



The RHODOTELLER

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NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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- Vice-President**
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Noni Godfrey335-0717
..... Nonigod@shaw.ca
- Social Committee:**
Evelyn Wright ..339-7493
- Revenue Table Committee:**
Louise Casson...334-2331
- Sunshine Lady:**
Pauline Bonney.339-7594



Coming Events

3rd January, 2008 - Executive Meeting

The executive meeting will be held at the home of Don and Dorothy Law: 671 Crestview Drive, Comox. (Take note this is Thursday)
Executive Meeting begins at 2:00 p.m.

8th January, 2008 - Regular Monthly Meeting

**"Ask The Experts" - Nadine Boudreau,
Isabel Petch and Paul Wurz**

Our panel of local experts will be discussing various aspects of gardening, with Harry Wright as panel moderator. Although the emphasis will be on rhododendrons, the panel will take questions and provide answers on any aspect of gardening. So be sure to bring along any questions or concerns you may have from your gardening experiences.



President's View

... by Harry Wright

As I prepare this for the January newsletter it is the first day of winter and so far we have had a snowfall of two feet and a big blow in November that caught a lot of big trees leaning the wrong way. At the same time, we've had heavy rains, high tides and earlier this week the temperature dropped to -10 degrees - *and that was fall*. Should we welcome Winter? Our garden survived this fall onslaught with only one large rhodo branch broken. We have also only seen two salmon swimming upstream to spawn in the creek this fall, which is normally crowded with hundreds in November.

We had our first Christmas Light Display evening, clear and cold but well attended. (Editor's note: Harry reports that a total of 703 visitors attended the gardens this year, with donations to the Sonshine Lunch Program totaling \$1,457.00.)

Thanks to the Social committee that put on a most enjoyable December meeting (party.) I hope everyone had a safe and healthy Christmas holiday, and we look forward to another new year. See you at the meeting...Harry



...by Diana Scott

Members Notes

Christmas Party 2007

In seasonal fashion, club members and guests were greeted by Santa's Elves at the annual NIRS Christmas party held December 11th, 2007. Chris Aldred and Isobel Petch looked delightful in their elf ears as they directed folks to the hot apple cider table where Louise Casson and Evelyn Wright were dishing up hot drinks for everyone. The tables looked suitably festive with Evelyn's charming Christmas centerpieces, and Brian Staton put us in the mood with seasonal music on the piano.

Early in the evening, Chris teased us with a 'Guess the Number of Candies' contest, which was ably won by Dany Fortin's wife Jamie Willms. The Christmas Trivia contest got everyone thinking as well as wildly guessing, and although no one got all the answers, Diana Scott and Isabel Petch had enough correct to win the prize.

The food table had a wonderful variety of sweets and savouries to choose from again this year, and a number of the delicious recipes will be included in our upcoming newsletters. It was a real 'treat' to try out the yummy goodies members brought to share!



Games continued after dinner, and we found out who in the group had the knack for tossing Christmas cards into a bucket. It seems that practice makes perfect, so we do wonder how some of our members have been spending their afternoons. There appeared to be a wee bit of friendly rivalry between Teams 1 and 2, but scores ended up being close enough to declare everyone a winner. Folks took a while to get the feel of things in our "What's in the Christmas Stocking?" relay, but again both teams did well. Throughout the evening there were lots of prizes and lots of winners. Thanks to Chris and Diana for the games this year!



N.I.R.S. January 2008

Our Club Albums were on hand to look through, and Lois Clyde has done a terrific job of keeping them up-to-date. It was great fun to look back on some of the events and celebrations over the years. Pictures are worth a thousand words!

Dave Godfrey was our Santa this year for the Gift Exchange and he used the poem "The Night Before Christmas" to orchestrate the gift selection. With a drawn phrase in hand, members waited for the matching part of the poem to be read aloud by Santa before shouting "Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas!" and racing to the table to select their gift. When the poem was finished and all had a gift in hand, Dave wished everyone a Merry Christmas and invited us to open our packages. There were lots of oohs and ahhs as everyone showed off their gifts and admired what others had received. As part of the Gift Exchange, Corinne Innes won the honour of taking care of Miss Piggy for the coming year.



