

The Yak

Newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society

Volume 21 Number 02
February 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, February 20, 2008

Speaker: Bill Bischoff

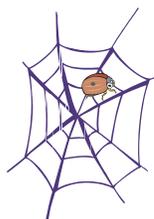
Topic: Cyclamens as Companion Plants

Plant Sales: Les Clay

2008 Officers

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Newsletter:	Brenda Macdonald	604-990-5353
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Quick Hits



Crawling 'Round the Web ...

From the North Island Rhododendron Society comes this note about BC Seeds:

BC farmers and gardeners now have a new seed-finding resource this growing season:

www.bcseeds.org.

This website is dedicated to helping BC gardeners source BC-grown seed. The website was started by the BC Seed Security Project, a small group of organic farmers dedicated to promoting the growing and use of BC-grown seed.

Buying BC-grown seed not only helps support small-scale farmers and seed growers, it also ensures gardeners and farmers are purchasing seed that is well-adapted to their growing climate. With rare and heritage varieties being a small-scale specialty, gardeners will have no trouble finding the seed they want from the large selection provided by BC growers.



From the President

Notes from the Chair

This year marks the twentieth year for the Fraser South Rhododendron Society. The original meeting was held in the home of Les and Bev Clay on November 18, 1988. Les and Bev are still very active members. Some others in the group of founding or very early members are still members also, or have been within the last couple of years. These include Pat and Dennis Dahl, Cliff and Phyllis Anderson, Mike Bale, and Don and Louise Martyn. We owe a debt to these early pioneers and to the many others who have contributed over the twenty years to make our chapter what it is. Perhaps a good goal for this anniversary year would be to recruit some new and enthusiastic members who are young enough to carry the chapter through its next twenty years.

When I first started thinking about writing this column I thought I would write about the early rhododendrons currently in bloom. In mid-January *R. ririei* and *R. sichotense* were beginning to show color and I thought that with a week or so of warm weather they would soon be out. But then followed two weeks of mostly below-zero weather with several snowstorms. Our garden is still covered with slushy snow as I write



R. ririei

this (February 1) and like the proverbial groundhog these rhododendrons have decided to duck under cover and wait a bit before coming out in full. So we will have to talk about the rhododendrons which would be blooming early in a normal year!

R. ririei is one of the earliest of what might be called conventional rhododendrons, i.e. those with a standard globular truss with a number of flowers. It makes a nice plant. Ours is about 6 feet high in 15 or so years. The leaves are moderate sized, maybe 10-15 cm by 4 or 5 cm, matte green on top and much lighter, almost white underneath. The flowers are an interesting plum purple. Some people don't like that color, but I have always thought it looked rather nice against the leaves. For us it usually shows significant color around the first of February, but doesn't reach peak bloom until early March. It

has been a bit shy about blooming, but I noticed this year that the south side of the plant, which gets four or five hours of direct sun, is covered with buds, whereas the north side has only a few. Maybe it needs more sun than it is getting.

Another very early blooming variety is *R. sichotense*. This is a fairly newly named Russian species native to eastern Siberia, so it should be as hardy as one can get. It is a much smaller plant that probably won't be more than a few feet tall. The leaves are elliptic 3-4 cm. long by 1-2 cm. wide. They are partially deciduous, though this year most have remained on the plant. Those that remain turn a really nice mahogany brown in the winter. The flowers are 1-3 clustered together, a nice rosy



R. sichotense



R. ledebourii



R. dauricum album



R. mucronulatum

pink. I have only had it for a couple of years and so don't have very good records, but I think it will be in full bloom by mid-February. It makes a real cheery addition to the garden at that time.

A very similar species is *R. ledebourii*. It is a native of western Siberia and Mongolia so again it should be perfectly hardy. Superficially the plant looks just like *sichotense*, only with somewhat smaller leaves and supposedly smaller flowers. It is showing color now as well and so I would expect it to also peak in mid-February sometime. What we used to call *R. dauricum sempervirens* or 'evergreen dauricum' is apparently now considered to be this *R. ledebourii*. Both *ledebourii* and *sichotense* are part of the *R. dauricum* complex, and some people consider them just subspecies of *R. dauricum*.

