

# The Yak

# Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 16 Number 1 January 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

## 2002 Officers

President: Mike Bale  
604-853-8839  
Vice Pres: Colleen Forster  
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Secretary: Wendy Sellars  
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Treasurer: Trev Badminton  
604-856-0046  
Directors: Dalen Bayes  
Norma Senn  
Wenonah March  
Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald  
604-990-5353  
macdobr@shaw.ca

This Month's Meeting: Wednesday, January 15

## THE FIRST ANNUAL AGM AND DESSERT MEETING

Speakers: Norma Senn  
Dave Sellars  
Companion Plants: Colleen Forster  
Show & Tell: Vern Finley  
Plant Sale: Don Martyn

## Quick Hits



### PLANT SALE

Don Martyn will be bringing in some exciting material for the plant sale. Included will be a variety of species, including *R. tsariense*, some dwarf species, and some *R. kiusianum*. In addition, Don has some seedlings from the past Peter Wharton expedition, including a large-leafed species which may be new to cultivation. He will be bringing in some of his own hybrid seedlings and a collection of Japanese maples, as well as some *Stewartia ovata* (Mountain Stewartia). You will not want to miss this opportunity to obtain some unique plants.



### NEXT MONTH

Glen Patterson will speak on "Roof Deck Gardening with Rhododendrons." Meeting will be on February 19th.



From the President

#### CHRISTMAS PARTY:

Many thanks to all of those who contributed to a great Christmas party. Special thanks to Sue Klapwijk for coordinating the entire event. Sue and Chris were the first to arrive and help set up the tables and were also the last to leave after cleaning up the dining room and kitchen. Bev Clay (again – for the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive time!) provided a wonderful turkey which was carved with surgical precision by husband Les. The magnificent table arrangements were kindly provided by Sue and Chris Klapwijk, and those members who took them home will have had an additional delightful Christmas centerpiece for their own enjoyment. Dave's enthusiasm for the Species and Hybrids game is infectious

and each year further improvements are added. Wendy, as usual, was extremely helpful with setup and clean up. Many thanks to "Santa" Bayes for his willingness to distribute the Christmas gifts and for his humor. Our sincere thanks to all who participated!

#### ANNUAL AGM AND DESSERT MEETING AGENDA:

- Introduction, President's Report, Treasurer's Report, Library Report
- Dessert
- Awards 2002
- Dessert
- Presentation: Norma Senn
- Dessert
- Presentation: Dave Sellars
- More Dessert
- Show and Tell: Vern Finley
- Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

#### BEVERAGES & NOURISHMENT:

Our congenial "Beverages & Nourishment" Chairperson, Diane Scott, is coordinating the activities for Dessert January. If you have not been contacted for your contribution please give her a call at 604 857-9116.

#### TWOONIE TABLE:

Bill Dale has kindly donated a variety of seeds and some erythronium bulbs for the Twoonie Table. Les Clay will also have available some seeds from Peter Wharton's expedition to China in October 2001.

#### WEBSITE:

Our Web site seems to be a tremendous success. Since it's establishment last summer we have had over 2,000 "hits". Again, many thanks to Chris Klapwijk for all his work in making this site so efficient and successful.

## WELCOMING COMMITTEE:

Dixie Mueller has kindly volunteered to coordinate the Welcoming Committee and will be looking for members to help introduce guests and new members to the Chapter. She has been specifically requested to interrupt those of us who might be engaged in some earnest discussion in order to introduce us to the new members. Please help make her job easier by getting involved.

## DISTRICT NEWS:

For a variety of personal reasons Ken Gibson has been obliged to step down as the District Alternate representative. Harry Wright has accepted and been unanimously approved by the District I Presidents and will assume this position effective immediately.

## SPECIES STUDY DAYS:

- see below

## PORTLAND GARDEN TOUR 2003:

May 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003. The Portland Chapter has already involved themselves with the planning and organization of this tour, and I am confident that it will provide a wonderful opportunity to see some very exceptional gardens. Please make a note of the date and indicate your interest. Full details will be available in the February newsletter.

