

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 16 Number 2 February 2003



Fraser South Rhododendron Society
is a chapter of the
American Rhododendron Society

Meetings are held at 7:30 pm on the
third Wednesday of each month at:
United Church Hall
5673 - 200th Street
Langley BC

www.flounder.ca/frasersouth

2003 Officers

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This Month's Meeting: Wednesday, February 19, 2003

Topic: Roof Deck Gardening with Rhododendrons

Speaker: Glen Patterson

For many years, Glen Patterson, a long-standing member of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, nurtured and enjoyed an extensive and mature garden at his home in West Van. In 2001 Glen relocated to a suite with a roof garden - in the largest sense - situated on Coal Harbour.

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show & Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sale: Les Clay

Quick Hits



Type us in!

Come visit our website at:
www.flounder.ca/frasersouth

We have stories, we have pictures, we have easy links to other internet sites of interest. Chris Klapwijk has done a terrific job on setting up and maintaining the FSRS website. Visit it soon.



MORE ABOUT 'LIONHEART'

This month we are presenting the first of a series of articles about our home grown talent - members of the FSRS who have developed new rhododendron hybrids. Mike Trembath had previously written an article describing her tenacious search for the parents of her hybrid 'Lionheart' for the January and February, 1995, issues of *The Yak*. Copies of those articles will be available in the library for all those who would like to learn more about this fascinating part of the story of 'Lionheart'.



From the President

1) Turnout for the AGM and inauguration of the “Dessert January” was tremendous and it was a great pleasure to see friends who made a special effort to attend. The Chapter owes an enormous debt to Diane Scott for coordinating the events and to all those wonderful “chefs extraordinaire” who contributed such a wonderful assortment of deserts. The Chapter has a lot of talent among its membership. We hope to include some of the recipes in future newsletter editions. Our thanks are also due to the tremendous presentations made by Dave Sellars, Norma Senn and Don Martyn of our own Chapter. The presentations were truly delightful and inspired all of us to pursue and extend our interest in other plants in addition to rhododendrons. We are also grateful to Don Martyn for bringing plants for sale and to Bill Dale for his collection of seeds and erythronium.

- 2) **LAST CALL: Species Study Days 2003** The first session will begin Saturday, March 8. There are very few unfilled spots left so if you are interested please contact Mike Bale ASAP
- 3) **WANTED:** There are several ARS members from Vancouver Island who will be attending the Species Study Days. Anyone willing to provide overnight accommodation on the Friday evening before the teaching session please contact Mike Bale
- 4) **PLANT SALE:** Les Clay has once again kindly volunteered to bring plants for the February meeting and will include some choice hybrids and species.
- 5) **RAFFLE TABLE:** Please try and bring something for the raffle table. This is a significant fund-raiser for the Chapter and helps to defray cost of the hall and other expenses.
- 6) **MOTHERS’ DAY GARDEN TOUR:** May 10th, 2003. Plans are proceeding ahead to arrange a bus tour to members gardens on Saturday, May 10th. This venture can only proceed with the cooperation of host gardens. The planning committee would greatly appreciate it if members would volunteer their gardens. The smaller host gardens would receive only 1-2 coaches for the day which would be staggered at two to four hour intervals. The visitors would stay about 1 1/2 hours at each garden. Please contact Mike Bale.
- 7) **PORTLAND GARDEN TRIP:** Arrangements for this exceptional garden tour are being finalized. The tour will leave Vancouver at approximately 0700 hours on Saturday, May 17th and travel to Portland, stopping for a 2 hour visit at the Lakewold Garden which has one of the largest collections of rhododendrons, Japanese maples, camellias and cherry trees in the Pacific Northwest. After leaving Lakewold the tour will proceed to Portland where we anticipate visiting the Cecil & Molly Smith Garden in the afternoon. This garden was started in 1951 by Cecil and Molly who spent thirty years creating a rhododendron paradise. In 1983 the Portland Willamette and Tualatin Valley ARS Chapters assumed responsibility for the garden’s management. The group will overnight at the Portland Marriott downtown, located on the waterfront and providing easy access to entertainment, business, and cultural attractions. On Sunday the group will visit the Crystal Springs Garden, from there proceed to the Japanese Garden and then on to Boeve’s Nursery. Finally, the group will visit the highly regarded Portland Chinese Garden, which is reputed to be the most authentic Chinese Garden outside of China. The return journey north to Vancouver will be broken up with visits to various scenic areas on the way. We would anticipate arriving in Vancouver sometime around 7:00 p.m. The projected cost will be about \$325.00 Cdn. per person. Contact Mike Bale.

