

# The Yak

Newsletter of  
the Fraser South  
Rhododendron  
Society

Volume 21 Number 01  
January 2008



[www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth](http://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: Wednesday, January 16, 2008

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

FOR OUR 20TH YEAR AS  
FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

IN ADDITION TO OUR  
SIXTH ANNUAL DESSERT EXTRAVAGANZA

### 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 Bojczuk	
	3 <sup>rd</sup> yr	
	Sean Rafferty	604-990-5353
	2 <sup>nd</sup> yr	
	Larry Morton	604-888-6564
	1 <sup>st</sup> yr	
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

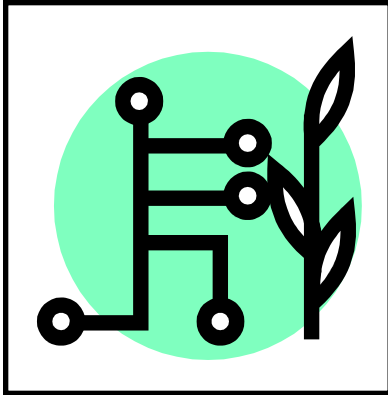


### Christmas is coming over, and ...

Boxing Day Sales have nothing on the FSRs, which this year again offers you their own version of the Two for One deal: the opportunity to participate in a democratic process AND thumb your nose at the usual post-Christmas diet frenzy.

Come and join us as we elect this year's Chapter officers and ratify our yearly financial statements. Other much more fun activities, too marvelous to mention here, are planned, and will be available to all attendees who manifest the secret Fraser South Rhodo Society handshake, or otherwise demonstrate an appropriate level of club zealotry.





From the President

## Notes from the Chair

There is about three inches of snow on the ground as I write this, and the garden is fully in the grasp of old man winter. It has been a rather benign winter here thus far with the lowest temperature of only 20 degrees F and no trees blown over. I say this with crossed fingers realizing that winter is not quite half over.

With the cool weather in December and several light snowfalls, spring seems a long way off. However, given a couple weeks of slightly warmer weather the Hellebores will be in bloom with *R. dauricum* soon to follow. Then the flood of early blooming species begins with the occasional halts caused by freezing temperatures. I will then be wondering where winter has gone as I haven't got any of my winter projects done, such as extensive pruning on a number of large cedars, mulching and the putting in of a new trail.



Thirty years ago Epimediums were rarely seen in North American gardens. Since then, their popularity has increased greatly. In a large part, this is due to the introduction of many new species and cultivars from China. There are now over eighty species identified, with ninety percent of them identified in the last thirty years. Undoubtedly many more species will be found in the mountains and valleys of China. Further hybridizing will also result in many new cultivars. The actual number of cultivars now exceeds one thousand.

Although, they were originally thought of as shade plants that could tolerate dryness, they are now considered very adaptable, and will grow in most areas in the garden as long as the location is not both dry and exposed to full sun. Epimediums will do their best in dappled or light shade with a rich, moist, well-drained soil. They are tough, long-lived perennials that require little maintenance. Almost all of them are hardy in the Northwest. They can be given a balanced fertilizer in the spring, and a few species will also benefit from an application of lime at the same time. Epimediums should be cut back to the ground in early spring before the tender flowering stems arise.

The flowers of Epimediums consist of two sets of four sepals and one set of four petals. The outer set of sepals are much like bud scales and drop as the flowers emerge. The main floral interest in the flower can be from the sepals or the petals, depending on the particular species or hybrid. In some plants the sepals are greatly expanded, with relatively insignificant petals, and in others the sepals are much reduced and the petals are significantly larger and often spurred. The sepals and petals are usually of different colors - this differentiation and the inherently wide range of colors result in almost endless combinations. Individual flowers are half an inch to two inches in diameter. They are carried on racemes rising several inches or more above the foliage.



*E. davidii*

The foliage on Epimediums can be either evergreen or deciduous and is round, heart, or lance shaped and carried on tough wiry stems. The leaves can be rimmed with red, brown or purple margins, or mottled in yellow, bronze, red, or brown colors, resulting in the most interesting foliage.

