

The Yak

Newsletter of
the Fraser South
Rhododendron
Society

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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 18, 2009
Topic: "Digital Photography for Gardeners"
Speaker: Ron Knight
Plant Sales: Les Clay

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Quick Hits

New Zealand
Redux ...

Norma Senn has once again provided text and images almost good enough to make

you believe you were there also. Part II of her New Zealand narrative begins on Page 6. (The Jack Russell pictured above, belonging to the Brentley garden, took his responsibilities to ensure that none of the goldfish would escape from the lily pond very seriously.)



From the President

Notes From the Chair

Last month we had a very interesting program given by Dave Sellars on the chaos theory of rock garden design. His point was that in nature alpine plants grow among random distributions of rocks, not in ordered linear structures as often found in designed gardens. He showed us how he built a section of his rock garden designed on these random principles. As usual, Dave's photos of alpine scenery and close-ups of plants growing there were absolutely magnificent.

Next month we have Ron Knight speaking on garden photography and the following month Norma Senn on New Zealand gardens. Both talks should be excellent, so it would be a good time to invite a friend, who might be interested in eventually joining the chapter.

It is coming up to open-garden time as well. Several people have already agreed to open their gardens - see elsewhere in the newsletter - but we would like to have more openings, particularly of gardens which we haven't seen before. You

don't need to have an impeccable garden - none of us do - and it doesn't have to be large. It is always fun to see how others do things, and the plants they have. So please let one of the executive know if you would be willing to open your garden to visitors for a few hours this spring.

WHAT'S NOT (YET) IN BLOOM

As I write this (March 7) it is still winter. We had a dusting of snow this afternoon and it is too cold to comfortably work outside. We have had a few blooms of *R. sichotense* and *R. ledebourii*, both Siberian natives related to *R. dauricum*, but very little else. Our plant of *R. ririei* was on track for more blooms than it had ever had, with buds half open. Its flowers are a light lavender, which I like, though some don't. However the -4 C night time temperature we had a week or so ago froze all of the buds, and so we will have no real flowers.



R. strigillosum, bright red blossom with deep nectaries, above, and leaf whorl with stem bristles, below

R. strigillosum is beginning to come out and should be nice in a week or so, if it also doesn't get frozen. Its flowers are a bright blood red which is particularly welcome this early in the season. For us this has been a hardy, well shaped plant that dependably covers itself with flowers. The young stems and leaf bases are covered with long bristles, so it is an interesting plant even when not in bloom.

Two others which should be coming out very soon are *R. ciliatum* and *R. moupinense*. *R. ciliatum* is a medium sized plant with leaves edged in long bristles, or cilia, from which it gets its name. The flowers appear in loose clusters of 2-5, and are white, or flushed pink. *R. moupinense* tends to be a smaller plant and have smaller leaves than *R. ciliatum*. The flowers can be white or pink, or white with various pink markings. We have a particularly nice clone obtained from the Badmintons (though apparently originally from the RSF) which is white, flushed pink on the



edges with a blotch of pink speckles.

One often finds in the nurseries a plant *R. 'Cilpinense'* which is a hybrid, *ciliatum* x *moupinense*, of these two. For us at least it tends to be a larger plant than



R. ciliatum, with some of the abundant leaf bristles shining in the sun



A particularly fine form of *R. moupinense*, with its winsome and generously open-faced blossoms in pink and white.



And the progeny, *R. 'Cilpenense'*, with silken blossoms less campanulate than ciliatum but not so rounded and open as moupinense.



R. lutescens, with its exceptionally clear yellow blossoms and early bloom period provides a welcome ray of sunshine after a long grey winter.

either of its parents. The flowers are similar, white flushed pink, but are larger also. Many of the plants one buys in the nurseries as *R. moupinense* are apparently actually this hybrid.

Finally among the early bloomers I should mention one of my favorites, *R. lutescens*. As is typical of members of the Triflora section, this has somewhat open asymmetric flowers in clusters of 1-3. They are a nice yellow, often with green spots. The plant tends to be a bit straggly, so I have found it works best in a fair amount of sun, and with an occasional judicious bit of pruning. But in full bloom it is great, especially so early in the season. I have heard from some people that some forms are a bit tender, but we have not found that. The clone we have has never had any winter damage either in Vancouver or in Abbotsford.

So, I have had to indulge in the usual winter gardener's musing about plants not yet in bloom. But hopefully it shouldn't be too long before those blooms exist in reality.

Harold Fearing

This Month:

This month our District 1 Director, Ron Knight, will present some well-needed information on digital photography for gardeners.

