

# 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)

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Volume 17 Number 9 November 2004

This Month's Meeting : Wednesday, November 17, 2004

Speakers: Paige Woodward  
Topic: Adventures in China  
Companion Plants: Colleen Forster  
Show and Tell: Vern Finley  
Plant Sales: Trevor Badminton

## Quick Hits



### This Month....

we welcome back Paige Woodward, who will be speaking to us about her last tour to China.



### Welcome .....

to Anna Burian from Surrey, who joined us last month. It is good to have you with us, Anna.



### Christmas is coming .....

which means our Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner is fast approaching. As in previous years we will start a bit earlier than usual, so mark your calendar 6:30 pm, December 15<sup>th</sup>, for next month's meeting.



From the President

## ONE OF THE JOYS.....

One of the joys of rhododendron meetings is to receive plants. My first excursion into the rhodo world was in March, 1978. Before leaving home Judy pled with me to avoid any and all elected offices. I assured her I was attending out of curiosity and this could be my one and only rhodo meeting. The meeting of the American Rhododendron Society, Vancouver Chapter, was held at Van Dusen Gardens the third Thursday of each month. In those days this was the only rhodo society in British Columbia. The President, Harold Johnson, began the gathering by asking if there were any new members. Being on my best behaviour—I know, that sounds like a stretch—and heeding Judy’s poignant plea to keep a low profile—even harder to imagine—I declined to raise my hand to be acknowledged. Beside, I really wasn’t a member, yet. One other newcomer admitted a desire to join, whereupon Harold presented her with a rhodo as a gift. Of course it was too late then to protest my earlier silence so I acquiesced in order to save face. After the meeting I unobtrusively chose to pay membership dues and join the ARS – sans rhodo gift.

During the coffee time following the scintillating speaker I introduced myself to Harold and Melba. They discovered I lived within three miles of their home and graciously invited me over for a garden tour. Two days later I knocked on their door. The garden tour commenced. As enthralled as I was with their garden I was absolutely captivated with them as people. This was the first step to an endearing and enduring friendship. Upon leaving several hours later (“short visits” were never part of Harold’s vocabulary) Harold presented me with two rhodos. It had nothing to do with my covert behaviour at the meeting. He didn’t know about that. Rather it was, as I later learned, a practice of caring gardeners welcoming others into their circle of friendship. Was Harold extremely wealthy to be able to afford these donations to a stranger’s garden? Well, yes and no. He was not a rich man. But he had a wealth of generosity and care. Similarly, if you were a friend of Melba’s you had a friend for life.

A walk along the Johnson’s garden pathways was an education. You could see species and hybrids of both rhodos and azaleas crammed together choc-a-block on a too-small city lot. Harold introduced each plant to me as though I was privileged to be included in his garden family. These plants had names, pedigrees and personal histories. For some, Harold got especially animated when he recalled their origins. Each plant stimulated a brief meditation on its source—the hybridizer, plant hunter, seed collector, or propagator. These people were all known to Harold, making their plants, now part of his landscape, that much more meaningful. Name tags adorned every plant, specifying plant name as well as the person responsible for its existence.

His greenhouse was traditional, built 18 inches below grade, resting on masonry building blocks. The upper walls and roof were of single pane glass. To assist cooling in hot weather grape vines meandered above the roof. Several well-established conifers around the property added to the shaded haven. In fact I sensed it was as much a happy hideaway as a place of plant propagation. Melba had her own greenhouse. Her more modern one was a lean-to style situated against the south wall of their home, adjacent to the basement. While she loved rhodos she did dabble in other genera. After visiting her son in Arizona she would often return with another cactus for her collection. Orchids also interested Melba, so the challenge was to balance the conflicting growing requirements of orchids and cacti.

Harold’s greenhouse was where the work of propagation got done. Most of the tools and projects were primitive but effective. Added to the cutting-bed growing mediums were several concoctions of various colored liquids. I was told these were containers of willow water. Many members of ARS will remember Harold’s affinity for willow water as the cure-all for hard to root cuttings. While some scoffed, it was impossible to argue with success. Harold rooted certain cultivars when other people failed.

