

# The Yak

Newsletter of  
the Fraser South  
Rhododendron  
Society

Volume 22 Number 4  
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[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

Date: Wednesday, April 15, 2009  
Topic: "Kiwi Magic"  
Speaker: Norma Senn  
Plant Sales Harold Fearing

## 2009 Officers

President:	Harold Fearing	604-857-4136
Past Pres:	Dalen Bayes	360-966-4596
Vice Pres.:	Bill Bischoff	604-589-6134
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:	Sean Rafferty	604-990-5353
Membership:	Wenonah March	604-532-9062
Newsletter:	Brenda Macdonald	604-990-5353
Website:	Chris Klapwijk	604-581-0925

## Quick Hits

✿ All photos in "Notes From the Chair" were provided by Harold Fearing, with the exception of the *R. hookeri* leaf, which came from the website of the Danish ARS chapter. This website, at <http://www.rhododendron.dk/RF.html> is a wonderful resource (some of it in English) with excellent rhododendron species images.

✿ Attached at the back is a promotional page for our upcoming Sale, scheduled for Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, between 10:00 and 3:00. Feel free to detach the flyer and post it at your place of work or anywhere in your community where you think it will draw some interest.



From the President

## Notes From the Chair

As I write this (April 5<sup>th</sup>) we have finally had a couple of days of warm sunny weather, so that it has been possible to get out in the garden. With the long cold spell things have been very much delayed. For example *R. 'Olive'*, which in our garden usually blooms around Valentine's Day, really didn't get started until about ten days ago, making it more than a month late. I was surprised today however at how many plants were in bloom or getting started. I have noticed in the past that when we have a late spring, things catch up, and once it does warm up, we get early and not-so-early plants blooming simultaneously. It did seem to me though that the trusses were smaller than usual and contained fewer flowers. I suppose that could be winter damage, or not enough warm time in the spring to finish development, or maybe my imagination. Are others seeing this also?

My intention this time was to write about a couple of fairly early, but relatively uncommon, species. But first let me describe

the momentous event of the afternoon. Some years ago, nineteen to be exact, I bought a plant labeled as *R. hookeri*, from Milton Wildfong. It grew into a nice 8 foot high plant with dark green leaves and beautiful smooth peeling purple/maroon bark, but it never bloomed. Each year I would check for buds, and I think I did that this year, but no joy. This afternoon as I was weeding in the vicinity I looked up to find a single bloom! The flower is a nice rose with some darker streaking and spots. It is fairly small but it does correspond pretty much to the description of the pink form of *hookeri*. However the ovary is clearly covered with stalked glands, which is not supposed to be the case for *hookeri*.

I was always a bit suspicious of the identification because a characteristic of *R. hookeri* is a series of tufted hairs evenly spaced out on the veins on the underside of the leaves. When I was young and stupid I thought that these tufts or 'hooks' were the reason for the name. Now that I am old and not so stupid (though some might debate that) I know that actually the name refers to J. D. Hooker, an early plant explorer. On a smaller *hookeri* plant I have, this one a Steve Hootman collection, these tufts are obvious on all the leaves even without a magnifying glass.



Underside of an *R. hookeri* leaf, showing the tufts of hairs along the veins

On the large plant the tufts are hard to find. Today I could find none, though what I remember was that they were more evident on young leaves, which aren't there yet.

So what is it? It could be a *hookeri* hybrid I suppose. It might be the closely related *R. faucium*, which has no tufts and a glandular ovary, or I guess it could be something totally different. In any case it is disappointing to wait so many years to get a bloom, and then be unsure as to what the plant's name is.

However, another plant in full bloom this afternoon was *R. elegantulum*. These become nice compact plants, maybe 5 feet tall in 10 years or so. They seem to be pretty adaptable, as one I have gets full sun from noon on, while the other gets lots of light, but direct sun only maybe two hours of the day. Both do fine, though the one in more shade tends to bloom a week or so later. The most striking thing about these plants is the leaves. They are relatively narrow, dark green and shiny on top, but covered on the bottom with beautiful fawn or cinnamon red, thick woolly indumentum. The flowers are a very pale pink, shaded with darker pink and are nice, but similar to many others.



