

# The Oak

Newsletter of  
The Fraser South  
Rhododendron  
Society

Volume 26 Number 3  
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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  
(except June, July and August) at:  
United Church Hall  
5673 - 200th Street  
Langley BC

## This Month's Meeting

Date: Wednesday, March 21st., 2012

Topic: "Flora and the People of Bhutan"

Speaker: Carmen Varcoe

Plant Sales: Les Clay

## 2012 Officers

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BCCGC Liaison	Bill Bischoff	604-589-6134

## Quick Hits

Our March speaker will be Carmen Varcoe speaking on the people and flora of Bhutan.

See inside for details - page 4 .





## FROM THE PRESIDENT

big things, and almost all of them are eminently suitable for planting as companion plants to rhododendrons.

One of the most rewarding is *Primula moupinensis*. Not only is this an easy grower, but it has the added, and huge, advantage of being a very handy spreader. It sends its stolons out in all directions and can cover a small area quickly and very densely. Even the dreaded Shepherd's Purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) finds it hard to get a start. Although not showy, *moupinensis* is attractive enough, with its lime-green crinkled leaves and small, pale-pink, open-faced flowers.

## Notes From the Chair

### THE UNDERSTORY

With the Editor concentrating on the rhododendrons, tall and small, I thought I would discuss some options for what goes in the dirt underneath. After all, we vertically challenged people, perforce, spend more of our time concentrating on the little things.

And the genus *Primula* is filled with little things, and a few



above: *Primula moupinensis*  
left: *Primula florindae*

At the other end of the scale is the late-blooming *Primula florindae*, a large, nay, huge primula of the cowslip variety. It not only has a flowering scape that can reach 3 feet, there can be forty or more fragrant, tubular, pale yellow, nodding flowers in each umbel. *Florindae* can be distinguished from its near relative *Primula sikkimensis*, another giant primula, by its greater stature, rounder, more paddle-shaped leaves, and less symmetrical umbel. While acknowledging that part of my warm feeling for this plant is derived from its name - who could resist a flower named by Frank Kingdon-Ward for his wife Florinda - this is a wonderful plant for that soggy area of your garden. It grows quite happily in very wet conditions such as beside streams or ponds, and in fact requires lots of water in the summer to attain its full potential.

*Primula vialii* was one of the first primulas I fell in love with. Well, more accurately one of the first of the less well known primulas I fell in love with. My first love was probably the ubiquitous but always rewarding *Primula* 'Wanda', that heirloom variety whose bright magenta



blossoms graced every garden I can remember as a child. Only now do I learn that its popularity was based on its extreme toughness - once you had it you probably kept it since the only real threat was a massive slug invasion. I always assumed everybody grew it because of that wonderful purple colour, always so early in the spring. It was the best sign that winter was really behind us.

above: *Primula 'Wanda'*  
below: *Primula vialii*



*Primula vialii* however, is a relatively late bloomer, putting on its show in late June and July. Its erect spear-shaped leaves do not usually appear until the last week of May, later than any other primula species. Although the dried herbarium specimens were initially confused with *P. watsonii*, in the field there is no mistaking the absolutely unique spire of blue and red flowers. There is no other flower quite like it. It always looks somewhat other-worldly to me, as if it should be something that the Little Prince grew along side his rose. Less enamoured of water than florindae, it still prefers a moist environment. That elusive “open, humus-rich, fertile, and moist but well-drained” soil should do very nicely. Once happy it will self-seed and under optimum conditions can create quite a display.

*Brenda Macdonald*

I, too, enjoy the little things, and here are some beautiful flavours of Cyclamen coum, courtesy of the Bischoff Garden, where spring usually seems to start in December. (ed.).





## FROM THE EDITOR

### Last Month:

David Sellars showed us several beautiful hikes through the Wenatchee and Olympic Mountain ranges, preceded by a brief geographic outline concerning the extent of the last ice age. Most important, was the fact that glaciation did not quite extend to the Wenatchee or Olympic ranges, which allowed for the retention of many relic alpine plant communities. We were transported to these areas of rare and endemic plants through images captured with David's exquisite photography. Although as he pointed out, it is relatively easy for us to reach these regions ourselves, as one can drive up into the alpine area and engage in any number of day trips along established trails there.

