

The Oak

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, September 19, 2007

Speaker: Art Lightburn, Vice-President
of the Mount Arrowsmith
Rhododendron Society (MARS)
located in Qualicum Beach on
Vancouver Island

Topic: Australia, and the 2006 Pacific
Region International
Rhododendron Conference
held last October

Plant Sales: Sue Klapwijk

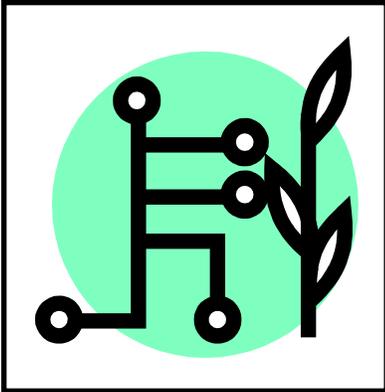
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Welcome Back!

Down tools and come on
over! Put away that hose
and that rake and rejoin old
friends for our first meeting
of the 2007-2008 year.



From the President

Notes from the Chair

I hope you all had a good summer. Lori and I survived another trip up north and we hope to see you all at our September meeting.

PRIMULAS

I can no longer remember when I purchased my first primula or what kind it was. Since then they have become an essential part of our garden. Now we have over a dozen different species and several hybrids.

The genus primula is in the family Primulacea along with over twenty other genera. Among these are Dodecatheon, Soldanella and

Cyclamen. There are over 600 known species of primula, primarily in S.E. Asia and Europe, with one other one at the southern tip of Chile. I wonder how that one got there! The only native ones in the Northwest are three diminutive species in the mountains of S.E. Washington and N.E. Oregon.

Primulas are small herbaceous perennial plants ranging from a few inches in width and height, to 3 feet in width with flower scapes to 4 feet. Most are deciduous,

with one of the exceptions being the auriculas, which have thick leathery leaves and are often grown in pots for competition.

My favorite primulas are the candelabras. These have dark green serrated leaves up to a foot or more in length and flowering scapes from 2 to 3 feet in height. Their flowers are in whorls with a new whorl opening every 2 or 3 days. There can be up to 8 whorls on a scape, which gives them a long blooming period. There are numerous species of this group, some blooming in early May, others as late as early July. They come in many colors, varying from white, pink, crimson, yellow, deep gold, lavender through to dark purple.

Among those we grow are *P. pulverulenta*, which blooms in early May with reddish purple flowers and is soon followed by *P. japonica* with flowers varying from white to crimson. My favorite is *P. bulleyana* with deep gold flowers blooming in late May. Two of the latest flowering candelabras (late June) are smaller in size: *P. anisodora* with dark purple flowers, and *P. poissonii* with pink flowers. The candelabras grow well along streams, often growing right in the water in winter and early spring, however they also do well in sites that are not so wet.

P. florindae is a large primula that will grow in a few inches of running



P. japonica



P. florindae



P. bulleyana



P. anisodora.



P. vulgaris ssp. sibthorpii

water as well as moist sites. Not a candelabra type, the yellow, bell-shaped, nodding flowers are carried in clusters of up to 50 blooms, and the flowering scape can reach up to 3 feet. This is a very fragrant primula that blooms in early July. The flowers are normally yellow, but there are orange and red forms also.

P. vulgaris ssp. sibthorpii, a relatively small plant, starts to bloom in early January and keeps its light lavender flowers till April. Not disturbed by frost, its blooms are able to stand temperatures down to approximately 20° F.

P. denticulata, the drumstick primula, blooms in early spring with dense ball-shaped clusters on a stout stem. Colors available range from white to violet and purple.



P. denticulata



P. moupinensis

There are many other interesting primulas, two of which are available at the Rhododendron Species Foundation. *P. moupinensis*, which was introduced into cultivation by Steve Hootman, is a low spreading (by runners) ground cover plant with pale pink flowers. Another is *P. sonchifolia* with its basal rosette of white, mealy-covered leaves and striking, large, ice-blue flowers.

Another favorite of mine (I obviously have lots of favorites) is *P. kisoana*. Like *P. moupinensis* it is stoloniferous, and forms a good ground cover a few inches high, with white or pink flowers.



