

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 18 Number 10 October 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
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 - 3rd yr
Les Clay - 2nd yr
Colleen Forster - 1st yr

Membership: Wenonah March

Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald
604-990-5353

Website: Chris Klapwijk
604-888-0920

This Month's Meeting : Wednesday, October 19, 2005

Speakers: Mary-Anne Berg, Garth Wedemire,
Brenda Macdonald, Sean Rafferty,
Dalen Bayes

Topic: Yunnan, China, Spring 2005

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show and Tell: Vern Finley

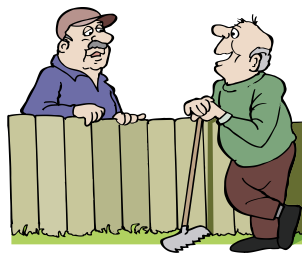
Plant Sales: Les Clay

Quick Hits



Welcome ...

To our new member, Brian Grose of
Langley, who joined us this month.



Over the Backyard Fence... Nature vs Nurture, cont'd

Last month Mike Trembath treated us
to a thought-provoking essay on what
appears to be the almost universal
compulsion on the part of gardeners
in general, and perhaps rhodoholics
in particular, to, well, "improve"
things. Pruning, pinching, forcing, training, tweaking one way
or the other - it all seems to amount to a basic and apparently
bottomless desire to shape and control... our plants, if not our
lives. This month Mike discusses the other way we attempt to
leave our mark on our rhodos - by creating new ones which
will embody all those attributes we deem desirable. And
hopefully in a single plant.



From the President

TRAVEL WHILE YOU ARE YOUNG

Travel while you are young. Oh, sure. When you are young you can't afford it, and as you age you can't handle the rigors since you are increasingly unable to cope with the physical demands of traveling. So, you tend to change travel plans as often as you change medications. Which brings us to our personal experience of England's medical system:

England's health system is wonderful, in some ways, but woefully inadequate in others. During our month of traveling in England, Judy developed a cold followed by a persistent cough. Likely it was from the recirculated air on our flight from Vancouver to Gatwick. As the cough deepened so did the panic. Here we were, out of our home country and needing help. When you are sick you just want to go home, but after only seven days of a four week travel plan it was not prudent to cut and run. We were staying for three days with friends in Plymouth as Judy's health deteriorated. The coughing and temperature escalated. Our travel was in jeopardy. If medical help was available, we reasoned it was more likely to be found in Plymouth than in St. Ives, our intended location the next

few days. Our friends concurred, and with their persistence we were able, only after much bowing, extensive scraping and tearful groveling, to secure the attention of a local physician in a health clinic. Actually, clinics are called "Surgeries" in England.

We registered with the receptionist in the surgery and waited a mere 25 minutes before being ushered in to see the doctor. I expressed indignation along with trepidation that we needed only some antibiotics and hoped scalpels and hemostats would be unnecessary. The doctor, an immigrant from Nigeria but a naturalized citizen of England for 35 years, was a wonderful example of the good things about the system. He was caring, concerned, and professional as he assessed Judy's health or lack thereof; helpful, studious enough to ask about other medications and research them in medical manuals to ascertain the British equivalents, and offering suitable antibiotics to cure the problem. Upon visiting the Pharmacy, oops-the Chemist, to have the prescription filled we were told there was no charge. The doctor's fee and all prescriptions were paid by the British Health System.

What is not to like about that? Of course someone pays the bills, likely in taxes, but our Canadian health gurus should take note, especially regarding immigrant doctors alleviating the shortages of qualified physicians.

