

INDUMENTUM



VANCOUVER
Rhododendron
SOCIETY

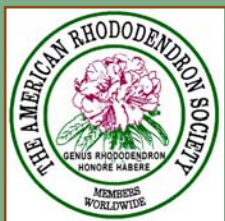
NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2006

GENERAL MEETING:
SEPTEMBER 21, 7300 P.M.
VANDUSEN BOTANICAL GARDENS

LECTURE PROGRAM:
QUENTIN CRONK, DIRECTOR
OF THE UBC BOTANICAL GARDEN
AND CENTRE FOR PLANT RESEARCH,
PRESENTING:

'RHODODENDRON - THE
ANATOMY OF AN OBSESSION'



Vancouver Chapter

WWW.RHODO.CITYMAX.COM

Quentin Cronk (photo below, courtesy of the University of British Columbia) is the Director of the UBC Botanic Garden, arguably the most distinguished horticultural position, certainly in British Columbia, and perhaps in Canada. He claims to have no other credentials, but UBC would not have brought him all the way from Edinburgh if this were actually the case.

Of his lecture, 'Rhododendron - the anatomy of an obsession', Quentin says: "This talk will trace the reasons for plant obsession and its consequences, with particular reference to Rhododendron. From the snowy Himalaya to isolated Appalachian coves, Rhododendrons have shown the capacity to launch expeditions and engender lust, loyalty and lucre. Should we look for reasons in the plants themselves, or in the darkest recesses of the minds of their devotees?"



Mr. Cronk's credentials include Reader in Vascular Plant Systematics at Edinburgh University and RBGE, Faculty member, Institute of Cell and Molecular Biology (ICMB) Edinburgh; University and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh; Curator of the Oxford University Herbaria; Departmental Lecturer in Botany, University of Oxford; Fellow and Tutor for Admissions, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge; Lecturer in Botany, Trinity College, Dublin; Research Fellow, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge; PhD Department of Botany, University of Cambridge.

He has written numerous research papers and books including *Developmental Genetics and Plant Evolution*, *The Endemic Flora of St. Helena* and *Plant Invaders: The Threat to Natural Ecosystems*, among others.

His research group is dedicated to understanding the evolution and biodiversity of vascular plants. An important part of this programme is the reconstruction of the history of life through comparative gene sequencing: molecular phylogenetics of plants. The research group uses the techniques of molecular developmental biology to understand how genomic change is related to changing plant morphology.

"This talk" he adds, "will be the unexpurgated version of the lecture given in Victoria (ARS) in 2005." We all want 'unexpurgated' versions!

By Joe Ronsley

Dear fellow VRS members,

Welcome back to the new season that is about to start! Your executive hopes that everyone has had a good summer, enjoying the prolonged sunny weather and diligently watering the rhodos (and gardens) as needed.

To conclude our last season, our Show & Sale at Park & Tilford Gardens turned in a tidy profit, Gerry Gibbens led a highly instructive and entertaining tour of the VanDusen Gardens in May, and in June all who came to the colourful and multi-faceted Lamont Gardens in Surrey enjoyed a bountiful feast of food and wine. (See photos this page).

There will be new ideas coming forward, including proposals for a "VRS Scholarship Fund" and for "Rhodo 101 Classes for Novices". We do need your help, your comments and your advice in order to make our next year's program even more attractive and useful – and to keep our funds healthy. Your participation in your Society in whatever niche that suits you is most welcome.



An overview of our upcoming programme for 2006/2007 is as follows, but see our website www.rhodo.citymax.com for details and/or updates:

September 21 – Dr. Quentin Cronk (UBC-CPR), "Rhododendrons – an Anatomy of an Obsession".

October 19 – Brenda Macdonald, "VRS Members on a Second Trip to China".

November 16 – Dr. Rolf Matthewes (SFU), "Plants of the Queen Charlottes – Past Present and Future";

January 18 – Stuart Scholefield – "Gardens in Winter", AGM and members' slides (and perhaps Coffee and Desserts to dispel winter blahs?);

February 15 – Peter Wharton, TBA;

March 15 – Joe Ronsley, "Enhanced Woodland".

April 19 – Mike Snowden, "Rowallane: Caring for the Collection";

May 5 – Show and Sale, at Park & Tilford Gardens

May 17 – Alleyne Cook, "The Ted & Mary Greig Walk in Stanley Park".