The 'regular' *dauricum*, which is more commonly found in gardens, is supposed to be more deciduous than the above two. It is also much more widespread, and can be found across southern Siberia, in Mongolia, northern China, and Japan. It is quite variable, and can have flowers ranging from pink to purple to white and blooming from very early to almost midseason. There are many named varieties. I had one, *R. dauricum* 'Nanum', which reliably bloomed - one or two flowers - on January 25. It usually lost all but a few leaves in the winter, however last winter did it in completely. Two white varieties, *R. dauricum album* and 'Arctic Pearl', a seedling of *dauricum album*, bloom in the first and third weeks of March in our garden. They are supposed to be partially deciduous, though they have kept most of their leaves this winter. The leaves remain green however, quite different from *ledebourii* and *sichotense*.

There is one other species in this same subsection, namely *R. mucronulatum*. For us this is not a particularly early blooming variety as the individuals we have usually don't reach peak bloom until the end of March. There are lots of varieties though and I think some bloom much earlier. Flowers can be a deep rose pink ranging to fairly pale pink, as in the cultivar 'Cornell Pink'. An important feature which distinguishes *R. mucronulatum* from the dauricums is that it is completely deciduous. This year even the ones we have in the greenhouse lost every single leaf. The flowers then come out before or with the leaves.



R. 'Olive'



R. 'Seattle Springtime'

Among the hybrids, 'Olive' has been the most reliable early bloomer for us, and one which is commonly available in local nurseries. It is a moderate sized plant with rosy pink flowers. In our gardens, both in Vancouver and in Abbotsford, it has always bloomed on Valentine's Day, about half the time, like last year, in the snow. We will see about this year. Other early hybrids, which usually get started in mid-February, are 'Tessa Bianca' and 'Seattle Springtime'. Both are white, and 'Seattle Springtime' is a prolific bloomer. However one degree of frost turns the petals brown, so does need a protected location.

By mid-February a lot of the species get started, and the bright reds of *R. strigillosum*, *R. barbatum*, and *R. smithii* start to show - often in the snow. Some varieties of *R. moupinense* start then too, and by the end of February many things are in bloom. But that is a subject for next month's column.

Harold Fearing



R. strigillosum



From the Editor

Last Month

Last month was our 20th Annual General Meeting, at which we elected new Executive members, ratified our Financial statement, tried out our new digital projector with short presentations from a number of members, and ate ourselves silly from the splendid assortment of desserts and snacks brought for the occasion. Kudos to everyone who participated, and especially to Harold Fearing (president-elect) on being the recipient of the 2008 Gerry Emerson Memorial Award:

Due to the exhaustive research and comparison shopping for the club's digital projector, he has ensured that we have received the best value for our money.

*Harold also has contributed greatly to plant sales and meeting with his extensive supply of *Rhododendron* species.*

He has generously opened his garden for tours to allow us to see an emerging collection of some very attractive and unique species.

In appreciation for all these things, we present the Gerry Emerson Award.

Thank you, Harold.

This Month:

Bill Bischoff and his wife Carla and two daughters were originally from Hamilton, Ontario, where he and his wife were avid gardeners (receiving several prizes from the City of Hamilton for their garden) as well as accomplished growers of both Cyclamens and Orchids. The family moved to Surrey some 20 years ago and maintained their horticultural interests. Bill notes:

“A former co-worker of Carla’s showed us some Cyclamen plants she had brought back to Canada when she had visited relatives in Austria. It must have been *Cyclamen purpurascens*. I knew this plant as “Alpen Veilchen”, “Alpine Violet”. What I did not know, was that it was not a Violet at all. Somehow the thought got lodged in my mind to grow them in our garden. Several years later, we had moved to BC and were members of the Alpine Garden Society in Vancouver and someone brought *Cyclamen purpurascens* corms to a meeting. These plants were from (then) Czechoslovakia. We bought several of them. There were no culture sheets with these plants, so I had to get some information from the library. I was a surprise to learn that they were distantly related to Primulas I can’t remember exactly how, but we became members of the Cyclamen Society in England and have remained members ever since - excellent newsletters and free seeds.

Our collection has so grown over the years that there is no part of our garden where there are no cyclamen plants. Some were planted deliberately, others self seeded. Of the 22 available species, we successfully grow and bloom 18 as out-door plants. We have many of the numerous leaf variants and are still getting more when and where they become available.

