

Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 33, Number 6, February 2002



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

2002 Executive

President: Gerry Gibbens

Vice President: Ron Knight

Past President: Joe Ronsley

Treasurer: Martie Irwin

Secretary: Bill Spohn

Membership: Carole Conlin

Newsletter: Douglas & Karen Justice

Program: Joe Ronsley

Directors:

Jim Hall (1 year)

Louis Peterson (2 years)

Todd Major (3 years)

Education: Louis Peterson

Advertising: Joanne Ronsley

Library: Sue Liem & Louis Peterson

Publicity: Martie Irwin,
Kathy Poole & Ray Talbot

Refreshments: Mary Dorsey

This Month's Meeting: Thursday, February 21st 7:30 PM

**Program: Richie Steffin, Elizabeth C. Miller Botanical
Garden, Seattle, WA - Plant Exploring in Turkey**

President's Message

As we begin this term, I want to acknowledge those members of the past Executive who have contributed much to the achievements of our organization. **Judy Williams**, whose term as a Director has finished, contributed much to the revision of our constitution. Many thanks for your involvement over the past three years. The tremendous effort that was made towards increasing our membership was the work of our Membership Chair **Joanne Ronsley**. We achieved a membership as high as that prior to the creation of the many rhododendron societies that now comprise District 1. It is also a tribute to Joanne's abilities that revenues from advertising in our newsletter have increased. **Penny Pearce**, through her role as Secretary and last year as Vice-President, has contributed greatly to the smooth running of the VRS. Many thanks, and good luck on the building of your new home. I must also thank these members for their part in supporting the other activities that make our society a strong contributor in the horticultural community.

Ron Feicht, in his years as Show and Sale Chair, guided us through difficult times, but has continued to achieve the high standard the public has come to expect. Many thanks for your efforts; we hope that you can spend your time enjoying your talent as a ceramic artist. I also wish to acknowledge the contribution of **Fred Ganders** for bringing a wealth of knowledge to members during his years as Book Sale Chair. Thanks also to **Phil Downey** for his assistance in helping to run the library.

With the new library now in place, one can see the results.

Martie Irwin deserves special recognition for her years of service to the society in her role as

Treasurer. Hers is not an easy task, and Martie has allowed our organization a sense of security that is not often seen. We are pleased she has agreed to continue using her talents on our behalf.

I would like to welcome on board **Ron Knight**, who takes on the position of Vice-President. His previous role as Education Chair proved invaluable to the members and greatly enriched our monthly meetings. Ron will also be taking on duties as Chair of the Plant Show and Sale. I'm sure that the work of Ron and his able team members will bear fruit.



Continued next page

Carole Conlin, as the new Membership Chair, has the benefit of Joanne Ronsley's knowledge and experience. I am pleased to welcome Carole to our team. **Todd Major** begins his involvement on the Executive as a Director. His knowledge of horticulture and abilities in the business world are a great asset.

Joe Ronsley, in his years on the Executive, has shown the ability to bring out the best in those around him and has given our society a higher standard to uphold. In his role as Program Chair, Joe has brought us a wealth of excellent speakers, an enjoyment of others' efforts in their gardens and a greater pleasure in the sharing of our knowledge. We look forward to his continued efforts in a role he obviously relishes. Thank you, Joe.

It is no small effort to edit and publish our newsletter; **Douglas and Karen Justice** have in the past year achieved tremendous success. As the previous Editor of the newsletter, I am aware of the time and effort required to bring such a publication to our members. I would like to commend both **Bill Spohn** and Douglas Justice for bringing our newsletter to members through e-mail.

Louie Peterson has taken on the dual roles of Education Chair and Library Chair, and brings to both a wealth of knowledge and enthusiasm. I am sure that his efforts will be appreciated by the members. If you have any thoughts on possible topics, please do not hesitate to bring them to Louie.

Jim Hall has assisted over the years in many small ways that bring a great deal to the society. His promotion and sale of raffle tickets at our meetings has reduced the direct cost of hall rental. Jim's willingness to help out at all our functions has enabled them to be successful.

Though not a member of the Executive, **Mary Dorsey** has been a mainstay of our monthly gatherings. Her efforts in organizing coffee, tea and treats is an important part of each meeting, allowing us the time to socialize with others. Please add your support by providing cakes, cookies and other snacks when possible.

Finally, it is for you, the members, that we on the Executive strive to achieve a high standard in all that we do. We appreciate your support and welcome any thoughts and ideas that might make our society a more inviting and informative organization.

