

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society



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

2004 Officers

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Volume 17 Number 4 April 2004

This Month's Meeting: Wednesday, April 21, 2004

Speaker: Garth Wedemire, President
Fraser Valley Rhododendron Society

Topic: Rhododendron Collections from
Maple Ridge to Mission

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show & Tell: Vern Finley

Quick Hits



Plant Sale!

Don't forget our Plant Sale.
This year, the big day is
Saturday May 15th, 10:00am to 3:00pm
at our usual meeting place -
the Langley United Church. Be there for
some wonderful opportunities.

Listing of Rhodo Varieties and their Locations, for British Columbia

About 15 years ago, Harry Wright of Courtenay, B.C., became interested in documenting all the rhododendrons - species, hybrids, and known crosses - that grow successfully in B.C. gardens. Since that time some 113 gardeners have sent him their inventory lists, and the total of rhododendrons stands as 3,901.

In anticipation of the ARS Annual Convention that will be held in Victoria in the spring of 2005, Harry would like to update his book "Rhododendron Varieties in BC". He requests that all those who previously sent him their lists, send him an update, and that any other interested members of the rhododendron community advise him of what they have and where their gardens are located, so that an updated and expanded version of the book will be available in time for the convention. If the material is sent to him by next fall, it will give him time over the winter to prepare it for the conference.

Harry can be reached at:

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I WANTED TO START SMALL

I wanted to start small. The idea was to keep the cost down and make it affordable. Keep it simple, easy to understand and accomplish. The whole idea of propagation was mysterious, mystical and, so far, mythical. The concept of growing plants from cuttings seemed as unattainable as turning sand into gold or politicians into model citizens.

It ranked right up there with winning the lottery, and the chances of success were just as fickle. But if others could do it, why couldn't I? I wasn't a complete idiot..... all right, the jury is still out on that one. Yet, how hard could it be? Perhaps if I asked the right questions of the right people at the right time, I might get the right answers.

From the President

Fortunately, the Vancouver Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society came to my rescue. The regular monthly meetings at Van Dusen Gardens officially began at 8:00. But at 7:30 a knowledgeable member engaged other members in an educational discussion about various topics essential to the care and coddling of rhodos. So, if we arrived early,

we were blessed with a wealth of information about such mysteries as pruning, fertilizing, companion plants, greenhouse practices, plant labels, bonsai, books and educational materials, competitive showing, and.....wait for it, PROPAGATION.

Not only was I early for the education, I arrived before 7:00 in order to ask all those dumb questions I was afraid to ask during the meetings. As the demonstrators were setting up their lesson materials they were pestered by my ignorant queries. But, show an interest, and someone "in the know" will generally be willing to encourage you. I have found this to be true when traveling in a foreign country where there is a language barrier. Try a few greetings in their native tongue and in spite of your bumbling effort they will love you for honoring them. However, ladies, if a male in Jerusalem asks you "Mah hah sha ah?" (What is the hour?), he is more interested in making time than knowing the time. But I digress.

As I showed my enthusiasm and learned some initial vocabulary and concepts integral to rhodo propagation, experienced members kindly encouraged me. Visits to homes and gardens are invaluable moments of inspiration and education. I have been richly blessed to be invited to the gardens of the Finleys, Johnsons, Darts, Gene Round, Lil Hodgson, the Rhodes, Clays, Trembaths, and Garth Wedemire. From our own chapter I reflect on the graciousness of the Crabbs, Badmintons, Roeskes, Bales, Fearings, Irwins, Bengoughs, and so many others who have been my mentors.

Garth Wedemire arrived at Van Dusen one evening with tools in hand and a lesson in mind. We were to learn, "Window sill Propagation of Rhododendrons".

Step- by-step I followed, took notes, and drew diagrams.