Mike Bale



From the Editor

Last Month:

I think we were all a little surprised with how enjoyable a function as inherently unexciting as an Annual General Meeting could be when it is smothered under a million calories. Everybody seemed to have a very jolly time, and it was due in no small part to tremendous effort and outstanding organizational skill of Diane Scott. We all owe her a debt of thanks, and I am sure we will get around to telling her so in person as soon as we can catch our collective breath after trying to get the zippers on those mysteriously tight pants done up again.

And there were even slide shows! David Sellars' talk on Alpine Flowers of the Cascade Mountains of BC and Washington made me very anxious to strap on my boots and go look at something. I am not sure about everyone else, but I never feel bored by pictures and commentary such as supplied by Norma Senn and Don Martyn. It is always such a treat to visit a place one has never seen, or even see a familiar sight through someone else's eyes.

The other major event of the evening were the presentations of the Ella J. Crabb Memorial Award to Mike Trembath, for her long service and dedication as Editor of the Yak and writer of the FSRS history "The First Ten Years", and the Harold Johnson Memorial Award to Chris Klapwijk for his great effort and outstanding success in developing our website.

The award to Mike read:

**IN APPRECIATION OF YOUR-LONG SERVING AND DEDICATED CONTRIBUTIONS AS
EDITOR OF THE YAK, FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY'S NEWSLETTER
AND FOR UNDERTAKING THE CHAPTER'S HISTORY PROJECT, THE FIRST TEN YEARS,
WE ARE PLEASED TO AWARD YOU WITH THE ELLA J. CRABB MEMORIAL AWARD
FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY 2002**

The award to Chris read:

**IN APPRECIATION OF YOUR EFFORTS TO DEVELOP THE EXCELLENT FRASER
SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY'S WEBSITE, WHICH PROMOTES OUR CLUB
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, WE ARE PLEASED TO AWARD YOU WITH
THE HAROLD JOHNSON MEMORIAL AWARD.
FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY 2002**

Brenda Macdonald



COMPANION PLANTS

Z is for Zantedeschia

Family: Araceae

The Calla or Ethiopian Lily has long been grown as a florist flower, popular at weddings and funerals alike, and easily recognized by the elegant white trumpet-like spathes. Originating in several parts of Africa, the hardiest species, *Z. aethiopica*, can be grown in gardens here in rich humus soil in full sun, with ample summer water. I have seen wonderfully established clumps about 3 feet across in Vancouver gardens, on west walls under the overhang to ensure some shelter from too much rain in winter.

Growing from tuberous rhizomes, the glossy arrow-shaped leaves stand upright to 3 feet, and a long succession of large white blooms from late spring through summer emerge among them. The "bloom" is actually a modified leaf or bract up to 10 inches long, and the true flower is merely the yellow spadice arising from its center. This species can also be grown in pots as a marginal aquatic in water up to 12 inches deep. Selections have been made for more compact forms, as in Little Gem and Apple Court Babe, only 18 and 24 inches tall; an extra hardy stout growing type – Crowborough; and the unusual Green Goddess – with bright green and white handkerchief-like flowers.

There are now more and more colored forms available, but these should be grown as potted plants or lifted in fall, as they are not at all hardy. The Golden Calla, *Z. elliotiana*, sports 4 inch blooms in a color range from cream to yellow thru orange to deep rust and crimson. Leaves are heart-shaped, often spotted white, and stand 2-3 feet tall. The Pink Calla, *Z. rehmannii*, has more linear leaves and has 2-4 inch blooms from blush thru pink to deepest royal purple. WOW!! These make excellent accent plants for patios or conservatories, or may be planted in borders and lifted for winter. The rhizomes of all can be divided in fall for plants to share, or plant again about 4 inches deep. Be careful to provide good air circulation to avoid fungal diseases, especially in cooler weather, and use caution when handling – the sap can cause skin irritation, and all parts are poisonous to eat. The blooms make excellent long lasting cut flowers, and have no fragrance to compete on the dinner table.

A closely related plant, the Bog or Water Arum (*Calla palustris*), is native to Europe, Asia, and parts of North America, and is useful as a small marginal aquatic specimen. This is smaller in all ways than its African cousins, standing only 10 inches tall and having more open flattened white spathes 2 inches long. Also being hardy to Zone 4, it has a much wider range of adaptability. In Northern Europe, the roots were

ground up for flour and used in bread making as a wheat substitute.

And so, we are able once again to bring a bit more of the tropics to our gardens with a plant that serves several good purposes, and will reward our efforts for many years to come.

