

Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 34, Number 1, September 2002



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

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This Month's Meeting: **September 19th at 7:30 pm**
Jeanine Smith: "Sikkim Adventure 2000"

Education Feature: Douglas Justice: "Companion Trees for Rhododendrons"

President's Message

Welcome back! It has been an extraordinary summer. I can't say I have missed all the rain that we would ordinarily have. There have not been any casualties due to the extremely dry weather. Many of the rhododendrons in the Sino-Himalayan Garden at VanDusen have shown signs of heat stress, but I suspect they will all pull through. We are grateful for the generous assistance of our irrigation system.

Congratulations to everyone who exhibited at our Show. To those who won trophies, these will be presented at our October meeting. I want to congratulate **John Priestman**, who won two trophies in the novice class. We should be encouraged by the efforts of our newer members who participate in our shows. Good work, John.

Joe Ronsley has again produced a compelling list of programs for the coming year. We are fortunate to have such a great resource person as a member of our Society.

Louis Peterson has developed some excellent education programs that are intended to assist both new and long term members in developing their knowledge and abilities in growing and showing rhododendrons.

The **Species Study Group** presented by **Steve Hootman** of the Rhododendron Species Foundation this last year was a resounding success. I understand that there will be a second series in 2003. I would encourage members to consider joining and increasing their knowledge of rhododendrons. More details will be published in future newsletters.

I look forward to seeing everyone at our September Meeting. See you there.

Gerry Gibbens



For up-to-date news and views, including upcoming events and rhododendron photographs, log on to the VRS website: www.rhodo.citymax.com.

September Program

Jeanine Smith is a gardener in Woodinville, Washington, an eastern suburb of Seattle. Much more than an ordinary gardener, however, she has, with her husband Rex, developed a beautiful 3-acre woodland garden with an emphasis, naturally, on rhododendrons. Jeanine is also one of those people we all know who propagate rhododendrons extensively, many more than she is able to use herself. The garden has been featured, most deservedly, in several books and magazines.

Jeanine has a very high profile with the American Rhododendron Society, of which she has been a member for over thirty years. She has served as President of the Seattle Chapter, the Seattle Rhododendron Society, Director of ARS District 2 and ARS Western Vice-President. She is a recipient of the Bronze Medal and is presently Chair of the ARS Honours Committee.

Popular as a speaker, Jeanine has spoken, with considerable knowledge and charm, to local nurseries, to various ARS chapters—including the VRS a few years ago, on the development of her garden—to ARS national and regional conferences, and in New Zealand.

Recently Jeanine has toured the rhododendron country in Sikkim, and it is on this expedition she will be lecturing to the VRS the evening of September 19th. Her talk is entitled “Sikkim Adventure 2000.”

Education

At **Todd Major's** suggestion, we are planning to add a new feature to the Education Session that usually precedes our regular meetings. The proposal is to provide an occasional “hands-on workshop,” the first one to be held at our October meeting (17th) in the Floral Hall, on the general theme of **propagation**.

Todd has agreed to conduct his session on “Propagating from Seed,” and **Garth Wedemire** has kindly agreed to do a session on “Propagating from Cuttings.”

For those interested, both workshop sessions will start at

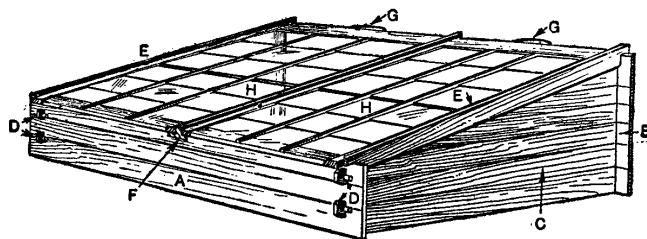


FIG. 21.—THE TWO-LIGHT FRAME.

A and B represent front and back respectively; *D and D* are mortices, tenons and pegs holding the frame together. The lights slide up and down on rebated ledges *E, E* and *F, F*. *HH* are flat iron bars which strengthen the lights; *GG* are iron handles.

7:00 pm (a bit earlier than usual), and last about 30 minutes. Each workshop will be given twice; the first session begins at 7:00. At half past seven, the groups will switch places, so everyone will have the opportunity to participate in both “seeds” and “cuttings.”

We need to know how many people will attend the workshop, so that Todd and Garth can



prepare their materials and hand-outs. We will need a minimum of 20 people and a maximum of about 40 (20 around each table), so put your name in quickly! Please phone me or reply by e-mail to be placed on an informal registration list. We are hoping the activity will be a success, and that others will follow. Ideas and suggestions are welcomed.