1. Begin by taking cuttings correctly. Avoiding flower buds, take the slender growth buds at the side of the plant, when the growth is semi-ripe.
2. Cut the stem 3-4 inches from the tip. Remove all but 4-6 leaves at the tip. Excise half of each leaf.
3. Wound the lowest 1 inch of the stem, exposing the cambium layer.
4. Dip in rooting hormone such as Seradix. It should be number 3, for hardwood.
5. Rooting soil mixture: 50 percent peat and 50 percent coarse sand. (I later learned I would have more success with 50/50 peat and perlite).
6. Insert cuttings in a small plastic pot – 1 gallon works best. Cover the pot with a plastic bag supported with 3 small wooden sticks. Use an elastic band to hold the plastic bag on the pot.
7. Place the pot of cuttings on a north-facing window sill and ensure the temperature is about 20 degrees. Atop a refrigerator is also ideal.
8. Water the cuttings every week or two. Periodically remove the plastic to give them fresh air.

Cuttings should root by 16 weeks.

Bobby Ogdon



From the Editor

Last Month: Last month we enjoyed a fascinating presentation by Terry Maczuga of Cloud Mountain Farm on the use of dwarf conifers in the garden. Living as we do in the Pacific Northwest, I think we all periodically suffer from conifer overexposure, so it was heartening and instructive to see such a great demonstration of how these plants can provide year-round interest and structure to a landscape. I think we all knew that there are conifers in every imaginable shape, and many foliage colours, but still it was nice to see an actual garden where they were so extensively utilized, and not a one of them made me think of the 100 ft. hemlocks in my back yard.

This Month: This month Garth Wedemire, only just returned from a plant-hunting trip to Asia, will be talking about rhododendron collections in our area.

Next Month: Our Annual Beer Bottle Truss Show. Get ready, it's coming!

The Business Stuff:

SHOW AND SALE

Our major fund raising event of the year is our annual Plant Sale, to be held this year on Saturday, May 15th, between 10:00am and 3:00pm, in the church hall parking lot. This is the event in which we can all participate in one way or another, and which does so much to ensure our Chapter's continued participation in the gardening community.

We will need a number of volunteers to help during the sale, so at the April meeting there will be a sign-up sheet blocked off in two-hour sections for you to pick from. The jobs are not onerous and do much to make the event run more smoothly and profitably. We will need some muscle-help with the setting up and taking down of the tables, some cashier-help during the show and sale, some general dogsbody-help during the day to help with questions from the public and keep our vendors supplied with a cup of coffee now and again, as well as some help with clean-up after 3:00pm.

And even if you find it impossible to sign up for a 2-hour help session, you can always assist by bringing in some trusses for display – this is what brings the public in off the street – or donating something for our Tweekie Table, such as plants you have raised from seed; divided perennials; or surplus or unwanted rhodos, azaleas, or other shrubs. Make sure everything is well labelled. Now is the perfect opportunity to pass on those plants which are getting crowded out, knowing that a new home for them will benefit your garden, the purchaser's garden and our club.

RAFFLE AND REFRESHMENTS

Treasurer Alan March reports that income from last month's raffle was \$71.00, and from the refreshments was \$34.00. Although individual contributions may not be huge, the cumulative amount goes a long way toward handling our monthly expenses. And none of this would be possible without the generous support of those who make a donation to the raffle table, or to the stalwart kitchen ladies whose indefatigable efforts in providing the baked goods, making the tea and coffee, and cleaning up afterward remain largely unsung. I would thank them all individually, only I am never quite sure who they are. But as someone with a committed sweet tooth, as well as on behalf of all the other members, I would like to thank them all for making our refreshment break so enjoyable.

Notes:

Jim And Elfriede DeWolf write:

We wish to thank all those wonderful people who so generously donated fine plant material to The Glades Rhododendron Garden Park:

- UBC Asian Gardens donated eleven fine Rhododendron species grown from seed collected in China by Peter Wharton.
- Arnim Roeske donated a stunning ten year old species also from Peter Wharton's seed collection.
- Dr. Allan Kilvert donated five magnificent species Rhododendrons and a beautiful Kalmia.
- Betty Nicholson donated five great shrubs that we welcome to the garden.
- Ed Metcalfe offered a Pinus strobus (Eastern white pine) that we were unable to use as we already have a large one, but we were able to find a good home for it with Brian and Lois Williams.

