



*North Island
Rhododendron
Society
2008/2009 Executive*

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..... nonigod@shaw.ca

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Marleen Crucq941-1957

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The club meets at 7:30 p.m
the second Tuesday of each month
(except May through August)
United Church in Comox.

Coming Events

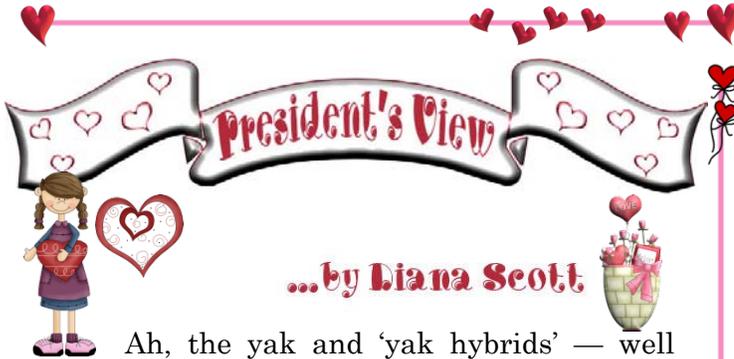
2nd February 2010 - Executive Meeting 2:00 pm

The executive meeting will be held at the home of Dick and Pauline Bonney, 3293 Seabank Road.

9th February 2010 - Regular Monthly Meeting

As an experienced gardener for most of his life, Harry Wright will present his program "Gardening Basics" at our February meeting. His PowerPoint presentation will explore and explain many aspects of gardening, from planting to pruning and seeding to weeding, with information for all levels. Be sure to attend this educational program.





Ah, the yak and 'yak hybrids' — well loved and appreciated by Rhodo enthusiasts! *Rhododendron yakushimanum* (*R. degronianum* ssp. *Yakushimanum*) is native to and named for a small area on the northern end of Yaku Island or Yakushima off the southern coast of Japan. The island is a treasury of Japanese vegetation and is home to some 1,900 species and subspecies of flora. This rich ecological area was the first site in Japan to be inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1993.

Susan Clark of the American *Rhododendron* Society Massachusetts Chapter has written an excellent article entitled "Species in Our Midst - *Rhododendron degronianum*"

<http://www.rosebay.org/chapterweb/specdegr.htm> where she explains how this beautiful and well loved Rhodo came from the far reaches of Japan to the attention of the world. Quote: "Yaks were first described by Nakai in 1921 and introduced into Europe by Lionel de Rothschild at Exbury in 1934, to whom 2 plants were sent by the famous Japanese botanist, Koichiro Wada. From Exbury yaks were grown at the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley. It was a Wisley yak, in full bloom, in the 1947 Chelsea Flower Show, that took a First Class Certificate and started the yak craze. *Rhododendron* fanatics fell in love with this fabulous plant and they precipitated an exuberant breeding spate that is still producing hundreds of named yak crosses."

One of the more popular yaks is Ken Janeck (*degronianum* ssp. *Yakushimanum* seedling). The leaves are long, narrow, and roll slightly inward. As the new leaves emerge they are covered with a light fuzzy tomentum. This gradually fades over the summer to reveal the dark green leaves, while the undersides retain their thick cream to tawny-coloured indumentum. A midseason bloomer, Ken Janeck's flowers are pink fading to white with a spotted upper lobe. It's a compact mounding plant and I think that almost everyone I know has one!

Other popular yak hybrids include the series developed in the 1970's named after Snow White's seven dwarfs. R. 'Bashful' has blushing pink blooms that go well with the silvery young leaves. R. 'Dopey' has glossy red blooms and R. 'Grumpy' has pink buds and pale pink flowers that fade to cream. Other favourites are R. 'Fantastica' which has dark pink blooms that shade to white in the throat, with attractive light green spotting. R. Teddy Bear has deep orange indumentum and shell pink flowers. Yaku Prince, Yaku Princess, Yaku Queen and Yaku Sunrise have all been hybridized using *degronianum* ssp. *Yakushimanum* 'Koichiro Wada'.