His lecture was truly delightful and informative, and he even managed to diplomatically include two images of *R. macrophyllum*, which is native on the Olympic peninsula. The appeal of David's presentation was evidenced by a

wonderfully long and interesting question and answer session at its conclusion.

### This Month:

We shall be leaving the nearby mountains of Washington State and travelling to the dizzying heights of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, which is wedged between Sikkim to the west. India on the east and south, and Tibet to the north. Squashed between neighbours such as these I am astonished to note that "Business Week" magazine rated it the happiest country in Asia, and eighth happiest country in the world. Doubtless, having accessible rhododendron forests in one's mountains is the overriding cause of such equanimity

To help us understand this country, Carmen Varcoe will come from Victoria to speak with us. Carmen is a well-known plantswoman in Victoria, and will give an illustrated talk on her botanical trip to Bhutan, with slides of the plants, landscapes and people of this remote kingdom in the Himalayas. Carmen is a retired schoolteacher who is a part-time instructor at the Glendale and Woodlands Horticultural School and a key member of the Finnerty Gardens Advisory Board.

Ask her and Carmen would describe herself as a "total plant geek and member of many garden clubs in Victoria and abroad." She is a classroom instructor, lecturer on wide range of garden topics, performs design and maintenance of the hardy plant garden at Glendale Gardens, is an Advisory Board member for University of Victoria's Finnerty Gardens, an executive member for The Victoria Horticulture Society, Victoria Rock and Alpine Society and the Hardy Plant Group. She is also assisting with the forthcoming ARS Fall Western Regional Conference in Nanaimo, which we should all attend.

She teaches the following courses at the Pacific Horticultural college: Plant Identification LH 104 (Landscape Horticulture Technician program) Plant Identification LH (Apprenticeship Level 3)

### Next Month:

We shall need to keep our backpacks handy as Ron Long, photographer and naturalist, will take us along the Alaska highway to Pink Mountain, in northern BC, home to many rare and presently endangered plants.

#### ✿ Other Duties as Assigned -

The preparation of beneficial, sustaining potions and salubrious snacks will be overseen by the scullery squad of Sue Wedemire, and the Joans Bengough and McGiveron. Any help by the bringing of treats for the table to assist them will surely be welcome.



## The Business Stuff:

It is indeed time to get ourselves out and about as a group, noodle around in other peoples gardens and discover if the grass is any greener elsewhere. There is probably no better way to accomplish this than to organise a bus tour to take us there, and our valiant VP, Chris Hodgson, has knowingly booked both a bus and an itinerary for us. This will be a day trip on Sunday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, which will pick us up at the Church parking lot and whisk us over to North Vancouver's Park and Tilford Gardens to add Vancouver and North Shore members, and then proceed to West Vancouver and Lion's Bay. There are three large gardens to visit and this will occupy the whole day. Pack yourself a picnic lunch

and we will find a scenic spot to stop and enjoy it. The cost per person will be fifteen dollars.

The first Garden, in West Vancouver, is that of Bill and Suzanne Spohn. This is an established, acre-plus, collector's garden (as are the other two we shall be visiting) consisting of species and a few select hybrid rhododendrons interspersed with magnolias and Japanese maples. It is a remarkable collection of plants.

Following the visit to the Spohn's we shall cruise up the Sea to Sky highway to Lion's Bay. For those who have not travelled this road since the improvements were made for the Olympics, you are in for some of the most breathtaking vistas in the world, and I am able to state that guiltless of hyperbole.

Joe and Joanne Ronsley, of Lion's Bay, describe their garden as an 'enhanced woodland' in order to convey the fact that although some of the original west coast forest has been removed, it has been accomplished in such a fashion to blend seamlessly with newly planted material. This is a long established hillside garden with trails up and down, traversing over bridges and small waterfalls. They have a grand collection of species rhododendron and woodland companion plants under a mixed canopy of native west coast, magnolia and many other speciality trees. This is a rare and spectacular landscape.

