

# 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)

## 2005 Officers

President: Bobby Ogdon  
604-572-9993

Vice Pres.: Dalen Bayes  
360-966-4596

Secretary: Mary-Anne Berg  
604-853-5737

Treasurer: Alan March  
604-532-9062

Directors: Les Clay - yr. 3  
Harold Fearing - yr. 2  
Colleen Forster - yr. 1

Membership: Wenonah March

Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald  
604-990-5353

Website: Chris Klapwijk  
604-888-0920

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This Month's Meeting : Wednesday, April 20, 2005

Speaker: Dalen Bayes

Topic: The Bayes' Garden

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show and Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sales: Sue Klapwijk

## Quick Hits



### Plant Sale!

Don't forget our Plant Sale.  
This year, the big day is  
**Saturday April 9<sup>th</sup>, 10:00am to 3:00pm**  
at our usual meeting place -  
the Langley United Church. Come and  
help! come and buy! There will be a  
wonderful selection available.

### Next Month!

The justly famous  
Twelfth Annual Beer Bottle Truss Show.



### This Issue!

Norma Senn has written an informative  
article on Sudden Oak Death, and what  
it means to us as rhododendron  
fanciers, and Ginny Fearing has contributed  
a lovely piece on her somewhat secret  
regard for the Rhododendron genus in  
general, and one species in particular.



From the President

## THE PRECIOUS LONG-AWAITED SEED ...

It was Spring. You could tell by the warmth of the soil, the chirping of the birds, and the parcel in the mailbox. The precious, long-awaited seed had arrived. Now what should I do? I had no specific, concrete plan to indicate what to do next. I needed something fool-proof; something a neophyte would find impossible to bungle. How do you propagate rhodos from seed? I resorted to my tried and true two-fold approach to horticultural problem solving. I researched libraries, and I questioned my acquaintances in the American Rhododendron Society, Vancouver Chapter. Both sources, however, offered a minefield of contradictory opinions.

Three years earlier I attended my first rhododendron meeting, discovering a new magical world of rhodos including the mysteries of propagation. I was a dismal failure propagating from cuttings. It had taken me three years to approach any semblance of moderate success. Now I was poised on the cusp of a greater challenge. Introspectively I mused, who was I to request the horticultural forces of nature to deal kindly with my shortcomings?

Varieties of containers for propagation were tried, and all consistently disappointed me, often due to an inability to control condensation. Used tins and old yogurt containers were not the answer. Better equipment was needed.

I had previously only learned to root cuttings in a cutting bed. A large cutting box along with instructions and considerable encouragement were given to me by Dr. Gordon and Vern Finley. But now I needed to move on to the next phase of my deficient horticultural education: propagation from seeds. Books and periodicals contained numerous descriptions and accompanying drawings, some very costly and elaborate. Was there not something more affordable? One so called expert from the VRS offered to sell me a seeding box but at his price gouging it would necessitate re-mortgaging my house. The person who came to my rescue was none other than my friend Harold Johnson. We talked about possible designs of seed boxes with the proviso that they had to be affordable. Together we sketched drawings of some prototypes. An amalgam of research from libraries and personal experience stimulated our effort resulting in a functional and utilitarian model that changed little in succeeding years.

I really refined the idea when assisting my son Reid construct an elementary school science project, a simple tool of rhodo propagation from cuttings using two wooden apple boxes. In the bottom box we affixed an electrical light bulb socket. The upper box, resting atop the bottom heat housed the cuttings in the rooting medium, all of which was covered with six mil poly. The judges liked it but more importantly, it worked. Harold reported seeing something like it as a seed box when he was attending an ARS convention. So, we got to work.

I built a box of  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch plywood measuring 18 x 24 inches, and 10 inches deep, with an open top. On the base I attached a socket for the 25 watt bulb which would provide the heat. The box for the top had the same outside dimensions, but the open bottom was covered with sheet metal, designed to evenly distribute the limited heat. Placed above the sheet metal was an inch of coarse sand to act as a heat sink, and above that a rack from an old oven as the platform for the seed trays or pots. On the top of the box I fashioned a hinged wooden frame clad with clear Plexiglas. On the outside of the boxes, fore and aft, I attached two posts to hold a small florescent grow light, and to help keep the seed boxes in line.

Now the acid test was it functional? Well, yes and no. Seeds initially germinated, but like much of the modern home construction I neglected to account for condensation. Although my leaky condo was on a smaller scale than most, water control was paramount. The seeds quickly "damped-off" even before I mixed the Benomyl or Captan fungicides. However, that was no problem that couldn't be solved by a half inch drill. In the propagation box I drilled 6 to 8 holes near the top frame to let it "breathe." Now Harold and I were in the business of seed propagation. We used those seed boxes successfully for the next twenty years. It certainly beat our previous seeding attempts using recycled soup cans covered with Saran wrap.

