

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
(except June, July and August) at:
United Church Hall
5673 - 200th Street
Langley BC

This Month's Meeting

Date: Wednesday, November 18, 2009
Topic: "Great Plant Picks"
Speaker: Gwen Odermatt
Plant Sales: Bill Bischoff

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President:	Harold Fearing	604-857-4136
Past Pres:	Dalen Bayes	360-966-4596
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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



A last desperate plea for any outstanding membership dues. It makes our Membership Chair's job easier, our annual budgeting more precise, and our reputation as really nifty organization more obvious if we can finish off our yearly enrolment in one swell foop.



And here it is, our trendy Kermode "Spirit" Bear holding something that looks suspiciously like an Olympic torch, but is not. It is a Christmas decoration, there to remind us that next month is our Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner, complete with gift exchange, riveting Christmas game, and lashings of wonderful food. Put a big gold star on Wednesday, December 16th, with an early start at 6:30pm.



From the President

Notes From the Chair

A few days ago as I was weeding in the greenhouse - an endless task - I brushed against the foliage of a small plant and noticed a wonderful spicy fragrance. That got me to thinking. Fragrance is something we don't normally pay much attention to in rhododendrons. Only a few of the normal lepidote or elepidote rhododendrons have fragrant flowers, unlike some of the azaleas, which are quite fragrant.



R. fortunei (left) and *R. diaprepes* (right) are both members of the Fortunea subsection, members of which are often known for their clean, sweet, if somewhat subtle fragrance.

Of the regular hardy rhododendrons, *R. fortunei* is probably the best known fragrant species. It is usually a vigorous, large growing plant with pale pink flowers. The fragrance is subtle, not something you notice across the garden, but still nice near the plant. Others of the Fortunea subsection, such as *R. decorum* and *R. diaprepes* have similar fragrances.

Probably the most fragrant regular rhododendron we have in our garden is one distributed in the lower mainland as *R. rigidum* 'Bodineri'. This plant originated from Frank Dorsey. While I don't remember all the details

of the story he told, the 'Bodineri' part was a name he apparently coined. The plant keys out to *R. rigidum*, and appears identical to two other clones of *R. rigidum* I have, except for the fragrance. And this is fragrance you can smell across the garden, especially on a sunny warm day. The plant covers itself with blooms as well, so it is a spectacular plant for the garden.



There are also several relatively tender rhododendrons which are supposed to have large and very fragrant flowers: *R. maddenii*, *R. nuttallii*, *R. dalhousiae*, and *R. edgeworthii*. I have no personal experience with these, as they are all too tender for the exposed garden we have. I think some people in more protected gardens in the lower mainland are able to grow *R. edgeworthii* successfully however.

R. rigidum 'Bodineri'



Among the deciduous species there is more choice. One of my favorites is *R. atlanticum*. This is a smaller plant with gray green leaves. It spreads by stolons and so eventually becomes a spreading bush with lots of stems. The flowers have a long tube with flaring petals at the end and a sweet fragrance powerful enough to smell from some feet away.



R. luteum is another very fragrant plant. It is a deciduous azalea, bright yellow and a native of the Caucasus area of eastern Europe. Many of the fragrant hybrid azaleas have *R. luteum* in their parentage. Our own west coast azalea *R. occidentale* can also be very fragrant, as are several of the east coast native azaleas, such as *R. viscosum*.

I have seen the claim in several places in the literature that most fragrant rhododendrons are white or pale pink. The theory is that the fragrance attracts pollinators and so there is no need for flashy colors. *R. luteum* is obviously a glaring exception to this claim. Although many of the others are pale colored, I don't really know how strong the scientific evidence for that claim is.



Deciduous azaleas, *R. atlanticum* (top),
R. luteum (centre) and *R. occidentale* (bottom)
can perfume an entire garden.



But enough of flowers and back to what got me thinking about fragrance in the first place. The plant I was weeding was *R. ledebourii*, considered a variety of *R. dauricum* by some. Simply sweeping your hands through the foliage is enough to release a sweet spicy fragrance. The related species *R. sichotense*, and *R. dauricum* itself, have similarly fragrant foliage. This characteristic is also inherited by some of the *dauricum* hybrids, e.g. the well known ‘PJM’. I have written about *R. ledebourii* before. It is a native of Siberia, so is completely hardy, and is also one of the earliest to bloom, even in late January or early February.

