

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

2005 Officers

President:	Bobby Ogdon 604-572-9993
Vice Pres.:	Dalen Bayes 360-933-4596
Secretary:	Mary-Anne Berg 604-853-5737
Treasurer:	Alan March 604-532-9062
Directors:	Harold Fearing - 3 rd yr Les Clay - 2 nd yr Colleen Forster - 1 st yr
Membership:	Wenonah March
Newsletter:	Brenda Macdonald 604-990-5353
Website:	Chris Klapwijk 604-888-0920

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This Month's Meeting :

Wednesday, December 14, 2005

early date, early time: set-up at 6:00
commencement at 6:30

THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

.... definitely the highlight of any rhodophile's festive season



Christmas is almost here ...

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 for 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 wrapped gift valued under \$10.00 for the gift exchange. We have asked Santa Dalen to officiate again this year

And, Colleen has promised to organize a little something in the way of a group activity to amuse ourselves during the post-feast lull.



A MAN'S HOME IS HIS GREENHOUSE

From the President

My first greenhouse, as you may recall from previous missives, was rather utilitarian, yet, admittedly wildly successful. Starting with a surplus of scrap lumber and discarded or scrounged used building materials, I fashioned a primitive shelter of sorts to house a modicum of pots and gadgets in order to attempt propagation of rhodos. The result was a structure resembling a Rube Goldberg creation, but one which, of necessity, was to be brought in under budget. Frank Lloyd Wright's watchword was indeed applicable: "form follows function."

I had a very limited budget with which to work. It had to be completed for less than \$100.00. The corrugated roof panels and the heating cable for the cutting bed were actually the only purchases. Everything else was material with "previous experience." It was not a pretty sight. Plus, it was a stand alone structure situated thirty feet away from

the back door, requiring a quick dash to keep away from the rain.

While the form was of questionable appearance, (some might say it was somewhere between eccentric and ugly), it served as a fully functional greenhouse for several years. Up to 300 rooted cuttings were produced from the cutting-bed each season, and the seed box happily hummed along disgorging hundreds of long-awaited seedlings. That primitive pile of building scraps enabled me to graduate from the kindergarten of propagating school to more advanced education, and to aspire to greater horticultural learning.

Temperature control was a constant battle. There was no way of reducing heat on warm days or of increasing heat when the thermometer dropped below freezing. In the late spring I "cooked" so many cuttings and seedlings that Judy thought it could serve as a second kitchen. Little did she know that behind all this was a master plan. But, first I had to prove a smattering of success before the big financial plunge. I was afraid \$100.00 would not do it the next time.

For several months I researched the possibilities of a proper greenhouse. I visited libraries to peruse books and magazines, with guidelines and illustrations of greenhouses in private residences. I consulted neighbors and friends who had their own horticultural hobbies. I attended home and garden shows with their plethora of commercial offerings. There were so many decisions: size, style, appearance, placement on my property, and cost. Along with the initial costs were the interminable costs of ancillary equipment. All of these variables impacted each other. I needed help; and thankfully I found help at B.C. Greenhouse in Burnaby.

With many full-size models on display, in a variety of materials, shapes and sizes, the prospective buyer can make a prudent, considered purchase. Eventually I settled on a lean-to style, measuring 20 feet by 8 feet. Its rounded roof styling and custom design enhanced the overall esthetics of the house. It was made of double-walled polycarbonate material so as to be more heat/cold tolerant, in contrast to the negligible insulation value of glass. To further assist temperature control it was designed with a door in one end and two roof vents that were actuated by temperature sensitive openers. The cost was just over \$3000.00, FOB, which I considered reasonable. Many people spend more than that annually on their hobbies. After the initial outlay, I deemed few expenses would occur in the future.

Following the detailed instructions from the experts at B.C. Greenhouse, I was able to complete construction within a week (using some of my vacation time), including foundation, polycarbonate panels, vents, door, and even benches which I constructed from 1x3 cedar boards. Water and electric power were extended from the house to facilitate propagation techniques, eliminating frequent trips to the kitchen when preparing cuttings. The new greenhouse was situated so that it encompassed the back door, which was used for access in inclement weather. What a joy to never have to go outside to brave the elements, and to whistle away in relative warmth while propagating seeds and cuttings.

As most propagators know, your greenhouse is never too large. It becomes a warehouse of garden equipment and plant storage in the winter. But my greenhouse was more than adequate for nearly two decades as I pursued my hobby of propagating rhodos and azaleas. Of course other genera fought for attention as well.

