

The Yak

Newsletter of
the Fraser South
Rhododendron
Society

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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, December 12, 2007

THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS PARTY

early date, early time:

set-up at 6:00

commencement at 6:30

2007 Officers

President:	Dalen Bayes	360-966-4596
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Secretary:	Mary-Anne Berg	604-853-5737
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Quick Hits

Christmas is almost here ...

which means our Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner has arrived.

You know the drill - talk, eat, talk, drink, talk, be merry.

As in previous years we will start a bit earlier than usual, so mark your calendar for 6:30 pm,

or come at 6:00 pm 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. This is Santa Dalen's last official year as key distributor of largesse.

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



From the President

Notes from the Chair

The Thanksgiving decorations are down and the Christmas decorations are going up. Last Friday, Lori, David, Dwayne (our two sons) and I went to the Christmas tree farm we have been going to for over thirty years and selected our Christmas trees. It was a real joy to be there with our two sons, just like the old days, plus they packed our tree out for us. We go the first day they are open, because if I see a freshly cut stump, I know that somebody, (probably a jerk) took my tree, which was obviously the best one there.

It has been a tradition to look at all the trees, then, following much discussion, we choose ours. We always select a noble fir (*Abies procera*). At one time our oldest son was married to a lady with three girls. He took his family to our usual Christmas tree farm to select their tree. His wife and girls walked out about 30 feet into the trees and said, "This is the one we want." David's mouth fell open and when he recovered his speech he informed them that this was not the Bayes way to select a Christmas tree. He said he got them, amid much grumbling, to look awhile longer before they stubbornly marched back and selected their original tree.

At one time I had an Arizona blue noble fir, which had grown too big for its spot. It had a trunk about seven inches in diameter and was fourteen feet in height. This obviously was too big to move, at least for me. The color was a beautiful blue; it was nicely shaped and perfectly branched. The top was not a single leader but a group of 8-10 leaders giving it a wonderful pyramidal shape. One autumn I realized that this was my Christmas tree for the year. I cut off the top 10½ feet of it, and with a width of over seven feet, it nearly filled one end of our living room. We actually had to wire it to the wall for stability. I knew, being somewhat biased possibly, that we had the best Christmas tree in the state and I could only think, "Eat your heart out, Bill Gates!"

Things are peaceful around here with my garden asleep under an inch of snow with more in the offing tomorrow and Sunday. Then the monsoons are to start again.

Lori has fled to Hawaii with some of our friends. I made her promise not to get caught in any flash floods as happened last year. She has been hiking, snorkeling, and riding boogie boards and having a great time. She promised to be back for our Christmas banquet.

A group of plants that I have been reading about are the Meconopsis. We have grown several different types for a few years with good results, even though I obviously haven't been doing everything right. They are reported to be quite difficult to grow, but this is certainly not the case if a few basic requirements are met.

Meconopsis are members of the poppy family Papaveraceae. Their closest relatives are our common poppies. The differences are that poppies have a large stigma sitting directly upon the ovary, while in Meconopsis, the smaller stigma is held above the ovary on a style. Also the seedpod in poppies is globular in shape and the seeds are dispersed from small holes rather like a pepper shaker. In Meconopsis the seedpod is several times as long as wide and the seeds are dispersed by slits at the end of the pod.

There are 40-50 species of Meconopsis and more will undoubtedly be added with further exploration. However, the only European native, *M. cambrica* (the Welsh Poppy), found in southwest England, Wales, and

Western Europe, is significantly different and will probably be reclassified in the



left - *Meconopsis cambrica*, with its smaller stigma and longer, narrower seed pod.
right - *Papaver somniferum*, with its larger stigma sitting directly on the globe-like seed pod





Meconopsis horridula



Meconopsis integrifolia



Meconopsis betonicifolia

future. The rest of the Meconopsis are found across the breadth of the Himalayan Mountains and into China with the majority found from Nepal eastward. The few that are found in the western part of this range grow in a more arid and cold climate, but in the eastern part they usually grow in more of a monsoon type environment, at medium to high elevations.

M. horridula, a beautiful blue flowering species named for its sharp spines, actually grows at 18,000 feet, one of the highest growing plants in the world. Sean Rafferty said there were whole hillsides covered with the yellow *M. integrifolia* in the alpine zone at altitudes of 12,000-13,000 feet in Sichuan when he was there in 2006.

