

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

2006 Officers

President: Dalen Bayes
360-933-4596

Vice Pres.: Harold Fearing
604-857-4136

Secretary: Mary-Anne Berg
604-853-5737

Treasurer: Alan March
604-532-9062

Directors: Les Clay - 3rd yr
Colleen Forster - 2nd yr
Sean Rafferty - 1st yr

Membership: Wenonah March

Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald
604-990-5353

Website: Chris Klapwijk
604-888-0920

Volume 19 Number 3 March 2006

This Month's Meeting : Wednesday, March 15, 2006

Speakers: Joe Ronsley

Topic: "A Woodland Garden"

Companion Plants: Colleen Forster

Show and Tell: Vern Finley

Plant Sales: Trevor and Doreen Badminton

Quick Hits



Plant Sale!

Don't forget our Plant Sale.
This year the big day is
Saturday, April 8th, 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.



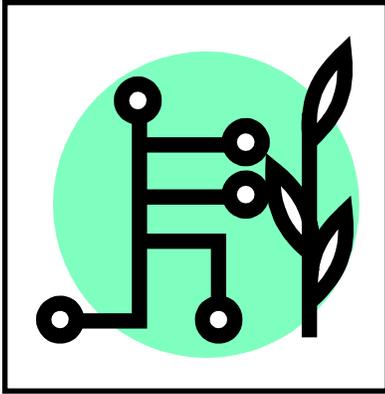
Revised Membership Listing

The 2006 Membership List for Fraser South
Rhododendron Society is attached. For
those who receive a hard copy of The Yak,
it will be included with the mailing. For
those who receive their copy electronically,
I will include a separate file - and this time
the errant production staff promises to
actually attach it!



Next Month

The justly famous
Thirteenth Annual Beer Bottle Truss Show!



From the President

NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

It's hard to believe that less than a month ago I was lamenting all the rain we had received this winter (I guess I whine a lot) and now we have an inch of snow on the ground. Actually I have no problem with the snow since at least it has warmed up the last two days. In between the rain and the snow the weather forecast had been for lows possibly down to a -13 or 14 C. So, frightened by this dire forecast, late afternoon found Lori and I in the garden trying to protect our precocious cardiocrinums from the frigid arctic air descending on us from Canada. (So much for homeland security.)

First, cones were made of newspaper to go over the 8-10 inch shoots, then the cones were wrapped with fiberglass insulation. Other shoots were protected by mounding beauty bark around them. You can imagine how this looked, mounds of beauty bark heaped up like anthills, and large white fiberglass flowers throughout the garden. As we walked back to the house by flashlight (yes, it was now that dark) I was thankful our garden wasn't visible from the road. To grasp the absurdity of all this, one must realize that these plants will all die after blooming, and that most will bloom while Lori and I are canoeing in northern Canada this summer.

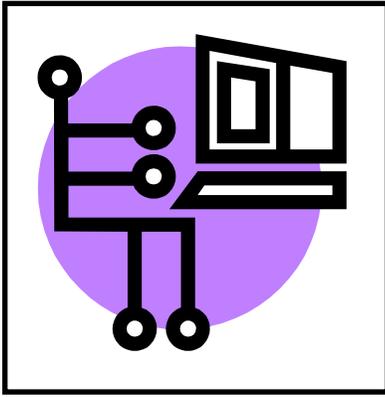
And in the end, the temperature only dropped to -7C. The covered plants will come through with no damage, and there was only slight damage to two plants we had missed.

A special note of thanks is due to Chris Klapwijk for all his work on our chapters's website (www/flounder.ca/FraserSouth) Not only has Chris spent hundreds of hours on our website but has also hosted it on his business site free of charge, saving our chapter a good deal of money. The website includes a calendar of our events, photos of member gardens, the last four years of "The Yak", a very informative section on rhododendron basics, a gallery of rhododendron photos and many more topics. A website like ours is not only informative to our members but to anybody with an interest in rhododendrons. It also is a good way to reach prospective new members. So on behalf of our membership I want to thank you again, Chris, for your abilities, your time, and your hard work.