June 10 – Potluck/picnic at Bill and Suzanne Spohn's Garden.

Themes for our Education Sessions are being developed. Mary Miles will be displaying some of her botanical paintings in September. Later we expect to present "Ramora – Sudden Oak Disease", "Ferns in the Landscape", and the popular "Mini Shows" and "Francisca Bouquets". Topics that have been suggested (not forgotten) include "Gardening in Containers" and "Rhodo Identification" (thank you Mary Davison and Lawrence Yung).

Best Wishes for a good year! Louis Peterson, on behalf of your executive Carole Conlin, Iain Forsyth, Radojka Harris, Lothar Mischke, Sean Rafferty, Barbara Sherman.



A specimen tree or shrub displayed in lone splendour on the open front lawn of many Vancouver homes was until very recently a common landscape feature, along with foundation planting on each side of the steps up to the front porch. Vestiges of this minimalist version of the Loudonian landscaping style are still to be found on front lawns of many smaller and older pre-WWII 'Stucco Bungalows' in the city. Rhododendrons as lone lawn specimens were no exception in Vancouver's benign climate. You can still find the odd one in Dunbar and Marpole even today.

I found one, across the street from our house. It had been there ever since we moved to the neighbourhood in 1956, going on 50 years ago now. An almost perfect eight foot diameter green globe on a short six inch diameter stout stem; that allows a hand lawn mower, or a weedeater with care, to cut the grass right up to the stem. The small front lawn where it is displayed is right across the street from our next door neighbour's garage and our carport. We double-front, having a street both front and back. With no lane we have to 'keep up appearances' in front as well as the back.

The house at 883 West 60th had been a rental property for many years until it was sold a few years back and extensively renovated by the new owners Leslie and Keith Silas of Prestige Kitchens in Kerrisdale. Keith had been our subcontractor when we renovated our kitchen, we were speaking neighbours. The rhododendron, in front of 883 was probably planted in the late 1920s or early '30s. I never saw anyone ever prune it so it has always retained its neat spherical shape. Every year when it bloomed, I would take a guess as to what it was. Always later blooming than most, it had small compact neat trusses scattered about the dense ball of dark green, *R. arboreum* like leaves. It has as a black spot in the throat, not the pure red of 'Britannia', long finished blooming, but a purplish cherry red.

With the 'hint of purple' in the flower, I assumed it was one of the catawbiense, maximum, and caucasicum hybrids developed in England, by either the Waterer family nurseries, Standish and Noble, the nursery that developed 'Pink Pearl', Sunningdale. Or the Cunningham nursery in Edinburgh between 1850 and 1910, and exported to New England and Northeastern US during the late 1880s and '90s through the turn of the century to just before the start of the war in 1914.

This importing came both pre-WWI and again and again right after in the early 1920s. Many, if not all of these exported rhododendron hybrids were grafted on *R. ponticum* or *R. caucasicum* understock.

'Cynthia' was an early guess: too pink, and much earlier blooming; 'Mrs C.S. Sargent' ? wife of the great American dendrologist: too light in colour; 'David', received an FCC, 1939, could be?, too dark though; 'Charles Dickens', had Great Expectations for it, nice try, right colour but off the mark with frilly edge on the flower petals; 'Garibaldi', the fiery red of patriotic fervour but not it. 'Nova Zembla', right blue red colour, introduced by Koster [Dutch] in 1902, right time, same parentage as 'America', but more compact according to Salley and Greer, very hardy, a Siberian connotation with the name. Seems to fit the bill, my last guess. However in all the years I had seen it bloom I had never really examined it closely.

This year 2006, when the 883 Rhodo was breaking into bloom I snuck over and broke off a truss and brought it back home for close examination. Armed with Rhododendron Portraits I began the slow process of comparing the live specimen with the 55 pages of "*Catawbiense* & hybrids" pictured in it. The colour rendition of rhododendron pictures printed from 35 mm Kodachrome slides does not always match the real thing, particularly with Kodachrome reds, and if the hybrid was not in cultivation in England or Holland the rhodo at 883 it wouldn't be pictured. The 883 truss bore a strong resemblance to a

lithograph picture I have framed. It was taken from a book (I didn't do it), of *R. arboreum* particularly the leaves and markings on the deep red truss; this gave me a clue it might be one of the secretive Waterer hybrids.