The two Canadian Rhodo stamps released in March 2009 featured trusses of *R. yakushimanum* 'Mist Maiden' introduced in 1947, and Dr. D. L. Craig's 1979 hybrid of Mist Maiden, R. 'Minas Maid'. Although many yaks have pink blooms, colours can range from white and peachy yellows to pinks and lavenders through to bright reds.

R. degronianum ssp. *Yakushimanum*, despite growing on cool, misty, windswept mountainsides in its native environment is very sun tolerant in cool climates and is among the hardiest of the large-leafed varieties. The compact form, the wide variety of bloom colours and the great leaf characteristics make the 'yak' and its hybrids a must for every Rhodo garden.

As we move into February it's time to start gearing up for the garden and Rhodo season again. We are delighted to have Harry Wright as our speaker at the meeting on February 9th, sharing his wealth of experience about gardening in general and Rhodos in particular!





...by *Dave Godfrey*

Member's Notes

January is usually one of our quietest meetings of the year, but at our first meeting of twenty-ten 43 members and 4 guests, including Art and Susan Lightburn of Parksville, attended to learn more about gardening techniques from our panel of local experts. This year's panel consisted of Ross Munro (Mason bees and fruit trees), Arthur Ralfs (Rhododendrons), and Bernie Guyader (Alpines and Bonsai) with Paul Wurz as the moderator for the evening's 'question and answer' program.

Ross Monro, Arthur Ralfs, Paul Wurz (moderator), Bernie Guyader



The panel provided answers or suggestions for a variety of gardening concerns and questions posed by members and guests alike. The program was informative and enjoyed by all in attendance.

Following the program, draws were made for the raffle and door prizes. Helena Stewart was the lucky winner of the rhodo 'Firestorm' provided by yours truly. The door prize of a Christmas cactus, donated by Susan Holt, was won by Ross Munro; while Ann Chevrier was the winner of a set of gardening books. Congratulations to all our winners of the evening.

Director Brian Staton is organizing a day trip garden tour to Powell River for Thursday, May 27th, 2010. It is anticipated that there will be 4 or 5 gardens arranged by NIRS member David Moore. To reduce costs, all those attending must board the 6:30 AM ferry from Little River terminal, and will board the chartered bus in Powell River. A bagged lunch is recommended with liquid refreshments generously provided by David Moore. Following the days outing, it is anticipated that return will be via the 5:15 ferry with a possible dinner purchased on the ferry. Brian will apprise members of further



details and will be booking seats on a first come basis at our MARCH meeting.

Speaking of garden tours, plans are already underway for our annual Mother's Day Garden Tour on Sunday, May 9th. This year's gardens will be in the Black Creek area, and Brian and Barb Staton are already lining up locations. As this is the biggest fund raiser of the year for our chapter, the support of many members will be needed to once again make it a success. Be sure to lend a helping hand when the time comes.

We are also in the planning stages of our annual Rhodo Sale and Show on Sunday, May 2nd. In addition to the usual plant donations, we are asking any members who have gardening books or magazines they no longer require to consider bringing them to a meeting for either sale to our members at the revenue table, or to the public at our NIRS table at the sale. These donations will be greatly appreciated.

Given the number of questions to the panel relating to blueberry plants and their care, Ross Munro offered to hold a pruning workshop on Saturday, January 23rd. Fifteen members gathered at Harry and Gwen's Haida Gold Gardens to learn about the proper methods, types of plants, and pruning techniques for blueberries. In addition, Ross has provided an article on blueberries in this issue of the newsletter.



Ways and Means Director Nadine Boudreau advises that she has a number of names listed for those members wishing to purchase NIRS logo vests or polo shirts. Members requiring further information and/or interested in purchasing these items should check with Nadine at our next meeting. An order will be placed in the near future. For our newer members, a reminder that we have two excellent books available full of valuable information on Rhododendrons. Greer's Guidebook (the bible of Rhododendrons) and our locally produced Fundamentals Booklet are both available at the W&M table at the meetings. So be sure to pick up your copy soon.

Also, Membership Chair, Brian Staton, is taking names for those members wishing to purchase an NIRS name tag for \$10. Those who have a name tag and wear it while purchasing raffle tickets will receive an extra 'free' ticket. Be sure to wear yours to the meetings. The executive wishes to thank Art and Susan Lightburn for their generous donation of two large rhododendrons which will be used as raffle prizes at coming meetings.

