



The
Rhodoteller

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**North Island
Rhododendron
Society
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2015/2016**

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February 2016

Coming Events

2nd February 2016 -- Executive meeting

This month's meeting was held at the home of our Librarian **Ruth Fowler**. The meeting started at **10 a.m.**

Regular meeting 16th February 2016

Please note that due to Church activities the date of our February meeting has been changed. While it will still be informative and a barrel of laughs, it will be one week later than normal.

Rhodo in the Banner

Identify the "**RHODO IN THE BANNER**" and become the latest winner of "**The Garth**", the prestigious award for rhododendron identification. See the back page of this newsletter for a few clues for those who need them.

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

Note: The February meeting has been changed to 16th Feb 2016

COMMITTEE REPORTS

In order to cut some time from the business section of our meetings and make that time available to the Speaker of the evening, we are including the following information from the NIRS Committees. Your feedback on every one of our programmes is encouraged and each idea will be thoughtfully considered.

MEMBERSHIP

Jill Gould

As of January 24, we have 70 members who have renewed. **Our Membership booklet (to be distributed at the next meeting) will include these folks.** There are no new memberships so far this year. If any of your personal information changes (e-mail, telephone, address) please let us know. This information, **with your permission**, also goes to the ARS.

Please remember, if you want an NIRS membership badge, or would like a new membership badge, see me at the meeting. I will get them done very quickly. The price can vary a bit because of unforeseen increases by the supplier, but they are approximately \$12.00 for a pin, and \$16.00 for magnetic fastener, taxes included.

WAYS AND MEANS

Lois Clyde

Our Raffle Rhodos this month are **"Saffron Silk" & "Makinoi x Pachysanthum"**.

"Saffron Silk" Height could be anywhere between 3-7'. (Paul Wurz says his is only 3' in 6 years). Hardy to -12 degs. Blooms early May.

This is a beautiful Frank Fujioka hybrid, vivid wavy yellow flowers, foliage glossy dark green with an excellent plant habit.



"Makinoi x Pachysanthum" Height 3-4'. blooms in May with lovely pink flowers,
This lovely cross has tan indumentum under leaves, silvery white tomentum above. Both parents known for their striking foliage.



Our Door Prize is **"Honey Butter"**.

"Honey Butter" is a 5 footer & blooms in April with flowers that look good enough to eat. Flowers are luscious tones of yellow with apricot edging.

Foliage is dark green. Good plant habit.



We also have our " Greer's Guidebooks" for sale @ \$25

"The Public Gardens of Vancouver Island" by Ian E.Efford. \$25

Plant tags @ \$12 a box

Fundamentals for Growing Rhododendrons @ \$3, great for beginners.

Lovely bags @ \$14 in a variety of colours, very handy for shopping, meetings & travel.

Not to forget our truly coveted bumper stickers " I Brake for Rhododendrons". Only 2 left!!

See you at the meeting hopefully with walker in tow!

THE RHODO GARDEN

Wolfgang Hoefgen



Spring is almost in the air -- we all hope! Our first work party and a new start for 2016 will be on **Thursday 18th February at 9 a.m.** weather permitting. Since we were not able to rake most of the leaves, we should clean up after winter -- dead wood branches, etc. We wanted to keep most of the leaves between the plants as mulch and will top dress with bark mulch at the March work party. Any help is always very appreciated. It's always lots of fun to work with and beside people who enjoy a job well done.

See you at the Rhodo Garden!

THE PROGRAMME

Co-ordinator Paul Wurz/Report by Helena Stewart

What could be better For the February monthly meeting of the North Island Rhododendron Society than a presentation about a flower show that everyone loves—the **Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show** at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, London. The show (also known as The Great Spring Show) has been held since 1912 and is the most famous in England attracting visitors from around the world. In May 2015, two NIRS members who attended the 5-day show, **Peter and Antje Guertler**, visited 15 gardens most of which were on National Trust properties but also several private gardens. Among the garden's many visitors in 2015 were several "royals": the Queen, Prince Phillip, Prince Charles and Camilla and Prince Harry.

UPCOMING PROGRAMMES

Paul Wurz

Feb 16.....Peter Guertler "England Garden Tour".

Mar 8.....Sean Rafferty "Rhodo Searching in Tibet"

Apr 12.....Terry Richmond and Allen Murray "Rhododendrons and Our Changing Climate."

