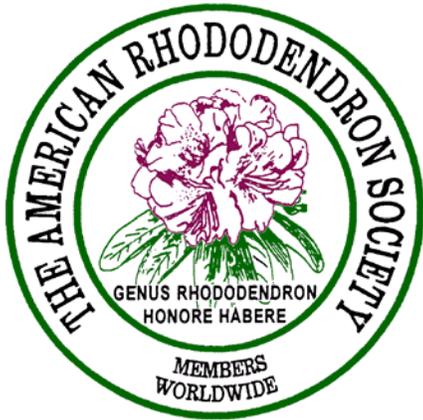


Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 35, Number 6, March 2004



The Vancouver Rhododendron Society is a chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

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This Month's Meeting: Thursday, March 18th 7:30 pm
Floral Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden

Program: Steve Hootman: 'The Rhododendron Species Foundation'

Education: Basic Computer Workshop Session 7:00 pm

Plant Sales: Les Clay and Sue Klapwijk

Plants in Bloom – *Rhododendron moupinense*



Rhododendron moupinense adapted from an illustration by Matilda Smith (1909) from Curtis's Botanical Magazine

What makes a good rhododendron? Small growing with a compact habit? Clean, glossy foliage? Drought and sun tolerant, and hardy to -17C? Large, showy, fragrant flowers? *Rhododendron moupinense* sounds pretty good, eh? Well, it is, and it deserves to be better known and more widely grown.

Plants in cultivation (locally) produce white flowers, usually with a degree of both pink staining and pink to purple spotting, but the species is known to be variable (white to red), and flower colour often intensifies when unopened buds are exposed to cold weather. The small leaves are shiny dark green above with sparingly hairy edges—which is a lovely feature on a frosty or dewy morning (well, anytime, really). Its flowers generally open in March (see photo, page 5), and while they're usually undamaged by cold in the

Vancouver area, they're routinely hammered by late frosts in areas where those are common, such as western Europe. Somewhat intolerant of intense heat, which may be why we don't see it planted in shopping mall parking lots (growing 60 to 80cm tall), *R. moupinense* would be considered ideal by landscape architects and nursery sales-people for that purpose. In its native Sichuan and Guizhou (China), it grows at 2000-3300m elevation, usually as an epiphyte in trees or on rocks and cliffs. *Rhododendron moupinense* does well locally in sunny woodlands as long as there is adequate drainage.

...continued on page 3

President's Message

Being a teacher by profession, I tend to believe that a good speaker is one who involves his audience so deeply in his topic that people want to increase their learning by taking notes. If that is true, then the guest speaker at our February meeting, **John Schroeder**, deserves special commendation. John showed magnificent slides of perennials that can be used as companion plants for rhododendrons. I have never seen so many people taking so many notes. I filled one whole page myself. Many thanks to **Joe Ronsley** who continually finds us such excellent speakers.

Thank you also to the following people who signed up during February's meeting to help out at our annual Sale and Show on May 1st and 2nd at UBC Botanical Garden: **David Leith, Margot Ketchum, Rosemary Burnham, Kathleen Share, Meg Brown, Barbara Forsyth, Vern Finley, Doug French, Joanne Ronsley, Norm Moysa, Alan Cheung, Suzanne Spohn, Tony Cox, D'arcy Bartlett, Jennifer McKee, Diane Kehoe, Roger Low, Maureen Cruise, Tish Pike, Carla Knight, Mike Bale, Philip MacDougall, Norah Hall, Sean Rafferty, Brenda Macdonald and John Priestman.**

Our VRS executive members are once again providing leadership in all the key Sale and Show areas and have obtained other helpers by telephone. Thanks also to these volunteers. Executive members will continue their telephoning during March and April. Please say "yes" when



Phyllostachys aureosulcata

adapted from an illustration by Ann Farrer, in Curtis's Botanical Magazine, February, 1995

they call. We need at least 60 volunteers to make our Sale and Show as big a success as it has been in previous years. And if for some reason no one contacts you, please call me at 604-929-5670 and let me know where you would like to help. We don't want anyone to feel left out!

We are very much looking forward to being at UBC once again for our Sale and Show and appreciate **Doug Justice** making all the facilities arrangements. As usual, we will have access to a wonderful room for our truss show and the use of the walkways and gazebo for our sale. At our membership table will be rhododendron experts who will be able to answer questions. In addition, there will be ample free parking and the opportunity to visit the magnificent UBC Botanical Garden at a time when a host of gigantic rhododendrons will be in bloom.