The genus Meconopsis can be divided into two groups; the perennial ones, which bloom year after year, and the monocarpic ones which bloom only once, set seed and then die. In the perennial group, some are evergreen and others deciduous. Another difference among them is that some form basal rosettes of leaves and others do not.

The names of plants in cultivation are quite a muddled mess as they hybridize quite readily. New material recently being brought back from the Himalayan mountains should be more accurately named. However even in the wild there is considerable hybridization between species in some areas.

The most readily available species of Meconopsis today, and justly so, are the beautiful blue Himalayan poppies. These are *M. betonicifolia* and *M. grandis*, along with their hybrids under the name of *Meconopsis x sheldonii*. Flowering stalks of *M. betonicifolia* can reach four feet or more while those of *M. grandis* are half that size. When these plants are in bloom, late May to early June, it seems that their stalks are carrying beautiful pieces of pure blue sky. The flowers of *M. betonicifolia* are of a lighter shade than *M. grandis* although there are variations among them. *Meconopsis x sheldonii*'s color is intermediate between that of its parents.

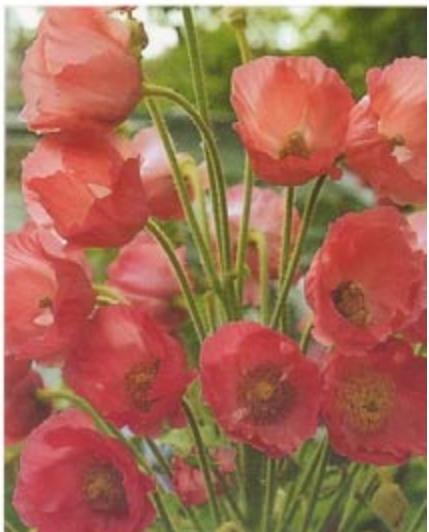
Less readily available, but certainly worth searching for, are two monocarpic species, *M. napaulensis* and *M. paniculata*.

These plants will usually take three to four years to bloom, and then they will die. However, they set copious amounts of seed to continue their show in the future. Their flowers are on panicles rising to six feet. Individual plants can have well over 100 flowers opening from the top levels downward. The flowers of *M. napaulensis* vary from white, blue, yellow, pink, to red while *M. paniculata*'s are yellow. A significant feature of these plants is their rosettes of leaves densely covered with bristles. The bristles of *M. napaulensis* are green to gray while those of *M. paniculata* are gold in color and quite striking, especially in the wintertime while the rest of the garden is drab, at best. The rosettes of *M. paniculata* appear to be clumps of brilliant sun fallen from the sky. Actually with this striking winter display I would rather they didn't flower at all, but put on their beautiful winter display year after year. This is certainly one of my favorite plants. As you may have noticed, I have many favorite plants, but in the winter this one is at the top of my list.

Meconopsis are woodland plants strongly resenting any hot sun. If



Meconopsis x sheldonii
'Lingholm'



Meconopsis napaulensis

they find themselves in this situation, they will mostly likely show their disgust by dying. They like a cool environment - Dan Hinkley says the nicest ones he has ever seen were growing near Anchorage Alaska. They are hardy at least to zone 3. They like lots of moisture as long as their crowns are not soggy in the wintertime. If one's drainage is not good, they can be grown in raised beds. All this being said, I don't water mine in the summer, and they do well, but I do have good moisture retentive soil.

They like lots of humus in the soil and this should be worked in deeply as they have an extensive root system both horizontally and vertically. They are hungry feeders and I apply rhododendron fertilizer as they commence growth in the spring and after they are done flowering.

The perennial species should be dug up every few years and divided. This also has the advantage of allowing more humus to be worked into the soil and to allow the growing of preferred cultivars.

Given the proper conditions *Meconopsis* can naturalize in our area. They are readily raised from seed, which is best collected about 3 weeks after flowering. Immediate sowing allows the plants to reach good size by the following spring, allowing them to be planted out.

Most growers of *Meconopsis* believe that in the perennial species removal of the first years bloom bud results in a more vigorous plant - even though this may be somewhat traumatic if one is awaiting one's first beautiful *Meconopsis* blooms. At least don't do as I did, removing the flowering buds from *M. integrifolia*, which being a monocarpic species then died that year. Even in perennial species some plants will be monocarpic so don't give up if you don't achieve success at first.

