

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 16 Number 9 November 2003



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

Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. 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, November 19, 2003

Speaker: Susan Murray

Topic: Heritage Trees of the Fraser Valley

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show & Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sale: Colleen Forster

Quick Hits



CHRISTMAS PARTY The December meeting, on Wednesday, December 17th will be another great potluck dinner. As in previous years, we will start a bit earlier, at 6:00 pm. This allows us lots of time for eating, and visiting, and eating. More details in next month's Yak.

(And I love the way this piece of clip art looks almost exactly like our logo. It is sort of the Christmas equivalent to *R. hippophaeoides*.)

abebooks.com ABE Books is the name of one of the best local success stories I have encountered in a long time - particularly in these times of dot.com meltdowns. It started out as a regular store front selling used, out-of-print, and antiquarian books in Victoria, However its principals soon realized that what was missing in the used-books arena was a way to find the specific book that a customer wanted if it was not currently in stock in that particular book-seller's establishment. So they built it, called it Advanced Book Exchange, and thereby allowed any book lover anywhere the ability to browse through hundreds and hundreds of used book stores all over the world.

This is a marvelous thing! I personally have purchased out-of-print books from Minnesota, Hay-on-Wye, California, and Oxford. It is dead easy, secure, and free. The books are often very reasonably priced, and service is (at least all the times I have used it) very prompt. You will be amazed at what you can find. www.abebooks.com

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES We were a little tardy in getting the membership renewal applications out to you this year. I have attached a hard copy to the last page of this issue. You can outshine us by completing and returning it and your payment as soon as possible to Wenonah. This will ensure there is no gap in either your subscription to the Yak, or our Chapter's cash flow.





From the President

2004 TRUSS SHOW AND PLANT SALE

A decision was made to host the Truss Show and Plant Sale on May 15th, 2004 at the United Church hall. Fortunately this date will not clash with the long weekend and we hope to have many more members assisting and achieving an even greater success than last year. We are hoping to introduce some changes in the procedure so that it is easier for the cashiers to identify and credit the source of the plant.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

Efforts are now underway to make our Christmas Party, which will be held on December 17th, as entertaining as in previous years. Any suggestions or ideas would be most welcome.

NOVEMBER SPEAKER

Our speaker for November - Susan Murray - is one of our own members who has a great gift and enthusiasm for public speaking. The topic is surely one of interest to all gardeners so bring a friend or encourage members from other garden clubs to attend.

RAFFLE AND TWOONIE TABLE

Please continue to be as generous as in previous meetings. The proceeds from the raffle really do make a difference to the Chapter's finances. However, I must admit that the very last item to be selected at the last meeting was my own contribution. I am feeling bad about that and hope to do better this time!

NOMINATIONS

Trevor is continuing to solicit for participation in the Executive next year. Please consider volunteering as I am certain that the experience will be most rewarding and that your involvement will bring a much greater appreciation and understanding of our common interest in rhododendrons.

WEB SITE

As a result of a suggestion by our webmaster Chris Klapwijk, the Executive have enthusiastically endorsed a proposal to include a commercial segment to our website. This would be available to any commercial enterprise willing to make a contribution to the Chapter's funds, and we are expecting that this will be a tremendous source for revenue for the Chapter. We have already had much interest and commitment from several suppliers. As a non-profit society our only goal in seeking revenue is to redistribute it to worthwhile projects. If the venture were to prove very successful it might enable the Chapter to purchase a site and then have its own garden and propagating capability, and perhaps even a meeting room which might also be rented to other organizations. The concept is new and original, and could potentially could become a major factor in promoting our Chapter and our activities.

MEMBERSHIP

PLEASE send your renewals to Wenonah as soon as possible.

THANKS

Thanks to Mary-Anne for co-ordinating and to Patti and Wendy for their contributions to the refreshment table.

CONDOLENCES

We were sorry to hear of the passing of Merv Firby, husband of our Eleanor, in early October. All of the members of the Chapter send our deepest sympathy and warmest wishes to Eleanor during this difficult time.

Mike Bale



COMPANION PLANTS

G is for Gentians
the Gentian Family
Family: Gentianaceae

You want blue?? You'll get blue with Gentians, and not just blue, but electric fantastic true, true, blue!! But you're going to have to work for it, because they're not all that easy to grow. If you have a well-designed rockery, you'll be more successful with the mat-forming types, but there are a few other taller ones that can thrive in mixed borders. With careful selection, you can have gorgeous blue blooms from May to October, or even later if the weather holds.