Harrowgate was another story. Following a week enduring York's winter winds (remember it was the third week of May, and just to the North of us, Scotland reported snow), Judy's cough returned with severity. Clearly we needed further medical attention. Parking near Betty's for some tea-- everyone needs to experience world-renown Betty's Tea Shop at least once before leaving this world—we asked directions to the nearest surgery. Using the correct esoteric language should have counted for sympathetic assistance. As for the directions, they were adequate. But the same could not be said for the response from the physicians. We were shuffled off to the third surgery office, all the while braving the chilling North York winds, before we were summarily dismissed as obstinate travelers attempting to scam the system. Since we had no advanced appointment we could not be admitted to a doctor until later in the week no matter how dire the need. Oh, and health insurance, if we had any, would prove ineffective. It would be cash up front. But we only needed to renew a prescription, we argued. "We are traveling and unable to alter our itinerary." "This is not London, or Plymouth, this is Harrowgate. If you wish to book an appointment it will be 57 Pounds. We will try to fit you in next Tuesday." So much for my appreciation of the British medical system. It was back to Betty's for some of her comfort medicine.

We never did obtain other antibiotics during our trek around England's countryside. Judy's health gradually improved. We kept to our schedule, visiting castles, ruins, gardens, friends, and tourist attractions. Perhaps the germs got tired of keeping up with us, or we wore them out. Maybe the heat in the tropical zone of The Eden Project was therapeutic. Regardless, I am convinced now more than ever, that to travel comfortably one needs to be in fine physical form.

The same can be said of gardeners. Until back surgery (here I am using the Canadian definition of surgery) I was able to keep up with my garden. Following surgery it was only a matter of time before the inevitable dismantling would take place (of my garden, not my ruptured disc). I had five more years to augment the plantings and to enjoy the park-like setting of our home garden, though often accompanied by physical pain. As I reported at our last FSRS meeting, I have many pictures of glorious

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rhodos in the landscape, but I have none of the property as it was redeveloped -- it was too painful to take pictures of the garden's destruction.

Our itinerary in England was loaded with garden tours toward the end of the trip. I noticed Judy was coughing less, and had greater stamina the final week of our stay. Earlier, her coughing would have frightened away the black swans from Leonardslee's lakes. Out of frustration I grouched that we were unable to do what we came to England to do: see historic sights and classic gardens. It is tough enough traveling when in good spirits, but when ill it is exhausting. The last week was one of garden visits and improved physical conditions. When we were despairing in York I had told Judy that we needed to spend more time in the gardens and less in the surgeries. Maybe rhodos really are the way to better health.

Bobby Ogdon



R. genesterianum
as drawn by Lillian Snelling in 1928
for *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*

Grave of Père Annet Genestier 1856 - 1937
Dulong valley, northwest Yunnan, China



From the Editor

This Month: :

This month those of our members who participated in the RSF trip to Yunnan, China, earlier this year will attempt a sort of round-robin presentation, with each of us discussing a different aspect of the trip.

Last Month:

Last month President Bobby Ogdon treated us to an all-too-brief visual history of the extensive garden he (and his family) developed at their residence in North Surrey. I personally never got to see it but I had heard of it frequently, and now I know why. The range and quality of his plant material were extraordinary, and his garden design a pleasure to look at. Although the garden is gone now, it was still a joy to catch at least some of its flavour through this presentation.

Next Month:

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, November 16th. Don Martyn will speak on Magnolias.

Notes:

KITCHEN DUTIES - Cherry Groves has forwarded the following fall schedule for the Coffee and Calories Brigade:

October	Mary-Anne Berg, Nancy Moore
November	Lori Bayes, Patti Bale, Joan McGiveron

PROVEN PERFORMERS - As well as the “Rhododendron of the Year” list candidates discussed in the March, 2005 issue of the Yak, all ARS Chapters have also been requested to submit candidates for a “Proven Performers” list. The criteria for this list are somewhat more relaxed than for ROY since candidates do not necessarily have to be registered to be eligible. The list can, and should, contain both rhododendrons and azaleas, species and hybrids. The purpose of the list is to provide other members of the gardening public with some guidance in the selection of rhododendrons which will do well in each Chapter’s geographical area. Come to the next meeting armed with the names of at least two rhododendrons/azaleas that you feel have superior attractiveness, vigor, and sustainability.