THE SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Judi Murakami

Thank you to everyone who participated in the new system of bringing your own mug as it's working well, making it easier for the social committee to do a quick clean up. **No more dishes, YEAH!**

Everyone enjoyed the treats in January, thanks.

February treats will be brought by Helen Stefiuk, Barb Staton, Maureen Denny, Cathy Storey and Antje Guertler.

A MILNER GARDEN UPDATE

Advisory group representative

Paul Wurz

The Milner Garden Species Advisory group met January 20th at Milner Gardens to discuss the progress on the development of the Species garden at Milner. The big news was that the clearing of the site was completed in the fall and survived the winter storms without any damage to remaining trees. The next step in development of the site is to mark out, and do a shallow excavation of the major paths in the garden – upon completion the paths will have a base of fine gravel and later be covered with bark mulch. Irrigation will also be installed at this time in preparation for planting which could be started in the fall.

The plant committee has placed an order to the Species Foundation and several members of the committee hope to check out the plants in the next couple of weeks. Also, MARS members, Susan & Art Lightburn have generously donated in excess of 40 species rhododendrons from their wonderful garden in Parksville. Art and Susan are associate members of NIRS.

Volunteer work groups will be set up early in March to help prepare the site for planting – hopefully some of our members will participate. The fund raising committee will be coming up with a process on how individuals may donate to the garden. All donations will be tax deductible. Tony Ansdell is in the process of applying to the ARS endowment fund for a grant to help purchase the plants. If successful the garden could receive a grant of up to \$2500. It was a very productive and worthwhile meeting!



IN LYNN'S GARDEN

By Lynn Wurz

HYDRANGEAS

In our large rhododendron garden, spring is a season of glorious bloom but after the thousands of rhodos are finished blooming the hydrangeas come in handy to fill the gap, lasting from summer well into fall. They are easy to grow, requiring basically the same conditions as rhodos -moist, well drained, acidic soil with plenty of sun for good bloom (except for the climbing hydrangea). A light fertilizing with a slow-release fertilizer and pruning in the spring keeps them compact. You can find varieties to suit any landscape from the huge asperas to planter-sized specimens; we have over a dozen different ones besides the old ubiquitous blues and there are new ones introduced every year. Some of my favourites are:

H. aspera villosa-to 10', likes semi-shade, with large fuzzy leaves and lacecap flowerheads of mauve. (See photo below right side)

H. anamola (climbing hydrangea)-to unlimited height; a beautiful climber with white, lacecap flowers; slow to get started but then it goes up a wall or stump vigorously and is one of the few vines that will bloom in shade.

H. quercifolia (oak leaf hydrangea)-4-6', likes a warm, sunny, humid spot; has beautiful fall colour.

H. paniculata ("PeeGees" are in this group)-4-6' with large pyramidal flowerheads usually white turning pink in the fall and beautiful for drying. I'm really excited about 2 new paniculatas:

"Limelight"-6' with huge, lime green heads, fading to creamy pink in the fall (See photo below on the left)

"Little Lime"-a smaller version at 4'

"Bobo"-3', a new dwarf, white flowers, suitable for front of border or containers.

H. arborescens (tree like) -"Annabelle" is well-known; 5' with huge white snowballs, lasting all summer.

H. macrophylla (mophead hydrangeas) -here is where the old turquoise/burgundy blooming shrubs of most gardens fit in, but this is where there are many new exciting introductions, including some of my favourite such as:

"Madame Emile Moullere"-pure white, picoteed blooms that fade to pink in the fall

"Ayesha"-spoon-shaped flowers, pale pink, unusual.

"Harlequin"-3', suitable for a container, 2-tone purple and white blooms

"Pistachio" 4', also good in a container (not sure if I like this one yet),unusual green/red blooms.

"Nigra" -(black)-5', the name refers to the dark purple stems that contrast with the pink flowers.

H. serrata -3-5',fall colour -- (See photo top centre below)

"Preziosa"-5', dk. maroon stems, shiny leaves, flowers shades of pink, mauve, white, gorgeous!

Hydrangeas are easy to propagate, by layering or cuttings and easy to move, as long as they're kept watered.

Although there are not the huge numbers of varieties as in rhodos, they are wonderful, easy plants lasting a lifetime. Try some of the new ones. I'm not cured yet! !

