

VANCOUVER
Rhododendron
SOCIETY

Membership News

June 2010

Vol 1, No 4

Greetings VRS Members

Well, what has to be the most spectacular and prolonged rhododendron display in a very long time, is finally winding down, and our thoughts turn to all those 'other things' in the garden. As you while away those idyllic hours, plucking an occasional weed, and pruning a wayward limb, we ask you to think about what you would like to share with your fellow club members, if they were there beside you, plucking and pruning [*yeah, right*]. Many of our ideas for this newsletter are formulated at such moments ... anyway, we ask you to consider conveying those ideas to us, by email or post, so that we can share them with everyone.

This is the last newsletter before the summer break. when we return in September, we would like to have a reserve of ideas, items, or just interesting photos, to share. We have an almost inexhaustible supply of our own images, to 'dress up' these pages, but eventually we will have to fall back on pictures of helicopters and outcrops [of which every geologist has a few thousand], and nobody wants that ! So why not send along that digital photo of your favourite rhodo, or companion plant, and we will publish it in the Members' Forum, or perhaps in a separate section called 'My Favourite Rhodo' ... remember, this is *your* newsletter ... we are just the facilitators ... so let's get together and make it work ...

Upcoming VRS Meeting

The next get together will be our Annual Potluck Dinner and Auction, on **Sunday, June 13**, at 3:00 pm, at the home of Heather and Richard **Mossakowski** at 155 Highview Place, Lions Bay, rain or shine ... phone (604) 921-9574. Another garden in Lions Bay will be open for visiting, from 1 to 3 pm ... for details, see the section on Member's Garden Tours.

Those of you who have already confirmed your attendance and stated the potluck item that you



R campylocarpum ... UBC Botanical Garden

will be bringing are listed below. Please also remember to bring:

- 1 ... your adult beverage ... ie BYOB ... Tea and coffee will be available
- 2 ... a chair
- 3 ... your plant or plant-related item for the auction table

If you have not yet signed up, or if your plans change and you won't be able to attend, please email Norah Hall, at hall_law@telus.net, or phone (604) 266-8132

Hors d'oeuvres:

Joe & Joanne Ronsley
Meg Brown
Sergio & Geraldine Nicolodi
Joan Schalke & friend

Don & Shona Haslam
Mary Comber Miles
Norbert & Val Wuensche

Salad:

Dana Cromie & Greg Brown
Jill Newby
Chris & Sue Klapwijk

Bill & Suzanne Spohn
Bill & Carla Bischoff

Main Course:

Richard & Heather Mossakowski (ham)
Tony & Jackie Clayton
Vern Finley
Sean Rafferty & Brenda Macdonald

Charlie Sale & Margaret Charlton
Teresa Stancioff & David Clayton
Norah Hall

Dessert:

Frances Lam
Larry Wick
Alleyne & Barbara Cook (fruit)

Tony & Val Cox
Karen Shuster
Bob & Jo Wright

Other Chapters

Guests are always welcome at these other chapters, and, as a member of the VRS, you can get a year's associate membership for \$ 10 or 15 ... a bargain !



- **Fraser South** ... Saturday, June 12 ... 2:00 pm
Annual Potluck Picnic and Auction
Bring your edibles and auction items to the home of Karen Linton and Larry Morton
for more information, contact Karen and Larry, at morlin1@shaw.ca



- **Fraser Valley** ... Sunday, June 27 ... 3:00 pm
Annual BBQ & Pot Luck Dinner will be held at Sheila Martin's home on Rippington Road in Pitt Meadows ... for more information, contact Rosemary Prufer, at ramapo@telus.net



- **Peace Arch** ... PARS is planning a season-opener garden party in late August to make up for the lack of its normal spring picnic ... for more information, contact Chris and Margaret Hodgson, at chodgson@telus.net

Proven Performers List

Time was not available at the April club meeting for discussion, so the subject of Proven Performers was deferred until September ... now you have lots of time to compile a list of your personal favourites, after a full blooming season. To assist you with your deliberations, we attach a compilation of all the Proven Performers selections of the other chapters in District 1, with an unpublished list from Fraser Valley, and an old published list from the VRS, and the selections of Great Plant Picks. This compilation is still 'in progress', mainly because we lack references to many of the older azalea hybrids ... anyone with information about the gaps in this listing, or any corrections [Alleyne? Clive?], please forward it to us, and we will issue a revised edition in the Fall.