Underside of an *R. elegantulum* leaf, showing the thick, woolly, fawn coloured indumentum

A much newer introduction, also blooming now, is *R. coeloneuron*. This was not in cultivation until recently and is thus not listed in Greer. I think all of the plants in the lower mainland probably originate from seed brought back by Peter Wharton from a China expedition of the mid 90's. In the ground it also forms a nice compact plant, 5 feet tall or so, which seems to take either full sun or a lot of shade, and which covers itself at this time of year with rose pink flowers. There is some variation in flower color, from pale



*R. elegantulum*

pink with some streaking to a deep rose pink. The leaves are also interesting. On top they are a medium green, while the underside is covered with rusty indumentum. The leaves tend to have an unusual twist, which while hard to describe, makes the species easy to recognize once you have seen it.

A third variety now in full bloom is *R. principis*, formerly known as *R. velleureum*. In this species the buds start out white, tipped with rose

pink. They open to pale pink flowers, with some darker markings. As the flowers age they turn white, so a well grown plant can be covered with flowers in various stages, which gives the plant a variegated appearance. The leaves are relatively narrow, light green and covered on the underside with a marvelously soft, velvety light-colored indumentum.

All of these three are easy to grow, and unlike my ersatz *hookeri*, bloom at a few years of age. Thus they make nice additions to an early garden.

*Harold Fearing*



A rose-pink form of *R. coeloneuron*



*R. principis*

Cyril Elmer (Cy) Irwin  
April 14, 1928 – March 22, 2009

It is with great sadness that I report that Cy Irwin passed away on Sunday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>. Cy was a long-time and valued member of Fraser South, having joined sometime in the early 1990's together with his wife Martie. Both of them had been members of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society for an even longer period of time, having joined there in 1978. Cy, with Martie, was always been very supportive of the rhodo clubs he belonged to, serving first as a Director, then as Treasurer, then as Auditor for the VRS. In 2000, Cy and Martie were awarded a Bronze Medal from the VRS in recognition of their efforts.

But I think what we in the FSRS remember Cy for was his unfailing and gentle cheerfulness. Cy was the quintessential gentleman, in all its senses, balancing a generosity of spirit with a serenity of demeanour that made him both soothing and supportive.

And he was a dab hand in the garden. Gentians grew like weeds for him, and visitors to his and Martie's garden always went away with some treasure or other stuffed into an old plant pot or plastic bag. He treated his plants the way he treated his humans, with respect for their individual characteristics, admiration for their beauty, and patient forbearance for their foibles and shortcomings. Not for Cy the short trip to the compost heap if performance was not up to snuff – he was always willing to give the plant just one more growing season to reach its potential.

We at the FSRS will miss him.

*Brenda Macdonald*



From the Editor

## This Month:

This month Norma Senn, prodigal globe hopper, will return to the fold, live and in person, to discuss her trip down under.

This is a good chance to experience New Zealand (at no cost and little effort) as seen by an expert gardener and wonderful photographer. The pictures are bound to be simply luscious.

## Next Month:

There are two events that figure importantly in next month's calendar: the Plant Sale on Saturday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, in the Church parking lot, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, and the 16th Annual FSRS Justly Famous Beer Bottle Truss Show, on Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup>. Be there, or be square!

## The Business Stuff:

☛ Ian Efford of the Cowichan Valley Chapter has sent a note to other District One Chapters advising that they have found a number of duplications in their

library and are taking the opportunity to raise some funds by offering these books to interested buyers by silent auction. Many of the books being offered are important reference books, some of which are difficult to find and all of which are being offered at prices that could not possibly be duplicated by other sources. The auction begins immediately and concludes on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Bids are to be sent to [efford@shaw.ca](mailto:efford@shaw.ca) identifying the item and the offered price. The highest bids for each item will be listed weekly on the website and e-mailed to those that bid. Those who cannot bid over the internet can telephone their bids to 250-597- 4470.