You can be assured that your plants will be cared for and will be appreciated by the many visitors to The Glades in the years to come.

Brenda Macdonald



COMPANION PLANTS

L is for Liquidamber,
of the Witch Hazel Family
Family: Hamamelidaceae,

The Sweet Gums are wonderful shade trees of a formal habit that give great definition to yards, boulevards and parks. Often mistaken

for maples due to their form and foliage, a quick peek at the branches shows alternate, not opposite, leaf attachment. Any similarity to the witch hazels is certainly not evident to the observer, and has to do with minutiae like shape of pollen and such. The glossy dark leaves change to brilliant shades of scarlet, gold and maroon in autumn. Happiest in deep acidic soils, Liquidambers colour best when not stressed for water, unlike most other fall foliage trees. Two Far East species exist, *L. formosana* and *L. orientalis*, but the species most commonly grown is the one native to the eastern USA, *L. styraciflua*. The leaves of all are palmately lobed, with 3 to 7 segments, and from the inconspicuous green flowers curious spiny balls are produced, hanging singly on stalks below the branches and lasting well into winter. The tree is named for the fragrant resin that oozes out when the bark is cut. This gum was chewed by early settlers and natives, and used in medicines and perfumes.

Many selections have been made from the species - unusual leaf shapes: 'Worpleston' and 'Rotundifolia'; variegation: 'Silver King', 'Moonbeam', and 'Golden Treasure'; consistent fall color: 'Burgundy' and 'Palo Alto'; and habit: 'GumBall' (a dense shrub), and 'Festival' (columnar).

Choose the site carefully – they dislike root disturbance and will sucker petulantly in retaliation. One small drawback is that the roots are fairly shallow, and can create havoc if planted too close to walks or driveways, so give them space, preferably in a mixed border or woodland. Ultimate height in cultivation is much less than in the wild, usually slow to 50 ft, with a 20 ft spread. Young trees can suffer tip damage in late spring frosts, but they settle down with age (don't we all!?) Used as a background to a bank of rhodos, the contrast in autumn is truly spectacular, and the corky bark and formal branching pattern give interest all winter.

Another plant of interest in the same family and definitely more witch hazel-like, is the *Loropetalum*, an evergreen woodland shrub from the Far East. Unfortunately it is on the edge of our hardiness zone. The species, *L. chinense*, is white flowered and fragrant, with arching branches 3-5ft high and wide. However, look for one called 'Razzleberry' – far more eye catching with fluorescent fuchsia-pink spidery blooms just like a Hamamelis, mostly in spring but off and on in the summer too. The foliage is matte burgundy, blending to olive-green inside the plant, and is best in sun. It should be sheltered from cold wind and heavy frosts, in deep rich acidic soil that is not too dry – possibly a west wall in the company of other plants. Other colored forms may be offered, but they are similar if not the same. *Loropetalum* is a novelty and not readily available, but worth a look, and certainly unusual – especially to see a tray of 2 inch tall cuttings in full bloom in the prop-house in February! I've also seen it as a young plant put in hanging baskets as a focal point – very attractive.

Happy Planting,

Colleen Forster



Liquidambar styraciflua



Liquidambar styraciflua
fall colour



Loropetalum chinense rubrum



Up the Garden Path with Norma Senn

Recently, ferns have become increasingly popular additions to gardens because they offer a range of foliage colours and textures that persist throughout the growing season and, if placed correctly, serve as good low-maintenance companions to many other garden plants. Some ferns are evergreen and add interest to the winter garden. We are fortunate in having lots of fern species available commercially, including both fine native plants and introduced species.

Spring is a good time to plant ferns since there is ample soil moisture available to get them started. As mentioned above, ferns are adapted to a variety of growing sites, however most grow best in shady areas with acidic soils that are well-drained and rich in humus. Ferns need to be watered regularly during the first year of establishment, but after that, if planted in a suitable location and mulched, they require little care.

