

# 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](http://www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth)

## 2004 Officers

President: Bobby Ogdon  
604-572-9993

Vice Pres.: Colleen Forster  
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Secretary: Mary-Anne Berg  
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Treasurer: Alan March  
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Directors: Dalen Bayes  
Les Clay  
Harold Fearing

Membership: Wenonah March

Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald  
604-990-5353

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This Month's Meeting : Wednesday, December 15, 2004

early - set-up at 6:00  
commencement at 6:30

## THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

....possibly the highlight of anyone's festive season

## Quick Hits



### Christmas is coming .....

which means our Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner has arrived. As in previous years we will start a bit earlier than usual, so mark your calendar 6:30pm, or come at 6:00pm if you want to help set up.

Bring something to contribute to the potluck dinner, and some dishes and eating utensils so you can try everyone else's contributions.

Each attendee should also bring a gift valued under \$10.00 for the gift exchange. We have asked Santa Dalen to officiate.

Tune up your pipes, President Bobby has vetoed the karaoke suggestion, but he has promised to bring his guitar so we can sing (or, for those of use who can never remember anything beyond the first verse, hum) a few Christmas carols.



### Your Just Desserts .....

And, coming up in January is our Annual General Meeting and Dessert Extravaganza.



From the President

## TALK TO YOUR RHODOS

I have a confession: I like to walk through a garden and talk to the plants. Indeed, I listen as well. It's a kind of horticultural communication. Yes, I also sing to them, and when they respond it is music to my ears. After a tough meeting or challenging conflict it is easy to unwind among my rhododendrons. For me a walk in the garden is therapeutic, and a great relief from stress. Is it because plants do not talk back? On the contrary, the reverse is true. Plants in general and rhodos in particular speak to me with deafening clarity. However, not everyone hears the talk or sees the picture.

Being attuned to your plants is a definite prerequisite. Rhodos, in some ways are not so different from people. We begin by exchanging names. Continuing, we discover relevant facts as we pursue our interests. Background information may be: home, family, career, values, priorities, awards. Your rhodos may reveal all of the above and more if you look and listen insightfully.

In a world of people-watching and personal communication we should consider broadening our base. Some of us spend more time in our gardens than with our acquaintances. Try to make it quality time by being cognizant of the health and well being of the plants. We comment on our friends' new hair style, poor health, injury, weight loss, new clothing, or changed appearance. Why not do the same assessment with our rhodos?

Plants have personalities (if in fact it is possible for inanimate objects to take on personal and human characteristics). A walk through a garden introduces you to some fascinating characters. Rhodos are waiting to reveal themselves. Overall appearance, size and plant habit meets your eyes. Your interest is captured by the blossom, noting shape, size, color, markings. A color chart may verify the plant's uniqueness, allowing future registration of a new hybrid. Leaf size and shape, along with indumentum, attests to horticultural bloodlines. Conversation continues as your rhodos reveal their tolerance/intolerance to heat, drought, cold, their need/dislike of fertilizer, and a host of other variables.

Imperceptive gardeners miss the joy of talking to their plants. Many people are confused by conflicting or misunderstood signals and messages. This confusion applies to their friendships and their plants. Both our friends and our gardens need better communicators, and will be well served by our better efforts.

Jesus was the greatest teacher in history. He used unique teaching techniques and communication skills. Often he was misunderstood. Sprinkled throughout his most effective lesson plans we find a liberal use of parables. The word "parable" comes from the Greek language, meaning to place objects along side each other for the purpose of comparison. A functional definition may be, "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." Simultaneously intriguing yet confusing, our Lord persisted, patiently trying to reach his audience. Many "saw the light." Others walked away dazed and frustrated, missing the meaning altogether. Critical religious leaders had a field day reviewing his somewhat cryptic truths. When questioned, Jesus explained he was purposely enigmatic so as to be understood by those with esoteric knowledge. In his words, parables were only for "those who had eyes to see and ears to hear."

Rhododendrons willingly report to those who have the time and the aptitude to listen. Moving through a garden is more than a walk in a park. We need to use all our senses to ascertain the conversation and to respond appropriately. Talking to your plants may seem futile or mysterious. Do not give up. Learn from your garden walks. And, listen. When your neighbors wonder about your propensity to talk to rhodos, just give them a knowing wink before admonishing them to search for answers which are always available to those with eyes to see and ears to hear. When you truly look and listen, you will learn, and you will be blessed.

