

The Yak

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, March 19, 2008
Speaker: Garratt Richardson
Topic: Back Roads of South Central
Sichuan - Spring, 2007
Plant Sales: Doreen Badminton

2008 Officers

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Quick Hits



Things are starting to get complicated

Keep yourself on sched with the
calendar outlining upcoming
events for our area. See page 3.



And another organizational tool

Keep yourself connected with the
2008 Membership listing. See
page 11.



From the President

Notes from the Chair

One of the perks of belonging to a club such as Fraser South is the opportunity to take a look at some fine private gardens. We had such a chance last month with a tour, arranged by Sean Rafferty, of Bill and Carla Bischoff's garden. The garden was not large, just a city lot, but every crack and cranny was filled with precious plants. A number of the cyclamen were in bloom, scattered among the rocks and under some very nice rhododendrons. Inside, in a solarium, we saw a large collection of orchids, many in bloom. Those of you who attended the February meeting, heard Bill talk about cyclamen, obviously a tremendous passion of his. It was a very interesting talk. I didn't realize that there were so many varieties of cyclamen, or so many different interesting leaf shapes and patterns.

I heard another very good program recently, given at our sister chapter, Peace Arch, by one of our members, Garth Wedemire. There were several sections - a couple dealing with the study days of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, complete with pictures of many of our members who participated. Another section I found particularly interesting, however, dealt with several web sites crammed with rhododendron information. Garth talked about the American Rhododendron Society site (<http://www.rhododendron.org>), the Rhododendron Species Foundation site (<http://www.rhodygarden.org>), and the ARS District 1 site (<http://www.rhodos.ca>), and showed us some of the wealth of information available on those sites.

On the web, one can start closer to home with our own Fraser South site (<http://www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth>). Chris Klapwijk maintains this, and has done a tremendous job in making an attractive and informative site. One can find past and present issues of *The Yak*, which look a lot better in color on the screen than in black and white, a complete calendar of chapter activities, and links to many other rhodo sites. There are also informative articles on rhodo culture and modern ideas of classification, and a very nice gallery of rhodo pictures, some from Mike Trembath's collection, but many taken by Chris. A neat feature of the gallery makes it possible to search among the pictures to select those which meet certain criteria, e.g. type, bloom date, color, size, etc. This site is well worth a visit.

When I wrote last month we had had a stretch of cold weather and some of the earliest rhodos were just getting started, *R. dauricum*, *ledebourii*, *sichotense*, *ririei*. As I write this (March 3) these have all peaked, as has a *moupinense*, which I didn't realize was so close to bloom.

Some of the next rhodos to come into bloom, and some of my favorites, are the members of the Subsection Barbata. The nicest of these is called (surprise!) *R. barbatum*. It is in bloom now, with brilliant, deep red flowers against dark, matte green leaves. The leaves are moderately large, up to 25 x 8 cm. with bristly petioles, and usually do not have any indumentum. The leaf buds are sharp pointed and often sticky. The plant grows treelike, normally losing most of its lower leaves and exposing the trunk, which is a plus, as the older trunks become smooth with an attractive plum color. It comes from India, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet.

The classification of the other members of this subsection is a bit confused - apparently characteristics intergrade across the range - and has changed in recent years. I have an older version of *R. smithii* and one of *R. imberbe* which I can't distinguish from *R. barbatum*. In fact *imberbe* is now considered the same as *barbatum*. Newer



R. barbatum



R. barbatum (formerly *R. imberbe*)

introductions of *smithii* have a sparse indumentum on the lower surface, and have been renamed *R. argipeplum*, while the old *R. argipeplum* has been renamed *R. erosum*. Confusing isn't it! From a practical point of view though, *barbatum*, *smithii*, *imberbe*, and *argipeplum* are essentially the same, and are all beautiful plants. Everyone should have at least one in their garden!

R. erosum, and another member of the Barbata subsection, *R. exasperatum*, are significantly different. They have the bristly leaf petioles of *barbatum*, but the leaves are much rounder, up to 20 x 10 cm. *R. exasperatum* has lighter green leaves with very short petioles so the leaves look squeezed against



R. erosum

the main stem, producing an attractive effect. *R. erosum* is supposed to have plum purple new growth. The flowers of both of these are supposed to be red or pink, though I have only juvenile plants so don't know this from personal experience.

