

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 18 Number 5 May 2005



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
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Vice Pres.: Dalen Bayes
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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

This Month's Meeting: Wednesday, May 18, 2005

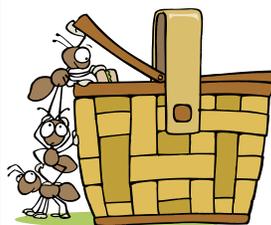
EARLY - at 7:00pm

THE 12TH ANNUAL FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY BEER BOTTLE TRUSS SHOW

Admission: One truss - any kind, any colour



Quick Hits



Picnic Don't forget to mark
your calendars for our annual
picnic **Sunday, June 19th** at
3:00pm at the home of Trevor
and Doreen Badminton.



Elizabeth, and the other Red Beauties

See page 7 for another of Mike
Trembath's entertaining articles;
this one on Mike's lifelong love of
R. 'Elizabeth'.



BEAUTY ALL AROUND

It was a dark and stormy night - no, that has already been done. Instead, make that a dreary, drizzling, very wet morning in late March. Typically, as occurs so often in the Lower Mainland, it followed a warm and summery day that pilots know as CAVU ceiling and visibility unlimited. The day before, Judy and I had meandered around Granville Island, a microcosm of cosmopolitan Vancouver. The Public Market was filled with fresh foods of every description tempting the curious browsers and those unwary of competitive prices. Cooper Boating, where I occasionally serve as a sailing instructor, appeared ready to embark on new courses for the expected spring crowds of aspiring sailors. Art galleries, many associated with the Emily Carr Art Institute, beckoned us to admire the latest exhibitions.

From the President

Judy and I had spent the day and evening in the City. Dinner at the Fish House in Stanley Park with our son Reid and his fiancé Sarah was a gastronomic delight and a special joy.

Picturesque English Bay reflected the glittering night lights in a 180 degree view from Point Grey to Kitsilano. Denman and Robson Streets were clogged with crowds of late-night tourists and locals sampling the delectable flavours of the City. It just doesn't get any better than that.

The next morning we embraced more typical March weather: rain. Even in the rain, which I happen to love, Vancouver has to be one of the greatest cities in the world. What is not to like? The stimulating topographical setting, the attractive moderate climate, the diverse recreational pursuits, the boundless vocational possibilities, the beautiful and peerless parks and gardens make the Lower Mainland of British Columbia a destination of choice. What or where else can compare?

World renowned Stanley Park reflects the lifetime care of chief gardener, Alleyne Cook. His landscaping and gardening expertise is evident at every turn. Whether annuals, perennials, shrubs, or trees, Stanley Park is a gardener's paradise. Much of the credit for the garden belongs to Alleyne. His guidance over many years produced a world-class garden that rivals the world's best, especially the rhodo collections, stimulated by his 50 years association with the VRS.

The Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden was a threefold project twenty years ago. Mary Greig, working with the Vancouver Parks Board and at the encouragement of the American Rhododendron Society, Vancouver Chapter, donated the remainder of the rhodos she and her husband had amassed over several decades. It was my pleasure as President of the VRS to officiate at the dedication of this garden in the park when it was designated by the Parks Board. Some late-flowering *R. auriculatum* hybrids showed promise, but of course we would need to return in July and August to appreciate their flowery fragrance. However, many early-flowering species and hybrids from the Greig's property at Royston on Vancouver Island were already happily blooming in their new home in Stanley Park.

Mature specimens of rhodos as landscaper's pet rhodo projects from the 50's and 60's resulted in a "Unique" setting, literally. Mass plantings of *R. 'Unique'* abound throughout the city, including hotels such as Pacific Palisades on Robson, and the Sylvia overlooking English Bay. Other varieties of rhodos are seen as well. We were enjoying breakfast at O'Doul's restaurant on Robson Street in the West End and beaming at us amid the low clouds, mocking the rain, was a gorgeous 'Cheer', clad in various shades of pink. Nearby on Alberni Street we saw a mass planting of a half dozen large 'President Roosevelt' rhodos, complete with fascinating variegated leaves and two-toned pink blossoms, begging for attention from passers-by.

