



**Book Review** by Margaret Hodgson

***Rhododendrons in the Landscape***, by Sonja Nelson  
 Timber Press, Inc. Portland, Oregon, 2000.  
 215 pages, 51 colour photos, 19 Tables,  
 approx. 9 black and white drawing,  
 Bibliography, Hardbound, US\$29.95  
 ISBN 0-88192-440-7

**Sonja Nelson** is editor of the *Journal American Rhododendron Society*. She has a degree in English from Smith College and in journalism from Western Washington State College. She hails from Excelsior, Minnesota, is a Master Gardener, and tends her own landscape of rhododendrons near Mount Vernon, Washington.

***Rhododendrons in the Landscape*** will give the reader tangible help as each chapter of this book visits a public or private garden and analyzes the limitations that have been circumvented to successfully exhibit an affecting landscape. Rhododendrons present the gardener with such a wide range of colour, textures and forms as well as shapes and sizes. The challenge is to successfully see the larger picture of how to coordinate all into a

pleasing landscape in your garden. Sonja Nelson presents many possibilities in this book.

As with most books, she opens this with a history of landscaping with rhododendrons. In the second chapter, she lays out the principles of designing a landscape by stressing the need for unity, plant harmony, and movement. As she takes the reader through the chapters, she offers very practical advice such as taking inventory of the site, drawing plans on paper, narrowing down choices, choosing companion plants, improving the site.

Some chapters deal with specific details such as the rock garden, mixed borders, a collector's garden, a native plant garden. One chapter is devoted entirely to dealing with a small garden or urban garden and stresses what the limitations will be. The focus will be determined by facts of high fences or existing trees in the garden, the path of sunshine into the garden through the seasons, storage facility on site and many other considerations.

The last chapter of the book is titled "Special Features" and covers unusual uses of rhododendrons such as hedges or making an island in a sea of lawn and having a large collection of rhododendrons together to break up a large expanse to give the illusion of space to a garden. She also suggests using them as accents for drab entranceways and niches. Use them as bonsai, espalier and topiary to get unusual shapes into your garden and, of course, use them in large containers to add accents to decks, patios or borders. They enhance a coziness and can serve as transitions between garden areas or theatrically focus the eye on a centre spot in your garden.

The nineteen tables are extremely usefully. Each table gives the name, hardiness zone, Plant size in ten years, Plant form (rounded, or upright, open compact etc), foliage texture and lastly the flower colour.

Table 1: Evergreen Rhododendrons, tradition leaves

Table 2: Evergreen Rhododendrons, narrow leaves

Table 3: Evergreen Rhododendrons, egg shape or oval leaves, small or med., shrubs

Table 4: Deciduous Rhododendrons  
Table 5: Sun-tolerant Rhododendrons  
Table 6: Rhododendrons making  
single or multi-stemmed trees when mature  
Table 7: Companion Plants, trees  
Table 8: Evergreen Azaleas  
Table 9: Rhododendrons with  
creeping habit  
Table 10: Companion Plants, shrubs  
Table 11: Companion plants,  
herbaceous perennials  
Table 12: Companion Plants, ferns and  
mosses  
Table 13: Vireya Rhododendrons  
hybrids

Table 14: Native North American  
Companions, small trees  
Table 15: Native North American  
Companions, shrubs  
Table 16: Native North American  
Companions, herbaceous perennials  
Table 17: Native North American  
Companions, ericaceous companions  
Table 18: Rhododendrons suitable as  
single specimens  
Table 19: Fragrant Rhododendrons

Each table is tied into a chapter to illustrate how she uses specific rhododendrons to fill landscapes problems or accents.

**A most useful book!**