Miss Piggy came to the party in a new incarnation as "Garden Nymph" after having been gold for many years. Corinne has agreed to place Miss Piggy in her garden this summer and bring her back to the Christmas Party next year to pass on to the next custodian. Congratulations Corinne!

The highlight of the evening was the presentation of the ARS Bronze Medal to Dave and Noni Godfrey by President Harry Wright. Dave and Noni have been in the club since 2003, and have been highly active in the club throughout that time. They both have exceptional organizational and leadership skills and have been a tremendous asset to the club. Congratulations Dave and Noni!

We ended the evening by drawing for our beautiful door prize. A gorgeous Christmas Wreath was donated by Gwen and Harry's daughter Debbie McLaren, and the lucky winner was Brian Staton.

A great big Thank You to the Christmas Party committee of Evelyn Wright, Louise Casson, Christine Aldred and Diana Scott. Thanks also go out to all who participated and made this year's Christmas Party one of the best.



Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year to everyone!

Milner Garden

(Continuation of the article in the November Newsletter)

Old growth Douglas Firs and Cedars frame views of the Strait of Georgia. The garden lawns slope gently down to meet a precipitous bluff which plunges to the beach below. To the north, Denman, Hornby and further islands are visible.

The gabled house includes features of a Ceylonese tea plantation house. Each bedroom has a bathroom, with screened door leading to the garden. A covered veranda looks out on both garden and sea views, and serves as an outdoor room. It is believed that the house was started in 1928 and completed in 1931.

The garden features 500 varieties of rhododendrons, as well as hostas, honeysuckle and many hydrangeas, along with many other perennial plants and shrubs. Apart from the garden and lawns, there are huge old fir and western red cedar trees, part of an old growth forest of 140 acres, one of the last of these, and hopefully it will remain so indefinitely.

Summers are warm and winters are mild. Average rainfall is 140 cm. Free draining, sandy soil is covered by a thin layer of forest loam which supports a wide range of plants. Today the multi-layered forest canopy casts dense shade over much of the garden area. The understory supports the extensive collection of rare Rhodos, as well as many fine specimen trees.

I have condensed the article which I obtained from the Cowichan Rhodo Newsletter of April 2001, because I borrowed a copy of "Veronica's Garden", from the Campbell River Library. I highly recommend reading the book. See the following review.



By Mary Palmer

Book Review

Veronica's Garden

Author: Margaret Cadwaladr

Publisher: Madrona Books & Publishing, 2002

This is a lovely book, full of details about Veronica Milner's life, and photos of people, gardens, and flowers of the many phases of her wide-ranging and interesting life. She first restored a castle garden in Ireland, then when widowed, she married Ray Milner and transformed his "summer retreat" into a beautiful wild garden in the manner of William Robinson.

The garden at Qualicum has always had visitors, some of them "the Royals" including Prince Charles and Lady Diana, and Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip.

There are descriptions of many of the plants in the garden, as well as of the forest surrounding it. Once you leave the highway and walk into the forest, you notice the silence - (in Fall, I expect the trees are full of birds in summer). The whole property is so peaceful, even with busy volunteers and students from Malaspina College digging, weeding, and discussing plants with visitors.

Descriptions of Veronica's family give an idea of how some people lived in the Victorian and Edwardian ages. Imagine "Like other aristocratic children in the Edwardian age, Veronica saw little of her parents. They were distant entities and servants were central to her life. As was the custom in upper-class families of the time, uniformed nannies and nursemaids raised her and her siblings, two brothers and a sister, in the top floor of the house".

What a contrast to living in a Vancouver Island forest in the 20th Century!

Yes, this is a fascinating book, far more interesting than anything further that I can write. Ask for it at your local library, or send for your own copy:

Madrona Books & Publishing,
P.O. Box 578,
Qualicum Beach, B.C. V9K 1T1

We Care We Share

The members who contributed to our Christmas Hamper project are thanked for all the great items donated. In addition to the non-perishable food items donated, there were gifts for all members of the family and the club provided a \$50 gift certificate for the purchase of a turkey and all the fixings.



