

# Indumentum

## Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 35, Number 8, May 2004



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

### 2004 Executive

President: Ron Knight

Vice President: Louis Peterson

Past President: Gerry Gibbens

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Membership: Carole Conlin

Newsletter: Douglas & Karen Justice

Program: Joe Ronsley

Directors:

Lothar Mischke (3 years)

Bill Herbst (2 years)

Todd Major (1 year)

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Education: Louis Peterson

Advertising: Tony Clayton

Publicity: Gail Lehman

Library: Jasbir Gill

Refreshments: Mary Dorsey

This Month's Meeting: Thursday, May 20<sup>th</sup> 6:30 pm

Program: A Walk in the Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden, Stanley Park: Led by Alleyne Cook

### Plants in Bloom – *Rhododendron vernicosum*



One of the most impressive plants in the UBC Botanical Garden collection is labelled *Rhododendron vernicosum* f. *rhantum*. Flowering in Vancouver normally any time from late March to mid May, it produces opulent trusses of between 6 and 12 broadly funnel-shaped flowers of cool pink with subtly sprinkled spots deep in the throat. At 7x7m after 30 years, it is a bruiser of a shrub, with large, dull blue-green leaves.

This form of *R. vernicosum* is also known as var. *rhantum* (pictured at left and below; all photos by the author).

*Rhododendron rhantum* was once used for plants supposed to be from a particular area in Yunnan, but the name (used at any rank) is now considered invalid. Nevertheless, a number of these distinctive plants came to the Botanical Garden from the Greig collection in 1970.

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The closest relatives of *R. vernicosum* are other species in the Fortunea subsection, particularly *R. fortunei*, *R. decorum* and *R. oreodoxa*, with all of which there are definite resemblances in leaf, habit and flower—although *R. vernicosum* evidently stands alone in displaying long styles with dark red glands. Like *R. oreodoxa*, the flowers of this species are without significant fragrance, but their beauty easily compensates. *Rhododendron vernicosum* is native to southwestern China and neighbouring Tibet at between 2700 and 4300m elevation.

A newer accession in the David C. Lam Asian Garden is a recent Cox and Hutchison collection from



*Rhododendron vernicosum* C&H 7132

Yunnan that looks very different from the one previously mentioned (see photo left). Note the more rounded leaves and white, unspotted flowers.

Interestingly, neither plant exhibits red stylar glands, that I can find. In any case, many authors note that *R. vernicosum* is an exceptionally variable plant, generally hardier than others in the subsection and always worth growing.

The name *vernicosum* means varnished, which, as Bean notes, “seems very unfitted for a dull-leaved plant like this.” He goes on to explain, however, that “a varnished appearance can be developed by heating the surface of the leaf, which was, probably, what had been done by the collector [Soulié] when drying the original specimens on which Franchet based his description.” Cox, too, explains that “the upper leaf surface will become sticky-waxy and shiny when heated over a flame.” You too can see this at your next rhodo bonfire!



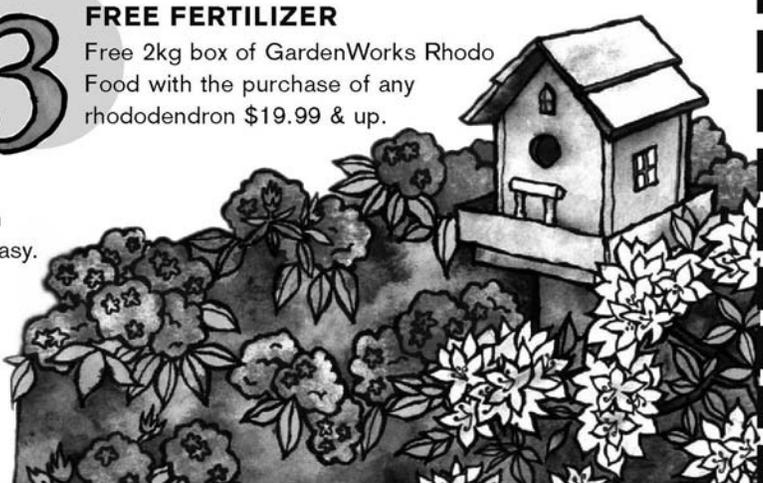
*Rhododendron fortunei* 'Mrs. Butler'

Douglas Justice

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## President's Message

The hot spell we had in the middle of April seemed to cause many rhododendrons to bloom earlier than usual. One example in my garden was 'Yellow Hammer', which is shown in the photograph at right.