Hardy Cyclamen are unfortunately very much under-rated as companion plants for, especially, shady places. From full sun to deep shade, there is a species that will fill any spot in a garden. Flowers can be expected from mid-January until December, right up to Christmas. All species are winter evergreen, except *Cyclamen repandum* and *Cyclamen peloponnesiacum*. To the best of my knowledge, Cyclamen are deer safe, rabbit safe, etc. The rest I will tell you at your meeting.”

Next Month:

Next month there will be a presentation by our own (associate) member Garratt Richardson. Garratt’s home chapter is in Seattle, and he since 1989 has been travelling to China, India and Southeast Asia on plant hunting expeditions. His topic will be his latest visit to South Central Sichuan with Peter Cox and a number of others, in the spring of 2007.

The Business Stuff:

BONSAI WORKSHOP WITH ROGER LOW

There are still some spots available to participate in Roger Low's bonsai workshop, to be held Saturday, March 29th. This is a great opportunity to get some hands-on experience on the grooming and feeding of your very own developing treasure. Many of you may remember (or may even have participated in) Roger's extremely successful workshops at the Fall Conference we hosted in Harrison Hot Springs. A fee of \$35.00 will cover the cost of materials (including a plant) and a spot of lunch. Speak to Mary Berg if you would like to participate.

ELECTED SLATE OF CHAPTER OFFICERS FOR 2008

Please see the first page of the newsletter for the names and telephone numbers of our newly elected members of the executive committee, as well as those of the incumbent executives and various program chairpersons. **ARS**

SPRING CONFERENCE - TULSA, OKLAHOMA: APRIL 16 TO 20, 2008

Ron Knight, District 1 Director, sends the following information about the upcoming ARS Spring Conference:

- The conference schedule, fees, and registration forms are now posted at: www.rhododendron.org
- A discount for early registration is available until March 1.
- The format is unlike any ARS conferences that have been held in BC. Rather, it is exactly the same as last spring's ARS conference in San Francisco. That is, the program consists solely of full-day garden bus tours, plus evening banquets with keynote speakers and entertainment. Delegates pay "a la carte" for each activity.
- The conference rate at the Doubletree Hotel (in a business park in southern Tulsa) is \$96 per night which, according to my travel agent, is unbeatable. That rate is available until April 1.
- There are no direct flights to Tulsa from anywhere on the West Coast. Delta Airlines will get you there from Vancouver, via Salt Lake City with a minimum cost of about \$480 and a total flight time of between 8 and 11 hours (Watch the return flights; many involve 2 stops and 11 hours of travel time.) United Airlines has several daily flights to Tulsa out of Seattle, with one short stop in Denver. The lowest cost (as of December 2007) is \$280 which includes all taxes and fees. The total flight time, including the stopover, is just over 4 hours. (This means it takes less time to drive to Seattle and fly to Tulsa with United than it does to take flights from Vancouver to Tulsa. The \$280 cost is cheaper than the internet booking rate on www.united.com. It can be obtained by calling April Moody at Lake Union Travel in Seattle (1-206-343-7000). She can handle everything by phone or email.
- There are still a few hotels/motels near SeaTac Airport priced under \$90, that offer continental breakfast, free airport shuttle service, and free parking while you're in Tulsa if you stay with them for one night: eg. Travelodge (206-242-1777); Valu Inn SeaTac (206-878-8427); or perhaps a better choice: South Seattle Family Inn (1-800-684-2932 or www.seattlebedandbreakfast.com)



GARDEN TOUR

The weather having been incredibly inclement, the proposed garden tour of this month's speaker Bill Bischoff's garden had to be postponed - a blanket of white, although very attractive, was not the reason we were going out for a viewing.



The good news is that it was postponed until Sunday, February 17th, at 1:00 pm, so we will all get a second chance. Please see the final page of the newsletter for the full address and directions.

Brenda MacDonald



Up the Garden Path



Chelsea Garden Show

There's a movie out right now called "The Bucket List". As I understand the plot, it's about two men who decide to do all the things in life they'd wanted to do before they 'kick the bucket'. High on my bucket list was to attend the Chelsea Flower Show, and last May, I finally went. It's everything I'd hoped for and more.