A good source of different species of *Meconopsis* used to be Heronswood Nursery at Kingston, Washington. But, alas, the Burpee Seed Company bought out Heronswood Nursery, which after a short period of time they moved it back to the east coast and they no longer carry the rarer plants. With

Dan Hinkley it was a labor of love, but with Burpee's it is purely a matter of money.

The best sources for seeds I know of today are the North American Rock Garden Society www.nargs.org, the *Meconopsis* Group www.meconopsis.org, and the Royal Horticulture Society www.rhs.org.uk.

References:

Meconopsis, by James Cobb, (now out of print.)

The Explorer's Garden, by Dan Hinkley

Dalen Bayes



Meconopsis paniculata



Last Month

Last month Gerry Gibbens gave us a brief glimpse into the criteria and functions of a Botanical Garden - one which is not only used as an educational centre and resource, but also serves as a repository and propagation resource for botanical material - as well as a nice slide review of the development of the rhododendron species and hybrids at Van Dusen Gardens. As always, an informative and enjoyable presentation.

This Month:

Our Annual Christmas Potluck ... the protocol is traditional but flexible. Here are the rules from last year - they seemed to work quite nicely so we can just all follow along again.

New members could follow the guidelines as listed below, or just wing it like the rest of us:

1. Be merry, or if you cannot make it all the way up to merry, be placid
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, and the usual Punch Bowl A and Punch Bowl B. Those wishing to move from placid to merry should choose Punch Bowl A.
5. Bring your own plates, mugs, and cutlery, then remember to take them home again.
6. Wear something seasonal, even if not festive. Remember - we are a garden club. Just about anything dragged off the compost heap should do: a few of the evergreen boughs that blew down in the last storm, the last of the limp Michaelmas Daisies, a wreath of holly boughs for those wishing to discourage too much physical contact during the flu season. Add a red Santa hat and you're done!
7. Come bearing gifts, or at least one small gift (value under \$10.00), for Santa Dalen to redistribute, remembering that this is a reciprocal arrangement - those who give, also receive.
6. Be placid, be merry, but be there. The food is good and the company great. Everyone will have, as they used to say, a swell time.

Next Month:

Our 19th Annual General Meeting, including the election of new Chapter officers, adoption of the annual fiscal report, and recognition of outstanding service by Chapter members, all interspersed with the conspicuous consumption of yummy calories during our 5th annual Dessert Extravaganza. This meeting will commence our 20th calendar year as a Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society - reason enough to celebrate in style. This is also the meeting in which members are encouraged to provide the visual entertainment, so if you don't want to stand at the front and sing "Edelweiss", or juggle garden tools, bring along a few slides of whatever your latest passion is: a trip to Borneo, hand-carved nude statues for the garden, whatever. We will have maximum display possibilities as we proceed to break in (perhaps a poor choice of words), as we proceed to initiate our new digital projector. So bring slides, or something on a disc or memory stick and we will see how everything works.

The Business Stuff:

BONSAI WORKSHOP

The Executive committee has approached Roger Low about the possibility of providing a Bonsai workshop for our members, probably some time in March or April. We are currently finalizing arrangements for a location and will be able to confirm details by next month.

Brenda Macdonald



Those of you who were at last year's Christmas party will remember that Colleen came up with a new party game where we had to supply hybrid Rhody names to complete her story. The following is a direct steal of Colleen's idea, so – blame her.
Merry Christmas!



Having attended many FSRS December parties (and June picnics), I can say with confidence, that most of us enjoy our **Christmas Cheer** – and, whether it's in the form of **Apple Brandy**, **Brandywine** or **Sparkling Burgundy**, we all leave with a nice **Warm Glow**. I've noticed we like our snacks too, so good menu additions include **Peppermint Twists** and **Sugar and Spice Cookies**.

One of the things I like best at this time of the year is that the season is full of **Glad Tidings**, like those first heralded with the appearance of the **Royal Star** when the **Yaku Angels** sang **Hallelujah, be of good Cheer, with Peace on Earth.**

Most of us spend time thinking about finding perfect family gifts. I don't know if they really like it very much, but lots of Dads are destined to receive some **Old Spice**. Mothers, of course, get **Perfume**, and for children, a **Teddy Bear** is always a popular gift.