Louis Peterson, Education Coordinator.
604.921.7260
e-mail: lpeterso@sfu.ca

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VRS member **Mike Bale** writes... Because of the success of last year's **Species Study Days**, **Steve Hootman** intends to introduce a similar teaching model at the Species Foundation next year for enthusiasts in the US. It is not clear at this time what the format will be. Steve has also advised me that he is willing to repeat a similar study program next year for our group if there is sufficient interest. It is essential that we have sufficient lead time in order to set aside the appropriate days, as it is quite certain that Steve's schedule for next year is already filling up.

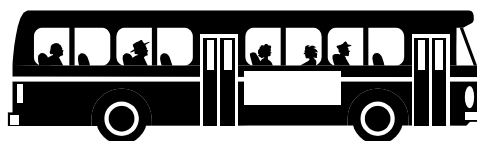
At the present time there has already been considerable interest from many of last year's participants to repeat the program next year. If there are other individuals from any of the District 1 Chapters who are interested in the program, please contact me as soon as possible. It would be most helpful if a cheque in the amount of \$50.00, dated 15th of January 2003, could be forwarded to me as a gesture of commitment. When there is enough support, we can finalize details with Steve and review the program—and hopefully arrange for some new material for those repeating the program. The format would likely be similar to last year, which proved to be quite successful.

Sessions would be held from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm on a weekend—either a Saturday or Sunday—one day each month from February to May. The anticipated costs will also be the same as last year: \$140.00 for the entire program or \$35.00 for individual sessions, if this can be accommodated. We will probably arrange car pooling, which worked well last year, but if there is sufficient interest and lead time, transportation by mini bus could also be considered.

We are hoping that there will be interest from members on Vancouver Island and in order to assist them with the costs of attending the study days, it is hoped that members from the mainland will be able to host the islanders overnight on the Friday evening. This worked well last year and I am fairly confident that we would be able to host Vancouver Island members again this year.

Time is of the essence for formalizing the arrangements. The maximum number of participants that the RSF can accommodate is 30. At the present time, the program is almost 50% committed. Please advise as soon as possible.

Mike Bale
33623 Wildwood Drive
Abbotsford BC V2S 1S2
604.853.8839



PORTLAND GARDEN TOUR

May 17, 18, 19, 2003 (Victoria Day Weekend)

In previous years, a group of rhododendron enthusiasts and friends from the Lower Mainland has visited spectacular gardens in Victoria and Nanaimo (2002), Whidbey Island and the Olympic Peninsula (2001) and Parksville and Tofino (2000). Next year we are looking at organizing a trip to the magnificent gardens in Portland, which is surely the garden capital of North America. There are many extraordinarily fine gardens in Portland and the surrounding district, including an exceptional internationally renowned Japanese garden and also an outstanding Chinese garden. In addition, there are the well known Crystal Springs Garden, Cecil Smith Rhododendron Garden and the Oregon horticultural growers garden on 157 acres.

It is anticipated that the group will leave Vancouver early Saturday a.m. and travel leisurely to Portland, visiting interesting gardens on the way in order to break up the drive. The group will overnight in Portland for two nights

and return on Monday, again visiting gardens en route to Vancouver. We would expect to arrive back in Vancouver in the early evening.

The anticipated cost would be about \$325.00 Canadian, bearing in mind that hotel accommodations will have to be paid for in US dollars. Details remain to be worked out and finalized. We would anticipate that members from the Portland ARS Chapter would assist with the planning arrangements.

If you have the slightest interest, without any commitment at this time, please let me know [see Mike's number above].

If any from Vancouver Island are interested, they would be more than welcome to join us.

Mike Bale

Joe Ronsley, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, is asking members for their suggestions of nominations to the VRS Executive. Members should contact him ASAP.

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conlin@sfu.ca Phone: 604.921.7260

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Please contact **Joanne Ronsley** for information on advertising in *Indumentum*.

jrjr@techwest.com Fax and Phone: 604.921.9444

News & Notes continued

Peter Wharton, Curator of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at UBC Botanical Garden, is off to China this month on a collecting expedition. Peter will be collecting seed and associated herbarium specimens for UBC in four separate areas of southern China under the auspices of the Kunming Institute of Botany.

VRS member and *Indumentum* co-editor, **Douglas Justice**, who was recently appointed Associate Director and Curator of Collections at UBC Botanical Garden and Centre for Plant Research, will present a paper he co-authored with **Peter Wharton** entitled 'Observations on Recent Asiatic Maple Introductions to UBC Botanical Garden' at the International Maple Symposium, to be held at Westonbirt Arboretum in England, in early October 2002.