Just a stone's throw up the hill from the Ronsley's is the garden of Richard and Heather Mossakowski. At the entrance to their garden is a rather splendid collection of the smaller alpine rhododendrons set in several rockeries. More rhododendrons are located in both side gardens of the home, and after passing through to the rear garden one will find that the property flows downhill on three sides. These hillsides have crafted tracks to carry you through an extraordinary landscape of predominately species rhododendron. This is a joyful garden.

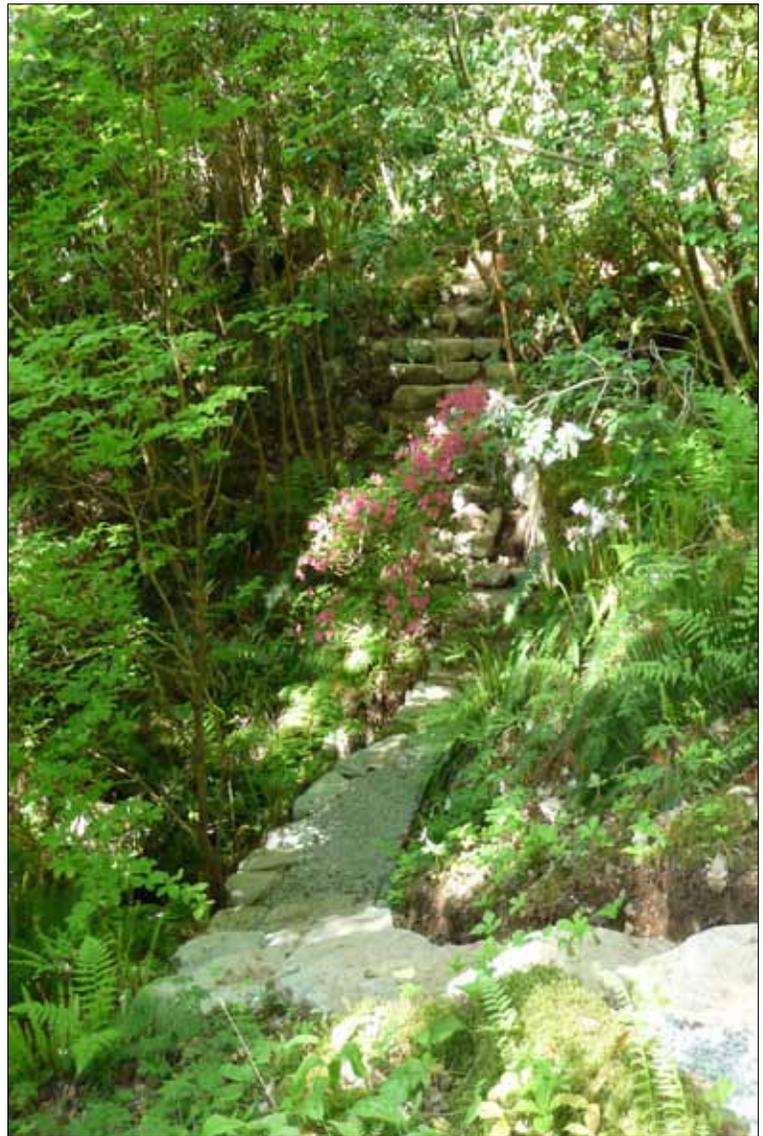
I urge you to come along on this journey. We now have new members from both the Peace Arch and Fraser Valley Chapters and this outing would be a lovely opportunity to chat and become even better acquainted with each other while we are all enjoying some truly wonderful gardens.

