

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 20 Number 3
March 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, March 21, 2007
Speaker: Norma Senn
Topic: Coastal Gardens of the Pacific Northwest -
Walking in the Footprints of the Sasquatch
Plant Sales: Doreen Badminton

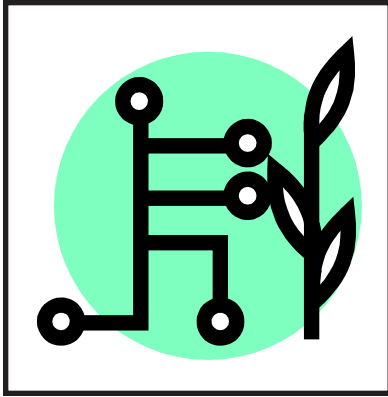
2007 Officers

President: Dalen Bayes
360-966-4596
Vice Pres.: Harold Fearing
604-857-4136
Secretary: Mary-Anne Berg
604-853-5737
Treasurer: Alan March
604-532-9062
Directors: Colleen Forster- 3rd yr
Sean Rafferty - 2nd yr
Larry Morton - 1st yr
Membership: Wenonah March
604-532-9062
Newsletter: Brenda Macdonald
604-990-5353
Website: Chris Klapwijk
604-888-0920

Quick Hits

Reminder ...

Don't forget our upcoming Annual Plant Sale, scheduled for Saturday, April 14th, from 10:00 to 3:00. This is your big opportunity to sound the gong and beat the drum in support of the Chapter. Bring your friends, bring your neighbours, bring your co-workers. Come and lend a hand and buy a couple of raffle tickets and a plant or two. You know you want to!



From the President

Notes from the Chair

In 1815 Mount Tambora, in Indonesia, erupted in the most violent eruption of historic times. Mt. St. Helens blew a cubic kilometer of dust into the atmosphere. Tambora blew a 100 cubic kilometers of dust into the atmosphere. It took months for the full effect of the dust to be felt in the northern hemisphere. The dust reduced the sunlight reaching the earth enough that temperatures were substantially reduced. 1816 was known as “the year without summer” in eastern N. America and Europe.

One day last week the temperature here reached 59 degrees F. and that has been the only day over 51 degrees F. so far this spring. Granted, we live 600 feet above sea level and back in the foothills a bit, but spring has never been this slow. *R. dauricum* is the only rhododendron that has bloomed fully.

I'm considering calling this year “the year without spring”.

Oh well, last year at this time at least 20 different species were blooming or had already bloomed, but then I was fretting about frost.

Surveying the effects of last winter, one plant that took a beating here was *Erica arborea alpina*. The snow broke a number of the trunks off at the ground. This may have been furthered by my insufficient pruning. *Erica* can also be damaged by high winds as well as snow. However, it regenerates well to pruning even if cut to the ground.

Erica arborea alpina has given Lori and I considerable pleasure over the years. It has several trunks with ascending branches, and has reached the height of 8 feet with a spread of 6-7 feet. In early May the ends of the branches break forth with delightfully fragrant grayish-white flowers arranged in pyramidal panicles up to 18 inches in length.

In the ‘Sunset Western Garden Book’ *Erica arborea alpina* is listed as being hardy to about 20 degrees F. The form *Erica arborea alpina* sold at nurseries in the northwest is much hardier, handling temperatures down to 5 degrees F. The differences in hardiness is explained by the tremendous distances over which it occurs. It is found from south of the equator on Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania to the shores of southern France, and from the Canary Islands in the west to eastern Turkey. On Mount Ruwenzori in Uganda at elevations of 10,000 to 12,000 feet, *Erica arborea* grows to a height of 50 feet. Further north, it occurs in the Tibesti mountains in the Sahara Desert, where it reaches the height of 20 feet with trunks 12- 16 inches in diameter. You can see why it is aptly named the tree heath. The rule seems to be the harsher the climate, the lower the plant.