Many of you will have favourites that aren't included in this listing ... If you send us a list of your favourite performers over the summer, we will compile it into a starting 'list of candidates', to be published in the September 'News', for the deliberations in September. Let's make this a group effort, not just the ruminations of a few volunteers ...

New Members

After our recent Grand Tour of the Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island, a number of people that we visited, who are active members of Vancouver Island chapters, signed on as associate members of the VRS:



R 'Arpege' ... Van Dusen Garden

Ken and Madeleine Webb ... Ken and Madeleine are members of the Victoria Chapter. They have a beautiful 1-acre garden in the forested hills of the Saanich Peninsula, just north of Victoria, filled with an assortment of hybrid and species rhodos. Like many experienced rhodophiles, they are serious propagators of rhodos, from seed and cuttings. They also like to attend conferences, which is where we met them last year, in Everett ... they have just returned from Europe, after attending the New York and Germany conferences.

Paul and Lynn Wurz ... Paul and Lynn are members of the North Island Chapter, and own Hidden Acres Rhododendrons, a nursery outside Campbell River, specializing in Lofthouse and Fujioka hybrids. Their beautiful several-acre garden, filled with a great assortment of hybrid and species rhodos, and numerous companion plants, is a 'must see', if you are visiting the Campbell River area.

Bill and Theresa McMillan ... Bill and Theresa are members of the Victoria Chapter, Bill being a past president. Their garden, on a residential lot in the suburbs west of Victoria, contains about 200 rhododendrons, plus numerous heathers, hostas, and other companion plants, as well as a small greenhouse with vireyan rhodos. Bill is a retired geologist, which, of course, makes him a very special person ...

Please welcome these new members to our club. Remember that we encourage guest visitors, so please make an effort to invite friends and fellow gardeners to our upcoming meetings. As always, if you give us their names a day or two before the meeting, we will prepare guest nametags, to facilitate their full enjoyment of club hospitality. *[and to ease our work load at the start of the meetings]*

2010 Membership Directory

We will be distributing a revised directory in the next few days, to reflect recent changes in the membership roster. This will probably be the last revision for this year, unless we get a flood of new members over the summer.

Member News

While browsing through some historical records, we discovered that Clive Justice was club president in 1960-61 ... that makes 2010-11 the **Golden Anniversary** of Clive's presidency ... Congratulations, Clive!! ... and thank you for your long service and support of the club. Clive was a founding member of the club in 1954 ... His efforts on behalf of the club were acknowledged in 1981, when he was awarded the Bronze Medal ... his long and great service to the rhodo world was recognized in 2000, when he was awarded a Gold Medal by the ARS (because he was in Sikkim at the time, Clive's award was not actually presented until last year, at the annual convention in Everett, Washington) ...

And now, of course, you are asking ... what other past presidents are still members of the club? ... well, there's Bob Rhodes (1973-74) ... Les Clay (1986-87) ... Richard Mossakowski (1990-91) ... Diane Kehoe (1992-93) ... Harold Fearing (1998) ... Joe Ronsley (1999-2000) ... Ron Knight (2003-04) ... Joanne Ronsley (2007-08) ... and, of course, our current leader, Don Haslam (2009-2010). All have taken on the challenging, and often thankless, job of overseeing a group of enthusiasts with a broad range of interests and experience, corralling them into the cohesive group that is the VRS (one chapter president recently referred to it as 'herding cats') ... on behalf of all the membership, we extend to them a heartfelt 'thanks' ...

Member's Garden Tours

We had one response on last month's mystery garden photo ... Rob Talbot correctly stated that it was the White Garden and Tudor Tower at Sissinghurst, England, the famous garden built by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicholson in the 1930's.

This month's mystery garden, also English, is on a much grander scale, and is full of rhododendrons, some dating back to the early English plant collectors. This photo was taken on a rainy day in October 2008, so the garden was not at its best.



The June meeting is a potluck, to be held at the home of Richard and Heather Mossakowski in Lions Bay, on Sunday, June 13. Before the potluck, from 1 to 3 pm, early arrivers can visit the garden of Joe and Joanne Ronsley, 250 Oceanview Road, which is an easy walk away ...

