

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: Wednesday, January 21,
2009

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

IN ADDITION TO OUR
7TH ANNUAL DESSERT EXTRAVAGANZA

2008 Officers

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Vice Pres.:	Sean Rafferty	604-990-5353
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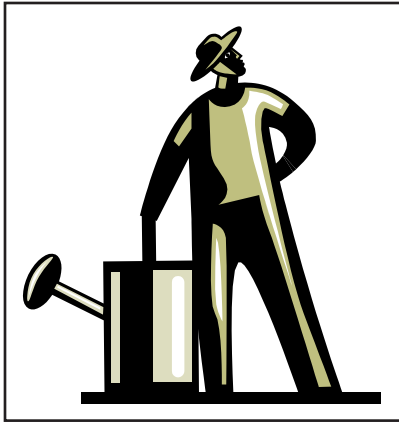


Quick Hits

Recipes?

Each month I usually hear some rumblings about the goodies that are so generously brought to our monthly meetings, our annual Christmas potluck, and our AGM Dessert Fest : who made it?? what is the recipe??

So now its time to prepare for the first-ever annual collection of recipes for all those treats. If you can winkle out the recipe from the chef, send it to me and I will print them all in the February issue.



From the President

Notes From the Chair

What a winter! As I write this (early January) we are still snowed in, as we have been now for more than two weeks. We started before Christmas with frigid temperatures and howling winds that froze the leaves on the rhodos so that they all pointed in one direction. Then we have had snow, and then heavy wet snow, which I can already see has broken lots of branches. I am afraid there has been major damage in our garden this year. However in a month or maybe six weeks we should be seeing blooms of *R. dauricum*, *R. sichotense*, and *R. 'Olive'*, so all is not lost!

At the last executive meeting, I asked for suggestions on what to write about, and several people suggested something on fertilizing rhododendrons, so that is what I am going to talk about this month. When writing about a particular rhododendron, it is always possible to consult the experts and the various books to get fairly definitive information. When it comes to fertilizing

however, consulting two rhododendron experts will lead to at least three contradictory bits of advice.

What is on the Internet is also not so useful as it is often tailored to specific climates and soil conditions. I am going to try to distill my experience and things I have learned from other local rhodo growers, but I am certainly not an expert, so what follows should be taken with a very large grain of salt ...er, fertilizer.

Like any plant, rhododendrons need a steady supply of nutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, (the N-P-K of fertilizer mixtures) as well as calcium, iron, sulfur, and other micronutrients. The nitrogen promotes vegetative growth. Phosphorus is important for root development and flower production, and potassium improves vigor and disease resistance. Some fertilizer mixtures include something to make the soil acid, but that normally isn't really necessary in the lower mainland since with all the rain we get, most soils are naturally acid.

The question is whether one needs to use chemical fertilizers to provide these nutrients. The world is divided into "those who don't" and "those who do", with a significant group of us categorized as "those who intend to, but sometimes don't get around to it".

Whether you plan to use chemical fertilizers or not, you should start as though you are not going to. That means you should regularly add a layer of mulch to your rhodos, an inch or two out past the drip line. Bark mulch, well-rotted compost, pine needles, or other coarse organic materials are good. Peat moss, sawdust, and green grass cuttings are not good, as they shed water. Manure is also not good as it tends to be alkaline. The late Frank Dorsey of the VRS used shredded oak leaves, which he said, with his usual wry sense of humor, he pirated from a secret location in the middle of the night. One caution though - fresh organic material, for example fresh bark mulch, absorbs a lot of nitrogen as it first starts to decompose. This nitrogen is later released and slowly made available to the plant as the decomposition proceeds, but this means that such fresh materials can lead to an initial nitrogen deficiency. If you do use such fresh organic material, you should add some high nitrogen chemical fertilizer at the same time.

So, you have done everything right so far. Do you need to use additional chemical fertilizers as well? It is probably not really necessary in most lower mainland gardens, at least once the plants are well established. However I do, as do most others with large collections with whom I have talked. I missed a year a few years ago and I thought the plants suffered. They didn't die, but the next year when I got back to my usual schedule of fertilizing, I thought they grew better, were healthier, and bloomed better.

What most people seem to do is to fertilize twice a year, the first time in February/March before the plants really start growing and the second time in June, right at the end of flowering season. For the first application I usually use Green Valley 10-8-6 Rhododendron and Azalea fertilizer. This was developed for our climate 20 or 30 years ago by the late Tom Brown of the VRS and the late Harold Johnson, working with the Green Valley people. It is reasonably high in nitrogen, some of which is delayed release, and contains the needed micronutrients. It should be broadcast under the plant out to the drip line. I use a carefully measured amount for each plant - a small handful for small plants and a large handful for large plants! This seems to be less available in garden shops than it used to be, but can still be obtained (at least last year) from the Green Valley plant in Abbotsford. For the June feeding I use this same fertilizer or any of the other brands of specifically rhododendron fertilizer which are available in garden shops. These tend to have

relatively less nitrogen and may be more appropriate for later season application, as they may be less likely to stimulate new growth so late in the season that it doesn't have time to harden off before winter.

