

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 20 Number 4
April 2007



www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth

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

This Month's Meeting

Date: Wednesday, April 18, 2007
Speaker: Peter Wharton, Curator of the David
C. Lam Garden at the UBC Botanical Garden and
Centre for Plant Research
Topic: Plant Expeditions in Asia
Plant Sales: Les Clay

2007 Officers

President: Dalen Bayes
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Larry Morton - 1st yr
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Quick Hits



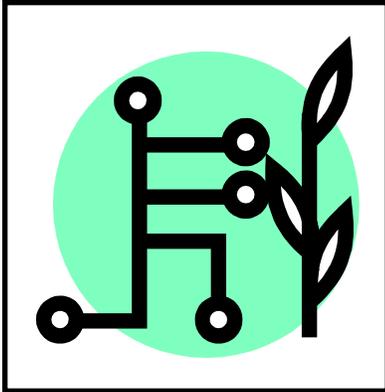
Garden Open Houses:

Rak/Tham - Saturday, April 28
Clay - Wednesday, May 2
Bayes - Saturday, May 5
Dodd - Sunday, May 13
Details inside!



Next Month ...

It's that time of year again!
Time for the (justly famous)
Fourteenth Annual Beer Bottle
Truss Show.
Details inside!



From the President

Notes from the Chair

SPRING AT LAST

Last Sunday the temperature dropped to 27 degrees F. and an inch of snow fell; this took care of the blooms on the early blooming rhodies. But with the warm weather, others are coming into bloom so not all is lost.

One rhododendron that didn't get frosted is *R. x geraldii*. Being as it is one of my favorite rhododendrons it is planted under a cedar tree for protection. It is a naturally occurring hybrid between *R. sutchuenese* and *R. praeevernum*. The original plants grew from seed brought back by Wilson.

Our plant is about 25 years old, 12 feet wide and 10 feet high. Each spring it covers itself with blooms. Individual flowers are 3 inches deep and 4 inches wide in a truss of up to 13 flowers. The truss is open on top and up to 9 inches across. The flowers open a deep pink with white near the base and a deep purplish-red blotch. Each spring *R. x geraldii* puts on a spectacular show with its large trusses.

The last several years I have given away a lot of *Cardiocrinum* seed. However, I haven't taken the time to grow any seeds myself. Last year I wondered if a few thin grass-like blades could be seedlings, but they eventually got eaten by slugs or covered with mulch. This year, much to my delight, I've discovered several areas with numerous *Cardiocrinum* seedlings growing. I have replanted some of the seedlings further apart and will put others in pots. Hopefully, I can keep the slugs in check.

Dalen Bayes



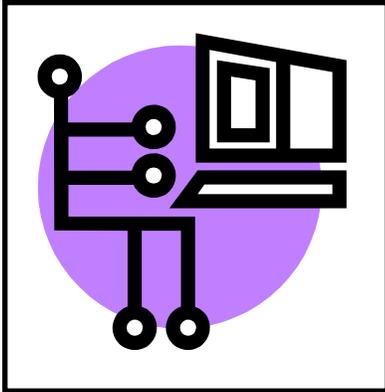
R. praeevernum



R. sutchuenese

R. x geraldii





From the Editor

Last Month

Last month our own Norma Senn gave us a quick reprise of the presentation she had made to the Fall Conference in Harrison Hot Springs, entitled "Coastal Gardens of the Pacific Northwest". This was a wonderful opportunity for most of us who were at the Conference but unable to attend many of the programs to witness Norma's unique ability to draw the many threads of garden design and development that have influenced west coast gardens into a comprehensible pattern.

Norma's presentations are always informative, amusing, and visually appealing, and we are grateful to her for sharing her knowledge.

This Month:

This month, Peter Wharton, Curator of the David C. Lam Garden at the UBC Botanical Garden and Centre for Plant Research, will review some of his adventures and findings from his most recent trips to the areas of west China and north Vietnam. Peter always provides an interesting presentation encompassing information on not only what flora is currently extant, but also what used to be there, what is likely to be there in the foreseeable future, and the complex ecological and political relationships between the needs of the human species (actual and perceived) and the needs of every other species in a given geographical area.

Next Month:

Get your secateurs ready for the 14th Annual Beer Bottle Truss Show. Everyone should participate because everyone can be a winner. There will be winners for species and for hybrids. There will be winners for colour classes - including the first ever "Lionheart" award for the best yellow (in honour of Mike Trembath and the lovely hybrid she developed and registered under that name). And there will be all the other winners also: Most Lurid, Best Hammerhead, and my personal favourite, Most Elegantly Weevil-Notched.

Judging will be done in the usual democratic fashion, by you the members. This is a good chance to bring along a friend or neighbour so they can see the enormous variety of plant material available within the genus *Rhododendron*. Plus, it's fun.