H. serrata "Preziosa"



H. paniculata "Limelight"



H. aspera villosa

ENCOUNTERS

WITH THE SPECIES RHODODENDRONS OF VANCOUVER ISLAND

By Pauline Thompson

Many years ago I was planning a trip to Victoria and a co-worker suggested that as I was interested in plants I should visit her dad who had a nursery near Victoria. Her dad turned out to be Norman Todd and having no idea of his rhodo reputation, I went merrily off to his nursery, introduced myself as a friend of his daughter's and exclaimed at the number and diversity of rhodos and that the flowers were lovely. That was my first (and probably last) experience of 'the look' that one gets when noting how pretty the flowers are and completely failing to notice the varying size and shape and sometimes fragrance of the leaves, the tomentum and indumentum, the buds, calyxes, stature, compactness or legginess of the plants. Thankfully Mr. Todd took the time to tour me around the nursery and bring these features to my attention. At the end of the visit though, I surprised him by asking why Labrador Tea was not considered a rhododendron when in my humble opinion it seemed to exhibit very similar characteristics. He beamed and said that it had recently been included as one of the species rhodos of BC, bringing the total to six. And thus began my quest to track down these lovely species rhodos.

***Rhododendron groenlandicum* - Bog Labrador tea**

Alert Bay on Cormorant Island, formerly a thriving fishing village on the BC coast, is the oldest community in the northern Vancouver Island area. Heritage buildings and old village houses are adjacent to the thriving culture of the 'Namgis First Nation of the Kwakwaka'wakw.



photo: Pauline Thompson, Alert Bay Ecological Park

While on a kayak trip in the region I hiked up to the nearby Alert Bay Ecological Park, a natural wetland fed by an underground spring. Originally, this site provided a water source for the Spenser and Huson's fish saltery (1870), that later became a cannery. This wetland area has an abundance of *R. groenlandicum*.

Groenland is the Danish name for Greenland and as the name suggests this plant is found in Greenland and in northern latitudes around the world including every territory and province in Canada. It was originally classified as *Ledum groenlandicum*, however recent genetic evidence has shown that the species are correctly placed in the genus *Rhododendron*, where they are now treated as *Rhododendron* subsect. *Ledum*.

Labrador tea is a common name for three closely related plant species: 1.) *R. tomentosum* - Northern Labrador tea, previously *Ledum palustre*, 2.) *R. neoglandulosum* - Western Labrador tea or trappers tea - collected along the Skagit River Dewdney Trail in 1915 previously called *Ledum glandulosum* and 3.) *R. groenlandicum*, - Bog Labrador tea, previously *Ledum groenlandicum*.

This herbal tea has been a favourite beverage among Athabaskan and Inuit people. The tea is described as having an "interesting forest-like flavor, a little bitter, a little astringent, a little spicy, a little camphor-like". It is sometimes used a spice for wild game or as a replacement for bay leaves in soups. During the 18th century, German brewers used *R. tomentosum* while brewing beer to make it more intoxicating, but it became forbidden because it apparently led to increased aggression.

The plant is a small erect shrub up to 1.5 metres tall with leathery aromatic evergreen leaves that roll under and have a yellowish soft hairy underneath when young or rusty brown when mature. The white flowers are in umbrella-like clusters and are very fragrant.

Rhododendron albiflorum

At Mt Washington, on the walk around Paradise Meadows, I spotted *R. albiflorum* with its delicate pinkish buds and creamy white flowers. This is a deciduous rhodo growing about 1 metre in height. It is found at elevations from 6 to 2800 metres, averaging about 1500 metres. There were patches of this in bloom in July. This plant was identified in Forbidden Plateau in 1936 and added to the UBC botanical collection.



photo: Pauline Thompson, Paradise Meadows

Rhododendron macrophyllum - Pacific Rhododendron

There was quite a bit of excitement at an NIRS meeting a few years ago when Harry Wright revealed that he and Don Law had found what Harry believed to be *R. macrophyllum* at an undisclosed location in the Lazo Marsh. I chatted with Don recently and he said that he checked on it a couple of years ago and it was still fine. He has promised to check it again this spring and bring a leaf and flower to an NIRS meeting so that other experts might perhaps confirm the identification. If this is *R. macrophyllum* it would be one of the most northerly naturally occurring plants found on the Island. This rhodo is an erect spreading shrub up to about 8 metres tall with leathery oblong-elliptic leaves measuring 8 - 20 cm. The flowers vary from a pale pink to a deep rose-purplish, spotted red-brown. They are tubular bell-shaped, 2.5-4 cm long, up to 5 cm across, deeply 5-lobed, with lobes spreading and edges wavy. This species was first recorded on the Island at Rhododendron Lake near Parksville in 1970 and added to the Royal BC Museum botanical collection. It was first collected in the Hope-Princeton area in 1938 and added to the UBC botanical collection.