Barrett, C.; 1994	History of the Rhododendron Species Foundation	\$10
Cox, Peter A.; 1985	The smaller Rhododendrons	
Cox, Peter A.; 1979	The larger Rhododendron Species	\$20
Cox, Peter A.; 1979	The larger Rhododendron Species	\$10
Cox, Peter & K. N. E. Cox ; 1997	The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species	\$5
Cox, Peter & Kenneth Cox ; 1988	The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids	\$25
Cox, Kenneth; 1998	Rhododendrons, a care manual	\$25
Davidian, H.H.; 1982	The Rhododendron Species:(1) Lepidotes	
Davidian, H.H.; 1989	The Rhododendron Species (II) Elepidotes	\$10
Davidian, H.H.; 1995	The Rhododndron Species Volume IV Azaleas	\$10
Fairweather, Christopher; 1988	Azaleas, classic garden plants	\$10
Fang Wenpei; 1986	Sichuan Rhododendron of China	\$40
Galle, Fred C.; 1991	Azaleas	\$20
Hooker, J.D.; 1849	The Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya	
Jaynes, Richard A.; 1988	Kalmia, the Laurel Book II	
Kneller, Marianna; 1995	The Book of Rhododendrons	\$50
Kenyon, John & Walker, J.; 1997	Vireyas, a practical gardening guide	\$20
Leach, David G.; 1961	Rhododendrons of the World	\$20
Leach, David G.; 1961	Rhododendrons of the World	
Spurr, Joy; 1980	Cuttings through the Year	\$5

### OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED .....

☛ While Macdonald and Rafferty are all geared up to provide Tea Room support for this month's meeting, Carla Bischoff and Karen Linton should be ready to pick up the Supply Box at the end of the evening, in preparation for next month's meeting.

**THE CALENDAR:**

<b>Sunday, April 12</b>	<b>Open Garden - Les and Bev Clay 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm call 604-530-5188 for directions</b>
<b>Wednesday, April 15</b>	<b>Fraser South Chapter - Norma Senn "Kiwi Magic"</b>
<b>Thursday, April 16</b>	<b>Vancouver Chapter - Charles Lyte "Rhododendron Adventurers"</b>
<b>Saturday, April 18</b>	<b>Open Garden - Harold and Ginny Fearing 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm call 604-857-4136 for directions The Bradner Flower show takes place this same weekend and is located only a mile away from Fearing's residence. You might like to consider visiting both places in a sort of blossom extravaganza.</b>
<b>Saturday, April 25</b>	<b>Open Garden - Dalen and Lori Bayes Sumas, WA - call 360-966-4596 for directions Don't forget your passport for the border</b>
<b>Monday, April 27</b>	<b>Fraser Valley Chapter - Art Lightburn "Scotland, and the Edinburgh Conference, 2008"</b>
<b>Tuesday, April 28</b>	<b>Peace Arch Chapter - Art Lightburn "Scotland, and the Edinburgh Conference, 2008"</b>
<b>Thursday, April 30 to Sunday, May 3</b>	<b>2009 ARS Rhododendron Rendezvous Convention in Everett, Washington</b>
<b>Saturday May 2</b>	<b>Fraser South Chapter - Annual Plant Sale at Langley United Church, 5673 - 200<sup>th</sup> St., Langley 10:00 am to 3:00 pm</b>
<b>Sunday, May 10</b>	<b>Open Garden - Wingswept Garden, John and Gael Dodd 10:00 am to 5:00 pm call 604-530-0153 for directions</b>
<b>Saturday, May 16</b>	<b>Open Garden - Lu Zhu Garden, Mike and Patti Bale 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm call 604-853-8839 for directions</b>
<b>Saturday, May 16 Sunday, May 17</b>	<b>Vancouver Orchid Society, 2009 Show and Sale Saturday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Sunday, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm Richmond Curling Club, 5540 Hollybridge Way, Richmond</b>
<b>Wednesday, May 20</b>	<b>Fraser South Chapter - 16th Annual FSRS Beer Bottle Truss Show</b>