The tickets were expensive, but definitely worth it - after all, it was a full day's entertainment. The crowds were amazing, but everyone was good-natured, and I found that

in the late afternoon, the crowds thinned out, so it was a good time to have a better look at some of the displays. One of the things that I enjoyed was a large amphitheatre where a variety of entertainment was offered all day. Nearby there were also lots of good food choices, so when tired, it made a nice place to rest and refuel.

There's tons of stuff to buy, but since I only had one suitcase that was already full, extra spending wasn't much of an issue for me. I did see a very nice metal sculpture that would have been very tempting if not for the transportation problem (and the price). The day I attended was hot and sunny, but two days earlier, it had been pouring rain, so if you go, be prepared for any kind of weather. And, of course, the plants and landscape garden designs were fabulous.

The #1 award winning design last year (gold, best show garden) was an interpretation of what a garden might look like on Mars. The "rocks" used (really pressed concrete) were a deep reddish colour, and the plants chosen were "tough", able to withstand heat, drought and wind. Personally, I found it a bit too stark, but then, I always want to see lots of plants and I prefer a softer, more woody type of garden. I do realize that part of the show's goal is to stretch our imaginations about gardening, so a display like this one was eminently suitable. However, I think the average attendee



Chelsea Gold Winner - Bradstone

shares my taste as the display voted most popular by the public was designed by the staff from Hidcote Garden to represent one of their "garden rooms". It was filled with lots of colourful flowering plants, and much more traditional in design.

My favourite large show garden was the one sponsored by Fortnum and Mason



Chelsea - Hidcote Garden

which had the look of an old estate walled garden, complete with beehives. It had beds of perennials with a border of pleached trees set alongside brick walls, and a central sward of grass leading up the middle of the garden.

Another show garden very much to my taste was entitled “A Tribute to Linnaeus”. Its inspiration was that of a garden that might typically be found in the Swedish countryside. It featured lots of small trees, some shrubs and a very lovely stream. The stream was designed to flow over carefully placed cobblestones so the rocks shone in the sunlight and a charming footbridge led over the cobblestone stream. This garden also made good use of vertical accents by including lovely birches and some crabapple trees among the beds of perennials.