P. sonchifolia

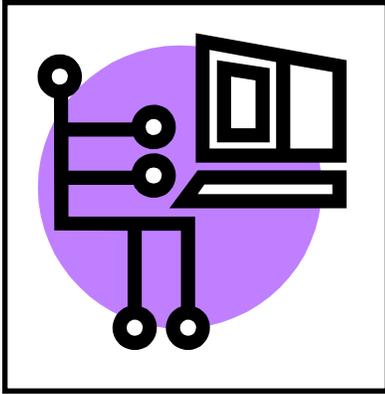


P. kisoana

The candelabras and *P. florindae* naturalize easily from seed. Dividing clumps of other primula can be done in spring or fall. Others can be grown from seed if specimens are not available in local nurseries.

Overall there are primulas that are a welcome addition to almost any garden.

Dalén Bayes



From the Editor

Last Month

Last month was three months ago, when we held our annual picnic and auction at Wingswept Gardens, the home of John and Gael Dodd. The setting was spectacular, the food great, the company enjoyable, and the fund-raising auction a resounding success.

Our thanks to everyone who attended and contributed to the great meal and superb collection of auction items, and especially to Gael and John for hosting the affair, and Vern and Sue and everyone else who did so much in the way of the preliminary organization.

This Month:

Our speaker will be Art Lightburn, the current Vice-President of the Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society on Vancouver Island. Art attended the fall convention "down under", in Burnie, Tasmania.

Next Month:

Roger Low, whom many of you know as a result of the oh-so-successful bonsai classes he ran during our own fall conference out at Harrison Hot Springs, will speak on bonsai techniques.

The Business Stuff:

DISTRICT 1 SUMMER MEETING

The District 1 summer meeting was held August 19, 2007, and the following points were noted:

- 1) Ron Knight, District 1 Director reported that the Community Forest Committee has given protection status to the Mount Elphinstone *Rhododendron macrophyllum* grove. In addition, there will be a program to distribute seedlings of *R. macrophyllum* from various sources to District 1 members in order to ascertain garden-worthiness.
- 2) The 2008 International Rhodo Conference is being held in Edinburgh, Scotland on May 7 - 11 at the Royal Botanic Garden. You can obtain a registration package from: marjory.mcfarlane@gmail.com
- 3) The 2008 spring conference is being held in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the 2008 fall conference is to be in Hilo, Hawaii.
- 4) The 2012 Western Regional Conference is being hosted by the Nanaimo chapter. See the ARS website - www.rhododendron.org - for more details.

RHODODENDRON SPECIES WORKSHOPS

Many members who would have liked to attend a program such as that presented by Steve Hootman at the Rhododendron Species Foundation were constrained by the transportation time and expense required to travel down to Federal Way in Washington state. There will now be an opportunity for those members to participate in a series of Species Study Workshops, to be held locally this spring.

Douglas Justice will be instructing 4 sessions to be held at the UBC Botanical Garden on March 1, March 22, April 5, and April 26. The classes will run from approximately 9:30 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon, with participants bringing their own packed lunch.

Registration packages will be available in early November, and class size will be limited to 25 persons. Priority registration (and a discount) will be given to all those who register for all 4 classes by January 31st.

The fees per class are \$35, or \$120 for all 4 sessions if you register by January 31.

The topics covered will include rhododendron anatomy, environmental needs, classification; lepidotes and azaleas; elepidotes; and photography, pests, diseases, and other problems.

Brenda Macdonald



Up the Garden Path with Peonies

Herbaceous peonies are among the most popular perennials in Canada. They are hardy into Zone 3, long-lived, easy to grow, fragrant, have nice foliage, are deer resistant, have few insect or disease pests and make great cut flowers. There are about 25 species of peonies, and wild flower enthusiasts go crazy for the rare species, but the most commonly grown garden plants are selected from three species: *Paeonia tenuifolia*, the fern-leaf peony; *P. officinalis*, the one we most often see; and the Japanese peony, *P. lactiflora*.

The best time to plant herbaceous peonies is in the early fall, from mid-September to mid-October, and traditionally garden centres sell roots (as bare roots) for just this short time period. In the last few years, peonies have become available as container-grown plants and sold in April and May for spring planting, but there are far fewer varieties to select from at this time of the year. If you're transplanting a peony from one site to another in your garden, it should be done from September to October.