From the 23rd floor of the Westin Grand we looked down on the Coliseum-like Vancouver library. While we had often remarked about the distinctive architecture, we had not previously viewed the horticultural attractions on the roof. The entire roof structure is encased in wall-to-wall plants, no doubt contributing to the greening of the city, though unfortunately viewed only from the surrounding buildings above the twelfth floors.

As you read this Judy and I are travelling in England where we are vacationing for the month of May. We will, of necessity visit

several rhododendron gardens. I am anticipating the joy of discovering mature plants, an experience of which we are bereft here in the New World. In Vancouver a "heritage" building may be all of 40 years old with a landscape displaying one or two 30-year old rhodos. I long for a sense of history offered by a country that dates from Roman times, and gardens that contain 200 year old rhododendrons.

I trust we will be enthralled with numerous plants more mature and enticing than the meagre and youthful sampling found in Vancouver and environs. We will miss the usual onslaught of rhodo blossoms that proliferate in May. Regardless, we will enjoy whatever we find with the expectation of greeting familiar rhodo friends upon our return to our beautiful home in the unique Lower Mainland.

Bobby Ogdon



From the Editor

Last Month:

Last month we were treated to a series of wonderful slides of the stunning woodland garden that Dalen and Laurie Bayes have carved out of their acreage just outside Sumas, in Washington state. Between Dalen's tree-felling and construction skills and Laurie's prodigious mastery of dead-heading and all around maintenance, they have developed a woodland idyll.

This Month:

This month is our **Annual Beer Bottle Truss Show**. As always, all judging by vox populi. Unlike the upcoming provincial and federal elections, this is one venue where you can be sure your opinion counts. Don't forget that we start early - remember there's lots to be done! Bring something to enter, and be there by 7:00 pm so that you can fill out your form without rushing and then wander around checking out the competition. All the relevant rules are listed on page 4.

Also, there will be many trusses and other floral material available at the end of the evening. Each year we try to make arrangements for the flowers to be donated to local hospitals and nursing homes. If you know of a worthwhile recipient to which you would like to deliver some of the material, please feel free to do so.

Next Month:

Our Annual Pot Luck Picnic and Auction - the last function of the year - will take place at the home of Doreen and Trevor Badminton, starting at 3:00m. Further details will follow in next month's newsletter.

Notes:

ARS Winter 2004 Journal

Mary-Anne Berg reports that copies of the ARS Winter Journal have been ordered for our members who missed that issue since our renewal fees did not reach the ARS until after the cut-off date.

Manning Park Hike

Don Martyn has offered to lead a trek around Manning Park on Saturday, June 11th. We should meet at 10:00am at Sumallo Grove. Bring a picnic lunch to be eaten amidst the blooms in the alpine meadows. Please let Mary-Anne know if you are interested so that we can arrange car pools.

Brenda Macdonald

Twelfth Annual Fraser South Beer Bottle Truss Show



The world famous Fraser South Beer Bottle Truss Show will be held at our May meeting, Wednesday, May 18th. This is a fun event in which everyone can participate.

Here are the rules, beautiful in their simplicity:

1. Entry to the hall will be by bringing at least one truss. It is not necessary that it be a rhododendron.
2. There will be three areas for display:
 - a. competitive rhododendron trusses
 - b. non-competitive rhododendron trusses
 - c. companion plant displays.
3. For the competitive event, participants will be allowed to enter only one truss in each class. Additional trusses can be displayed on the non-competitive table.
4. To assist in deciding which class to enter, an Advisory Panel will provide guidance and make any final decisions necessary.
5. All trusses must be in glass bottles. (Cans and plastic pop bottles are too unstable.)
6. Judging will be by member votes.