In the week after that summer-like weather, I was the guest speaker at the three northern Vancouver Island rhododendron clubs. My back-to-the-basics presentation was entitled, "Make your rhodos think they're growing in the Himalayas." Each day, I was taken to visit three or four magnificent rhododendron gardens and then in the evenings, enjoyed sitting through club meetings and seeing differences in the way their members handled programming issues similar to the ones we face in the VRS. Many thanks to **Louis Peterson** for planning and chairing our April meeting in my absence.

At our March meeting, we took 10 minutes to allow everyone present to complete a questionnaire about our VRS meetings and programs. The results were interesting. They indicate generally that people who attend our meetings are happy with what happens there. Members offered favourable comments about the education time, plant raffle, guest speakers and social time.

In addition, there were some good suggestions. Regarding the education time: consider topics such as How to Identify Rhododendrons, Plant Diseases, and Companion Plants for Rhodos. To complement the raffle table: ask members to divide perennials and donate them to the club to be sold



each meeting for one dollar. On the topic of guest speakers: invite local nursery people to talk about plant care and selection. Regarding our social time: have refreshments at the beginning and include decaf. coffee.

There were also many positive comments about *Indumentum*, our VRS magazine, which is published by **Douglas and Karen Justice**. Some members liked the on-line, colour version, while others preferred the black-and-white paper copies. It was suggested that we distribute *Indumentum* copies at meetings in order to save postage.

Other general comments were: Continue having book sales and make *Greer's Guidebook* available for purchase at all meetings.

Include a fund-raising component at the June pot-luck, involving a raffle and/or auction.

The executive will consider all the suggestions on the questionnaires over the next few months. Moreover, **Carole Conlin**, our membership chairperson, will have blank questionnaires at her table each meeting. If you ever have comments or advice for the executive, please write it on a questionnaire and leave the sheet with Carole.

Finally, a huge thank you to everyone who helped with our 2004 Sale and Show at UBC. I will give you a detailed report next month.

*Ron Knight*

To advertise in *Indumentum*, contact Tony Clayton 604 921 7947 [tclayton@telus.net](mailto:tclayton@telus.net)

### Subscription Rates

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

### 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

## Open Gardens & Garden Events – Spring 2004

Spring is upon us again and gardeners everywhere are working hard to prepare their gardens for nature's fantastic display. The much anticipated splendours of the season are as much a credit to nature as to the vision, labour and intimate plant knowledge that gardeners bestow upon their creations and are ever so ready to share with others. Below is a list of events and open gardens which have generously been made available for the enjoyment of the membership. Most are in the Vancouver area while others are a little further afield. I urge you not to miss the opportunities to visit these fine gardens, so pack a lunch, call a friend and have some great outings! If the open garden dates are not suitable for you, then a private tour may be arranged by contacting the owner directly. For additional listings of events and tours, please refer to the VRS website [www.rhodocitymax.com](http://www.rhodocitymax.com), or the District 1 website [www.rhodos.ca](http://www.rhodos.ca), where events in District 1 chapters are listed. If you require more information on the gardens, please don't hesitate to call me. I hope you have a great spring and enjoy your tours.

