

1984 25th Anniversary 2009



R. Courtenay Lady

The Rhodoteller



www.nirs.rhodos.ca



2009

January

North Island Rhododendron Society 2008/2009 Executive

President

Diana Scott 338-0208

Vice-President

Dave Crucq 339-7845

Past President:

Harry Wright 338-8345

Secretary

Pauline Thompson 339-3423

Treasurer

Don Law 339-2735

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Dave Godfrey 335-0717

Director: Membership

Brian Staton 337-5228

Director: Publicity

Chris Aldred 331-0395

Director: Newsletter/Library

Noni Godfrey 335-0717

..... nonigod@shaw.ca

Social Committee:

Evelyn Wright 339-7493

Revenue Table Committee:

Louise Casson 334-2331

Sunshine Lady:

Pauline Bonney 339-7594

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

Coming Events

6th January 2009 - Executive Meeting 2.00 pm

All executive please take note that this month's meeting has been changed from our pre-arranged schedule. Don and Dorothy will not be available to host the meeting for the month of February, so have switched for January. So...the upcoming executive meeting will be held at the home of Don and Dorothy Law, 671 Crestview Drive, Comox.

13th January 2009 - Regular Monthly Meeting

"Ask The Experts"

Once again, our ever popular 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 try to provide answers on any aspect of gardening. So be sure to bring along any questions or concerns you may have from your gardening experiences.



A fun time at this years Christmas Party



President's View

...by Diana Scott

Despite a few "Keystone Cop" moments, the Christmas Party was great fun and a typical team effort for NIRS! There was lots of great food brought in by our very talented members, and it was enjoyed by all. Thanks to the Christmas Party Committee of Chris Aldred, Louise Casson and Evelyn Wright for a job well done! Thanks also to all those who helped set up beforehand and clean up afterwards, to Gwen and the kitchen crew who pulled things together with help from Harry and Don who got last minute supplies. A pat on the back goes to Evelyn for getting the hot apple cider ready despite being on crutches! Thanks to Pauline, Dick, Pauline and Bob for handing out the free 'raffle' tickets as folks came in, to Claudia and Jake for 'manning' the sign-in at the door, to Sue for helping at the Gift Table, to Dick for the plant tag donation, and to Joseph for helping out with the Boggle tally. Our appreciation goes out to Brian for almost playing the piano. If only one had been where we left it -- he was READY!!! Thanks to Noni for helping me with the Garden presentation, and for being our techno-wizard as usual. The gardens looked great, and we were delighted with the number of folks who were able to send us their photos. After the presentation Dave led us through the gift exchange. Bravo to Dave for being Santa as well as Music Man and Camera Man - a man of many talents and many hats! Thanks to Lily and Corinne who made wonderful assistants at the gift table and helped make the gift exchange run smoothly! Debbie McLaren did a beautiful job on the Christmas wreath that she made for the door prize, and I know that Sheila was delighted to win it - thanks a bunch! In addition to all the work done beforehand, Louise and Chris kept things moving all evening - bravo! As an added bonus, Nancy Munro offered to be part of the social crew in the coming year which will be great. Thanks Nancy! Chris Aldred did a super job coordinating our Christmas Hamper, and the NIRS members outdid themselves once again with their generosity. It was great to see some of our members who have not been able to make it to many meetings this year, and a delight to have a couple of guests join us as well. **Everyone** helped out all evening, and so really - I'd like to extend a big 'THANK YOU' to all!

This will be a special year for the North Island Rhododendron Society. In February 1984, a small group of gardeners interested in Rhododendrons began to meet, and by October of that year became a Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. The year 2009 marks our 25th Anniversary. To mark this special year, we will be highlighting some of the history of the club in our newsletter, and plan on a special celebration as part of our

June Pot Luck. Happy 25th Anniversary NIRS!

As you wind down from all the Christmas and New Year's festivities, you might be starting to think of the garden again. This is a great time to get your gardening questions answered, and our annual Gardener's Panel will take place once again at our January meeting. Be sure to bring your questions, and wonderings too, with you on the 13th!.....See you at the meeting!.....Diana

Happy New Year

...by Dave Godfrey

Member's Notes

Harry and Gwen reported another successful 'open garden' showing of lights over the holiday period. Each year, Haida Gold Gardens are strung with hundreds of lights and ornaments which adorn the beds and pathways. This year was one of those rare 'White Christmases' which added to the splendor of the show. With a total of 452 visitors on the three open nights, the event raised over \$800 in donations for the Sonshine Lunch program. Well done to the Wrights for continuing this worthy tradition.

For those members who have not yet renewed their membership for 2009, you will not receive the winter issue of the ARS 'Journal' magazine in January, and will have to borrow one from the library or another member. Speaking of which, Harry asks that any members not saving their 'Journal' magazines to please bring them to a meeting. He will collect them and distribute to other locations around the Valley.