There are six species rhodos in BC. In addition to the three mentioned above there are the two other Labrador teas and also the bright pink Lapland rosebay *Rhododendron lapponicum* which has been located in areas including Mt Edziza, Stikine River, Pink Mountain, and one hundred miles north of Fort Nelson, where it was collected and added to the UBC botanical record in 1943.



Photo: John Weagle

COMPANIONS

By Jill Gould

BLECHNUM SPICANT (DEER FERN, HARD FERN)

Blechnum spicant is a native fern that is a truly good companion plant for rhododendrons. Deer Fern resembles a smaller version of Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*) and is often mistakenly thought of as a stunted Sword Fern. But it is a different genus. The two ferns can coexist in the same area, adding to the confusion. The first difference is the size of the plant: Sword Ferns form large clumps that spread out as much as four or five feet, while Deer Ferns are less than two feet in height and spread.

A careful comparison of the leaves also easily differentiates the two. Sword Fern has leaflets on the stem which are attached by a short stalk. Deer Fern's leaflets are attached right to the stem, with no stalk.



1. *Blechnum spicant*



2. *Polystichum munitum*

Deer Fern really likes shade, more so than Sword Fern, but will tolerate some sun in moist areas. It is often found streamside. An evergreen perennial, it prefers, like many woodland plants, wet leaf mould and the duff of forest floors. The fronds which winter over (see Fig. 1) are sterile. In the spring, a second type of leaf grows up: tall fertile fronds (Fig. 3). These have spore bodies (sori) on the underside. The plant, at this stage, is very attractive. It won an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1993.

Native to North America and Europe, Deer Fern is common in certain areas of the Comox Valley. It can also be purchased at a reputable plant nursery. This is a great plant for tucking under a large leafy rhododendron.



Fig. 3 *Blechnum spicant* with fertile fronds

FRIVOLITY

By Helena Stewart

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

(Spoiler alert: this article is not about rhododendrons but there's one mention of our beloved shrub inserted just to appease Jake.)

As everyone is aware, 2016 is Leap Year but not everyone is versed in arcane historical details like the year's myths and superstitions or even how this year-with-an-extra-day started. Since I can't write more than a few sentences about rhododendrons, I have mined my inexhaustible chest of highly relevant trivia which I now happily share.



On Leap Day, February 29, it's become customary to hold Sadie Hawkins Day dances and races where women do the pursuing and men take evasive measures. This practice however is a bit of a ballet with fact. The original Sadie Hawkins Day which sprang from the fertile imagination of cartoonist Al Capp was actually held in mid-November. Since the reason behind the dance and race tied in with older stories spun around Leap Year, the race date was changed. Sadie Hawkins, for those of you not old enough to remember, was a character in the comic strip *Li'l Abner* that began in 1934 and was set in the hillbilly town of Dogpatch. Sadie was the daughter of Hekzebiah Hawkins, one of the town's first settlers and she had the distinction of being the "homeliest gal in them thar hills." When Sadie turned 35 and a prospective husband still hadn't turned up, Hekzebiah (not wanting to support a spinster for the rest of his life) decided to take matters into his own hands.



He called all Dogpatch's eligible bachelors together and declared Sadie Hawkins Day which would be celebrated by a race in which Sadie would pursue the bachelors. The "lucky" chap she dragged kicking, screaming and calling for mommy over the finish line before the sun set would become her "lawful wedded husband." The other spinsters in Dogpatch loved the idea.

The change of date for the race from November to February 29 likely rests with the well-known Leap Year custom conferring upon women the "privilege" of proposing to men instead of the other way around. Any man who refused such a proposal owed his spurned suitor up to 12 pairs of gloves, a silk gown and a kiss as long as she was wearing a red petticoat when she popped the question. (Some women were known to fund their entire wardrobes by proposing to a lot of men they knew would reject them.)