*Epimedium davidii* is one of our favorites, with its large yellow petals, which are spurred, and smaller red sepals. The foliage is evergreen, with mottled new foliage. This is one species



*E. davidii*



*E. x rubrum*

that will benefit from an application of lime in the spring. Another favorite is *E. x rubrum*, whose new foliage, rimmed in red, emphasizes the red flowers dancing above. *E. grandiflorum* varies from six inches in height to almost three feet. The flower colors vary from



*E. x rubrum*

white, yellow, rose red, purple-red to purple. There are more than fifty named cultivars for this species. Our cultivar is *E. grandiflorum* 'White Queen', which has large white petals backed by small red sepals. Another favorite, and new



*E. grandiflorum* 'White Queen'.

introduction is *E. acuminatum*. The clone we have has lance-shaped leaves up to 6 inches long, mottled in a striking red-brown color that changes to pink and then to green. It blooms throughout the summer, with large flowers of white inner sepals and purple petals.

Epimediums have a number of common names. One is Fairy Wings, named for the dainty flowers dancing in the breeze above the foliage. They are also called Barrenwort for their supposed ability to reduce fertility in women. But the most intriguing common name is Horny Goat Weed. Legend has it that long ago

in China, a goat herder noticed greatly increased sexual activity in his goat flock after they consumed the plant. Today it is one of the important herbal products consumed in China. Maybe this



*E. acuminatum*

is why their population is one and a half billion, although it seems tricky to reconcile the two seemingly opposing functions captured by the common names Barrenwort and Horny Goat Weed. It is also supposed benefit the liver, kidneys and counter the effects of old age. Like most herbal medicines, no scientific tests have been done on it, so



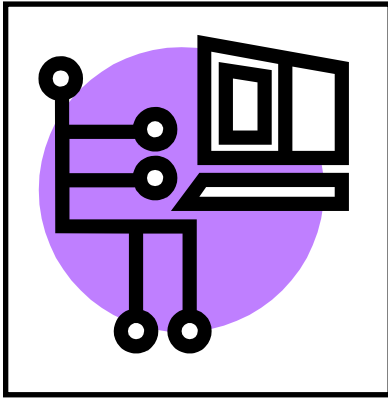
*E. acuminatum*

I wouldn't throw out your Viagra yet. In China it is harvested in the wild, resulting in the endangerment of several species. I will have some liquid concentrations and leaves for you at the next meeting, if I can get them across the border. Actually all I am going to do is change some name tags - it is a rather striking name.



It has been an honor and privilege to be your president the past two years. I would like to thank all members for the help and support that they have given me. At our January meeting I will be handing the gavel over to Harold Fearing. I trust that you will give him the same help and support that I received .

*Dalen Bayes*



From the Editor

## Last Month

Last month we had our usual wonderfully successful Christmas Potluck Dinner. Thanks to everyone who attended and special thanks to Les and Bev Clay for cooking the turkey, Colleen Bojczuk for organizing the "Guess the Name of the Rhododendron Pinned on Your Back Using only Questions that Can Be Answered with Either Yes or No" game, Chief Catering Organizer Karen Linton, Santa Dalen, and of course all the little elves who did the dishes, put the food out, cleared the food away, and generally, in an un-sung hero sort of way, managed to make the evening so remarkably enjoyable.

## This Month:

This month is our Annual General Meeting. This is the time when we ratify the annual fiscal report and the slate of Chapter officers for the upcoming year, and share in the celebration of special awards for special people. It is also the time when we attempt to banish thoughts of the inevitable rain, wind snow, and the fact the earliest rhodos are not going to be out for at least a few more weeks by immersing ourselves in cups of hot tea and all the wonderful desserts brought for sharing. It is also the time when all Chapter members are invited to bring along a few pictures to show: favourite rhodos, gardens visited, horticultural projects started or completed, vacation trips enjoyed. Nothing fancy, nothing lengthy, just a few images to share with friends. We will have the slide projector set up of course, but this time we will also have our new digital projector ready to go. So bring in a few slides (10 - 15 are just fine), or a few digital images. You can bring the digital images in your own laptop, or load them onto a CD or memory stick. As long as they were created using one of the more common software programs we can probably find some way of displaying them.