Another successful Christmas party was held on Tuesday, Dec. 9th at our usual meeting place. The food was delicious, the games were challenging and fun, and the company couldn't have been better!

Despite a few minor hiccups while setting up, the team of Christine, Louise and Diana, along with help from many members, did a terrific job of entertaining everyone. A total of 33 members and guests enjoyed the evening's activities. Harry Wright was within 3 to win the "guess the number of items in the jar" contest. Also three draws were made for delightful prizes. Congratulations to Bob Eberle, Dave Godfrey and Sue Holt (even though she did draw her own number, ha!) as winners of the draws for beautiful gift baskets.

The digital presentation of members' gardens brought back warm memories of this past summer season. There were many beautiful scenes and colourful flowers to enjoy from the gardens of about 26 members. Thanks to Noni and Diana for gathering and compiling the show. We may produce copies for sale at a nominal price. If any members are interested please let us know.

At the gift exchange, while handing out the presents, Santa Dave managed a few kisses from some of the

delighted ladies. Elves Lily Vanderhorst and Corrine Ennis were Santa's helpers this year. Corrine was sad to say goodbye to our prized "Miss Piggy" as she handed her over for safe keeping and display in the garden of Marjorie Dewitt

Annual Passing of the Pig



The team of Bob Eberle, Don Law, Sheila Medori, and Ross Munro were the winners of 'the names game'. As an added surprise, Sheila also won the Christmas wreath made and donated by Debbie McLaren (Gwen and Harry's daughter.) Apparently Sheila had wanted to buy one earlier in the day, so it was quite a surprise for her to win one instead.



Photos of the evening are already available for viewing on the NIRS web site's 'Gallery' page.

Many thanks go out to all members who helped once again to contribute to our Salvation Army Christmas hamper for a family in need this holiday season.

There were lots of presents and food provided, with a \$50 certificate from the club funds to buy a turkey and fresh fixings. Chris Aldred is to be commended for coordinating this project again, and making it the great success it has become.

With the Christmas season behind us, and snow still on the ground, we now look forward to celebrating our chapter's 25th anniversary. Yes, 1984 was when it all began, and throughout the coming months, articles in our newsletter will reflect on those years. A special celebration party is planned for our June pot-luck picnic. More details on this in the coming months.

Garden Chatter, Natter and Notes

Harry says..... "Anyone interested in starting and growing Rhodo's from seed, please let me know and we will have can have a seeding session in February".

The World Rose Convention will take place in Vancouver this year from June 18 -24th 2009. The convention will include a 3 day 'World Rose Festival' and rose show from June 19-21 at the Westin Bayshore Hotel. Members interested in this event can get more information at: <http://www.worldrose-vancouver2009.com/>

To get a head start on growing cyclamen from seed try this method as sent to me by Christine A.

Developed by Reading University in England, this type of seeding allows indoor germination to take place any time of the year.

- Soak the seeds for 24 hours.
- Prepare growing medium of three parts soilless plant mix, one part packaged composted manure, and one part coarse sand.
- Fill clean plastic pots to within one inch of the rim, and tap to settle the soil.
- Sow the seeds half an inch apart, and cover with one inch of the soil mix. (It's important to have enough soil over the seeds, because the corms form quickly, and the depth of soil prevents them from turning)
- Stand the pots in HOT tap water until the soil surface is moist. Then allow the pots to drain for several hours.
- Put the pots onto a tray and cover with a sheet of black plastic to keep out the light. Keep at a temp of 59-68 degrees F.
- Seedlings usually appear in 15-26 days
- Remove covering at this point and place under cool fluorescent lights - or in a bright window.
- When seedlings look strong enough plant outdoors in shade or part sun, and away from strong winds.

The Question Box

by Norman Todd

Brown Leaves

Q. What causes the leaves on my rhododendron to have brown tips?" ...asks a distressed gardener.

A. The questioner should not feel especially concerned, as this is a common complaint; it is not often a life-threatening condition. There are four main causes for plants having brown tips to their leaves: (1) lack of water at the roots, (2) sun burn, (3) fertilizer burn, and (4) frozen tissue.

The first is the most likely. Rhododendrons need 25 mm of water per week in spring, summer, and fall. To check whether a plant has adequate root moisture, dig down just outside the drip line to a depth of 25 cm; the soil should be moist for the complete depth of the hole. When using automated irrigation, it is a good idea to place tin cans in the irrigated area and measure the amount of water being

dispersed. It should accumulate to about 25 mm over a week. Some allowance should be made for evaporation in the container.

Other rhododendrons show their thirst by curling their leaves. They do this to reduce the area of the exposed underside of the leaf where the transpiration of water takes place. Others do not. I think it is fair to say that the ones that do not curl their leaves come from very moist summer climates where they have no need for this defensive strategy.