Happy planting,

Colleen

Zantedeschia is named after a Professor Zantedeschi, although it is unclear exactly which Professor Zantedeschi, and the name *aethiopica* is not directly related to Ethiopia. In classical times it meant south of the known world, that is, south of Egypt and Libya. Sometimes it is called the Arum Lily, although it is neither an arum (genus *Arum*) nor a lily (genus *Lilium*).



Calla palustris
Flora von Deutschland Österreich
und der Schweiz.
Prof. Dr. Otto Wilhelm Thomé
1885, Gera, Germany

Up the Garden Path with Norma Senn

WOODY CUTTINGS

FEBRUARY, 2003

Spring is an excellent time of the year to propagate many woody plants, either by preparing softwood cuttings or by layering. Both techniques are particularly useful for deciduous shrubs, but many broad-leaved evergreen shrubs and ornamental trees can be propagated by these methods too.

To take softwood cuttings, you need some Number 1 rooting powder, clean pots, potting media, a sharp knife or pruning shears, labels and some clear plastic bags. The rooting powder is readily available in most garden centres. For a good potting media, you want something that is "clean", will hold some moisture, but also is light and well-aerated. A mixture of peat moss and perlite or coarse, clean sand works well. You may have to play with the proportions a bit, but about one part peat moss to one to two parts perlite or sand is a good place to start. The potting mix should be well-moistened before you actually take any cuttings. I prefer to work with plastic pots when I take cuttings, usually using a 5 or 6 inch pot, but deep flats can also be used. Containers should have drainage holes.

To take softwood cuttings, look for newly expanded vegetative growth. The stems should have at least three sets of leaves, but may be longer. Avoid using flowering shoots as they are difficult to root. For woody plants, heel cuttings are often taken. This is where young side shoots are pulled away from the parent plant so that a piece of bark and wood from the old stem is pulled away with the new growth. The extra bit of old wood, the heel, helps to protect the cutting base from rotting while still exposing the base of the new young wood where roots will form. If there is a long, thin tail on the heel, trim it up to make the cutting base neat and easy to stick.

After taking the cutting, strip off any leaves that would get buried under the surface of the potting mix. Dip the cut surface in the rooting powder. The pre-moistened potting mix should already be in the pots, and it should be tamped down firmly enough to hold

the cuttings upright, but not be heavily compacted.

Make a hole in the potting mix with a dibbler or pencil, and place a treated cutting in the hole. Insert each cutting deeply enough to stand up in the pot and have at least one set of nodes below the rooting mix. Firm some potting mix up around each cutting. Each pot can hold several cuttings; usually, they are best inserted in a ring around the outside of the pot, with a label identifying the kind of cutting and the date, placed in the centre of the pot.

Once the cuttings are stuck, water them in gently. Then, enclose the entire pot in a clear plastic bag. Blow some air into the bag so that it billows out around the cuttings and seal with a twist tie. Ideally, we want to provide an environment that offers warmth to the developing roots, while keeping the stems and leaves cool, but this can be difficult to do at home. I find that placing pots of cuttings against the north side of the house works well. There is enough light available to maintain the leaves, but no direct sun to burn the delicate tissue. As well, the area is sheltered so that the cuttings are not damaged by wind or late frost. The cuttings will need to be checked regularly. The potting mix should remain moist, but do not let any free water stand in the enclosed bag as this will encourage rotting. Promptly remove any leaves or cuttings that do rot.

The actual time it takes for roots to form will vary depending on the kind of plant and the rooting conditions. For most deciduous shrubs, roots should begin to form within four to six weeks. If no roots have formed after a couple of months, but the cuttings still appear to be healthy, leave them for at least another month. However, if there are no obvious signs of rooting by the end of three months, rooting is unlikely to occur.

Leave the potted cuttings in the plastic bag until the new roots are at least an inch long. Then, gradually



harden the plants off by first opening the plastic bag for a few days before removing it completely. Keep the new plants in a shady location for a few weeks before potting them on.

Layering is a particularly useful technique to propagate plants that do not root readily from cuttings or take a long time to root. The advantage to layering is that the mother plant will continue to nourish and support the growth and development of the daughter plant until new roots are formed. The disadvantages to layering are that it takes months for the daughter plant to form roots, and usually we can only get a couple of plants propagated per mother plant.