Every Spring I fidgeted and paced awaiting the delivery of seeds from the ARS Seed Exchange knowing the chances for success were thus greatly enhanced. On three occasions, at the competitive show, I was awarded the Seed Exchange trophy for best rhodo grown from seed. Then they went and changed the rules and eliminated giving a trophy. Too bad. It resembled a recycled soup can and could have given a rhodo neophyte a stimulus to indulge in seed propagation.

*Bobby Ogdon*



From the Editor

## Last Month:

Last month David Sellars provided us with another of his excellent presentations. The subject was the flora of the Italian Dolomite mountains and it was hard not to throw a rucksack over one's shoulder and stride off immediately in search of a limestone mountain or two. This was the first time that David and Wendy used only a digital camera during their trip, and the results were spectacular. The precise focus of the close ups and extended depth of field available with the camera were outstanding, and David's knack for composition made the photos esthetically pleasing as well as informative. The entire presentation was digital, facilitated by a laptop computer (and viewer) which allowed David to manipulate his images for additional information and effect.

## This Month:

This month Dalen Bayes will discuss his woodland garden located near Sumas in Washington state. The Bayes' garden (which my husband, the gardener, calls his most favourite garden, ever) is a rhododendron wonderland, with an amazing number and variety of both species and hybrids.

## Next Month:

Get ready for the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Beer Bottle Truss Show! Start grooming those rhodies now. Full details and regulations will be published in next month's Yak.

## Notes:

### ARS WESTERN REGIONAL FALL 2006 CONFERENCE

Mike Bale reports that plans for the Fall Conference to be held at the Harrison Hot Springs Resort in September of 2006 are progressing very well. A number of exciting speakers have already been lined up, the growers are on tap, and the tours and other peripheral activities are well in hand. We have Mike and his committee to thank for all the effort they have already put into this endeavour. It is shaping up to be a great conference.

### CONDOLENCES

I was sorry to hear of the passing of John Korska, an FSRs member and partner of Carol Atkinson. I know that all of the members of the Chapter join me in extending our deepest sympathy, and our expressing our pleasure in seeing Carol again after her absence over the last couple of months.

### DISTRICT 1 PRESIDENTS MEETING

Mary-Anne Berg attended the District 1 Meeting held in Nanaimo on March 20<sup>th</sup> on behalf of the Chapter. There were a number of issues discussed which we all should give some thought to so that our executive representatives can better serve our needs:

- 1) Garth Wedemire presented a detailed graph with membership details which show a decline in ARS membership. There was some discussion about whether this represented a decline in total membership or a decline in the percentage of members who chose to become full members rather than local (no ARS portion of the fee) members only. The consensus of opinion was that there had been a decline in overall membership. As Chapter members this is a trend which we should all think of ways to try to reverse.
- 2) Harry Wright circulated a copy of the book he compiled after soliciting information from all BC members last year about what species and hybrid rhododendrons grow successfully in BC gardens. He stated that there are presently 4,180 varieties available in BC. His booklet indicates a source for each variety. Copies are available from him.
- 3) Victoria Chapter reported that their 2005 Spring Convention was exceeding all expectations, and that people would be attending from all over the world.
- 5) Vancouver Chapter reported that they are planning a number of projects to celebrate Vancouver's 50th anniversary.

*Brenda Macdonald*



# COMPANION PLANTS

## V is for Vaccinium from the Blueberry Family Family: Ericaceae

Huckleberry – Blueberry – Cranberry - that's what I think of when I read Vaccinium, but actually throughout the world there are as many as 450 species, ranging from tiny creeping vines to large tree-like plants, from the Arctic to the tropics. We may not think of them as landscape material because of their more obvious food/farm value, but they have features that make them very attractive in any mixed garden. The huge bonus is SNACKS to reward you for slaving away in your garden in the heat of the summer rather than sitting on the patio in the shade with a beverage!

There are more than 10 species native to B.C., and my favorite of these is *V. parviflorum*, the Red Huckleberry (Zone 5). I can't walk through any of our local forests in winter without marveling at the way they sprout from the tops of old cedar stumps like fanciful hats. The tracery of the delicate branches is magical in the early morning frosts. If I were lucky enough to have a woodland garden, I would surely have a stump upon which to seed one.