Special thanks to Christine Aldred for organizing the drive, and for delivering the goods to the Salvation Army depot for delivery to the family.

Note from Chris: "I would like to thank all who contributed to the Salvation Army Hamper appeal. We had a great response, and managed to fill at least 6 boxes with food and gifts. I'm sure this made one family very happy, and added some special festive notes to their Christmas, which they otherwise would have foregone.

Once again, thank you for your generosity..... Christine"

Members are reminded that at our January 8th meeting we will be collecting non-perishable foods to assist the local food bank in restocking their shelves after the holiday season. We hope that all those members attending the meeting can bring an item or two to share with those less fortunate.



Snippets From Sayward

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)

I'm writing this exactly a week before Christmas, and so far only one big storm in December. That one didn't do much damage for us, and the power in Sayward even stayed on. The two earlier storms in October and November didn't do any damage in the garden either, though we did lose both boathouses, one in each storm. Our Hardwicke wharf looks a little bare for Christmas.

I'm still obsessing about the problems with English holly as an invasive plant on the coast. In past newsletters, I've shared some of my research into varieties and hybrids that are purported to be non-threatening, but I'm not convinced. By sharing these concerns and questions here, I'm hoping our knowledgeable membership will let me know their opinions and experience as well. I'll add my email address at the end of this letter.

The culprit is *Ilex aquifolium*, English holly, native to Europe. It has been a popular garden plant for a very long time, and it is unquestionably beautiful. English holly, which needs a male plant to set berries on the females, self-seeds vigorously, helped by birds who feast on the berries in winter. The seeded offspring pop up in gardens, but also in wild places, where they can threaten native understorey plants that are less vigorous or slower to establish.

Because of English holly's popularity, plant breeders have made an effort to develop less invasive varieties. The Dutch cultivar 'JC van Tol' is self-fertile, producing berries without a male pollinator. The berries produced are sterile. However, the plant can still be pollinated by a male *I. aquifolium* growing within striking distance, and if that happens, the berries will not be sterile. I no longer sell this variety.

The venerable *Ilex aquifolium* cultivar 'Ferox,' or hedgehog holly, exists only as a male plant. It has been propagated vegetatively for centuries. It was cultivated by the earliest French settlers in Canada, who brought it from Europe. One would think this super-prickly, berry-free holly would be safe, but its vegetative propagation is so easy that discarded cuttings pop up as new plants as readily as seedlings do. I no longer sell 'Ferox.'

Van Dusen Gardens is an official holly arboretum and test centre (for all holly, not just *I. aquifolium*). There I first saw *Ilex x altaclerensis*, Highclere holly, a hybrid of *I. aquifolium* and *I. perado*, an evergreen from the islands of the South Atlantic. It is a lovely hybrid, usually with smooth leaves, and often in variegated forms. However, as a hybrid of English holly, its berries could produce plants that revert back. Highclere holly is not very hardy, so I've never sold it anyway.

A recent article in Steve Whysall's weekly Vancouver Sun gardening column is all about this issue. He cites a member of the Invasive Plant Council of BC (and curator of Van Dusen's collections, so no ignoramus), who recommends blue or

meserve holly as a "completely non-invasive" holly hybrid. *Ilex x meserveae* is a hybrid of *I. rugosa* and, yes, *I. aquifolium*. It produces abundant berries on female plants pollinated by male plants. I must be the ignoramus here, as I don't understand why pollinated berries would be infertile, and why the offspring would not have the potential to revert back to *I. aquifolium*. Blue holly is propagated widely, so must also come easily by vegetative means. I don't trust it, so I don't sell it either.

Of course, my little pipsqueak nursery is not going to have much of an impact when it comes to controlling invasive plants. Still, I have to look in the mirror at least once a day, and keeping English holly out of my inventory makes that a little less painful. Located as I am in a fairly remote area, very near the exquisitely beautiful Salmon River estuary, this issue is very important to me.