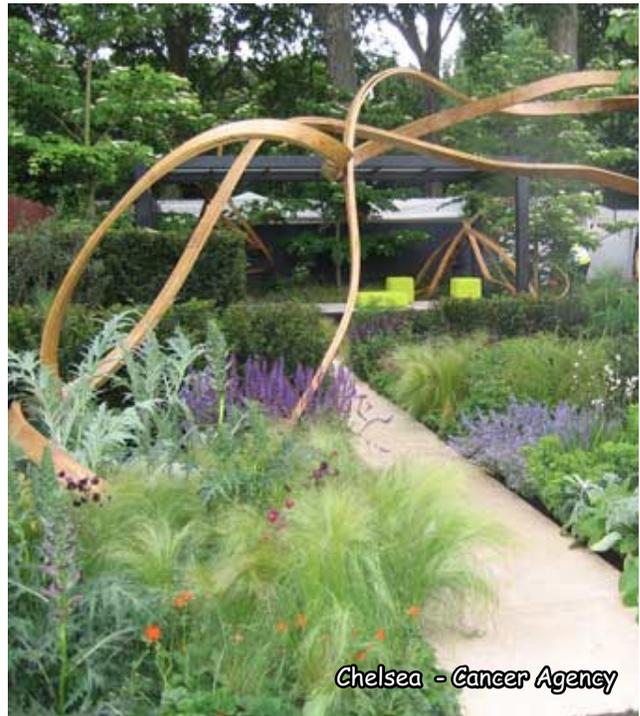


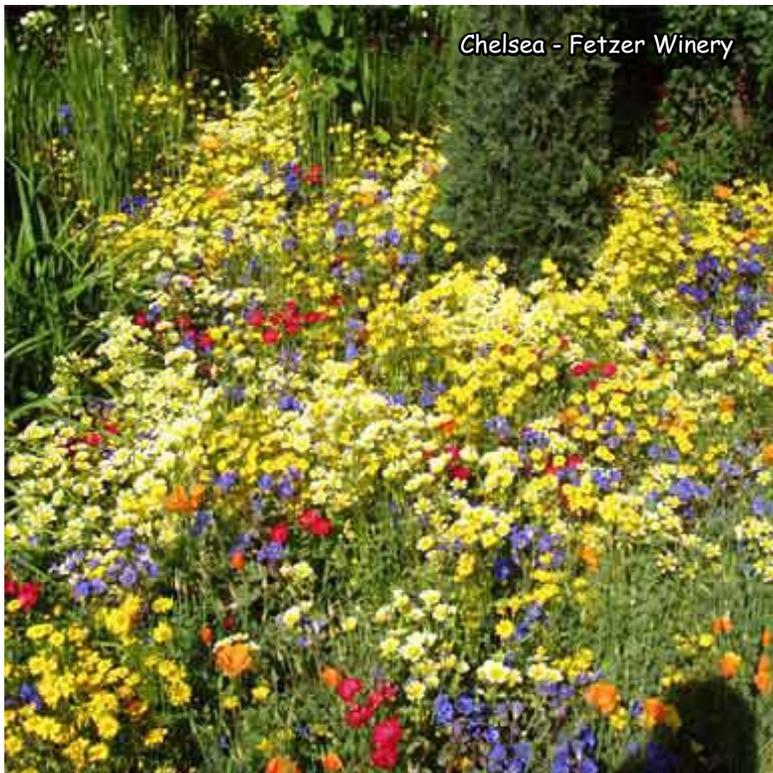
The Cancer Agency garden was also very appealing because of the feeling of movement created partially by the use of a flowing oaken sculpture that threaded its way around the garden. The sculpture reminded me of strands of DNA as it twisted in a somewhat helical fashion. Flowing movement was reinforced by the use of a lot of Stipa and Fennel, whose soft, silky foliage would blow with every breeze. As well, I liked the dense plantings in this garden.

Chelsea also features many small garden displays,

perhaps offering more realistic inspirations to those of us who are gardening in increasingly smaller areas. One of my favourites was The Fetzer garden, sponsored by the Fetzer Winery of California. This little gem was planted with California wildflowers and it looked just like the hillsides outside of San Francisco in early spring, with Linum, Phacelia and Limnanthes all in bloom to give the impression of a wild meadow.

It was lots of fun looking at all the Show Gardens, but even better were the dedicated displays from the specialty growers. The first thing that comes to mind were the sweet pea displays. Depending on the grower, each bouquet had 12 to 24 absolutely perfect stems, arranged so that every single bloom could be seen. Then, there were the roses, the orchids, the wildflowers, the insectivorous plants,





the gingers, tulips, Cacti and ... well, you get the picture. If you lived in Great Britain, it would have been difficult resisting the catalogues. Fortunately, for my pocketbook, I couldn't order anything.

While I didn't buy any plants, lots of other people did, especially as the show closed. On Saturday evening, I was on the Picadilly train line shortly after Chelsea closed, and I saw lots of people carrying home treasures they'd bought as the displays were being dismantled. I saw several large, blooming Cymbidiums and some Cycads being carted home in shopping bags and hoisted on people's shoulders on the tube.

One unexpected, but very interesting discovery, was that the BBC runs a nightly, two-hour broadcast all about Chelsea during show week. The commentators get into each show garden for close ups of plants and materials. They interview the garden designers and installers, so you got a more detailed understanding of the design goals for each

display. As well, the specialty growers were highlighted, and the programs showed many of their home nurseries and greenhouses, as well as how their show exhibits were prepared. I just love the idea that there is enough interest in Chelsea to warrant running a special program devoted to gardens and gardening on national television every night for a week.

Well, it's nice to have finally attended the Chelsea Flower Show. But it was so much fun, I've kept it on my "bucket list" because I want to go back and do it all over again. If you haven't been and you get the chance, make sure you go! You'll be glad you did.

Norma Senn



R. 'Olive'



R. mucronulatum

What's in Bloom?