## Next Month:

*Cyclamens* is the topic of the program Bill Bischoff will be presenting at our February meeting. In addition, Bill has generously invited us for a garden visit to his home. This is a wonderful opportunity to see many cyclamens in bloom, purchase a few if you would like to, and perhaps even get a glimpse at the fantastic orchid collection his wife maintains. Further information about date and location will be forthcoming, but speak to Sean Rafferty if you are interested.

## The Business Stuff:

### **BONSAI WORKSHOP WITH ROGER LOW**

Roger Low has generously agreed to mentor a bonsai workshop, to be held Saturday, March 29<sup>th</sup>. 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.

### **PROPOSED SLATE OF CHAPTER OFFICERS FOR 2008**

The final placement in all positions has not yet been confirmed, but at least we have enough bodies to fill the empty chairs. And finding enough bodies to fill the empty chairs was pretty touch and go right up until the last minute. It is clear that we need to get more members involved in the club business - we cannot expect the same small band of warriors to soldier on indefinitely. Please consider lending your support to the club, either as an executive officer, or in one of the volunteer positions such as the "Kitchen Cadre Chief", or "Glad-Hander and Name Tag Purveyor". Maybe a Rhododendron Club is a bit like a shark, we either keep moving forward or we will just slowly sink into the depths, never to be heard of again.

### **PROPOSED SLATE OF TEA ROOM MINIONS FOR 2008**

Please see the next page for the listing, as well as we were able to decipher it. There seems to be some confusion about who signed up to help with Mary Berg at the February meeting. Please let Mary know who you are, Mystery Person!

*Brenda Macdonald*

**PROPOSED SLATE OF OFFICERS FOR 2008:**

President - Harold Fearing  
 Vice-President -  
 Secretary - Mary Berg (incumbent)  
 Treasurer - Alan March (incumbent)  
 Director (3rd year) - Sean Rafferty (incumbent)  
 Director (2nd year) - Larry Morton (incumbent)  
 Director (1st year) -  
 Chapter members Lori Bayes and Arlene Darby have agreed to allow their names to stand for election to the positions of Director (1st year) and Vice-President.

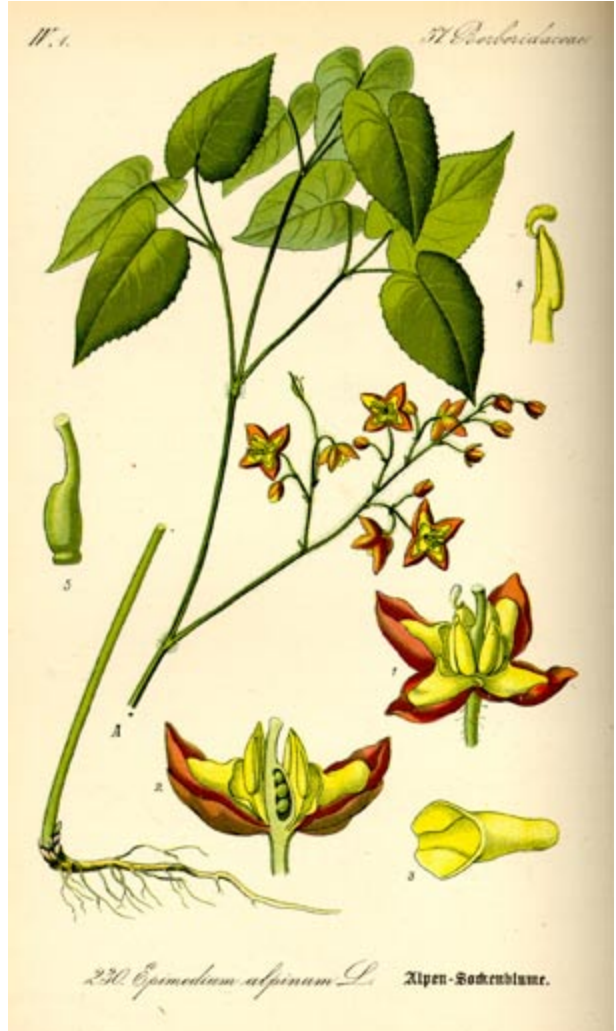


Programme - Les Clay  
 Membership - Wenonah March  
 Newsletter - Brenda Macdonald  
 Website - Chris Klapwijk