Well-grown peonies can live for decades, but the keys to success are to prepare the growing site well and plant the roots at the correct depth. Peonies grow best when they receive full sun, and have fertile soil with good drainage. They are tolerant of a range of soil pHs, as long as the soil is neither extremely acid nor alkaline. Plants can tolerate light shade, but the flowering quality may be compromised, and root systems from nearby trees may offer too much competition to the peonies.

To prepare the planting site, dig the area to a depth of at least 16 inches, and about 2 feet in width, although deeper and wider is better. Peonies like a fertile soil, so amend the garden soil by mixing it with well-rotted manure or garden compost. Backfill the amended soil and plant the roots so that when finished, the buds at the top of the root system are between 1 to 2 inches

below the soil line. Planting depth is critical, as peonies will not bloom if planted too deeply, and if too shallow, they are prone to winter injury. Tamp the soil around the root system and water gently but deeply. That's it for the first fall. If you live in an area with very cold winters, mulch the planting site.

New vegetative shoots will emerge in the spring. They are succulent and easily broken, so make sure they are protected. Hard as it may be, don't let them flower in the first year. If you see any flower buds appearing, nip them off carefully just above the topmost set of leaves. By doing this, new plants will put their energy into growing better roots, which in the long run, will produce stronger plants. If flowers are allowed bloom in the first year, plants will put their energy into reproduction at the expense of vegetative growth.

During their first summer, regular irrigation will help the plants become established. As well, an application of fertilizer in the spring and again in late June is helpful, something like a 5-10-10, following label rates is recommended. A yearly application of well-rotted manure or garden compost is also extremely beneficial and can be added each spring.



Paeonia tenuifolia



Paeonia lactiflora



Paeonia officinalis

Many people use wire peony rings to help support foliage and the heavy flowers. If you're using them, they should be put over the plants just as the stems are emerging, then as the stems elongate, guide them so that the stems stay within the ring. Peony rings are



single - 'Scarlet O'Hara'



Japanese - 'Westerner'



semi-double - 'Minnie Shaylor'

especially recommended for those varieties that have double flowers that become so heavy that the stems flop over without support.

For established peonies, foliage is cut off, just at ground level in late October as a preventative control treatment for botrytis. Botrytis is one of the few diseases that peonies suffer. By removing the foliage completely in the fall, you are removing a possible over-wintering site for fungal spores.

By the second spring, young peonies can be allowed to bloom. There is an abundance of nectar on the outside of the peony flower buds which attracts ants. The ants do not harm the flowers in any way, but if you are cutting flowers for indoor bouquets, it's a good idea to turn them upside down and gently shake them to dislodge the ants before you bring the flowers inside. When cutting flowers, there should be at least 3 sets of leaves left on each plant stem to provide

enough leaf surface for on-going plant growth. Cut peony flowers need a lot of water, so use a deep vase and make sure the water level is topped off regularly to prolong the bouquet's life.

By selecting varieties carefully, you can have an extended season of peony bloom. The earliest to flower is the Fern leaf peony, *P. tenuifolia*, which blooms from April through early May. As you might expect from

the common name, this species has finely cut, lacy foliage which is attractive throughout the summer. Flowers are a deep crimson red, and there are both single and double forms available.

Varieties of the European species *P. officinalis* are the next to bloom and this is the species that gives us the most common garden varieties. Varieties of this species have been a mainstay in Canadian gardens for over 100 years and these are the flowers many of us associate with our grandparents' gardens. Blossoms, which appear in May to early June, range in colour from white to pink to a deep cerise-red; they may be single or double.

There are literally dozens of varieties of this species, and some like 'Alba Plena' and 'Rubra Plena' were introduced over a hundred years ago.

The species *P. lactiflora* is native to China, although we often refer to it as the Japanese peony. It is the last herbaceous species to bloom and flowers from mid-May to mid-June. Chinese and Japanese gardeners have been in love with flowers from this species for centuries, and hybridizers from both countries have developed many varieties. Peony flowers have also inspired artists, and they are often pictured in Asian porcelains and luxury fabrics.

