

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

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This Month's Meeting : Wednesday, October 20, 2004

Speakers: Ken and Dot Gibson
of Tofino's Painted Mountain

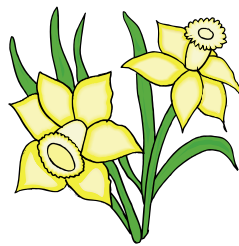
Topic: Rhododendron Tours, Ireland

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show and Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sales: Les Clay

Quick Hits



Bulb Sale

Don't forget that Les Clay will be collecting your orders for spring bulbs at the October meeting. Have your payment (cash, or a cheque made out to FSRS) and completed order form (back of the brochure handed out last month) ready. This is a wonderful opportunity to obtain good quality bulbs

at very reasonable prices and support fund raising for our chapter at the same time.



Annual Membership Dues

Now is the time for all good members to come to the aid of their chapter. For some years now it has been the intent of the chapter officers to ensure that membership fees be kept as low as feasible in order to make our club accessible to all who wish to join. To that

end there was agreement to maintain the fees at last year's level, and support the current schedule with the subsidy from other club revenues.

Full Member (includes ARS membership and Journal) \$35.00
Local Member (without ARS membership or Journal) \$20.00
Associate Member (full member of another chapter) \$10.00
Please ensure that Wenonah March, our Membership Chair, receives your dues by the November meeting.



From the President

IT WASN'T MUCH TO LOOK AT ..

It wasn't much to look at, but it worked. I needed (isn't it amazing how our wants become our needs) a greenhouse. If I was to make any progress in my understanding of the genus *Rhododendron* I needed a place to learn. I scrounged a stockpile of old patio doors and windows along with a jumbled assortment of discarded dimension lumber. Some of these materials were left lying around my acreage. Others were from neighbors only too happy to forego a trip to the dump.

Windowsill propagation of rhodos is great in theory, but in practice it has many downsides. Everyone knows rhodo propagation is best done in a greenhouse. Besides I needed a multitude of plants to fill my garden and there weren't enough windowsills in the entire neighborhood. My immediate neighbour, Bill Bisset, the chief gardener for the Corporation of Burnaby, had finished constructing an awesome greenhouse at considerable expense. His excitement was contagious, but his bank account wasn't. Bill's glass palace was large, expensive, had heating and cooling plus a variety of adult toys.

Measuring twenty by forty feet it had two aisles separating custom made benches. Built onto the end of his garage he was able to use natural gas for the forced air heater and electrical power for lighting and cooling. I cursed its size on the sweltering August day I helped pour the concrete for the foundation and pathways. I knew I could not compete with Bill's expensive building tastes. Instead I hoped to approach his rate of success in propagating. But, where he preferred seed propagation I chose to start with cuttings. Since I had a propagation box (given to me by Dr. Finley—see last month's newsletter) I planned to build a temporary greenhouse around it. Little did I know that temporary would mean twelve years.

I waded into the amassed pile of materials. Central to the structure were the two six foot wide patio doors. A standard wooden entry door added to the patio doors gave me a 15 foot south facing wall. The eight foot east wall had an aluminum framed six by four foot window. The north wall was a mix of various lengths of cement festooned shiplap previous used as forms for the foundation on Bill's greenhouse. The west wall abutted an old workshop beside a carport from which to scab power at a later date.

The nearly flat roof presented a problem: specifically, how to allow the entry of light while maintaining strength. I could not afford to emulate Bill Bisset's design. It was too expensive and required more than a modicum of engineering. Instead I settled on translucent corrugated fibreglass panels available at any building supply store. Special aluminum nails with rubber washers attached the panels and were supposed to prevent the ingress of water. A single electrical outlet from the workshop allowed the cutting box to function. Now I was in business.

It was Frank Lloyd Wright, the renowned architect who espoused "form follows function". From the above description you need not ask about the form. Just imagine. The final product was about as eccentric as a camel—the only animal that appears to have been designed by a committee. But however unattractive, the camel IS functional, with its webbed hooves, reluctant thirst and double eyelids for protection from the *hamsins*, the infamous desert sand storms. These characteristics combine to make the camel a perfect choice as ship of the desert.