**TEA ROOM ROSTER FOR 2008:**

January - Brenda Macdonald  
 - Sean Rafferty  
 February - Somebody Illegible  
 - Mary Berg  
 March - Norma Senn  
 - Nancy Moore  
 April - Vern & Sue Finley  
 - Dixie & Marge Mueller  
 May - Dalen Bayes  
 - Mike Bale  
 June - (Picnic)  
 September - Arlene Darby  
 - Barb St. Hilaire  
 October - Colleen Bojczuk  
 - Ginny Fearing  
 November - Joan McGiveron  
 - Joan Bengough  
 December - (Christmas Potluck)



*Epimedium alpinum*  
 one of the parents of *Epimedium x rubrum*  
 Illustration from  
 Prof. Dr. Otto Wilhelm Thomé Flora von Deutschland,  
 Österreich und der Schweiz, 1885



I was lucky enough to visit some lovely gardens around Lake Maggiore in the Italian Piedmont area last spring. The climate is such that there is a curious mix of sub-tropical and temperate plant material all growing together. It was delightful to walk along the lake front in Stresa, Italy, and see climbing roses trained up palm tree trunks.

Lake Maggiore is huge, extending from Switzerland into Italy. As you might expect, the



background scenery consists of forested mountains with lots of European chestnuts, beeches and oaks, as well as lovely conifers. Local homes all along the Lake have such highly decorative plantings of everything from geraniums to roses to bougainvilleas to jasmines to gardenias, that a walk anywhere is interesting. However, there are several fabulous gardens in the area that were the real reason I visited.

The gardens and villa on Isola Bella were constructed between 1650 and 1671. The Borromeo family, wealthy bankers and rivals to the Medici in power and influence, developed the island. One story I read said that the villa was built on the island at the request

## Up the Garden Path



### Italian Gardens

of the Borromeo women who wanted a home where they wouldn't have to hear the screams of the prisoners being tortured in the family dungeon in nearby Stresa. Whatever the reason, soil was shipped to the originally rocky island to create the gardens.

The property is 320 meters long and 400 meters wide and the gardens are organized in a series of



terraces. As you might expect given the date and place of construction, these are quintessentially Italianate in design; laid out in a formal, geometric pattern with fountains and statuary serving as focal points. Good use is made of variegated foliage with lots of formal bedding-out patterns. The feeling of the whole island is that it is a massive ship whose prow is festooned with flowers of



reds, pinks and whites. White peacocks found throughout the garden add a noisy, exotic touch too.

Upon arriving at the island, the ferry docks in a small market place, with shops and lots of restaurants - great food, especially the lake trout! Visitors enter the garden through the old villa. You can take a tour of the villa and hear all about the paintings and tapestries, but hey, there are 10 terraces of gardens waiting!



Typical temperate/  
sub-tropical planting

Plant material includes lemons and oranges, sago palms, southern magnolias, camellias and cork oaks, as well as lots of roses and herbs. There are large areas of emerald green lawns, all very well-manicured. Good, flat, walking paths lead through the garden, but there are also lots of stairs to climb. For anyone interested in arboricultural repair work, there was lots to see. A tornado went through the area a couple of years ago, and the damage it caused, plus the great age of many trees meant that there are splints, and bracing cables among the branches, tree cavities filled with cement and even sprinkler systems installed in the tops of some tree canopies, all to help damaged plants recover.

A second island garden is located on Isola Madre,



Isola Madre

accessed by the same local ferry. This island garden covers 8 ha and was started as a garden in the 18<sup>th</sup> century after having been first used for growing olives and then citrus. Remnants of the old orchards can still be found around the island. The current garden is based on what most of us would term an English landscape design with meandering pathways that lead through informal, woodland plantings of trees and shrubs. Again, there is a wonderful mix of sub-tropical plants with much hardier, temperate zone plants. When I was there the fabulous, very old, wisterias were in full bloom.