Nothing

R. 'Cowslip', *pachysanthum*, *kiusianum*, et al

North Vancouver/ 29JAN2008

photo: Sean Rafferty



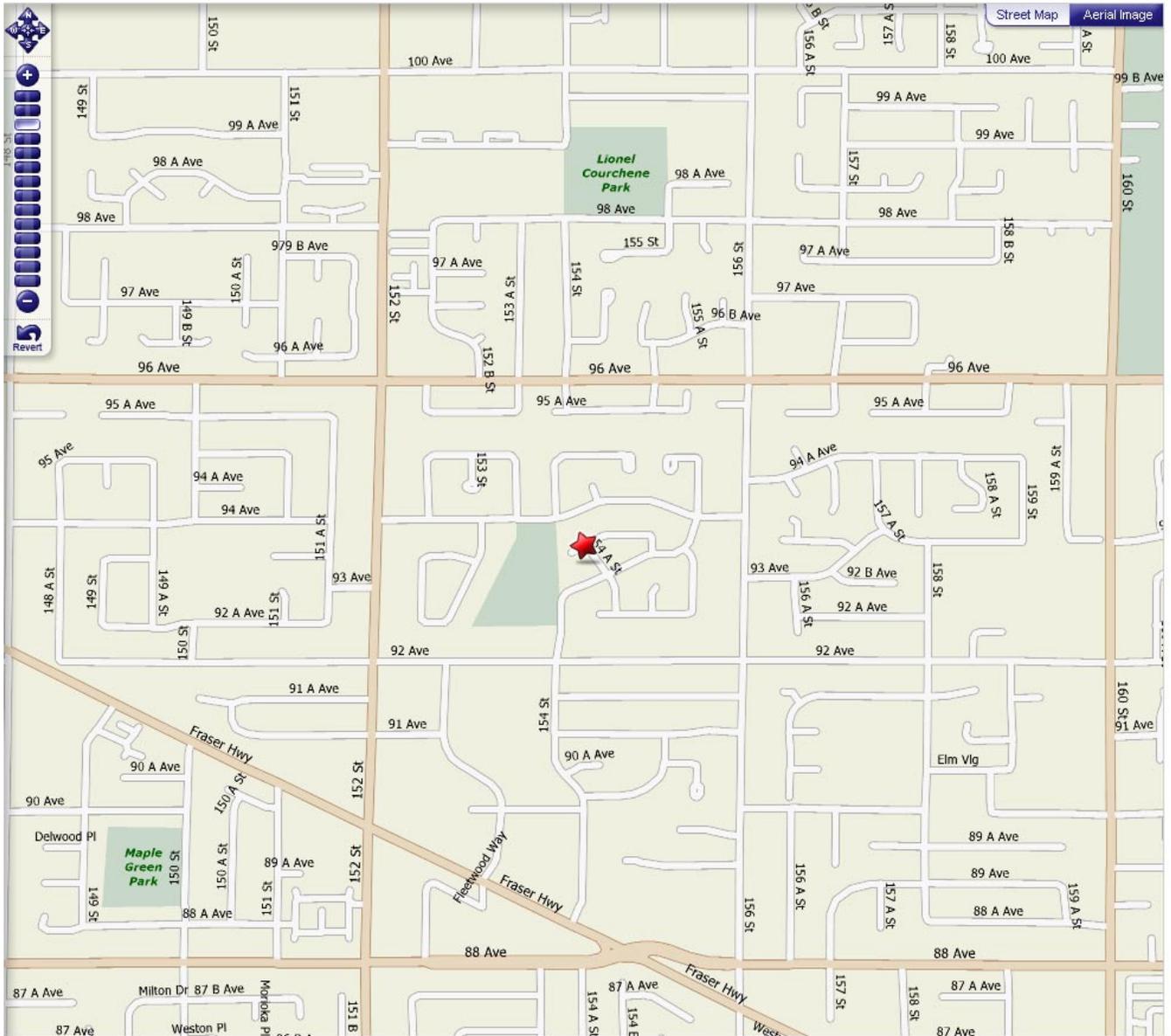
R. 'Little Bo Peep'

type: vireya

cross: *R. macgregoriae* x *annagalliflorum*

This diminutive beauty grows in a tall, narrow, well-draining pot on a north-facing windowsill. Although purchased as 'Little Bo Peep', every publication available describes something exactly as above, except the small bells are white with a pinkish throat. Nevertheless, whatever this is, it is charming, with tiny green leaves and slightly hairy stems, and a blossom that lasts forever. North Vancouver/ 12JAN08

photo: Sean Rafferty



15430 - 93A AVE, SURREY

Here is a map of the location of the Bill Bischoff's house, site of the Cyclamen garden tour he has so generously rescheduled for **SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2008, AT 1:00 PM.**