

The Oak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 20 Number 9
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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, November 21, 2007
Speaker: Gerry Gibbens
Topic: What is a Botanical Garden?
Plant Sales: Colleen Bojczuk

2007 Officers

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|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
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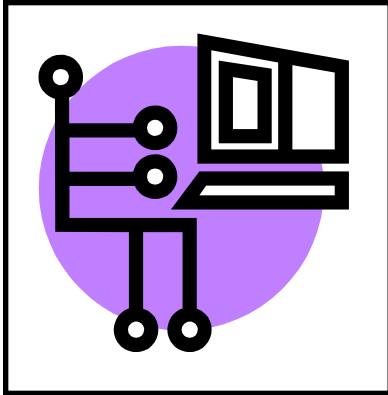
Quick Hits



Christmas is coming ...:

It's almost that time of year again!
Time to fatten up the festive
teddy bear and consider which of
the potted rhodos you are going
to haul inside to be decorated
with lights and tinsel - we are
particularly partial to 'Redwood'
with its deep green leaves and
nice red stems. AND, it's time to
get your felt markers out and put
a big circle around **Wednesday,
December 12th.**

Our annual Christmas potluck dinner will be held on
the second Wednesday of December since the third
Wednesday is perilously close to the big day itself and
would probably interfere with Christmas get-away
vacations and home-for-the-holidays family visits.
Remember we start early, around 6:30. More details
next month.



From the Editor

Last Month

Last month our speaker Roger Low spoke knowledgeably and enthusiastically about his life-long fascination with bonsai. Roger reviewed for us many items from his personal collection of books, journals, and catalogues all demonstrating the extent and depth of the world-wide bonsai community. It truly was a peek into another world, and as always, it is a delight to witness and share in another's enthusiasms.

This Month:

Our speaker will be Gerry Gibbens. Gardener, Van Dusen Sino-Himalayan garden. Gerry trained at Windsor Great Park in England and is a past-president of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society. Gerry's topic is "What is a Botanical Garden?"

Next Month:

Our annual Christmas Potluck Dinner. Early date: Wednesday, December 12th, and early time: 6:30 pm. All the rules and reg's next month.

The Business Stuff:

DIGITAL PROJECTOR

Last month, following extensive research and a recommendation by a committee reporting to the FSRS Directors, President Dalen Bayes requested a membership-wide vote to ratify such a purchase. The vote was passed.

Brenda Macdonald



R. keiskei



R. dauricum



R. hippophaeoides

Three lepidote rhododendrons, which, when crossed with *R. racemosum*, have produced many fine garden hybrids. See page 6.

All photos by Chris Klapwijk.



This past April, along with Mary Berg and Garth Wedemire from our Chapter, I attended the ARS Spring Conference held in San Francisco. We had a great time, and I thought that this month, I'd provide a short synopsis of the public gardens I visited as part of the conference tours. If you're lucky enough to get to the Bay area this winter or early spring, I recommend visiting at least a couple of these gardens. There are entrance fees for the Conservatory of Flowers, the Japanese Tea Garden and Filoli, but the San Francisco Botanic Garden at the Strybing Arboretum is free.

The first day of tours took us to Golden Gate Park for the day. This lovely park is situated on the western edge of San Francisco. Looking at the lush grass, trees, and shrubs, it's hard to believe that it started out as nothing but beach grass and sand dunes. (As part of the conference talks, we heard about the park's history and its chief creator, John McLaren). While park development started in the 1870's, few buildings were added until the California Midwinter International Exposition of 1894 (the San Francisco World's Fair).

There are now art galleries, museums, lovely walking trails, musical stages, and playgrounds for children in and around the park, but of particular interest to us are the gardens. We started the day by visiting the historic Conservatory of Flowers, which is the oldest Victorian-style conservatory in North America. It was originally built in 1878 and first opened to the public in 1879. Built of redwood and Douglas fir, it has the classic Victorian era

Up the Garden Path



San Francisco Gardens

curved glass panes that create a large central dome. Wings extend to either side of the domed area. The greenhouse itself is divided into a series of climate zones, including lowland tropical plants, aquatic plants, highland tropical plants (3000 to 7000 feet elevation), and seasonal displays of show plants. Almost 2,000 species are grown in the Conservatory. In addition to the actual conservatory being so impressive, just walking by it offers a spectacular vista. The front of the conservatory is planted in the Victorian style, with an emerald green lawn surrounding dramatic bedding-out displays that surround palm trees.



The Conservatory has definitely had some highs and lows in its history. It survived the 1906 earthquake intact and has been through a couple of major fires, but due to a severe windstorm in 1995 it was closed for several years. Following a 25 million dollar fund raising drive, the Conservatory underwent major restoration, and re-opened in 2003. One of its major functions now is to offer conservation education programming to local elementary school children. The Conservatory is included in the US National Historic Trust.

