

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 17 Number 3 March 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, March 19, 2003

Topic: Herbaceous Plants of the Pacific Biome

Speaker: Mary Hodgson Rose

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show & Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sale: Sue Klapwijk

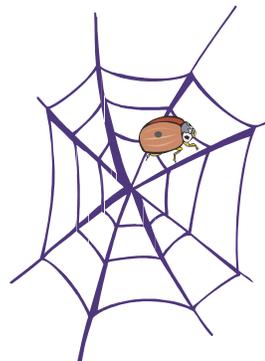
Quick Hits



The first attachment to this month's Yak is the 2003 Fraser South Rhododendron Society Membership List. The list will be sent by e-mail to those members who do not require a paper copy of The Yak.



The second attachment to this month's Yak is a photocopy of the wonderful "Winter Trifle" made by Leigh Mikitka for our First Annual AGM and Dessert Meeting held in January. Unfortunately I am not able to send it as an attachment for those on the e-mail list, but there will be some extra copies available at the March meeting, or you can send me a request at macdobr@shaw.ca and I shall send out a copy via snail mail.



Oh, the wonders of technology - especially in the pursuit of something as ancient as learning more about our natural surroundings. Go to www.rhodos.ca to view photos of those participating in the Rhododendron Species Foundation Study Days. Click on the link located near the bottom of the ARS logo entitled "**Species Study Days - 1, March 8, 2003, picture photo gallery**".



From the President

LAST MONTH For me, one of the great joys about being a member of the Rhododendron Society is that you frequently have the opportunity to meet individuals who are possibly even more eccentric than oneself! Glen's inspirational presentation provided tremendous interest and motivation, and I think inspired us all to do more, and to do better.

MOTHERS DAY TOUR Information about the Mothers Day Tour is available on our own website at www.flounder.ca/frasersouth. This should be a very enjoyable tour for the participants, and hopefully a good fund-raiser for the Chapter. It is scheduled for Sunday, May 10th, and will include a scenic drive in a luxury coach, a tour of 3 private Fraser Valley gardens, and a gourmet picnic lunch, as well as a wine tasting at a local winery and shopping at a local nursery. Further details will be announced later

PORTLAND GARDEN TOUR Plans are already well in hand for the Portland bus tour scheduled for the May long weekend: May 17, 18, and 19, 2003. The provisional itinerary has us leaving (very) early Saturday morning and stopping at Kubota Garden in Seattle on our way down. We should arrive at the Cecil and Molly Smith Garden in Portland about 6:00pm. This garden has been under the stewardship of the Portland ARS Chapter for almost 20 years now.

After an overnight stay in Newberg, located in the centre of the Yamhill County wine district, we will travel to the Van Veen Nursery. This venerable and well-known rhododendron nursery was established in 1925 by Ted Van Veen, and it has continued as a family managed business ever since. Later that morning we will visit the Crystal Springs Rhododendron Garden, established in 1950, which contains more than 2,000 mature specimens of rhododendrons, azaleas, and magnolias on a five acre site. After lunch on Sunday we will proceed to the Portland Classical Chinese Garden, and thence to Portland's Japanese Garden, reputed to be the most outstanding Japanese garden outside Japan. Our last stop on Sunday will be at Bovees Nursery, which has become home to the largest collection of vireya rhododendrons in North America.

We will set off for home Monday morning, after another night's stay in Newberg, but will first stop in at the Elk Rock Garden at the Bishop's Close located on 13 acres above the Willamette river. This garden, donated by the daughters of Peter Kerr to the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon in 1957 has an extensive collection of rare and interesting plants from all over the world. Our last point of call will be at what was once a private estate and is now Lakewold Gardens in Lakewood, Washington.

JUNE PICNIC Our June picnic has traditionally been held on the 3rd Sunday of June, but last year, as most of you know, all three lower mainland Chapters hosted their picnics on the same day and this caused some difficulties for those members who have joint membership. This year the PARS Chapter have chosen to host their picnic on the 8th of June, and the Vancouver Chapter determined that the only date suitable for their member is June 22nd. As a consequence, the executive has rescheduled the FSRS Picnic, and propose to hold it on Saturday, June 21st. Hopefully this rescheduling will not inconvenience too many people.

GRATEFUL KUDOS Many thanks to all those people who continue to support the Chapter and perform tasks which often go unrecognized. Special thanks to Bev Clay, Martie Erwin, Wendy Sellars, and Mary-Anne Berg for goodies with our February coffee. And many thanks also to Dave Crabb for his effective raffle sales, and to all those individuals who brought material for the plant sale and raffle. Proceeds from the February Coffee, Raffle, and Plant Sale netted a considerable amount to help offset the facility rental and other expenses.