An idea I would like to present to our chapter is for a section in "The Yak" where people could list plants that they would like to acquire but are unable to locate. Other members could respond if they know where a given plant might be located.

My list is *Primula apicola*, *P. capitata*, and *P. secundiflora*; as well as *Meconopsis paniculata* and *M. integrifolia*. If you know a nursery that does, or even may have any of these plants, please let me know at dalenb@premier1.net, 360-966-4596, or at the next meeting. Please bring any suggestions or ideas on this subject to the next meeting.

Each spring in years past, several members would volunteer to open their gardens for viewing and visiting with other members. (Directions to any given garden would be announced or given out at a meeting only, there would be no directions published in the on-line version of "The Yak".) Sharing one's garden is an enjoyable and important part of gardening. My idea on this is that these would be informal visits where the host would present his garden as it is, without a great deal of labour. Bring your ideas to the next meeting



From the Editor

This Month: :

This month Joe Ronsley will speak on "A Woodland Garden". Joe and his wife Joanne live amidst a wealth of rhododendrons, azaleas, Japanese maples, and other garden beauties under some pretty impressive west coast conifers on their property above Lion's Bay. Both the Ronsleys have been active in the Vancouver Chapter for many years, and their zeal and dedication for gardening in general and the genus *Rhododendron* in particular are reflected in the care with which the woodland nature of their property has been amended and moulded rather than eliminated or destroyed. Joe's presentation on the vision they had for their garden, and the development of that vision, should be inspiring to all of us.

Last Month:

Last month Garth Wedemire gave us what was essentially a Cook's Tour of Rhododendrons in Yunnan, and all without our having to lift our bottoms out of our chairs. We saw it all, the wide rivers and rushing torrents, the tall mountains and the precipitous slopes, the waterfalls and the road washouts, the valley vistas and the switchback roads, and above all, the rhododendrons, and we didn't even have to get our feet wet. I am always amazed and delighted at how much one learns when Garth gives a talk, although it is personally somewhat mortifying to find that somehow I understood the geography of the trip ever so much better after he talked about it than I did before, even though we both took the same trip. It was an evening well spent, learning things we didn't know and looking at pretty pictures at the same time.

Notes:

NIRS NEEDS ISLAND HYBRIDS

We received a note from the North Island Chapter advising that they were going to install a new bed at their Rhodo Garden in Courtenay in the fall. The intent is to plant only hybrids which were developed on Vancouver Island, and they are looking for donations of plant material that fill these criteria. My personal knowledge of hybrids which are uniquely Vancouver Island is non-existent, but I have heard the names of 'Royston' and 'Malahat' mentioned. Perhaps anyone who knows the names of any other hybrids could contact me and I could put out another query in The Yak next month. In the meantime, if you have any plant material you would like to donate, please contact Harry Wright of the North Island Rhododendron Society (NIRS) at 250-338-8345, or at haidaau@mars.ark.com

FSRS ANNUAL PLANT SHOW AND SALE

The Annual FSRS Plant Sale will be held on Saturday, April 8th this year, in the usual spot - the parking lot of the church. A sign-up sheet will be circulated at the March meeting for volunteers to man the cashier spots and help with coffee, and to assist the public with any questions they might have. Volunteer early, volunteer often! It's just like voting, it really works.

Brenda Macdonald

WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS

This club is very fortunate in having a large number of very talented and creative members, many of whom keep their lights hidden under the proverbial bushel. Now we are giving you a chance to come out and show us what you can do.

At the Western Regional Conference in September there is to be a large raffle, and we are looking for donations from members for the prizes.

We strongly urge all you talented people to use your creative abilities to make something unique - showcasing your own speciality. Just keep in mind that these items have to be transported up to Harrison and then home with the lucky winners. (Full-size garden sheds not recommended!!)

Many ideas spring to mind - small garden sets, plant stands, planters, birdhouses, painting, pottery, a selection of jams and jellies or pickles and relishes - the possibilities are endless.

