VANCOUVER Rhododendron SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

November General Meeting:
Thursday Nov. 17, 7:30 p.m.
Vandusen Botanical Garden

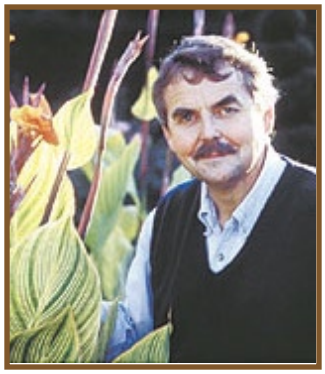
Lecture Program:
Brian Minter
'Rhododendron's Best Friends'

Plant Sales:
Frank Dorsey

THE AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
GENUS RHODODENDRON HONORE HABERE
MEMBERS WORLDWIDE

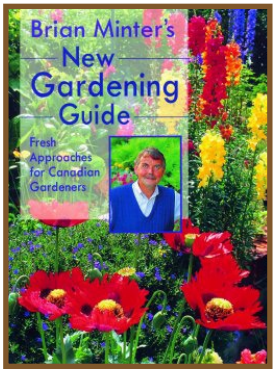
Vancouver Chapter

VRS Website: www.rhodo.citymax.com



Our November speaker, ***Brian Minter***, is a native British Columbian, whose name is horticulturally very well known in this part of the gardening world. With a degree in Honours English from UBC, Brian went on to found and direct Minter Gardens, a 32-acre show garden in Chilliwack, and an innovative garden centre and greenhouse growing operation called Minter Country Garden. Clearly, he has put his Honours English degree to good use.

In fact, that degree did turn out to be useful (I would like to think the literature as well as the writing practice) when it came to his extensive communication work, written and oral, in regard to gardens and gardening. He has been a syndicated gardening columnist with various lower mainland newspapers, and host of a radio open-line programme with CBC Radio and AM600, as well as Gardening Host on Cable TV and a garden series on the Knowledge Network. He has lectured widely both in Canada and the United States, and has produced seven gardening videos which are currently in distribution. His book, Brian Minter's New Gardening Guide—Fresh Approaches for Canadian Gardeners, published in 1998, has been a Canadian best seller, and is in its third printing. Brian continues to work as a columnist for several BC and national garden magazines.



Being extremely active in civic service, especially in the fields of education and tourism, he is also the Regional Director of the Garden Writers Association of America. As a result of his extensive service and his outstanding achievement in several fields, he is the recipient of many honours and awards, including the Canadian Horticultural Science Award, the Garden Writers Association of America Top Award, and, not least, the Communication Achievement Award from the Toastmasters International Club of Chilliwack! He is also a recipient of the Order of Canada.

Brian Minter has lectured widely, under several different, high profile, auspices, in Canada, the United States, and England. This very distinguished person in our midst will continue in this vein by speaking to the Vancouver Rhododendron Society the evening of November 17th. Evidently he won't be speaking about rhododendrons, at least not directly, but he will be speaking about 'Rhododendron's Best Friends'. We all need friends and companions, and the rhododendrons in our garden need them too.

By Joe Ronsley

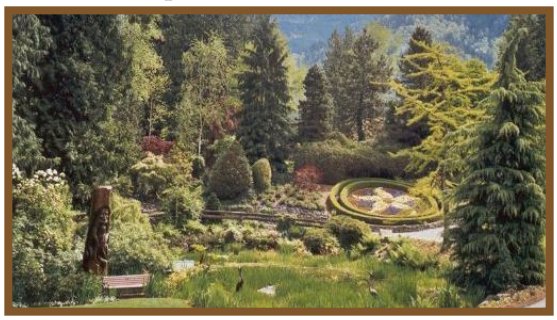
A Minter Garden Story

Centuries ago, a massive mountain slide suddenly swept over the fertile lands of the eastern Fraser Valley. This rock fall pushed north across the Fraser River and ended its westerly flow at the area which is now Minter Gardens. The unique land formations which were created left an area unsuitable for crop farming, but early settlers found it ideal for raising cattle and other animals. Tall native specimen trees added to the charm of the location and thousands of wild Geraniums, Columbine, Roses and Bleeding Hearts added a finishing touch to this magnificent setting. It was this site which Brian and Faye Minter first saw on Christmas Day, 1977. The topography was so unique and the setting against 7,000 foot Mt. Cheam so picturesque, instantly one of those once-in-a-lifetime dreams was born: to create one of the most beautiful gardens in the world!