Family activities are important too, and many of us like to watch the classic movie, 'A Christmas Carol' by **Charles Dickens**. In addition to the usual shows, you can also watch **Olive, The Other Reindeer**, a "new" children's classic. And, did you know that when he was just a fawn and before his nose turned red, **Rudolph's Orange** nose still glowed? Perhaps your family likes to gather together to read stories like

Up the Garden Path



It's That Time of Year Again

Hansel and Gretsel to your children and grandchildren.

While we're out shopping, the Salvation Army **Bell Ringers** will be using lots of **Jingle Bells** to collect money for those in need. However, such activities are weather dependent and a **Snowstorm** may keep us all at home.

At the North Pole, it's a busy time for Santa and his helpers, but if there's lots of **Arctic Snow**, **Rose Elf** and her friends will take some time to play, making lots of **Boule de Neige** for a friendly snowball fight. Here on the Coast, we usually have a green Christmas, so for us, **Falling Snow** at Christmas makes for a very magical **Evening Glow**.



Christmas Cheer: early, pink flowered *caucasiun* hybrid.



Apple Brandy: compact Yak hybrid with silver tomentum and silvery pink flowers.

Brandywine: mall, cream coloured flowers edged in pink, to 3 feet (*pubescens* x *keiskei*).



Sparkling Burgundy: a May blooming hybrid of 'Purple Splendour' x *macrophyllum*.

Warm Glow: the pale orange flowers with darker throat are held in a lax truss; a cross between *dichroanthum* and 'Vida'.

Peppermint Stick: as you might guess, it has white flowers edged with red

Sugar and Spice: Greer describes this as a fantastic hybrid! Bright creamy white flowers with a golden brown blotch; dark, slender leaves (Greer really likes this hybrid, just read his comments!)

Cookie: fragrant, large flowers of rose spotted maroon.

Glad Tidings: large flowers of blended cream and pink; also has large leaves ('China' x *williamsianum*).

Royal Star: 'Moser's Maroon' x unknown; deep purple flowers with dark blotch; plant is compact in habit.

Yaku Angel: lovely plant with narrow, recurved leaves; tan indumentum; flowers are pink in bud and open to clear white.



Hallelujah: another one that Greer really likes; good foliage and handsome plant; bright rose red flowers.



Cheer: a vigorous grower with glossy green leaves; flowers are pink.



Peace: (*rigidum* x *concatenans*); small plant with flowers held in a lax truss.

Old Spice: large, scented pink flowers shading to apricot (*decorum* x 'Azor').

Perfume: another fragrant hybrid, this time a *fortunei* cross. Best grown with overhead shade.

Teddy Bear: a *bureavii* x *yak* cross; lovely cinnamon-red indumentum; soft pink flowers on a compact plant.



Charles Dickens: a *catawbiense* hybrid; slow growing and hardy. Flowers are dark red and spotted.



Olive: one of our very early hybrids; pink flowers, a *moupinense* x *dauricum* hybrid.



Rudolph's Orange: flowers are light orange with pink shading.

Hansel and Gretsel: Sister seedlings, a Lem cross between *bureavii* and 'Fabia'. Both have good foliage with nice indumentum, and flowers are orange with pastel shading.



Bellringer: soft, creamy white flowers on an attractive plant.



Jingle Bells: flowers open reddish orange then change to yellow; a fairly low-growing plant.



Snowstorm: another yak hybrid; the flowers are fragrant, white with rose spotting.

Arctic Snow: late May for bloom; flowers are white with yellow markings; fragrant.

Rose Elf: a sweet, small plant; flowers are orchid pink; a *racemosum* x *pemakoense* hybrid