<b>Saturday, May 23</b>	<b>Open Garden - Bill and Carla Bischoff</b> 11:00 am to 4:00 pm call 604-589-6134 for directions in conjunction with Alpine Garden Society of BC (no pets and no smoking, please)
<b>Monday, May 25</b>	<b>Fraser Valley - Rosemary Prufer</b> "Last Year's Trip to New Zealand"
<b>Saturday, June 13</b>	<b>Fraser South Annual Picnic and Auction</b> Alan and Wenonah March Call 604-532-9062 for directions

Brenda Macdonald

Apparently for some people, Spring has sprung a little bit earlier, or a little bit farther, than for others.

Here are two pictures of an *R. calophytum*, unblemished by the winter and in full bloom, in the garden of Bill and Carla Bischoff, on April 7<sup>th</sup>.

An extravagant rhodo in all ways, from its 12" leaves to its heavily-substanced large truss and its 30' height, it nevertheless retains a remarkably clean and tidy look. Sitting precisely at the top of the whorl of long mid-green leaves, its pure white blossoms are accented rather than diminished by the deep red-wine blotch.

Even the absurdly oversized discoid stigma - looking more like a metal detector or a vacuum attachment than a flower part - cannot altogether destroy its stateliness.





From Under the Tall Trees

The genus *Vaccinium*, which belongs to the family Ericaceae, has over 400 species occurring around the world. The heaviest concentration of *Vacciniums* is in the Malaysian region. In NW America we have around twenty five species.

What follows is a description of three of my favorite native

species. My selection is based in great part on their availability to me for personal consumption, plus the brightly colored meadows and hillsides resulting from their fall color.

Almost anyone who lives in the lowlands west of the Cascades and Coast Range has seen, if not grazed upon, our local red huckleberry – *Vaccinium parvifolium*. It is most often found on rotting logs or stumps, usually along the edge of forests and streams. It can grow in shady areas, but when it does, it has fewer berries and is rather straggly.

*V. parvifolium* usually grows 6' – 8' in height but can reach 20'. When grown in sun it is a shrub with many trunks. One that grows at the corner of our house is 10' high and nearly as wide, with many trunks up to 2" in diameter.

The branches are sharply angled. The leaves are 1/2"–1" in length, nearly as wide, and oval in shape. The flowers occur in leaf axils and are not particularly showy, being 1/4" or less in size and a light cream to pinkish in color. The berries are up to 1/2" in size with a striking light red color, ripening in late June and then lasting for up to 2 months. The berries are tart with a pleasing taste. They can be eaten fresh or made into preserves. Overall, *V. parvifolium* can make a nice garden plant with its almost lacy look, red edible berries and pleasing fall color. It has an attractive winter appearance with last year's branches laced with new red buds.

Most often seen growing out of "nurse" logs, it should have a considerable amount of rotten wood

mixed into the soil, or preferably planted over a piece of firewood that will supply it with the bacteria it needs for years. It prefers a well draining soil which holds moisture, but once established it is quite drought resistant. It needs an acid soil, (pH of 4.0-6.0) and resents any lime.

The Native Americans made good use of *V. parvifolium*, eating it fresh as well as drying it for later use. They also made use of the berry's resemblance to salmon eggs to attract fish. The berries are eaten by bears, elk, deer and other small mammals and birds.