Their dream became reality in May of 1980. The 11 individual gardens are as varied as they are interesting reflecting the seasons magnificently. The garden is adorned throughout with garden architecture, first class plant specimens as well as unique and creative floral designs strategically interspersed throughout the gardens.

Over 1,000 Rhododendrons are planted throughout the Gardens, but the most spectacular showing is found in the unusual Rhododendron Garden. On a north facing bank surrounded by huge cedar trees, hundreds of Rhododendrons are planted in solid masses above fern laden rock wall terraces. Pathways are gently sloped to accommodate wheelchairs, and as you wind back and forth among these specimens, the effect is quite overwhelming. Dogwoods and Magnolias are grouped between Rhododendron plantings to complement the beauty.

Thousands upon thousands of brilliant annuals are carefully colour co-ordinated over 32 acres. Massive floral beds depict the Canadian flag and other uniquely designed features.



Brian Minter is part gardener, writer and lecturer as well as entrepreneur and president of his businesses. He owns and operates the first class Minter Gardens as well his leading edge retail garden centre and greenhouse growing operation called Country Garden (photo left). Among the store's many fine displays and unique plants selections one can also buy one of the best of all garden companions - wine (photo below). Brian and Faye, have definitely taken show gardens and garden centre retailing to new levels of merchandising and display.

How to Find Minter Gardens and Minter Country Garden

Country Garden
(nursery and store); 18 acre Destination Garden Centre:
10015 Young Road, Chilliwack, BC, V2P 4V4 Ph:(604) 792-3799 Fax:(604)792-8893
www.mintergardens.com/country.htm

Minter Gardens:
A World Class Show Garden Exit #135 off Highway #1, 90 minutes east of downtown Vancouver B.C. at the Harrison Hot Springs exit.

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 40, Chilliwack B.C. V2P 6H7
Telephone: (604) 794-7191 Fax: (604)792-8893
Toll Free in North America: 1-888-MINTERS
Website: www.mintergardens.com

Article excerpts and photos courtesy of Minter Gardens and Minters' Country Garden , augmented by Todd Major.

The Most Massive Living Thing - A Fungus Among Us

Scientific Name: *Armillaria ostoyae,* the fungus, also known as the honey mushroom, spreads below ground by sending out these stringy rhizomorphs.

People have known about the "honey mushroom" for some time, but were not aware of how large and invasive this species of fungus could be. The fungus was investigated more closely by researchers when they realized that it was responsible for killing large groves of evergreen trees. When foresters cut into an infected tree they would find spreading white filaments, mycelia,

(photo right) which draw water and carbohydrates from the tree to feed the fungus. Researchers collected samples of the fungus from a widespread area and analyzed the DNA. A large sample of the specimens they collected turned out to be from a single organism. Until August of 2000 it was thought that the largest living organism was a fungus of the same species (*Armillaria ostoyae*) that covered 1,500 acres (600 hectares) found living in the state of Washington. But then mycology experts surmised that if an *Armillaria* that large could be found in Washington, then perhaps one just as large could be responsible for the trees dying in the Malheur National Forest in the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon. Researchers were astonished at the sheer magnitude of the find. This most recent find was estimated to cover over 2,200 acres (890 hectares) and be at least 2,400 years old, possibly older.