## MOTHERS' DAY WEEKEND GARDEN TOUR:

- see below

## FREE!:

This is a unique opportunity to obtain - to quote Steve Hootman - "the real thing". A number of Mt. Woodside Douglas fir seedling are available free to anybody who can make use of them.

**Warning:** - they do grow quite large.



Lu Zhu  
Garden of Patti and Mike Bale  
(photo Sue Klapwijk)

## Mother's Day Garden Tour

The Chapter's annual operating expenses amount to approximately \$3,000, of which about one third is derived from membership dues. Some costs, such as plants, photocopying, postage, computer, paper, and technical expertise are donated to the Chapter by individual members. This year, the Executive has attempted to make membership to the Chapter more affordable, and has approved a subsidy for full membership to the extent of \$5.00 per person. By way of comparison, full membership in the FSRs for 2003 will be \$35.00 and at the Vancouver Chapter \$50.00.

The ARS has advised that a fee increase will be necessary in 2004 to offset the continued increase in costs that they have experienced over the past few years. They anticipate that it will be necessary to increase the national membership costs by approximately \$6.00 US in 2004, and

hope this amount will provide sufficient funds for a further three to four years. This additional cost of approximately \$10.00 Canadian will have to be passed on to individual members. Your Executive is committed to minimizing the impact of this increase by encouraging Chapter activities and using the proceeds from these funds to subsidize membership, and in this way encourage enrollment and participation.

One of the activities that the Chapter has successfully pursued in the past is the Mothers' Day Garden Tour. The concept was to sell tickets to interested individuals who then had the opportunity to visit one or more of the members' gardens. The programme was organized to take place on the "Mothers' Day weekend" as this provided an opportunity to promote the concept of a "Mother's Day treat" which, by chance, coincided with the peak opportunity for viewing and admiring rhododendron trusses. The concept envisaged the participation of the entire membership with individual members either acting as a "host garden" or providing assistance in one form or another. The objective was to promote camaraderie between chapter members and at the same time, to promote interest in the rhododendron genus and recruit new members. The two previous garden tours were successful and the Chapter made a significant profit. However, ticket sales were disappointing and the burden of sales was not uniformly shared among Chapter members. Because there were a limited number of host gardens, it was not possible to provide alternate gardens for the tour and the host gardeners became fatigued by the work and responsibility involved in hosting visitors. The host gardeners were also concerned with issues related to liability in the event of injury by visitors, as well as with security for the home and content of the garden. It was therefore felt that there should be a year of respite.

With these concerns in mind, the Executive sought to look for some other format which would enable the "Mother's Day Garden Tour" to continue, but which would provide an easier method for the distribution of tickets. A proposal has been developed to continue the Mothers' Day Garden Tour but to have visitors arrive by coach. The idea



Wingswept Gardens  
Garden of Gael and John Dodd  
(photo Chris Klapwijk)

is to have approximately six coaches with 50 passengers each which will visit three or four different gardens during the course of the day. The tour would be arranged so that only one coach arrives at any given garden at one time. This arrangement would afford the following advantages:

1. parking requirements are reduced to a minimum
2. visitors arrive at one time, therefore addressing and meeting the group is made easier
3. security would be improved as there would be no need to publicize the addresses of the gardens
4. liability would be assumed by the tour operator, in addition to the 'umbrella insurance' the Chapter has through the Garden Clubs of B.C.
5. visitors would leave as a group rather than in dribs and drabs, allowing a recuperative period between visitors and shortening the "duty" time of the host gardener

The primary advantage for the Chapter would be that members would be relieved of the sale of individual tickets. Hopefully Chapter members would continue to participate as

bus captains and guides to provide information to the bus passengers, or to assist the host gardener with preparation and reception activities. In this way, all members of the Chapter would participate in the garden tour and have an opportunity to meet the public and promote our interests. The Chapter would receive a substantial financial benefit which would greatly relieve the Chapter's annual operating expenses.

Obviously, the success of this venture would entirely depend on the willingness of individual members to act as host gardens. A commitment needs to be made soon so there is sufficient lead time for the promotion and sale of tickets. An early commitment would enable the host garden to have several months for preparation, hopefully the assistance of other Chapter members.