Most of the hybrids made and introduced by the Waterer Dynasty between 1850 and 1914 are crosses listed in Salley and Greer as ½ *R. catawbiense*, ½ unknown. According to Leach in Rhododendrons of the World this unknown is suspected in many instances to be the species, *arboreum*. The truss from 883 bore this out. When I came upon a picture of the hybrid 'John Waterer' I knew I had scored. It matched perfectly except for colour no purple showing through in the picture but the petal edge scalloping matched perfectly and *arboreum* like leaves also.

Continued see "**Back to Sally and Greer**" on page 4



Rhododendron hybrid 'John Waterer' in the front lawn of a home at 883 West 60th Ave. Vancouver

Back to Salley and Greer, low and behold a listing: “ ‘John Waterer’ ½ *R. catawbiense*, ½ unknown. . . Still in cultivation. J. Waterer, 1860.” There were two John Waterer’s, father and son, the father John for which the Rhododendron is named was the son of Anthony Waterer the founder of the Waterer Dynasty of Sussex/Surrey nurserymen. There are 21 hybrids bearing the Waterer name 3 up front ie, ‘Waterer’s Victoria’ and 18 honouring one or other of the many family members: ‘Hosea Waterer’, Gomer, Helen, Kate, Mary and Michael, Else, Ida and ‘Fred Waterer’. The majority are either red or pink. Most are no longer in cultivation..

The ‘John Waterer’ in the lawn at 883 is unique in several ways; it is one of the first if not the first of the 50 or so Waterer hybrid to be introduced. ‘John Waterer’ at 883 is one of the few if not the only one in Vancouver, the province, (it would be hardy in Nelson), or Canada to be identified as such. George Fraser in his 1925 catalogue and Layritz in his 1923 and 1933 catalogues carried the rhododendron hybrid ‘John Waterer’. So perhaps there may be some still around from that period beside the one at 883. I don’t know of any, do you?

Mary Comber Miles - Paintings of Southern Hemisphere Plants

Mary Comber Miles has been a member of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society for a good many years. Born in Scotland, she was educated in England, and later she studied at the Cambridge School of Art. She is an internationally recognized botanical artist whose works are now published in major horticultural or botanical publications and hang in homes, institutions and offices worldwide.

Throughout her childhood and her youth she acquired considerable horticultural and botanical knowledge from her didactic father, Harold F. Comber, A.L.S., a distinguished botanist, horticulturist and plant explorer, and from her horticulturist grandfather James Comber, V.M.H.

Mary has been Honorary Artist in Residence at VanDusen Botanical Gardens for over twenty years. There and at other botanical institutions she has extended her paintings and relevant notes for the purpose of botanical and horticultural education, and she regularly gives weekend workshops on the techniques of realistic botanical painting.

Mary has been most generous to the VRS in the past, in painting rhododendrons on our unique Bronze Medal Certificates, making them perhaps the most beautiful in the entire American Rhododendron Society. At our first meeting of the new season, on September 21, 2006, Mary has offered to provide an educational segment, where she will show a collection of her paintings of Southern Hemisphere plants. Mary notes that one result of the anticipated global warming may be the opportunity to grow a few more of these semi-tender trees and shrubs alongside our beloved rhododendrons.

Mary Comber Miles is represented by Harrison Galleries, 901 Homer Street, Vancouver, British Columbia (Tel 604-732-5217; web www.harrisingalleries.com and by Gala Gallery, 2432 Marine Drive, West Vancouver, B.C., (Tel 604-913-1059; web www.galagallery.ca VRS members are welcome to visit a two-week Exhibition of Mary’s paintings at the Harrison Galleries, commencing with a reception, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 4, 2006

By Louis Peterson

Just For Interest

Photo left, by T. Major, of white spider on Gentian.



Membership

Guests are always welcome at our meetings. Check the website at 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 2007 will be mailed as your renewals are received, or you can pick them up at the October and November meetings. Life members will automatically receive their 2007 membership cards. New members are welcome and can obtain information from me or the VRS website referenced above.

Welcome to Janette Sen-Lum who joined the Chapter this summer. New members receive the remainder of 2006 and all of 2007 for the one year price.

If you change your name or address or email or telephone, please let me know so our records can be updated.