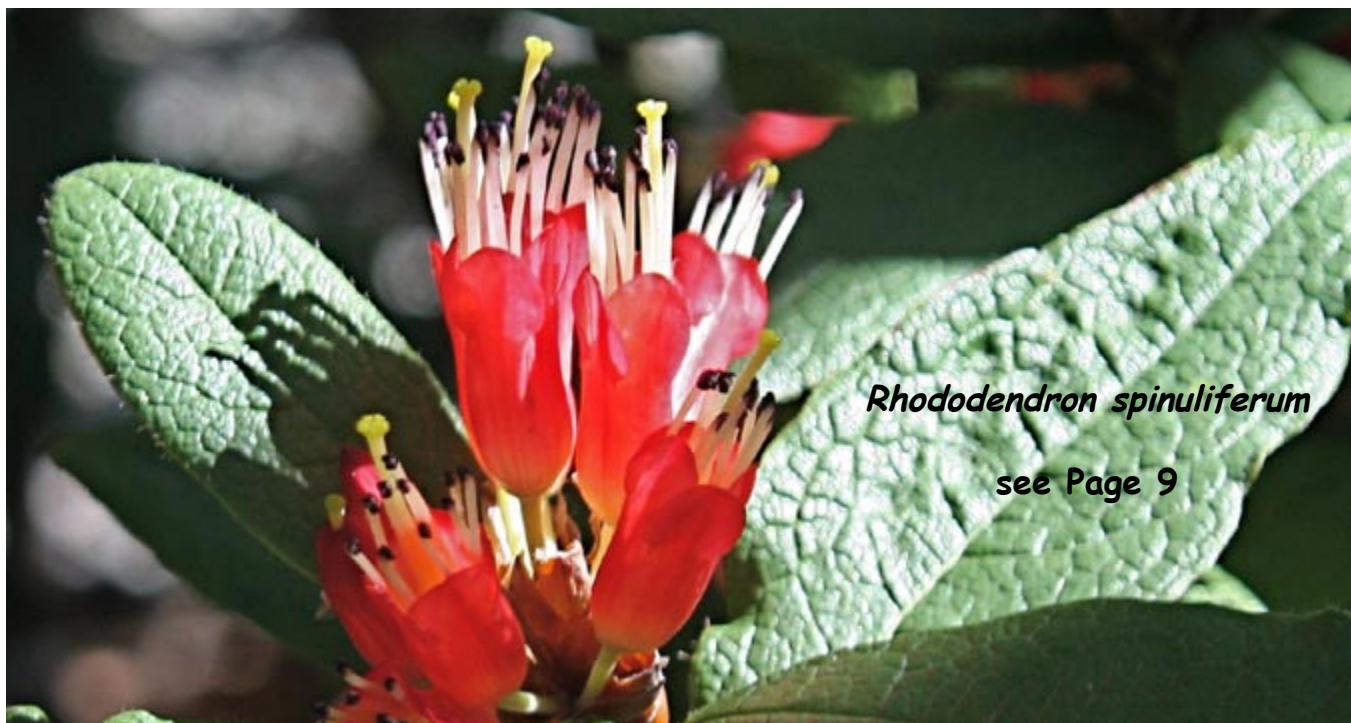
Boule de Neige: a tough plant, cold hardy and also able to tolerate heat; flower trusses look like snowballs.



Falling Snow: a yak hybrid with white flowers, many flowers/truss; plant habit is good.

Evening Glow: compact growth, late blooming time, and resistance to heat stress make this a good yellow.

Norma Senn



Rhododendron spinuliferum

see Page 9



Rhododendrons of China



Rhododendron spinuliferum

Definitely the odd duck of the rhododendron world, *R. spinuliferum* has always been more a curiosity than the subject of concerted investigation. Although it does not resemble other members of the subsection *Scabrifolia* to which it belongs, its relationship to them is clear due to the presence of the natural hybrids with *R. scabrum* found in the wild, and designated as *R. x duclouxii* by the Chinese and *R. scabrum* var. *pauciflorum* in the west.

Like other members of the subsection, hardiness is variable, depending on the elevation at which the parent plant grew, but generally good enough for slightly protected sites; and like other members of the subsection, its growth habit can be straggly although generally upright in form.

The inflorescences are upright, usually terminal and occasionally axillary, and consist of a group of one to four bright red, tubular flowers, constricted at both ends to give them an oddly pouched appearance. The black-tipped stamens and style protrude significantly beyond the corolla, giving the truss an oddly bristly look, or like a red pencil holder with a lot of burnt match-heads poking out. Although the flowers are small, they are long-lasting, and the plant is quite floriferous. The contrast of the brick red blossoms and deep green shiny bullate leaves is quite attractive.



R. spinuliferum
photo by Sean Rafferty
Rhododendron Species Foundation, 2006



R. spinuliferum
illustration by Valerie Price
Curtis Botanical Magazine

First discovered by Abbe Delavay in 1891, introduction of seeds to Europe did not take place until Maurice Ducloux (hence the name *R. x duclouxii* for the *spinuliferum/scabrum* hybrid) sent seeds along to Maurice de Vilmorin, of the Les Barres arboretum in 1907.

Its natural range is throughout central and south Yunnan, in thickets and pine forested areas.

Brenda Macdonald