Another plant, which may be part of this subsection was collected by Peter Wharton on one of his expeditions as *R. sp. Barbata*, PW#35. I have



R. sp. Barbata

several individuals which have bloomed consistently now for several years. The plant looks quite different from the other members of the subsection. The leaves are smaller and narrower, usually somewhat yellowish, maybe chlorotic. The plant spreads wider than tall, 1 m. wide x 50 cm. tall in my largest plant. The flowers however look much like *barbatum*. I have never been successful in keying it out to a result that I believe. Anyone else have any luck? I would be interested in hearing.



R. exasperatum

Next month, many things will be in bloom, and it will be a lot harder to choose favorites. So many riches! Happy gardening!

Harold Fearing



From the Editor

Last Month

Last month we enjoyed a fascinating exposition on gardening, the history of Europe and the Middle East, the derivation of name Bosphorus (think Oxford), and all things cyclamen by Bill Bischoff. For the first time I was able to get my head around how many different species there actually were (relatively few), their history and current locations (very ancient, and mostly in Europe and the Middle East) and uses in the garden (myriad, and underused). Bill has a true passion and a wealth of knowledge he so generously shared with us, and many of us went home with some new plants, some relevant handouts, and a determination to add these beauties to our landscape.

This Month:

This month's speaker, Garratt Richardson writes: "In May of 2007, Peter Cox organized a plant-hunting trip to the southern part of Sichuan province in central-west China. The high mountains in the western part of the province have only partially been explored over the past 150 years. It was an epic trip.

We visited some of the new national parks, but also drove over back country roads, encountering waterfalls, gorges, and old and new sites of environmental destruction. Many rhododendrons were in bloom as well as a number of other high-altitude perennials and shrubs. We were able to visit out-of-the-way cities and villages; visiting the markets, suffering the roadblocks, dining on wonderful local cooking, and enjoying the camaraderie of the local ethnic people as well as our own team members."

Biography of Garratt Richardson

"I am a retired physician and strictly amateur rhododendron person, whose travels in China date back to 1989. There is excitement in discovering new and different areas in mountainous regions of southern and eastern Asia that are rich and diverse in plant life. The cultural differences found in remote villages and towns are fascinating, and there is the thrill of being present when the real plant-hunters discover new species and forms of plants, especially rhododendrons."

Next Month:

To be announced.

It is with sincere regret that we advise our members of the passing of Rosemary Burnham on Thursday, February 14, 2008.

Although not a member of our Chapter, Rosemary was an avid alpine and rhododendron plantswoman, and a member of the Vancouver Chapter.

Many members will remember her from her participation in the September, 2006, Conference at Harrison, where she sold her exquisite botanical paintings; and some of us remember her from her eager participation in the trip to China with Steve Hootman which took place earlier in that year.

Rosemary was a free spirit as well as a talented artist, and displayed an enthusiasm for life and delight in all her surroundings that was a profound inspiration to all who knew her.

Her talent and her presence will be sorely missed.

The Business Stuff:

THE CALENDAR

Saturday, March 29	Bonsai Workshop with Roger Low at Aldergrove Nursery at 28080 Fraser Highway, Abbotsford. 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Register with Mary Berg.
Saturday, April 5	Peace Arch Chapter - 14th Annual Plant Sale and Flower Show Elgin Hall, 14250 Crescent Rd., (Crescent Rd. at 142A St.) Surrey, B.C., 9 am - 3 pm
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

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED

☀ Tea Duties for March fall to Norma Senn and Nancy Moore. Vern and Sue Finley, and Dixie and Marge Mueller should be waiting in the wings for April.

☀ As noted above, our own Plant Sale is fast approaching. This year will present a change as we will be holding our plant sale in conjunction with the Langley United Church whose basement we so gratefully occupy each third Wednesday of the month. We are expecting that the increased exposure and publicity will make for a busy and successful Plant Sale, so helpers will be needed all around. A sign-up sheet will be sent round at this month's meeting on which you can volunteer for a couple of hours duty setting up, or taking down, or as a cashier, or as a general dogsbody and rhodo information source for prospective buyers. Don't forget - many hands make light work, and hopefully a wonderfully successful Sale as well.