No self-respecting camel would relish being likened to my first greenhouse. Even a camel could never be that ugly. Yet, like the camel it was perfectly suited to its purpose: housing a cutting bed and later a seeding box. The roof began to leak when the rubber washers disintegrated from the UV rays. The nearly flat roof also needed to be shovelled during any slight snow fall. The multi-colored and many textured siding and shiplap would eventually be painted to ease neighborhood grumblings about the "local eyesore". My greenhouse was high maintenance. It was too hot with no means of cooling. I was constantly moving materials in and out according to the weather. At best I was able to extend the growing season a couple of months.

But soon I was offering rooted rhodo cuttings to my friends and neighbours. They often questioned where I got them, as if anything of value could come from that place. Still, I had the last laugh. My greenhouse worked!

Bobby Ogdon



From the Editor

This Month:

This month we will be entertained and enlightened by a presentation from Ken and Dot Gibson on their travels in Ireland. Rumour has it that Ken speaks about the travel, and the gardens, and the plants, and Dot speaks about Ken's adventures as he travels and looks at gardens and plants. It is sure to be informative, and may well be amusing.

Last Month:

Last month was a very successful education program presented by a number of our own members. Harold Fearing gave us great information on seeding techniques, all grounded in his own successful practices. Then Colleen shared her enormous expertise at taking and handling cuttings (how many thousands was it that pass through her hands

in a year?), providing us with solid information we can use even if we do not operate at the near-industrial level she does. Next, Les Clay gave us a quick but fascinating over-view of the tissue culture process. This is not a plant reproduction technique that many of us are likely to use on a personal level, but it was a thought-provoking glimpse of the business side of plant propagation. And last, but certainly not least, Don Martyn gave us some "hands-on" hints on moving seedlings through the potting up and hardening off processes.

Next Month:

Next month our speaker will be Hart Wellmeier of Wrenhaven Nursery in Surrey. With its glade-like setting and long history (I first visited it some 30 years ago, when it was called C&T Azaleas, if I remember correctly) Wrenhaven is a wonderful source of both species and hybrid rhododendrons and azaleas.

Notes:

CREDITS AND KUDOS

Sue Klapwijk, the chair of the Ways and Means Committee - well, actually, she seemed to be the entire Ways and Means Committee - has passed her torch on to Karen Linton. We welcome Karen to this new responsibility with utter confidence. After all, this is the person who organized the AGM/Dessert Extravaganza last February. But before we do so I, on behalf of all the members of the FSRs, would like to thank Sue for her yeoman's efforts in keeping us all so well fed and watered all these years. There is nothing so invisible as a job well done, and Sue, with the help of Wendy and Mary-Anne and their coterie of helpers have made all our functions, big and little, so enjoyable, so comfortable and sociable at the same time. I always get this shoemaker's elves sort of feeling - all that efficient scurrying going on when we aren't watching. Break time comes and the tea is made and the coffee is hot and there are yummy things to eat. It's magic. But of course it isn't, and without Sue's unsung efforts on our behalves, it wouldn't have happened. So, again, Sue, thank you for everything.

THE BUSINESS STUFF

We have received a Certificate of Appreciation from the George Fraser committee for our donation of \$50.00.

We have a number of copies of Susan Murray's book "Our Sylvan Heritage" available at \$34.00. This is a very attractive book filled with interesting local history which would make a wonderful Christmas present for anyone with an interest in our surroundings.

We have received word that the City of Langley has received the 2004 Communities in Bloom Award for cities with a population between 20,000 and 50,000. This is a national competition which honours communities across Canada for community participation in landscape beautification, heritage conservation, and environmental awareness. All our members who are Langley citizens, and all those who have helped with the small beautification projects in the area such as the Ellen Crabb Garden should feel rightfully proud.