There is another approach, espoused particularly by Tom Brown, but also by others, which advocates fertilizing in the late fall or early winter. The theory is that in our climate where the ground (usually!) isn't frozen over most of the winter, the roots continue to develop through the winter and early spring. Thus a winter feeding stimulates root growth and leads to a healthier plant. I have never tried this, but it does sound logical. However one would have to time the application so the fertilizer reached the root zone, which is very shallow for rhododendrons, in the very early spring as the ground started to warm up. If applied too early I would think the winter rains would wash a lot down below the root zone before it could be used.

Finally, one reads that some rhodos 'don't like fertilizer'. This is supposed to be true particularly of the small-leaved varieties and of some specific hybrids. I have never seen any evidence of this. I do match the amount of fertilizer to the size of the plant, but I have never seen any obvious fertilizer burn for plants in the ground. For plants in pots it is a different story, and I have over-fertilized and burned a number of them.

I am sure there is formal research about fertilizing practices applicable to controlled situations in commercial greenhouses, but for the wide variety of conditions we experience in home gardens, our knowledge comes mainly as word of mouth from local growers. I would be very interested to hear from anyone who has suggestions or experiences different from those above.

Harold Fearing



From the Editor

Last Month:

Last month was our annual Christmas do, and a great time was had by all. Special thanks go to Les and Bev Clay for cooking (and so expertly carving!), yet again, the Christmas bird; to Colleen Bojczuk for her "Match the Rhododendron to the Description" game; to Karen Linton and the Kitchen Elves for organizing everything so well; to everyone who brought such a wide and delicious selection of foods; to Mai Swan for being resourceful enough to actually find a rhododendron blossom for an almost-coronet; and to Santa Dalen Bayes and vice-Santa Nancy Moore for their efficient and prescient gift distribution (how do they always know the best person for the package?)

Let's do it all again next year.

This Month:

This month is our Annual General Meeting and 7th Annual Dessert Extravaganza. It is the meeting at which we take care of our corporate responsibilities by interspersing all the dry financial and societal governance stuff with lashings of sweet calories and hot tea (coffee always available for those in need of sterner stuff). And then, as a reward for our good behaviour, someone will show us lovely pictures and talk about them.

It is also the meeting at which we ratify the slate of Chapter officers for the up-coming year as well as when we take time to celebrate and recognize those Chapter members who have distinguished themselves with their special contributions to our communal well-being.

Remember however, that the party is only as good as the people, so bring along a few slides or a disc with some photos of what you did last summer, or what you wanted to do but never got around to, or your favourite collection of companion plants, or your favourite collection of your neighbour's plants. Something, anything, share the wealth! You know you want to!

And don't forget to bring a little something toothsome for adding to the groaning table, to share and share alike, keeping in mind that 'little' is the operative word here, we don't want to groan too much.

Also, it is abundantly clear that we have some superior cooks and bakers within our Chapter, so I am proposing that we make every February issue a special recipes issue in which we can publish instructions for all the goodies we enjoy during the year as well as at the December and January meetings. I already have Arlene Darby's

recipe for Double Chocolate Chip cookies, which was requested by several members at the September meeting, and if I can find the shy person who made them, and finagle out the recipe for those wonderful Date and Walnut Rollie-Things that appeared at the November meeting, I will publish that also. Oh, and I cannot forget Patti Bales' Lemon Squares with the really yummy crunchy bits at the corners, drool, drool.

All suggestions welcomed.

Next Month:

Next month David Sellars will speak on "The Application of Chaos Theory to Rock Garden Design", a masterful topic if I do say so myself. Speaking as someone whose life encompasses chaos in all its mundane and scientific variations, I am looking forward to a little support for my theory that the reason my rockery has all those dead bits in it, and is, even as we speak, slowly slipping out of its initial configuration as a bright and tidy place filled with artistically placed structural elements and tiny exquisite jewels of the plant kingdom, into something infinitely larger, messier, and harder to control, is simply because of the passage of time and some butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil.