The new greenhouse was popular with the whole family. It looked like it was designed for, and complemented, the home. Judy and the kids made use of it often. It became a place of science projects for Reid – a real laboratory of learning. For Keely, it served as the kindergarten of her propagating skills, though in a much more welcoming milieu than the aforementioned house of many colors. Judy loved it as well, as it became, for me, a haven of horticulture that meant I had my own kitchen, and thus could stay out of hers.

Bobby Ogdon



This Month:

Our Annual Christmas Potluck do we all remember the rules?

1. Be festive, in a sort of laid-back rhododendron club sort of way
2. Come early, festivities start at 6:30, but you can come earlier if you want to help set up
3. Bring a dish of food to share, with serving utensils if required
4. Beverages will be provided: tea, coffee, Punch Bowl A, and Punch Bowl B. We do not have a license for the consumption of liquor, however
5. It is easier to be festive when clustered around Punch Bowl B
6. Bring your own plates, mugs, and cutlery
7. Wear something festive, but not necessarily elegant. We are a garden club after all. A crown of holly leaves or seasonal conifer branches is perhaps more Martha Stewart than we need, but that great red and green checked mackinaw you use when you wander out to knock the snow off the rhodo branches might be just the thing. Add a belt of highly polished garden forks so that you can jingle like Santa and you will be fabulous!
8. Come bearing gifts, or at least one small gift (value under \$10.00), for Santa Dalen to redistribute, remembering that those who give, also receive.
6. Be merry, or at the very least, be festive.

Last Month:

Last month we were treated to a marvelously informative and visually entrancing "Magnolias 101" from Don Martyn. Obviously a subject close to his heart, Don's considerable research and accumulated garden experience combine to make the depth of his knowledge on the subject verging on the profound. His enthusiasm was contagious, and oblique references to the occasional instance of plant loss not necessarily advertised to his spouse notwithstanding, it was clear that many members were once again mentally reconfiguring their gardens in hopes of freeing up a little Magnolia space.

Next Month:

Next month is our AGM (Annual General Meeting) and Dessert Extravaganza. It is during this meeting that we elect the new Club Officers, present Awards, and review and approve our Annual Report - all of these activities being interspersed with frequent breaks to have a cup of tea or coffee and sample the wonderful treats brought by our members. It is also the date of our annual DIY program, when various chapter members provide short slide presentations on whatever tickles their fancy - their garden as it is, their garden as they want it to be, other gardens they have known and wanted, trips taken, scenic vistas captured, etc.

This is a necessary meeting, but interestingly enough, it is always a really fun meeting. OK. More rules:

1. Bring a little something to share, something wonderfully decadent like Tiramisu if your Christmas over-indulgence is not quite complete, or something healthy like fruit salad if you are have already embarked upon your annual re-dedication to a healthy body and a healthy mind.
2. Do not worry about eating utensils, there are enough forks and spoons at the hall, but do bring appropriate serving utensils for your contribution if needed.

Notes:

WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE UPDATE

The Committee members for the Western Regional Conference, which the FSRS will be hosting at Harrison Hot Springs in September of 2006, have been active for quite a few months now, and very soon will be approaching each and every Chapter member for participation and support in making this a wonderful success. Committee Chairpersons will be contacting Chapter members individually for help with the various on-going activities such a conference entails. There will places for people to help at the Plant Sales, the Registration Desk, Display set-up, and other areas.

A website with some preliminary information has already been set up, so click on the ARS Western Regional Conference Fall 2006 link on our own FSRS website at www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth/, or start out at the ARS District 1 website at www.rhodos.ca and follow the links from there.

Also keep in mind that the Committee will be asking for support in the form of raffle contributions from each of the Chapter members. So keep us in mind when you are doing your summer jam making, or, much more in tune with the current season, when you get a second copy of that great gardening book this Christmas. Just think, you won't even have to wait for next Christmas for that great "re-gifting" opportunity.

Brenda Macdonald

Rhododendron Species Study Days 2006

The Rhododendron Species Study Days will be held again in 2006 for the 5th consecutive year, at the Rhododendron Species and Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington on the following Saturdays:

February 25th

March 25th

April 29th

May 13th.

The programme is personally directed by Steve Hootman, Co-Director at the garden, and plant explorer extraordinaire. The format will follow that of previous years but will introduce new material for the benefit of past participants. No prior knowledge of the subject is necessary as the course begins with the fundamentals, and progresses in detail at each session.