*Sean Rafferty*



The enhanced woodland of  
Joe and Joanne Ronsley in  
Lions Bay

Images courtesy of Joe and  
Joanne Ronsley



THE CALENDAR:

Thursday, Mar 15	Vancouver Chapter 7:30 PM Gerry Gibbens - The van Dusen Rhododendrons
Wednesday, Mar 21	Fraser South Chapter 7:30 PM Carmen Varcoe - Flora of Bhutan
Saturday April 7	Alpine Garden Club of BC Spring Show and Sale Van Dusen Floral Hall 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM
Wednesday, Apr. 18	Fraser South Chapter 7:30 PM Ron Long - Pink Mountain
Thursday April 19	Vancouver Chapter 7:30 PM Gordon McKay (Alba Plants) Companion Plants for Rhododendrons
Saturday April 21	Fraser South Rhododendron Society Plant Sale 10:00 - 3:00 PM United Church Hall, 5673 - 200th., Street, Langley
Saturday, May 5	Vancouver Rhododendron Show and Plant Sale Park and Tilford Gardens, North Vancouver 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Sunday, May 6	Burnaby Rhododendron Festival Deer Lake Park, Burnaby
May 4 - 7	2012 ARS Convention - Asheville. N.C.



Many thanks for the above images to Joan McGiveron, which tell us that Spring is Springing in her garden.  
*R. sutchense*, above left and *R. 'Bo Peep'* above right.

## A Request

Chris and Sue Klapwijk ask if any of our readers are growing *Rhododendron* 'Caitlin', (pictured below) and if so, might they be able to obtain cuttings?

As you may note from the caption underneath the image, *R.* 'Caitlin' was grown and registered by the late Dr. Margaret 'Mike' Trembath. For those new to Fraser South, 'Mike' was a founding member of the chapter, also, our club historian, rhododendron guru, wonderful hybridiser, editor of the 'Yak' and most fetchingly, the owner of a lovely old Leonberger dog called 'Megabyte', who notably, had been taught to ring the front doorbell when wanting to come in the house.

It is interesting that in 2007, the District of Mission, designated 'Caitlin' as its official flower, thus making it the second urban entity in the Lower Mainland, alongside Burnaby, in 1992, to take the *rhododendron* as its official floral emblem. Even more interesting, is that *R.* 'Burnaby Centennial' the cultivar that the city of Burnaby chose, was grown, named and registered by Mike's good pal and long time Fraser South stalwart, Vern Finley. Both of these women probably put more pollen on more rhododendrons, and grew on more plants with more satisfying results, than anybody else in the Lower Mainland. Our club has been truly blessed.

As you are aware, Fraser South, takes pride in distancing itself from the competitive bloodlust of most annual truss shows, and substitutes in their place the affable, laid back "Justly Famous Beer Bottle Truss Show" whereby democratic judging is conducted by voting for a favourite truss with a rationed number of Smarties or beads. Trophies and ribbons are disallowed; assumed to spawn cutthroat rivalry. However, one exception has been made, both to honour the memory of Mike Tembath and to testify to the beauty of her own lovely yellow hybrid. The FSRS recently introduced the 'Lionheart' Award; a stunning white coffee mug, purchased with no concern for expense from London Drugs and stamped with an image of *R.* 'Lionheart', (and not dishwasher safe), to be claimed by whomever succeeded in showing the best yellow truss. This qualification is an honourable and justifiable minor retreat from club philosophy.



*Rhododendron* 'Caitlin' - Elepidote, Hummingbird Group x seedling of *fortunei*.  
Hybridiser J.A. Marcellus 1956, Grower: M.L. Trembath (c 1960), Named: J.A. Marcellus 1998,  
Registered: M.L. Trembath (1998)  
Blooms: Early mid April.v