Mike Bale



From the Editor

Last Month:

Having already seen a shorter version at the AGM of the Vancouver Chapter in 2002, I was probably somewhat more prepared but still no less astounded by the content of Glen Paterson's presentation on Roof Gardening. I sometimes worry that I seem unable to think farther ahead than whatever household chore or business meeting is obliterating my horizon, and after hearing about Glen's reasoned and meticulous approach to the changes he was going to manage, I feel both inadequate and energized at the same time. Also of interest on a broader scale was the information we received on the use of "extensive" roof gardening techniques for commercial structures, in contrast to the "intensive" techniques used in a project such as his own.

This Month:

Our speaker this month is Dr. Mary Hodgson Rose. Dr. Rose is an experienced and enthusiastic gardener who will be discussing native companion plants for rhododendrons, with particular emphasis on those suitable for partial shade. Dr. Rose lives in Washington State, and has a nursery near Anacortes.

The Business Stuff:

Here are the highlights of the January and February Directors' Meetings:

- 1) Wenonah March (Membership) reported that the membership list for 2003 has been completed, and all fees due to the ARS have been forwarded. She also noted that the FSRS Chapter's activities and membership information has been posted in "Gardens West".
- 2) Dixie Mueller has volunteered to host the welcoming committee for new members. She will solicit help from other Chapter members to ensure that guests and new members feel at ease.
- 3) The replacement of the Ken Gibson by Harry Wright of the North Island Chapter as District 1 alternate director was announced.
- 4) Trevor Badminton (Treasurer) advised that the 2002 Financial Statement has been audited. The final balance for 2002 was a \$510.00 loss.
- 5) The City of Langley has invited the FSRS to join their 2003 Communities in Bloom Committee. Colleen Forster has volunteered to join the committee.
- 6) A letter was sent by Mike Bale on behalf of the FSRS to Tom Schuetz of the ARS in response to a request to participate in providing and monitoring an "ARS Test and Display Garden". Mike advised that the most Chapters would be too small to take on such a task, particularly in view of the criteria outlined in "policy 9.15". Mike further explained that although our members had enthusiasm and willingness for such a project, previous activities along these lines had not met with success due to on-going vandalism and theft of the plant material. Mike concluded that it was quite possible that such projects were really only suited to large, publicly funded venues which have full-time personnel and secure perimeters.
- 7) A letter of concern about the proposed increase in ARS fees was sent by Mike Bale to Dr. Ed Reiley, President, ARS. Mike outlined the concerns of the FSRS Chapter that the proposed increase would significantly affect our ability to recruit new members, particularly when the amount of increase is equal to the entire yearly fee of some of the other local garden clubs. Since, in a time of unprecedented interest in garden activities, the ARS is experiencing a continued decline in the number of members, the FSRS is concerned that the fee increase will only exacerbate the problem. Mike concluded with the hope that the ARS would consider developing other more creative ways of raising the necessary funds necessary.

Brenda Macdonald



COMPANION PLANTS

A is for ACER, the Maple family

Family: Aceraceae

Much has been written expounding the virtues of Japanese Maples specifically and in general, but it still remains that to my mind, there is no finer group of small trees to give contrast and definition to our rhododendron gardens. Although many species originate in Japan, only two, *A. palmatum* and *A. japonicum*, with its offshoot *A. shirasawanum* 'Aureum', are commonly called Japanese Maples, and a mind-numbing number of cultivars have been selected from them. These vary both minutely and greatly in regards to plant habit, leaf shape, foliage color- spring, summer and fall, and bark features, and all of these factors should influence your choice. Doing a bit of research will reveal that recent work among plant breeders has made great strides in selecting superior forms of ones thought to be standards of type (i.e. 'Bloodgood', 'Burgundy Lace', and 'Inaba Shidare'). If you are unsure, it's probably best to observe them at various times of the year – a dormant stick in a pot will not give much of an indication of subsequent glory. (P.S. – garden tours are a great way to see mature specimens in wonderful settings, and the hosts are a veritable font of information.) But some older varieties are hard to improve upon. I'll not even try to cover a fraction of the available forms, but rather showcase a few that I think are worthy of more exposure.

A. japonicum 'Aconitifolium' (Dancing Peacock) is one that I particularly like. Slow to start with a rather open low-branched habit, it has large round leaves very deeply cut into lobes. Dappled shade comes with summer leaves of a matt green with bronzy tints, and then STAND BACK! – it explodes in fall to gold, orange, scarlet and burgundy, every leaf a different blend. Fabulous, and very aptly named! I have one in a large pot and the color lasts a good long time.



