

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 21 Number 04
April 2008



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 16, 2008
Speaker: Paulus Vrijmoed
Topic: Native Plants
Plant Sales: Harold Fearing

2008 Officers

President:	Harold Fearing	604-857-4136
Vice Pres.:	Sean Rafferty	604-990-5353
Secretary:	Mary-Anne Berg	604-853-5737
Treasurer:	Alan March	604-532-9062
Directors:	Larry Morton	604-888-6564
	Lori Bayes	360-966-4596
	Arlene Darby	604-597-1849
Programme:	Les Clay	604-530-5188
Membership:	Wenonah March	604-532-9062
Newsletter:	Brenda Macdonald	604-990-5353
Website:	Chris Klapwijk	604-581-0925

Quick Hits



Garden Open Houses:

Fearing - Saturday, April 19, Sunday
April 20
Bayes - just call
Dodd - Sunday, May 11
Bale - Saturday, May 17, Sunday,
May 18, Monday, May 19
Details inside!



Next Month ...

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



From the President

Notes from the Chair

We have been very fortunate in the past few years to have had a whole series of varied and interesting programs, from both outside and local speakers. Les Clay has been the program chairman for quite a while now, and though he has had some help from others, he has been primarily responsible for the speaker program. Thanks! Les has agreed to continue as program chair for next year. However he wants some help from the membership in terms of new ideas for programs. So put your thinking caps on! At the next meeting we will take a few minutes to hear suggestions. So bring a list of topics you think would make good programs, speakers you would like to hear, or ones you have heard give good talks, or even better, speaker names with specific topics you would like to hear them talk about.



R. oreodoxa var. *fargesii* - formerly *R. fargesii*

There was a pretty hard frost at our place a few days ago, so when I looked around our garden to decide what to write about I found a number of plants where the top, or the more exposed, flowers had been browned by the frost. One plant which was not at all touched by the frost however, and which has been producing a lot of color for the last couple of weeks, is *R. fargesii*. In the modern classification this has been reduced to a variety, *R. oreodoxa* var. *fargesii*, but despite this lesser status, it is still a beautiful plant. The leaves are a nice gray-green, lighter underneath, with no indumentum. They are elliptic, maybe 8 x 4 cm. The flowers are a light pink, with a few darker spots, 6-7 lobed, campanulate (open bell shaped) and come in a loose truss of a half dozen or so. The version I have tends to keep its leaves only for a year or two, so that the trunk and lower branches are exposed. Thus it makes a good plant for the back

of planting. It comes from a variety of locales in China.

I also have a very similar plant which I got from the Finleys many years ago as *R. erubescens*. Its leaves are narrower and longer and taper to more of a point at the end, which, according to Davidian (who was very much of a 'splitter') is what distinguishes it from *fargesii*. Nowadays it has been lumped with *fargesii* and its differences are just considered part of the natural variation of individuals in a species. From a horticultural point of view, I think it is the better plant as the flowers are larger and the leaves stay on, so the plant doesn't develop the exposed lower branches. Sue and Chris Klapwijk are still propagating this plant and may have some for sale from time to time.



R. oreodoxa var. *fargesii* - formerly *R. erubescens*



R. praeevernum



R. sutchuenense

Two other rhododendrons we have had good success with, and which are currently in bloom, are *R. praeevernum* and *R. sutchuenense*. These, like *oreodoxa* var. *fargesii*, and a number of other familiar rhodos - *fortunei*, *decorum*, *orbiculare*, *calophytum*, etc.- are members of the Fortunea subsection and so share some similar characteristics. These two rhodos are big, something for the larger garden, and perfectly hardy here. The leaves are long and relatively narrow, up to 30 cm or so by 8 cm, and tapered to the base. *R. sutchuenense* has a bit of indumentum on the midrib of the leaf, whereas *praeevernum* has none. The obvious difference is in the flowers however. The trusses are both large, but *praeevernum*'s flowers are usually white, with a characteristic maroon blotch in the throat, whereas *sutchuenense* has light pink flowers with sometimes a few speckles. There apparently is a cross of these two, *R. x giraldii*, (which I have not seen) which is intermediate - pink flowers with a blotch. If you have room in your garden, either of these plants are good choices.