Just beyond Isola Madre and on the same ferry route, is the 16 ha estate Villa Taranto, technically located in Verbania, Italy. While built on an old estate, this is a very recent garden, having been started by Captain Neil McEacharn in 1931. The Captain's goal was to create a botanical and display garden, and he wanted to grow as many species as possible. There is an estimated 20,000 species currently in cultivation at the garden.



Villa Taranto

When I was there, the tulips had just finished and were being lifted. Extensive plantings of annuals are used for massed summer colour. A large conservatory houses a tropical plant collection including a famous collection of Amazon lilies. Extensive summer displays of dahlias look like they would be spectacular, although not until later in the summer. Areas of the Taranto gardens have informal, woodland plantings: lots of maples, rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias and dogwoods can be found. There is a large collection of lotus and water

lilies growing in ponds throughout the property. As well, there is an impressive set of formal terraces with waterfalls



Villa Taranto

spilling down the center of the terraces – these nice, cooling sprays of water help on a hot day.

The fourth garden in the Stresa area is a new one, and instead of reaching it by ferry, this one requires



Giardino Botanico Alpina

a cable car ride. This is truly an alpine garden (it really is in the Alps, and up the mountain side). Alpine plants from around the world have been planted by geographic region. Nice, albeit still small, specimens of rhododendrons, wildflowers and conifers are organized into tidy beds, and they are all well-labeled. I was

very pleased to see several specimens of *Rhododendron ferrugineum* in bloom. This is the species native to Europe, commonly known as the Alpine Rose of



Switzerland. I think this garden will become a tiny jewel, well-worth revisiting in a few years.

For anyone thinking about a trip to northern Italy, the food was delicious, the trains were excellent



Giardino Botanico Alpina

and the people and scenery were lovely. The gardens are well worth the trip. I'd happily go back and I hope to eventually get to see the equally famous gardens of Lake Como.  
Norma Senn



Three *R. ferrugineum* hybrids: *R. 'Puncta'*, *R. 'Tottenham'*, and *R. 'Intermedium'*





# Rhododendrons of China



*R. fulvum*  
illustration by Lilian Snelling  
Curtis' Botanical Magazine, 1938



## Rhododendron fulvum

*R. fulvum* is a member of the two-species Subsection Fulva, which it shares with *R. uvarifolium*. Widespread in its native habitat in southern Sichuan, western Yunnan, and south-eastern Tibet, *R. fulvum* exhibits great variation in colour of both flower and indumentum.

The flower colour ranges from white to deep pink, usually with a crimson basal blotch and striping on the outside of the corolla to a greater or lesser degree.

The indumentum is one of its most notable characteristics, having a dense and suede-like but peculiarly granular texture. The colour varies from pale fawn through cinnamon to rich red brown.

Although dependably hardy, *R. fulvum* is one of those rhododendrons with a marked response to cold weather, curling its leaves under to such an extent that the plant begins to resemble an outdoor drying rack for unripe cigars.

A large shrub or small tree (to 40' in cultivation) *fulvum* was collected many times, starting with Forrest (1912) then Farrer, Rock, and Yu. Although the leaf size can vary considerably and at their largest reach only 10", the shiny, dark green tops and richly coloured plush indumentum make this a

spectacular foliage plant.

In addition, *R. fulvum* is generally a free-flowering species that is fairly precocious when grown from seed, producing an abundance of inflorescences of 8 - 20 campanulate flowers up to 2" long, on a schedule designed to accommodate you rather than your grandchildren. The blossoms appear in March through April and can sometimes be nipped by a late frost, but any damage is usually minimal and not permanent.

Interestingly enough, there is not a single *R. fulvum* hybrid documented in Salley and Greer's "Rhododendron Hybrids".

*Brenda Macdonald*



*R. fulvum*  
photo by Sean Rafferty  
RSF, March 2006