The origin of this romantic tradition is ancient and steeped in legend. One source claimed the custom was proposed by the Scottish Queen, Margaret, and became a statute passed by Scottish Parliament in 1288. The statute bestowed the right for ladies "baith highe and lowe" to propose. Another story dating back to the 5th century says that St. Patrick was approached by St. Brigid who had come to protest on behalf of all women the unfairness of having to wait for men to propose marriage. After consideration, St. Patrick offered St. Brigid and her gender the right to pop the question one year out of seven—this was eventually reduced to one year out of four, leap years specifically. Since it was leap year when St. Brigid negotiated this right, Brigit, being single, got down on one knee in front of St. Patrick. He however refused giving her a kiss and a silk gown in consolation. Perhaps St. Brigid would have had better luck had she, like St. Patrick, dealt with snakes instead.

For nit pickers, scholars claim that Queen Margaret of Scotland would have been five years old when she introduced the leap year proposal act in 1288 and St. Brigid was nine or 10 years old when St. Patrick died in 461AD. Details always mess up a good story.

It was the Egyptian Ptolemy III in 238BC who figured out that the solar year and the man-made calendar didn't always match up. The Earth actually takes a little more than a year to travel around the sun (365 days, five hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds). As the extra hours accumulated, an extra day was occasionally and randomly added to the calendar. It was the Romans (some say Julius Caesar) who carved the practice of adding a day into stone. They designated February 29th as a "Leap Day"; in the 16th century the Gregorian calendar fine-tuned the calculations to include a leap day, February 29, in years only divisible by four.

Some of the superstitions that have attached themselves to Leap Year include the belief that "new beginnings" of any kind are not a good idea in Leap Year—changes that include starting up businesses, making major purchases and taking distant trips. (Oddly, US presidential elections are held in leap years.) Even changing a hairdo and hair colour. Psychologists say that the extra day alters people's customary vision of the world and some are afraid of anything "supernatural." Another superstition states that the appearance of the first tooth of a newborn should not be celebrated in a Leap Year. If one does, the rest of the child's teeth will not grow properly and the child will suffer for the rest of its life.

Children born on February 29 are called "leaplings" or "leapers" and are considered "unlucky" and "unfortunate." Historically there are no reasons behind this myth other than the fact that the day may cause bureaucratic complications. Also, according to Greek and Ukrainian folklore, a wedding held on the 29th is considered to be cursed with bad luck. Leap Day is deemed unlucky for marriage in Ukraine because every day of the year is assigned a saint and Feb. 29 happens to boast a particularly bad saint named Cassian. Legend has it that Cassian refused to help a peasant whose cart was stuck in the mud and St. Nicholas came to his aid instead. God therefore granted St. Nicholas two saint's days per year while limiting Cassian to a measly one every four years. Since then a vengeful Cassian has brought sickness to people and cattle with a single gaze. On February 29, Ukrainians are urged to stay indoors, keep animals inside—and refrain from marrying.

There is Leap Year trivia that is actually historically accurate. When explorer Christopher Columbus was on his final trip to the West Indies, he and his crew were stranded on Jamaica. Relations with the indigenous population broke down and the Indians refused to help Columbus with food and provisions. Columbus consulted his Almanac and found that a lunar eclipse was due that day (February 29, 1504) so he gathered the native chiefs around and told them that God was going to punish them by painting the moon in blood-red. During the eclipse he said that God would withdraw the punishment if the chiefs started cooperating again. The panicked chiefs agreed and the moon began emerging from its shadow. Also, on February 29, 1692, the first warrants were issued in the Salem witchcraft trials in Massachusetts.

As far as gardens go, the earth should be shown extra respect in a Leap Year and gardeners should be careful not to be negligent or careless. It used to be said that beans and peas planted during leap year "grow the wrong way" (whatever that means) and in the memorable words of the Scots "Leap year was never a good sheep year." The belief is that in a Leap Year the land is particularly unpredictable so that while sowing seeds—or planting rhododendrons—the gardener must utter the words: "I am sowing in a Leap Year—so I'll live a little more." The incantation may not help if our summer is a scorcher like last year but what the heck—surely a sincerely read prayer can't do any harm.

THE RHODO IN THE BANNER

Win "**The Garth**" -- a fun, and hopefully educational contest to determine your ability to identify rhododendrons. You might know this one just by the photo but don't forget this contest is all about using whatever resources are available to you

All entrants e-mailed to jakeellis@shaw.ca with the correct answer will be entered in a draw which will take place at the next meeting.

PRIZE! PRIZE! PRIZE!

The Clues

1. Deciduous azalea
2. Common names: The Cork Azalea or Five Leaved Azalea