Brenda MacDonald



A reminder from the garden of Bill Bischoff - last month's speaker - of the winter we have had, and the spring we are just beginning to enjoy.

Up the Garden Path



with Forsythia



We're fortunate in being able to grow some lovely winter blooming shrubs, witch hazels, winter-blooming honeysuckles and *Prunus autumnalis* all come to mind, but the bright yellow flowers of our local Forsythias are, to me, one of our true harbingers of spring.

Forsythias are easy to grow and completely hardy in the lower Mainland. The most common cultivar grown locally is probably *F. x intermedia* 'Lynwood Gold', but there are other equally lovely varieties, and for the enthusiast, other

species. At the time of writing, my Forsythia 'Mini Gold' is in full bloom. It has smaller flowers than 'Lynwood Gold', but they are a much deeper shade of yellow. With a mature height of just over a meter, it is also shorter than some of the other *F. x intermedia* hybrids, making it useful for smaller gardens, or as in my case, a good choice for a container.

For good flower displays, plants need full sun. In shade, the vegetative growth will be O.K., but there will be few to no flowers. (Editorial comment from me: for most of us, the only reason to grow Forsythias is for the spring flowers. The rest of the year they're what I call a "green blob" in the landscape – there's nothing wrong with them, but they don't offer a second or third season of interest). Plants aren't fussy about soil type, but the usual advice of good drainage and even moisture applies. Forsythias tolerate a range of soil pHs, and there are no major pests or diseases of concern.

The only bit of work needed is to do some renewal pruning on established plants, on a yearly basis. Wait until after flowering, and then remove 1/3 to 1/4 of the wood, cutting branches as close to the ground as possible. Take out the oldest wood - that is the heaviest, darkest and thickest of the canes. Renewal pruning does two things: it keeps plants in bounds and it promotes the growth of new wood, which in turn means better flowering since flowers are borne on wood that grew the previous summer. Of course, it's a lot easier to see what to prune before the



Forsythia x intermedia 'Lynwood'



Forsythia x intermedia 'Lynwood'

plants leaf out, so I usually do some pruning in late January or early February and use the cut branches for forcing. All Forsythias are at their best when the natural, arching habit of the canes is encouraged. This is not a good choice of plant for clipping into balls or topiary.

Forsythia viridissima, Greenstem Forsythia, is an upright grower with, you guessed it, greenish coloured stems. In addition to good flower displays, this species has the most reliable fall colour in the genus, with leaves becoming reddish-purple in the fall. It is a big plant, easily reaching 3 meters, so not a great choice for the small garden. It is one of the parents of *F. x intermedia*.

The other parent of *F. x intermedia* is *F. suspensa*, the Weeping Forsythia, and as the name implies, this is a low growing species. I've seen it used to good effect on sloping sites where the weeping, spreading branches are allowed to cascade down hillsides. This plant is more appreciated in northeastern North America than here because it blooms more reliably than other Forsythias in areas with cold winters. It's not that the flower buds are any hardier than the

other species, but rather, that the low-growing branches are regularly covered in snow, providing winter protection to the buds. The vegetative portion of the plant is reliably hardy, but in general, Forsythia flower buds are killed when temperatures dip to about -23°C .



Forsythia ovata

The earliest species to bloom, and also the one with the hardiest flower buds, is *F. ovata*, the Korean or Early Forsythia. In her book, Flowering Shrubs, Isabel Zucker recommends this species because it is the hardiest of the genus (flower buds are hardy to about -26°C), it blooms about 2 weeks earlier than the others and so extends the blooming season, and it is a somewhat smaller plant than the Border Forsythias. It is an upright grower that might reach 2 meters in height.