Ron Knight is a retired biology teacher and school administrator. He is a confirmed rhodoholic, past-president of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, and currently the Director for the American Rhododendron Society's BC Division. Ron is a busy guest speaker at garden clubs on the Sunshine Coast and at rhododendron clubs on Vancouver Island and in Greater Vancouver.

Over the past decade, Ron and his wife Carla have created Caron Gardens at Pender Harbour on the Sunshine Coast. In this one-acre lakeside garden, they display over 500 different rhododendrons, sell plants, host garden club tours, and teach a variety of gardening courses.

Ron is a keen garden photographer. His photographs have been published in the ARS Journal and in Gardens West magazine, which features Caron Gardens in their winter 2009 edition. At our March meeting, Ron will be presenting a Powerpoint presentation entitled, "Digital Photography for Gardeners". He will discuss how your digital camera works, five common pitfalls, and composition hints. Bring your digital camera to the meeting.



From the Editor

It is March 9th, Daylight Savings has arrived and as I sit here huddled over my computer trying to pick up any ambient heat generated by the LCD screen, the only thing warm around here is the fiery red colour of Harold's photo of (last year's) *strigillosum*. Our entire garden is again (still?) blanketed with snow. We were just beginning to see brown earth by the end of last week, only to wake up Saturday morning to find everything white again, with all those poor rhodos who were finally beginning to lift their limbs from the icy embrace of crusted snow completely bowed over once more.

This is really the first year in which we have noticed a significant meteorological difference between us and, apparently, the rest of world - or at least us and every other gardener in the Lower Mainland. In all previous snow years our accumulation did not appear to be very much different from what we would have received at our previous house in West Point Grey. (West Point Grey has always surprised me with the amount of snow it receives - something about the clouds scudding over the Strait of Georgia and then having to lift up and over the cliffs along the edges of the University Endowment Lands. All I know is that we would receive inches of snow at our house, but by the time I slid -

sometimes literally - down the hill to Kits there would be only a scuffle of snow visible under the shrubbery.)

But this year was something else. It started to snow a couple of days before Christmas and it just kept on, and on, and on. It didn't really interfere too badly, we could just put the Toyotasaurus in four-wheel drive and carry on, but the volume was incredible. There were huge, bread-loaf shaped accumulations on the garden seats, and great jagged heaps like Annapurna where the snow slid off the glass roof of the walkway.

And apparently the difference between us and the rest of the world was only a matter of a couple of hundred feet. We would roll down the hill and by the time we hit Peters Road the snow would be rain, or at the very worst, sleet. It was as if some ancient cartographer had drawn a mapping line right through Peters Road, above which was substituted "Here be snow" for the usual "Here be monsters".

I tell you, if I wanted to live like this I would have moved to Ottawa.

Next Month:

Next month our own, or at least our former-own, Norma Senn will provide us with a better look at some of the New Zealand gardens she has already given us a glimpse of in her "Up the Garden Path" articles.

The Business Stuff:

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED

● As you know, the FSRS annual plant sale is coming up - Saturday, May 2. from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. A sign-up list will be sent around at the next meeting and we will be depending on a few more members than usual for support since a number of the stalwarts will be attending the ARS Spring convention in Everett that weekend.

However, apart from any arm-twisting we may inflict in April in order to fill that roster, this month is the month to start looking around for companion plant material that we can provide for the sale.

We unequivocally depend upon our growers to supply the wonderful specimens of rhodos and azaleas as well as other woody materials that provide the bulk and mainstay of our sale, but there is a vast opportunity for the Chapter to increase its revenue by supplying other garden material directly from our members to the public at that time.

Look around your garden and you are likely to find all sorts of hidden treasures - Siberian irises in desperate want of division, extra dahlia tubers from last year's harvest, naturalized seedlings of Japanese maples. The possibilities are endless, the effort required to pot them up minimal, and the profit to the Chapter absolute. And remember, even if it doesn't look like much this year, pot it up and grow it on for next year, by which time it will look like a million bucks and be available for significantly less.

THE CALENDAR

Wednesday, March 18	Fraser South Chapter - Ron Knight "Photography in the Garden"
Thursday, March 19	Vancouver Chapter - Norma Senn "Walking in the Sasquatch's Footprints"
Tuesday, March 24	Peace Arch Chapter - Harold Fearing "Species Rhododendrons"
Sunday, April 12	Open Garden - Les and Bev Clay 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm 3674 - 224 Street, Langley
Wednesday, April 15	Fraser South Chapter - Norma Senn "Kiwi Magic"
Thursday, April 16	Vancouver Chapter - Jens Nielsen
Saturday, April 18	Open Garden - Harold and Ginny Fearing 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm 5376 Ross Road, Abbotsford 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.
Saturday, April 25	Open Garden - Dalen and Lori Bayes 4950 South Pass Road, Sumas, WA Don't forget your passport for the border
Monday, April 27	Fraser Valley Chapter - Art Lightburn "Scotland, and the Edinburgh Conference, 2008"
Tuesday, April 28	Peace Arch Chapter - Art Lightburn "Scotland, and the Edinburgh Conference, 2008"
Thursday, April 30 to Sunday, May 3	2009 ARS Rhododendron Rendezvous Convention in Everett, Washington
Saturday May 2	Fraser South Chapter - Annual Plant Sale at Langley United Church, 5673 - 200th St., Langley 10:00 am to 3:00 pm
Wednesday, May 20	Fraser South Chapter - 16th Annual FSRS Beer Bottle Truss Show