Some rhododendrons are just unable to pump enough water to keep their leaves turgid. The old saw that says "the bigger the leaf, the more the shade" is something that every grower should keep in mind. After all, the reason a plant has big leaves is so that it can catch every photon of light and keep up its productivity.

My experience is that many yellow-flowered rhododendrons do not like the hot afternoon summer sun. Paul Wurz, who recently spoke to our clubs, mentioned that he found several of the yellow-flowered plants did well when given a lot of light. Further, if that situation had really good air movement, the plant was not as liable to become infected with powdery mildew. The lesson we can take from this is that rhododendrons should be sited to receive as much light as possible and we should not be slow about moving them around—they are very portable. More light also gives a heavier bud set.

Rhododendrons are not begonias; they are not gross feeders; however, they do like a constant supply of nourishment. Slow release fertilizers are safest. The general fertilizer that I use most frequently is 10–8–6. This is coated with a resin so it releases its nutrients slowly. The resin dissolves more rapidly with warmer soil temperatures, but this is a good arrangement as the plants' need for food doubles with every 10°C rise in temperature.

I did hear of a very unhappy outcome when using a 10–8–6 fertilizer that was coated with an inferior resin that had no lasting effect at all. The plants OD'ed and their leaves went brown at the edges. The amount of antifreeze that a rhododendron has in its system varies with the variety. Leaf tissue can suffer cell damage from becoming frozen. Many of us remember February 1989. January had been fairly mild and the sap was running in many plants. At our place (near Elk Lake outside Victoria) the temperature went down to about -9°C with a strong northeast wind. Some foliage was desiccated and froze. The big leaf species such as *macabeanum* had lots of brown edges. Some of the even more tender ones just gave up the ghost.

The moral in all of this is, just don't be too blue about the odd brown leaf. With a little thought and effort most browning can be prevented.


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Rhodos and Gentians


...by Bernie Guyader

Now do we say *Rhodos* and *Gentians*, or *Gentians* and *Rhodos*? I suppose that if you are a rhodophile the first order would be yours. No matter the order, they make a great combination. (Companion plants anyone) Our garden is in large part a rock garden with many alpine plants. Whenever I read or attend talks on companion plants, I am amazed that there is never any mention of

G BRACHYDILLA




G CACHMERICA




Gentians. I suppose, I may be prejudiced due to the fact that Gentians are my favorite plants. I feel that the best companion plants have the same horticultural requirements as rhodos and bloom at different times, or complement the rhodos when they are in bloom. I think, possibly, the reason more people do not grow gentians is because they have been told they are difficult. I have found that if you give them the proper conditions most of them will grow and blossom happily for many years.

G PARADOXA



G PUBERULENTA



I suppose if we mention alpiners, we should first consider the Rhodos that are native to the Alps of Europe, which are *ferrugineum* found on siliceous subsoil and *hirsutum*, found on calcareous subsoil. We also have *Rhodothamnus chamaecistis*, which was previously known as *Rhododendron chamaecistus*. These are all perfectly happy on a well-drained rockery, in full sun with a mulch of 5 to 8cm(2-3in) of shale or rock chips. I should mention at this time I also grow *R. radicans* on the rockery, but on the north side in a more shaded area. With the alpine rhodos you can grow *Gentiana* in the *acaulis* group such as *alpina*, *kochiana*, *dinarica* and *clussii*. *Clussii* in my garden is more lavender than the usual deep blue of the others. It may not be to everyone's liking. These evergreen gentians with their large showy trumpets, most of which are approximately 8cm (3 in) long in a deep rich blue, bloom at the same time as the rhodos. The plant height is about 7cm (2.5in) with the flower rising up to 15cm(6in.) above the foliage. They simply require a well-drained, gritty soil in full sun. I top-dress them with a handful of screened compost in early winter. The compost is worked in by the winter rains or even better by the melting snow. I think most people lose these plants or have them do poorly because they treat them too kindly, giving them too much moisture and fertilizer. Blooming during the summer, given the same conditions are *Gentiana septemfida*, *lagodechiana* and many other gentians from the Alps and the Caucasus. They are deciduous and grow

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Have a great 2009!
Live simply
Love generously
Care deeply
Speak kindly
Leave the rest to God!

Happy New Year!

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to a height of 25-30cm (10-12 in.). I also have a summer gentian that I grew from seed I received from a seed exchange. It is supposed to be "*paradoxa*". It is a great plant with some of *paradoxa*'s features, probably a hybrid, definitely not *paradoxa*. I think it is the best summer flowering gentian I have grown.