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COMPANION PLANTS

P is for Pieris

of the Heath Family

Family: Ericaceae

Try to imagine a spring without the retina-searing banks of 'Forest Flame', or the foreboding ox-blood red displays of 'Mountain Fire'! These Lily-of-the-Valley shrubs, staples in the landscapes of our area, are useful and versatile, but many other varieties have been developed that expand the spectrum far beyond the norm. Blooms come in white, shades of pink, and red, and the appearance of the new foliage several times during the growing season is possibly even more eye-catching. Size will range from low mounds of tiny foliage and perky blooms to soaring trees forming a brilliant canopy over pathways below. (The Wenonah and Alan March garden has some spectacular specimens!) Generally fine-textured, dense and well-clothed with foliage, they can fill gaps in perennial gardens or mix well in woodland gardens.

Of the 7 species known worldwide, most of our garden cultivars are hybrids or selections of *P. floribunda* (Zone 5), *P. formosa* (Zone 8), or *P. japonica* (Zone 6). The latter has a sub-species – *P.j. yakushimana* – that has caught the attention of plant breeders lately, and given rise to a flurry of dwarf, white-bloomed plants that make excellent foreground material, container subjects or even bonsai specimens. Look for names like 'Prelude', 'Sarabande', 'Cavatine', 'Debutante', 'Purity', and others.

Colored flower selections started with 'Blush', a very soft pink, which led to 'Christmas Cheer', 'Flamingo', 'Daisen', 'Pink Delight', and 'Valley Rose'. A fantastic variety called 'Dorothy Wyckoff', has very dark green foliage that develops a dark bronze tint in winter, and prominent burgundy buds that open to pale pink and fade to white – very dramatic in its contrasts! The darkest flower color comes in 'Valley Valentine', a deep red that gets a bit lighter at the base with age.

The large growing white-flowered forms combine the best in foliage and bloom, especially 'Scarlet O'Hara' – the earliest and longest blooming cultivar I've ever seen. It blossoms from March 'til May and follows this up with shiny scarlet red new growth. For extra heavy blooms on compact plants, try 'White Cascade' or 'Snowdrift'. A fairly new hybrid with extra cold hardiness is 'Brouwer's Beauty' (Zone 5), unusual in its purplish flower buds and its refreshing lime green new foliage which matures to a darker shade.

Different again are the variegated leaf forms - the first selection was *P. j.* 'Variegata', with thin white edges on smaller green leaves. 'Little Heath' is a miniature form, which rarely blooms but has red new growth. Two sports of 'Forest Flame' have been named: 'Flaming Silver', a more vigorous form with brilliant red/pink new growth. Slower growing with bolder creamy white edges is 'Havilla'. Because of the white on the foliage, the blooms are not especially showy.

All of these are quite happy in moist well-drained acidic humus soil, in sun or part shade, and away from cold winds. Pruning is rarely needed unless the plant has been damaged, except that, as for rhodos, deadheading is esthetic and helps develop more even branching. New growth is susceptible to late frosts, but plants recover well and blooms are usually not bothered.

I'd love to have space to plant all the different types, but what I'm really waiting for is the first pink-flowered, variegated form – and I already have a name picked out – how about 'Raspberry Frost'?

Happy planting!



Pieris 'Flamingo' has bright pink flowers



Pieris 'Flaming Silver' showing the brilliant new growth and white-margined leaves



Pieris 'Little Heath' is one of the miniature forms



Pieris 'Little Heath Green' is even smaller, but does not have the variegation

Colleen Forster



Up the Garden Path with Norma Senn

More Conifers October 2004

In my last article, I wrote about some of the lovely large conifers that are native to North America. Of course, there are many introduced species that are also very good garden plants.



The Atlas Cedar
Cedrus atlantica



The Cedar of Lebanon
Cedrus libani

The true Cedars, native to areas from North Africa into the Middle East and the Himalayas, are beautiful, picturesque trees. Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*), from the Himalayas, is the most commonly planted species. It is distinguished by having a “floppy top”, with a pendulous leader that makes it an easy tree to identify. The Atlas Blue Cedar (*C. atlantica*) and the Cedar of Lebanon (*C. libanii*) are also attractive trees, both of which have a stiff habit of growth that, with age, develops a distinctive, horizontal or layered branching habit. The Tree of Lebanon is mentioned in the Bible as the tree from which the Temple of Solomon was built. The Cedars are hardy to Zone 7, and possibly even Zone 6 in sheltered gardens. Once established, they are reasonably drought tolerant, and do well in sunny locations. Especially when small, Deodar Cedars are absolutely adorable, and because they are easy to propagate from seed, they are usually inexpensive. However, they grow quickly, and in time this species becomes large, so it is best suited to big gardens. In my neighborhood, many people planted small Deodar Cedars in the middle of their