Our native
*Gentiana
sceptrum*
showing the
terminal
purple-blue
trumpets



The spring-flowering *Gentiana verna* (Star Gentian) does not display the familiar trumpet shaped gentian flower

It starts with the Star Gentian, *G. verna*, and then the Trumpet Gentians, *G. acaulis* and *G. alpina*. Then for mid-summer blooms, try *G. dahurica* (Spotted Gentian), *G. paradoxa*, *G. septemfida* (Crested Gentian), and *G. cruciata* (Cross Gentian). For fall there are the lime-haters that like cool peaty soils – *G. sino-ornata*, *G. asclepiadea* (Willow Gentian) and *G. macaulyi*, and the exception to the rule, *G. farreri*, which prefers a scree bed.

We also have some native gentians. One suitable for quite moist sites is *G. sceptrum* (King Gentian) (*G. menziesii*), an herbaceous form growing 2-3 feet tall, with large purple-blue trumpets in late summer.

In truth, not all gentians are blue – there is the yellow species, *G. lutea*, and several white types, but I personally dismiss these as not worthy of being called gentians!

The very low alpine species grow only 2 to 4 inches tall, and are never invasive, spreading only 8 to 12 inches. They are mostly evergreen or partially so, and have comparatively large flowers for their size – some trumpets up to a startling 2 inches long. The herbaceous types are generally taller, from 12 to 36 inches. Most make tidy clumps, and may retain a winter rosette of foliage.

When you see gentians in a plant center, please don't be so distracted by saying WOW! so many times that you forget to read the labels carefully to determine exactly which ones you're about to get. They are quite particular as to growing conditions, and poor locations tend to encourage leaf diseases. Slugs can be dissuaded by a good dressing of grit around the base. All gentians prefer drainable light humus soil that does not dry out in summer, and partial shade. Spring and early summer bloomers can tolerate a neutral soil, but the later they bloom, the more necessary an acidic soil.

Increase is tricky for many, due to their tight growth habit, but some, like *G. acaulis* and *G. sino-ornata*, come apart well; just make sure to firm the divisions in well to establish. Seed production is probably best left to experienced professionals, but hey! you've nothing to lose if you try.

So if you're one of those gardeners blessed with a rockery, you owe it to yourself to have at least two or three different ones, and for those of us who do not, well – we can dream, can't we?



Gentiana alpina



Gentiana septemfida (Crested Gentian) showing the "seven cuts" of the crest

Happy Planting

Colleen Forster



From the Editor

Last Month:

October's presentation by Margaret Cadwaladr about the life and history of Veronica Milner was an interesting change from our usual presentation, and, as Sean Rafferty commented afterwards, would make "a good Masterpiece Theatre series," or perhaps a series of talks on the "Rich and Famous." It must have been quite a culture shock to have been brought up in the grandeur of a castle and then immigrate to such a secluded and untamed location in faraway Canada. The garden she created under those circumstances is all the more indicative of her artistic drive.

Many of us have visited "Milner Gardens" and also heard Jim Calwaladr's presentation regarding the development and future plans for the site. As was reported in the last newsletter, the garden volunteers are presently propagating rare and hard-to-find species for sale to members as a fund raising project. The Chapter has acquired a copy of Margaret's book and hopefully it will get well worn.

Colleen Forster, as usual, enthralled members with useful and exciting companion plants, and Vern Finley's delightful presentations always spur us on to look for additional interesting plants to mix with our rhododendrons

This Month:

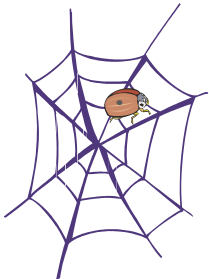
Susan Murray will talk to us about the heritage trees on the south side of the Fraser River. Susan has a long history in things horticultural, as her family is that of the long-established and deservedly renowned "Murray's Nurseries" in Vancouver.

Susan is an instructor at Kwantlen University College, in the School of Horticulture, where she teaches courses in Plant Identification, Landscape Design, and Arboriculture.

Next Month:

The Annual Christmas Extravaganza! Come early! Come hungry!

Brenda Macdonald



Crawling 'Round the Web:

● Paghat the Ratgirl - This is an odd little site I keep bumping up against, whenever I Google something to do with gardens or plants. The owner of the site appears to be an artist living in an old house located on the Olympic Peninsula. Eccentric would hardly be too strong a word for both the artist and the web site, but she does have some nice information about whichever plants seize her fancy.

<http://www.paghat.com/gardenhome.html>

● Linnean Herbarium - This is the site of the Swedish Museum of Natural History (in English) and contains images of the actual herbarium specimens collected, named, and labelled by Linneaus at the dawn of systemic botanical nomenclature. There may be only a single rhododendron (*Rhododendron ferrugineum* L.), but still it is a fascinating glimpse of the beginning of all the name calling.