To do a simple layer, start in the spring by working up the soil next to the mother plant to form a trench about 4 to 6 inches deep. Then, select a long, pliable young vegetative shoot that can be bent over to touch the ground where the soil trench has been prepared, but have about 8 or 9 inches of the stem tip above ground. To help induce roots, carefully bend the stem tip to about a 90 degree angle as it leaves the bottom of the trench. By having part of the stem lay along the ground, in a horizontal fashion, then having the 90 degree angle, the plant's naturally occurring hormones will accumulate in the stem to help promote rooting.

Bury the woody stem in the trench to a depth of about 4 inches, with the top 8 or 9 inches of the stem above the ground. It may be helpful to hold the buried stem in place by creating "staples" out of wire to pin the stems down. If necessary, work some coarse sand into the soil used to backfill the trench to help provide good drainage, necessary for developing roots. Thoroughly water the area where the layer is located, and make sure this area is well watered throughout the summer.

By fall, the daughter plant should be rooted and the stem section joining the mother and daughter plants can be severed. If possible, leave the daughter plant in place for at least a couple of weeks after severing and before lifting and transplanting. This will give the new plant time to become fully independent. If the plant is deciduous, it is advisable to wait until the leaves have dropped before doing the actual transplanting. As with all new transplants, water well after transplanting.

If you know in advance that you want to layer a shrub, then prune back the mother plant during the winter before the actual layering procedure will be done. This will induce the mother plant to make new vegetative shoots in the spring that will be flexible and easy to layer.

Cuttings and layering are easy to do, but make sure the developing plants are kept moist until new roots form. The newly created plants will also need some tender, loving care for the first season after rooting.



R. chionoides
(photo Chris Klapwijk)

PROPAGATORS AND PEDIGREES

This is the first of a series of articles that celebrate members of the FSRS and their work in developing new rhododendron hybrids.

Hybridizing is a hopeful art, one undertaken by both the backyard enthusiast and the career horticulturist. It requires almost endless patience and demonstrates an extraordinary ability to take the long view. Developing a new rhododendron hybrid is not a task for those seeking immediate gratification.

Will it be the right colour, will it be frost hardy and/or heat hardy, will it be easy to propagate, will it be fussy about growing conditions, will the foliage be worth looking at for the 11 months of the year when the plant is not in blossom, will it be floriferous or a shy bloomer, will it produce blossoms on the propagating bench or will it be a substantial shrub of 10 years before we can even see what the blossom colour is? These are all questions which reverberate in the mind of the hopeful propagator as the pollen of one plant is dusted on the stigma of another.

It is all a matter of chance, and hope.

‘Lionheart’
(‘Rimini’ x ‘Mrs. Lammot Copeland’)
M.L. “Mike” Trembath, 1971
(photo Mike Trembath)



In January, 1995, Mike wrote an article for *The Yak* in which she describes the subdued frenzy of the late 60's and early 70's as rhododendron fanciers sought the development of a really good yellow rhododendron.

“At this time everyone was searching for buttercup yellow rhodies. The Hawks were available - only just - but Crest was not easily acquired. When E.J. Trayling brought a truss of Larsen's Mrs. Lammot Copeland to a show we held in the Cowan Centre in Burnaby we all drooled over it. The Traylings were, at that time, neighbours of the Finleys, and Vern was able to get some pollen from Mrs. L.C. With great enthusiasm we rushed about putting pollen on any bloom showing even a hint of yellow in both our gardens. We divided seed - and grew on hoards of plants. Most of these were bitter disappointments, of course - tending to be bicolours which faded out to cream - or unpleasant, (to my taste at least), mixtures of orange with greeny-yellow throats and edged in red - yuck!”

The immediate parents of ‘Lionheart’ were known: ‘Rimini’ was an established plant in Mike's garden in Surrey, B.C., and the blossoms were dusted with pollen from the Trayling's truss of ‘Mrs. Lammot Copeland’, but things were a little less precise beyond that point. In fact, when Mike submitted ‘Lionheart’ for registration at the Royal Horticultural Society she was requested to provide more information about ‘Rimini’ since the Registrar had no record of it.

Only by determined sleuthing was Mike able to ascertain that ‘Rimini’ was a Lionel de Rothschild cross of the 1930's, of what was then termed *R. apodectum* x *R. discolor* but is now known as *R. dicroanthum* ssp. *apodectum* x *R. fortunei* ssp. *discolor*. Due to Mike's efforts Exbury was prompted to quickly lay claim to ‘Rimini’ and register it with the RHS.

As for the other parent, the very desirable 'Mrs. Lammot Copeland', it was the result of a cross by Hjalmer Larson of his own 'Virginia Scott' and *R. wardii*. That seems pretty straightforward, since 'Virginia Scott' was another Larson cross, but this one was only half known: *R. souliei* x unknown.