On the Rhody Road [The Grand Tour] ... Part I

When Jo and I took on the job of membership last year, we were immediately confronted by a list of members, most of whom we had not met. We have managed to correct this situation with regard to members in the Lower Mainland, at least those who can make it out to our meetings, but we were still left with a small group of members on the Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island. We decided to plan a small holiday through these areas, and to drop in on as many as possible for a brief visit, to introduce ourselves. When we sent out initial enquiries, we were overwhelmed by the generous response of our members, who invited us to tour their gardens, stay for meals, and even to stay overnight ... I suppose, on reflection, that we should not have been surprised, as we have found rhodo enthusiasts to be some of the most generous and friendly people that we have met ... anywhere. Anyway, to round out the trip, we decided to pop in on some of the rhodo people that we had met at conferences last year at Everett and Federal Way. So, over a 6 day period, we visited 10 gardens, attended the Nanaimo show and sale, and gave BC Ferries enough money to put a substantial down payment on another super ferry. We had a wonderful time, and have kindled what we hope will be lasting friendships ... we plan to repeat the adventure sometime in the near future, perhaps adding some public gardens to the mix. In Part I of our narrative, we will cover the gardens on the Sunshine Coast. Due to space limitations, we will have to save the rest of the story until September and October ...



Eva Diener and Jo in the Garden

We set out on a sunny Wednesday morning, catching the 7:20 ferry at Horseshoe Bay, for the 50 minute trip to Langdale, followed by a short drive up the highway to Sechelt, where we arrived at the home of **Erwin and Eva Diener**. They have a beautiful chalet-style home atop the moss-covered rocks on the shore of Georgia Strait, surrounded by several acres of forested land, which they have converted into a woodland garden. They came to Canada from Switzerland some years ago, ending up on the Sunshine Coast, where they purchased a forested lot, and began to build their home ... as lots around them came available, they added them to their property, eventually increasing their garden by five times. As each property was added, they created a new garden, each having a slightly different character from the others, and each forming a 'room', in the tradition of classic European gardens. Eva is an artist, having displayed her works in Europe and elsewhere ... she brings her artistic talents to bear on her garden design, with a wonderful display of colour and texture, from minute groundcovers of every form, to majestic trees, some of which they planted as mature specimens. Eva is so intent on form and texture that, she confessed, she even removes the flower buds from some rhodos, lest the flowers become a distraction ...



One of the plants that particularly caught my eye was *Rodgersia*, with its bronzy new growth. This, along with ferns and hostas, are arranged in a very natural way, giving this part of the garden a natural woodland feel. Other parts of the garden are more formal, with raised beds and bark mulch paths. We could happily have spent an entire day in Eva and Erwin's garden, exploring the variations of colour and texture displayed by the tremendous variety of plants, many of which we had not previously encountered. The Dieners are also members of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, so they have a great assortment of species rhodos, interspersed with the hybrids, like 'Loderi King George' and 'Phyllis Korn'. After a light lunch, provided by Erwin, and a pleasant hour of conversation, in which most of the world's problems were laid to rest, we bid farewell to the Dieners, promising to return in the near future ...



Rodgersia sp

On the way to the ferry at Earl's Cove, we passed the turn off to Ron and Carla Knight's **Caron Gardens**, but they were not home, so we continued on our way, with a plan to return for a visit soon ... Bob returned three weeks later, as part of the PARS field trip contingent, but that's a subject for another time ...

After a short ferry ride from Earl's Cove to Slattery Bay, we continued the drive, through Powell River, and on towards Lund, then, after a short hop across the peninsula to Okeover Inlet, we



arrived late in the evening at the home of **David Smith and Sari Spencer** where they very generously put us up overnight. David built the house himself over decades, moving there with Sari on a permanent basis once he fully retired. The garden was also established over the years and presents itself in a steep woodland hillside. After a hearty breakfast, we climbed up through the garden which is broken up into distinct areas and themes. Dotted throughout the garden are chairs where one can sit and enjoy the wonderfully different views of the garden with the inlet in the background.

David, Jo & Sari, with *R oreotrephes*, centre

When asked, David ascribes the health of his rhodos to judicious mulching ... he has a routine of spreading 12 trugs of bark mulch a day on to his garden and calculates that he's actually carried 70,000 trugs around the hillside since he started his gardening. He also noted that having natural seeps which irrigate the garden for most of the year is very beneficial and ensures that the garden has an aura of lushness. His rhodos are certainly thriving. David & Sari have a philosophy of blending in with nature, so their rhodos

compliment the landscape and the trees around them. When the winds come through and blow trees over, David simply accepts it as part of the natural scheme of things, and cuts up the firewood.



