

The Oak

Newsletter of
the Fraser South
Rhododendron
Society

Volume 21 Number 05
May 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, May 21, 2008

THE 15TH ANNUAL FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY BEER BOTTLE TRUSS SHOW



2008 Officers

President:	Harold Fearing	604-857-4136
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Newsletter:	Brenda Macdonald	604-990-5353
Website:	Chris Klapwijk	604-581-0925

Quick Hits

Garden Open Houses:

Bayes - call to arrange time - 360-966-4596

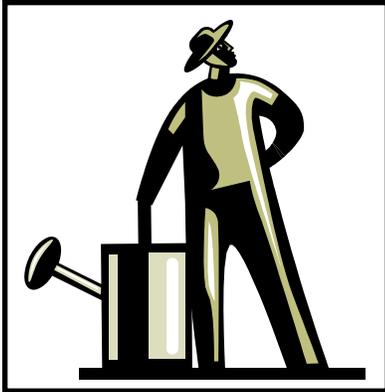
Bale - Saturday, May 17, Sunday, May 18, Monday, May 19

→ note correction to contact telephone number. Call
604-853-4100 for directions

Next Month ... Our Annual Picnic

at the home of Karen Linton and
Larry Morton
Saturday, June 14, 2008
Details inside!





From the President

Notes from the Chair

Well... what a winter (spring?) we have had. In our garden at least we have had snow, hail, sleet, rain, frost and high winds, all in what is supposed to be spring. A number of the rhodos which had the temerity to bloom suffered damage, either from the freeze or from hail and rain. Things are getting back to normal now however. In fact what I found in our Vancouver garden, where I kept better records than I have in Abbotsford, was that while a late spring would delay the blooms and a early or hot summer would shorten the season, those that bloomed around the middle of May, usually bloomed then regardless of the weather. That seems to be happening now, as we have many of the earlier varieties still in bloom at the same time as the usual mid May ones.

We had quite a few people by for our open garden. Thanks to all who took the time and made the effort to come. There are still several more open gardens

- see last month's Yak - and I would urge everyone to take advantage of the opportunity to see some of the nice things others are growing.



This month I thought I would write about a large group of rhodos, the Triflora section, as that group contains a number of rhodos now in bloom and many of my favorites. These are mostly large and fairly rapidly growing plants, easily reaching 2 meters or so in 10 years. They tend to start out a bit sparse and straggly, but then fill out as they get older. They bloom as young plants, so one gets color usually after only a couple of years. The flowers are all similar, except for color, in that they are openly funnel shaped with protruding stamens. They are zygomorphic, which is a fancy way of saying asymmetrical. Usually there are three petals pointing up and two down, often with a blotch of some kind on the center top petal. The name 'Triflora' apparently comes because some of them have mainly three flowers per truss. However that is a bit misleading because many of them have more than three flowers per truss, and the trusses appear both at the ends of branches and along the sides of the branches, and are often so closely spaced that it is hard to tell where one truss ends and another starts. The end result for a mature well grown plant is a solid mass of color.



The clear yellow blossoms of *R. lutescens* look like a patch of sunshine in your garden in the early spring

The earliest of this group to bloom is *R. lutescens*, which peaks for us in late March or early April. It is a light yellow. The leaves are fairly long and narrow and pointed and are often tinged with reddish brown. Because it is early, it makes a very welcome addition to the garden.

For us the various varieties of *R. augustinii* come next, normally by the last week in April. These are normally in shades of blue or purple, often with a greenish, yellowish or brownish blotch or spots on the upper petal.

There are many named varieties, 'Electra' or 'Marine' are both darker blue-purple. 'Tower Court' is one of the better lighter



R. augustinii 'Berkeley's Blue'

blues. 'Berkeley's Blue', 'Bergie', 'Hobbie', 'Playfair' are other named varieties. For many of these the color seems to vary a bit from year to year - why, I have no idea. However all are nice. There are also a couple of subspecies. *R. augustinii* ssp. *chasmanthum* has done very well for us, and at least in the version we have, is much pinker than the others. Ssp. *hardyi* is supposed to be white and partially deciduous, though I have only a tiny one from the RSF and so haven't actually seen it bloom.