Erica arborea var. *alpina*

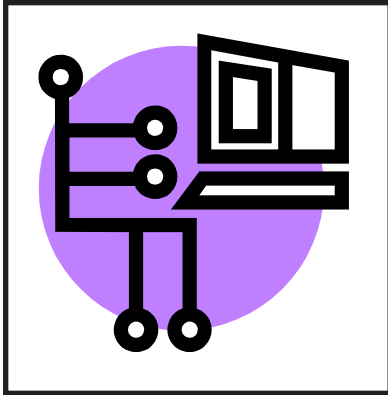
The burls on the trunks are made into briar smoking pipes. In the Canary Islands it is an important honey producer. In the northwest it is a most useful garden plant with it's different textured foliage and very fragrant flowers.



R. dauricum sempervirens
photo - Chris Klapwijk

Erica arborea alpina will flourish in full sun to light shade. It prefers a well drained soil of neutral to slightly acidic Ph. It also would do best with wind protection.

Dalen Bayes



From the Editor

Last Month

Last month we were able to enjoy a wonderfully informative and visually splendid presentation by Frank Fujioka. The images Frank brought back from his trip in May, 2006, to France, where he spoke at the triennial Rhododendron Conference of the Société Bretonne du Rhododendron, and thence to Denmark and Hachmann's Nursery in Germany were educational as well as beautiful. It is fascinating to see that horticultural techniques and designs could vary so profoundly even though we are all dealing with the same species and approximately the same climatic parameters. I doubt that many of us were aware of the possibility of low garden walls built entirely of large peat blocks tempered by several years of careful drying, or that Danish growers continue to enjoy the splendid sight of mature plants of *R. cinnabarinum* entirely covered with blossoms - as yet largely unaffected by the powdery mildew, *Microsphaera azalea*, that has devastated so many of our plants here in the Pacific Northwest.

The second part of Frank's program was a review of his ongoing hybridization program, including pictures showing the rigorous field trials all his seedlings undergo. Frank's philosophy of hybrid development is clear: the hybrid must be significantly different and superior to any existing species or hybrid, and it must be able to manage under the sorts of cultural conditions provided by the public at large - unprotected in a south-facing field with little supplementary irrigation after the first year.

All in all it was a fascinating presentation, and we are deeply grateful to Frank for making the trip up from Whidby Island to talk to us.

The following award was presented at the February meeting as the recipient had not been able to attend the AGM in January.

GERRY EMERSON MEMORIAL AWARD 2006

Presented to: GARTH WEDEMIRE

We would like to honor Garth Wedemire with the 2006 Gerry Emerson award for designing and maintaining an exceptional website for the A.R.S. Fall Conference. His work has set the standard for future conference websites. In addition to this valuable work, Garth's wonderful slide shows entertained conference participants throughout the weekend. Garth has also contributed to the Fraser South Rhododendron Society's regular meetings by sharing his travel experiences through his wonderful slide presentations. Additionally, he serves all of us through his work at the District level. Thank you, Garth.

The Business Stuff:

PLANT SALE - Don't forget our annual Plant Sale coming up on Saturday, April 14th, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. This is both our biggest fund-raiser for the year and our best opportunity to educate the public and introduce prospective new members to the positive benefits of joining our Chapter. Also a great chance for each one of us to let our little lights shine by offering some assistance - only a couple of hours help guarantees your gold star will be really bright. We will need cashiers, set-up and take-down volunteers, and general dogsbodies to help keep the coffee urn filled and the public's questions answered. Also, one of our best drawing cards is the display of those rhodos and azaleas currently in blossom. Please bring along any trusses you can spare to add to the array. Contact Mary-Anne Berg at 604-853-5737 to offer your services.

RHODO SPECIES DAYS - Don't forget about the upcoming Rhodo Species Days at the Rhododendron Species and Botanical Garden, under the auspices of Steve Hootman. The dates are April 7, April 21, and May 19. Contact Mike Bale at 604-853-8839 or lu_zhu@telus.net for more information.

DRIP IRRIGATION SEMINAR -The Fraser Valley Rhododendron Society sends along this note:

“FVRS installed a drip irrigation system in the display garden at Whonnock Lake in 2005. The work was done by volunteers led by three members who had attended a workshop put on by Ron Knight. Ron’s workshop is highly recommended both for the quality of the instruction and the beauty of the day trip to the Sunshine Coast.