MEMBERSHIP - Don’t forget to complete your membership application and deliver it to Wenonah or Alan March at the next meeting. Our Chapter fees must be submitted to the ARS by the end of the year, so we need a full piggy-bank to fulfill our obligations.

RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION - Mary-Anne reports that we received a letter of gratitude for the donation the Chapter made to the RSF to fund an Intern for a short period this summer. The RSF depends a great deal upon both volunteer labour and the sponsorship of horticultural/botanical summer students in order to maintain the level of staffing needed, and they were deeply grateful for our assistance.

ANNUAL EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR ELECTIONS - Don’t forget that our Annual General Meeting and Elections are coming up soon. Please take a minute to seriously consider taking a more active role in supporting the Chapter. The individual effort required is not large, but the result for the Chapter is life-sustaining

Brenda Macdonald.

The church, the caretaker, and the inside ceiling of the church where Père Annet Genestier is buried. Dulong valley, northwest Yunnan, China





Up the Garden Path with New Forms of Houseplants

Lots of exciting new varieties of flowering house plants are now available from various retail outlets. Particularly impressive are the new flower colours of such old standbys as *Kalanchoe*, Crown of Thorns (*Euphorbia*), and Flowering Maple (*Abutilon*). As well, dwarf forms of potted Peruvian Lilies (*Alstroemeria*) and Gerbera Daisies are on the market and their small size makes them easy to grow as house plants.



Two different colour forms of *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*

The Kalanchoes are a large genus of plants grown mostly for their succulent leaves. *K. blossfeldiana*, native to Madagascar, has been a houseplant favourite since the 1930's because of its ease of care and brilliant flowers. Up until the early 1980's, the only flower colours available were deep oranges to reds, but Dutch and German plant breeders have extended the colour range to include white, yellow, pink and purple, as well as orange and red. To care for this plant, give it bright light to full sun. When watering, the entire volume of soil should be moistened, but let plant dry out slightly before watering again. *K. blossfeldiana* will tolerate hot, dry locations, but the flowers last longer if the plant is kept in a cool, bright location.

K. blossfeldiana is an example

of a plant that flowers under short day conditions. To induce flowering in commercial greenhouses, the crop is covered by a blackout cloth from late afternoon through to the next morning for about 6 weeks. This ensures the plants receive a dark period of 14 to 16 hours, without any stray light. To get a *Kalanchoe* to re-bloom at home, you need to mimic this condition. Try covering your plant with a box at night, so that the plant gets long nights, uninterrupted by artificial light. *Kalanchoes* don't have many insect or disease pests, so are nice, low maintenance plants.

Crown of Thorns (*Euphorbia milii*) is related to Poinsettias, and like them, have milky latex. The common name, Crown of Thorns, comes from the plant's thorny growth habit. In the last century, the story developed that this plant was used as the "crown of thorns" during Christ's crucifixion. The legend goes that prior to the crucifixion all of these plants had white flowers, but the plant "blushed with shame" at its role so its flowers changed to red. However, the plant is native to Madagascar, not the Middle-East, so it is not the Biblical plant. Like *Kalanchoe*, this plant has had its flower colour range extended from oranges and reds into whites, creams, pinks and soft yellows.



Euphorbia milii cultivars, 'Rainbow', 'Primrose', 'Blushing Bride'

A mature plant can easily be several feet tall, and it commands respect due to the nasty thorns that form along the stems. I always feel sorry for the poor greenhouse workers who have to prepare cuttings or pot up young plants. Gloves are definitely needed when handling this plant. For best growth, Crown of Thorns needs full sun and warm temperatures. It has some ability to withstand dry or cool conditions, but if allowed to get too dry or cold, it will drop its leaves. It should not be allowed to sit in standing water or it will suffer root rot.