David and Sari are also members of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and have many fine specimens planted in a natural setting, including *.sinogrande*, *rex*, *hodgsonii*, and many others ... in

fact, I would say that they have the most extensive collection of species rhodos that we have seen, outside the Rhododendron Species Botanical garden in Federal Way



R oreotrephes

Sari, like Eva Diener, is a talented artist, having trained and worked as a medical illustrator ... she paints in a variety of media, and in a variety of styles, from realistic illustration to abstract impressionism ... we look forward to the day when their house and garden building winds down, so she can devote more time to her artistic endeavours.

We returned from our gardening trek for a late morning cup of coffee, then bid our new friends a fond farewell, and headed into Powell River to catch the mid-day ferry to Comox. Bob worked in the Courtenay-Comox area for three years during the late 1980's, so it was interesting to return to our old haunts, to see the amount of development that has occurred in the last 20 years. We met up with Harry and Gwen Wright [*distant relatives, perhaps*], who are active in the North Island Rhododendron Society, and they kindly took us for a tour of the Rhododendron Garden in Courtenay, a project of the NIRS Chapter. We settled in for the night, eagerly looking forward to our trip to Campbell River the next day ...

... to be continued ...



Jo, Bob and Gwen

Photo by Harry Wright

MEMBERS' FORUM

The following 4 questions were submitted by Justine Murdy ...

Dear Rhodo Garden Gurus, please forgive my "green" questions:

- I am in the process of foundation planting my backyard in east Vancouver, transforming it from lawn to an eventual oasis (I trust!). As a new member to the VRS, I have already acquired a number of rhodos in 1 gallon pots. What I need to know is how did you, way back when you started, decide to position small plants with big potential? I have plants that will be 3 feet at 10 years and 6 feet at 10 years. Do I space them as if it's 10 years in the future or should I place them closer, then move them later? I've opted for option 1 but there is a LOT of exposed soil... what do you recommend to fill the gaps in the intervening years. And if this helps to guide your answer, I am on a bit of a budget so can't afford to buy too many more plants in the short-term.

Most rhodos grow as wide as tall so space them according to the 10 year height (ie. width) as listed in Greer's Guidebook. In the meantime, fill in with annuals or herbaceous perennials that can be easily moved later. Also, ferns and heathers can be used to fill in the empty spaces as they are easy to move later ... *Ron Knight*

Place them closer, then move them later, rhododendrons are very mobile ... *Chris Klapwijk*

Everyone wants to space them so they will look good right away ... Big mistake ... Space them so they will look good in 10 years, and if necessary, stick some disposable stuff in between that you don't mind chopping out in about 5 years. The end result will be much better, and it is a lot less work than having to move the 10 year old plants to spread them out ... *Bill Spohn*

We are planting our rhodos at something less than the 10 year spacing, on the assumption that we will lose a few, and can move every second one at a later date (Bill, can I count on your help?) ... *Bob Wright*

- What are your favourite garden design books? Do you have one you refer back to all the time?

We didn't use any design books. Just look at a lot of good gardens and steal ideas by taking photos with your digital camera. ... *Ron Knight*

Frankly, most garden design books seem to be for people with a crew of gardeners, and for locations other than Vancouver ... your best design resource is ... the 2010 Directory of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society ... many members would be pleased to have one or two people show up for a visit, at an appropriate time, and you can borrow ... OK, steal ... ideas that you like ... *Bob Wright*

- What are your top 5 Lower Mainland gardens? Why?

VanDusen, UBC Botanical, Lu Zhu, The Glades, Dr. Sun Yat Sen, etc. ... *Ron Knight*

Any list should include UBC, Van Dusen, and Darts Hill, because of their size, and resulting variety ... as for private gardens, we haven't visited enough (hint, hint) to formulate a preference ... *Bob Wright*

- If you could have only 7 rhodos in your small city lot garden, what would they be? Why?

Buy dwarfs and low-growing ones if you have a regular city lot: Ginny Gee, Patty Bee, Ken Janeck, Shrimp Girl, Dora Amateis, Golden Ruby, Blaney's Blue. Look in Greer's Guidebook