Your feedback would be much appreciated.

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## RE: SPECIES STUDY DAYS 2003

I am sure it is obvious to everyone that determining dates for the Species Study Days cannot be arranged to meet everybody's needs. An attempt has been made to avoid the major ARS activities, including the ARS national meeting at Olympia May 1-4, the Vancouver and Victoria truss shows, and the planned coach garden tour to Portland on the May long weekend (May 17 – 19). Steve also has many commitments already scheduled for next year.



*R. yunnanense*  
photo Chris Klapwijk

We can now confirm that the Species Study Days will be held on the following days:

Saturday March 8<sup>th</sup>  
Saturday March 29<sup>th</sup>  
Saturday April 19<sup>th</sup> (Easter weekend)  
Saturday May 31<sup>st</sup>

The format will be similar to the programme established last year and consist of several hours of instruction and review in the classroom followed by the balance of each session examining the study material in the garden.

The sessions will start at 10:00 a.m. and finish about 4:00 p.m.

The fee for the programme will be \$140.00 (Canadian) and the proceeds will be used to provide an honorarium for Steve Hootman and a donation to the RSF.

Preference will be given to individuals who are able to commit for the entire four sessions but it should be possible to accommodate those individuals who are only able to attend some of the sessions. Last

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year we were able to accommodate all participants and were able to provide refunds for individuals who were unable to attend sessions because of ill health.

If the programme is not fully subscribed by February 15<sup>th</sup> an invitation will be extended to other Districts in order to fill the void.

Arrangements for carpooling will be organized prior to each session.

Participants from Victoria and Vancouver Island are especially welcomed to attend. In order to defray the additional costs that Island members would incur we are very optimistic that arrangements can be made with a local member to provide overnight accommodation for the Friday evening prior to the study sessions.

Please confirm and forward a cheque to the undersigned as soon as possible.

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Abbotsford BC  
V2S 1S2

Phone: 604 853-8839  
Email: [lu\\_zhu@telus.net](mailto:lu_zhu@telus.net)

Mike Bale

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## COMPANION PLANTS

Y is for Yucca

Family: Agavaceae

Not exactly a companion as such for most rhododendrons, but I think many of our gardens have a sunny place that could use a bit of visual punch, and the Yucca could do just that! Also called Adam's Needle or Dagger Plants, these names are obviously derived from the stiff sharp-tipped leaves that are usual among the genus. Of the 40 or so species native to North and Central America, only a few from the south-east U.S.A. are

suitable to our climate, but these do very well in proper settings. Any average soil that drains well in a full south or western exposure will be fine, and if the soil is a bit heavy, incorporate pumice or grit of some sort to improve aeration. A note of caution – the tips of the leaves are REALLY sharp and will cause injury if planted too close to walks or where children frequent.



The clumps are slow to increase in size, but could reach 4 or 5 feet across in some time. They increase by suckers that can be easily removed and relocated whether showing foliage or just 'toes', and just digging around the base will expose them to be sliced away with a sharp knife without digging up the whole plant.

In past times, various yuccas were much more than just ornamental shrubs – they provided leaf fibres for ropes, baskets and mats; food from flowers and fruits; soap from the stems and roots, and party drinks from the fermented fruit.

Up 'til fairly recently, only green forms were readily available, either *Y. filamentosa* – with prominent curling threads on the edges of stiffly upright dark evergreen leaves: or *Y. flaccida* and its selection 'Ivory Tower' – with more arching blue-green leaves with only a few threads. The blooms on both are stately panicles of bell flowers on tall stalks above the leaves in summer, all in cream or slightly green tinged. Now offered for sale are some striking variegated forms with gold or white patterning on the leaves. These are generally slower growing and a bit more shy to bloom, but make up for it in foliage effect. Look for such names as Garland Gold, Bright Edge, Variegata, Golden Sword, and Color Guard.