Large-sized blossoms of *Gerbera* daisies are popular cut flowers, but there are also many smaller selections that are readily

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available as flowering pot plants. Plants can also be grown from seed since many seed companies carry several strains of dwarf Gerbera seed. Like their tall cut-flower cousins, the potted plants have flowers that come in white, pink, yellow, orange and red. Most varieties have a typical daisy-like flower with a central disk surrounded by ray florets, but double flowers are also grown where the centre becomes very full. I always think plants with daisy-like flowers are cheerful, and Gerberas are no exception. Gerberas require full sun and excellent drainage for best growth. They are susceptible to root rot if kept too wet, and if light is limited, powdery mildew may also develop. Other than that, they are easy to grow. Gerberas are native to South Africa.



Two colour forms of the Flowering Maple - *Abutilon x hybridum*

Flowering Maples (*Abutilon*) get their name because they have maple-shaped leaves. There are a number of species of *Abutilon*, but the most common is *A. x hybridum* which has gorgeous flowers that look like they're made out of crepe paper. While the flowers are smaller, they are reminiscent of one of their relatives, the tropical Hibiscus. They come in white, yellow, cream, pink and red. A related species, *A. megapotamicum* is equally pretty but has pendulous, two-toned flowers of brilliant red and yellow. This plant often has variegated leaves which are also very showy. Abutilons are native to Central and South America.



The species form of *Abutilon megapotamicum*, and a hybrid form *A. 'Seashell'*

For best growth as houseplants, Flowering Maples need full sun in winter and protection from the noon day sun in summer. In winter, a bright, cool room is ideal. They need lots of water, especially when they are actively growing, but they also need good drainage. Regular fertilizing, with any good house plant type of fertilizer, is also recommended. When grown well,

Abutilons can become large, easily reaching several feet in height. However, they can be kept in bounds by cutting them back regularly. Spring through early summer is the best time to prune. I've found that flowering branches make good cut flowers, so when my own plant gets too large or leggy, I wait for flowers to form, then cut it back hard to force new growth, and then enjoy the bouquet. The major pest of Abutilons is white fly, and you need to avoid introducing this nasty insect to your home because once introduced, it can be very difficult to control.

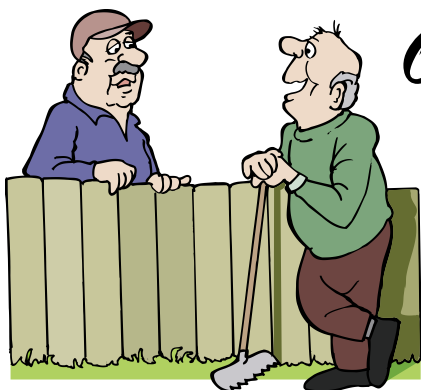
Tall stems of Peruvian Lilies (*Alstroemeria*) are popular cut flowers, but there are also nice, small potted plants available. Flowers range in colour from creams to pinks to pale lavenders. As a houseplant, Peruvian Lilies grow best under cool, bright conditions. Keep plants moist when in bloom, but make sure they have good drainage too. After blooming, it's normal for the stems to die back. You can try letting the plants rest in a cool area, then re-forcing them, or if you live in coastal B.C., you might have some success in transplanting them outside to the garden. If all goes well, the plants will rest for a few weeks, then form new flower shoots. However, don't be too disappointed if you can't get them to re-bloom as houseplants, as they can be fussy about re-growing. I've seen pots of dwarf *Alstroemerias* also being sold as bedding plants over the last couple of summers, but I haven't seen any garden displays where the dwarf forms have become established.



Three colour forms of *Alstroemeria ssp.*

The range of blooming pot plants is amazing and there's a flower type or colour for everyone. With care, these plants will continue to grow and give pleasure for many years.

Norma Senn



Over the backyard fence . . .