If you are willing to make a contribution, and we hope many of you will, please let us know.

Lori Bayes and Joan Bengough



In spite of the blasts of Arctic winds in mid-February, we've had very good winter flower displays this year. Late winter-early spring blooming plants certainly help brighten up our dreary weather while offering the promise that spring will come.

As I write this, one of my all time favourite plants is in full bloom. Cornelian Cherry Dogwood (*Cornus mas*) is a true harbinger of spring. The flowers are a soft chartreuse green/yellow, and while the individual flowers are small, they appear in clusters that cover the tree in clouds of bloom. The flowers are tough and able to tolerate the season's chancy weather. This year is the earliest I've seen *Cornus mas* in bloom, with the flowers out fully in mid-February; I usually expect bloom in the first week of March.



This small tree offers year-round landscape interest. The leaves are bright green, opposite in arrangement, with the typical dogwood venation pattern and they develop good fall colour. *Cornus mas* also produces brilliant red fruits in mid to late summer. Birds love the fruit, but if you're able to beat them to it, the fruit can be used to make jelly (a word of warning though, the fruits are small with a large seed, so

Up the Garden Path with Late Winter and Early Spring Shrubs

it takes a lot of fruit for even the smallest batch of jelly). In winter, the plant has attractive bark.

This is an easy to plant to grow from seed, with a stratification treatment usually needed for germination. However, I often find seedlings popping up in my garden, and I suspect the digestive juices from the birds are providing enough scarification to allow germination. I've read that Cornelian Cherry Dogwood can be hard to establish, is fussy about soil pH and that it takes many years before it starts to flower, but I don't believe any of it. I've found it to be an easy grower, tolerant of my heavy garden soil, and flowers from about age 5.

This winter, my Wintersweet (*Chimonanthes praecox*) had lots of flowers. Fortunately I took the time to go out



and look at the plant carefully, as the flowers are small, dull-coloured and unassuming from a distance (how's that for an inducement to grow a plant?). But this plant has fantastic fragrance and even a small branch will perfume the entire house with a scent reminiscent of cloves and cinnamon. Wintersweet tends to be a "green blob in the landscape plant" for the rest of the year. That is, it has nice enough green leaves, but doesn't really offer anything else of great landscape interest during other seasons. However, I haven't seen any disease or insect problems on my plant, and it tolerates a difficult growing site including heavy clay soil, so with the winter fragrance it offers, it's definitely a "keeper".

Viburnum bodnantense is one of my all-time favourites and a plant I'd always want in a garden. I grow 'Pink Dawn' as

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well as a white form, but 'Pink Dawn' is definitely the showier, hardier plant and the form I'd recommend. 'Pink Dawn' starts to bloom in the late fall and continues with sporadic flowering throughout the winter as long as temperatures are near freezing. If it gets very cold, the plant sits, but then resumes flowering as temperatures rise. Then, in late winter, the 'Pink Dawn' puts on a good, final flower display.



The foliage is bright, emerald green with good fall colour. The leaves also have an interesting scent – reminiscent of green peppers to me. *V. bodnantense* needs full sun for best growth and regular renewal pruning helps promote young flowering wood. 'Pink Dawn' ultimately becomes a very large shrub, easily up to 15 feet tall, so give it lots of room.

Sarcococca hookeriana var. *humilis*, the Himalayan Sweet Box is a small, well-behaved, broad-leaved evergreen shrub that is particularly useful for foundation plantings. It needs shade, even moisture, acid soil and protection from cold, dry winter winds. The dark green foliage is glossy and neat, but *Sarcococca* is especially known for its small, white, intensely fragrant flowers that appear in February and March. Under good conditions, this species produces small black fruits, but they aren't particularly showy. If the growing conditions are appropriate, this is a good choice to plant near a doorway so you can appreciate the fragrance. *S. ruscifolia* is equally nice, but reputed to be less hardy than *S. hookeriana*. *S. ruscifolia* has bright red berries and is taller than *S. hookeriana*.