R. davidsonianum

For those who prefer pink, *R. davidsonianum* makes a very nice plant. It is normally rose or clear pink (though there is a white version), and like the others makes a solid mass of color. 'Ruth Lyons' is a named variety. For us it blooms a little bit later than most of the *augustinii*. It also has been the least hardy of the Triflora we have had, but that has meant only that there is sometimes a bit of winter damage to the leaves in the really bad winters like the one before last.

In white, there are two common species, *yunnanense* and *rigidum*. *R. yunnanense* is usually white with a brown or yellowish brown blotch, though there are pink versions. One plant which we got as *R. yunnanense*

var. *suberosum* is a rose pink and absolutely spectacular. Most versions of *yunnanense* that I have seen tend to be a bit unruly and so one has to pinch them back a bit, or let them go, and recognize that their unruliness is just part of their charm.



R. yunnanense



R. rigidum var. *eriandrum*

R. rigidum is also white, usually with a darker spot. Some botanists view this as simply part of the natural variation of *yunnanense*. It tends to be more compact and usually has blue-green leaves which are somewhat glaucous (with a whitish coating). There are several varieties in circulation locally. One version *R. rigidum* 'Bodineri', or just "Bodineri", originated from Frank Dorsey. It looks like the other varieties of *rigidum*, but is often very fragrant, especially in the warm sun. I

can't remember all the details of the story but Frank told me that he didn't know quite what the plant was and so coined the name 'Bodineri', which is the name I, and several of the other local growers, have used when we propagated it. There actually is a species, *R. bodineri*, which is quite different and apparently not in cultivation.



R. yunnanense var. *suberosum*



R. triflorum var. *bauhiniiflorum*

There are two other yellow Triflora which one can often find, *R. triflorum* var. *triflorum* and *R. triflorum* var. *bauhiniiflorum*. The key distinguishes these by saying that *bauhiniiflorum* has larger flowers. Big deal! Such a statement is meaningless unless you have both of them side by side. Eventually when I did see them side by side it became obvious. The variety *bauhiniiflorum* has flowers like a nice *augustinii* and is the much nicer plant. The variety *triflorum* has flowers not much larger than a loonie.

Finally there is one very late species, *R. trichanthum*, which is worth having simply because of its late bloom period - early June in our garden. It is very similar to many

of the *augustinii*, a nice blue-purple with a yellow or perhaps greenish blotch. It is distinguished by bristles on the leaves, shoots, and even parts of the flower.



R. tricanthum

I have been able to describe only some of the Triflora section.

There are a number of other, rarer, ones, *ambiguum*, *concinnum*, *polylepis*, *siderophyllum*, *tatsienense*, *zaleucum*, etc.

which are also nice. In fact this section probably has more different spectacular rhodos than any other. Everyone who has room should have a few. I would start with *augustinii*, perhaps several varieties. Then include a *davidsonianum*, a *lutescens* for early bloom, a *rigidum* or *yunnanense* for something white, and then anything else you have room for.

Harold Fearing



The very rewarding floriferousness of members of Subsection Triflora, as exemplified by *R. davidsonianum* on the left and *R. augustinii* 'Bergie' on the right

All photos by Harold Fearing



From the Editor

This Month:

You know the rules - it's time!

Get out into that cold, crisp, spring air and lop off a few rhodo flowers. Never mind that it is supposed to be mild, balmy, spring air. We rhodophiles are a hardy lot! Never mind that you are still looking at your early, early bloomers instead of the early, mid, or even mid, mid bloomers. Think of it as an opportunity to display varieties no one has seen in a truss show for years!

All the rules are posted on page 8.

Come one, come all! Bring some trusses. You know you want to!

Next Month:

Our Annual Picnic and Auction, to be held on Saturday, June 14th. This is a grand time to have a good old-fashioned chat-up with old friends and new acquaintances, enjoy outstanding food, raise some money for the club, and generally bring our 2007/2008 club year to a very enjoyable conclusion. Full details next month, but in the meantime, keep your eyes open and your thinking caps on as you squirrel away valuable items to be auctioned off for the benefit of the club coffers.

The Business Stuff:

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED

● Last, but certainly not least, the honourable gentlemen Mike Bale and Dalen Bayes will be presiding over the tea table.