Membership rates:

- a) Vancouver Rhododendron Members \$25.00 per year (borrow ARS journals from VRS Library)
- b) 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 2007 ARS journal – don't miss out – renew early!).
- c) Associate Members - \$10.00 per year – must be a member of another ARS Chapter to be eligible for Associate membership.

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
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Do You have some News or a Picture of Interest!

Letters to the **INDUMENTUM**, news, pictures and anything rhodo or otherwise, can be emailed to Todd & Shannon Major at stmajor@shaw.ca. We need pictures! The larger the picture file size the better the result on screen and in print. If you don't send something, then you will have to live with what we print, so get involved!

Todd & Shannon Major,
INDUMENTUM Editors

Name this Azalea?

The azalea pictured below is unidentified. The owner does not know the flower colour or name. The leaf has a pronounced blue colour, not well shown in the photographs.

If you know the name of this plant please contact the Indumentum Editor at stmajor@shaw.ca





The Fraser South Rhododendron Society Presents:

The American Rhododendron Society (ARS) Western Regional Fall Conference Highlighting Rhododendrons Around the World

The 2006 ARS Western Regional Conference is to be held at the Harrison Hot Springs Resort & Spa from Friday, September 22 to Sunday, September 24.

The town of Harrison Hot Springs is renowned for its breathtaking scenery and for the natural hot springs. It is situated at the southern end of Harrison Lake which runs for a total length of almost 48 miles. The view from the town is spectacular with the surrounding mountains bordering the entire length of the lake.

The Harrison Hot Springs Resort & Spa (photo right and bottom right) is a luxury hotel with many superior facilities. The resort hosts five hot indoor and outdoor pools, each fed by the natural mineral hot springs (photo below) that have remained a primary attraction for visitors for more than 100 years. The resort has its own golf course and many other outdoor recreational facilities. The Healing Springs Spa was built at a cost of \$2.2 million dollars and is a recent addition which was opened in 2001 and provides state of the art therapeutic equipment and treatment rooms. The



dining facilities are superior and include the world renown "Copper Room." The Conference reception and plant sale will be located in the Exhibition Hall adjacent to the hotel and the lectures and banquet in the Conference Centre. The reception area for the lectures and banquet will be located in a magnificent room affording panoramic views along the entire length of the Harrison Lake.

This conference features some top notch speakers from Canada and the U.S. Speakers include Des Kennedy, Steve Hootman, Dalen and Lori Bayes, Collen Forster, Glen Jamieson, Don Martyn, Charlie Sale, David Sellars and Norma Senn.

Tours are available of the following attractions: Bridal Veil Falls, Minter Gardens, Ferncliff Gardens, Westminster Abbey and the Harrison Lake Boat Tour. There is also the town of Harrison close by for sightseeing and shopping.

Members from all B.C. rhodo chapters are most welcome to invite relatives, friends, neighbours and especially other gardening enthusiasts to attend the ARS Fall Conference at Harrison Hot Spring Resort & Spa. Membership in the ARS is not a pre-requisite. This would be a golden opportunity to expose individuals to our passion and recruit more members for all Chapters.

The \$40.00 registration fee offers great value and affords full participation in most activities at the Conference including the Bonsai & Ikebana Demonstration, the Wine & Cheese Reception, attendance to the keynote and all the lecture presentations including the Sunday morning session on hybridizing and Rhododendron Species. Also provides access to the video displays, photo exhibition and the plant sale. The plant sale includes Rhododendron species, Vireyas and many special companion plants. Full conference details are available at the www.arsfallconference2006.com/, or www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth/index.asp or www.rhodos.ca, or phone 604 853 8839. For Harrison Hot Springs Resort information go to www.harrisonresort.com.





Bergie Larson

BACK TO BASICS



Circus

Members asked the Indumentum: What are some late-blooming rhododendrons that can be purchased in BC? By Ron Knight

Ten years ago, I would have defined late-blooming rhododendrons as those that were in flower during July in my garden. However, for the past few years, perhaps because of our warmer winters, most of these same plants have finished blooming by the end of June. In fact, only about two percent of the 500 rhododendrons in my garden on the Sunshine Coast are still in flower in mid-July.

Despite their low numbers, these late-blooming rhododendrons are an interesting group. Among their numbers are some very good yellows and oranges. Also included are azaleas that have much more going for them than the ones that line the shelves at Walmart and Rona in May. In addition, all of these late-bloomers are quite rare in B.C. gardens because few retail nurseries seem interested in selling rhododendrons that flower outside of the regular spring gardening season.