CLASSES **Division I**

Species Classes

- Class 1. Rhododendron (lepidotes)
- Class 2. Azalea (deciduous and evergreen)
- Class 3. Hymenantha (elepidotes)

Division II

Hybrid Classes

- Class 4. Any lepidote hybrid
- Class 5. Any deciduous azalea hybrid
- Class 6. Any evergreen azalea hybrid

Colour Classes

- Class 7a: Red - (small)
- 7b: Red - (large)
- Class 8a: White - (small)
- 8b: White - (large)
- Class 9a: Pink - (small)
- 9b: Pink - (large)
- 9c: Pink - (really, really, large)
- Class 10a: Yellow & Cream (small)
- 10b: Yellow & Cream (large)
- Class 11: Mauves & Purple
- Class 12: Orange
- Class 13: Bi-colour

Division III

Special Classes

- Class 14: "What's it Called" - best new non-registered hybrid - a special class for the hybridizer
- Class 15: Truss with the Best Fuzzy Foliage
- Class 16: Best Blotched
- Class 17: Best Speckled
- Class 18: Most Lurid
- Class 19: Best Last Year's Truss
- Class 20: Most Elegantly Weevil-Notched
- Class 21: Best Hammerhead
- Class 22: Most Flaccid
- Class 23: Best Miniature Truss - under 6"
- Class 24: Most Fragrant (Az. or Rh.)

Definitions:

1. Small - 6" or under
2. Large - 6" to 10"
3. Really, Really, Large - over 10"
4. Blotch - each individual flower shows a solid colour mark on dorsal lobe (or three lobes), distinctly different from the base colour of the flower.
5. Lurid - most vividly garish
6. Hammerhead - an inflorescence which arises from more than a single flower bud
7. Speckled - distinguished from blotches by non-solid colour sprinkles and spots, either around entire flower, or at least on upper lobe(s) - e.g. 'Paprika Spiced'



COMPANION PLANTS

W is for Weigela
from the Honeysuckle Family
Family: Caprifoliaceae

Once the main splash of rhododendrons is over, there is a charming group of plants that fills the color gaps in our landscapes quite nicely. Named after a German botanist, C.E. von Weigel, the Cardinal Flowers (Zone 4/5) are deciduous shrubs of open woodland areas in parts of Asia, which have a multitude of foliage and flower features. Most of our available varieties are selections or hybrids of two species: *W. florida* and *W. praecox*, although the wild forms are rarely offered. The blooms, in May and June, are tubular, in small clusters along older stems, often with nicely contrasting stamens. In blossom, they attract hummingbirds by the flock.

The 'in' thing these days among plant introducers is purple leaves, starting back with 'Foliis Purpureis' ('Java Red'), on to 'Victoria', then 'Wine and Roses' ('Alexandra'), 'Ruby Queen', and now 'Midnight Wine'! The color is getting darker, and the plant habit is getting smaller – what's next – a black groundcover Weigela? Attractive and useful plants nevertheless – most of them have pink to bright pink blooms.

The 'Dance Series', developed by Agriculture Canada, have all been selected for very compact habits, extra hardiness (Zone 4), and richly colored blooms. Foliage variations are from green to burgundy, with deep pink or red blooms. Look for 'Tango', 'Polka', 'Samba', 'Rumba' and 'Minuet'.

Gold-leafed forms are a bit more finicky – they need partial shade to avoid foliage burn, but too much shade makes them go green, so it's a fine line. 'Looymansii Aurea' has pale pink blooms, while the newer 'Briant Rubidor' (aka 'Olympiade' or 'Golden Ruby') has dark ruby flowers that offer a striking contrast. Variegated leaves, with cream to light yellow margins, occur in both species, and have pink flowers. The variegated areas take on rich pink to red tones in fall, for extra punch.

White-flowered forms are available as 'Bristol Snowflake', 'Candida', 'Mont Blanc' and others, but I must admit I don't really care for them, although 'Mont Blanc' is highly rated. Possibly I just haven't seen one at the right stage or in the right setting. A new introduction, 'Carnaval', has blooms of white and 2 shades of pink all at once on the same plant. That's kind of neat! For deep reds, the old 'Bristol Ruby' and 'Eva Rathke', although good and reliable, have been superseded by newer, tidier, non-fading varieties like 'Red Prince', 'Lucifer', and the even smaller 'Nain Rouge'.