The sessions begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. and ends at approximately 4:00 p.m. The mornings are generally spent reviewing various topics of general botanical interest relative to the study of rhododendron species, followed by the keying of plant material in bloom in the garden at that time. A short break is taken for lunch between 12:00-12:30 and the afternoon is spent touring the RSBG, garden and identifying and discussing the wonderful collection of rare and exotic plants.

The course fee is \$35.00 for each session (x 4) and the entire proceeds are used to provide a stipend for instruction and a donation to the garden. A nominal sum of \$5.00 is charged for lunch for those wishing to participate.

In past years, participants from Vancouver Island have traveled to the mainland on the Friday prior to the session, and stayed with a host overnight, returning Saturday evening.

In previous years we have found that it is desirable to cross the border before 7:00 a.m. in order to avoid a delay at the border and the early a.m. Seattle traffic. This has permitted a leisurely drive to Federal Way with arrival about 9:15 and time for breakfast at the location of choice for most of us, the Country Buffet. Arrangements for car pooling will be made.

The facilities at the RSBG are limited and a maximum of 28-30 people can be accommodated.

In order to avoid disappointment, please confirm your interest and forward payment to the undersigned:

Mike Bale
33623 Wildwood Drive
Abbotsford BC V2S 1S2
(604) 853-8839
email: lu_zhu @telus.net



A winter photo of *R. 'Crest'*, showing the reddish, fat, and pointed flower buds sitting at the top of each branch, as well as the almost diagnostic "instant droop" that afflicts this hybrid as soon as the temperature drops. '*Crest*' seems to droop faster and more profoundly than almost any other rhodo in our garden, yet sustains very little winter damage.

photo: Brenda Macdonald

Up the Garden Path with Interesting Bark



At this time of the year, trees that have beautiful bark really come into their own. Many plants like the Paper Bark Birch (*Betula papyrifera*) and Japanese Cherry (*Prunus serrula*) are justifiably famous for their bark, but there are many others.

Paper Bark Birch is well-known for its historical use by eastern Native Americans who used the beautiful white ex-foliating bark for building canoes and covering shelters. When done correctly, removing sheets of bark doesn't harm the tree. The outside of the bark is white, but it is marked with prominent black lenticels which function in gas exchange. The underside of the bark is soft amber pink.

Other birches are also grown for their bark and twig habits. River Birch, (*B. nigra*) which is hardy to Zone 4, has tan-coloured bark that peals off in paper-thin strips.



River Birch
Betula nigra

This is a particularly useful woodland tree for wet soils or poorly drained areas. The European birch, (*B. pendula*) is often grown as an ornamental in BC, as it is hardy into Zone 2. There are many named cultivars of this species, most of which were selected for their pendulous branches and/or finely cut leaves. The ex-foliating bark is white. This



Paper Bark Birch
Betula papyrifera

For best growth, cherries prefer full sun and sites with good soil drainage. They also need even moisture throughout the summer. However, *Prunus* is a huge genus, and there are species available that are adapted to a wide range of climates.

Beech trees (*Fagus*) all have lovely, smooth gray



Ornamental Cherry
Prunus serrula

species is highly susceptible to bronze birch borer, so should be used with caution if this is a pest in your area.

All three birch species have lovely yellow fall colour, and to my mind, look best when grown in clumps. Really good bark displays develop as these plants reach maturity, so don't be disappointed if young plants don't live up to your expectations at first. Birches are woodland trees and need cool, moist soils for healthy growth. They are well suited for north facing slopes or as under-story trees. If planted in hot, dry locations, birches are particularly susceptible to attack by leaf miners and bronze

birch borers. Both insects are attracted to plants that are not growing well, and a combination of insect attack and poor growing conditions leads to rapid death for birches.

The entire cherry genus, *Prunus*, also has distinctive bark that is marked with prominent lenticels. Particularly beautiful are the trunks of the ornamental cherry, *Prunus serrula* (Zone 5) which look like they are made of beaten copper. When lit by the sun, the bark just gleams. On younger branches, the coppery bark flakes off in thin strips to gradually reveal the smooth, dark copper bark with white, horizontal markings underneath. *P. serrula* has single, white flowers in late April to early May, and while pretty enough, are not as outstanding as other flowering cherries.

This plant is really grown for its bark display.