Years later, I was privileged to be asked by Melba to conduct Harold’s funeral. As I prepared, I reminisced about our friendship and the first visit to their home and garden. My meditation at the service focussed on the singular personality trait I had observed more than twenty years earlier.

Barnabas, St. Paul’s companion on his missionary journeys, always encouraged others, which was the meaning of his name. So, I likened Harold to the Biblical Barnabas. He was a constant encourager to me, from the very first rhodo meeting.

If we were to change the names in this scenario to those of Fraser South Rhododendron Society the same story would play out in the gardens of our members. Most of our members are encouragers who care enough to give and share as they have been blessed.

As I said, one of the joys of rhodo meetings is to receive plants. We try to arrange for a grower to bring rhodos for sale at each meeting. At our next meeting Trevor Badminton will sell you some delicious rhodos. Each month there is opportunity to participate in a raffle, or the toonie table. You may have received a rhodo when you first joined, but you can always add to your collection.

I loved those first rhodos given by my friends Harold and Melba. Over the years I have been able to reciprocate not just with them but with many who visited my garden. As exciting as it is to receive, it is even more joyful to give.

*Bobby Ogdon*



From the Editor

## This Month:

We welcome back Paige Woodward this month, who will be speaking to us about her last tour to China. You may remember that Paige is co-owner of the family-run Pacific Rim Native Plant Nursery, located near the top of Chilliwack Mountain. The nursery concentrates on BC native plants with a special emphasis on some of the rarer species, including a fine collection of alpine specimens.

In fact, one of the first hits I got while cruising the internet looking for background information on Colleen Forster's Companion Plant article on Camas Lilies this month was a nice display of the several types available at Pacific Rim. The website for Pacific Rim Nursery is [www.hillkeep.ca](http://www.hillkeep.ca)

## Last Month:

Last month was a wonderful presentation by Ken (and Dot) Gibson of Painted Mountain, Tofino, renown. Ken's commentary on the slides of their travels in Ireland was as entertaining as ever and the pictures themselves were a treat.

## Next Month:

Next month is our annual Christmas potluck dinner. Get ready for good grits and a great time. My suggestion that the entertainment portion of the evening consist of the Past and Present Presidents crooning big-band favourites on a karaoke machine was voted down, so we are still open to any suggestions you might have.

## Notes:

### CREDITS AND KUDOS

Chris Klapwijk has done a wonderful job of updating our website with extensive and up-to-the-minute information on the situation on Sudden Oak Death (SOD) disease, and how this will affect all of us. There are numerous links to other information sources such as the BC and Canadian government agencies, as well as the USDA. Log into our website at [www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth](http://www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth) and choose "Sudden Oak Death" from the menu on the left.

You will also note that Chris has received a Certificate of Appreciation from the George Fraser Committee for his efforts on their behalf. (This is an additional certificate to the one sent to the Chapter as a whole that was acknowledged in last month's newsletter.)

### THE BUSINESS STUFF

There has been some concern expressed about the tardiness with which we post the information about our speakers and topics for the monthly meetings on our website, and the Directors recognize that this certainly constitutes fair comment. We are always, of course, constrained firstly by our ability to generate suitable topics and/or speakers and secondly by the usual problem of "life" interfering with "plans". We would welcome any suggestions the membership has for possible programs or activities.

And, as we all march forward into the technological splendour that is the future, it has become increasingly clear that we need to investigate the options available for projecting digital images rather than slides. Like all things electronic, digital cameras have become smaller, better and cheaper over the past few years, and more and more of our speakers are utilizing digital photos loaded onto a computer rather than a film camera and slide format. The lag time between the digital camera and the digital projector has not been great, and there has been rapid development in this area also. The Directors have pledged to investigate this idea further and report back to the Chapter.

*Brenda Macdonald*



# COMPANION PLANTS

Q is for **Quamash**  
of the Lily Family  
Family: Liliaceae



*Camassia quamash*  
blue form

OK, this time I've drawn a complete blank – a veritable Mother Hubbard's cupboard of Q plants, so again I've cheated and used a common name – please forgive me! Actually I put full blame on Carolus Linnaeus for letting me down. I give you....