Perhaps my favourite ferns are the Maidenhair

Ferns, in the genus *Adiantum*. There are several species that are reliably hardy. *Adiantum pedatum*, the Common Maidenhair Fern, is native to northeastern North America, but it is easy to grow and is well-adapted to the West Coast. The Rosy Maidenhair Fern, *A. hispidulum*, and the very beautiful Himalayan Maidenhair Fern,



Adiantum hispidulum
Rosy Maidenhair Fern

A. venustum, are also easy to grow. All three species have fan-shaped, curling fronds with light to bright green foliage that is held up on dark, wiry stems. The Himalayan Fern is especially beautiful because of its soft, filmy fronds. The Maidenhairs are interesting to watch open in the spring as the fiddleheads or crosiers slowly uncurl and stretch up. In my own garden, I've watched a single small plant of the Common Maidenhair Fern increase to a patch that is well over two feet across in about eight years. This plant needs even moisture throughout the summer, but in its shady location, with a good layer of mulch, I've found it to be easy to grow.

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Ferns

April 2004

We often think of ferns as being delicate plants best suited to protected, damp, woodland conditions, and for many ferns, this is the case. However, these plants have been on Earth for a long time, and are tougher than you might think. They are thought to have preceded the dinosaurs, and paleontologists think that ferns served as major food sources for some of the herbaceous dinosaurs. Any plants that have grown for so many millennia must be survivors.

Ferns do not bear flowers or seeds, but they do have an interesting reproduction cycle. The plants we see and grow in our gardens are known as the sporophyte generation, and they are characterized by having large leaves or fronds. Fronds are green and "fern-like," and carry on photosynthesis for the plant. These fronds may or may not produce spores, depending on the fern species. In some ferns, there is a second set of specialized fronds called the fertile fronds, that are brown and more stick-like. These fronds are strictly devoted to producing spores. If a fern species has both types of fronds, we say that it has a dimorphic habit. Either way, fronds from the sporophyte plants bear specialized structures called sporangia, which look like rusty brown "spots," that contain thousands of tiny single cells called spores. When the spores are released they are carried by the wind, and if they land in an area that is conducive to their growth, the spores germinate and form a tiny green, heart-shaped structure, the prothallus. Under the right conditions, the prothallus gives rise to two specialized reproductive structures that contain egg and sperm cells. If water is present, the sperm cells swim to the eggs and fertilization will occur. From the fertilized egg, a new sporophyte plant gradually grows and the prothallus withers away, leaving us with a new fern plant. Because of the need to have free-standing water for reproduction, most ferns grow best in sites that have enough water for their needs.

Blechnum spicant, the Deer Fern, is native to the Pacific Northwest, so is very much at home in our gardens. It has dark green fronds that reach up to 20 inches in height. It is a well-behaved plant for the garden as the clumps increase in diameter slowly and makes a good companion plant for Rhododendrons. In the wild, the Deer Fern is found growing along forest edges and in clearings. It also does best with even moisture and mulch.



Blechnum spicant
Deer Fern

The Cinnamon Fern, *Osmunda cinnamomea*, is a very hardy fern, growing throughout most of eastern North America from Zones 10 to 2. It gets its name from the cinnamon-coloured fertile fronds (the special fronds that bear spores) that stand up straight, and look like rusty sticks. The fertile fronds appear early in the growing season and persist well into summer. The bright green, sterile fronds form a circular crown of growth around the fertile fronds. The sterile fronds have typical fern-shaped leaves and they can grow tall, reaching a height of 3 feet or



Osmunda cinnamomea
Cinnamon Fern

more. A related species, *O. claytoniana*, the Interrupted Fern, is one of the earliest ferns to appear in the spring. Its native range reaches as far west as Manitoba, but it has adapted well to local fern gardens here in B.C. The Interrupted Fern grows outward in a circular pattern, and in time the centre of the clump dies out, leaving an ever-increasing ring of growth. Both *Osmundas* are native to wet sites, and do best in deep, moist soils. With ample moisture, they are tolerant of sunny sites. The fronds are sometimes harvested for use in floral arrangements.

showing the stick-like cinnamon-coloured fertile fronds

The Ostrich Fern, *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, would be familiar to anyone who hikes the coastal forests. This plant has an enormous native range that includes B.C. In the wild, the Ostrich Fern can reach a height of 4 feet or more, but it is usually smaller when cultivated. The bright green, feathery foliage contrasts nicely with darker green broad-leaved shrubs. The Ostrich Fern does best with even moisture throughout the summer, but in my own garden, because I mulch them, I haven't had to water any of my clumps of Ostrich Fern at all, even during last summer's drought.