Photo: 'Mike' Trembath

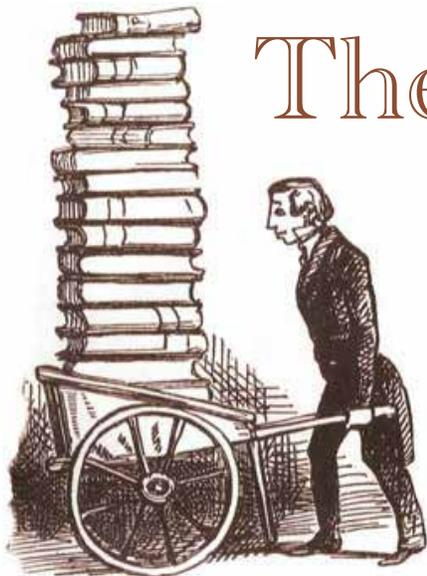


*R.* 'Lionheart'  
'Rimini' x 'Mrs. Lamont Copeland'  
M.L. Trembath 1971

Photo: *M.L. Trembath*

*R.* 'Burnaby Centennial':  
'Leona' x 'Etta Burrows'  
Hybridizer: E.J. Trayling 1968  
Grower, Named, Registered:  
Dr. & Mrs. G.R. Finley  
Photo: <http://hirsutum.info>





# The Book Cart

## ***Kalmia, Mountain Laurel and Related Species***

by Richard A. Jaynes,  
Timber Press, Inc. Portland, Oregon, 1997.  
295 pages, approx. 140 colour photos, Bibliography, Index.  
Hardbound, \$47.50

Richard Jaynes, a geneticist and horticulturist, resigned from the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in 1984 to establish and continue his innovative work with laurel at the Broken Arrow Nursery in Hamden, Connecticut. He has received several awards for his work on chestnut trees and laurel, including the Jackson

Dawson Medal for horticultural achievement presented by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. He has been the designated National Registration Authority for *Kalmia* since 1977 and the International Registration Authority since 1978 by the Council of the International Society of Horticultural Science.

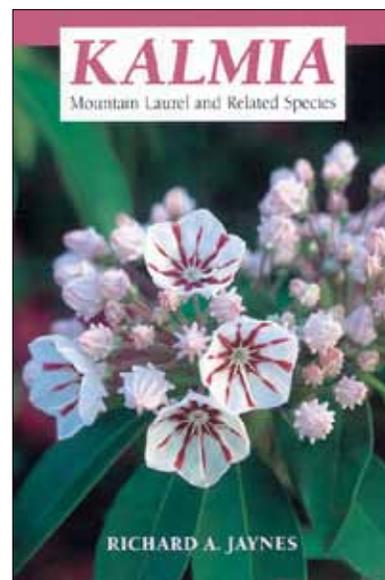
As pointed out on the jacket cover of the book, ***Kalmia, Mountain Laurel and Related Species***, *Kalmia*, a member of the heath family along with rhododendrons, azaleas and blueberries, grows well in most temperate climates, but is more drought tolerant than rhododendrons. *Kalmia* is not an easy plant to domesticate, but in this third edition, Jaynes details all seven *Kalmia* species and more than 80 recognized cultivated varieties, 35 of which were selected or bred by the author, and he also includes history, characteristics, cultivating and landscaping ideas.

The book is organized into Part I and Part II, with three Appendices, Bibliography and Index following Part II. Part I leads the reader through a logical sequence of twelve chapters discussing such topics as the perfect laurel, laurels in the wild, propagation by cuttings, grafting and layering. Chapter 5 is followed by 140 colour photo plates before continuing on to further topics of seeds and germination, garden care of laurels, landscaping, pests and diseases. Many of these topics are further illustrated with good black and white diagrams. Part II is devoted to breeding better laurel, delving into more specialized topics of pollination and fertilization, species hybridization, intergeneric crosses, techniques for controlling crosses.

Appendix A lists research needs.