A. japonicum 'Aconitifolium' showing outstanding fall colouring



A. palmatum 'Red Pygmy' is another choice I would make for a very versatile plant. This linearlobum type emerges in spring with dark scarlet red ribbon-lobed leaves that turn a deep bronze in summer. This is a vase shaped shrub only to 5 feet or so, and lives very happily in pots or planters as well as among the smaller rhodos. A note to remember – as in all linearlobums, the current season growth will produce leaves that are much wider lobed, more palmate than leaves on older wood, and this is perfectly natural. Don't be alarmed that it's reverting to some ordinary old thing.

A. palmatum A linearlobum type, showing the difference in leaf shape between the current growth (red) and previous growth (green).

And lastly, *A. palmatum* 'Aureum', the Golden Japanese Maple (not to be confused with *A shirasawanum* 'Aureum', the Golden Full Moon Maple) is a little known beauty. From quite red twigs, the red buds open to a fairly small deep gold palmate leaf that mellows to chartreuse in summer, and then to deep red-gold in fall. This one is more vigorous - low branched and twiggy to perhaps 12 feet of so - prefers full sun to retain the gold color, but should not be left to dry out, as the leaves can burn. It also fares well in a large pot or barrel for many years.

A hard choice to make, but all of these fit nicely into even a small garden such as mine, and never rule out growing any variety but the most vigorous ones in a nice big pot. They can give many years of pleasure and are easily moved to prominence as the seasons change.

Happy Planting!

Colleen Forster

Up the Garden Path

with
Norma Senn

HARDY ROSES

MARCH, 2003

Many of us want to grow roses, but don't want to fuss with diseases like powdery mildew and black spot, or insect pests like aphids and spider mites. It is possible to have roses that are easy to grow, reliably hardy and very beautiful. The shrub roses, many of which are also known as the "old" roses are wonderful additions to most gardens. There are so many species and hybrids to select from that the most difficult thing about them may be choosing just a few to grow. Some of my own favourites are described below.

Shrub roses have an interesting history, with some species having been grown commercially since Roman times. They have been valued for their fragrance and beauty throughout Europe, the middle east and Asia. In western European cultures, the modern popularity of shrub roses traces its history to the Empress Josephine of France, who supervised their collection at her home at Malmaison. Her goal was to grow every rose species known in her time. Remaining records indicate that she had at least 250 species and varieties. Even during the English blockades of French ports, rose shrubs were permitted entry into France for Josephine's garden. Sadly, her garden was abandoned after her death, and many of the records were destroyed, however with the resurgence of



Rosa rugosa 'Dagmar Hastrup'
showing the deeply veined leaves of a rugosa rose



interest in all the shrub roses over the last decade or so, modern gardeners have even been working on re-creating the Malmaison collection.

Most shrub roses are easy to grow and extremely hardy. Many also become large plants. I remember visiting a private garden in Beaver Lodge, Alberta in June a few years ago that was loaded with shrub roses in full bloom, most of which were at least as tall as I am. The impression was of an English cottage garden, with lush flowers everywhere. The fragrance was out of this world.

Perhaps the biggest drawback to growing shrub roses is that most only have one blooming period each year. But by careful selection of species and varieties, it is possible to have continuous bloom from late May to early July, with the peak of bloom in June. While the flowers may not repeat later in the summer, most shrub roses have other attributes that provide year round interest to the garden. For example, some will have good fall leaf colour, others may have attractive hips, and some have interesting stem colours.

Among the most popular shrub roses for Canadian gardens are the many varieties of *Rosa rugosa*, and hybrid plants with *R. rugosa* parentage. Native to Japan, *R. rugosa* takes its species name from its rugose leaves, that is, leaves with deeply incised veins. They don't suffer from common rose diseases or insect pests. The flowers range from pure white to deep purplish-reds. They can be single or double, and many are very fragrant. The rugosa roses can have very fine fall colour, and they have the added benefit of producing large round hips that remain attractive throughout much of the winter. Because they tend to sucker and spread, *R. rugosa* are best planted in a bed by themselves: they don't blend well with other species. *R. rugosa* has been used a great deal in the hybridizing work done at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa

to create the Canadian Explorer rose series. You can identify these varieties because they were named for Canadian explorers like Champlain, Alexander McKenzie, Captain George Vancouver, and so on. All of them are attractive and reliably hardy, often to Zone 2. In addition to the "Explorer" series, well-known varieties of the straight species like Pink Grootendorst, F.J. Grootendorst, and Hansa are readily available.