Try to plan the placement of these with some care – they make a very strong tropical statement and can be overdone if used in conjunction with too many other vertical accents. They combine well with mounding shrubs such as *Helianthemum*, *Brachyglottis*, *Santolina*, *Cistus* or *Cotoneaster*, but let the *Yucca* stand proud without overcrowding. In truth, I may be tempted to try to combine one or two of the dwarf alpine rhodos in the same area, or even some of the older 'ironclad' varieties as background. Given that these yucca species are not from extremely arid climates, with adequate drainage they could well tolerate conditions that some of the more resilient rhodos can thrive in also.

So make a liar out of me – plant Yuccas and Rhododendrons together and make them like each other!

Happy Planting  
Colleen



*Yucca filamentosa* cultivar

# Rootstalk

by Indumentum

Rhododendrons are not dormant in the winter like deciduous plants. You can tell a rhododendron is growing in the winter because of the way the leaves respond to freezing weather. They curl up to reduce transpiration from the leaf surface to compensate for the frozen roots being unable to take up water. But when the winter temperature is above freezing, it is an ideal time to move rhododendrons. You do not have to worry about watering in a relocated plant and there is plenty of time for the rootball to settle in before the spring.

The rootballs of young rhododendrons can be lifted out of the ground easily as they are so compact, they come up like a brick out of stone paving. Very large rhododendrons can only be moved with a bobcat or other heavy machinery. Ken Gibson of Tofino has used a crane for some of his big moves. However, the home gardener often has to move medium-sized rhododendrons with large rootballs, which regular readers will recognize as one of Indumentum's favourite topics. In this section of The Yak, 'Rootballs "X" Us'.

The basic equipment required is a long-handled shovel, a six-foot pry bar and a rubber-tired moving dolly. Canadian Tire stocks a 1000 lb dolly with very large pneumatic tires which roll over rough terrain much better than the typical moving dollies available for about half the price at Home Depot. The platform is too small for rhododendron moves but this can easily be extended by drilling three holes in the plate and bolting a piece of half-inch plywood on top.

The first step is to cut a circle around the rhododendron below the drip line. If this results in too large a rootball then the diameter can be reduced but the plant will be more stressed. For larger plants it will be necessary to dig a trench around the plant. The next step is to drive the shovel in under the roots as far as possible and then lift the roots up all around the plant. This should be done a couple of times to ensure that the edges of the rootball are completely free from the surrounding soil. Then drive the pry bar under the centre of the rootball to cut between the roots and the soil. Using a block of wood under the pry bar, gradually lever up the rootball starting at the edges and working towards the centre. Be careful not to lift the rootball too much at this stage or the rootball could tear and break. Once the rootball is more or less free from the underlying soil, slide the pry bar directly under the centre of the plant stem and lever up the whole plant using additional blocks of wood to gain the extra height



Digging around the drip line.



Prying up the edges of the rootball.



Lifting the rhodo with the pry bar under the stem.



Move the plant onto the dolly platform by a combination of levering up the rootball and sliding the dolly further and further underneath. You may have to pull on the plant stem which is often not recommended in the literature. However, if the plant and rootball are healthy, this is usually not a problem. If you feel the rootball start to tear, however, stop pulling on the stem. For larger plants, I usually tie the plant to the dolly with thick rope to reduce the chances of it sliding off in transit.

For planting the rhododendron, mix in a barrow load of bark mulch (composted if you have it) and dig a shallow dish-shaped hole. Remember that the plant should be slightly raised above the general bed level for good drainage and to reduce the chance of the stem being buried in mulch, which could cause it to rot. Ken Gibson's dictum is that rhododendrons should be placed, not planted. The plant can be oriented the way you want, prior to sliding it off the dolly into the hole.

It used to be recommended to disbud the rhododendron after moving it but we do not follow this practice. Some plants however, take a few years to settle in and maybe disbudding would help. We have found that most of the hundreds of rhododendrons that we have moved, carry on the next spring as if nothing had happened.



To balance the weight over the wheels, the handle must be kept at a low angle .



Working the dolly platform under the rootball.



The platform extension is essential for a rhodo this size.



Lifting the plant out of the hole.



Placing the rhodo over the new hole.