That is not to say that I haven't done some skeptical questioning. One of our new trails on Hardwicke winds through established forest with a great many holly volunteers in the understory. None were more than two feet high when I first started using this trail, and I wondered if perhaps the canopy shaded them out or at least controlled them. We pulled out most but left a few to see what happened. Most disappeared within the next few years, even those in a more open spot. I was quite thrilled that the native vegetation seemed to be able to look after itself, until one Sunday afternoon revealed that another imported alien was doing the job.

When no one else is on Hardwicke, a common occurrence in winter, we turn our Fjord horses loose to have some playtime. They like that trail. When they were called home for supper one day, Sam (who was a comedian in another life) still had a holly plant in his mouth, roots protruding. Sam loves holly. Yay Sam.

My email address is rsilkens@saywardvalley.net.

Editors Note



As most members know by now, Rose-Marie and Bruce suffered a tragic car accident on December 23rd, in which Bruce was killed. Rose-Marie is still recovering in the Victoria General Hospital with serious head and chest injuries. This month's article was submitted prior to the accident.

We look forward to reading more from Rose-Marie in the near future. It may be quite some time however, before she recuperates enough to once again contribute her "Snippets from Sayward" for our newsletter. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Rose-Marie at this time for a speedy recovery.



Bronze Medal Presentation

...by Diana Scott

It was with great pleasure that President Harry Wright presented the ARS Bronze Medal to Dave and Noni Godfrey on December 11th, 2007. The Bronze Medal is awarded for outstanding contributions to a Chapter and is the highest commendation awarded by a local Chapter in the Society.

Since joining NIRS in 2003, Dave and Noni's exceptional organizational and leadership skills have been a tremendous asset to the club.

Dave has managed our Ways and Means area since 2004 and has been instrumental in the ongoing success of our annual Rhodo Plant Sale & Show and Garden Tours. His initiatives have included the streamlining of some of our administrative processes, as well as offering us the opportunity to promote the club with our NIRS vests. He is an excellent writer, and together with Noni and assistance from Garth Wedemire, has developed our impressive NIRS web site.

*Noni and Dave
receiving the
Bronze Medal
from
President Harry*



As newsletter editor, Noni has carried on from Mary Palmer's outstanding era. Noni's knowledge of desktop publishing, collections of graphics, and other personal touches have made it one of the best newsletters in the District. The newsletter, now aptly named 'The Rhodoteller' is full of interesting information, great photographs, and sought after recipes.

As Librarian, Noni continued with improvements to our library, purchasing wonderful books and making the collection titles available in print and on line. Noni is also our resident computer expert. With her skills and guidance, our newsletter is now distributed electronically and available on our website.

Both Dave and Noni contribute endless hours to the club and can be seen hard at work at most NIRS events. As active club members they can be counted on to be both welcoming and gracious in any situation. We congratulate them on being awarded the Bronze Medal.



The celebration of the new year is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon about 4000 years ago. In the years around 2000 BC, the Babylonian New Year began with the first New Moon (actually the first visible crescent) after the Vernal Equinox (first day of spring.)

The beginning of spring is a logical time to start a new year. After all, it is the season of rebirth, of planting new crops, and of blossoming. January 1st on the other hand, has no astronomical or agricultural significance. It is purely arbitrary.

The Babylonian new year celebration lasted for eleven days. Each day had its own particular mode of celebration, but it is safe to say that modern New Year's Eve festivities pale in comparison.

The Romans continued to observe the new year in late March, but their calendar was continually tampered with by various emperors so that the calendar soon became out of synchronization with the sun.

In order to set the calendar right, the Roman senate, in 153 BC, declared January 1 to be the beginning of the new year. But tampering continued until Julius Caesar, in 46 BC, established what has become to be known as the Julian Calendar. It again established January 1st as the new year. But in order to synchronize the calendar with the sun, Caesar had to let the previous year drag on for 445 days!

The tradition of using a baby to signify the new year was begun in Greece around 600 BC. It was their tradition at that time to celebrate their god of wine, Dionysus, by parading a baby in a basket, representing the annual rebirth of that god as the spirit of fertility. Early Egyptians also used a baby as a symbol of rebirth.