At our March VRS meeting we will be handing out 5 small posters to each member of the audience. Please post these in conspicuous places in your community or give them to gardening friends. You

might wish to remind your friends that there is nowhere else in Canada, besides the VRS Sale and Show, where they will be able to find such a huge variety of rare and unusual rhododendrons at such reasonable prices.

Ron Knight

To advertise in *Indumentum*, contact Tony Clayton 604 921 7947 tclayton@telus.net

Subscription Rates

VRS + ARS Membership	\$50.00
(US & Overseas)	\$US 28.00
VRS Membership	\$25.00
(no ARS Quarterly Journal)	
Associate Membership	\$10.00
(member of another ARS Chapter in Canada)	
Associate Membership	\$US 10.00
(member of another ARS Chapter outside of Canada)	

Advertising Rates

	1 month	3 months	8 months
Business card	\$10.00	\$25.00	\$50.00
¼ page	\$25.00	\$67.50	\$160.00
½ page	\$40.00	\$108.00	\$256.00
full page	\$70.00	\$189.00	\$448.00

Unfortunately, hybrids abound and these are often not differentiated as such by their owners. Not that this should be a crime—it's not as if they're polluting a salmon stream or something—but it is an insidious problem, as generations of gardeners have propagated the wrong plants as *R. moupinense* and spread them around. Those of us who like to be accurate in our plant naming (I get paid to be a fuss-budget) have been reminding people for years that open-pollinated plants from gardens are invariably hybrids. Rhododendrons are wonderfully promiscuous (if that's a trait to be celebrated) and easily cross with whatever other rhodies are in bee-shot (i.e., lepidotes with lepidotes and elepidotes with

elepidotes only). The trouble is, *R. moupinense* is (and its hybrids are) exceptionally easy to propagate from stem cuttings. You can see where I'm going with this.

To be fair, there are some exceptional hybrids, with *R. moupinense* usually conferring both earliness and size to the flowers of its offspring. One of the most beautiful and commonly grown hybrids is *R. 'Cilpinense'* (*R. ciliatum* × *R. moupinense*). Other notable hybrids include 'Bric-a-Brac' (*R. leucaspis* × *R. moupinense*), 'Bo-Peep' (*R. lutescens* × *R. moupinense*), 'Tessa' (*R. 'Praecox'* × *R. moupinense*) and 'Olive' (*R. moupinense* × *R. dauricum*). I suppose my fascination with *Rhododendron* species suggests I'm just plant hunting vicariously in the wilds of China. I'll accept that and grow hybrids, too ; but you have to come clean about your moupinense.

Douglas Justice

Have you seen the VRS website? Go to

<http://www.rhodo.citymax.com/>
to see up-to-date news, views
and more!

The ARS website,
<http://www.rhododendron.org/>
has rhododendron news with a
more international flavour

News and Notes

VRS member **Karen Shuster** writes: The lovely illustration of *Rhododendron dauricum* from *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* calls to mind **The Illustrated Rhododendron** (Timber Press, 2001) in which the the author, Pat Halliday, "has set out to demonstrate the classification of the genus

Rhododendron as proposed by the Royal Botanical Garden, Edinburgh, using as a medium the beautiful illustrations from the *Botanical Magazine*." I had been avoiding looking at this book due to its prohibitive cost (US\$69.95) until Alleyne Cook said, "You must borrow this for a bit." Once I had it in my possession I avidly perused its contents. When after an

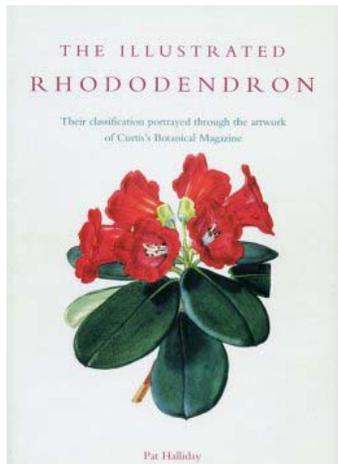
all too short time I returned it, muttering to myself in a Gollum-like voice, "My Beauty, Karen must have this book," I quickly went to the Internet and was ever so fortunate to find a copy. It was even most affordable. The grand sum of US\$26.19 covered taxes and delivery and within the week it was in my hands. As of yesterday, the first of February, there were 19 copies available from <http://www.BookCloseOuts.com/> for US\$19.99. I'm just

about to order another copy to donate to the library so you best hurry before they are all gone!