*Bobby Ogdon*



From the Editor

## This Month:

Our annual Christmas Potluck Supper. Need we say more? Well, perhaps for the new members, here are the rules:

1. come early, festivities start at 6:30, but you can come earlier if you want to help set up
2. bring a dish of food to share, and serving utensils if required
3. bring your own plates, mugs, and cutlery
4. wear something festive, your pink tutu from your last performance as the Sugar Plum Fairy is not obligatory, but that nice Santa brooch with the strobe-light eyes would be cheery; white beards and large tummies for the men are always appropriate
5. come bearing gifts, or at least one small gift (value under \$10.00), for Santa Dalen to redistribute in his own inimitable way
6. Be merry

## Last Month:

Last month was yet another fascinating presentation by Paige Woodward of Pacific Rim Native Plant Nursery in Chilliwack. Paige's images (I cannot say slides since this was an entirely electronic presentation) are always of the highest quality, and her subject matter – the peony in China – was filled with inherent beauty.

Great visuals, enough scientific information on the genetics and taxonomy to pique our interest, and itchy feet satisfied by a “virtual” trip to China. What more could we ask for?

## Next Month:

Next month is our third annual AGM and Dessert Extravaganza. This is the time of year when we take care of business with the review and approval of our Annual Report, the election of Chapter officers, and the presentation of awards. Bring along a little something decadent - like Death by Chocolate, or a little something healthy - like fruit salad, and share the wealth.

Don't worry about eating utensils, there are enough forks and spoons at the hall, but appropriate serving utensils with your contribution would be helpful. As an added bonus, a number of our chapter members will be providing short slide presentations on things horticultural or scenic or both.

## Notes

**FROM THE LIBRARIAN** Joan Bengough would like to remind all chapter members that the library will not be open during the December meeting, but will be back again for business for the January meeting.

**FROM THE PAST PRESIDENT** Mike Bale reports:

It is oftentimes said that “old golfers never die but simply lose their balls”. A somewhat similar position exists for past presidents, except that they have responsibility for the Nominations Committee.

This year, the past president has been put out to pasture as all present members have graciously professed a willingness to contribute their time and expertise for a further year.

However, new blood is needed, and any nominations would be most welcome and should be directed to me as soon as possible. Nominations will take place at the special AGM Exotic Dessert Meeting in January.

*Brenda Macdonald*



# COMPANION PLANTS

R is for **Rhododendron**  
of the Heath Family  
Family: Ericaceae

What is the ultimate companion for rhododendrons? Why, more rhododendrons of course!

This genus of plants is not only one of the largest, but one of the most diverse on the planet. From the tiniest alpine mounds to the noble giants of the Himalayan forests, the colours, forms, and textures are virtually limitless. The mother lode of the wild forms is southwest Asia, but their range spans much of the northern hemisphere and into Australasia, and includes upwards of 900 species – so far! We owe a great debt to intrepid plant explorers – Fortune, Wilson, Kingdon-Ward, Hooker, Forest, and others, without whose groundwork we could never experience the wealth of selections and hybrids, approaching 10,000 now, that we enjoy today.

Most of us regard rhodos as wonderful spring-flowering plants that embrace nearly every color of the rainbow except true blue, but I offer you these plants as indispensable foliage accents for the other 11 months of the year. The diversity of color, form and texture applies equally as well to the leaves as it does to the blooms, and I truly think this feature is much under-emphasized. The blooms open in a blaze of color, peak within a week or two, fade and wither, and if you're lucky, fall to the ground.

But the leaves – well! – they emerge from those tiny buds, unfurling and changing day by day, and instead of withering, they become more glorious, with colours, bracts, indumentum, shine, and fragrance. Pinch off those faded flowers and watch your rhodos 'bloom' all over again.

Close your eyes and use your other senses – fondle the plush soft indumented leaves of 'Teddy Bear'; feel the bristles of 'Snow Lady'; smell the spicy resin of the *R. dauricum* hybrids or *R. primulifolium*; listen to the patter of bright falling leaves of the deciduous azaleas on a fine autumn day. There is so much beauty beyond the blooms, if we only look.

We don't have to be fanatics or connoisseurs to have a wonderful collection, but an understanding of the parent species will guide us to the more interesting hybrids. There are selections available to offer many features – the soft blue leaves of 'Ramapo' and *R. oreotrephes*; the glossy mahogany of 'Lem's Cameo' and *R. williamsianum*; the burgundy red of 'Moser's Maroon' and *R. lutescens*. Indumentum (fuzz on leaves – not a disease!) comes in many forms and colors – from silvery white to fawn to tan to richest cinnamon. It may be matted or plush velvet, and it may be on the underside only, or both sides, and even on the stems.

The influence of *R. yakushmanum*, *bureauvii*, *smirnowii*, *rex* and others can be seen in many fine hybrids. The size of the leaves varies from the tiniest *R. complexum* and *nivale*, to the massive tropical foliage of *R. sinogrande*, and the shapes go from the perky round leaves of *R. orbiculare* and *thomsonii* to the long narrow leaves of *R. makinoi* and *roxianum*.