Following is a selection of ten late-blooming rhododendrons. All of them are easy to grow and produce their first flowers reasonably quickly after being purchased in one or two gallon size pots.

1. Bergie Larson is a wardii hybrid and a favourite of visitors to my garden. She's low growing, with a nice rounded shape and gorgeous yellow and orange flowers. On the down-side, Bergie seems to be quite sensitive to windy locations and I will be moving her into a more sheltered spot this fall.

2. Circus is not described by Harold Greer as blooming particularly late, however, on a shaded hillside in my garden its flowers first open in mid-June. It's another low grower that comes from a rather uncommon cross of an orange with a purple rhododendron (Fabia X Purple Splendour). As a result, the flowers display a wide range of colours from orangey-yellow to pink, to reddish purple.

3. Goldsworth Orange is a great plant. It grows to be quite tall and the bright, tropical orange blooms last for about a month in a semi-shaded part of my garden, finishing well into July. It's also quite heat tolerant.

4. Hazel Fisher is a fairly recent introduction and receives high ratings for flower and foliage from Harold Greer. Harold identifies it as a late bloomer although I find the buds often open before any of the other rhododendrons mentioned in this column. Hazel's blooms show yellow, lavender, and apricot colours with a darker eye.

5. Independence Day was introduced by Waterer and is well-named. The plant is usually still in bloom on the fourth of July. It is hardy and fairly tall-growing, but the red flowers are on the small side.



Goldsworth Orange



Hazel Fisher



Independence Day

Continued see "Midsummer" on page 8



BACK TO BASICS



6. Midsummer may have been an appropriate name for this plant in 1958 when it was hybridized. However, nowadays its blooms appear around the first day of summer and only last into early July. The flowers are a deep pink with a yellow flare and the plant is both heat tolerant and cold hardy.

7. Old Copper is a very reliable orange rhododendron that likes heat and full sun. My plant has grown two metres in ten years and has extremely dense foliage. It blooms heavily in late June with somewhat lax trusses. Specimens are very easy to obtain in BC.

These final three representatives of the late-blooming rhododendrons in my garden are azaleas:

8. *R. nakaharae* is an evergreen species azalea that grows wild in Formosa and makes a great rock garden plant. Its growth habit is quite different; it creeps steadily outwards, reaching a height of only about twenty centimetres in ten years. Two colour forms are being sold by BC growers; one is dark pink and the other is an orangey-red.

9. Pink and Sweet is another well-named rhododendron. This deciduous azalea's flowers are pink with yellow highlights and are sweetly scented. Specimen Trees wholesale nursery in the Fraser Valley propagates it and they would be able to tell you which retailers stock the plant.

10. Frosted Orange is a very different evergreen azalea that has been propagated by Les Clay. It is a nice low, tight-growing plant, with flowers that are white with pinkish-orange edges.

If another rhododendron collector was to have written this article, I'm sure other late-bloomers, such as *R. auriculatum*, would have been mentioned. I left out this outstanding plant simply because it takes so long to bloom and my ten year old specimen has yet to produce flowers for me to photograph. Moreover, the bred-in-BC auriculatum hybrids, Royston Reverie, Royston Orange, and Royston Peach were omitted because many of their flowers fail to open fully in hot weather despite regular watering and I find this habit most annoying.

Better bets, all being propagated in B.C., include Arthur Osborn, Good News, Monaco, Polar Bear, Courtenay King, *R. brachycarpum*, and *R. prunifolium*. For suggestions about other good-quality late bloomers, you might wish to consult "Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons (Harold Greer, Offshoot Publications, Eugene Oregon, 1996) pages 216 to 220, for a chart that identifies late blooming plants. Realize, however, that many of these rhododendrons may not be available in British Columbia.

Your best source of information about late blooming rhododendrons is member-growers of your local rhododendron club. They will be able to help you find a selection of rhododendrons that will produce trusses in your garden from February through July.

Ron Knight is a retired biology teacher and school administrator whose rhododendron collection is displayed at Caron Gardens on the Sunshine Coast. Ron is a past-president of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society and now serves as Alternate-Director for the American Rhododendron Society's B.C. Division.