front lawns about 25 years ago. The trees are now being cut down, or at least the lower branches are being trimmed up, because the plants have outgrown their location.

Where hardy, and there is room, the Giant Redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*, Zone 8) and the Giant Sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*, Zone 7), both native to California, make magnificent additions to the landscape. They grow easily from seed, and are also available as container grown plants in the South Coastal area. In a good site, with even moisture, they grow quickly. They can tolerate some shade when small. Obviously, these are trees for large gardens, but there is a weeping form of the Giant Sequoia, (*S. giganteum* ‘Pendula’) that is much more manageable in size and makes a good addition to the average-sized garden. I’ve seen this plant used very effectively when espaliered along walls or trained along fences.

The Giant Sequoia *Sequoiadendron giganteum* showing its very large size and precise conical form



The Japanese Umbrella Pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*), is a slow growing conifer that has long, flat emerald green needles. It has a stiff habit of growth, is very typically Christmas tree shaped, and is a good choice if a formal, elegant plant is needed. It is hardy into Zone 5, and does best when given even moisture and full sun. While very old specimens can become large, this is a slow growing species that will take decades to reach more than 20 feet tall. So it is a good choice for suburban gardens. It is usually grown from seed, but it can be rooted from cuttings.

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Metasequoia glyptostroboides

The Dawn Redwood has delicate feathery green foliage that contrasts with the rich red bark of its robustly buttressed trunk

The Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) is a deciduous conifer. This species was discovered in China in 1945, and seed reached the west in 1948. Before 1945, the species was only known to scientists from the fossil record. It is now widely grown throughout Western Europe and North America as it is an easy tree to grow. It is hardy to Zone 5, but it needs good soil moisture and an open planting site. It is a fast growing tree, and in 15 to 20 years, it can reach 50 feet in height if provided with good growing conditions. In spring, the new, soft needles are light green. They darken in color for the summer, and then turn yellow in the autumn, just before the needles drop. To maintain an attractive tree shape, this species is best grown in an area where the branches are allowed to remain right to the ground. Limbing it up destroys the lovely pyramidal shape.

Some of the large species of Chamaecyparis make spectacular additions to big gardens. Two particular favorites are the Yellow Cedar (*C. nootkatensis*) and Hinoki False Cypress (*C. obtusa*). The Yellow Cedar is native to coastal forests from Alaska to Oregon, growing wherever there is enough moisture to allow survival. Where it can be grown, this is an elegant tree that has a narrowly pyramidal habit with weeping, dark green foliage. Hinoki False Cypress is native to Japan, and is more commonly grown as a garden plant. Like other Chamaecyparis, it is best grown where there is plenty of moisture. It is a slow-growing conifer with dark, glossy green foliage. The selected variety 'nana' is the best known form of Hinoki Cypress. This dwarf selection is particularly suited to small or rock gardens. There are other species of Chamaecyparis that offer attractive plants for the landscape, but they are not as commonly available.

Pines can be good choices for gardens too. For a tough, hardy species (Zone 2), many people grow Scotch Pine (*P. sylvestris*), which is native to northern Europe. Christmas tree growers often plant Scotch Pine on marginal lands as it tolerates poor soils. The bark has a nice, dark reddish cast and the needles are usually dark green, although there are selections for more bluish coloured needles. It is a two-needle pine and the needles have a characteristic twist in them. There are named forms of Scotch Pine that are sometimes available, for example 'Watereri', is a slow-growing, pyramidal form with a definite bluish cast to the needles.