*V. parvifolium* is the classic "huckleberry" of our childhood for anyone who grew up in the Pacific Northwest. Clear in this illustration is the single fruit growing from each leaf axil, making a decent harvest of huckleberries a long and exceedingly tedious process. Picking each berry and putting it in your bucket seemed absurd, but trying to gather a few of them together by plucking them off one at a time with thumb and forefinger while keeping the others loosely grasped in the palm of your hand with your other fingers, invariably resulted in too many of them rolling down your wrist and being lost in the undergrowth. Other techniques include spreading a blanket or towels on the ground and then "combing" the huckleberries off with your fingers, or, my personal favourite now that we enjoy an almost endless supply on our wooded mountainside, simply pruning off a well-laden branch and taking it into the kitchen sink, where the berries can be stripped from the branch and cleaned and sorted, with a minimum of frustration..

Brenda Macdonald

*Vaccinium membranaceum* occurs in western North America and around the Great Lakes. Its common names are mountain huckleberry, black huckleberry, and thin-leaved huckleberry. It prefers elevations from 3000' – 6000' in our area. It is often the major shrub in the more open lower subalpine areas; with more shade, less fruit is produced. *V. membranaceum* forms clumps of twiggy growth and reaches heights of 1'– 6'. The shorter of these



*Vaccinium membranaceum*, more than other vacciniums, often presents a somewhat variegated appearance caused by the differing colours of the berries as they ripen, from palest pink, through red and deep purple, all the way to the shiny, jet black of the ripe berries shown above.

heights is typical of the higher elevations. Leaves are 1/2" - 1" in length, elliptic in shape and bright green until fall, when they turn orange, purple, and red. Flowers are 1/4" long, solitary and borne singly in leaf axils. They are urn shaped and are greenish-white to pinkish-white in color. The flowers blossom in May and June and are followed by berries in September. The berries are reddish purple to black in color and 1/4" - 1/2" or slightly more in size. The berries are slightly acid but very favorable in taste.

*V. membranaceum* is difficult to grow at elevations below 2000'. It doesn't like its roots disturbed, so leave it the pot until it is planted out in a permanent spot. It likes a free draining soil that contains organic material. Once established, it is quite drought resistant.

*V. deliciosum* is our most common subalpine and alpine huckleberry. It goes by a multitude of common names: dwarf blueberry, alpine blueberry, cascade bilberry and numerous others. Its geographic range is from central Oregon to southern B.C.



The typical urceolate (urn-shaped) blossoms of a ground-hugging *V. deliciosum*

It forms tufted mats from a few inches to 2' in height, and can spread by rhizomes into extensive

colonies. The flowers form in leaf axils and are solitary with a creamy color. They are followed by delicious (hence its scientific name) blue-black berries with a pale bloom, up to 1/3" in diameter. The leaves are 1/2-1" in length with serrations on upper half of the leaves

Many hikes and climbs that Lori and I have gone on have been delayed by these berries. The berries were extensively used by the native peoples. They are a very important food source for bears. The survival of cubs and the fertility rate in females falls after a poor blueberry year.

All of our local *Vacciniums*, seven in number, are in the Section *Myrtillus*, which have their flowers and resulting berries formed in leaf axils. There is now a movement in the scientific community to consider them all to be huckleberries, while the term "blueberries" is reserved for *Vacciniums* that grow their berries on racemes from last year's growth.

Our local commercial blueberries bear their fruit on racemes, resulting in clumps of berries which are more productive and easier to pick mechanically. These high bush commercial blueberries are mainly derived from *V. corymbosum*, which is native to the east, occurring from Quebec and Nova Scotia to Michigan and Illinois. Its range also occurs eastward to the coast and as far south as North Carolina.

*Dalén Bayes*

Brilliant fall colour on an extensive mat of *V. deliciosum* creeping between fallen "nurse" logs.





Fraser South Rhododendron Society

# Annual Plant Sale and Flower Show

Saturday, May 2 - 2009  
United Church Hall  
5673 200<sup>th</sup> St  
Langley, BC

10:00am to 3:00pm  
(rain or shine)

Plants for sale include

- rhododendrons and azaleas
- maples and other specimen trees
- companion plants

Plants are locally grown

Growers will be available to help you  
choose the right plant for your garden  
conditions

Growers and club members will be on  
hand to answer your gardening  
questions

Sponsored by the Fraser South  
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