Flowers from this species are classified as single flowered, Japanese or anemone-flowered, and double flowered. Single flowers have only one row of petals, but those petals surround a large boss of bright yellow stamens. The Japanese or anemone-flowered types also surround a centre of bright stamens, but they have at least two rows of petals. The fully double flowered forms have so many petals that they look like floral pompoms.

In western tradition, peonies are sometimes referred to as the "Queen of Flowers", and in Asia as the "Prime Minister of Flowers". Both epithets honour this lovely, easy to grow, garden favourite.



anemone - 'Fancy Nancy'



double - 'Evening Star'

Norma Senn



Rhododendrons of China



Rhododendron edgeworthii

This justly famous rhododendron was the subject of hybridizing schemes almost as soon as it was first introduced by Hooker in 1851, as growers attempted to marry its exquisite lily-like blossoms and heavenly fragrance to something a bit hardier and less rambling. Salley & Greer list more than 60 hybrids and named forms beginning in 1862, including the legendary 'Fragrantissimum' (*edgeworthii* x *formosum*), and 'Forstereanum' (*veitchianum* x *edgeworthii*), both of which can be best be termed only marginally hardy. Subsequent crosses for the most part did not even achieve marginal hardiness, with the exception of 'John Bull', a *edgeworthii* x *johnstoneanum* hybrid introduced in 1957, leaving most of the later hybrids suitable only for frost-free gardens.

In point of fact it is not primarily the cold that is intolerable, as this variable species is well-distributed over India, Burma, Bhutan, and northwest China in areas and elevations that are definitely not tropical, but a lack of perfect drainage. Most frequently seen as an epiphyte, growing in crotches of large trees and protected by the forest canopy above, *edgeworthii* also flourishes in other habitats even more difficult for the home gardener to emulate, such as the talus slope of a rock slide on the side of a mountain continuously bathed by swirling mists.

Still, any success garnered by using a container planting to be over-wintered in a glass-house away from the winter rain and hard frost, or ensuring extra coverage and a well-protected planting site makes all the fuss seem worthwhile, when the large, faintly pink-striped white, funnel-campanulate blossoms begin to send out their intoxicating perfume in April.

Even here in North Vancouver, half-way up a rainy mountain, the three baby *edgeworthii* planted out only last fall in pockets cut out of the huge stumps left after the original logging, and seemingly annihilated by this past year's vicious winter, have all popped back up again. Although we are a number of years away from enjoying the blossoms, the deep green bullate leaves with their densely plush, tawny indumentum are reason enough to keep on trying.

Brenda Macdonald

R. edgeworthii
Illustration by Walter Hood Fitch
- Curtis' Botanical Magazine



R. edgeworthii
photo by Sean Rafferty
Yunnan, 2005

What's in Bloom, Re-Bloom, and just hanging around?



R. rushforthii

type: vireya

Although one of the hardier tropical vireyas, this one will still go in the garden room as frosts approach.

Sulphur-yellow and waxy, the flat-faced, tubular blossoms are more interesting than spectacular.

North Vancouver/ 06AUG2007



R. sanguineum ssp. didymum

type: elepidote

epithet: species - blood red, ssp - two-fold (referring to the two-layered indumentum)

size: broad, to 3' in 10 years

Note the deep crimson, almost black, blossoms of this very late bloomer. There are clearly visible glandular bristles all along the pedicel and the outside surface of the blossoms.

North Vancouver/ 30JUL2007



Hyla regilla

type: Pacific Tree Frog

Caught soaking up a little late summer sun on the leaf of *R.*

'Peeping Tom', this little guy is one of our more terrestrial frogs. Measuring only about 2" long he has sticky rounded

toe-pads which aid him when leaping from leaf to leaf

North Vancouver/ 08SEP2007



R. fastigiatum

type: lepidote

epithet: upright

size: upright, or broad, or almost prostrate, to 3' in 10 years

A reliable re-bloomer, this specimen was sold to us as *R.*

impeditum, but is distinguished from that close relative by its markedly glaucous-grey leaves that have a matt rather than shiny appearance. The leaves of *R. impeditum* are dark green and shiny.

North Vancouver/ 09SEP2007