Forsythia suspensa
as a bonsai specimen



Straight stems of a Forsythia cv. grown for the floral trade

For those of us with room for only one Forsythia, most of us grow one of the Border Forsythia hybrids (*F. x intermedia*) which have the best flowering displays within the genus. This is an old cross, having been made in Europe in the latter half of the 19th century. All but one species of Forsythia are native to Asia, but most hybridizing seems to have been done in Europe. There are many good cultivars, but locally the easiest to find is ‘Lynwood Gold’ (sometimes called just ‘Lynwood’). This sport of *F. ‘Spectabilis’* was originally found in County Tyrone, Ireland, and introduced to North America in the 1950’s. ‘Lynwood Gold’ has good, bright yellow flowers that are borne along entire lengths of branches, so it makes a fabulous display when in bloom. It is also very popular with growers who produce forcing branches of Forsythia for florists. In the American South, this plant is cut back to the ground every year to promote the growth of long, straight, floriferous canes for the commercial florist trade.

Forsythia ‘Spectabilis’ is another popular variety of *F. x intermedia*. It originated in a German nursery in 1906. When in bloom, it has so many large, brassy yellow flowers that it is sometimes described as being a living bouquet. *F. x intermedia ‘Primulina’* is a sport of ‘Spectabilis’ with softer yellow flowers, which many people find more pleasing. Most of the intermedia hybrids are large plants, easily growing in excess of 2 meters.

Renewal pruning does help keep the height down.

Forsythias are easy to propagate by taking either hardwood or softwood cuttings. If you’ve got the energy to get in and dig, divisions of plants can also be used for propagation.

And finally, a word about the so-called “white” forsythia, *Abeliophyllum distichum*. This is a lovely spring blooming deciduous shrub but it’s not a Forsythia. *Abeliophyllum* has the reputation of being a difficult shrub to grow because it is slow to establish after transplanting, and it resents root disturbance. However, it is lovely and worth the effort. Throughout the winter, the flower buds are purplish in colour, and then in mid-April, the small flowers open pale pink and fade to white, just as the “Golden Bell” Forsythias have finished. A well-grown *Abeliophyllum* will be covered in flowers. While the plant is hardy in our area, flowers are often damaged by late spring frosts, so this plant benefits from having some overhead protection.



Abeliophyllum distichum

Norma Senn



From Under the Tall Trees

One of the native plants that Lori and I enjoy in our garden is club moss. Its scientific name is *Lycopodium clavatum*. We obtained ours years ago from an area that was going to be logged on a hillside near our place. I have never seen it for sale in nurseries, but it must be available somewhere in

the nursery trade. In the Pacific N.W. it grows from sea level to the alpine zone, although it is most prevalent above 2000 feet.

L. clavatum is in a group of plants referred to as fern allies. These plants have a vascular system, but are not as advanced evolutionary-wise as the ferns. They are small plants that creep along the ground. The branching is dichotomous (dividing into two branches) not always of the same size. The branches are about 1/8 inch in diameter and covered with narrowly lanceolate leaves up to 1/4 inch in length that are held close to the stem. Roots appear along the branch frequently. The main branch may grow a foot or more in a year. After three or four years a branch in a given location dies out, but by that time the branch has grown further, rooting itself as it goes. We position the branches according to the direction we want them to grow.

The life cycle of *L. clavatum* consists of two phases. The sporophyte, which is the green plant we see, eventually sends up vertical branches several inches in height, at the top of which are closely packed fertile leaves arranged in cone-shaped



structures called strobilli. These leaves produce sporangia in their axils which then produce spores. The club mosses get their name from these vertical branches with their enlarged strobilli at the end.

The spores are extremely small and can be carried for thousand of miles by air currents. Upon landing, the spore grows into an underground mass of tissue called a prothallium, which can be several inches across. The prothallium grows in conjunction with fungi for its



food source. In the temperate parts of the world, it takes five years or more for the prothallium to reach maturity, at which time it produces both female and male gametes. The male gamete swims through water and fertilizes the female gamete, which then grow into the green sporophyte we see.

L. clavatum is in an ancient class of plants known as Lycopodiopsida. There are only five genera in this class, two of which are extinct. They first appear in the fossil record 400 million years ago. Within the next 50 million years some species had evolved into trees over a hundred feet in height with leaves three feet in length. These trees grew in large coastal swamps, and their remains form most of the coal deposits that we use today. A hundred million years later, the climate had become drier and cooler, resulting in the extinction of these giant trees.