THE CALENDAR

Wednesday, May 21	Fraser South Chapter - 15th Annual Fraser South Rhodo Society Beer Bottle Truss Show
Saturday, June 14	Fraser South Chapter - Annual Picnic & Auction at the home of Karen Linton and Larry Morton

Brenda Macdonald

A bouquet of *R. augustinii* from the garden of Harold and Ginny Fearing



R. augustinii 'Hobie'



R. augustinii 'Tower Court'



R. augustinii var. *chasmanthum*



R. augustinii 'Berkeley's Blue'



Up the Garden Path



Spring-flowering Ground Covers

At this time of the year, the brightly coloured, spring-blooming ground covers make a welcome show. While they're common and easy to grow, especially nice are Aubrieta, Arabis, Aurinia and Iberis –all members of the Mustard family (Brassicaceae). As well, Moss or Creeping Phlox (*P. subulata*) from the Polemonium family and Lithodora (Boraginaceae) offer wonderful colour. By selecting several of these types of plants, good flowering

displays can be enjoyed from April through early June. They are popular in rock gardens, and also as plants for edges, being especially showy as they drape down rockery walls.

Many of these kinds of plants are native to the Mediterranean basin and Asia Minor and thus are able to tolerate hot, dry sites. While most are able to adapt to a wide variety of soil pH, they do prefer a bit of lime.



Aubrieta cultivar.

Note that the correct spelling and pronunciation of this plant is not 'Aubretia' as is almost universally used, but Aubrieta, after the French painter Claude Aubriet.

The most common Aubrieta grown is *A. deltoidea*, Purple Rock Cress. This has maroon-red to amethyst-purple flowers borne on a dense mat of gray-green foliage. When in bloom it's hard to imagine being able to fit even one more flower on a plant. Bloom is from April through May. There are many named varieties within this species and there are several other species that are of garden interest, but are not so commonly available.

Another genus with a mat-like growth habit is Arabis. This genus is something of a mixed blessing as it contains some garden worthy species, but also some really annoying weeds, and as is the usual



case, the garden forms tend to be somewhat short-lived, while the weeds spread easily and seem to go on forever. In doing some background reading, I found that this genus has a confusing mixture of names in the literature, so you may come across variations of names for both species and hybrids in your own references. The most commonly deliberately-grown species include the Wall Rock Cress, *A. caucasica* (also known as *A. albida*), and *A. procurrens*. Both have white flowers, but there is a double form of *A. caucasica* called 'Flore-pleno' which has showy flowers that remain conspicuous for a longer time than most of the other Arabis. I've read that blooms from this plant make good cut flowers. There are also some variegated leaf forms that provide additional interest when the plants are not flowering. Most Arabis have gray-green foliage, similar to Aubrieta. *A. procurrens* is one of the easiest to grow from the genus as it isn't fussy about soil, and will tolerate partial shade as well as full sun. There are also several hybrid Arabis, created by Georg Arends in the early 20th century. He crossed *A. caucasica* with *A. aubrietioides* to create a number of pink flowered Arabis: look for names like 'Rosabella' and 'Spring Charm'.



Arabis cultivars

One of my favourite plants for trailing over rockery walls, ledges or along stairs is *Iberis sempervirens*, Perennial Candytuft. This is a tidy ground cover that produces clustered heads of clear white flowers in late April through May. As the name implies, the foliage remains green throughout the year. I've been growing the cultivar 'Little Gem' for many years and it has been completely trouble-free and well-behaved. Another good named form is 'Snowflake' which is a slightly taller plant.

'Basket of Gold' Alyssum, *Aurinia saxatilis* (previously classified as *Alyssum saxatile*) is outstanding when in bloom. I've seen it used in the American mid-west where it is sometimes planted on roadway retaining walls or railway embankments and it makes a dazzling display in bloom. There are a number of named forms available with flowers ranging from pale yellow to deep gold. There is supposed to be an apricot coloured form too, but I haven't seen this one. The double-flowered form, 'Flore Pleno' is exceptionally handsome.

All of these species are low-maintenance plants once established. Simply shear off spent flowers in early summer. They all benefit from an occasional dose of lime. Propagation is easy by taking cuttings or layering shoots in early summer.