Responding to calls for a local venue, FVRS will conduct a workshop on Drip Irrigation in Maple Ridge on Saturday April 14th 2007, starting at 10 a.m. The session will include information on all the essential components and practice in assembling the smaller parts. After a lunch break the workshop will meet at Whonnock Lake to observe a working system.

Meeting Place: Ridge Meadows College, 22610 Dewdney Trunk Road, Maple Ridge. Parking is available at the rear. Registration is required. Call Ridge Meadows College 604-466-6577

The cost of the workshop is \$35. If you have questions please call Scot Henney 604-464-7979.”

This Month:

This month our own Norma Senn will be speaking on the Gardens of the Pacific Northwest. Sasquatch sightings, while not scheduled, are not absolutely inconceivable.

Next Month:

Our next meeting will feature a presentation by Peter Wharton, Curator, David C. Lam Asian Garden, entitled “Plant Hunting in Southern Sichuan”

Brenda Macdonald

The “Rhododendrons of Sichuan” article on Page 6 highlights *Rhododendron calophytum*. This magnificent species has inspired much hybridization activity resulting in many fine garden plants, amongst which are:



R. ‘Exbury Calstocker’
photo - Chris Klapwijk

R. ‘Exbury Calstocker’ - Rothschild, 1948

R. *calophytum* x R. ‘Dr. Stocker’

The influences of the *caucasicum* and *griffithianum* parents of ‘Dr. Stocker’ have produced a much more upright and rounded truss, but the *calophytum* influence remains visible in the over-size, discoid stigma, large leaves and tree-like stature.

Although often referred to as just ‘Calstocker’, this ‘Exbury Calstocker’ is superior to the plant originally named ‘Calstocker’ by Whitaker in 1935.

R. ‘Spellbinder’ - Leach 1975

R’s *calophytum*, *maximum*, *catawbiense*, *sutchuenense*

This lovely frosty pink hybrid is well loved by our more climatically challenged compatriots who reside in Continental Climate zones back east. The solid, rounded, pink dome of blossoms is a plus, but it is the very large leaves (probably from *R. calophytum*) that are the real draw.

R. ‘Spellbinder’
photo - ARS



Letters to the Editor

In her article TO SAVE OR NOT TO SAVE - THE CHRISTMAS PLANT DILEMMA, 'The Yak', February 2007, Colleen Forster refers to Christmas Cactus as *Schlumbergera* and Easter Cactus as *Zygocactus*.

Schlumbergera Lem. and *Zygocactus* Schum. are synonymous, and the Easter Cactus should probably more properly be referred to as *Hatiora gaertneri*.

Current taxonomic publications list the following as the accepted nomenclature, with the previously-used names following.

Easter Cactus - *Hatiora gaertneri* (Reg.) Barthlott.

Hatiora gaertneri synonymy:

Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri (Reg.) Moran.

Epiphyllum gaertneri (Reg.) Schum.

Schlumbergera gaertneri (Reg.) Britt. & Rose.

Christmas Cactus - *Schlumbergera x buckleyi*

hybrid: *Schlumbergera truncata* (Haw.) Moran x

Schlumbergera russelliana (Hook.) Britt. & Rose.

Schlumbergera truncata synonymy:

Epiphyllum truncatum Haw.

Zygocactus truncatus (Haw.) Schum

Further synonymy may be found online, but as no authors were given, these should be regarded as being questionable.

Chris Klapwijk

Editor's Note:

In searching for an image of the Christmas Cactus to compare with the lovely photo of the Easter Cactus supplied by Chris, it became apparent that, as usual, discussions using common names are even more complicated than they seem. I discovered that the plant I had always seen offered for sale around Christmas time as a "Christmas Cactus" is actually the "Thanksgiving Cactus" (various *Schlumbergera truncata* cultivars) - so offered because its bloom time of late November brings it into blossom just in time for the Christmas marketing upswing, whereas the "Christmas Cactus" (*Schlumbergera x buckleyi*) noted above, typically comes into blossom a bit too late in December to allow for significant sales.