'Lionheart'
(photo Mike Trembath)

So, gathering up the progenitors of 'Lionheart' we have (that we know of) *R. dicoanthum* ssp. *apodectum*, *R. fortunei* ssp. *discolor*, *R. souliei*, and *R. wardii*.

Of course the traits of the parents show up in the progeny in various combinations. The trick is to discover the particular seedlings which display as many of the parents' best characteristics and as few of the worst characteristics as possible.

Further on in her article, Mike describes the funnel-campanulate blossoms of 'Lionheart' as "a warm yellow with brick red buds, a frilled calyx and a bloom time of June 1 – 14."

In this particular case we can conjecture that *R. dicoanthum* ssp. *apodectum* contributed the warm colouring and fleshy substance to the corolla and calyx, that *R. fortunei* ssp. *discolor* imparted the large open to funnel shaped blossom shape and the late flowering period,

and *R. wardii* gave its yellow colour and large wavy calyx. Unfortunately the only thing which *R. souliei* seems to have brought to the table is its great reluctance to be propagated, either by rooting or by grafting.

All of 'Lionheart's parents bloom relatively late in the season, with *discolor* very late - at the end of June and beginning of July. Having a rhododendron blossom so late in the year is a definite plus for the committed gardener, but it does not make for a very commercially attractive plant. The general public is just not out in the heat of summer looking to see if there are any rhododendrons which would look nice. In addition, 'Lionheart' apparently did not inherit the positive traits of flowering freely and at a young age from *wardii*, but instead wound up with the late developing and somewhat shy flowering attributes of *apodectum*. These characteristics, in conjunction with the difficulty in propagation, served to effectively remove 'Lionheart' from candidacy as a commercially viable hybrid.

But still it is a lovely plant because above all, as Mike says,

"It makes me happy to look at it - maybe because of the lateness of the bloom, or perhaps because of its rich, warm colours, or the layered look it has when in bloom - from the rather flat topped trusses - it is a smiling plant."

A good enough reason for anyone to admire the results of this backyard propagation.



'Lionheart'
(photo Mike Trembath)

Brenda Macdonald

ROOTSTALK

by Indumentum

My brother in London, an Internet fanatic, entered “Yak” “Newsletter” and “Indumentum” into Google, the amazing and powerful search engine that can find anything. He came across the web page of the Eugene Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. One Pepper Berkeley (must be a pseudonym) had written an article with a number of quotes from a Rootstalk column on the definition of a mature rhododendron garden. Happy as I am to be the subject of literary deconstruction, it had never occurred to me that my columns might be worthy of detailed analysis. For example, half way through Pepper’s well-seasoned article called Potpourri (so Pepper must be a woman) she quoted from Rootstalk “there is a real feeling of a mature garden when the wife runs over the lower branches with the mower”. Pepper then added some salt: “So SHE does the mowing?”

Clearly Pepper is of the view that jobs in the garden divide along gender lines and mowing is a task for the male of the species. I have to admit I very much agree that there is no place in the garden for political correctness. It just happens that, with our rear-wheel drive mower, the wife enjoys the exercise while walking behind the mower and the satisfaction of making the garden neat and tidy. And there you have the quintessential difference between men and women in a garden environment. Men prefer to develop the landscape whether it’s building a new rhododendron bed or constructing a water feature while women worry more about making sure the weeding is done and the leaves are swept up. It reminds me of a cartoon in *Punch* in the 1960s. Two women were staring under the hood of a car broken down by the side of the road. One says to the other, “Let’s start by giving it all a jolly good dust”.

There is a marvelous book called “Cuttings from a Rock Garden” that describes the development of the famous rhododendron and alpine garden at Millstream in Connecticut. The relationship between Linc and Timmy, also known as H. Lincoln Foster and Laura Louise Foster is fascinating. At one point, Timmy comments “Linc calls me a compulsive weeder. He can walk past a bed full of gigantic weeds and apparently never see them whereas if I see a weed I have to bend over and dig it out. This drives Linc crazy on the few occasions when we walk through the garden on a sightseeing tour together.” Sounds exactly like the wife and I.

The differences between men and women when it comes to landscape development and upkeep can power a dynamic gardening team. Complementary skills and interests are much more effective in achieving harmony and results than if you both like doing the same things. Men like to dig, move rocks and stand around in the rain, just to get out of the house. Women are interested in colour combinations, aesthetic balance and general tidiness. But I have to admit that a neat garden, weeded and edged, is much more satisfying to be in than a messy one. As Harold Johnson was fond of saying, “Never develop a garden bigger than your wife can maintain”.