Gerry Gibbens



Rhododendron dauricum



Crocus kerdorffiorum by Pauline Dean
from *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* 15(2) 1998

Program

Our speaker for the evening of February 21st will be **Richie Steffin**, who spoke to us a few years ago as nursery manager of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden. Richie has recently left the RSBG, however, for the position of Coordinator of Horticulture at the Elizabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden in Seattle. He will give a short presentation on the Miller Garden and its exiting new plant programs, a subject that should certainly be of interest in that it involves a close destination for our members during a visit to Seattle. The main focus of his talk, however, will be on a place not quite so convenient for Vancouver gardeners, his recent plant expedition to Turkey.

"Turkey is one of the most botanically diverse countries in the world." Richie will show slides of his "adventures from exotic and bustling Istanbul to the wild and remote Black Sea region." He will discuss the rhododendrons that were found in this beautiful land, as well as other interesting plants discovered during his travels. Richie Steffin's previous lecture to the VRS was received very enthusiastically by our members. Be sure to hear what he has to say on what is certainly an unusual subject for the VRS, '**Plant Exploring in Turkey**'.

Joe Ronsley

News and Notes

VRS Librarians **Louis Peterson and Sue Liem** are happy to report the Library is open for business! We have some nice new books – please come browse. We may have to place some books in a reserve section, but others can be taken out and brought back at the following meeting. Happy reading!



Help...

There are 8 people coming from Vancouver Island to attend the seminars at the Species Foundation this spring. The organizers would like to be able to offer accommodation to them on the Friday night before each session. They will be coming on **March 1st, March 22nd, April 26th, and May 24th** for the trip south on Saturday. They will be bringing their own vehicles so it is just a matter of offering a bed. Among those coming are the Griegs and two from Milner Gardens.

If you can offer a bed on any or all of those nights would you please contact **Mike Bale** at 604.853.8839 or 604.853.4100. His fax number is 604.853.2626. You can also send an e-mail to lu_zhu@telus.net. There is still space for anyone else to join the group. Send your cheque for \$140 to Mike made out to Fraser South Rhododendron Society.

Paddy Wales, VRS member and photographer of some repute, would like us all to see her latest exhibition:

FLORAllure gives an intimate, even erotic, glimpse of familiar garden favourites. **March 4 - April 2** at Milestones Restaurant, 1210 Denman Street at English Bay.

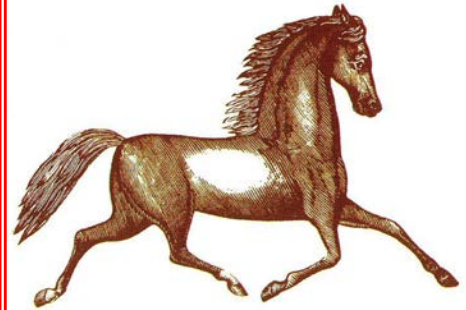
VRS Secretary **Bill Spohn** reports that he is working with CFIA - Canadian Food Inspection Agency (formerly Agriculture Canada) with the intention of complying with (at the very least, *understanding*) the recently re-implemented permit requirements for plant importations from the United States. He notes that there is now more specific information that CFIA requires on the phytosanitary certificate, and that shipments must be directed through the Pacific Highway (commercial) border crossing. Bill promises more details as he discovers them.

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HAPPY CHINESE NEW YEAR !

RHODODENDRONS

They were brought under sail
from a red-tinged east,
carried down gangplanks
in dockers' arms. Innocent
and rare. Their thick leaves
bore a salt-damp gleam,
their blooms a hidden gargle
in their green throats.

Shuddering on trains
to Poolewe, or Arduine,
where the head gardener leaned
across the factor's desk. On a hill
above the sparkling loch
he spoke to his hands,
and terraces were cut,
sites marked, shallow holes dug

before they were turned out.
—Such terribly gentle
work, the grasping of the fat
glazed pots, the fertile
globe of the root-ball
undisturbed, Yunnan
or Himalayan earth
settled with them.

So we step out from their shade
to overlook Loch Melfort
and the bare glens, ready now
to claim this flowering, purple
flame-bright exotica as our own;
a commonplace, native
as language or living memory,
to our slightly acid soil.

—Kathleen Jamie

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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
$\frac{1}{4}$ page	\$25.00	\$67.50	\$160.00
$\frac{1}{2}$ page	\$40.00	\$108.00	\$256.00
full page	\$70.00	\$189.00	\$448.00

Questions and Answers

More in a series of questions submitted by VRS members. Your co-editor, Douglas Justice, responds.