The Business Stuff:

GARDEN TOURS - The first of our Garden Tours is scheduled for the end of this month: Saturday, April 28, between the hours of 12:00 and 4:00 at the home of John Rak and Mun Kwan Tham. It is my understanding that this property had once contained extensive gardens, but they had been abandoned and were almost completely overwhelmed by brush and weedy trees by the time John and Mun started working on them. Apparently John and Mun have already accomplished a great deal, so go along and cheer them on with their garden renovation.

Les and Bev Clay will make their garden available in time for a nice evening drive on Wednesday, May 2, between 6:00 and 8:00. Les still has a fairly extensive nursery business in place and it is wonderful to see his placement of mature specimens of all those plants we have purchased for our own gardens over the years.

Then there is an opportunity to visit the wonderful woodland garden of Dalen and Lori Bayes on Saturday, May 5, between the hours of 12:00 and 4:00. If you have never had the opportunity to wander around this forested paradise you are missing a treat.

The final destination for this year's schedule is "Wingswept Gardens" of John and Gael Dodd, who will be hosting their annual garden open house on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 13, between 11:00am and 6:00pm. A sumptuous conclusion to this year's tours. (**Also, be sure to look for the article on the Dodd's garden in the recent issue of "Better Homes and Gardens - Perennial Issue".)

Addresses are included in the updated Membership List attached, and maps with basic directions are included separately.

Brenda Macdonald



Up the Garden Path with Begonias

Many new varieties of Begonias are popping up for sale in garden centres and supermarkets. Begonias of all types have been popular for many years as houseplants and for bedding out, but the new varieties offer spectacular foliage and flower displays and make nice additions to the older varieties still being grown.

The genus Begonia is huge, containing an estimated 1500 species. In the wild, they are found growing as groundcovers or shrubs in shaded or semi-shaded habitats, and almost all are native to tropical/sub-tropical countries. Because the genus is so big, for ease of discussion and culture, The American Begonia Society has divided Begonias into several groups based on growth habit. The groups are: Cane types (also known as Angel-Wing Begonias), Rhizomatous, Tuberous, Rex, Shrubs, Semperflorens (Wax), Trailing and Thick-stemmed. The Begonia society has a great website at www.begonias.org which contains pictures of various members of each group and detailed growing instructions.

In our area, members of the Rex, Cane and Rhizomatous groups are readily available as houseplants. Rex Begonias are grown indoors for their

magnificent, brightly coloured leaves; they flower in the spring, putting up stalks of small white or pink flowers. Rhizomatous Begonias are similar to Rex types, and are also grown primarily for their colourful leaves. The chief difference is that Rhizomatous Begonias gradually spread outwards by growing on horizontal stems while Rex Begonias tend to maintain a central rosette habit of growth. The Cane types are popular houseplants too, but Cane Begonias also make good additions to outdoor containers for shady areas, where they add foliage interest and height. The Cane types have attractive foliage, usually green with white markings and appealing, delicate flowers of white or pink. In cultivation, they usually reach up to a meter in height, but in the wild, some will grow to a height of several meters.

The Semperflorens group (Wax Begonias) are the most widely grown Begonias. They are used extensively outside as bedding plants where both flowers and leaves are important, but they also make attractive houseplants. Leaves are bright green, bronze or variegated with a crisp,

waxy appearance and texture. Wax Begonias are often used outdoors in massed floral displays because they maintain such good leaf colour throughout the summer. Since the leaves are so attractive, in some ways it makes the flowers seem like a bonus, although the abundant small flowers of white, pink or red are certainly showy. As bedding plants, Wax Begonias are tough, and while they do best with some protection from the noon-day sun, they will tolerate a wide range of light conditions, from



Rex types



Cane types

full sun to partial shade. Outside, give them good drainage and maintain even moisture throughout the summer. Wait until all danger of frost is past in the spring before planting outside.

To grow any Begonia as a houseplant, provide good bright light and use a potting mix that contains both peat moss to retain moisture and some sort of drainage material like perlite to provide good aeration. A regular dose of fertilizer formulated for houseplants is beneficial. If the plants get too tall, simply pinch them back.

Among Begonias, the flowering “stars” are the beautiful Tuberous Begonias used outside in hanging baskets, containers and in shade gardens. Some varieties have flowers that are 15 cm or more across. Flowers may be single or double, with colours of clear whites, yellows, pinks, reds and oranges. There are varieties with picotee edges of a contrasting colour and some have fringed or ruffled petals. If you visit Butchart Gardens in the Victoria area between July and September, you will see their magnificent display of Tuberous Begonias grown in hanging baskets. The baskets are kept in a lattice shade



Semperflorens types



Tuberous types

house so they receive partial shade throughout the day.