Matteuccia struthiopteris
Ostrich Fern
also known as Shuttlecock Fern

The Japanese Painted Fern, *Athyrium niponicum*, is hardy at least in southwestern B.C and possibly further inland, although I have yet to see a set of climate zones given for this species. The plant I have in my garden came out of a florist's gift basket where it had been included in a mixed planting of tropicals, so perhaps it can be successfully grown indoors in a cool bright location. It was easily transplanted to the garden a couple of years ago where it continues to prosper. As the common name suggests, the foliage is multi-coloured. Most of the fronds are pale gray-green, but near the centre there is a hint of soft red. The variety *A. niponicum*

pictum is a particularly colourful form that is readily available. Japanese Painted Ferns are relatively small plants that reach about a foot in height. If provided with even moisture throughout the summer, they will continue to unfurl new fronds. They make good accent plants, but are particularly handsome when planted in clusters. The light-coloured foliage adds patches of brightness to dark areas.



Athyrium niponicum pictum
Japanese Painted Fern

There are many other ferns that are well-adapted to West Coast gardens, for example, the Lady Ferns (various species of *Athyrium*), the Christmas Fern (*Polystichum*), and the Male Ferns (*Dryopteris* ssp.) For more information about these and others, take a look at some of the excellent web sites devoted to ferns. I particularly like the Hardy Fern Foundation's website, www.hardyferns.org as it has good pictures of individual ferns to accompany growing recommendations.

Norma Senn



Notes from the Field

Rhodos I have loved and lost ...

To paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan's Lord High Executioner of The Mikado: "I have a little list – and they are really missed". One might think that after oh so many years (a half century ? !!) the list would diminish, but perhaps I am incapable of learning, and what I must assume are blunders, continue.

When young, foolish, and enthusiastic, there is a tendency to "push the envelope"; to try those gorgeous smelly things (for example) that wiser growers warned you gently were too tender for your garden. But after a bit there is no excuse for that. Okay, you keep your *edgeworthii* in a big pot and run it in and out of your garage until you build that beautiful conservatory, but you no longer dig it up each fall.....

So, I am really talking about those plants which can and should (and do – for others) survive in gardens in your area. One early sadness was the loss of the charming *tephropeplum* var. *deliense*. Okay, it is a bit dicey here, but with a little TLC it might have survived for years. But, in a surge of team spirit, I dug the poor thing up, and took it in to one of the Vancouver Shows. The plant never really recovered. That year the VRS show, chaired by the late Lloyd Smith,

was held in an arena off Willingdon Road somewhere, and was a whopping big job, with beautiful displays put in by commercial nurseries, and a whopping big success. I had also dug up and transported a 2-3 ft. *R. 'Cosmopolitan'* in full bloom, and even that unsinkable variety was set back a couple of years. You see I didn't then, and still don't, container grow my plants. I could have lived quite happily with the loss of 'Cosmopolitan', but the *deliense* I still grieve for.

Maybe this is a form of Murphy's Law – I call it the Law of the Perverse – but it seems that if I treasure a plant, that's the one marked for death. It may be sudden, with no warning whatever, or it may be agonizingly slow – huddling and diminishing by the month or even by the year. For example, I am passionately fond of *baylei*. I think it is truly, spectacularly, beautiful. I have killed three good-sized plants, and cannot bear to try again. They live a year, thrill me with their bloom, and when I look at them the next spring, they are dead. I cringe over the loss of the Royston hybrid 'Butterball', and try to make myself feel less guilty by assuming it is a bit tender. I tucked a very sweet little plant of *megeratum* in what I hoped was a very safe and protected spot, but it simply quivered its way into nothingness.