“Shapes” Part 2 - The Shape of Things to Come

Wouldn't you think that a genus containing hundreds of species, so many of which can be and indeed are, excellent garden plants would be enough already? Well it isn't. Growers of rhododendrons, in their thousands, are certain that they can do better. Is there any other genus that had produced as many hybrids? If so – I don't want to hear about it. Everywhere, a never-ending trail of the newly-created marches into the

record books. Enthusiasts cross Clydesdales with Shetland ponies, St. Bernards with Chihuahuas and even zebras with mares.

Changes must be made: small flowers must become bigger, pale must become bright, loose must become packed, plain become frilled. I would not be surprised if some one had tried Viagra to help lax trusses stand up. The oh-so-serious hybridizer will explain his goals - maybe he is looking for a true blue elepidote (lotsa luck, guy); maybe a medium-sized plant with heavy indumentum, a break-through colour, and a beautiful aroma; perhaps a good natured plant that is easy to root, blooms one year from cutting, and grows fast to 2 ½ feet - where it promptly stops and stays at that size ...but healthy of course.

Just as there are “horses for courses” there are plants for sites. Hybrids which grow happily in our favoured west coast area shrivel and die in harsher, drier climates further east. Local hybridists work for their own areas presumably, so we have a plethora of big blowsy plants looking as though they had been fed a diet of steroids. I have no real objection to large flowers, but a well proportioned plant – growth, leaves and flowers – is a pleasant sight. I wonder if this “all in proportion” appearance is not one of the factors that maintains ‘Unique’ in its favoured position.

Part of the problem with rhododendrons is the ease with which they can be crossed, and grown on. No rhodie enthusiast can begin to be familiar with all the rhodies out there, even those grown in his own area, and so when he falls in love with a new plant, and adds it to his garden, he is very tempted to try crossing this new plant with his last season's favourite. When you have overseen the development of your very own new rhododendron, you are loathe to destroy it, or its siblings, even when you finally realize that ‘your’ plant deserves only to be grubbed out. (I confess to having a number of these non-remarkable seedlings still hiding in my garden.) It shouldn't surprise one, but often does, that the taste of rhodie growers is quite catholic; the plant which produces what to you are hideously garish blooms, is bound to be someone's darling.

During my a long spell of enthusiasm for the genus, I have swung between being delighted with hybridizing to being disgusted with the burgeoning number of registered hybrids whose descriptions appear to duplicate already existing plants. Life as a rhodoholic is rarely dull.

M. L. “Mike” Trembath



The hybridizer's art: from the simple - R. 'Snowlady' (Lancaster, 1958)
to the complex - R. 'President Roosevelt' (Booskoop, before 1930)

Membership



As in previous years it continues to be 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. This year's fees will remain the same as last year's, with the current schedule being supported with a subsidy from other club revenues. Moreover the Chapter officers encourage all members to participate as Full Members, which includes membership and support for the parent organization, the American Rhododendron Society. It is through the ARS umbrella that many of the educational activities and the exchange of information and sharing of resources is made possible. A strong ARS, supported by Full Memberships all across the continent, is what makes our rhododendron community possible. All membership questions should be addressed to our Membership chair, Wenonah March, or any other of the FSRS officers.

Fraser South Rhododendron Society 2006 Membership Form

- New Membership
 Renewal Membership

Date _____
Name _____
Partner or Spouse's Name _____
Address _____
City _____
Province (State) _____
Postal (Zip) Code _____
Telephone Number _____
Fax Number _____
Email Address _____

All personal information collected by FSRS is for Society use only. Chapter members who would like their name and address to be included in the FSRS Member List - to be distributed to FSRS members only - and who wish to receive a copy of the FSRS newsletter, must indicate their consent by marking this box:

Please indicate the type of membership below, and enclose your payment with this registration form. All cheques should be made out to: **Fraser South Rhododendron Society**

- Full Member (includes ARS membership and quarterly ARS Journal) \$35.00
 Local Member (without ARS membership and Journal) \$20.00
 Associate (full member of other Canadian ARS chapter) \$10.00

Please indicate name of primary membership chapter _____