Upcoming Events and Speakers at the VRS

- October 17 - Hideo Suzuki 'Akagi Nature Park'
- November 21 - Steve Hootman & Peter Wharton
- February 20, 2003 - Robert Van Pelt
- March 20, 2003 - David Gilliland
- April 17, 2003 - Peter Cunningham
- Garden Tours - April/May, dates TBA
- May 15, 2003 - Walk in the Sino-Himalayan Garden
- June 19, 2003 - Potluck Picnic

◆ **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.



TO AUTUMN

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozy hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

John Keats

Rhododendrons: Good Foliage is Hard to Beat

Rhododendrons are generally grown for their flowers, but choosing rhodies for foliage alone is not a bad idea; flowers seldom last more than a few weeks, while leaves can often go on for years. There are plenty of species (and increasingly, hybrids) to choose from that display interesting leaves.

I'm partial to leaves that change with the seasons and deciduous rhododendrons are an obvious way to introduce this dynamic element to the garden. Most common deciduous azaleas (particularly hybrids) are unfortunately, vegetatively quite boring. There are a number, however, that are exceptional. For example, spring and autumn colours complement beautifully the unusual leaf shape and open, twiggy habit of the spade-leaf azaleas (e.g., *R. reticulata*)

and umbrella rhododendrons (e.g., *R. quinquefolium* and *R. schlippenbachii*).

Among evergreen rhododendrons, there are considerably more foliar attractions. Many of the heavily indumented species, such as *R. bureavii* and *R. roxieanum*, produce new growth entirely plastered with hairs. Eventually, the hairs wear off the upper leaf surface, leaving only the auburn felt beneath. The uncommon and unusually named *R. flinkii* has spectacular orange-cinnamon indumentum, remnants of which remain on the upper surface well into autumn.

A trick performed by a number of species involves indumentum on newly emerged leaves that changes to a completely different colour after a few months. In some forms of *R. campanulatum* (see picture below) the spongy marshmallow-white indumentum, which is smartly set off by the red rims of the unrolling leaf margins and the waxen, metallic blue adaxial surface, eventually settles down to a more calming fawn colour. Similarly, *R. wasonii* changes its indumentum from ivory to an attractive rusty brown, but this species has an added bonus: the leaves smell surprisingly (and pleasantly) of camphor, cloves and soap, a satisfying consolation for a shy-to-flower species. Other species with beautiful leaves and olfactory appeal are quite common in subsection Taliensia, which also includes the *R. wasonii* relatives *R. baulforianum* (camphor, honey and mint) and *R. traillianum* (camphor and peach soap). I admit, however, the aroma from these species is often somewhat elusive.

Curiously, foliar fragrance is seldom mentioned in descriptions of rhododendrons. Do I only dream the sweet aroma of *R. recurvoides*? I find it subtle and fleeting compared with the former species, but it does make an impression. No matter; it also has beautiful, narrow leaves with veritable mattresses of lower surface indumentum and masses of glands on both leaves and stems. These glands are probably responsible for the aroma (if I'm not imagining it), but also exude a sticky material when handled. Interestingly, the glue seems to evaporate from the fingers, but remains sticky on the plant.



Rhododendron campanulatum photo by Justin Moore, UBC Botanical Garden

Continued next page

From previous page

Strong aromas are common among lepidote rhododendrons, and many smell, to my nose, at least, of varying combinations of camphor and bleach. For example, the diminutive, late flowering *R. micranthum* is noteworthy for its immaculate foliage and pleasant, spicy aroma, while *R. groenlandicum* (Labrador tea), quite reeks of bleach. Other small-leaved rhodies can pack a significant camphor punch—particularly, a number of the purple-flowered ones, such as *R. lapponicum* and 'Ramapo'. Many of these aromatic plants are said to be comparatively resistant to weevils, likely a result of the pungent compounds in the leaves. In my experience, the below-ground portions of these plants are perfectly attractive to weevil grubs, however, presumably because the roots lack these chemical feeding-deterrents.

Perhaps the most highly aromatic of rhododendrons are the cinnabarinums, smelling just this side of eucalyptus, and so strongly, it is said, that the aroma can bring on headaches in some people. Personally, I love the fragrance. For me, the crème-de-la-crème of rhododendrons is *R. cinnabarinum* subsp. *xanthocodon* Concatenans Group, with its wonderful aroma and extraordinary, dusty blue foliage. The flowers aren't half bad, either.

Douglas Justice

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er·i·ca·ceous (ĕr'ĭ'keĭjĕs) **1.** of or relating to the Ericaceae, a family of plants with typically bell shaped flowers: includes heather, rhododendron & arbutus. **2.** often used in conjunction with *compulsion* to describe common affliction of rhododendron lovers. See also *ericaceous compulsion*.

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