

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, November 19, 2008
Topic: "Vireyas and Their Habitat"
Speaker: Glen Jamieson
Plant Sales: Colleen Bojczuk

2008 Officers

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

Quick Hits



Welcome! ...

to our new members Peggy Brenne
and Sandra Procter, who live in Surrey.
We are so glad you have joined us!

And it's official: the TV ads for
chocolates and toys are in relentless
repetition, so it must be time to start
thinking about our annual Christmas
Potluck. Mark your calendar with a big
red bow for Wednesday, December
10th. As usual, we will be holding the
December meeting one week earlier
than usual for maximum convenience
and participation.





From the President

Notes From the Chair

As I sit down to write this it is pouring rain outside. The fall has been beautiful though, with more intense colors on the maples and alders than I can ever remember. Quite a few of the deciduous rhododendrons have had particularly nice leaf color also. *R. vaseyi*, *R. cumberlandense*, and some plants of *R. wadanum* and *R. amagianum* have all been bright red and particularly showy this year.

With the rains though comes a chance to do some indoor gardening projects. I have just finished planting this year's seed batch, so I thought I would talk about that. With seeds we can access a tremendous variety of rhododendrons which are not available elsewhere. It is also possible to make your own hybrids, and get something which is truly unique.

The plants I sell come mostly from seeds, so I am clearly not being a hard-nosed businessman since I am going to reveal all my trade secrets and urge others to learn how to do it, making it possible in principle to compete. Donald Trump would have me out behind the woodshed in no time!

The first question is where does one get the seeds. The best source is the American Rhododendron Society Seed Exchange, which can be accessed from the ARS website. They offer seed from expeditions, seed from hand pollination of plants in personal collections, and seed from crosses made by hybridizers looking for particular characteristics. The ARS catalog comes out in February. The Rhododendron Species Foundation and the Rhododendron section of the Royal Horticultural Society offer seeds as well.

You can also make your own crosses by pollinating a flower of one plant with the pollen of another. As a general rule I think it is a waste of time to use open (i.e. bee) pollinated seed. Only a small percentage of even well planned crosses amount to anything nice, so the chances of getting something good from a random pollination is pretty small. However for this year, since it is too late to make your own crosses, if you want to try out the system, then picking a few random seed pods is probably ok. If you are one of those whose garden is impeccably deadheaded every year, feel free to come to ours, as there will be many seed pods to choose from! Once you have collected or purchased the seeds they should be kept in an airtight container in the refrigerator. I have found no loss of fertility for several years when seeds are kept this way, and I have germinated seeds that are as much as ten years old.

The next question, which I really haven't answered very well for myself, is when to plant the seeds. It takes 2-4 months for germination and enough growth to transplant the seedlings into 3 inch pots. It then takes 5-6 months or more for the plants, under lights in the basement, to get to be 4 or 5 inches high so that they can be transplanted into one gallon pots and put outside. When I was working, I usually planted seeds over Christmas vacation, which meant I often ended up with plants ready for one gallon pots in August or September, really too late to put them outside. So I had to try to keep them inside over the winter, where they got too big and leggy. So more recently I have been trying



to get seeds planted in the fall, October this year, with the aim of having them ready for one gallon pots and outside in May or June, so that they can grow over the summer and survive outside the following winter. If you are only doing a few batches it probably doesn't matter when you start them, but I did more than 100 seed lots this year, so for me space in the basement is really the most important factor determining when to plant.

The next issue is the media. I use half perlite and half peat moss, just the standard garden perlite and the usual peat moss that comes in bales. I do sterilize the media, which most people don't do, as peat moss is supposed to have some natural anti-fungal properties. However for me, for reasons I will get into below, sterilization has led to



a major improvement in success rate, and simplification of the process.

I have tried various methods of sterilization - oven, microwave, etc. - none of which work very well. The best method I have found is the following. First you send your spouse, assuming he/she is the one with the most proprietary interest in the kitchen, out on a shopping expedition or something else away from the house, because you are going to make a huge mess and, while you know you will clean it up, your spouse may have doubts. Then fill the largest pot you have half full with water and bring to a rolling boil. Add enough of the peat/perlite mixture to

make a thin stew and boil for 5 minutes. I then dip the media out with a long handled screen strainer and let it sit in a spaghetti strainer to drain further. With a spoon, I fill 4 inch square pots with the mixture, leveling off at the top. These are covered with plastic wrap while they cool so as to keep airborne spores off.