The "Thanksgiving Cactus" (which is one of the parents of the hybrid "Christmas Cactus") is most easily told apart from its hybridized progeny by the rather pronounced bend upwards at the ovary, which, combined with the slight downward curve of the stamens and pistil makes it look somewhat like a rather delicate bird of prey, or a very small but vibrantly coloured Concorde SST.



Easter Cactus
photo Chris Klapwijk



Christmas Cactus



Thanksgiving Cactus



Rhododendrons of Sichuan



R. calophytum
illustration by Valerie Price - Curtis' Botanical Magazine

This is an early bloomer and not usually affected by late frosts, but it is only the patient gardener who will have the fortitude to wait the requisite number of years for its first blossoming season.

Originally *Subsection Fortunea* contained both *R. calophytum* and *R. openshawianum*, however it is now generally agreed that *openshawianum* is simply a less spectacular form of *calophytum*, having both smaller leaves and only 5 to 10 flowers to a truss.

The new growth on both *R. calophytum* var. *calophytum* and *R. calophytum* var. *openshawianum* emerges stiffly upright and usually covered with a thin silvery indumentum. Although the indumentum is almost entirely lost as the leaf matures, the new leaf growth's bright silver candles, initially covered with red leaf scales, are very impressive.

Brenda Macdonald

Rhododendron calophytum

This luscious member of *Subsection Fortunea* is one of the hardiest of the tree-like species, making it a wonderful choice for anyone with the garden space to house it. At maturity it can reach more than 30 feet in height with leaves as long as 12 inches and a truss comprising 15 - 30 blossoms.

The large blossoms are most frequently white (although there are some pale and even dark pink) usually with a dark, wine-red blotch on the upper lobe, and house 15 - 20 stamens and a disproportionately large discoid stigma. Their shape is openly campanulate, but also ventricose - that is, more deeply swollen or inflated on one side than the other - causing individual flowers to face outward rather than upward, resulting in a somewhat lax truss.

In addition, the very long, scarlet pedicels (flower stems) contribute to the inflorescence's rather swoopy romantic look - think Byron, not Pope - and from a distance, the appearance of the flat-topped truss sitting like a row of blossoms above the long, vertically oriented leaves gives the impression of an extravagant bridal wreath above a green veil.



R. calophytum
photo Chris Klapwijk - RSF March 2004



R. calophytum var. openshawianum
new growth, with red bud scales and silvery
indumentum



R. calophytum var. openshawianum
mature plant, new growth candles can be seen
gleaming at the top of the tree

photos Sean Rafferty - China, 2006

What's in Bloom?



R. 'Olive'

cross: *moupinense* x *dauricum*
by S. Maxwell **size:** to 5'

Although not the showiest of rhododendrons, 'Olive's' sweet pink-tissue blossoms and very early bloom time make it a heartwarming addition to the garden.
North Vancouver / 18MAR2007



R. 'Snow Lady'

cross: *leucaspis* x *ciliatum*
by Lancaster **size:** to 5'

Another consistently early bloomer, 'Snow Lady' appears to be hardier than either of its parents. The white colour of the blossom could have come from either parent, but the wonderfully dark brown anthers are a legacy from *leucaspis*.
North Vancouver/ 18MAR2007



Vaccinium ovalifolium

The earliest of the whortleberry/blueberry/huckleberry family to blossom in this area, the large, white-flushed pink blossoms seem to hang like tiny Japanese lanterns along the bare reddish branches. Although the large blueberry fruits borne in July are tasty, it is the view of these ghostly lanterns strung out on the twigs springing out from nurse logs deep in the forest gloom of late February and early March that is the real treat.
North Vancouver/ 18MAR2007



Primula moupinense

This primula's slightly faded pink colour is really its only drawback. Its single, quarter-sized blossoms come very early and don't require any coaxing. As a low-profile ground cover it spreads quickly by means of runners, forming an almost impenetrable mat under your rhodos that can defeat almost all weeds.
North Vancouver/ 18MAR2007