R. hirtipes

One of the fun things about growing rhodos from seed, aside from the fact that you can get varieties from seed which you will never get any other way, is the buzz you get when they bloom for the first time and you finally get to see what they look like. I have one blooming now for the first time which is really nice. It is *R. hirtipes*. The plant is only 40 cm tall and a couple of years old and yet has a half dozen trusses. The flowers are open campanulate, somewhat like *fargesii*, and are a light pink, shaded with darker pink. The new shoots and leaf petioles (stems) are covered with bristles. The leaves are oval, 5-10 x 3-6 cm, dark glossy green on top with a bit of indumentum underneath. It comes from China and SE Tibet and seems to be perfectly hardy here. If this reaches the expected 5 feet and continues to bloom as it has so far, it is going to be a spectacular garden plant.



It is getting to be open garden season. Ginny and I will have ours open, as will several others in the chapter. See the information elsewhere in the newsletter. Open gardens are a good opportunity to see unfamiliar plants, see how others have done things, and be comforted by the fact that you are not the only one with weeds and weevils. It is disappointing to a garden owner to prepare and then have few people come, so please take advantage of this opportunity, and consider next year opening your own garden for others to share.

Harold Fearing



From the Editor

Last Month

Last month our associate member Garratt Richardson presented a recreation of his trip with Peter Cox to southern Sichuan in central-west China. Although the trip was disappointing in some respects (very limited blossom production the previous spring had drastically reduced seed production, and limited blossom production during the current spring impaired their ability to locate suitable specimens for future consideration) the trip of course had many interesting and scenic moments which Garratt so generously shared with us. It was a fascinating, if virtual, tour of the area, giving us an opportunity to glimpse not only the botanizing and scenery, but also bits of the history and culture of the diverse ethnic groups living in the area.

This Month:

This month's speaker is Paulus Vrijmoed, who will be speaking on "Native Plants". In 1997, Paulus and two partners, Nirmal Grewal and John Folkerts set up "Linnaea Nurseries Ltd.", a wholesale nursery based in Langley in, which offers a variety of nursery stock, and specializes in native plants.

The name of the nursery is derived from *Linnaea borealis*, the exquisite native Twinflower, a plant so beloved by the father of modern taxonomy Carolus Linnaeus, that it was the one he named after himself.

Although we know him under the Latinized version Carolus Linnaeus, his name in his native Sweden was Carl Linné. The surname of Linné had only been in use for a single generation as it was Linnaeus' father who adopted Linné as a permanent last name rather than continue the previously accepted Scandinavian patronymic system. Interestingly enough, Linnaeus' father chose the name Linné after a giant Linden tree on the family property.

Next Month:

Get your secateurs ready for the 15th 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. There will be our only "juried" award - the "Lionheart Mug" for the best yellow, whether species, hybrid, rhododendron, azalea, truss, or spray. 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 friends or neighbours so they can see the enormous variety of plant material available within the genus Rhododendron. Plus, it's fun.

The Business Stuff:

THE CALENDAR

Saturday, April 12	Fraser South Chapter - Annual Plant Sale at Langley United Church, 5673 - 200th St. Langley, British Columbia 10:00 am - 3:00 pm
Sunday, April 27	Fraser Valley Chapter - Truss Display and Plant Sale - 11am to 3 pm at Whonnock Lake Centre, 27871 113th Ave., Maple Ridge
Sat.-Sun., May 3-4	Vancouver Rhododendron Chapter - Plant Sale and Rhododendron Flower Show held at the Park and Tilford Gardens, 333 Brooksbank Avenue at Main Street, North Vancouver
Wednesday, May 21	Fraser South Chapter - 15th Annual Fraser South Rhodo Society Beer Bottle Truss Show

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED

- Tea Duties for April fall to Vern and Sue Finley, and Dixie and Marge Mueller. The honourable gentlemen and former presidents Mike Bale and Dalen Bayes should be waiting in the wings for May.
- Start thinking about the annual picnic, to be held Saturday, June 14th, at the home of Karen Linton and Larry Morton. This is our last function of the year and a great opportunity to raise money for the club by donating useful (often, but not exclusively, horticultural) items to be auctioned off. Put on your thinking caps and concentrate on the Zen of re-gifting.
- And don't forget about donations to our raffle table. Bring along perennials you have divided, small seedlings that have popped up, home baking or preserves, gardening books - anything you think you might want to receive if you didn't already have it. They all go towards maintaining fiscal liquidity in these times of economic uncertainty. What care we about the US sub-mortgage crisis if we can cover the cost of our hall rental with ticket sales for the raffle items!