From the Conservatory, we went to the nearby Japanese Tea Garden. The current five-acre garden gradually evolved out of a one-acre garden and Japanese village originally constructed for the 1894 World's Fair. This strolling or rural-style Japanese garden is built on a hillside, so has a lot of elevation changes. As well, its fairly dense canopy



of tall trees reinforces the woodland garden “feel”. Paths meander and curve alongside small streams and by ponds. Along the way, you can see an authentic pagoda and a huge statue of Buddha, and cross the high arching Moon



Bridge. A spring visit offers flowering cherries, hot pink azaleas, magnolias, late camellias and a fabulous wisteria trained over the tea house. In addition, there are a lot of iris and hydrangeas planted that would be lovely to see later in the season. There is a large collection of conifers in the garden trained in classical Japanese style, which are wonderful in any season.

For the afternoon, we were turned loose in the San Francisco Botanical Garden at the Strybing Arboretum. There were a number of rhododendrons in bloom, along with lots of lovely plant material that we just can't over-winter here. Plants are arranged, more or less, by geographic origin and climate zone. So, if you can't get to Australia or New Zealand, just take a stroll through the Strybing Arboretum. In addition, there are a number of special collections of plants, for example succulents and herbaceous perennials, scattered in various locations throughout the garden.

The tour organizers had arranged a tour of the garden's working greenhouses, cold frames and propagation facilities. These are modest, hard working structures, but they were packed with plants. They had lots of vireyas and, as you might expect, maddenias. Some were being maintained as stock plants, but lots of plants were being propagated for fund raising sales. (Alas, we couldn't bring any plants back, as the California plant inspection agency flatly refused to offer any plant inspection services for the conference).

One of the best estate gardens in North America is Filoli, located in San Mateo County, just south of San Francisco. This was originally the home and estate of the Bourn family who owned, among other things, a gold mine. They lived at Filoli from 1917 to 1937,

when the Roth family purchased the estate. The Roths donated Filoli to the US National Historic Trust in 1975, and shortly thereafter it opened to the public. The entire estate is 654 acres in size and is set among native Californian oak forests. The actual formal gardens take up about 16 acres.

If you go, plan on spending the day as there is so much to see, and make sure you allow enough time

to take a tour of the house too. Around the home, the gardens are very formal, and kept in immaculate condition.



They are organized into a series of garden rooms that lead you on from one space to another. Along the way, you'll see reflecting ponds and seasonal displays of floral colour. When we were there, the tulips were just finishing and about to be replaced.

There are also more informal areas with wooded paths and a fruit and vegetable garden. I was interested to hear the guide say that one of the goals for Filoli is

to maintain it as it was in the early 20th century. They are working hard to contain plantings and, if at all possible, are not introducing new varieties.

As part of the conference tours, we saw some fabulous private gardens – one of the



perks of attending ARS conferences. But it's nice to see excellent public gardens too, and the advantage to these is that we can all visit them whenever we're in the area. Go, enjoy. You'll be glad you did.

Norma Senn



Rhododendrons of China



R. racemosum
Illustration by Valerie Price
Curtis' Botanical Magazine

Rhododendron racemosum

Although *R. racemosum* is extremely variable and can sometimes look somewhat unkempt due to its ability to continue to grow under conditions which might cause the expiration of other more decorous species, it is a valuable addition to the garden that can produce a very pretty picture if given half the chance.

Free-flowering in various shades of pink it is one of the few rhododendrons with axillary flower buds near the main terminal flower cluster. These lateral flower clusters not only contribute to the overall impression of the size of the flower head but help to extend the flowering period, often from March to May. There are some white forms also, and several, although not all, of the available clones have a lovely fragrance.

Racemosum is not fussy as to soil type and will easily take full sun and a somewhat dry condition. Their native habitat is usually in the open rather than as an understory plant, and the full colour of blossom, stem, and leaf bud scales is most fully realized with a moderate amount of sun, particularly here in the Pacific Northwest. Deep shade or consistently wet feet are probably the only situations under which this plant will not cope.

First discovered by Delavay in 1884 in Yunnan, seed was sent to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, and five years later plants

were forwarded on to Kew Gardens and also to James Veitch for cultivation and propagation. However, it is a plentiful plant in its distribution area of Yunnan and south-west Sichuan, and it is likely that all plants presently available commercially are from collections made far more recently than the late 1800's.

It's natural habit is rather open and stiffly upright, although there is a dwarf, compact form with deep pink flowers collected by Forrest (F19404) in the Sungkwei Pass, Yunnan, which is sometimes available in the trade.

Just like the flower colour, the hardiness of this species also varies considerably, but on the whole *racemosum* is both hardier and more floriferous than its look-alike cousins in Subsection Scabrifolia: *R. hemitrichotum*, *R. mollicomum*, *R. pubescens*, and *R. scabrifolium*.