Iberis sempervirens



Aurinia saxatilis



Creeping or Moss Phlox (*P. subulata*) has charming star-like flowers that range from white to many shades of pinks to almost lavender, and there are bi-coloured flowers too. The leaves are needle-like and plants remain prostrate. While this plant may look a bit messy in winter, don't be tempted to do any hard pruning. Instead, wait until flowering has finished and just do a light shearing of spent flowers. This is another good selection to trail down rockery walls. While I'm very fond of Moss Phlox, I've found it to be short-lived in my garden here. I suspect this one just doesn't like the wet winters. However, it is worth re-planting every few years.



Phlox subulata

One of our bluest garden flowers is *Lithodora diffusa* (also known as *Lithospermum diffusum*). We most commonly see the cultivar 'Grace Ward'. Supposedly there are other varieties, but they don't seem to be commonly available here. Unlike the previous plants mentioned, this plant definitely prefers acid soils, so it does well in our area although it needs good drainage. While I've seen it growing in our area in full sun, many references recommend giving it protection from the noon-day sun.

The major drawback to this plant is that with age, the center of the plant dies out and it starts to look scruffy. When this happens, I think the best solution is to re-plant rather than try to put a plug into the middle to fill the gap. However, the stunning blue flowers certainly make the effort worthwhile. Cuttings can be started in mid to late summer for use in replanting.



Lithodora diffusa

I hope this has whetted your appetite for adding a few of these spring charmers to your garden. There are lots of other choices, but these are easy to grow and readily available.

Dalén Bayes



Fifteenth Annual Fraser South Beer Bottle Truss Show

The world famous Fraser South Beer Bottle Truss Show will be held at our May meeting, Wednesday, May 21st. This is a fun event in which everyone can participate.

Here are the rules, beautiful in their simplicity:

1. **Entry to the hall will be by bringing at least one truss. It is not necessary that it be a rhododendron.**
2. There will be three areas for display:
 - a. competitive rhododendron trusses
 - b. non-competitive rhododendron trusses
 - c. companion plant displays.
3. For the competitive event, participants will be allowed to enter only one truss in each class. Additional trusses can be displayed on the non-competitive table.
4. To assist in deciding which class to enter, an Advisory Panel will provide guidance and make any final decisions necessary.
5. All trusses must be in glass bottles. (Cans and plastic pop bottles are too unstable.)
6. Judging will be by member votes. Having given up on the too-sticky Smarties, we will be continuing with last year's counting beads. Just drop your bead in the receptacle in front of the truss you wish to vote for.

CLASSES Division I

Species Classes

- Class 1. Rhododendron (lepidotes)
- Class 2. Azalea (deciduous and evergreen)
- Class 3. Hymenantha (elepidotes)

Division II

Hybrid Classes

- Class 4. Any lepidote hybrid

- Class 5. Any deciduous azalea hybrid
- Class 6. Any evergreen azalea hybrid

Colour Classes

- Class 7a: Red - (small)
- 7b: Red - (large)
- Class 8a: White - (small)
- 8b: White - (large)
- Class 9a: Pink - (small)
- 9b: Pink - (large)
- 9c: Pink - (really, really, large)
- Class 10a: Yellow & Cream (small)
- 10b: Yellow & Cream (large)
- Class 11: Mauves & Purple
- Class 12: Orange
- Class 13: Bi-colour

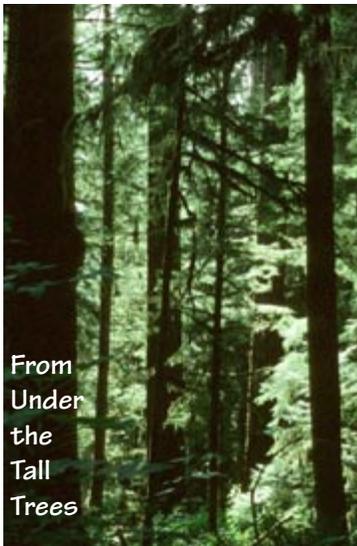
Division III

Special Classes

- Class 14: "What's it Called" - best new non-registered hybrid - a special class for the hybridizer
- Class 15: Truss with the Best Fuzzy Foliage
- Class 16: Best Blotched
- Class 17: Best Speckled
- Class 18: Most Lurid
- Class 19: Best Last Year's Truss
- Class 20: Most Elegantly Weevil-Notched
- Class 21: Best Hammerhead
- Class 22: Most Flaccid
- Class 23: Best Miniature Truss - under 6"
- Class 24: Most Fragrant (Az. or Rh.)
- Class 25: Lionheart Award for best over-all Yellow