To prepare lists of the ones with all these features would take a book in itself. I suggest you take a cold rainy evening or two, sit in a comfy chair with a good pot of tea, pick up your best rhodo book, cover up the bright colored flowers and find the magic of the leaves!

Next spring, in June when nearly all the flowers are finished, cruise the plant centers and public gardens and start your shopping all over again. You won't be sorry.

Happy Planting!

Colleen Forster



*R.* 'Teddy Bear' with its thick rust-brown indumentum



*R. orbiculare* with its skillet-shaped leaves



*R. oreotrephes* with its elegant blue-green leaves



# Up the Garden Path with ..... Christmas Spices

December 2004

Holiday baking and cooking call to mind fragrant spices and herbs. We all have our favorite dishes, but I think of things like eggnog sprinkled with nutmeg, turkey dressing flavoured with sage and thyme, spicy gingerbread men and of course, peppermint candy canes. Flavoring agents have been prized for centuries, and they continue to be an important component of our holiday fare.

The use of cinnamon has been well-documented since ancient Egyptian times, but it is actually native to southern China and the island of Ceylon. Its value, even in ancient times, was such that it has been an important trading commodity from time immemorial. It continues to be one of the most important spices in the world.

Cinnamon is actually the dried inner bark harvested from two trees, *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, native to Ceylon and southern India, or *C. cassia*, from southeast Asia. In the wild, the trees are about 40 to 50 feet tall, but for commercial purposes, trees are grown in plantations where they are severely pruned to be kept just over 6 feet tall. To harvest, twigs are cut from the trees, and the bark is carefully peeled off the twigs to form "quills". The quills are dried by wrapping them around another piece of wood, and during the drying process, the cinnamon ferments slightly. After drying, the quills are unwound and cut to short lengths for sale, or ground into cinnamon powder. Cinnamon oil can be distilled from the bark too, and this is used as a commercial flavoring agent and in the perfume industry. Usually, no reference is made as to which form of cinnamon is sold in a given package, but in North America, the "cassia" form of cinnamon is more commonly available, while Europeans and Mexicans prefer the Ceylonese form of cinnamon. Both forms provide a spice with a rich, aromatic scent and flavor, but the cassia form is thought to have a more robust flavor and the Ceylonese form is more delicate. Cinnamon is commonly used in baking and some processed candies, but it also is often added to pickles.



*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, illustrated in the 1887 atlas of medicinal plants "Medizinal Pflanzen", published in Germany

Cassia buds, dried fruit capsules of *C. cassia*, are also harvested and dried for use in making pickles. The buds have a more pungent flavor of cinnamon.



*Myristica fragrans* at harvest time, showing the bright red aril which produces the spice "mace", and the "nutmeg" within

Nutmeg is the seed of the nutmeg tree, *Myristica fragrans*. A related spice, mace, is also harvested from the nutmeg seed, but it is the leathery coating that is found wrapped around the actual "nut". Nutmeg is a medium sized tree, native to Indonesia. It is now grown throughout southeast Asia and in the West Indies. Nutmeg trees are dioecious, that is, male and female flowers are borne on separate trees. In planting a nutmeg orchard, the grower must ensure there are enough male trees to pollinate the female flowers, so about one in every 10 to 12 trees will be a male pollinator. Only the female trees bear nuts. As they ripen, the nut's outer husk splits open, revealing a kernel, wrapped in the mace. After the nuts are gathered and the outer husk is removed and the leathery mace is carefully removed by hand. The mace is pressed and dried. The remaining kernel consists of a hard outer shell with the seed inside. These nuts are slowly dried and when curing is complete, the hard shell is removed. The kernel within, the

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“nutmeg” is the actual spice and it can be packaged whole or ground. Both nutmeg and mace are used for flavoring sweet dishes, but they are also commonly used to spice meats, fish, preserves and pickles.



*Myristica fragrans*

These flower buds, when carefully dried and processed, produce clove oil, otherwise known as “eugenol”, a medicament which was the source of the characteristic smell of dental offices for many years

Cloves are the dried buds of unopened flowers from the tree, *Eugenia aromatica*. It is thought to be native to Indonesia, although its exact origin is unknown. Cloves are harvested just before the flower buds actually open. Pickers climb the trees to carefully cut off the sprays of buds which are separated into individual units and dried on mats for several days. Since the flower buds are delicate, the heads and supporting stems can easily come apart which lessens the value of the crop. Whole cloves, the most valuable form of the spice, must have the appearance of a “nail” with both the head and stem connected. Broken pieces can be ground into powder or used to distill oil of cloves which is a common flavouring in toothpaste and mouthwash. These can also be used to flavour condiments and candies. Whole cloves are used as “nails” to stud hams or other kinds of meats. Cloves are also used in baking, curry, pickles, preserves, and sausages. Another use of oil of cloves is to flavor tobacco, so if you’ve ever smelled “aromatic” tobacco from pipe smoke, you were probably smelling cloves.