And now you know...

Comox Valley Horticultural Society Makes Donations:

At the November 19th meeting of the Comox Valley Horticultural Society, President Sandra Carruthers presented two cheques to NIRS members Harry and Gwen Wright. A donation of \$500 was presented to Harry for the newly developed 'BOVI' bed in the CV Rhododendron Garden, and a second cheque of \$500 was presented to the Wrights towards their collections on behalf of the Sunshine Lunch Program.



Each Christmas, Harry and Gwen decorate their Haida Gold Gardens and invite the public to tour the many lights and ornaments for a small donation to the program. The Horticultural Society's donation will certainly boost this year's total, and help provide hot lunches to those less fortunate in our communities.



Pythophthora

Several years ago people in our club were terribly worried about this nasty fungal problem. It is possible the 5 very dry years we had after that time solved the problem, but it won't hurt to review some of the information picked up from a copy of the Portland Rhodo News of Nov. 2006.

Have you noticed dead branches or dead plants in the garden? A whole branch or even a whole plant can suddenly be affected by this problem, especially if you know drainage is poor in the area. Rhodos love acidic soil, but acidic clay can be a death-knell. If you consider this to be your problem, the first thing to do in order to save a plant is to cut off the affected branch, dig the plant up and make a new hole for it, three times the width of the old one. Dig the hole a little deeper also. Then fill it with coarse peat moss, coarse pumice if available, shredded bark such as that used for orchids, and mix these in a 1:1:1 or 1:1:2: (if using orchid bark). Wash the old dirt off the roots, and replant the shrub high in the mix. Water it in well, be sure that it drains. Drainage is the key for all ericaceous plants. Get as much organic material as possible around all of these plants, including rhodos, azaleas, and heathers.

Three points to remember are drainage, drainage and drainage. (Think our heavy November and December rains - it hasn't stopped all day today, so this is the most vital point of advice). It is good to know the micro-organisms which attack and break down the bark are also predatory on the phytophthora organism. Kellogg's Redwood Bark breaks down over a long period, but pine needles and bark decay rather quickly.

There is a new type of phytophthora called p. ramorum, called "sudden oak death", which affects some plants while the ones next to them die. If leaves remain wet for over 18 hours there is a potential for that fungus. In California Bay trees are unaffected but are excellent hosts. Sometimes, if a plant is resistant, it will drop just the lower leaves, or drop all leaves on a branch, then re-grow them again. If an annual defoliation pattern develops, find a product with phosphorous acid in it (not phosphoric acid).



Recipe Requests

Beet, Red Onion and Orange Salad

Salad:

...by Jaime Willms

- 1 1/2 pounds fresh beets
- 1/2 red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 large naval oranges, peeled and sectioned

Vinaigrette:

- 1/4 c. red wine vinegar
- 1/4 c. fresh orange juice
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp. orange zest
- 1/2 c. olive oil
- salt and pepper to taste

To Make Salad: Cook beets in boiling salted water 30-40 minutes, or until tender. Drain, remove skins and cool. Cut into 1/4" slices. Place beets, onions and orange segments in a salad bowl.

To Make Vinaigrette: Whisk vinaigrette ingredients together in a bowl. Pour over salad. Cover and refrigerate for several hours. Serves 8. I added some raisins to it since I thought it was a bit tart.

Note from Jaime: I Hope you like it! Very simple to make when you boil the beets ahead of time.

I Am The New Year

~author unknown

I am the New Year.

I am an unspoiled page in your book of time.
I am your next chance at the art of living.

I am your opportunity to practice what you have learned about life during the last twelve months.

All that you sought and didn't find is hidden in me, waiting for you to search it out with more determination.

All the good that you tried for and didn't achieve is mine to grant when you have fewer conflicting desires.

All that you dreamed but didn't dare to do, all that you hoped but did not will, all the faith that you claimed but did not have - these slumber lightly,

waiting to be awakened by the touch of a strong purpose.

I am your opportunity to renew your allegiance to Him who said, 'behold, I make all things new.'

I am the New Year.