Brenda Macdonald



R. racemosum
photo by Sean Rafferty
Rhododendron Species Foundation, 2004

The Contemplative Gardener



'Haridijzer's Beauty'



'Mary Fleming'



'Egret'

R. racemosum was a valuable and oft-used parent in the dizzy whirl of rhododendron hybridizing that began with the first plants sent back to England from China, and which continues to this day. Valued for its floriferousness, axial blossoms, marginal to very-good hardiness, general ease of cultivation, and attractive blossoms in varying shades of pink, it was used in crosses with many of the other small-leaved lepidote species. Currently more than 75 hybrids using *racemosum* as part of the parentage are listed in Salley and Greer's Rhododendron Hybrids.

Among the more notable hybrids from *racemosum* were a number of azaleodendrons, such as 'Haridijzer's Beauty', using an unknown Kurume azalea, and 'Ria Haridijzer', using the well-known azalea 'Hinodegiri'.

Many different crosses were made although there are relatively few that are still commercially available.

'Mary Fleming', developed by Guy Nearing and named for the secretary of the New York chapter of the ARS, was a *keiskei* cross that not only remains on the "Good Doer" lists of many of the eastern chapters, but was also frequently used in the development of subsequent hybrids. Warren Berg also used *keiskei* for 'Ginny Gee' (pink fading to white tinged pink, from the omnipresent 'Mary Fleming'), the less well known 'June Bee' (white, from *keiskei* Yaku Fairy form), and 'Fairy Mary' (pink fading white, from 'Mary Fleming' and Yaku Fairy form). Cox used the 'White Lace' form of *racemosum* to develop another *keiskei* cross, 'Crane', and a *campylogynum* cross, 'Egret', both of which are white.

Other *campylogynum* crosses such as 'Betty's Bells' (Betty Shedy) and 'Candi' (Caperci), using the pink form of *racemosum* and red forms of *campylogynum*, resulted in bright rose/pink colouration, however they do not seem to be readily available in the marketplace.

Another of Caperci's crosses, this one with *dauricum*, appears to be much more successful. 'Ernie Dee' is a cute-as-a-bug's-ear low-growing mound of frilled light-purple blossoms.



'Ria Haridijzer'



'Ginny Gee'



'Ernie Dee'



'Rose Elf'

Although its colour verges on the ubiquitous mauve, its dwarf stature and consistent re-blooming habit make it a valuable addition to the garden.

R. moupinense had been used by both Halfdan Lem to get 'Jodi', and Scott, to get the still popular 'Pink Snowflakes'. Lem also tried his hand at a *pemakoense* cross, the eponymous 'Pera', but the only *pemakoense* cross that seems readily available (and in which *racemosum* actually figures only slightly) is 'Rose Elf' by Lancaster.



'Pink Snowflakes'

Our chapter emblem, *R. hippophaeoides*, was used by Harold Greer to produce 'Shooting Star', and he also tried *dauidsonianum* with *racemosum* to produce 'Pink Fluff'.

And in perhaps the oddest pairing (but one obviously designed to increase cold-hardiness) *racemosum* was crossed with an upright form of *R. lapponicum* that had been found on the south-east side of Great Slave



'Nahanni'

Lake. The resultant hybrid by Brueckner, named 'Nahanni' was a surprising vivid magenta and reassuringly hardy.



Weldon Delp was a prolific hybridizer from the west-central area of Pennsylvania and member of the Great Lakes Chapter of the ARS who used *racemosum* extensively. Although there were those who criticized Delp for registering so many hybrids, some of which were not hardy in the Zone 4 environment in which he gardened, his response was that not everybody gardened in Zone 4, and that he used his greenhouses for development of his hybrids in order to accelerate the hybridizing program. By being able to evaluate blossom characteristics within 14 to 18 months rather than the usual 3 to 4 years needed for outdoor development, he could speed up the selection process. He postulated that he started his crosses with hardy species and he could leave it to others to fine tune the hardiness of the hybrids.

Guy Nearing, who developed the ever-popular hybridizing parent 'Mary Fleming', was a pioneer hybridizer who specialized in developing super-hardy lepidotes for the harsh conditions of his New York state location. He was also the developer of the Nearing Frame for propagation and a renowned mycologist. John Cage (he of the "prepared piano" fame), although most notoriously known for his composition 4' 33" (in which a pianist sits at the piano, closes the top to signal the commencement of the piece and opens it for the final time after 4 minutes and 33 seconds of complete silence), also composed a suite of pieces entitled Indeterminacy ... Ninety Stories by John Cage, with Music. Two of the pieces reference Guy Nearing, whom Cage regarded as his mentor in the study of mushrooms and other wild edible plants. It was Nearing and Cage who, with three other friends, founded the New York Mycological Society.

Brenda Macdonald