The Highbush Blueberry, *V. corymbosum*, (Zone 4) is native to eastern North America, and has been hybridized extensively for commercial food production in many parts of the continent. Even though it is usually seen on large farms in much of the lower mainland, even 2 or 3 plants in your garden are a welcome addition. Red winter twigs to cut for Christmas decoration, apple-blossom pink flower clusters in spring, glossy foliage and luscious blue fruit in summer, and brilliant leaves of red and gold in fall all combine to offer more than many cultivated ornamental shrubs. There are early, mid-season and late fruiting varieties, and flavors from mild to sweet/tart for your discerning palate. Visit U-pick farms and speak with the growers about the different varieties, and do lots of sampling to find your favorite. These will all grow easily in moist acidic soil that drains well in winter, preferably in full sun, and need roughly a 5 x 5 ft space to mature. Pruning is rarely needed except for dead or damaged wood.

Another favorite is *V. vitis-idaea*, the Lingonberry, legendary as an accompaniment to Swedish Meatballs – YUM! A very hardy evergreen species (Zone 3), widespread in arctic and alpine regions of Europe, Asia, and North America, it grows only about 10 inches tall and suckers to form a small thicket in sun or part shade. Typical tiny pinkish bell flowers turn to shiny red berries ¼ inch wide. The larger fruited form 'Koralle' is a prolific producer, and a smaller overall version, *V. v. ssp minus*, has deep pink flowers, and grows only 8 inches tall. Even if you don't care to eat these tart little beauties, they are highly decorative in the garden.

Let's count the great values here – branch pattern and color; glossy and colored foliage; delicate pink and white spring flowers; delicious waffle sauce, hot steaming muffins, cobbler with ice-cream – Oh , stop right there! Are there any other shrubs that offer all these treats?  
Happy Planting! *Colleen Forster*



*Vaccinium corymbosum*  
Highbush Blueberry



*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*  
Lingonberry



Highbush Blueberry - *Vaccinium corymbosum*



Mountain Cranberry, Cranberry - *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*



## Up the Garden Path with ..... SOD

were taken and tested. Quarantine regulations were also put into place for many types of plants, at least for part of the summer, and a lot of stock could not be moved off the nursery/garden centre site. You may have noticed signs at some of the garden centres last year indicating that plants behind the yellow tape were not available for purchase. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency also put a temporary halt to all shipments of nursery stock from Monrovia for part of the summer.

In addition to the problem we had with *P. ramorum* showing up in plants that were shipped to BC last year, in June, 2003, several Rhododendron plants in a Richmond nursery were found to be infected. These plants caused an international fracas since the BC nursery had shipped stock to Oregon. For awhile, there was major concern that the border would be completely closed to Canadian stock going into the USA. All of the Richmond plants were destroyed, and subsequent testing has shown the site to be free of *P. ramorum*.

Along with all the other problems concerning *P. ramorum*, it is a difficult fungus to culture and identify. In Canada, for identification, we still follow the traditional techniques of culturing samples by growing them on special agar media and then identifying the fungus against known

By now, most of us have heard about a new plant disease, Sudden Oak Death (SOD), which can attack and kill a broad range of our most prized garden species, including Rhododendrons. SOD is caused by the pathogen, *Phytophthora ramorum*, a fungus that was previously undescribed. (Did you know that *Phytophthora* is derived from the Greek, and means plant killer?)

SOD was first reported as a pathogen on Rhododendrons in Europe in 1993, and the European fungal strain, A1, was finally identified in 1999. In California, *P. ramorum* strain, A2, was first detected on oaks (*Quercus* spp) and tanbark oaks (*Lithocarpus* spp) in 1995 when there was a sudden, simultaneous death of leaves on major stems, or complete leaf death of entire trees. Infected trees also develop oozing cankers along their trunks. The disease has now spread to several counties in central California, and literally tens of thousands of native trees have died in the last 10 years.

At first, it was thought that the A1 strain was only found in Europe and the A2 strain in North America. However, both strains now exist on both continents. As you might expect, plant pathologists are worried that if the two strains come in contact with each other, they may undergo sexual recombination that could lead to the development of an even more virulent strain of the pathogen.

Despite putting strict quarantine measures into place in the affected areas of central California, the disease was found in a Monrovia Nursery field located in the hot, dry Los Angeles area in 2004. No one is sure how the disease moved so far, but it can take up to a year before disease symptoms appear, so an infected plant was probably transported unknowingly from central California to the Los Angeles area. Since the nursery stock is grown under sprinkler irrigation, if introduced, the fungus has a good chance of surviving.