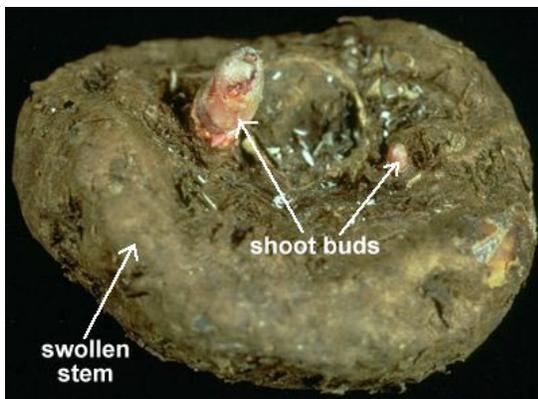
There are varieties of Tuberous Begonias that can be grown from seed, but it is a slow-growing, fairly demanding crop. It's easier to buy packaged tubers at the garden centre in February or March and grow them on. Tubers can be planted directly in a hanging basket, using a good potting mix. Tubers are oriented so that the concave end is up and the rounded part of the

tuber is down. Plant them just at the soil surface – don't plant deeply. Young shoots will arise from the centre of each tuber to form the top growth. If you're starting them indoors early, keep them in a bright window or greenhouse, provide even moisture, and wait until all danger of frost has past and night temperatures are consistently staying above 10°C before moving outside.

Tubers can also be planted directly in the ground in mid to late May although these plants won't reach peak bloom display as fast as those started indoors. In the fall, the tubers can be brought inside and stored just as you would gladiolus corms or dahlia roots, and re-planted the following year. As the tubers enlarge, you will get progressively better flower displays, and individual tubers can live for many years if properly grown.

The Trailing, Shrub, and Thick-Stemmed groups of Begonias aren't seen very often outside of specialty collections. Trailing types can be grown in hanging baskets, or some are trained to grow upright, in a vine-like manner. Members of the Shrub or Thick-Stemmed groups are stunning, but they can be extremely large plants (up to 6 meters tall). Since we have to grow them indoors, their size limits their appeal unless you have a very large sun porch or greenhouse. However, if you're interested in specialty Begonias, these groups can offer the grower spectacular plants. You would have most success in obtaining these plants by joining a Begonia Society.

Norma Senn



Tuber, with new growth buds



Rhododendrons of China



R. simsii var *simsii*
illustration by Sydenham Edwards
- Curtis' Botanical Magazine

Rhododendron simsii

This scarlet azalea was one of the first we encountered as we grew desperate for the sight of a flower from any species of plant after days of wandering through nondescript forested mountains looking for access up to the promised uncultivated areas at higher elevations. Growing in roadside cuts along with other "weedy" species such as *R. decorum* and *R. racemosum* it looked very decorative indeed peeking out between and through the other shrubberies lining the road.

Formerly called *Azalea indica* it is the main ancestor of the formidable array of plants available in the florist's trade and usually known as "Indica" (or "indicum") azaleas - a nomenclature boo-boo that has led to years of confusion for those involved in the nursery trade. The azaleas known as 'Indicum', "Indica" or "Indian Azaleas" were developed from *R. simsii*, not from *R. indicum*, and *simsii*, although it enjoys a wide distribution, is found nowhere in India.

Although the colour apparently varies from scarlet, through dark rosy red, with or without spotting, all of the ones we saw tended toward the warmer spectrum of brick red.

Brenda Macdonald

R. simsii var *simsii*
amid the pine trees of
northeast Yunnan
- photo Sean Rafferty
May, 2006



What's in Bloom?



R. luteiflorum

epithet: with yellow flowers **type:** lepidote

size: to 2'

Previously known as a variety of *R. glaucophyllum*, which it closely resembles with its nodding bell-shaped flowers and perky self-coloured calyces, this early bloomer is a small jewel of the garden. Sometimes marred by late frosts, resentful of fertilizer, and with a somewhat fussy disposition, it is still worth the effort, with its dark green, aromatic leaves, smooth brown, flaking bark, and clear, lemon yellow blossoms of a shape and size that can only be described as adorable. North Vancouver/ 10APR2007



R. thomsonii

epithet: named after a Thomas Thomson of the Calcutta Botanic Garden **type:** elepidote

size: to >20 feet

R. thomsonii is a stunner when it finally gets round to blossoming. It can be quite floriferous when happy, although somewhat prone to powdery mildew. The blood-red, waxy, slender bell-like blossoms are usually produced in somewhat lax clusters of 6 to 10, and they display both deep nectar pouches and a large cup-like calyx. The calyx is sometimes of a contrasting yellow or pale whitish-green, although this specimen shows only a smaller red calyx also common within the species. The brown/tan/pink flaking bark evident on mature plants makes *thomsonii* an attractive addition to the garden even when not in bloom. North Vancouver/ 10APR2007



R. ciliatum

epithet: fringed with hairs **type:** lepidote

size: to 6'

One half of the more ubiquitous *R. 'Cilpinense'* (itself almost always masquerading under the name of its other parent *R. moupinense*) *ciliatum* is a small-flowered, hardy member of the usually more flamboyant and more tender *Maddenia* subsection. The slightly bristly hairs on the surface and around the margins of the leaves give the plant a somewhat fuzzy look, and often catch drops of water and touches of frost in attractive ways. The reddish-brown peeling bark also adds to winter interest. The blossoms have the tubular-campanulate shape, large lobed calyx, and ghostly pale colours of other *Maddenias*. In this case, the blossom is usually white with the palest of pink washes overtop. North Vancouver/ 10APR2007