For best growth, cherries prefer full sun and sites with good soil drainage. They also need even

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bark. They are long-lived trees and ultimately, most become forest giants. These are trees to plant for your descendants, but if you have the room, they are magnificent. The Pacific Agriculture Research Centre in Agassiz, B.C., has some of the finest beech tree specimens in western Canada, and if you're near that area, they are well worth seeing. Few of us now have gardens that can accommodate such large trees, but dwarf selections are available that still have the beautiful bark, but are much more suitable for small gardens. I've even seen dwarf and weeping forms of *Fagus* grown in large containers here at the Coast. In addition to lovely bark, beeches have attractive leaves, good fall colour and nice branch patterns. Variegated leaf forms are also available and the copper-leaved varieties are stunning. Beeches prefer a soil that is rich in humus and has even moisture throughout the growing season. They can be grown in sunny locations but need some protection from the noon day sun of summer when young. They also tolerate dappled shade.

The lacebark pine (*Pinus bungeana*), is native to China and is hardy to Zone 4. Smooth, creamy patches are left when the bark peels away. In my opinion, this species should be planted more often because it is a well-behaved, slow-growing tree. It has deep green needles that persist for up to 5 years and a picturesque growth habit. It often grows as a multi-stemmed tree. Like most pines, the Lacebark Pine grows best in full sun and well-drained soils.



Coral Bark Maple
Acer palmatum 'Sengokaku'



Lacebark Pine
Pinus bungeana

Some of the small maples are well-known for their bark. The Coral Bark Maple, *Acer palmatum 'Sengokaku'* (also known as 'Senkaku') has, as the common name suggests, coral red bark. Because of its striking colouration, place it in a location where it can be seen easily throughout the winter months. Like other varieties of this species, the Coral Bark Maple is a small tree (or large shrub). It has attractive foliage that opens pinkish but then changes to light green in the summer, followed by good fall colour. While

hardy into Zone 7, it needs protection from hot summer sun and requires even moisture throughout the summer. It makes a good specimen choice for large containers.

Many other species of small maples are grown for their beautiful bark. One group, collectively referred to as Snake Bark Maples, have white striped bark on a background of dark green. Locally, *Acer pensylvanicum*, *A. davidii* and *A. capillipes* are the best known species of snake bark maples.

A. pensylvanicum is the hardiest of the group, with some selections growing into Zone 3, while *A.*

davidii and *A. capillipes* are hardy to Zone 5/6. The striking bark is most noticeable on young branches, and is gradually lost as the wood ages. In their native habitat, these are edge of the woods trees and they grow best where they receive dappled light, and have good drainage with soil rich in humus and even in moisture. Look for these small maples in specialty nurseries.



Snakebark Maple
Acer pensylvanicum



Paperbark Maple
Acer griseum

Acer griseum, the Paperbark Maple, has cinnamon red bark that peels off in curling strips. It is easily seen from a distance. This maple has compound leaves that develop some fall colour, and the plant has an open, rounded habit. It is hardy to Zone 5. It is also an edge of the woods tree and should receive partial shade during the hottest part of a summer's day.

Even though it's winter, there are lots of plants we can use that provide landscape interest to the garden.

Take a look at some of these lovely trees. At this time of the year, we can really appreciate their lovely bark characteristics.

Norma Senn

Q Rhododendrons of Yunnan Q



This photo by Sean Rafferty
Yunnan, China, May, 2005



This illustration by Lilian Snelling was first published in 1938 in Curtis's Botanical Magazine, from material supplied by Lt.-Col Stephenson R. Clarke, from his garden at Borde Hill in Sussex

Rhododendron decorum

Originally divided into two separate species *R. decorum* and *R. diaprepes*, it is now generally recognized that they are geographical distributions of the same species that have developed slightly differing bloom times and hardiness ratings. *R. decorum* ssp. *decorum* is generally located in cooler areas, and has slightly smaller blossoms and an earlier bloom period than ssp. *diaprepes*, although there is considerable overlap between the two. George Forrest introduced the species in 1913, having found it growing between 10,00 and 11,00 feet in the forests of the Salween divide in northwest Yunnan near the Burma border.

These are most rewarding plants, with precocious and abundant, fragrant, blossoms, although they can be somewhat straggly looking as they grow to their eventual height of up to 50 feet. Although *diaprepes* is somewhat tender, it rewards the careful grower with larger blossoms of heavier substance and greater fragrance. The colours on both are pale, almost ghostly. Sometimes there is a clear pink flush with darker stripes on the outside centre midrib of the widely funnel-shaped blossoms. The pedicels (blossom stalks) and perulae (bud scales surrounding the new leaf growth) are also often quite rosy, and contrast nicely with the pale flowers.