Some of Monrovia's stock was shipped to nurseries in the Lower Mainland last spring, leading to temporary but complete closure of some of our local nurseries and garden centres during the busiest part of their year while plant samples



Leaf necrosis on *Rhododendron* leaves

references. In other countries, DNA is collected and amplified so that scientists actually read the gene sequences and compare them with the known genome for the fungus. Both diagnostic techniques take time, need professional pathologists and are expensive.

An additional concern is that this fungus has a huge host range, and over 60 genera of plants are now known to be susceptible to this disease. In addition to rhododendrons, this includes such garden staples as maples, honeysuckles, horse

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chestnuts, camellias, roses, viburnums, vacciniums, arbutus, etc. As serious as this may seem to gardeners, our native Douglas fir is also susceptible. If this disease gets loose in our forests, it would cause unbelievable losses to our forest ecosystems and economy. The loss of native oak forests in California is already having an impact on that ecosystem, and other than trying to contain the disease, not much else can be done.

On Rhododendrons, SOD symptoms include leaf spots, particularly at leaf tips, and necrotic lesions on leaves as well as cankers on twigs and stems. The outline of leaf spot



Tip wilt on Douglas Fir *Pseudotsuga menziesii*

damage is usually described as being “fuzzy”, rather than being sharply defined. There are some very good pictures of damage to Rhododendrons available on various web sites. Death of an infected plant is likely.

At the moment, there is no control for the fungus once it infects a host plant. The spores are thought to be able to survive in soils for years. Strict quarantine regulations are now in place throughout most of North America in an effort to contain the fungus and prevent it spreading. Anything that moves soil, for example getting soil on your shoes, livestock feeding, wildlife, ATV's or even soil erosion, could conceivably lead to the movement of the fungus from an infected to an uninfected area. Spores are also spread by wind and rain.

The disease grows best under cool, humid conditions, with 20°C being optimal for infection. For Rhododendrons, it appears that *P. ramorum* can infect leaves if they have free standing water on them for several hours. One control you can practice is to avoid using overhead sprinklers on Rhododendrons late in the day. Or, even better, use a trickle drip system to water the root systems while keeping the leaves dry. Obviously, if we run into periods of wet weather, there's not much you can do, although planting in areas with good air circulation may help leaves to dry off.

There is some speculation that for cultivated plants like rhododendrons, some of the fungicides that are already on the market to control other *Phytophthora* diseases may

provide some control for *P. ramorum*. However, at the moment, this is still in the realm of speculation. As well, most fungicides no longer have a domestic label and we simply do not have access to these chemicals, so the use of preventative sprays is not an option.

Since the disease has been found on both sides of the border, Canadian and US plant inspection agencies have agreed to work together to set up approved certification programs for nurseries in both countries. The BC Landscape Nursery Association has worked



Tip wilt on *Rhododendron*

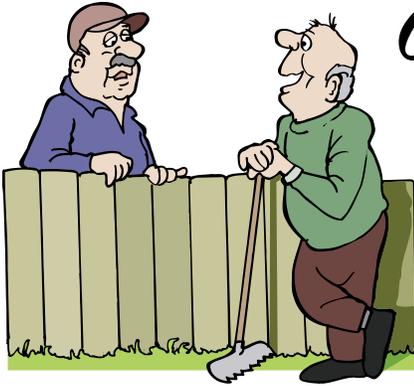
hard to develop a program where participating nurseries sample their stock for *P. ramorum* and have it tested. In addition, they have undergone training so that they are following a “best practices” protocol in their nurseries to minimize the chances for disease infection. This includes detailed tracing systems so that if an infection is found, the exact information is known of where the plant came from, where it was grown and, when sold and shipped, to which destination. The entire program has been set up by contributions from the local nursery industry members.

Since this disease has such devastating potential, gardeners need to remember to abide by all quarantine laws, and no matter how tempting a plant may be, don't try to sneak any plants across the border! There are legal procedures in place for us to follow to import plants from certified nurseries, and while the legalities may seem onerous, they are there for a reason. SOD control comes down to preventing the introduction of the pathogen.



Exfoliated leaves and girdled twig on *R. 'Nova Zembla'*

Norma Senn



## Over the backyard fence . . .

### A Dabbler in Rhodieland

I'm a dabbler, not a diver, so although I know a little about a lot of things, you really cannot expect me to know the Latin names and parentage of 700 rhododendrons.

My husband is crazy about rhododendrons. As the wife of a rhodie 'diver', I tend to grumble about the endless planting, weeding, and deadheading, not to mention the great camping weekends lost to sales. But, in fact, I might like rhodies more than I let on. 'Olive', 'Sir Charles Lemon', and 'Crest' are like old friends.

Lately it has occurred to me that, while I still think roses the superior plant, if I am to be the mother of 700 children, I should begin getting acquainted with them.