To go into the forest where this giant fungus makes its home you would not look at it and see a huge, looming mushroom. *Armillaria* grows and spreads primarily underground and the sheer bulk of this organism lies in the earth, out of sight. Occasionally, during the fall season, this specimen will send up golden-colored "honey mushrooms" (photo bottom left) that are the visible evidence of its hulking mass beneath. Scientists have not yet begun to attempt to estimate the weight of this specimen of *Armillaria.*

How is it possible for a single fungus to get so big? Scientists who study this species of fungus have postulated that the huge size may be a function of the dry climate in eastern Oregon. Spores have a hard time establishing new organisms, making room for the old-timers to spread. Without competition from other specimens this enormous *Armillaria* has been able to grow and spread unchecked. And yes, the honey mushrooms (photo bottom left) are supposedly edible, but apparently not very tasty.

Frank Dorsey's Rhodo Donations

Frank has very generously donated about 40 rhododendrons to the VRS to boost our fund raising efforts These plants, in 1-gallon pots, will be sold at our meeting on November 17. The descriptions are taken somewhat loosely from Greer's Guidebook, third edition, the codes referring to height in ten years (e.g., 6'), hardiness in degrees Fahrenheit (e.g., -50F), and approximate flowering period. The plants are:

R. augustinii (Trevorcourt form) (5). Triflorum, lavender blue flowers; 6', -50F, March-May.

R. augustinii (Ness Best Blue form) (3). Blue flowers.

R. campanulatum var. aeruginosum. The Rolls Royce of foliage that opens as silver green, deepening to soft blue, with a striking indumentum. Flowers are bell shaped, light lilac to white; 4', -50F, March-May.

R. campylogynum cremostum (bodnanr red) (2). Small bell flowers; 2', -100F, March-May.

R. campylogynum var myrtilloides. More dwarf than cremostum, with smaller flowers in a range of colours.

R, edgarianum. Tiny leaves with golden yellow scales on top side and dark reddish brown scale underneath. Tiny funnel shaped bluish-purple flowers; 3', -50F, May-June.

R. lutescens fcc form (3). New leaves are red, changing to dark green. Wide, funnel-shaped flowers range from soft primrose yellow to bright yellow, spotted light green; 6', -50F, March-May.

See **Frank's Donations** on page 4

Frank's Donations continued

R. oldhamii (2). Evergreen azalea with differing Spring and Summer foliage and wide funnel-shaped salmon red to brilliant brick red flower trusses; 4', 100F, May.
R. rigidum bodinieri (7). "a beautiful sight when in full flower, a floating cloud ranging in colour from white to pink to intense rosy lavender, occasionally spotted red"; 6', -50F, March-May.
R. rubropilosum (3). An evergreen azalea whose leaves are dark green with red hairs. Funnel shaped flowers in trusses are pink spotted mauve; 4', 50F, May.
R. sargentianum (2). A very compact shrub spreading only 10"-12" and 6"-12" high in 10 years. Small tubular flowers are pale lemon yellow to white to creamy white; 1', -50F, March-May.
R. viridescens (Doshang La form). Growth habit is low and spreading. Leaves are pale green on top, waxy blue-green below. Small, funnel-shaped flowers in trusses are pale yellowish green, spotted green; 3', -50F, May-June.
R. williamsianum (2). "One of the loveliest and most highly regarded dwarfs, it grows in a perfectly rounded evergreen shape. New growth is a lively bronze. Bell-shaped flowers in various shades of pink hang like fairy lanterns amid the dense foliage"; 18", -50F, March-May.
R. yunnanense. A very variable species with an open upright habit. Flowers range in colour from white to pink or rosy lavender, sometimes spotted or blotched in crimson; 6', 0F, April-May.
R. williamsianum x kalmia sp (not recorded).
R. County Fair (3) (not recorded).
R. Elizabeth Lockhart. Dwarf plant. Young foliage is very red, changing to deep green. Flowers are deep red.
R. Razorbill. A hardy plant with unusual and attractive tubular rosy pink flowers produced in profusion; 3', 100F, April.
Kalmiopsis leachiana. (not recorded)

The VRS thanks Frank Dorsey for his gracious contribution in aid of our Society.