QUAMASH (*Camassia*), the Camas Lily.

This is a lovely bulb-forming perennial native to moist meadowlands in various parts of North America - some in our own backyards. Elegant tapering racemes of starry blooms in blue (yum), purple or white stand well above narrow sage-green basal leaves. They create a perfect upright accent among our blocky rhodos AND they bloom during the peak rhodo colour season. I was immediately drawn to a stunning blue grouping in the Sellars' garden on one of our tours.

Species include *Camassia cusickii*, *C. leichtlinii*, *C. quamash*, and *C. scilloides*. Named selections have been made of each. Look for 'Orion', 'Blue Danube', 'Zwanenburg', 'Blue Melody', 'San Juan', and others. All are hardy to zone 4, and prefer quite moist fertile humus soil, in sun or part shade. They also make excellent container plants, and last well as cut flowers



*Camassia quamash*  
white form

Divide crowded clumps in autumn and replant the offsets right away. Plant about 4 inches deep and up to 1 foot apart, as the leaves can spread that much. Collect seed as soon as it is ripe and sow in a cold frame. If the capsules are left on the plants, the seedlings will colonize quite an area. The species *C. quamash* naturalizes well and combines perfectly with Narcissus. The native Indians once considered the bulbs as a major food source when cooked, and it is they who gave it the common name.

Look for the Quamash in specialty perennial nurseries. They are available, and we can all use more blue in our gardens – especially during rhodo season – and what texture and form !!

Happy Planting!

Colleen Forster



## Up the Garden Path with ..... Perilous Beauty

November 2004

Modern gardeners are able to grow plants that have been collected from all over the world. However, some introduced plants become major weeds when they escape and become established in the wild. Without their original biological controls to provide natural checks and balances, invasive plants can out-compete our indigenous species and take over vast areas of native habitat. Famous local examples include

Scotch Broom that now covers hot, dry sites throughout the South Coast, English Ivy and Silver Nettle Vine which grow well in our forests, Purple Loosestrife which has taken over native wetlands throughout Canada, and Himalayan Blackberries which seems to be able to grow anywhere.

Perhaps the most notorious plant escape in Canada is Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*). It is a hardy, easy-to-grow plant with pretty spikes of pink to purple flowers, but a single Lythrum plant produces millions of tiny seeds, which are each capable of becoming a new plant. Once established, plants are difficult to eradicate because the roots can regenerate missing parts. Just breaking off the top of a Lythrum plant does not kill it. Loosestrife easily out-competes our native wetland plants, leading to the creation of immense stands which clog waterways and don't support our native fauna. Because it is an introduced plant, Loosestrife has no natural enemies in Canada to keep it under control. Attempts are underway to find some of its natural insect pests that can be introduced into regions with Purple Loosestrife, but which won't attack native Canadian plants. Some promising biological controls are coming, but at the moment, none are completely effective. Unfortunately, there have been some horticultural selections of Lythrum made and promoted for garden use, for example 'Morden Pink' and 'Morden Gleam'. When they were introduced, it was thought that they were sterile and incapable of producing either pollen or seed. However, we now know that all horticultural selections are fertile and capable of spreading to our wetlands. If you have any Purple Loosestrife in your garden, it should be eradicated completely. There are excellent pictures of Purple Loosestrife available on the internet. Just type in Purple Loosestrife, and let the search engine go to work.



Two cautionary photos of the same site, showing the obliteration of this waterway shoreline by Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) The first was taken in June, 1968, the second in August, 1978, .

In the garden, we use English Ivy as evergreen ground covers, in baskets or containers and to grow up fences. However, English Ivy (*Hedera ssp*) is well adapted to our coastal forests, local parks and woodlots where, it can now be found growing up tree trunks and covering large tracks of ground. Since it is evergreen, English Ivy is able to grow throughout the year as long as temperatures are above freezing. This long growing season gives it a competitive advantage over many native plants. Once the vines reach the tree canopy, they spread and shade out the foliage of other plants. The weight of the vines can become so great that English Ivy can topple trees.