The Business Stuff:

THE CALENDAR

Thursday, January 15	Vancouver Chapter - AGM and members' slides
Wednesday, January 21	Fraser South Chapter AGM and Dessert Extravaganza
Monday, January 26	Fraser Valley Chapter - Garth Wedemire "Lu Zhu - A Plant Collector's Passion"
Tuesday, January 27	Peace Arch Chapter - Graham Lane "Dart's Hill"
Wednesday, February 18	Fraser South Chapter - David Sellars "The Application of Chaos Theory to Rock Garden Design"
Thursday, February 19	Vancouver Chapter - Fred Whitney, President ARS "You Grow Rhododendrons for the Blooms?"
Monday, February 23	Fraser Valley Chapter - Bill Bischoff "Hardy Cyclamen All Year in Your Garden"

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED

☛ Tea room duties for 2009 have been assigned, I just don't know to whom. Cherry Groves, who continues to shoulder this organizational responsibility on our behalf, had emailed me this year's list with her usual efficiency, at which point, possibly in a post-turkey stupor, I trashed it. In my own defense I must say that I clearly remember sitting on the chesterfield, in front of the fire, with the laptop propped on my knees, winging the "print" command off on the wifi-ether to the printer, which was sitting on what seemed at the time a computer desk located a very great distance away, in a cold, dark and possibly lonely room. And then, having successfully avoided moving for yet another half hour, I assuaged any feelings of guilt by vigorously purging my emails of anything already taken care of.

Hopefully the January contingent are already in place. The list will be published next month.

Brenda Macdonald



Up the Garden Path

*Attending the New Zealand
 Rhododendron Conference,
 December 2008*

When you're a "rhodoholic", spring can't come often enough. The solution? Go to New Zealand in October and November. Fellow FSRS members, Mary Berg, Nancy Moore and I, did just that. While there, we attended the New Zealand Rhododendron conference and then toured many lovely gardens around the South Island.

This year, the NZ conference was held in Geraldine on the South Island. Their conferences are a bit different than the usual ARS ones in that the New Zealand conferences are spent touring gardens. In this case, the gathering place was at a local country hall, Woodbury Hall, just outside Geraldine. The hall was used for meals, the banquet and for the one talk presented at the conference. Funnily enough, the presentation was by Richie Steffen about Seattle's Elizabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden. The truss display and other related displays were housed in adjacent tents.

The gardens we visited were lovely, and ranged from a couple of relatively new suburban gardens to large country gardens. The large gardens were, for the most part, established decades ago to surround the farmhouse of working sheep stations.

In most of the gardens we visited, the topography was rolling, allowing changes in elevation throughout the gardens. Often, rhododendrons were planted on steep terrain providing them with excellent drainage, although planting must have been a challenge. Also in most places, some sort of water feature, usually a natural stream, was present, adding to the natural charm of the gardens.

It seems like anything can grow somewhere in New Zealand as long as plants can be protected from the

wind. The "Southerlies" are cold winds that originate in Antarctica, and these sweep over the South Island frequently. Large, dense windbreaks have been planted throughout the South Island. These are made up of numerous species, but particularly Monterey Pine (*Pinus radiata*) and Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*). Round the "stations" we visited, woodlands were planted early on, and we saw lots of oaks, elms, beeches, maples, Douglas firs, Chamaecyparis and some Thujas. We were told that both Monterey Pine and Douglas fir have become a bit of a problem in some areas, and steps are being taken to control their spread into grazing lands. Considering that NZ was colonized just over 150 years ago, the size of the trees is amazing, but growth rates there are phenomenal. Shrubs and herbaceous ornamentals also grow quickly once shelter is available. And, in the Orari Garden, as Nancy said, they were just showing off when *Cardiocrinum* had turned into a ground cover.



R. 'Michael's Pride' buds

Many of the popular hybrids grown in New Zealand would be easily recognized by ARS members. For example, most gardens we visited had 'Mrs. G.W. Leek', a whole host of Loderis, and 'Lem's Cameo'. Also popular were 'Horizon Monarch', 'Pink Pearl', 'Taurus', 'Scarlet Wonder', 'Pink Petticoats' and 'Fastuosum Flore



R. 'Kiwi Magic'

Pleno'. Of course, there were also loads of lovely New Zealand hybrids, some we grow here, but some I hadn't seen before. 'Kiwi Magic' [(*yakushimanum* x 'Dido') x 'Lem's Cameo'] is certainly a sensational plant, with frilly flowers changing from deep pink in the bud through soft pink to pale yellow over time. I was also pleased to see lots of 'Rubicon' ('Noyo Chief' x 'Kilimanjaro'), although in most cases, this gorgeous red-flowered rhody was just past, leading to our hosts using that popular garden phrase, "you should have seen it last week".