In closing, our members extend a warm welcome to Jillian Gould who became our most recent new member at the January meeting. We look forward to seeing Jill, and most of you, at our February meeting when Harry Wright will not only be acting President, but will also be providing a slide presentation on 'Gardening Basics'. The new 2010 Member's Yearbook is now available and will be passed along to all those attending the February meeting. See you there, and don't forget to wear your name tag!



...WEBMASTER DAVE GODFREY

In the year ending December 31st, there were a total of 8161 visits to our NIRS web site for the 2009 period. An increase of more than 7.5 % over the previous year. December had 664 visits, while July 2009 saw the largest number with 809 visits. It seems most visitors are viewing photos of our many club events and activities on the "Photo Gallery" page. Also the archived newsletters draw a lot of interest. Be sure to check us out at www.nirs.rhodos.ca

Several new links have been recently added to our "Links" page for businesses of our members and other sites of interest. Any other members with web sites interested in having their link provided please contact me at your convenience. All we ask in return is a reciprocal link to our NIRS web site on yours.

A new Rhododendron database site based in Holland is now available. The website "hirsutum.info" is an initiative of the Dutch chapter of the ARS. As webmaster Herman van Ree says:

"Besides lots of pictures and information, there is one thing that the Dutch members really appreciate: the "My Garden" administration tool. With two or three clicks you can indicate the rhodos that you have in your garden. In return, you get a photo album webpage with all kinds of details about your rhodos. This data is only accessible after login ...but members (in Holland as a try-out) can indicate: show my garden to other members 'yes/no'. That way people can 'walk' through the gardens of fellow members. The "My Garden" feature only started in December 2009, but already 21 people have entered their rhodos from such countries as Finland, Sweden, France, Canada, and Germany."

A link is always available on our NIRS website's "Links" page.

<http://www.hirsutum.info/index.html>



MOTHER NATURE'S GIFT

The high tides and winds on the weekend of Jan 16th brought tons of seaweed mulch ashore along Marine Drive in Royston. Many gardeners took advantage of this free and easily accessible gift from Mother Nature.

Vancouver Island Hybridizers

The Victoria Contributors Part 2

by Alan Campbell, Cowichan Valley Chapter

Herman Vaartnou (1917–1996)

Dr. Herman Vaartnou was also a charter member of the Victoria Rhododendron Society. He was born in Estonia, and managed to escape to Sweden as the Russian army overran his country during the Second World War. In Sweden he marked up two achievements: he gained a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture, and he married Hella, also an expatriate of Estonia.

In early 1950, the Vaartnouns immigrated to Canada and settled in Vancouver where Herman entered the agronomy department at the University of British Columbia as a laboratory assistant under the eye of Dr. Vernon Brink. At the same time, he undertook the added task of upgrading to a master of science in agriculture. Upon attaining that degree, he then took on the position of Supervisor of Grounds in the Department of Physical Plants at UBC which he held until 1966, during which time he also obtained his PhD in plant ecology and taxonomy.

It was during his tenure as grounds supervisor that his interest in rhododendrons took root. Late 1964 saw the initial steps taken by Dr. Milton Walker of the newly formed Rhododendron Species Foundation and Mary Greig of the Royston Nurseries to bring in rhododendron species plant material from Britain to UBC for propagation. Herman was immediately taken with the project and enlisted the aid of his promising new propagator, Evelyn Jack (Weesjes), to begin the conversion of seed and cuttings into gardenworthy plants. At this time, Dr. Vaartnou began his own collection of species *Rhododendra* by procuring propagated material coming out of Brodick Castle in Scotland to UBC as well as chosen Greig forms of species from the Royston nursery. See how the various threads of the local rhododendron community are starting to form a tighter weave?

Herman and Hella moved to their Lansdowne Road property in Victoria in 1976 and immediately began what was to become one of the noted gardens of Victoria for its large collection of big-leaved rhododendrons. In time, Herman became involved with the newly formed Victoria Rhododendron Society as well as the Friends of the University of Victoria's Finnerty Garden.