By Louis Peterson

Rhododendron Lake, Vancouver Island, British Columbia

Rhododendron Lake lies in the Englishman River drainage about 20 kilometres (12 miles) west of Nanaimo at an elevation of 460 metres (1500 feet). The main feature of the area is a small grove of Pacific Rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*), a rare plant in British Columbia.

Rhododendron Lake (photo below) contains this small grove of about 2 hectares (5 acres), one of only two localities on Vancouver Island (there is another even smaller grove south of Nanaimo near Weeks Lake between Shawnigan and Port Renfrew). On the mainland of British Columbia, the Pacific Rhododendron is most prevalent in the Skagit Valley on the western slope of the Cascade Mountain Range and is readily seen from the highway near the western entrance to Manning Park. Recently, another small grove has been discovered on the slopes of Mt. Elphinstone on the Sechelt peninsula. The Pacific Rhododendron is much more common in Washington State where it was adopted as the state flower. It is most prevalent in the State of Oregon and occurs in several

locations in California. Rhododendron Lake is located on forest land owned by Island Timberlands LP (formerly MacMillan Bloedel) and access is gained from their Northwest Bay road network. From the parking lot, there are trails into the rhododendrons with interpretative signs. The peak flowering season is in early June. Other wildflowers of interest include Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*), Bog Kalmia (*Kalmia polifolia*) and Labrador Tea (*Rhododendron groenlandicum*). The Englishman River watershed is part of the Mount Arrowsmith Biopshere Reserve that was designated in November 2000 by the Man and Biosphere Program of the United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Pacific Rhododendron has a vigorous root system and is more drought tolerant than many of the hybrids available from commercial nurseries. There are selected forms which have been introduced into cultivation that have a range of flower colours from white to darker red than the native form. The rhododendrons are located adjacent to the shore of the lake at the bottom of the picture extend up the hill into the trees. Clive Justice and the late Harold Johnston of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society arranged for the signs which were donated by MacMillan Bloedel Ltd. See the article by the late Lillian Hodgson in the 1985 ARS Journal Volume 39, Number 4.

Article & photo courtesy of the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society, visit their website at: www.nanaimo.rhodos.ca

2006 Nominations of VRS Directors and Officers

According to the Constitution, the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Newsletter Editor, Membership Chair and Programme Chair shall be elected for one year terms. The duties of these Officers are specified in the Constitution. The Board of Directors shall consist of the above Officers, the immediate Past President, and three elected Directors who shall serve for three years each. For the AGM in January 2006, the slate of Nominations is as follows:

President:
Louis Peterson to stand for a second (final) term.
Vice President:
Lothar Mischke to stand for a second (final) term.
Past President:
Vacant
Secretary:
Radojka Harris is nominated to replace Bill Spohn.
Treasurer:
Barbara Sherman
Newsletter Editor:
Todd and Shannon Major
Membership Chair:
Carole Conlin
Programme Chair:
Louis Peterson
Director:
Sean Rafferty is nominated replacing Bill Herbst
Director:
Iain Forsyth (until January 2008)
Director:
John Priestman (until January 2008)

Vacancies
If there are vacancies on the Board of Directors following the AGM, those vacancies may be filled by the Directors from among the qualified members of the Society, if they see fit to do so.

Committees
The start of the new year is an opportune time to express our appreciation to the various committees that have contributed to VRS activities over the past season, and to consider how all of us can contribute in ways small or large to the season ahead. The executive always appreciates work done on behalf of the VRS by volunteer members. Volunteers are the life blood of this and many other organizations, bring vibrancy and growth to our Society. The Executive must be supported by the membership through volunteerism. Please consider giving some of your time to help to grow our society.