approaches, the leaves die down. The rhizomes are lifted, washed and dried slightly. Ginger can be purchased as a powder which is made by grinding dried ginger, or it is readily available as pieces of the cleaned rhizome. If purchasing the rhizome, it should be stored at room temperature or just slightly cooler, and kept dry. If kept long enough, you may see buds starting to develop along the rhizome and you can actually plant the ginger. It won’t be much of a houseplant for us, as we can’t provide it with enough light to sustain the plant, but it’s fun to keep it going for awhile. Ginger adds a pleasant, pungent “bite” to pastries, cookies, pies, candy, curry, and beverages. Ginger ale really does contain this spice, and while many of us enjoy ginger ale at any time, it actually does help settle upset tummies, so it is often given to people when they are ill.

Ginger is made from the rhizome (underground stem) of the ginger plant, *Zingiber officinale*. It is grown throughout most of the sub-tropical and tropical world, but originated in southeast Asia. Ginger is a herb that goes through periods of active growth and rest. As a rest period



*Zingiber officinale*

The rather plebian-looking rhizome which gives us ginger is never-the-less blessed by being a member of perhaps the most euphonious plant family there is - the lovely sounding *Zingiberaceae*. Leave the “g” hard, as in “zing went the strings of my heart” and let the rest of the word just roll off your tongue. One can almost hear the waves crashing on some tropical isle.

Sage comes from *Salvia officinalis* and thyme from *Thymus vulgaris*. Both plants are members of the mint family and are native to the Mediterranean where wild plants of both species can still be found growing over the hillsides. Sage and thyme grow best in climates with hot, dry summers and moist, moderate winters. Commercially, the branches of these “subshrubs” are harvested just as the plants bloom. The branches are dried and then the leaves are stripped off the twigs. Leaves are ground and packaged. Both sage and thyme are commonly grown in local gardens for use in cooking.

Mint is also a common kitchen garden herb. There are several species of mint, but for culinary purposes the most commonly grown are spearmint, *Mentha spicata* and peppermint, *M. piperita*. Freshly picked leaves are often used as a garnish, or the leaves can be dried and ground into a powder. Commercially, most mint is distilled to make mint oil. If harvesting leaves for drying, the leaves are harvested just as flowering starts. After drying slightly, the leaves are stripped off the stems and allowed to dry more and then they are ground. In the case of mint oil, the entire top part of the mint is processed. The state of Oregon is one of the largest producers of mint oil in the world, and if you are traveling through the Oregon countryside at certain times of the year, you can smell the distilling mint for long distances. Mint oil is a common ingredient in candies, toothpaste, mouthwash and ice cream.

Like our treats, the holiday spices and herbs have a long history of tradition and come to us from all over the world. Bon appetit, and best wishes for the holidays.

*Norma Senn*

# More Notes from the Past President:

## Growers

All rhododendron and companion plant “growers”, whether large scale or more modest, who are potentially interested in participating in the Plant Sale at the Fall 2006 Convention to be held September 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> at the Harrison Hot Springs Resort & Spa are invited to contact the undersigned so that a meeting can be arranged to discuss your needs and any other concerns that you might have.

We would like to arrange this meeting fairly promptly so that there is sufficient lead time to propagate and have these plants available for the Conference. Please contact Mike Bale at (604) 853-8839

## Species Study Days, 2005

Steven Hootman has hosted the Species Study Days for the past three years and has indicated a willingness to do this again in 2005. The study sessions are held at the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Federal Way, Washington, on Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

The sessions will take place at intervals during the period January through April. The sessions will follow the format of previous years, with formal instruction and plant identification in the morning from 10:00 – 12:00, and in the afternoon, a tour of the garden and identification and discussion of rhododendrons in bloom at that time. The dates have yet to be confirmed but will be arranged so as to avoid other major functions, such as the ARS Convention in Victoria in April and a visit to China by participants in May. The cost will remain \$140.00 for all four sessions.

Participants from Vancouver Island are most welcome, and in order to reduce the expense of an overnight stay, accommodation has generally been available with a host from the lower mainland on the Friday evening.

Arrangements will be made to provide lunches for those interested and car pool arrangements have worked well in the past.

Many of the previous participants have already indicated their intention to attend in 2005. The renewal by many previous participants is a direct reflection of the immense pleasure and joy that we have experienced as a result of Steve's enthusiasm. Facilities at the RSF garden are limited and a maximum of 30 individuals can be accommodated.

Those individuals who would like to secure their attendance are requested to contact Mike Bale at (604) 853-8839 (daytime)



*Salvia officinalis*



*Thymus vulgaris*