Weigelas grow easily in any well-drained moderate soil, and old bloomed-out stems can be cut to the ground to allow new ones to take their place. Trim right after blossoming in the early summer to keep leggy branches in order, and to give time for the wood to ripen and set bloom for next year. Some varieties will bloom off and on throughout the summer, and others appear in early summer and again in early fall.

Two unusual species, *W. middendorffiana* and *W. maximowiczii*, have light yellow flowers in late spring – most 'un-weigela-like', but truthfully I have not seen either offered for sale locally. Good on you if you can find one.

Look around in the plant centers when you've gotten all your beddings settled and your rhodos are on the wane, and you'll find one of these to be a delightful addition to your garden, big or small.

Happy Planting!

Colleen Forster



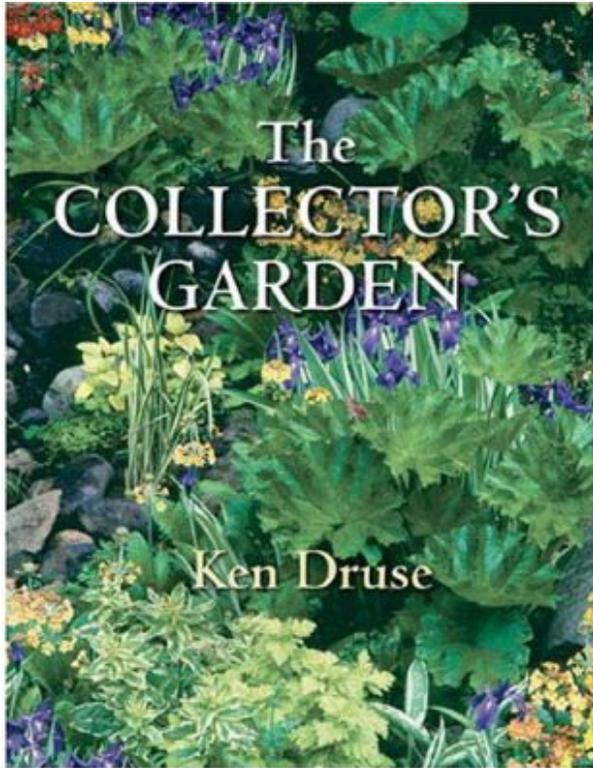
Weigela 'Samba'



Weigela 'Candida'



Weigela 'Midnight Wine'



IN THE LIBRARY

**The Collector's Garden, by Ken Druse,
published by Timber Press, 2004, paperback**

"It's rare, we want it. If it's tiny and impossible to grow, we've got to have it. If it's brown, looks dead, and has black flowers, we'll kill for it." So starts the introduction to this latest addition to our library, but the book is about much more than lusting after the latest and newest.

The author starts with a general chat about the history of plant hunters and collectors, along with comments on cultural requirements of various plants and the need to share rare plants – a good insurance for the day you lose one and need to retrieve a cutting from one of your beneficiaries. This is not a dry historical treatise, but a warm and inviting introduction to many collections of

plants growing in plant lovers' gardens. The written portions are a delight to read and the more than 400 photos are superb. The plants and gardens are as varied as the people.

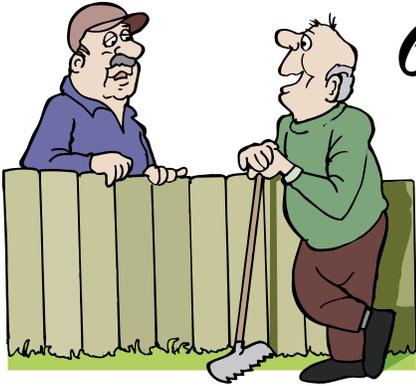
The book is divided into sections: Hunters - people who seek out the new and different, Missionaries - those who strive to save threatened plants, Specialists – folks who generally collect a specific taxonomic group or the denizens of a particular habitat, and Aesthetes – those who collect plants "just because they find them beautiful". Inside these sections are many examples of North-American gardens, mostly private.