VRS Committees continued

Webmaster:
Bill Spohn has agreed to continue to fill the new position of Webmaster.
The Programme Committee:
Louis Peterson supported by Joe Ronsley.
Refreshments:
Jackie Clayton and Barbara Forsyth
Growers' Liaison Committee:
Bill Herbst has agreed to continue to serve on the and to assist with the Show & Sale.
The Greig Project Committee:
Bill Herbst, Todd Major, Sue Klapwijk and Les Clay.
Publicity Coordinator:
Carole Conlin has agreed to fill this position until a permanent replacement can be secured.
Garden Tours:
Lothar Mischke will continue to head the committee.
Show & Sale Committee:
Consists of the entire Executive Board in sub-committee roles, together with many helpers from the membership at large.
Library Committee:
Jasbir Gill and Iain Forsyth, soon to be joined by Pamela Whitehead.
Potluck Dinner Coordinator:
Vern Finley continues to serve us very well and has done so for many years.
Education committee:
Volunteer coordinator needed.
A new "Rhodo Rescue" Committee:
Consists of Lothar Mischke, Sean Rafferty and Louis Peterson.

Your President is seeking volunteers for a "Reaching Out" committee to spearhead new events or activities. Many members bring raffle prizes, Jim Hall and others sell the raffle tickets, and Frank Dorsey, Douglas Justice and Charlie Sale do the Sterling Raffelmeister Duties

By Louis K. Peterson

A Rhododendron Poem
by Chris Barnes

Life transient moves on,
Bud primed ready for action,
Hardly shrouded,
Glossy exterior fighting manifold elements,
Mid –winter snow and soggy sleet;
Personable perennial I always greet,
May or June takes glory of full fisted bloom,
Pink, purple, blood red and cerise;
Stamens, whiskers of a Cheshire cat,
Eyebrows and mustachios sub-divided petals,
Strong probing sepals don't sag and blow away
But gently brown in long summer heat,
Maturing wine chilled,
By diurnal variation,
In anticipation of autumn evening relaxation
Yields next year's bud stacked below so neat,
Trump card in the pack,
Heaven sent- foliage sack.
Immigrant to our land,
Stacked symmetrically on your flanks
Home rolling pagodas
On Japanese hillside,
And there are those who would bring about your demise,
Those I despise; Rhodo-bashers,
Ignorant vegetation thrashers.
You've spread a bit, choking woodland borders,
Welsh mountains and the like,
Perfect symbol of generation
I won't allow you to be laid waste,
Here in my heart there'll always be space.

Do You Have an Opinion?

Maybe a Picture of Interest?

Share Some News or an Announcement?

Letters to the editor, news, pictures and anything rhodo or otherwise can be sent to Todd or Shannon Major at stmajor@shaw.ca.

Please send all letters in MS Word, Notepad, Wordpad or in the body of your email to us. We need pictures too! The larger the picture file size the better the result on screen and in print.

Membership

Welcome to Leslie Alexander who joined the Chapter this fall. New members receive the remainder of 2005 and all of 2006 for the one-year price. Guests are always welcome at our meetings. Check our website, www.rhodo.citymax.com for a list of speakers.

Membership Renewal time is here. Forms for renewal have been mailed to all members. Membership cards for 2006 will be mailed as your renewals are received, or you can pick them up at the November 17th meeting. Life members will automatically receive their 2006 membership cards. New members are welcome and can obtain information from me or the VRS website referenced above.

Membership rates:
Vancouver Rhododendron Members $25.00 per year
(borrow ARS journals from VRS Library)

ARS/VRS Members $50.00 per year
(includes 4 ARS journals a year; Avoid Journal Jeopardy by renewing before November 20th; those renewing after November 20th may not receive the mid-January 2006 ARS journal – don't miss out – renew early!).

Associate Members - $10.00 per year
Must be a member of another ARS Chapter to be eligible for Associate membership.

If you change your name, address, email, or telephone, please let me know so our records can be updated. If you have any questions about membership, please contact me,
Carole Conlin
VRS Membership Chair
PO Box 91
Lions Bay, BC V0N 2E0
Telephone: 604-921-7260
Email: cconlin@alumni.sfu.ca

VRS members asked the Indumentum: How can I prevent and treat powdery mildew?