On closer inspection, the unidentified plant in the Sunshine Coast garden (below) does not appear to be *R. brachycarpum* (as was initially posited), as both the flowers and foliage of that species are considerably larger than those described for the mystery rhododendron. Ron Knight describes it as probably being a hybrid with both



flowers and foliage the same size and colour as for *R. 'Ginny Gee'* (*R. keiskei* × *R. racemosum*), but significantly taller and more open than that hybrid. Any other guesses out there?



Milton Wildfong

At the February VRS monthly meeting an old copy of the ARS *Quarterly Bulletin* showed up on the raffle table. One of my ticket numbers was called so I picked it up; it was Summer Issue, No. 3 of Volume 30. Old timers will remember there were five more years of the *Bulletin* before it flowered into the larger magazine format *Journal* of the ARS with volume 36. 1976 was the American bicentennial year so it was arranged that the ARS Convention that year was held in America's birthplace, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. August Kehr was ARS National President, while Milton Wildfong was president of our ARS Vancouver Chapter. We were the only ARS chapter in British Columbia at the time. Districting of Chapters had not yet been initiated.



Milton Wildfong (pictured here with Alleyne Cook; photo by Barbara Cook) was the Vancouver chapter's 12th president. He had a nursery, Silver Creek Gardens, up the Fraser Valley near Mission. He began his rhododendroning, as Lil Hodgson relates, when he imported 1,800 cuttings by air of Dutch hybrids ('Earl of Athlone', 'Susan', 'Alice', 'Dr Endtz', etc.) from Nymans in West Sussex, England, which he rooted and planted out along a creek that tumbled down through the centre of his hillside nursery. He also raised species and hybrids from seed of crosses made by ARS members and sent to the ARS seed exchange—some 40 to 60 packets reciprocating with 50 to 60 packets of seed from his own crosses.

In 1985 Lillian Hodgson wrote, "At present he [Milton] is working with yak hybrids, in an attempt to obtain a yellow rhododendron with indumentum, which, if he should succeed, would be a major break. He also remarked with characteristic humour that he is crossing 'Hansel' with 'Gretel' and perhaps the offspring should be named 'Incest'." A year earlier, Milton registered a hybrid he named 'Ruffles and Frills' (see below right; photo by Les Clay). He used an English *yakushimanum* hybrid with *griersonianum* blood called 'Hydon Glow', a fourteen-flowered, rosy pink hybrid registered in 1969 by its creator, A.F. George of Hydon Nursery, Godalming, Surrey. Of the five sister seedlings (and George named all with the unfortunate

nursery name prefix), three have Awards of Merit (AM) and the other two First Class Certificates (FCC) from Wisley Trials in the 1970s and 80s. Milton crossed 'Hydon Glow' with 'Lem's Cameo'—the 'Dido' × 'Anna' cross that brought *dicroanthum*, *decorum* and *griffithianum* into the mix. Hybrid 'Ruffles and Frills' is a shrub reaching 6ft in ten years; leaves are bronze when young, heavy textured, and retained for three years. The frilled, funnel-shaped six-lobed flowers (twelve to the truss) are fragrant. Further, "throat Naples yellow, shading through orient pink at edges to jasper red in dorsal throat, with spotting; the reverse suffused azalea pink." Les Clay put 'Ruffles and Frills' into tissue culture and has it for sale.



It is not known if Milton registered or named any of the many other crosses he made. Many of his hybrids were brought from Silver Creek Gardens and sold to Vancouver chapter members when he was hospitalized in 1989 and was unable to look after the nursery.

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...continued on page 6



Rhododendron moupinense photo: UBC Botanical Garden

natural habitats. This is where the RSF comes in. Steve has gone on as many expeditions as anyone, bringing back propagating material collected in the wild. All the plants so introduced are propagated and eventually offered for sale. At the same time, especially beautiful clones of more familiar species are vegetatively propagated and distributed in a like manner, with similar benefits to the horticultural world. The RSF, and Steve particularly, also has much to contribute in the way of education about the natural species of rhododendrons. And finally, the RSF Garden is in itself not only educational, but also beautiful, and becoming more so under the directorship of Steve and his Co-Director Rick Peterson. Steve will give us information on the history of the RSF, which includes the crucial participation of UBC, an overview of the Foundation and its functions, and a tour of the Garden. The RSF is vitally important as an organization to all of us who appreciate rhododendrons and natural plant habitats. Steve's title is simply **'The Rhododendron Species Foundation'**. It's always a pleasure for all our members to welcome back this bright, young, articulate explorer, administrator and gardener.