R. hunnewellianum ... Van Dusen Garden

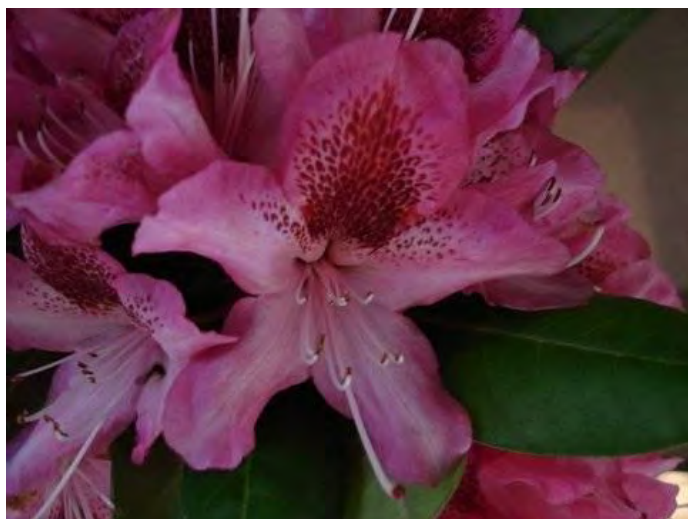
for ones that have won an SPA award or are rated 4.5 or 5/5 for both flower and foliage. ... *Ron Knight*

An almost impossible question to answer ... If I were forced to plant a small garden I would opt for small plants, and delightful ones like some of the Cox hybrids, which tend to be quite small, and species like *R campylogynum* ... *Bill Spohn*

I would go for a mixture of sizes, from Berg and Cox dwarfs, to a few larger, showy ones, like *calophytum*, *bureavii*, and others ... with a bit of judicious pruning, you can produce a more upright, open habit (I believe it's called 'limbing up'), which can be underplanted with the smaller rhodos. This introduces a vertical, layered component into the garden, which is important in a small lot ... makes it seem larger ... use the Proven Performers list, in conjunction with Greer, plus your own preferences for colour, to make the final selections ... *Bob Wright*

Here are some tried and true suggestions ... Yellow Hammer, small yellow flowers, small leaves ... Saint Tudy, small blue flowers, medium leaves ... Alison Johnstone, medium salmon flowers, medium leaves ... Christmas Cheer, medium pink flowers, medium leaves ... Humming Bird, medium red flowers, medium leaves ... Moonstone, cream-yellow flowers, medium leaves ... Bow Bells, medium pink flowers, medium leaves ... Jock, medium red flowers, medium leaves. Also suggest Azalea Palestrina, white flowers, small leaves. All are in the four to five feet range ... *Alleyne and Barbara Cook* [editor's note ... many of these selections are hybrids of *R williamsianum* ... you might consider adding the parent species, for interest ... it comes in pink and white forms]

While visiting Hidcote Manor, in the Cotswolds, England, we came across this ingenious approach to growing tender plants, like *Aeonium* and Cacti, in a climate not unlike our own ... the light-coloured limestone south-facing wall reflects solar heat, while the raised beds provide excellent drainage of excess moisture ... the frame is covered with glass panels, to keep out winter rain, and these are removed in summer. This method could easily be adapted to grow alpines, like *Lewisia*, as well as alpine rhodos that require good drainage and protection from winter wetness, without hiding them in a cold frame, or playing musical planters. All you need is a crew of gardeners to remove the glass panels every Spring ... size: 8 ft high x 6 ft deep x ? ft long



A lady from NanOOSE Bay sent us this photo of a rhodo in a Vancouver garden, owned by a 99-year old lady who is desperate to identify it ... she thought the plant might be about 50 years old ... any ideas? ...

Thanks to the following members, for contributing to the Membership News, thereby making our job easier : Justine Murdy, Ron Knight, Chris Klapwijk, Bill Spohn, Norah Hall, Alleyne and Barbara Cook

Please send your contributions to: rj_wright@telus.net

or by mail to Box 266, Lions Bay, BC V0N 2E0 ...

or by phone to (604) 921-9370

Attribution will be given for all contributions, unless anonymity is specifically requested ...
contributions may be edited for spelling, grammar, and length.

Bob & Jo Wright

Editor's postscript ... At least once a month, someone suggests that what we are producing here is 'The Indumentum', so we should call it that, and post it on the website. You will note that this issue contains the personal contact information of several members, and we encourage members to have a 'personal conversation' with other members in these pages ... it is our view that this information is not for the general public, and we are not prepared to spend the time required to produce a second 'sanitized' version of the newsletter for wider distribution [it is for this reason, that the libraries on our membership roster do not receive this newsletter] ... we distribute this newsletter only to club members, and to a select group of rhodo enthusiasts, such as chapter presidents, with the expectation that privacy issues will be respected ... If any of you have any concerns or suggestions, please respond to the Members' Forum.