<http://linnaeus.nrm.se/botany/fbo/welcome.html.en>

Up the Garden Path with Norma Senn



oppies

November 2003

Poppies are popular garden plants that offer brightly colored flowers for sunny areas. The poppy genus, *Papaver*, contains a great many species, and includes both annuals and perennials. There are also a number of closely related genera, like *Eschscholzia*, *Meconopsis* and *Romneya*, that also use poppy as part of their common name. Once established, perennial poppies will grow for years with virtually no care. Annual poppies also require little care as they usually self sow to provide many years worth of colorful flowers from just one planting. All poppies require a well-drained soil, but most need even soil moisture during the growing season.

In November we are all reminded of the little European annual poppy, *Papaver rhoeas*. This species, commonly called the Corn Poppy (because it is a common weed in European "corn" or wheat fields), has bright red petals with a black blotch at the base, and continues to serve as the model for the Remembrance Day lapel poppies. As European fields were disturbed during World War I, Corn Poppy seed was brought to the soil surface where it could germinate. During the war, fields throughout the Lowland Countries, and especially in the cemeteries, were covered in Corn Poppies. John McRae's poem "In Flanders'



Papaver rhoeas

Fields" acknowledged the little poppy as a symbol of remembrance for those who died. In addition to the single red form, selections have been made from the wild to give us the 'Shirley' strain, which is noted for its pink to white flowers, and includes both single and double flowers. This strain was developed by Reverend Wilks in England in the 1880s, and is now the most common *P. rhoeas* form in cultivation.

The Iceland Poppy, *P. nudicaule*, another very popular member of the Poppy genus, is a short-lived perennial

that is native to sub-Arctic regions, and grows best in cool garden sites. It is easily grown from seed, and ripe seeds can be scattered directly over the garden area in fall, or saved and sown in early spring. Seed can also be started indoors in late March with transplants moved to the garden in mid-May. However, like most poppies, Iceland Poppies develop a tap root so they can be hard to transplant. Young transplants need to be moved while the plants are still small. There are many strains of Iceland Poppies, each with lovely color selections. One of my favorite strains is 'Champagne Bubbles' which has flowers in a range of soft pastel colors. Iceland Poppies are the only poppy that make good cut flowers.



Papaver nudicaule
'Champagne Bubbles'

Because they have milky sap that can impede uptake of water by the flower, the cut stem ends need to be seared by dipping in boiling water for a few seconds. This procedure causes the milky sap to coagulate slightly allowing the stems to absorb water. Buds should be cut in the morning, and choose those that are just starting to open for best cut-flower performance.

Another short-lived perennial poppy that is easily grown from seed is the Alpine Poppy, *P. burseri*, also known as *P. alpinum*. This is a small plant that only grows 6 to 8 inches tall. Its small stature and requirement for good drainage make it a good species to grow in rock gardens. It is a spring bloomer with flowers of red, orange and yellow. As you might expect from its common name, the Alpine Poppy does well in cool gardens. For northern or cool-season gardens especially, both the Iceland and Alpine Poppies are well-worth growing.

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While not a member of the *Papaver* genus, *Eschscholzia californica*, the California Poppy, is a good choice for warmer climates and dry slopes. While it has not become an invasive pest in BC, there is debate about allowing the California Poppy to become naturalized in areas outside its home range. But, where a plant is wanted that can be allowed to self-sow and become naturalized, this can be a good choice. The typical California Poppy is orange or yellow, but selections like the 'Mission Bells Strain' offer additional colors of white and pink, as well as semi-double flowers. California Poppies have pretty blue-green, fine-textured foliage during the early part of the summer, but as the flowers set seed, the leaves turns yellow. New rosettes of foliage will be found at the soil surface in early fall. In its native habitat, the California Poppy is a short-lived perennial, but it usually behaves as an annual in most of British Columbia. As mentioned above, it does self-sow, but birds find the seeds attractive, so you may need to plant additional seeds from time to time. Like the other poppies, seed can be sown in the fall in the mildest areas of BC, or for colder regions, in early spring. Seeds can be started indoors and plants moved to the garden after danger of frost has passed in the spring.

The Opium Poppy, *P. somniferum*, has been cultivated for its edible seeds and as a medicinal plant since at least ancient Greek times. This is the species from which we derive the drug opium, but the plants grown in Canada have been selected for their flowers, not for the drug. Seeds are listed for sale in some seed catalogues, but it may be difficult to find seeds commercially, even though it is legal to grow the ornamental forms. This is an annual poppy that self-sows readily, and once it is introduced to a garden, it may come up as a volunteer for years. So, if you are looking for seeds to try, it might be easiest to ask someone to save a couple of seed capsules for you. The ornamental varieties have big, showy flowers in shades of pink, white or red. The foliage is blue-green, and the plants grow 24 to 30 inches tall.