Another nice pine is the Japanese Black Pine (*P. thunbergii*) which is hardy into Zone 5. This has very deep green needles, two to a bundle. This is the species that we usually associate with Japanese gardens, where the pines are routinely kept pruned to maintain the rounded, dense habit so admired in Japan. Left to grow without pruning, the Japanese Black Pine has a stiff, upright, open habit. It is particularly tolerant of seaside conditions, tolerating wind and salt spray.

The five needles pines are lovely, graceful trees, but they are not planted often in western Canada because they are subject to the disease White Pine Blister Rust (WPBR). For this reason, most BC gardeners avoid them. However, from time to time, I see specimens of Eastern White Pine (*P. strobus*) which is a beautiful tree, and possibly worth the risk to grow, even if in time, some plants are lost to WPBR. This species is native throughout much of eastern North America and figured prominently in Canada's early lumber industry where the trunks were especially prized for use as ship masts. As for WPBR, this disease has two hosts: any species of five-needled pine and currants (*Ribes*). Since Flowering Currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) is a native plant throughout much of B.C., the rust fungus can complete its life cycle if both currants and pines are planted together. While the disease is not that serious from the currant's point of view, it can be deadly to pine trees since the fungus gradually girdles branches or, most seriously, the main trunk. If infected, other than pruning out small infections, there is no control available to protect the pine trees. In eastern Canada, people have not been permitted to grow many species of currants in an effort to protect the native pine trees. Here, this isn't reasonable because currants are part of our native flora and found growing throughout much of the province. So, while you are definitely taking a chance, you might consider planting a five-needle pine like Eastern White Pine. There are many selected forms of this species that offer a variety of interesting growing forms and there are many dwarf or spreading selections that are suited to smaller gardens.

This listing of conifers is just a fraction of the species that are available to gardeners. Except for selected dwarf forms, the plants listed in this article are ultimately large, so they should be planted in sites that will allow for their growth. Where space is available though, the large conifers offer year-round interest, they act as backdrops for other plants and they provide shelter for birds. There are many lovely dwarf conifers that are wonderful choices for small gardens, but that is the subject of another article.

Norma Senn

From the Editor, cont'd

More Notes:

Les Clay has forwarded information just received from the B.C. Landscape & Nursery Association on the current situation in regards to Sudden Oak Death (SOD). The target audience for this mail-out was B.C. Wholesale Ornamental, Forest Seedling, and Christmas Tree Nurseries,

As you know SOD is a disease caused by the fungus *Phytophthora ramorum*, and it has become of great concern in the United States where its appearance and proliferation in the mid- to late-nineties in several counties of California has killed many of the oaks and tanoaks of their native forests.

Part of the challenge in combatting this disease is that the number of host species is extensive, although few of them seem to suffer the same level of damage as the oaks. SOD shows on most other species, such as rhododendrons, camellias, and many other Ericaceous plants, as leaf spotting and twig die-back. The Maple family (Aceraceae) is also susceptible, as are members of the Laurel Family (Lauraceae), the Horse Chestnut family (Hippocastanaceae), the Honeysuckle family (Caprifoliaceae), the Rose family (Rosaceae) and others.

Since so many plants can carry the disease without it being readily apparent, control of the movement of plant material which has the possibility of being infected becomes of paramount importance.

The B.C. Landscape & Nursery Association is currently only suggesting that members of the Association might want to obtain certification of the "SOD-free" status of their nursery stock through the voluntary program recently implemented. Les Clay reports, however, that there are indications that by the end of this month the program will no longer be voluntary. This would mean that any person/business wishing to do business other than in their own local area will have to be able to provide such a certificate.

The purpose of this program is to keep BC open for trade with the rest of the country and the rest of the world, and to reduce the risk of spread of *P. ramorum* into the Canadian environment.

This does not mean that we, as consumers and private gardeners will be asked to rip up all our existing rhodos and azaleas. It does mean however, that the heady days of being able to purchase just about anything we wanted from just about anywhere it was grown have probably gone - if not forever, at least for the foreseeable future.

Brenda Macdonald

What's Re-Blooming Now?



R. 'Fabia'

R. dicoanthum x *R. griersonianum*
(Aberconway, 1934)