Herman selected, named, and registered many good forms of rhododendrons from his collection as well as those in the university gardens, though it is not always clear if those chosen were Greig-selected forms, his own selected forms from Brodick, or open-pollinated plants from his own garden. Two Greig-selected plants that he named and registered were 'Chancellors Choice' (reg. 1990), a form of *R. pseudochrysanthum*, and 'Toni James' (reg. 1994), a form of *R. williamsianum* (a mix-up at registration misspelled Tony as Toni). Some of those plants coming out of Britain that Dr. Vaartnou named and registered are: 'Peeter's Pride' (reg. 1989), a form of *R. montroseanum* (and yes, Peeter is spelled correctly); 'Mother Julia' (reg. 1989), a selection of *R. varicose*; 'Manivalde' (reg. 1989), a selection of *R. praestans*; and 'Dr. Brian Saunders' (reg. 1994), a form of *R. calophyllum*. Still more of his registered plants were of selected seedlings from open-pollinated seed or, as Clint Smith calls them, "bumble bee hybrids." Open-pollinated means that the pollen parent is unknown. 'Linda Marie' (reg. 1989) is from o.p. seed of *R. irroratum*. 'Erik's Choice' (reg. 1989) is from o.p. seed of *R. grande*. Of course, we are all familiar with 'Prince Abkhazi' and 'Princess Abkhazi', both of which are from o.p. seed of *R. irroratum* (reg. 1989).



Herman Vaartnou-crosses included *R. irroratum*
[Chris Klapwijk photo]

The two named plants from o.p. seed of *R. soulei* are 'Finnerty' (reg. 1993) and 'Mrs. Dora Kreiss' (reg. 1995). Are they related? We don't know. Two o.p. *R. macabeianum* seedlings were also registered, 'Mrs. Margaret Buffam' (reg. 1995) and 'Norman Todd' (reg. 1994). The same question: are they from the same seed pod or do they have different pollen parents? Again, we don't know.

I do not want to appear to be trivializing or holding with less regard the contributions of Dr. Vaartnou because they are not the result of focused hybridizing goals, but I would like to make a point or two. I've been told that he named and (or) registered in excess of 50

plants, but lists held by Evelyn Weesjes and the Victoria Chapter count only 36. What plants are missing? We don't know. The documentation just isn't there and, as shown in the preceding paragraph, documentation is incomplete for many of the plants we do know of. My second point concerns those 14 or so plants missing from the lists. Do they still exist in some secluded part of someone's garden or, as in the case of the *R. macabeanum* hybrid 'Norman Todd', have they disappeared? The registered hybrid 'Norman Todd' died out in the Vaartnou garden and the name can never be used again in the rhododendron registry. If a hybridizer believes that a plant is worthy of naming and registering, then it must be propagated and planted out in various gardens to safeguard its existence. All that being said, I still feel that should someone have the space and decide to amass all the known Vaartnou plants, that collection would be a fantastic sight to see.

...conclusion next month



Born and raised in Chicoutimi, Quebec, following high school graduation and a year studying art, Dany Fortin moved to Calgary with his mother and sister, primarily for all of them to learn English. While in Calgary for a year, they heard about the Comox Valley through a friend who recommended they try the area for the climate and all that it has to offer.

So in 1995, they made the move to Cumberland where Dany's interests in gardening and landscaping began. He was hired to work for a Youth Environmental Project for 6 or 7 months, developing and building the #6 Mine Park in the village. This led to another Environmental project for a further 6 months, in which

Dany gained a lot of knowledge and experience in stream keeping, native plants and bird habitats.

After this initial year of work experience, Dany then enrolled in a 3 year Fine Arts program at the North Island College. It was here that he met his wife, Jaime Willms, who was just completing her Fine Arts degree. While taking his courses, Dany began working at the Filberg Lodge Park in Comox; again learning a lot more about landscaping, gardening techniques and plants through Joe Pendak at the Filberg.

Upon completion of his program at the college, Dany and Jaime move to London, England, with an offer to house sit for two years. During their time in England, both Dany and Jamie worked in gardens with a private landscape company. They had an opportunity to visit many of the fine gardens of England, and especially the world famous Kew Gardens. Dany applied for work at Kew Gardens, and after much persistence was hired on for a year. This again, gave him an opportunity to learn all the vast knowledge about plants from all over the world.