In true dabbler form, I decided to start learning what I could about one rhododendron. My first challenge was to pick a subject. That was easy. I chose a plant that lives right outside my workroom, where we keep an eye on one another.

The second challenge was to find out where novices get accurate information that is understandable. As a member of the FVRS, I realize that I have a wealth of knowledge available to me. I fantasize about shocking my rhodie friends with erudite contributions to their discussions. Not yet. First I have to learn something about one rhodie.

I decided to start with observation, using my eyes and hands to learn what I can about my plant. It lives on a very windy hill in full sunlight. It is about six feet tall with a rather open, upward growing appearance. It has 2-3 inch green narrow leaves that are just a bit reddish underneath. For the last two weeks, my plant has been covered with bell shaped lavender-pink flowers in clusters, each cluster circled underneath with a ring of leaves creating the appearance of a bouquet, in this case, hundreds of bouquets. This particular plant has 15-20 flowers to a bouquet, or truss.

I wondered if my plant were representative or if there were variations among different specimens of the same plant. I searched the gardens and found what I thought were 5 others. On closer examination, it was clear that the one with a purple throat, although striking, was not my plant. The other examples ranged in size from 4 to 15 feet. Two were living in sheltered locations, and two in full sunlight. All were blooming like fools.

Wanting to read something understandable about my plant, I turned to our library. I started with [The Fundamentals of Rhododendron and Azalea Culture](#) (American Rhododendron Society, 1995), which I understand is sold by the FVRS for \$1.00. While full of information on growing rhododendrons, it was not specific enough for my project.

Next I turned to [Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons](#), Third Edition (Greer, H.E., 1996). I learned that the approximate height of my plant at 10 years is 6 feet, that it is hardy to 0 F., and blooms in Oregon April 15<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>. I learned that the flower is rated 2, the plant and foliage are rated 3 and the performance (whatever that means) is rated 3. I also see that plants are rated from 1 (poorest) to 5 (best). My plant is described as:

“open and upright, with distinctive, scaly, purplish new growth. Lance shaped leaves, to about 3 inches, are smooth dull green on top, covered densely with reddish brown scales underneath. Funnel-bell-shaped flowers, to 1 inches long, are pink, rose, or rosy lilac, spotted brown, carried in trusses of 4-8.”

It grows in Szechwan, Yunnan, S.E. Tibet at 7,500-14,000 feet.

My plant's sisters in the woods are already way over 6 feet tall, although they are probably 15 years old and benefit from a father who feeds them more than regularly. They have all been blooming on our property since early March, having survived full sun, howling eastern outflow winds, ice storms and uneven watering. This plant, like many others in our garden, seems to be blooming

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two weeks earlier than previous years.

Because the rhodie 'diver' in the family has slavishly labeled every plant (and relabeled as the coyotes chew off the labels), I knew the name of this plant when I started, although I may not pronounce it correctly. Because the name on the plant label starts with an *R*. I know it is a species rather than a hybrid.

I'm a dabbler, not a diver, so don't expect me to know the Latin names and parentage of 700 rhododendrons. But when you come to visit us, you can expect to be introduced to 'reddish-brown', my *R. rubiginosum*.

*Ginny Fearing*



*Rhododendron rubiginosum*

Photo by Chris Klapwijk



*Rhododendron rubiginosum*

Illustration by Lillian Snelling for  
Curtis's Botanical Magazine, 1937

# What's in Bloom?

The following is a selection from the images and information which Chris Klapwijk has posted on our website. All images and information have been provided by Chris.



***R. morii***  
**epithet:** after U. Mori **type:** elepidote  
**size:** to 1.5m / 5' **bloom period:** Apr-May  
**hardiness:** -15° C / 5° F  
at Finley's / Mar 2004



***R. ochraceum***  
**epithet:** yellowish **type:** elepidote  
**size:** to 4m / 13' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr  
**hardiness:** -15° C / 5° F  
at RSF / 27Mar2004



***R. pemakoense***  
**epithet:** from Pemako province, Tibet **type:** lepidote  
**size:** to 3m / 10' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr  
**hardiness:** -15° C / 5° F  
at RSF / 27Mar2004



***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 / 27Mar2004



***R. neriiflorum***  
**epithet:** with flowers like *Nerium* **type:** elipidote  
**size:** to 3.m / 10' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr  
**hardiness:** -15° C / 5° F  
at RSF / 27Mar2004



***R. sulfureum***  
**epithet:** sulfur-coloured **type:** lepidote  
**size:** to 1.5m / 5' **bloom period:** Mar-Apr  
**hardiness:** -15° C / 5° F  
at RSF / 27Mar2004