Druse has interesting anecdotes to relate about most of the gardens and their owners. He tells of the lady who started a cyclamen nursery, which became so successful that she closed it after ten years because she no longer had time for gardening. Or the couple who grow wildflowers in their natural habitat garden, and are selecting and hybridizing trilliums with the aim of finding a way to get more trilliums into gardens. There are folks who collect only variegated plants – all kinds, those who collect cacti, rhododendrons, grasses, and so on. "Plain unadulterated plant greed led me to rock gardening", was admitted by one. A collector of rhododendrons laments, "My garden is too small for all the plants I want to grow, and too large to maintain," – a sentiment most of us can relate to.

There is a final section, Collector's Guide, chock full of information about mail order nurseries, (with comments about many of them), plant societies, some notes on propagation, and a list of books for further reading. Although first published by Clarkson Potter, New York, in 1996, the Timber Press edition has the book list, at least, updated to 2004.

I find something new in the book every time I pick it up, and I highly recommend it.

Joan Bengough



Over the backyard fence . . .

Had you asked me, 45 years ago, what was my favourite rhododendron, I would have answered unhesitatingly 'Elizabeth'. Even then, 'Elizabeth' was available in several forms – the A.M. form, the Wisley form, the form called "Jenny" that became "Creeping Jenny", and, I suspect, other grex plants. My own preference was the Wisley form. Its colour is perhaps a bit less intense than the A.M. form, but the flowers are larger.

Elizabeth belongs to that group called the "(Bloody) Bodnant Reds". In the 1930 – 40's, there was a move amongst hybridizers to produce rhododendrons having a good clear, red, with no hint of blue. The species *R. griersonianum* was used with this in mind, and many crosses were made. Lord Aberconway of Bodnant and his head gardener, F. C. Puddle, produced large numbers of hybrids. Amongst these are a number of crosses with *R. griersonianum* which are still in many gardens.

Of the first crosses, 'Elizabeth' (*R. forrestii* Repens group x *R. griersonianum*), 'F. C. Puddle' (*R. neriiflorum* x *R. griersonianum*), 'Mayday' (*R. haematodes* x *R. griersonianum*) and 'Hecla' (*R. thomsonii* x *R. griersonianum*) are all Bodnant crosses. Apart from 'F. C. Puddle' which I lost many years ago, all are growing in my garden. All of these plants have excellent colour, but most have inherited the somewhat open truss of *R. griersonianum* frowned upon by some fanciers. 'Hecla' and 'F.C. Puddle' have a somewhat willowy growth habit and less than robust leaf texture. 'Mayday', (the cross was with *R. haematodes*) has inherited excellent foliage and has a good growth habit. 'Elizabeth', the product of a cross with *R. forrestii* Repens Group has good leaf texture, and although no dwarf, it is low growing, and relatively tidy.

That last sentence is true – up to a point, and it was during this stage that I found it such a satisfying plant – relatively early in bloom (and blooming early from cuttings); relatively long-lasting blooms, that even when fading remained attractive; neat, medium-green foliage; and a tidy stature. Twenty-plus years down the pike, and some reconstructive work needs to be done. Several 'Elizabeth's, long suffering, and overgrown by larger, greedy varieties, have now been bodily hauled out into the open. They look ghastly. Long awkward, ugly branches, with meagre foliage of starved-looking tags of leaves.

I feared that too rigorous a cut-back might kill the plant, and so did only a bit of judicious nipping and let the plants be. After three years or so, I can now see that some will recover, and can be pruned (imagine me using that term in reference to rhododendrons!!) and that they are now well on their way to becoming an attractive hedge again.

'Elizabeth' seems to have fallen on bad times – you rarely see or hear of her now. Perhaps she does not age attractively (I feel for her) or perhaps she is just out of fashion, but she still remains one of my favourites.



R. 'Elizabeth', A.M. form

M. L. "Mike" Trembath