It was perhaps through this exposure to plants from around the world that they decided to go globetrotting. They bought an open-ended 'world' ticket with an airline, flew to Lima, Peru and from there went on to Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina before hoping over to Singapore to explore Southeast Asia and China. In total, they spent 9 months backpacking around these regions, experiencing the cultures and exploring the varied plant life.

Once their time had expired, they returned to Victoria, where Jamie's mother was living, and settled back into a somewhat normal routine. Dany began his 2 year employment working for Horizon Nurseries and a year as a landscape gardener at the B.C. Government House. During this time in Victoria, he also spent one year working as an arborist for Bartlett Tree Experts learning all there is to know about trees.

Then two and a half years ago, Dany and Jamie moved back to the Comox Valley with the hope of eventually buying their own home. They found employment with a local landscape company and enjoyed outdoor work in many areas of the valley. Dany is now employed as a gardener with the Parks Department for the Town of Comox, and most recently completed his International Society of Arboriculture (I.S.A.) Certification. They have purchased their first home on 14th Street in Courtenay, and look forward to the challenges of redesigning the gardens around the house.

Dany joined our ARS chapter shortly after returning to the Comox Valley, and says he really enjoys the activities and the information the club has to offer. We look forward to seeing and hearing more from Dany, as he will give a presentation on their last year's Asian travels at our April meeting.



Out Of The Blue

...by Ross Munro@RoystonHouse.ca

As I sat eating my breakfast cereal with the gorgeous big, dark blueberries on top, out of the blue, I was reminded of the suggestion that "someone" write an article on blueberries. So here goes...

Like any good planting, the key ingredient is soil preparation. Start early! Some years on the farm, I would begin the soil prep work 6-12 months ahead of planting. I still do the same at our Royston House. Ideal planting time is September or October, as the soil is still warm and there is ample rain to stimulate root growth. There is also very limited upper plant activity at this time of year. The millions of invertebrates in every square meter of our west coast soil are still very active, breaking down organic minerals for feeder root absorption.

Your blueberry row(s) should be oriented north-south in full sun to benefit from both morning and afternoon sun. Windrow in a continuous run or plant in individual mounds with plants spaced 3-4 feet apart on rows 6-10 feet on centre depending on hand/machine considerations. Break up your ground really well in the drier part of the year. Hilling or windrowing will bring the best soil to the top where blueberry feeder roots are located.

Soil condition is important as blueberries prefer sour soil 4.5 - 5.5 pH. Your soil is probably 6.5 or higher in the Comox Valley, so you will need to add elemental sulphur or magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts) to bring the pH down. I prefer magnesium sulphate as the magnesium is a great catalyst for microbial activity. If you aren't sure what the pH levels are in your garden, the rhodo club has a pH testing meter available for a nominal rental fee. Hopefully you are an active composter, so open up your hill and fill the bottom with partial to complete compost.

Once your soil is prepared cover it with some lumber wrap recycled from a lumber yard - black side up to cook any weed growth over the summer. Bugs will enjoy the heat and create great organic activity in the process. Your soil in September-October should be well broken up so the blueberry feeder roots can establish quickly. Blueberries are from the same family as Rhodos, and tolerate similar soil conditions.



Blueberry Varieties

These are my choices because of production, taste and berry firmness. As a commercial certified organic producer I avoided softer berries even though there are some good ones.

- **Duke** - "my breakfast": early July, big, dark, good keepers (several days in fridge); 2 main pickings 10-14 days apart. Likes black soils but not too wet anytime. Heavy producer and a heavy feeder.
- **Reeka** - mid July, medium to large berry, can take sandy soils. Available at Outback Nursery (tissue culture); good producer.
- **Northland** - late July, closest to wild blueberries in colour and taste, vigorous grower, heavy first pick, medium size, very dark. Strong plant will take heavy snow loads and very cold winds.
- **Blue Crop** - medium blue, medium to large size, most common variety, 3-4 pickings, wants to overproduce so needs heavy pruning to ensure quality berries.
- **Hardy Blue** - August, heavy producer when established, medium size, highest sugar count berry, a 'process' berry - freeze or process immediately, good for jams, wine, or frozen for baking (leave frozen in dough so berries don't bleed). On a very hot August day sugar will make the outside of the berry sticky so pick early in the morning. A vigorous, very heavy producer.