Daphne odora is another broad-leaved evergreen shrub that offers fragrant flowers in late winter. Like many Daphnes, this species has a reputation for being difficult to grow, but worth the effort. *D. odora* prefers well-drained acid soils, where plants receive some shade. They tend to be resentful of fertilizer, and I've found in my own garden that the plant I now have is happy enough when I just leave it alone (it took me a couple of tries before I really learned this lesson). There are a number of varieties of *D. odora* available, but I prefer the variegated forms because the foliage is so appealing in winter. Depending on the weather, flowers may appear as early as late January and continue through February. Flowers range from

white to pinky-purple, depending on variety.

Among our most popular winter bloomers are the Hellebores, in all their forms. These tough perennial plants are often evergreen in our area although some species are deciduous. Flowering times vary with species, but in mild years, some start to flower in January, while others flower later

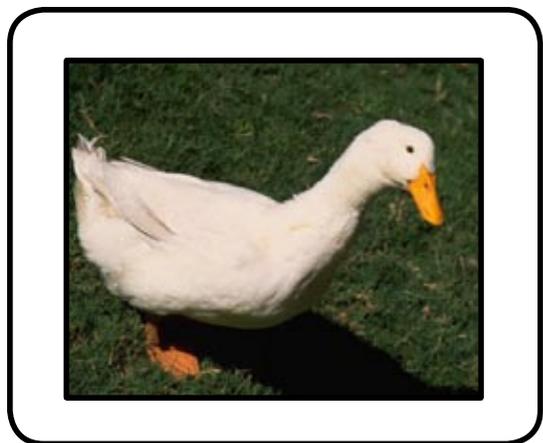


into the spring. The nodding flowers are saucer-shaped and come in colours ranging from pure white through pinks and purples. Many are now selected for their speckled petals. If you like to cut Hellebores for bouquets, mulching around the plants will help protect the flowers from being splattered by soil during our rainy winters. Plants don't like to be disturbed, so the usual recommendation is to plant them where you want them and then leave them alone. Once established, they are reasonably tough, but grow best in partial shade in soils rich in organic matter. They benefit from being watered deeply during the driest part of summer.

I had the chance to get to Van Dusen Gardens just ahead of, and just after, the mid-February cold snap. On my first visit, several species of Rhododendrons were in full bloom, including *Rhododendron virei*, *R. barbatum*, *R. strigillosum* and *R. stewartianum*. After the cold, the only one still looking good was their *R. barbatum*, and I suspect it survived the cold because it had better overhead protection than the other species. Of course, other lovely early Rhodies include *R. cilpinense* and *R. moupinense*, but these plants also need frost protection for their flowers.

There are many other winter treasures to enjoy, for example *Hamamelis mollis*, *Lonicera fragrantissima* and *L. x purpusii* come to mind, as well as the lovely early bulbs. Hopefully by the time this issue of *The Yak* arrives, spring will be in full swing, but in the meantime, isn't it nice to have such a wealth of winter blooming plants to enjoy.

Norma Senn



A Dabbler in Rhodieland

I'm a dabbler not a diver so I skim the surface of many things while the diver in the family focuses on precise inventory, neat labels, and arranging 2,000 pots of rhododendrons in alphabetical order!

Since my roses are currently buried under bark mulch hills, there is little at the moment to hold my attention (except for frost blasted tips) so I find myself wandering into rhodieland.

There is an amazing amount of color in the Lower Mainland during the winter – the green practically hurts my eyes. Because of the lush blooms rhododendrons often produce, it is easy to overlook the individuality and charm of the plants themselves. There seems no better time to focus on the shape, texture, and uniqueness of each rhododendron than in the winter when brilliant pinks, yellows, lavenders and sometimes even fragrance are not a distraction.

Of course, some rhodies, the deciduous ones, lose their leaves in the winter, providing beauty through the structure of the plant until warm weather prompts new growth. Pity the dabbler who, thinking the plant dead, yanks it out during its dormant season.