A few plants that I hadn't known before that I thought were terrific were: 'Ilam Cream', 'Ilam Cerise', 'Michael's Pride', 'Lemon Lodge' and 'Floral Dance'. I kept picking these beauties out every time I saw them. Here we know 'Ilam Violet', but there are lots of other hybrids grown in New Zealand that carry the Ilam name. Both 'Ilam Cream' and 'Ilam

Cerise' are large plants with large flowers. 'Ilam Cream' is a Loderi seedling that starts pink in the bud and then opens to rich, creamy-white flowers that are tinged with pink at the edges of the flower lobes. Flowers have the added bonus of fragrance. 'Ilam Cerise' is a cross of 'Lady de Rothschild' x *arboreum* and is truly cerise coloured. The plants I saw were loaded with flowers and looked particularly nice when back lit. These are old hybrids,



R. 'Michael's Pride'

and have the reputation of being difficult to propagate, so are usually grafted. 'Michael's Pride' (*burmanicum* x *dalhousei*) is tender with large, scented flowers, similar to 'Mi Amor'. It was at its peak of bloom while we were there. It has large fragrant flowers, yellow in bud, and as they open, the flowers gradually change from yellow to a creamy colour. For us, it would definitely need to be over-wintered in a greenhouse, but it just knocks your socks off!



R. 'Lemon Lodge'

'Lemon Lodge' ('Prelude' selfed) has primrose-yellow flowers, fairly large, in an open truss. Leaves are a nice medium green on a good size plant. 'Floral Dance' (*nuttallii* x *edgeworthii*) shows its *edgeworthii* parentage with bright green rugose leaves. The prominent flower buds are bright pink and open white with deep pink edges. As you might expect with its parentage, flowers are scented and the plant wouldn't be hardy outside here, but it's a beauty.

The deciduous azaleas were outstanding, and they had the most unbelievably intense, glowing floral colours. In talking with some of the New Zealand folks, I was told that one theory to explain the depth of colour was that because of the hole in the ozone layer overhead, the u-v light is exceptionally high and this contributes to floral pigment intensity. The intense floral colours weren't limited to azaleas, all flowers seemed to be just that much more colourful.

It was interesting to see that, at least for the gardens we visited as part of the conference, there



R. 'Ilam Cream' buds

weren't many species rhododendrons planted. We did see some *macabeanum*, a few *augustinii*, and *arboreum*, and occasionally a few other species, but they weren't common. I have the impression that locally we use more species in our average home rhododendron gardens than the New Zealanders do. Perhaps this is due to our proximity to the RSF?

On a slightly silly, but very practical note, one of the ideas we could borrow from the New Zealand conference is their use of portable potties. Someone had the bright idea of putting four "port-a-potties" on a trailer and then trucking the trailer around to each of the locations where the activities were in session. This meant that individual garden owners didn't have to cope with 300 people all in need of a comfort stop at the same time. Keep in mind, we were given tea, coffee and wine regularly, so the portable potties got a lot of use.

The conference was well-organized, and we were warmly welcomed by the New Zealanders. We enjoyed ourselves so much, and the gardens and plants were fabulous. If you haven't had the chance to visit New Zealand, you must add it to your places to visit. Next year, the conference will be in Auckland, so if you are interested in vireyas or maddeniiis, this will be the place to go.

Norma Senn



R. 'Ilam Cream'



Rhododendrons of China



R. hippophaeoides
illustration by Lilian Snelling
Curtis' Botanical Magazine, 1926

Various colour forms of *R. hippophaeoides*,
including a rare white form, at the RSF.
All photos by Chris Klapwijk.

Rhododendron hippophaeoides

It is time to celebrate *R. hippophaeoides*, official totem of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society. It may not be showy, it may not be flashy, and when out of flower, it does not make a great bold statement, but it is ours, and a bonny wee thing it is too.

Above all, it is a tenacious survivor, well-adapted to the Mediterranean climate of the Pacific Northwest with its soggy winters and droughty summers - conditions which can effect a quick slide to the burn pile for many of the larger, more spectacular species.

It shares many of the same characteristics of other members of subsection Lapponica: small, densely lepidote, and sometimes highly aromatic leaves, small broadly funnel-shaped flowers in small terminal trusses of somewhat muted but still charming colours ranging from lavender though mauve up to almost-rose, and a mounding, often quite low, habit.

Basically it a rhododendron your grandmother would be happy with; muted, heathery colours and small pleasantly scented leaves - something she could wear of sprig of on her lapel, like a tuft of heather. But like your grandmother, it's still here, hanging around and continuing to provide pleasure and quiet happiness to others long after the flashy aunt in the high-heeled shoes and red Cadillac has driven off into oblivion.

Hippophaeoides differentiates itself from other members of the group by a glaucous leaf surface, giving it its somewhat dusty look, and the densely-packed creamy yellow scales on the leaf underside. But those are up-close characteristics and not easily discernible as you look up the side of a tall bare mountain in Yunnan or Sichuan, marvelling at the undulating carpet of mauves and lavenders - the "sea of Lapponica" that so enthused Kingdon-Ward when first he spied it in 1913 in northwest Yunnan.

Brenda Macdonald