Brenda Macdonald

What's in Bloom?



R. leucaspis

epithet: with a white shield

type: lepidote

size: to 2'

One of the two parents (with *R. ciliatum*) of the ever popular 'Snow Lady' it lent both its fuzzy appearance and hardiness to that hybrid. As the blossom ages the stamens become darker and darker until almost chocolate brown - another charming characteristic it passed on to its progeny.

photo by Sean Rafferty

North Vancouver/ 07APR2008

And herein lies the lesson for today...

when you live half-way up a mountain in North Vancouver, your *leucaspis* is struggling to come out, your 'Olive' has been beaten to sodden clumps of pale pink by the hail, and even the crocuses look intimidated.

But when you live in Surrey, you can have a *calophytum* out that looks good enough to eat.

Such are the wages of a higher altitude.



R. calophytum

epithet: beautiful plant

type: elepidote

size: to >20 feet

Easily recognizable by its stature, the pale blossoms with a vivid wine-red blotch, very long, red pedicels, and a discoid stigma so large it looks like a tiny metal detector, *R. calophytum* easily lives up to its name of "beautiful plant". It is one of the hardiest of the large-leaved species and will eventually form a spectacular umbrella-shaped tree.

photo by Bill Bischoff

Surrey/ 22MAR2008



Rhododendrons of China



Rhododendron protistum

A great deal of splitting and lumping goes on in the Subsection Grandia to which *R. protistum* belongs - based on such arcane matters as whether there is a unistrate indumentum of rosulate hairs with or without a few dendroid hairs sprinkled in, as in *R. protistum*, or a bistrate indumentum of ramiform hairs over a lower layer of rosulate hairs, with nary a dendroid hair to be found, as in *R. giganteum*. However the general consensus of opinion now appears to be that *R. protistum* and *R. giganteum* are essentially the same plant, in differing stages of maturity.

A plant for the patient gardener with a very large backyard, *protistum* grows to 100 feet in the wild, and can take 50 to 60 years to mature enough to blossom. Originally *R. protistum* and *R. giganteum* were thought to be two separate species, both first collected by Forrest in Yunnan in May, 1918, and

R. protistum var. *giganteum*
Illustration by Ann Webster
Curtis' Botanical Magazine, 1954

September, 1919, respectively, based on differences in amount and type of indumentum. Reduced to synonymy as *R. protistum* var. *protistum* for the juvenile specimens with none or only patchy or marginal indumentum, and *R. protistum* var. *giganteum* for the more mature specimens with a woolly, continuous (but still somewhat thin) indumentum, they both display the extremely large leaves, often 18" long by 9" wide, and bright red bud scales that do so much to ameliorate the long wait for actual blossoms.

Not widely grown in the Pacific Northwest, it is not only their size and reluctance to set bud that discourages, but also their lack of hardiness - requiring either a very large cool greenhouse, an exceptionally sheltered growing niche, or a latitude of approximately San Francisco to survive. In addition, their very early spring growth habit makes them susceptible to even the mildest of late frosts.

Flowers range in colour from pale rose to crimson-purple, the nectar pouches often much darker, held in trusses of 20 to 30 three-inch long flowers - a sight well worth the 50 year wait.

Clearly closely related to *R. magnificum* (which differs primarily in its slightly later bloom time, more precocious indumentum formation, and narrower leaves) *protistum* may merge completely with *magnificum* in the wild.

Brenda Macdonald



Branch of *R. protistum*, cut down by local villagers for firewood and showing the typical bright red bud scales on the new growth, being held aloft by Glen Jamieson. Yunnan, China, 2005



R. protistum, photo by Sean Rafferty
RSF, March 2006