Definitions:

1. Small - 6" or under
2. Large - 6" to 10"
3. Really, Really, Large - over 10"
4. Blotch - each individual flower shows a solid colour mark on dorsal lobe (or three lobes), distinctly different from the base colour of the flower.
5. Lurid - most vividly garish
6. Hammerhead - an inflorescence which arises from more than a single flower bud
7. Speckled - distinguished from blotches by non-solid colour sprinkles and spots, either around entire flower, or at least on upper lobe(s) - e.g. 'Paprika Spiced'



From Under the Tall Trees

Two native plants that grow in our woodland garden are Wild Ginger (*Asarum caudatum*) and Vanilla Leaf (*Achlys triphylla*). The only maintenance they require is a small amount of weeding. They are unattractive to deer and slugs.

Asarum caudatum is a low, evergreen, plant with beautiful foliage. The dark green, heart-shaped leaves are held

only 2-3 inches off the ground. The leaves are 2-4 inches in diameter and only slightly longer. The paired leaves arise from closely spaced nodes on a shallow rhizome, resulting in a mat which makes a great ground cover. *A. caudatum* is an adaptable plant that can grow in dry to moist soil. It needs partial to full shade. In hot sunlight it scorches. The flowers are unusual, they consist of a calyx (there are no petals) that forms a bell-shaped center, which then terminates in three gracefully curved tails



Asarum caudatum is known as Long-tail wild ginger or British Columbia wild ginger. It differs from *Asarum canadense*, known as Canadian wild ginger, by the much longer, curved, calyx appendages. ~ And for all those anxious to finally know what the colour "puce" is - voilà! - a purplish-brown whose name derives from the French word for "flea".

1"-3" long. The flowers are very hairy and are hidden below the leaves. The flower is purplish-brown, although there is a rare form with beautiful greenish-white flowers. Blooming time is April to May. The flowers, being hidden below the foliage, are pollinated by beetles. Once formed, the seeds have an appendage containing an oil that is very attractive to ants. The ants collect the seed, taking it to their nest where they eat the appendage and discards the seeds, thus resulting in seed dispersal.

The common name Wild Ginger comes from the spicy ginger-like taste

of its roots. Wild Ginger is not at all closely related to culinary ginger. Culinary ginger is in the Zingiberaceae family, while Wild Ginger is in the Aristolochiaceae family.

Achlys triphylla, more commonly referred to as Vanilla Leaf or Deer Foot, is a perennial herb which grows in partly shaded to fully shaded areas, and will grow in dry to moist soils. It occurs from northern California to southern B.C. and is often considered a plant of the lower mountains, but in our area its range extends out to the coast. Its most attractive feature is the foliage, which consists of a single leaf composed



Achlys triphylla is known as Deer foot, Vanilla leaf, or Sweet-after-death, the last two names occasioned by the sweet vanilla-like aroma of the leaves after they are dried. ~ Early settlers learned from First Nations peoples to hang bunches of dried leaves or stuff leaves into their mattresses, both as a sweet smell and insect repellent.

of three fan shaped leaflets. The leaves are held horizontally on thin wiry stems that are 8" to 16" in

height and the leaves are 4" to 8" in diameter. The outer margins of the leaflets have 6 to 12 blunt lobes giving it a wavy appearance. The shape of the narrower center leaflet somewhat resembles a deer track, giving it one of its common names - Deer Foot. The other common name, Vanilla Leaf, arises from the vanilla-like fragrance of its dried leaves.

The flowers are born on a wiry stem rising from the slender rhizome at the same point as the leaves. The flowering stalk rises above the leaves by a few inches. The flowers resemble a narrow spike one to two inches in length, and have no sepals or petals, with the white stamens being the visible part of the flowering spike. Some of ours grow under cedar trees in dense shade. It also grows in partial shade as long as it's not subjected to hot sunlight. The plant has slender rhizomes and can form dense masses. Its not overly invasive and, with its most attractive foliage, it forms an attractive ground cover under rhododendrons.

Achlys triphylla is in the Berberidaceae family along with Epimedium, Vancouveria, Nandina, and Podophyllum, but it is the only wind pollinated plant in this family.

Dalén Bayes