Lothar Mischke

MAY 1 & 2

### VRS Flower Show and Plant Sale

UBC Botanical Garden Reception Centre  
6804 Southwest Marine Drive, Vancouver  
Saturday 10 AM to 4 PM  
Sunday 12 PM to 4 PM

MAY 9

### The Glades Garden - Mother's Day Open House

561 - 172<sup>nd</sup> Street, White Rock  
10 AM to 4 PM

### Vern & Gordon Finley's Garden

10476 - 125B Street, Surrey  
12 PM to 4 PM

### Perennial Plant Sale – UBC Botanical Garden

6804 Southwest Marine Drive, Vancouver  
Free entry to the Botanical Garden  
10 AM to 4 PM

MAY 15

### Bucket Hill - Margaret Charlton & Charlie Sale Garden

5414 Indian River Drive, North Vancouver  
1 PM to 5 PM (see directions on page 5)

### Cindy & Lothar Mischke Garden

330 Sasamat Lane, North Vancouver  
10 AM to 2 PM (see directions on page 6)

### Elizabeth & Ross Bligh Garden

810 Beachview Drive, North Vancouver  
1 PM to 5 PM (see directions on page 6)

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

### Darts Hill - Francisca Darts' Garden Open House

170<sup>th</sup> Street and 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Surrey  
10 AM to 4 PM

MAY 16

### Suzanne & Bill Spohn Garden

2950 Palmerston Avenue, West Vancouver  
10 AM to 4 PM

### Joanne & Joe Ronsley Garden

250 Ocean View Road, Lions Bay  
11 AM to 4 PM

### Heather & Richard Mossakowski Garden

155 Highview Place, Lions Bay  
11 AM to 4 PM

### Glenda Powroznik & Mark Lamont Garden

17918 - 68<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Surrey  
11 AM to 4 PM

MAY 20

### Ted & Mary Greig Rhododendron Walk

Stanley Park - A walk led by Alleyne Cook  
(see page 8 for time and meeting place)

MAY 29 & 30

### Dot & Ken Gibson Garden

Tofino B.C. (see directions on page 6)

### Susan Bloom's Stubbs Island Garden

Clayoquot Island, Tofino, B.C. (see directions on page 6)

MAY

### North Shore "ART IN THE GARDEN" Tour

North and West Vancouver artists display works of Art, visual and performances in select North Shore gardens. Locations will be announced in local papers in May.

JUNE 5

### Carla & Ron Knight's Caron Gardens

4622 Beaumont Road, Garden Bay  
Pender Harbour (see directions on page 6)  
11 AM to 4 PM

JUNE 13

### Ron Feicht & Derrick Hoffman Garden

6080 Eagleridge Drive, West Vancouver  
Potluck Picnic and Tour (see details page 5)



## Membership

Please join me in welcoming a new member **William McCarthy** of Burnaby.

The May Show & Sale special provides new members with 20 months membership for the price of 12. Please tell your friends and neighbours. Benefits, including discounts at nurseries, are listed on <http://www.rhodo.citymax.com>, or contact me for more information.

**Carole Conlin**

VRS Membership Chair [conlin@sfu.ca](mailto:conlin@sfu.ca)