When the pots have cooled to room temperature you are ready to plant. You will need a clean area, with a light colored surface. Rhododendron seeds are very small and it is important not to contaminate one seed lot with another, so an area which can easily be kept clean between seed lots is useful. I then take a 3 x 5 inch piece of white paper folded in half. The seeds are put in the crease and can then be tapped out so as to spread uniformly over the surface of the media. I usually use only half of an ARS seed packet for one pot. I then label the pots and put them in plastic freezer bags, usually two to a bag, mist the seeds and surface of the media lightly with a hand sprayer, and seal the bag tightly with a twist tie.

The bags are then put in trays and placed under lights - just ordinary 4-foot fluorescents - in the basement. They are left completely sealed until the seeds germinate and the seedlings are an inch or so high. Here is where the sterilization becomes important. Since the media is pretty sterile, I don't need to open the bags and don't usually have to worry about damping off. Once when I got busy, some of the bags remained sealed for almost nine months, with no problems. If you don't sterilize the media, then you will need to open the bags periodically, and probably use some sort of fungicide to prevent damping off. That is certainly possible, but in my experience was not as successful and certainly required a lot more fussing around.

Once the seedlings are an inch or so high I open the bags and carefully separate out the roots, usually with a plastic fork, and transplant each seedling into a 3 inch pot, using the same half peat - half perlite mixture, but not sterilized this time. Sometimes if the seedlings are small I have moved them first into 72 cell trays and then later into 3 inch pots. Covering the pots with a plastic cover for a few days until the seedlings are reestablished seems to help. These pots then go back under the lights for some months until they are large enough to put into one gallon pots and outside. During this time I fertilize every couple of weeks or so with a dilute 20-20-20 fertilizer, watering from the bottom.



It is important to keep things labeled throughout this process, as there are few things more worthless than a tray of unknown seedlings. I number the 3 inch pots individually, use them in numerical order, and keep track on paper of what is in each pot. This saves having to make individual labels and means it is not a disaster if someone pulls a tag and puts it back in the wrong pot - but there are many ways to do this.

So now you know all my secrets. It is a lot of fun. Give it a try and let me know your experience.

Harold Fearing



From the Editor

This Month:

Glen Jamieson may be research scientist for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, but as well as an interest in all things piscine and crustacean, he is a committed vireya enthusiast. Vireyas, you may remember, are those rhododendrons that disguise themselves with brilliantly tropical colours and perfumes and grow in locales similarly exotic.

Glen will speak to us about his travels, and the care and feeding of these glamorous plants.

- Please see the attached (and amended) membership list with addresses and telephone numbers. Some changes have been made in response to member's feedback. Please review, to ensure I made the proper corrections.

Next Month:

Next month is our annual Christmas Potluck Buffet and Group Hug. Get your fatted calf ready, or at the very least some of those great bit orange carrots, and get ready to celebrate another year of camaraderie and knowledge. Don't forget the meeting will be one week and one hour early - the second Wednesday at 6:30. Further information in next month's newsletter.

The Business Stuff:

THE CALENDAR

Wednesday, November 19	Fraser South Chapter - Glen Jamieson Vireyas
Wednesday, December 10	Fraser South Chapter Annual Potluck and Seasonal Frolic

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED

- Tea room duties for the penultimate meeting of the year will be handled by the Joan's Bengough and McGiveron -who have been remarkably patient about all the previous confusion. And it is certainly time to thank again all the unsung heros who so generously provide the astounding display of treats that always appears on our tea table. You know who you are - take a bow!

Brenda Macdonald

It is with deep regret that we announce that two of our long-term members have recently passed away.

- Fred Banford was a faithful and enthusiastic member of the FSRS for many years, until he and his wife Anne moved to Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island.

- Alex Paul was also a long-time and committed Chapter supporter, regularly travelling up from his home over the border in Sumas, Washington, to attend our meetings.

I know I speak for all the Chapter members in sending our deepest sympathy to Anne and Janette. Our thoughts are with you.



Up the Garden Path

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Moving, with Plants

As some of you know, I just moved to Victoria. This has been something I've wanted to do ever since the first time I visited in 1974 and spent an evening watching the hummingbirds visit the hardy fuchsia hedges at the motel we stayed at along the Gorge. I decided then and there, that some day, I'd get to live here.

In spite of this being part of a long cherished dream, I found leaving my home and garden in Aldergrove to be much more of an emotional wrench than I had imagined. Part of the problem was finding homes for lots of my plants as my new garden is, sigh, smaller than what I had before. However, I did find some willing people to take many of my plants, overall about 5 pickup truck loads went to new homes. Many of them were given away with the caveat, that if at all possible, people would try and root some cuttings for me. However, there were several plants that had to stay and cuttings weren't possible at the time.