Brenda Macdonald



As I wrote in last month's 'Yak', it's difficult to narrow down an article and write about just a few New Zealand gardens as they were all so nice. This month's article features some of the lovely small gardens we visited. Each property is considered to be an average, suburban sized lot in New Zealand, but their idea of what constitutes a small garden is somewhat larger than what we would find locally. These gardens ranged from 1500 sq meters to about 0.5 hectares in size.

Upon arriving in Christchurch, we met for a champagne brunch (food and wine was another recurring treat on our trip), before visiting three gardens on our very first tour day. For some of our group, they got off the plane and immediately went touring. This was no trip for wimps!

The garden of Mrs. Alison Ayling combines wooded riverbank with open lawn near the house. Her garden lies along the Avon River, a lovely watercourse that meanders throughout Christchurch. Mrs. Ayling is obviously a "rhodo-holic", and when we were there, she had many beautiful hybrids either in bloom or just coming out, including several maddeniiis, 'Rubicon', 'Wee Bee' and some augustiniis. This garden offered me my first look at Rhododendron 'Lemon Lodge', a hybrid I kept picking out every time I saw it. Another plant I really liked was an outstanding edgeworthia hybrid, 'Bodnant' which was in full bloom when we were there. During our visit, we had glimpses of sunshine, but we also dodged rain and hail so we ended up waiting out the storm in her sunroom overlooking the garden. Just outside the sunroom door is the Marlborough Rock Daisy, *Pachystegia insignis*, a plant that impressed us all with its silvery foliage and large flower buds. It is popular

Up the Garden Path

New Zealand Fall 2008

in the area for its drought tolerance. Mrs. Ayling also grows roses, and has a nice mix of deciduous shrubs and wildflowers growing along the river's edge.

Mrs. Mickey Kerr hosted us at the second garden, and isn't it amazing how well glasses of wine go with garden visits? This is a young garden composed of a series of formal terraced lawns that lead the eye down to the river's edge and offer views across the river. Informal side beds planted with rockery plants, trees and shrubs border the terraces. I made another "bee line" for 'Lemon Lodge', which was in peak bloom, as were a number of maddeniiis. Mrs. Kerr has done some hybridizing over the years, registering several good hybrids including a nice one of apricot tones I liked called 'Ambergris'. I was told that Mrs. Kerr has been ruthless in her selections and that all her registered hybrids are very good.



The third garden we visited belongs to Colin and Noella Knight. With all the rhododendrons planted along the perimeter of the property, it was easy to tell that rhody fans were in residence. Among the hybrids in bloom were 'Viennese Waltz', 'Halfdan Lem', 'Cream Glory', 'Arctic Tern' and 'Whitney's Orange'. The Knights are interested in many plants, and in addition to rhododendrons, they have roses, a great vegetable garden and lots of trees and shrubs. I particularly liked a single climbing rose called 'Nancy Heywood' trained

Above, left, a different Garden Path - the Brentley's garden in Dunedin

Above right R. 'Ambergris', hybridized by Mrs. Mickey Kerr



over their patio arbor. It is an early bloomer with large, cerise red flowers. As well, the arbor supports a Wisteria, and the soft fragrance and lovely lilac-coloured flowers were a treat; the rose and Wisteria combined beautifully. While they don't live on the river, the Knights have a nice Japanese-inspired water feature adjacent to the house that offers the sound of running water. We had a relaxing time enjoying their garden and hospitality, and guess what - more wine and goodies.

Our first two garden stops during the NZ conference were at relatively small gardens just outside Geraldine. Both properties have been renovated within the last decade or so, and their respective owners consider them to be young gardens. Chartwell Downs, home of Cheryl and Bruce Jopp, is situated high on a hill with views of the surrounding countryside. This garden has great hard landscaping features with red brick walkways around the house, an ornamental pool, and nice changes



Above, left, *Rosa* 'Nancy Heywood' with Wisteria - Knight garden
 Below, left, Chartwell Downs - Jopp garden, near Geraldine



in elevation. Like many of the gardens we saw in New Zealand, formal plantings are found immediately around the house, gradually giving way to more informal plantings towards the periphery that in this case included a water lily pond, herbaceous borders, roses, and woodland walks - all in a half hectare garden.