Q: Why do some publications list Labrador tea as *Ledum groenlandicum*, while others list it as *Rhododendron groenlandicum*?

A: According to recent studies of evolutionary relationships in the Ericaceae (using powerful molecular techniques), *Ledum* is more closely related to some rhododendrons than some other rhododendrons are to each other. In other words, because taxonomists use evolutionary distance and shared ancestry as criteria for maintaining groups, we have to consider *Ledum* as part of *Rhododendron*. *Menziesia*, which includes our native *M. ferruginea* (false azalea) is another genus that has been identified as requiring submergence into *Rhododendron*.

Q: What are some good early flowering rhodo species and hybrids?

A: Unfortunately, any plants I list here will elicit certain VRS members to howl, champion other plants and deride my choices. Nevertheless, I won't apologize for my opinions and you are welcome to accept or disregard them. If you want another opinion, I recommend *Colour in the Winter Garden* by Graham Stuart Thomas. *The Phenology of Cultivated Rhododendrons* by L. Keith Wade gives an objective account of the timing of rhododendron flowering in the Vancouver area. For a list of my favourite early bloomers, see page 6.

Rhododendron Links by Bill Spohn

For those who are new to rhododendrons, new to computers, or just new to the idea of web-surfing for information about your hobbies, I offer a brief overview of some rhododendron related sites you may wish to spend some time exploring.

Educational:

The Rhododendron Species Foundation on Federal Way near Seattle is the foremost repository of species material on this continent. Not much in the way of pictures, but worth a good visit to have a look, and for species fans, repeated visits to their plant release catalogue to browse. <http://www.rhodygarden.org/index.html>

The Rhododendron Guide – a very useful site with everything from culture hints to a searchable database of pictures and information about the plants. Interested in a particular plant? Want to identify one of your plants, but need to see a picture of what you think it might be? This is a good place to start the search. The downside? Sadly, they allow 'pop-ups' – ads that load as you navigate the site, and which may be annoying enough to prevent an extended sojourn. Still very useful, however, for a quick 'in and out' look at a plant. <http://www.netcolony.com/arts/rhodyguide/>

Vireya Rhododendrons – an excellent site to wander around even if you don't have room for these lovely tropical plants. See what you are missing, and maybe find a niche or two in the house for a couple. <http://www.vireya.net/index.htm>

Mystery Site – I don't read Japanese, but I had to include this one. When it asks you if you want to download the Japanese language add-on, you might as well say no, and then it will load the web page. Click on the highlighted links (a few are in Eng-



lish like 'Lepidotes', etc.) one at a time to have a look at some really excellent photographs. A great way to spend a few (or more than a few) minutes! <http://www.ekihi.co.jp/net/flame1.htm>

Commercial:

The Lake Tapps Rhododendron Garden and Nursery in Washington State, has a searchable catalogue, and some scenes from their garden. <http://www.rhodies.com/index.htm>

Hennings – Steve Hennings' site with many links and his own Rhododendron and Azalea Bookstore. <http://www.users.fast.net/~shenning/>

Greer's Gardens – Harold Greer is a character, and a very knowledgeable one – he literally wrote the book (or at least one of them, and one of the most useful, at that). You can get his catalogue in downloadable pdf format to peruse at your leisure. <http://www.greergardens.com/>

Glendoick Gardens – the other guys that wrote the book – Peter and Ken Cox, run a garden and nursery in Scotland. Worth a browse through their catalogue, though you won't likely be ordering any plants from afar. <http://www.glendoick.com/>

A Sandy Rhododendron – a commercial site with many pictures and an interesting 'Meta Tour' – if you don't want to search for a particular plant, hit that button and it will bring up pictures at random – you get to see hundreds of rhodos, for a few seconds each. Talk about a screen saver! You have to be quick if you see one you don't know and really like the look of, so you can stop it and read the write-up. <http://www.rhodo.com/>



Papaver fauriei by Sho Hayakawa from
Curtis's Botanical Magazine 16 (2) 1999

Clubs:

The American Rhododendron Society – the mother lode for rhodo information, and a wonderful multi-linked newsletter produced by Betty Spady that can take hours to wander through. <http://www.rhododendron.org/> Note – the Rhodo and Azalea Newsletter can be hard to find on the site – you can go directly to <http://members.aol.com/RandANews/news.html>