One of my favourite shrubs is *Rosa rubrifolia*, the Redleaf Rose. The plant has blue-green foliage tinged with red which is attractive throughout the summer and then in the fall, the leaf colour intensifies and becomes a deep burgundy red. The flowers are a deep pink to rose-red in colour, and they produce bright red hips. The Redleaf Rose can reach about 2 metres in height and is best grown as an informal plant where the canes are allowed to grow up and arch over to form an attractive vase shape. *R. rubrifolia* is very hardy and can be grown into Zone 2.



Rosa rubrifolia
showing the glaucous blue foliage of the summer, and the developing hips

I'm very fond of yellow roses, and two shrubs are great favourites of mine, *R. hugonis*, Father Hugo's Rose and *R. x harrisonii*, Harrison's Yellow Rose. Father Hugo's rose starts to bloom in May, one of the earliest roses to bloom. The flowers are single, soft yellow, and a well-grown plant will be covered in flowers. It is hardy to about Zone 5. *R. hugonis* is a tough plant, and can withstand poor soils as long as it has good drainage. It is native to China, and was named for an early Christian missionary. Harrison's Yellow Rose has deeper yellow, fragrant, double flowers that bloom in early June. It is of hybrid origin, and has been grown since about 1830. Harrison's Yellow Rose has been very popular in American gardens because it is easy to grow and very hardy. Both of these roses can easily reach 2 m in height.

Rosa damascena is the Damask rose, and has been written about since Roman times. It was native to Asia Minor and is thought to have been introduced into western Europe by the Crusaders. One variety 'Versicolor' is commonly called the York and Lancaster Rose because this variety has flowers that contain both red and white petals. It is very fragrant. *R. damascena* was often a favourite flower of painters and has been included in many floral still lifes. The Damask Rose is

hardy to Zone 4, but it does require fairly good garden soil. Most of the Damask roses only bloom once, but there is a group within the species referred to as the 'Portland Roses', which are also called the Damask Perpetuals, and these will have some re-bloom late in the summer. This latter group though is hard to find in the trade. The Damask roses have fairly large hips which add to the fall garden.

Rosa gallica, the French Rose or Apothecary Rose, has been cultivated in western Europe for centuries, and in addition to being a wonderful plant in its own right, it has figured in the parentage of many of our modern hybrid roses. It has dark red, to almost purple-red flowers that are very fragrant. The flowers, which appear in mid to late June are usually single to semi-double. The fruit makes a good show in the fall. *R. gallica* only grows to about a metre in height, and its growth habit is fairly up-right, so it is a good choice for smaller gardens. It is hardy to Zone 5.

One shrub rose to think twice about is the Austrian Briar rose, *R. foetida*. We tend to think of roses as being pleasantly fragrant, but *R. foetida* is an exception. While this species has gorgeous flowers, they have an unpleasant smell, so if you do decide to grow this, it is best planted away from the patio or house. The other problem with this species is that it is very prone to developing black spot, so it may need regular treatments of fungicidal sprays. The best known variety 'Austrian Copper' has single deep coppery-orange flowers. There is also the variety *R. foetida* 'Persiana' or the Persian Yellow Rose. *Rosa foetida* can become very large, almost 3 m tall, and it is wide spreading too. It has attractive, round bright red hips. While it is susceptible to black spot, this plant tolerates poor soils. It is hardy into Zone 4. This rose is one of the many ultimate parents of a number of our modern tea roses, including the beautiful 'Peace' rose. Unfortunately, it passed on the genes for susceptibility to black spot along with its beautiful flowers.

These are just a few of the possible shrub roses to consider planting. There are many other species and varieties that are equally lovely. We are fortunate in having an excellent local B.C. nursery that specializes in shrub roses. Check out the Old Rose Nursery, at www.oldrosenursery.com.

PROPAGATORS AND PEDIGREES

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

In 1969 Ed Trayling, long time rhododendron fancier, breeder, and generous distributor of hybrid seeds and cuttings, gave some seeds from one of his recent crosses to Vern Finley. This was the beginning of a new rhododendron hybrid which would, more than 20 years later, be chosen as 'Burnaby Centennial'.

Burnaby had chosen the rhododendron as its official flower in 1967, during Canada's Centennial celebration, and now they had chosen this particular example as their official rhododendron.