Another plant with similar characteristics and growing requirements is the Silver Nettle Vine (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*), which is starting to cause concern because it is rapidly invading our coastal forests. Silver Nettle Vine is frequently grown for its attractive, trailing foliage in baskets and containers. However if it escapes, it can spread quickly because it roots at every node along its horizontal stems.

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Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*), Bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*), and Bishop's Goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria*), are all used as ground covers for shady areas. At first glance, they seem to offer pretty foliage, reasonably attractive flowers and tolerance to difficult growing conditions such as dry shade. However, all three plants are able to spread easily and they can take over large areas of the garden. If they escape, they grow well in the wild where they can choke out native plants. All three of these plants have horizontal growing stems that can root at every node, and they can re-form tops from their root systems. As well, the root systems are difficult to remove by hand weeding. If you do decide to grow any of these plants, locate them in areas where they can be restricted, for example, in beds bordered with deep set concrete edges. Recently, there have been several new introductions of Periwinkle varieties that have pretty, small, variegated leaves that are used for foliage interest in baskets and containers. As long as these varieties are kept confined, they are nice plants. However, never empty the contents of old hanging baskets or containers into woodlots or ditches as this is a common way plants are introduced into native habitats. As well, unless you have ideal compost conditions where the pile gets hot enough to kill all plant remnants, don't put pieces of potentially invasive plants into a compost pile or you could inadvertently distribute living plant material throughout the garden when spreading the compost. Instead, dispose of these plants in the garbage.



Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) naturalized in Oregon

While most introduced plants are not considered as serious threats to our native habitats, all plants that can self-sow easily should be monitored to make sure they don't spread. For example, the Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) is now found throughout so much of B.C. that many people think this is a native species. While not as aggressive in our meadows as some other introduced species, Foxgloves, which are native to Eurasia, are spreading. This biennial plant produces copious amounts of viable seeds. Foxgloves adapt well to open, sunny areas and compete reasonably well with many of our local species. If you are growing them, deadheading fading flowers will help keep Foxgloves under control.

Another example of a plant that I've found needs careful deadheading is Common Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*). It is much loved by flower arrangers because it has sprays of tiny chartreuse green flowers that are excellent fillers in floral arrangements. However if let go, Lady's Mantle can self-sow, and the seemingly indestructible seedlings come up everywhere. There are many other plants that self-sow, for example, California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), Love In A Mist (*Nigella damascens*), Yarrow (*Achillea ssp*) and Verbena (*Verbena bonariensis*). I haven't deliberately planted any of these species in my own garden in many years, but I find seedlings of these plants still coming up every spring. They are all quite pretty, but they could easily spread if I didn't keep them under control.



Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*), showing its prolific seed production

There are other plants which are becoming notorious for their ability to invade. One of the worst is Chameleon Plant (*Houttuynia cordata*) which is a pretty variegated herbaceous plant introduced into North American commercial horticulture about 20 years ago. New Zealanders can't believe we allow it to be sold in Canada as this plant has become a noxious weed in New Zealand where it has spread in their wetlands, much as Purple Loosestrife has spread here. They are trying to completely eradicate it before it becomes an even more serious problem. Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is another plant that is well adapted to wet sites and grows so thickly that it chokes out everything else. In eastern Canada, there are concerns about the spread of Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*) and Amur River Maple (*Acer ginnala*). To date, I haven't heard that these are considered as serious threats to B.C. forests, but we may hear more about their spread in the future.

If you do decide to grow any potentially invasive plants, take the responsibility to make sure they don't spread beyond your own desired growing area. Deadhead plants as soon as the flowers are spent. Learn to recognize seedlings of self-sowing plants so they can be removed when small. Plants like English Ivy and Periwinkle are useful, but consider confining them to containers or beds where they aren't likely to escape. When weeding these or cutting them back, don't put pieces into a compost pile since they might accidentally be moved around the garden when spreading compost. Never dump the contents of old planters into the wild, as this is one of the major ways plants are introduced into our native habitats.

*Norma Senn*



*Acer platanoides*



*Aegopodium podagraria*



*Ajuga reptans*



*Digitalis purpurea*



*Hedera helix*



*Vinca minor*

All images from *Flora von Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz*, Gera-Untermhaus, 1885-1905