Most rhodies, however, are evergreen and keep their leaves. The leaves themselves are amazing – big, small, narrow, round, flat, curved. Sometimes there is an added bonus of fuzz (indumentum) underneath the leaves, often in quite beautiful colors. The shape, size and color of leaves are so distinctive that it is possible, if you are a diver, to identify many plants just by looking at them, whether or not they are in bloom. Once we had a drop-by visitor from Denmark who walked around our garden and correctly named all of the rhodies just by looking at them, whether or not they were blooming. Even my diver was impressed.

While wandering the yard I came across several plants in the greenhouse that immediately caught my eye. The leaves are enormous, oval and a smooth dark green. This is a plant that calls out to be noticed.

Let me give you hints as to the identify of this big-leaved beauty by sharing what I have learned from *Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons, Third Edition* (Greer, H.E., 1996) and from *The Larger Rhododendron Species*, (P.A.Cox, 1990). I copied the pictures from the American Rhododendron Society and Rhododendron Species Foundation websites.

This plant that calls to me is very highly rated by Greer. The leaves are 12 x 8 inches, broadly oval, usually dark green and shiny above with usually white to grayish-cream indumentum below. Although it grows to 45 feet tall in the wild, so far in cultivation it generally grows from 10-30 feet. The expanding growth buds look like red candles and these develop into silvery young growth with contrasting bright scarlet budscales. This plant eventually produces huge yellow, magnificent trusses early in the season, each flower having 16 stamens.

I learn that the combination of large yellow blotched flowers, dark green rounded shiny leaves, and grayish-white indumentum below is not found in any other species. It is easily grown and withstands wind, frost and drought better than its near relatives.

There is a clue to the pronunciation of this plant's name in the fact that it was named after Mr. McCabe, a former Deputy Commissioner in India.

I'm a dabbler not a diver so I skim the surface while the diver in the family, well, dives. When you come to visit us, you can expect to be introduced not only to my rubiginosum, but also now to bold, magnificent *R. macabeanum*.

Ginny Fearing

R. macabeanum
upper and lower leaf surfaces
photo - RSF website



R. macabeanum
flower truss
photo by Eleanor Philp-ARS website

Notes and Queries

Plant queries:



Mr. Lynn Marcy of Ringgold, Georgia, has written a note inquiring about possible sources for both 'Nameless Beauty' and 'Lionheart', two of Mike Trembath's hybrids. Would anyone who knows of a source for these plants please advise The Yak?



NIRS is looking for hybrid rhododendrons that were developed on Vancouver Island (see page 3). Would anyone who knows of the names and/or locations of any plants which meet this criterion please advise The Yak?



Our fearless leader, Dalen Bayes, is looking for *Primula apicola*, *P. capitata*, and *P. secundiflora*; as well as *Meconopsis paniculata* and *M. integrifolia*. Would anyone who knows of a contact for these items please contact The Yak, or Dalen personally.



I am looking for a *R. campylogynum* in that odd sort of salmon colour to add to my burgeoning and yes-they-are-still-alive collection of my favourite rhodos. Would anyone who knows of a source please contact the Yak, or me personally.

Brenda Macdonald



Rhododendrons of Yunnan



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

Rhododendron rubiginosum

This variable but vigorous and hardy species has a blossom and habit similar to members of the Triflora subsection such as *R. yunnanense*, but is differentiated from them by increased scaliness and terminal-only inflorescence. The “*R. desquamatum*” noted in the Curtis illustration to the right was sunk into synonymy by Cullen in his 1980 revision, perhaps in view of the significant variability of the species and the fact that larger more attractively coloured flowers did not necessarily a new species make. The rusty brown scales on the leaf underside are quite flaky (hence “*desquamatum*”) and on the whole, the leaves are not as heavily aromatic as other member of the Helirolepida subsection.



This illustration by Lilian Snelling was first published in 1937 in Curtis’s Botanical Magazine, although at the time it was considered a separate species *R. desquamatum*, and was differentiated from what was considered *R. rubiginosum* by its larger, darker flowers