So, what plants do I miss the most? Well, I had two gorgeous *R. calophytum*s that had just reached the



R. calophytum

point where they were blooming regularly in late March. Both are good clear pinks that held their colour well. These were plants my Dad had started from seed, and so were hard to leave behind on two counts: a fond memory of Dad and his propagating house and two really gorgeous specimens. As well, I had two large plants of *R. fortunei* hybrids also seed-grown by Dad, and these were also great favourites. They bloom in mid-May, and the flowers open a delicate peachy-pink, but gradually fade to soft golden-pink. They have the added bonus of being slightly fragrant. The seed for all 4 plants came from the RSF in the early 80's, so I'll have to see if I can get hold of seed and try to grow some replacements.

Another plant I was sorry to leave behind is *R. fraseri*, partly because it's a pretty little thing, and



R. 'Fraseri'
R. canadense x *R. japonicum*

partly because of its history with me. The plant was originally a "party favour" from the banquet dinner for the first Victoria ARS conference. I kept it in a pot for several years until I finally had a garden in which to plant it. It fitted in well as an understory shrub to a couple of dogwoods overhead. *R. 'Fraseri'* has small, hot pink flowers that show up well from a distance. I hope to find another small plant of this azalea and a spot to plant it here. After all, I'm in the "land of George Fraser", and this azalea is a charming namesake for this early rhodie pioneer.

The rest of the plants in the garden can pretty much be replaced, and I guess the hunt for some of them will be part of the fun of a new garden. Of course,

I'll have to find places to plant things, but I've already decided the large clumps of Pampas grass can go! I've made one nursery crawl since I moved and already bought a small *Viburnum x bodnatense* 'Pink Dawn'. This is one of my all time favourite plants, and I'd not want to be without it. It's one of those wonderful plants that offers something of interest all year. Especially pleasing are the bright pink flowers that appear sporadically throughout the winter, culminating in a burst of blooms in spring. The summer foliage is a bright, clear green that develops good fall colour.

Another favourite I'll plant eventually is *Cornus mas*, the cornelian-cherry dogwood. This also provides landscape interest all year. To me, this is really one of our best harbingers of spring as it blooms reliably in early March. The chartreuse-green flowers are small, but the tree will be covered in them. As well, bright red fruits are borne in late summer and these are great favourites of many birds. Fall colour and interesting bark in the winter make this tree a great asset. I collected some fruit from my "old" tree, and hopefully will be able to get some seedlings started for my new garden.



R. 'Alison Johnstone'

blooms in April, and it has smallish, delicate flowers of an unusual colour that Greer describes as amber pink. The leaves are fairly small and look neat and tidy and, to my eye, are slightly on the blue-green side. I've maintained my plant in a container for about 15 years, and the plant seems happy to remain potted. I try to remember to give it some slow-release fertilizer every May and some liquid feed later in the summer. However, if I don't get around to this, 'Alison' is very forgiving, and keeps on looking lovely and blooming reliably.

While I left lots of plants behind, I also moved many. I think there were something like 78 one-gallon or larger plants in Nancy Moore's pick up truck. I'm not going to tell you about all of them, but one plant I absolutely refused to leave behind was *R. 'Alison Johnstone'*. It's in a 100 litre pot, so this one was a challenge to lift into the truck. 'Johnstone'

I also brought 'Egret' and 'Razorbill', two of my favourite Cox hybrids. 'Egret' has small white flowers with a bit of a ragged edge, and 'Razorbill' has tubular deep pink flowers that fade over time. Both are small plants that grow well in containers. I also brought *R. 'Seta'* which blooms in March. It has tubular pink flowers and the foliage is a bright, deep green. Since it blooms so early, this is one plant I move to a sheltered location once I see bud colour and then usually I have flowers for close to a month. I've promised some cuttings to Harold Fearing, so perhaps a few of these might eventually make it into one of the FSRS plant sales or raffle.



R. 'Egret'



R. 'Razorbill'

While I'll continue to miss my old garden, I get the fun of starting over, and I'm now in a true Zone 8, so perhaps I'll be able to grow a few slightly more tender things than previously.



R. 'Seta'

And, by the way, I will still be an associate member of FSRS and I hope to attend the occasional meeting when I'm back on the Mainland.

Norma Senn