'Burnaby Centennial'
('Leona' x 'Etta Burrows')
hybridized by Ed Trayling, 1968
germinated by Vern Finley, 1969
submitted to Burnaby Beatification Commission 1988
Designated winner and named 1992

(photo Mike Trembath)

Both Ed and Vern germinated the seeds, which were a cross between Hjalmer Larson's 'Etta Burrows', with its outstanding foliage and blood red flowers, and Rudolph Henny's 'Leona' (named after his wife), with its intense pink, spotted-darker rose, blooms. At three inches each, the individual flowers of 'Leona' are very wide, but they are held in an upright domed truss.

After germination both growers brought the seedlings along. Regrettably, Ed suffered significant losses of his nursery plants to theft over the years, so it was left to Vern to grow on the remainder of the seedlings.

The parentage of 'Burnaby Centennial' is fairly complex, with red colours predominating. Of the five species known to have contributed to 'Burnaby Centennial's gene pool, four were red. But mixed in are the genes of *R. fortunei* - the hardiest of the scented rhodos - with its very large, pale, frilled, blooms. Another of the progenitors was 'Corona', whose own parents are listed as 'unknown'. However, according to Clive Justice, 'Corona' claims at least part of its heritage from *R. griffithianum*, another species with very large, pale, and sometimes scented flowers.



Designation as the official rhododendron of Burnaby's centennial celebration was a somewhat longer and more arduous process than simply submitting a nice looking truss to an evaluation committee. All entries had to be submitted by 1988, and each entrant had to supply multiple plants for evaluation. These specimens were then planted out in several locations all over Burnaby, and each year the selection committee visited and evaluated the plants in terms of their attractiveness and suitability for the public and private gardens in Burnaby.

ROOTSTALK

by Indumentum

Most of the great rhododendron gardens of the world have water features. Valley Gardens near Windsor has Virginia Water, Bodnant in North Wales has a rushing mountain stream in a spectacular rock gorge and the gardens of Scotland and Ireland have water all over the place, mostly coming down in sheets. These water features are typical of mountain environments where rhododendrons are happiest. Mountain streams and lakes are clear and cool and do not support much aquatic growth probably because the water is cold and generally acidic.

Very few of us are blessed with a natural water feature in the garden but it is not that difficult to create a pond that blends in with a rhododendron garden. Most references on garden ponds, however, focus on pond plants and fish. A pond choked with aquatic plants does not work so well for a rhododendron setting where it is effective to create cool, calm reflective surfaces to contrast with rhododendrons that Germaine Greer has described as “bloated heads of rubbery blooms of knicker–pink, dildo cream and gingivitis red”.

Site selection is critical to achieve a natural looking landscape. A pond should be sited at a low spot and if you construct a stream it should be located in a small valley. It is surprising how often this fundamental rule is disregarded. We were very disappointed when we visited the famous rock garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh to see the waterfall starting at the top of a hill. In nature, waterfalls are always located in valleys, and do not issue from a ridge top.

Ponds and streams for a rhododendron garden are most easily constructed to any desired shape using a flexible rubber liner laid over sand and fabric to reduce the risk of puncture. The key to successful pond construction is to plan the edge treatment beforehand, not as an afterthought. A rock–lined pool is one of the most effective designs and this is achieved by constructing a level shelf around the edge of the pond about six inches below the planned water level. You can buy a relatively cheap laser level from Lee Valley Tools that will make this task much easier. The liner is cut to extend several feet beyond the shelf. Large rocks are placed along the shelf to form the edge and the liner is folded up behind the rocks. Soil is backfilled behind the liner up against the rocks keeping the liner vertical. When the pond is filled, the water level is about six inches above the base of the rocks resulting in a natural look.

As the pond will be at a low spot, drainage around the pond is likely to be required to avoid the soil around the pond getting soggy because the liner is interrupting the natural drainage and to prevent groundwater pressure lifting the liner and floating it to the top of the pond. We put four inch drain pipe and drain rock all around our pond.

It is worthwhile building a small stream into the pond as the circulation of water keeps the main pond clear of algae. We use a submersible drainage pump to power the stream rather than the more expensive pumps sold specifically for ponds. Streams are constructed by forming small ponds with intervening small waterfall steps. The liner is overlapped from one pond to the next over the step and rocks are placed to cover the liner to achieve a natural look.

Many visitors to our garden ask if there are fish in the pond. Certainly the herons who often stop by, think there ought to be fish there. Armies of frogs showed up a few months after filling the pond with water and they do a great job of keeping the rhododendrons clear of root weevils. If we had fish they would probably eat the tadpoles and the root weevils would then have a field day.