604 921 7260

## Potluck Picnic and Tour June 13

**Ron Feicht & Derrick Hoffman Garden**

**6080 Eagleridge Drive, West Vancouver**

## Open Garden Directions

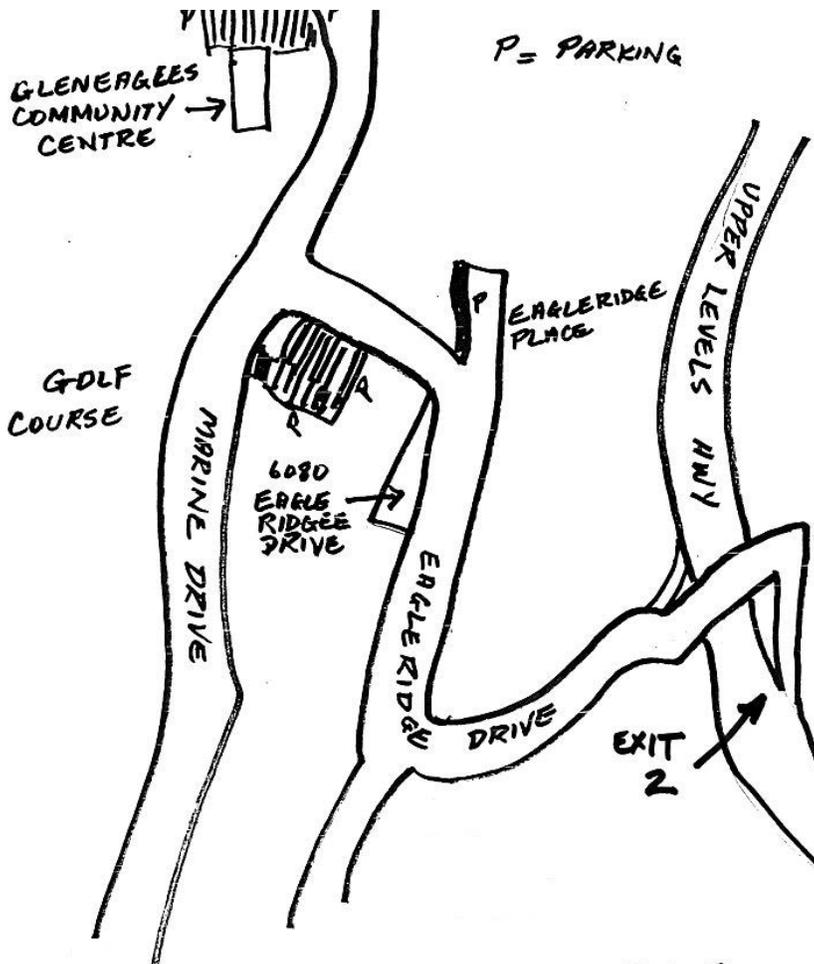
**Bucket Hill, Margaret Charlton's & Charlie Sale's Garden**

1. Westbound on Hwy 1: Follow Hwy.1 across the 2<sup>nd</sup> Narrows Bridge. Stay in the centre lane. (The highway becomes 2 lanes just before you exit.)

Exit from Hwy.1 at the sign for Mt. Seymour Prov. Park. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> off-ramp after crossing the bridge. After exiting, turn right at the traffic light on to the Mt. Seymour Parkway.

2. Eastbound on Hwy.1: Take the 1<sup>st</sup> exit at the bottom of "the cut" — the very long hill leading to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Narrows Bridge. Stay in the centre lane of the off-ramp, turning left at the traffic light. Proceed around the curve then turn right on to Mt.Seymour Parkway.

Follow the Parkway until you reach (on your left) the Parkgate Shopping Mall. Turn left just past the Mall at the sign for the Park (there is a traffic light at this turn) and then turn right at Indian River (just before the road curves). Take the 2<sup>nd</sup> left (at the sign for "Woodlands") and drive almost 5km (3 miles) to Fire Lane 6 (The fire lanes are not in complete sequence—Fire Lanes 7 & 8 come before 1 through 6). You will know you are close when you come to a stop sign at the top of a steep hill. Turn left at Fire Lane 6. At the white gate it may be necessary to open the gate (push the button on the



**Please bring deck chairs - Drop off at 6080 Eagle Ridge Drive**

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## News and Notes

### Remembering a Rhodo Pioneer

Ucluelet will celebrate an important part of the town's heritage on May 29 when it honours the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of George Fraser, one of North America's first rhododendron hybridizers.

Fraser, who was posthumously awarded the American Rhododendron Society's Pioneer Achievement Award in 1990, settled in Ucluelet in the 1890s and examples of his world-acclaimed rhodo hybrids can still be seen in the village.

The fourth annual George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair starts with a welcoming ceremony at George Fraser Memorial Park. The day's schedule includes a walk along streets that were originally part of Fraser's homestead and where enthusiasts can view beautiful rhododendrons and gardens in bloom along the way.