Azalea Society of America – some of this site is limited to members, but much of it is open for readers and includes material on care and cultivation, as well as a free newsgroup that you can read but not contribute to, unless you become a member. www.azaleas.org

The Rosebay Chapter Site – the New England chapter of the ARS has assembled an interesting site. Sign on and look for the links to three different areas. The first is their newsletter, and you can browse current and past issues for articles of interest. The second is a link to Your Gateway – a slightly clunky arrangement of a huge number of photos from members' gardens, but once you get the hang of it, you can spend hours there. The third is a similar area for the Species Study Group, also quite useful to examine. <http://www.rosebay.org/>

La Société Bretonne du Rhododendron – the site tells you what is available in English or only in French (for some reason they seem apologetic about that), and has sections on local European hybrids and an area on propagation techniques that anyone who intends to try to grow plants from seed or graft should visit.

<http://perso.wanadoo.fr/s.b.r./>

ARS – Danish Chapter – much content in English, and pictures of the Danish expeditions to Sikkim. Worth a wander. <http://www.rhododendron.dk/>

Gardens:

Meerkerk Gardens – on Whidbey Island, this site has some nice pictures and references. <http://www.meerkerkgardens.org/>

Sofiero Castle, Sweden – this might strike you as an odd place for a garden, but have a look – excellent site with lots of pictures. http://www.helsingborg.se/sofiero/rhod/rhode_01.htm

Bonus Site – Go here to download a free Rhododendron Screensaver with musical accompaniment – very nice photos that come up in series and fill the screen, and music that can be turned on or off at will: http://saix.freethemes.com/savers/adnload/160284_53440.html

If you come across any other sites you think the membership might like to know about, e-mail them to the editors or to me at wspohn4@aol.com.

Plants in bloom - *Rhododendron ririei*



Rhododendron ririei – photo by Judy Newton

Until they were nearly lost under a considerable blanket of snow the other day, the “great bell” rhododendrons, *R. ririei*, were a major talking point amongst visitors and staff at UBC Botanical Garden. Relatively little known both here and abroad, *R. ririei* is a robust species, growing tall and handsome with large, glossy foliage, much like its relatives in subsection *Argyrophylla*.

Rhododendron ririei is one of the earliest hardy rhododendrons to flower at UBC, nearly always showing colour through its buds in any but the coldest weather after the New Year. This year, at least four trusses were opening when the frost and snows hit. The flowers are individually very large, mauve-purple with crimson-black nectar pouches, and look smashing in cold weather, particularly when the leaves are dusted with snow.

Thankfully, the species has a habit of producing its flowers over an exceptionally long period and this is accentuated when multiple plants are grouped together, as they are in the David C. Lam Asian Garden at UBC. Hard frost or heavy snow destroys flowers that have opened, but unopened trusses don't appear to suffer. It is variously rated as hardy to -5°F (-20C) by Greer; H4 (i.e., hardy anywhere in the British Isles) by Cox; and USDA Zone 7 (-18C to -12C) by the Royal Horticulture Society. UBC's plants originally came from Leonardslee Gardens, England (the Loder family garden) and have been flourishing for more than 20 years.

Rhododendron ririei was introduced by Ernest Wilson, who collected it in 1904 from Mt. Omei, Sichuan, China, and named for his friend the Reverend B. Ririe.

Douglas Justice

Good Early Rhododendrons, from page 4

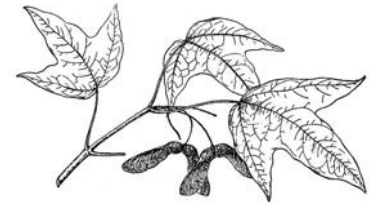
The following are generally in flower before April 1st

Species

- *R. barbatum*
- *R. calophytum*
- *R. dauricum*
- *R. fargesii*
- *R. forrestii repens*
- *R. keiskei*
- *R. lutescens*
- *R. moupinense*
- *R. mucronulatum*
- *R. praeevernum*
- *R. ririei*
- *R. strigillosum*
- *R. sutchuenense*

Hybrids

- 'Christmas Cheer'
- 'Cilpinense'
- 'Moonstone'
- 'Olive'
- 'Pioneer'
- 'PJM'
- 'Precox'
- 'Rose Elf'
- 'Shamrock'
- 'Snow Lady'



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- ◆ Contributions to the Raffle Table help offset the rental of the Floral Hall. Plants, books, fresh eggs, etc. are always welcome!
- ◆ For the Refreshment Table, donations of cookies, cakes, cheese, and other snacks are greatly appreciated.