L. clavatum has an extremely wide distribution: it grows from southern Greenland to southern South America, from Japan to South Africa, and occurs on all the continents except Australia and Antarctica.



Lycopodium clavatum
 from Flora von Deutschland Österreich
 und der Schweiz, 1885



The uses of *L. clavatum* are essentially restricted to its spores. A match laid on a surface of *L. clavatum* spores will not ignite them, but when exposed to a spark or flame, a dense concentration of them in the air will result in an instant flash. This is similar to the explosiveness of fine wheat particles in grain elevator explosions. In the early days of photography the spores were used as a source of a flash. Moreover, a proper concentration of them in the air can make sound waves visible. The spores are tasteless, odorless and resistant to the absorption of water, which has resulted in their medical use as a coating on pills. They are also used in homeopathy for, supposedly, curing just about any affliction ever suffered by mankind.

However, it seems to me that today the most important use of *L. clavatum* spores is for the reproduction of this interesting and beautiful plant.

Dalen Bayes



Rhododendron moupinense
 Vancouver Species Study Days, UBC Botanical Garden, 08 MAR 08
 photo: Sean Rafferty



Rhododendron barbatum x unknown
 Vancouver Species Study Days, UBC Botanical Garden, 08 MAR 08
 photo: Sean Rafferty



A Dabbler in Rhodieland

I'm a dabbler not a diver, so although I skim the surface of many things, I admire those of you who delve deeply into rhodie lore. Sometimes, however, there are advantages to being a dabbler, as I am finding out on my latest project.

The move from Vancouver to the Valley has been a happy one for us. We were shocked, however, to learn that the twice-weekly garbage collection we had enjoyed in Vancouver would now happen every two weeks here. We kept asking our friends what they did

with their garbage and received a variety of answers.

That first year, I decided to bury our kitchen garbage in my veggie garden, and carried buckets of slop all the way to the barn and garden. This worked, but at the same time was a lot of work. The following year I buried kitchen garbage in my rose bed. This worked as well, and was closer to the house, but produced interesting squash in the middle of the roses. Speaking of roses, one year I buried salmon heads and tails under my newly planted rose bushes, thinking to provoke fabulous blooms with my secret ingredient while at the same time disposing of garbage. Unfortunately, the coyotes uprooted the roses and left nary a trace of salmon behind – effective disposal, but hard on the roses.

My current rose secret ingredient is secret, but that is another story.

Hooked on composting, I finally invested in plastic compost bin #1 and began carefully layering 'green and brown'. This is easy to do. Throw in the kitchen garbage (peelings and waste from veggies and fruit). This is considered a 'green' layer, as are fresh leaves, coffee grounds, tea bags, green grass, weeds, seaweed, flowers, and manure and bedding (no cat or dog feces). Then put in a layer of 'brown': fall leaves, straw or hay, pine needles, twigs, shredded newspaper, eggshells, wood chips, corncobs, and untreated sawdust.

I filled the first bin quickly and invested in compost bin #2, thinking to rotate them. Then the snakes moved into bin #1 – mom, dad and babies sunned themselves just under the lid on top of the brown layer. There are no poisonous snakes in the valley, and I knew these were common garter snakes because Nature-Man identified them. He picks them up. I don't. Nevertheless, I became attached to them in a weird sort of way. I pass around snakes-in-my-compost-bin pictures like other people pass around grandchildren pictures. Now I'm pretty sure my snake family is hibernating in #2 compost bin.

Enter #3 compost bin to join the three-way rotation: this year, last year, and hibernating snakes. Fortunately, I have not formed an attachment to slugs.

It is shocking how little compost is actually produced by mountains of peels and such. Still, without the compost material, instead of the two (allowed) bags of garbage, I was putting out one bag. Then I noticed a neighbor's garbage bag, which looked like it had been vacuum packed. This led to a bit of neighborly rivalry as I resorted to crushing garbage (in the bag) into a corner with my body. Voila! Now I put out one, sometimes small, bag of garbage every two weeks. I am inordinately proud of this accomplishment, while at the same time I'm very glad that in this case that I am a (garbage) dabbler and not a diver.

Ginny Fearing