Powdery mildew is very common in the Pacific Northwest and is caused by members of the fungus genus *Microsphaera*. The disease can affect both hybrid and species rhododendrons. Surprisingly, the symptoms are different for rhododendrons than for many other plants. Specifically, it is rare to see deformed rhododendron leaves with a gray powder on them . Some notable exceptions include many azaleas (photo above, powdery mildew on azalea) as well as R. Purple Splendour and R. Vulcan's Flame.

Powdery mildew symptoms in rhododendrons appear first on the leaves, with light green or yellow blotches on the upper surfaces and brown to purple spots or feathery areas on the lower surfaces. In severe cases, partial or complete defoliation and stem dieback can occur between late summer and early spring. Photo above shows the upper and lower leaf surfaces on R. Virginia Richards show typical powdery mildew symptoms for rhododendrons.

The *Microsphaera* fungi seem to be able to infect most rhododendrons, but some are more susceptible to powdery mildew than others. According to Philip Dickey of Seattle's Green Gardening Program, highly susceptible examples include *R. cinnabarinum*, *R. campylocarpum*, R. Elizabeth, R. Virginia Richards, R. Unique, the Loderi group, and many deciduous azaleas.

Less susceptible plants are *R. yakushimanum* and its hybrids, rhododendrons with indumentum, and our local native species *R. macrophyllum* and *R. albiflorum.*

Photo below, Powdery mildew on R. Whitewater has caused partial defoliation.

Photo below, powdery mildew symptoms on Rhododendron, Photo courtesy of Oregon State University.

See **Powdery Mildew Flourishes** on page 8

Powdery Mildew Flourishes in locations with warm, sunny days and cool, humid nights. Especially favourable conditions occur in areas where plants are crowded and there is poor air circulation. Under such conditions, fungus spores

can be produced within 60 hours of an initial infection and are then ready to be spread around the garden by means of wind or rain. *Microsphaera* spores (photo left) prefer to germinate on dry leaf surfaces where they quickly infect the plant by sending specialized cells called haustoria into the leaf tissue to absorb nutrients. Young, soft rhododendron leaves are most easily attacked by powdery mildew although symptoms may not be evident until the leaves mature. Spores can over-winter on lower leaf surfaces or in buds and will attack new leaves that develop the following spring.

Prevention and treatment of powdery mildew can involve both cultural controls and chemical sprays.

Chemical Controls:
Fungicides will not remove the damage to infected leaves. However, if there are symptoms on last year's leaves, you might consider spraying the new spring growth to protect against further infection. Triflorine (Funginex) and sulphur sprays such as Safer's Garden Fungicide are registered for use by homeowners. Newer, potassium bicarbonate (baking soda) based sprays show some promise. In all cases, full leaf coverage with the spray is essential. Follow label instructions closely and wear protection goggles and clothing.

Cultural Controls:
Maintain healthy plants by providing good soil drainage and adequate water and nutrients. Stressed rhododendrons are more susceptible to disease. However, avoid over-fertilizing, especially late in the season, as this practice encourages soft, new growth that is a prime target for *Microsphaera* spores.

Inspect your rhododendrons regularly to identify infected plants and problematic areas of the garden.

Move infected plants to areas that have less favourable conditions for the disease. Harold Fearing says that at Fearing's Farm he is particularly careful about giving plenty of space to *R. cinnabarinum*, *R. thomsonii*, and their hybrids and tries to plant them in areas with a fair amount of sunshine and good air circulation. He reports that although he has not eliminated powdery mildew from this garden, "it has been a long time since I have had a plant sufficiently infected that I had to throw it away."

Prune to increase air circulation. Douglas Justice says that at UBC Botanical Garden, "we do nothing to rhododendrons (to control powdery mildew) other than occasional thinning of both the surrounding material and the rhododendrons themselves."

Remove old, heavily infected leaves from rhododendrons in fall or winter. Rake up diseased leaves that have fallen under the plant and burn them or dispose of them in the garbage.

And if all else fails, discard heavily infected plants and replace them with rhododendrons that are more resistant to powdery mildew.

Article and Photos By Ron Knight except where otherwise noted. Photo above left, courtesy of Microscopy Consulting Services.