Appendix B lists Gardens with *Kalmia* Collections throughout the USA and Europe

Appendix C lists laboratories, mail-order nurseries and growers of *Kalmia*



*Margaret Hodgson*

# *R. insigne*

The epithet *insigne* translates to remarkable or extraordinary and *R. insigne* was discovered by Ernest Wilson in 1903, on Mount Wa Shan, in western Sichuan, and introduced in 1908. The species is found growing from 7,000 - 10,000 feet (2,100 - 3,000m) and is quite hardy in our zone 8'ish climate. It grows in woodlands and reaches 20 feet (6 m.) in the wild, but is likely only to grow to 8 feet (2.5m.) in cultivation. *Insigne* is a lovely plant in the landscape with a clean and tidy look to it; perhaps as a result of retaining all its leaves for four or sometimes five years. These leaves are long, 2.5 - 5.5 inches (6.8 - 14cm) and 0.5 - 2 inches (1.6 - 5cm) wide, dark green on the upper surface with deeply impressed veins, very rigid and leathery and have recurved edges. The underside of these leaves is most intriguing, with a thin, plastered, continuous, pale coppery, unistrate indumentum which just begs you to run your fingers along it. The unique leaves and indumentum are a defining diagnostic characteristic of this species. *Insigne* has a beautiful, dense and round truss consisting of 6 - 15 flowers with each corolla 2 in. (5cm.) long. The flower colour varies from pale pink to coral pink with a darker stripe on each lobe.



*R. insigne*: painting by Carlos Riefel, from "The Rhododendron" edited by Leslie Urquart



*R. insigne*, leaf

Species and their Hybrids

		pollen ♂	
		B	b
pistil ♀	B	BB	Bb
	b	Bb	bb

It is such a stunning plant that I wonder why it has not caught the attention of more hybridisers. Salley and Greer's 'Rhododendron Hybrids' lists only 21 hybrids, which are both direct and indirect, and Hirsutum has 17 direct crosses and 5 indirect. Van Gelderen and van Hoey-Smith. list 21. All these references overlap one another so it is clear there are relatively few hybrids of *R. insigne*.

Most of the hybridising with *R. insigne* appears to have taken place in Germany in the late 1950's and 1960's with the Bruns, Hachmann and Hobbie nurseries carrying the yeoman's load. They found *R. insigne's* foliage, winter hardiness and later bloom time (late May and June) to be admirable for their programs. Elsewhere, Lord Abercoway at Bodnant, Wales, used *R. insigne* in four or five crosses, starting as early as 1927. The Queen's Commissioners at Windsor crossed *R. insigne* with *R. yakushimanum* to produce a very pretty thing called *R. 'Kings Ride.'* The only reference I am able to find of any work done with *R. insigne* on this side of the ocean is a plant named *R. 'Joe Paterno'* by Dr. Jim Browning, which was later tissue cultured by Briggs nursery. My references may be somewhat dated but it seems to me there has been a very small body of work done on such a worthy plant as *R. insigne*. It is a species which is shy to flower (ours took 12 years), but I should think that hybridising could modify that timeline somewhat.

'The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species' notes that *R. insigne* is endemic to Wa Shan where it may now be extinct, although there is a vague reference that it may have been found elsewhere. Davidian in 'The Rhododendron Species Volume II' notes that *R. insigne* was located by two other plant hunters but makes no mention where it was found or if it was brought into cultivation. The Rhododendron Species Foundation Botanical

Garden website has a question mark with respect to any collections found in Yunnan. Interestingly, the three volumes of 'Rhododendrons of China' and also 'Sichuan Rhododendrons of China' do not even have *R. insigne* listed in their indices. Perhaps there have only been limited collections of this plant brought into cultivation, which might have limited its distribution and availability for use in hybridisation? I find it both interesting and unfortunate that *R. insigne* has found such limited use with the hybridising community.

*Sean Rafferty*



*R insigne*  
Courtesy of the Hirsutum  
website: hirsutum.info



*R insigne*  
Courtesy of the Hirsutum website:  
hirsutum.info



*R. 'Anneliese'*: Bruns, 1961.  
*R. insigne* x *R. 'El Alamain'*  
Photo: hirsutum.info



*R. 'Brigitte'*: Hachman, 1970.  
*R. insigne* x *R. 'J.G. Millais'*  
Photo: hirsutum.info



*R.* 'Christiane Herzog': Bruns, 1970  
*R. insigne* x *R.* 'Blue Ensign'  
Photo: hirsutum.info

*R.* 'Hultschin': Robinek, 1952.  
*R. insigne* x *R. williamsianum*  
Photo: hirsutum.info



*R.* 'Nofretete': Bruns, 1961.  
*R.* 'El Alamein' x *insigne*  
Photo: hirsutum.info