Fertilizing

February: magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts) stimulates growth and lowers pH. Other fertilizers are the same kind of blends as for Rhodos: half mid-April for bloom, half mid-May for fruit after bloom. Duke takes more nitrogen - I used cotton seed meal but it is pricy. Sea soil or fish mulch works great on blueberries and you can load it to mature plants. Avoid mushroom manure and chicken manure due to calcium content. Mulching to keep roots cool is the same as for Rhodos.



Pruning

Pruning: 5 to 7 really strong main shoots is ideal. Thin out weak, blackened or inward growing. Top only if above 7 feet. Shoots below the canopy will have a problem ripening fruit and should be controlled. A five year rotation will eliminate all old wood.

Now you can eat and enjoy these wonderful tasty little gems that are really good for your body and especially your eyes. Organic please!!



Bee Mine!



Milner Garden's Spring Speakers' Series:

February 25th: Judy Newton will speak on Container Gardening.

March 25th: Gary Lewis will acquaint us with Western Australian Plants which are suitable for growing locally [Gary will have some of these plants at the event].

April 29th: Des Kennedy will be the speaker on a topic yet to be determined but sure to be both informative and entertaining!

All presentations will be held at the Qualicum Beach Civic Center located at 747 Jones Street, and will begin at 7:00 pm. Tickets are \$10.00 each or the complete series for \$25.00. Tickets will be available for sale at the door on the evening of the presentations.

Your support of these fundraising activities is greatly appreciated; the dollars raised from low-keyed events such as these are very important in the effort to keep Milner Gardens & Woodland the wonderful place we all enjoy.

Milner Gardens & Woodland
2179 West Island Highway
Qualicum Beach, BC V9K 1G1
Tel: (250)752-8573

E-mail: milnergardens@shaw.ca

Website: www.milnergardens.org



The Nanaimo Rhododendron Society's

February meeting will feature a special presentation. Dr. Richard Hebda will be speaking on "Facing Climate Change in our Landscape and in Our Gardens"

****Free admission****

Date and Location: Beban Park Community Center at February 10th, 2010 at 7:30pm

The intent of Dr. Hebda's presentation is not only to give us some background on climate change but to give us some insight on how climate change may affect our coastal ecosystems and our gardens.

Dr. Hebda has been a curator (specializing in botany and earth history) at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria for more than 25 years. He recently curated exhibits on climate and climate change. With his graduate students he has authored over 90 scientific papers and more than 200 articles. He has also co-authored or co-edited a number of books and major reports. His knowledge, enthusiasm and passion have made him a sought after public speaker, locally, nationally and internationally. Dr. Hebda has been featured in a number of newspaper articles, television shows and radio programs. Many of you may know him through his regular column on native plants, in *Garden Wise* magazine.

Late breaking news from Harry... our sign at the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden was torn off the posts and tossed into one of the beds. It has been recovered and safely stored at Haida Gold Gardens pending reinstallation in the spring. The good news is, there is no apparent damage to the sign itself.

Congratulations to Ross and Nancy Munro upon receiving a "Certified Backyard Habitat" award from the Canadian Wildlife Federation. They received the certificate on January 22, 2010 which reads: "for outstanding effort in helping wildlife through the creation of habitat" on their Royston property.

Old-Fashioned Oatmeal Cookies

3/4 C butter (1.5 sticks)	1/2 C sugar
1 egg	1/4 C water
1 tsp vanilla	3 C oats, uncooked
1 C all-purpose flour	1 tsp salt (optional)
1/2 tsp baking soda	
1 C raisins or dried cranberries	

Preheat oven to 350°F. Beat together shortening, sugar, egg, water, and vanilla until creamy. Add combined dry ingredients, and mix well. Drop by rounded teaspoons onto cookie sheet.

Bake at 350 for 12 - 15 minutes.

For added variety, add chopped nuts, chocolate chips, or coconut. Makes about 4 dozen cookies.