But darn it all, *campylogynum* is hardy enough here. This is a group I find delicious. I love the nodding bells on long pedicels and the fat, sharply bent styles. My first plant came from the late Murray Stevens of The Glades, a good-sized plant (nearly three feet across) having flesh-coloured blossoms – the only one I have seen of this colour. It was one of the plants that I brought with me from our previous location, and since the "new garden" was not ready for planting, this specimen (along with many other plants) was left for the winter heeled into a large sawdust bank under some cedars. Alas, this area proved to be a frost pocket, and *campylogynum* was one of the many casualties. I then acquired a very attractive lavender-coloured plant from Silver Creek Nursery. It was so enjoyed that I added a plant in the rosy-plum colour most often seen, and also managed to find a plant of 'Patricia' (another varietal form.) These I thoroughly enjoyed. But over a period of three years my original lavender plant began to die back and finally gave up the ghost – not helped by a colony of moles. 'Patricia' lost about half of her top; I guess because she lost half of her bottom courtesy of big-dog-paws chasing said moles. This year, I find that the rosy-plum coloured plant is now history – no idea why.....(loud rude curses followed by lamentations.)

There was lovely little plant called *eleagnoides* (now relegated to being a variety of *lepidotum*). All the little white flowers had the most delightful faces. It wasn't very big, and it disappeared: as did another I was given, presumed to be of the same variety but not having the same lovely little faces.

And then we come to the Coxes. No I don't mean the three generations of experts, I mean their hybrids. My first was 'Ptarmigan'. It failed to appear after its first winter. 'Goosander' has finally gone to rest. It did try, manfully, but was speeded on its way by being too close to the edge of the bed, and so was periodically severely pruned by the mower. 'Curlew' – other people have beautiful mounds of bright yellow – I have tried twice. One has disappeared, the other is 'hangin' in there', but only just. 'Eider' puts forth some bloom on a straggly plant with horrible yellow spotty foliage – the plant world's adolescent acne sufferer. Even 'Egret', which came to me from the Rhodo Ranch bright and cheery and full of delightful blooms, although still with me, manages only the occasional bloom. Do you think perhaps I am jinxed? – or just a very poor caretaker.

I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that I should limit my garden to the big, husky, hulking plants that can stand up for themselves – no dainty little things for me.

M. L. "Mike" Trembath

What's in Bloom?

The following is a selection of rhododendrons and companion plants currently in blossom.



***R. irroratum* 'Spatter Paint'**

epithet: covered with dew **type:** elepidote

size: to 10m | 33' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr

hardiness: -20° C | -4° F

at RSF / 27March2004 photo: **Chris Klapwijk**



R. sulphureum

epithet: sulphur-coloured **type:** lepidote

size: to 1.5m | 5' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr

hardiness: -15° C | 5° F

at RSF / 27March2004 photo: **Chris Klapwijk**



R. calophytum

epithet: beautiful plant **type:** elepidote

size: to 15m | 50' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr

hardiness: -15° C | 5° F

at RSF / 27March2004 photo: **Chris Klapwijk**



R. 'Exbury Calstocker'

parentage: *calophytum* x 'Dr. Stocker'

type: elepidote **size:** to 3m | 10'

bloom period: Apr-May **hardiness:** -20° C | -4° F

hybridizer: Rothschild photo: **'Mike' Trembath**



R. hippophaeoides

epithet: resembling *Hippophae*, Sea Buckthorn

type: lepidote **hardiness:** -20° C | -4° F

size: to 1.5m | 5' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr

at RSF / 27March2004 photo: **Chris Klapwijk**

The FSRS emblem



Trillium erectum

native to eastern North America

size: to 60 cm/ 24' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr

also known as "Wake Robin" and "Stinking Benjamin"

North Vancouver / 10Apr2004 photo: **B. Macdonald**