Several other small leaved species share a similar fragrant foliage, for example *R. sargentianum*, and its selected form ‘Maricee’, and the similarly flowered *R. primuliflorum*. Among the somewhat larger-leaved plants, the foliage of *R. cinnabarinum*, with its attractive blue green foliage, is supposed to have a distinctive spicy smell when crushed. However I could not detect this, at least on a cold November afternoon, in any of the several clones I have, except for *R. xanthocodon*, which is now considered a subspecies of *R. cinnabarinum*. Again according to the books, *R. hippophaeoides* is another common species with fragrant foliage. A narrow leaved version, var. *occidentale*, which I recently got from Sue Klapwijk, does seem to be fragrant, but the more common wider-leaved clone ‘Haba Shan’ has no smell that I could detect.

The small-leaved *R. ledebourii* (top), *R. dauricum album* (upper centre), and *R. sichotense* (lower centre), all have aromatic leaves whose spicy-sweet fragrance wafts up when the leaves are brushed or when the sun warms them.

R. xanthocodon (bottom) is a member of the *cinnabarinum* family, whose lovely blue-green leaves have a bracing resinous odour if rubbed or crushed.

So, while fragrance of either flowers or foliage would probably not be the primary reason for choosing a particular plant, it is another dimension to our enjoyment of rhododendrons. And, at this time of year, when you are crawling around on hands and knees weeding, a few plants with fragrant foliage can certainly make the task more bearable.

Harold Fearing



From the Editor

This Month:

This month our guest speaker is Gwen Odermatt. For over 15 years Gwen has operated 'Petals and Butterflies', a farm nursery that specializes in growing plants that attract butterflies and hummingbirds to gardens. As well, she grows a lengthening list of unusual, rare, and ornamental plants. She is on the Selection Committee for Great Plants Picks, is a member of the RHS, the Vancouver Hardy Plant Group, the Alpine Garden Club of BC, and the South Surrey Garden Club. Gwen will be speaking on 'Great Plant Picks'.

Next Month:

Next month is our annual festive spree. See below for more information.

The Business Stuff:

- Don't forget that we need to have the Chapter membership dues in to our parent ARS organization by the end of November. It is difficult and actually more costly for our Membership Chair, Wenonah March, to make several trips

to the bank in order to purchase the US funds bank draft necessary to send down to the ARS. Your help in simplifying this process by being prompt with your membership fee is greatly appreciated.

- Start thinking about the Annual Christmas Gala, to be held this year on Wednesday, December 16th. The rules, in all their precise and intricate glory will be reviewed in next month's newsletter, but you should start thinking about what you might be volunteering to bring as your potluck contribution, so as not to be flummoxed when Karen Linton calls you up ready to check you off her list. Also remember to keep your pre-HST bargain-hunting eye peeled for something whimsical, or useful, as the case may be, under \$10, for the annual gift exchange.

- Joan Bengough, Librarian, has added some new books to our extensive and somewhat under-utilized library. More on the new additions next month, but in the meantime, don't forget to have a good look at what is available. There is a wealth of material there, and unlike the public library, whose late fines continue to climb (remember when one still used to see library books in which the official "Late Fines 1¢ per Day" had been so carefully crossed out and replaced with "Late Fines 2¢ per Day"?) our system remains penalty free.

- Also don't forget that the January edition of the Yak is the one in which we publish requested recipes for any of the goodies we have so enormously enjoyed this year. Let me know if there was a particularly toothsome item you would like to know about and I will try to track down the purveyor and winkle the recipe out of her/him.

OTHER DUTIES AS ASSIGNED:

- Last on the roster for the year 2009 are Joan Bengough and Joan McGiveron. Cherry Groves will no doubt be circulating the sign-up sheet for 2010 anon.