*Rhododendron* 'Fraser's Pink' and R. 'John Blair' are among the Fraser hybrids still growing on these properties. Interpretive bus tours in the afternoon will drive by these same places, in addition to other Fraser historical sites and gardens. Historian and George Fraser expert Bill Dale will present a slide show on the Scottish horticulturist in the UAC Hall.

Guests of honour include BC's Lieutenant Governor Iona Campagnolo and the president of the American Rhododendron Society, Mike Stewart.

For more information: [www.uclueletinfo.com](http://www.uclueletinfo.com) or call 250 726 7456 (Wanda McAvoy, George Fraser Committee Member/Coordinator).

Kathleen Freimond, reprinted with permission from *GardenWise Magazine*.



*Rhododendron* 'Blue Peter' at Century Garden, Burnaby  
photo by Douglas Justice

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Please note that the times for Lothar and Cindy Mischke's open garden have been changed to **10:00 am** until **2:00 pm** on Sunday 15 May.



VRS member **Clive Justice** notes that *Rhododendron* 'Blue Peter' is putting on an exceptionally fine display this year. He writes: Burnaby's Century Gardens has a fine collection of old "blotches" like 'Arthur Bedford', 'Sappho' and nicest of all in my opinion, 'Blue Peter' (photo left). We know that Arthur was one of Lowinsky's gardeners and that Sappho was a Greek poetess, but who was this cold Peter? It turns out not to be a person, but a flag.

A ship about to sail hoists a blue flag with a white square in the centre—the signal being the code letter

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“P,” which is correctly called the “Blue Repeater” — from the French verb *partir*, to depart. So *Rhododendron* ‘Blue Peter’ is named for a flag that was hoisted to recall seaman who had gone ashore in a port of call, and also to give notice to the port that all who had claims for money against the ship should come and make them before it sailed. The ‘Blue Peter’ blotch is rich purple (not white) on a mauve field (photo above). You can always tell it (in or out of flower), as it has large, wide, flattened, dark green leaves that are paper thin compared with the cardboard-thick leaves of most other hybrids. ‘Blue Peter’ is a *ponticum* hybrid × *ponticum* hybrid cross, introduced in 1933 by Waterer, Sons & Crisp.

## Rhododendron

*The flower has a permanent empalement cut into five parts; the flower hath one wheel funnel-shaped petal, spreading open at the brim; it has ten slender stamina, which decline, and are the length of the petals, terminated by oval summits, and a five-cornered germen supporting a slender style the length of the petal, crowned by an obtuse stigma. The germen afterward becomes an oval capsule with five cells, filled with small seeds.*

From: *The Abridgement of the Gardeners Dictionary*, Sixth Edition, by Philip Miller, London, 1771.

Most VRS members already know our fellow member and our guide through the Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden in Stanley Park, **Alleyne Cook**. Alleyne was long with the Park Board working in Stanley Park, and is the creator of the Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden. He is also the holder of the American Rhododendron Society Gold Medal. Surely no one is more qualified to take us through, and talk about what is without doubt one of the major horticultural treasures of British Columbia — and one, incidentally, for which he is largely responsible.

Just a little background on Alleyne. He is a New Zealander by birth, and did his first apprenticeship at the famous Duncan and Davies Nursery there. This was followed by a further, more advanced apprenticeship at Sunningdale Nursery in England, where he worked under the supervision of the renowned horticulturist Jim Russell. He helped move the Tower Court collection of rhododendrons, and he worked both at Windsor Great Park and at Castle Howard at the time Ray Wood was established. More locally, he worked with the Greigs at their Royston Nursery on Vancouver Island before coming to Stanley Park. He is known for moving large rhododendrons, both on Vancouver Island and on the mainland, where he moved many plants from Stanley Park for safer keeping in VanDusen Gardens. He is one of our most knowledgeable horticulturists, a lively personality, and a good friend to many of us.

Please note that we will meet in the parking lot of the Fish House Restaurant, **at 6:30 instead of the usual 7:30**, in order to be able to go through the garden while it is light.

Joe Ronsley