Judy and Ron Kemp, owners of Ballymena, had the smallest of all the gardens we saw on our trip, but it still had lots of plants. In addition to hybrid rhododendrons, there were lots of roses grown on pergolas, a productive vegetable garden, space for lawn and some nice trees. Magnolia 'Yellow Bird' was in peak bloom and the flowers were low enough for us all to get a good look at them.

Just north of Dunedin, we stopped at the Brentley's home for lunch (and more wine) and a garden visit. They have a wonderful ocean view on a challenging site that requires the Brentleys to be part Sherpa to do garden maintenance work. The house is located at the top of a steep hill and the garden is planted down the



Above, right, Lady Banks Rose - Kemp garden
 Below, *R.* 'Oh Canada', a Jack Lofthouse hybrid - Brentley garden



slope, eventually reaching the shoreline at the bottom of the hill. Because of fast drainage, some areas are planted to drought tolerant plants, especially succulents. Narrow terraces have been dug into the hillside to allow for herbaceous borders, lovely trees and a goldfish pond greatly favoured by the resident Jack Russell terrier. One of the small trees I enjoyed seeing was crabapple, *Malus ioensis* 'Flore Plena'. We saw several specimens throughout our trip, as they are popular with the New Zealanders. They are lucky not to have the problems with apple scab that limit our ability to grow crabapples well. A number of nice rhododendrons were featured in this garden, including Jack Lofthouse's 'Oh Canada'. This was the first time I'd seen this hybrid in bloom, and having seen it, I'd like to find one for my own garden, as I do like flowers comprised of "sunset" colours. The climate this far south can be challenging, but the Brentley's successfully grow potted vireyas in a covered gazebo.

One of my favourite small gardens was at the



Above, left, *Malus ioensis* 'Flore Pleno' - Brentley garden
 Below, left, *Meconopsis integrifolia* - Stuart garden

home of Pat and Keith Stuart in Wanaka. This couple runs a retail nursery specializing in many native North American wildflowers like Trilliums and Lewisias, and Asian Primulas and Meconopsis. They use their garden as a tempting display for their nursery stock. The whole garden was lovely, but one of my most vivid memories of the trip was of Mrs. Stuart throwing breadcrumbs to the brown trout that live in the stream that runs along the edge of their suburban home. The fish obviously knew a good thing when they saw it as they came to the bridge as soon as she arrived. Whew! They were BIG, and this explains why fly-fishing is such a popular sport in the area. In addition to many choice herbaceous plants, the garden has large deciduous trees planted throughout and



a good understory of rhododendrons and camellias, plus many other interesting shrubs and small trees.

Another of my favourites was Valerie and Robert Sangstra's garden located outside Wellington at the south end of the North Island. The Sangstras were farmers, but upon retirement, they "downsized" to a suburban lot. While the garden was smaller than their previous one, it is so well designed that it seems larger than the actual square footage would indicate. Overhead are a variety of deciduous trees that provide dappled shade to the underplantings of shrubs and ground covers. The local birds seemed to like this garden too, as we kept

Above, right, Lewisia - Stuart garden



From there, we went to Lorraine and Malcolm Cubbit's garden, a camellia grower's delight, although peak flowering was past. The camellias are grown as dense hedges that almost completely surround the property and offer great privacy. To keep them from taking over the whole yard, Mr. Cubbit shears the plants immediately after blooming to give the appearance of a dark green wall. The Cubbits also have interesting container tolerant plants. I'd never heard of *Xeronema* (Poor Knights Lily), but this is a great container plant and obviously from the genus name, is drought tolerant.

Well, there you have a short narrative of just some of the New Zealand gardens we visited in October and November. I

could have written about every garden we saw, as they hearing distinctive bird songs while we visited. New Zealanders use a lot of containers and the Sangstras were no exception. Instead of flowers, however, they grow variegated foliage plants in their containers, grouping together several large pots of yellow leaved plants in one area and red foliaged plants in another. It made for very striking displays. After touring their garden, we had a

could have written about every garden we saw, as they



pleasant time sitting on the patio and soaking up some sunshine.



were all lovely, but I hope you get the chance to visit this wonderful country to see for yourself. I'd happily go back and do it all over again as there were so many gardens and so little time.

Norma Senn

Above, left, container display - Sangstra garden
Below left, *Xeronema callistemon*, the drought resistant Poor Knights Lily - Cubbit garden

Above, right, *Pachystegia insignis*, the drought resistant Marlborough Rock Daisy - Ayling garden