Papaver alpinum



Eschscholzia californica



Papaver somniferum



Papaver orientale
'Sultana'

They need rich, moist soil and full sun for best growth. Because of their coarse texture and floppy habit, they are best grown in groups, and they benefit from being staked. Poppy seeds sold for baking are the seeds of *P. somniferum*, but they are heat treated so will not germinate. They do not contain opium. The dried seed heads of this poppy are highly prized for use in dried flower arrangements.

Perhaps the most commonly grown perennial poppy is *Papaver orientale*, the Oriental Poppy. This is a large, coarse textured plant that seems to be able to grow for years without any care. Old plants of Oriental Poppy can sometimes be found growing around abandoned pioneer homesteads.

There are many selected cultivars of Oriental Poppies, and flowers may be single or double, and come in shades of white, pink and red, with all sorts of shades in between. The hairy, coarse foliage dies back to the ground by mid to late July, so most people recommend planting Oriental Poppies in the back of a flower bed so that other plants will hide the dying, messy foliage by mid-summer. The flowers, which appear from late May to mid-June, grow to about 3 feet tall, and make a fabulous show. While they are very short-lived as a cut flower, if treated like the Iceland Poppies, you can get cut Oriental Poppies to last in a vase for a couple of days. Oriental Poppies can be purchased in the spring as container plants, or as bare roots in September. Some strains can be grown from seed. Once planted, they do not like to be disturbed, so choose your planting site with care.

There are many other species of poppies, but these species are the ones most commonly found in cultivation. They are all easy to grow, and suffer few problems with pests or diseases. Most of the annual types are readily available through seed catalogues, and the Oriental Poppies are available from garden centres, and occasionally from mail order catalogues.

Norma Senn

ROOTSTALK

by Indumentum

In gardening as in life, you have to develop relationships to get by. Garden relationships can be rewarding, they can be frustrating and some go on for a long time. I have a very mature relationship with a *Rhododendron orbiculare*. It occupies a discreet position in the garden, the new growth like little unfolding hands is astonishing and it has flowered beautifully in the past couple of years. My relationship with the *Magnolia stellata* has been less satisfactory. It has been moved around so much it went into a big sulk for many years. But now it has starting to put on vigorous new growth and we are looking forward to better times together.

However, the longest and most tempestuous relationship has been with a huge cottonwood tree. When we cleared our one-acre lot, it towered over the southwest corner leaning out into the road. The bulldozer tried to push it over but the lean was the wrong way so the tree was left for the next 12 years mocking and leering at us. Huge branches would drop like spears every few years leaving us to clear up the mess and be thankful there was nobody walking along the road at the time. The huge wind storm in September 1999 broke off a thousand branches which were strewn all over our front garden. As the tree was on City property (the road allowance) I wrote a letter to the City of Surrey asking them to remove the tree particularly as it was a danger to passers-by. There was a fine 20-foot cedar growing only 10 feet away which would be a good replacement and would have more room to grow.

The City sent an arborist who decided there was nothing wrong with the tree. However they still cut off some of the huge branches overhanging the road but not on our side. I phoned the arborist and pointed out that the tree was still a danger to me when working in the yard and would likely damage a fine *Paulownia tomentosa* we had planted nearby. He responded by saying that it was our fault for planting the Empress Tree at that location and they did not want to remove part of the “Surrey canopy” just because branches might fall on me. The Surrey tree bylaw wins again.

Over the next four years the tree grew more and more top heavy. We consoled ourselves that at least it provided some high dappled shade. Then on a gusty day in August a large branch broke off the top and sailed about 100 feet into the garden narrowly missing a *Rhododendron glanduliferum* grown from Peter Wharton seed from China. I took detailed measurements and photographs of the crime scene, with circles and arrows on the back of each one, and decided to have another try with the City. This time a different arborist agreed that the tree was dangerous and a crew was dispatched to cut the giant down to size (a stump two feet high).

Tree by-laws are all very well if they protect particularly fine examples of interesting species. It is astonishing that there seems to be no discrimination between fine specimen trees and cottonwoods, the largest weeds in the Fraser Valley. And who wants a 16-year relationship with a weed?



Fraser South Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

2004 Membership Dues

PLEASE CHECK THE APPROPRIATE MEMBERSHIP

Full **\$35.00**

Local **\$20.00**

– this membership does not entitle you to receive the quarterly ARS Journals.

Associate **\$10.00**

– available to ARS members who belong to another American Rhododendron Society chapter.

Please indicate chapter in which you are a full member: _____

THIS SECTION MUST BE COMPLETED

Name _____

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PLEASE MAKE YOUR CHEQUE PAYABLE TO: *Fraser South Rhododendron Society*

AND FORWARD THIS FORM AND CHEQUE TO: *Wenonah March*
3759 201A Street
Langley, BC V3A 1R1

If you have a question regarding membership please call Wenonah at 604–532–9062.