THE CALENDAR:

Wednesday, November 18	Fraser South Chapter - Gwen Odermatt "Great Plant Picks"
Thursday, November 19	Vancouver Chapter - Douglas Justice "The Rhododendron Collection at UBC"
Monday, November 23	Fraser Valley Chapter Christmas Potluck, AGM, and Elections
Tuesday, November 24	Peace Arch Chapter Christmas Party, Silent Auction, Slide Show
Wednesday, December 16	Fraser South Chapter Christmas Potluck - early start: 6:30pm

Brenda Macdonald



This article by columnist Steve Whysall, which appeared in the Vancouver Sun on July 10th, 2009, celebrates the amazing garden that Gael and John Dodd have created over the past 30 years.

(Text by Steve Whysall, photos by Ian Smith.)

Every summer, I discover one very special garden that thrills me to bits. This year, I think I have just seen what could easily be the best garden in B.C. It has everything: fabulous ponds, beautiful perennial borders, extraordinary rose, shrub and tree content and wonderful curving lines.

But in addition to all of this, it is also a lifelong work, something that took more than 30 years of enthusiastic and dedicated effort to create. That always impresses me, I must say, rather than a garden that is designed by a professional and installed overnight using mature specimens.

The garden I am raving about belongs to Gael and John Dodd and occupies 2.5 acres on 61st Avenue in Langley.

When the Dodds moved in back in the 1970s, the site was a mess of cut and fallen trees and virtually a swamp, with water running everywhere over thick peaty ground.

The Dodds started by clearing the trees and building large ponds to capture and contain the natural spring water running through the property.

The two interconnected lakes act as large dark mirrors that reflect the beauty of the surrounding trees. There are big-leaf plants like gunnera, yellow waxbells (*Kirengeshoma*), Hosta 'Sum and Substance,' rogersia and skunk cabbage on the banks and a spectacular side creek filled with masses of pink, orange and yellow candelabra primulas.

The serene stillness of the pond's tranquil surface is occasionally interrupted by the splash of leaping cut-throat trout.



Hundreds of rhododendrons and azaleas have been planted in three layers in close enough proximity to the lakes that when they are ablaze with colour in spring the dazzling show is also captured as a reflection. The garden is long -- it's at least 600 feet from the Cape Cod-style house at the front to the secluded natural woodland and grove of white-barked Himalayan birch trees at the back.

There is a large, calming central lawn area at the back that acts as a welcome counterbalance to the busy perennial and shrub borders, which also contain an impressive selection of specimen trees, including Magnolia 'Apollo' and the sycamore maple 'Brilliantissimum.'

The borders are all carved with beautiful curving lines. "We don't like straight lines," says Gael.

The borders are filled with countless towering blue, white and purple delphiniums -- the much improved New Zealand-bred Millennium (Dowdeswell) delphiniums, probably the best example of them grown in a nature setting I have ever seen.



These towering sentinels are scattered through the borders and are also grouped together in tight clusters. They are interspersed with scores of roses, old-garden roses, as well as cottage-garden shrubs and perennials like lavender and lady's mantle, campanula and foxgloves. Unexpected treats include a perfect stand of giant Himalayan lilies set against the light and airy variegated foliage of a 'Floating Cloud' maple (Acer 'Ukigumo') and, close by, a great frothy explosion of white flowering giant sea kale (Crambe cordifolia).

"We think of spring as party time. That's when the rhododendrons and azaleas are glorious," says Gael.

Seasonal interest was something the Dodds became conscious of early on. They used perennials to connect the show of rhododendrons with the equally magnificent rose display and then add maples and katsuras for fall colour.

Today, they have collected more than 40 kinds of Japanese maples, which are dotted throughout the garden to create a sensational autumn tapestry.

The far end of the garden -- a quiet woodland grotto, which John describes as the "soul" of the garden -- offers a particularly picturesque view over the ponds and into the garden beyond that epitomize the idealized beauty of one of Constable's rustic scenes. In another part of the garden, there is a memorial to the Dodds' son, who died tragically five years ago. The site is a constant source of sadness and peace for the couple, who say the garden was, and continues to be, a source of deep comfort to them.

"The one thing people tell us they like most about visiting our garden is the peace they feel here. I know what they mean," says Gael.

Steve Whysall