Joe Ronsley

March Program

There are very few visiting speakers at VRS meetings who are invited back very frequently, year after year. Those who are, are re-invited for good reason: because they are excellent speakers and because they have very interesting things to speak about. And, generally, because we like them. **Steve Hootman**, Co-Director of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, is one of this very small and elite group. From past experience I have complete confidence that Steve will be heartily welcomed by VRS members. The only problem that arises in repeat visits by people like Steve comes in writing something new about them in these biographical sketches. So much of the following may seem familiar to long-time VRS members.

As most of you know, the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, located in Federal Way, Washington (a nondescript southern suburb of Seattle), belongs to the Rhododendron Species Foundation. And most of you know, too, that Steve Hootman in the past has always provided fascinating accounts of his expeditions searching for plants in Asia. We keep inviting Steve back both because his talks are so good, and because he keeps going on new trips which ultimately provide our gardens with extremely valuable new plants. His talk the evening of March 18th, however, will be entirely, or almost entirely, different from his previous ones. This time he will speak about the Rhododendron Species Foundation (RSF) itself. Some VRS members are quite familiar with the Foundation, but many others, while most know of its existence, do not really know much about it.

For the benefit of newer members, I should mention that the many recent plant expeditions that have been carried out in Asia not only provide our gardens with beautiful new plants, but also contribute to the conservation of the species in their dissemination among gardeners, when they might otherwise be brought to extinction by destruction of their

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Pacific Northwest Native Plant Sale, April 17, 11-3.

Collector's Plant Auction, April 21, 6:30 pm at the Roundhouse (tickets 604 822 3928).

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Milton Wildfong, continued from page 4...

At the 1990 Vancouver Chapter show, Dr. Dave Crabb won the Seed Exchange Keeper Cup with a truss of 'Albatross' × 'Avalanche' raised by Milton from ARS seed that he received from the exchange in 1975. He was awarded the ARS Bronze Medal by the Fraser Valley Chapter in 1988. Milton Wildfong, Plantsman, died on October 10, 1990.

Clive L. Justice



Rhododendron dauricum (Darts Hill Garden)
Photo by Chris Klapwijk

Membership

A few late renewals were welcomed back last month and the Membership Committee is looking forward to new members in the months ahead. Thank you to those who have recommended VRS membership to their friends; we grow because you share. New Members who join at the May 1&2 2004 Show & Sale at UBC will have the benefit of 20 months membership for the price of 12. Membership dues are:

- \$50 for ARS/VRS (includes 4 journals a year)
- \$25 for VRS members (no journals, but you can borrow copies from the Library)
- \$10 for Associate members (must be an ARS member of another Cdn chapter)
- \$10 US for Associate members from the USA, members of an American Chapter.

Please check your wallet and ensure you have your 2004 membership card. If you need a list of nurseries that offer us discounts or a replacement membership card, please contact me.

Carole Conlin

VRS Membership Chair conlin@sfu.ca 604 921 7260

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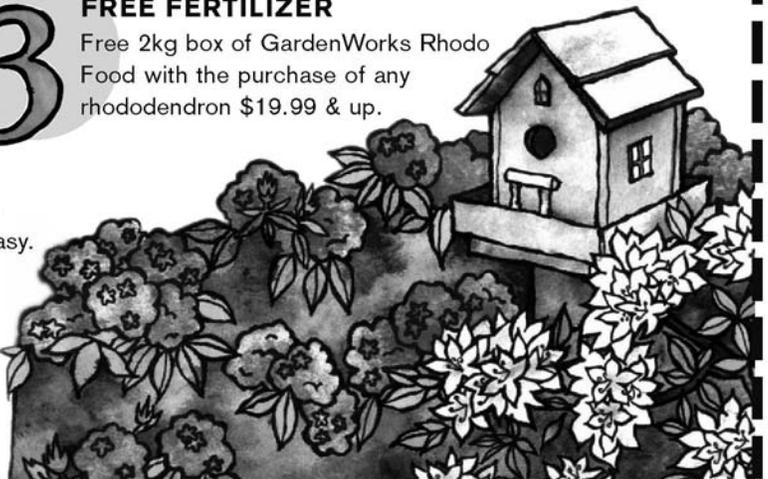
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