The following plants in our garden grow in a raised bed about twenty feet by ten feet, on the north side of our house. The Gentians, which grow here where it is a little more shaded and stays moister, are the August blooming *G. asclepiadea*, or willow gentian. It comes in many shades of blue and there is a white form, which is a little taller. They have upright arching stems to about 50cm (20 inches). They happily hybridize and sow themselves through the garden. The Asian gentians such as *G. sino ornata*, *ternifolia*, and their many hybrids, bloom in September and October. They are mat forming with dark green foliage with large trumpets from the darkest blue to white. These are the easiest to propagate as they root where the stems touch the moist soil. *G. paradoxa*, from the Caucasus, is also fall flowering. It has a long blooming period sometimes extending from August to October. It is more upright but does tend to trail. It is very attractive. Pale blue with dark stripes. They blend in well with *Cyclamen hederifolium*, both pink and white forms, which bloom at this time. When the cyclamen blossoms finish, the colorful foliage in dark green and silver carry on the show.

These companions are happily mingling with the rhodos. I am drawn to the dwarf and low growing rhodos, because they fit in so well with the overall scale and scheme of things in our garden. I much prefer the species but I have many hybrids as well. The species are *R. impeditum*, *keleticum*, *williamsianum*, *cephalanthum* and *psuedchrysanthum*. I have two campylogynum hybrids, at least I think they are hybrids, I got them from Tom Bowhan several years ago. One he named 'Ester Berry', which is very attractive, and 'Jade', which has dark shiny green foliage and a dark plum colored bell blossom, is one of my favorites. With these I have some of the 'birds' from Peter Cox. Centered between two bright blue hepaticas, is *R. 'Ptarmigan'*. The hepaticas blossom slightly before *Ptarmigan*, but they are still in full bloom when the pretty white bells of the rhodo open. 'Kim' another campylogynum hybrid is another favorite, even though Cox calls it muddy. *R. williamsianum* with its pink bells is between *R. 'Ptarmigan'* and 'Egret', great contrast.



Also in this bed we have *Trillium hibbersonii*, a dwarf species native to Vancouver Island, about 5cm (2in.) tall with pink blossoms on three-inch stems and *Cyclamen coum* which blossoms in the spring.

One other gentian which I have in the garden is *calycosa*, it grows to approximately thirty centimeters, has a large tubular, light blue blossom. This is a North American native, which is found from British Columbia to California growing in meadows,

In conclusion, think Gentians, there are over 400 species so there's quite a choice. Many different colors and sizes ranging from mat forming to the 100cm (36 in.) *G. Lutea*, which is yellow and the root, is used to flavor Schnapps. I have mentioned the ones that are most likely available and the easiest to grow and they are the natural companions to rhodos. You might have to search for them at specialty nurseries, one of which is Mt. Tahoma Nursery, but they are worth every effort. For more information read "Gentians" by Fritz Kohlein or "The Genus *Gentiana*" by Josef J. Halda



Three Winter Wonders

BY NADINE BOUDREAU

In late October at the Filberg Park, while hunched over raking leaves under some shrubs, I was overcome with the most wonderful fragrance. I looked above me, to find cute clusters of pink flowers...aahh, the *Viburnum x bodnantense* 'Dawn' was beginning to flower. This beautiful *Viburnum* hybrid is a deciduous shrub that grows to 10 feet high and 8 feet wide, in a vase shape. The leaves turn a burnished bronze color in fall before they drop. Then the flowers begin, bloom season can begin in October and continue until March! The flowers can be used for cut flowers indoors.

Viburnum x bodnantense is quite easy to grow. They flower best if placed in full sun, but partial shade is fine. Well drained and loamy soil is preferred, but will tolerate a wide range of soils except heavy clay soil. They become drought tolerant once established, and are hardy to Zone 4.

When picking a spot for a *Viburnum x bodnantense*, think of where it would bring maximum effect, along a path or by an entrance. Also, if you have an evergreen shrub behind the *Viburnum*, the flowers will stand out better.

The *Viburnum x bodnantense* is a cross of *Viburnum farreri* and *Viburnum grandiflorum*; it was made by Charles Lamont in 1933. He didn't think the plant was

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any better than the parent plants, so did not propagate them. In 1934 and 1935, the same cross was done at Bodnant Gardens in North Wales; hence the name. 'Dawn' was the first cultivar to be named. 'Deben' is another (not as fragrant) named in honor of the first propagator 'Charles Lamont'. This cultivar has darker pink flowers and larger flower clusters than 'Dawn'.

Propagation by softwood cuttings can be done in the early summer, or hardwood cuttings can be taken in early autumn.

Another welcome flower for the winter is Mahonia x media 'Charity'. This medium to large upright shrub has long pinnate leaves 20-24 inches long, and the leaflets are spiny. The flowers are deep yellow and are lightly fragrant. They come out of large terminal cluster and have long spreading, arching racemes. Mahonia x media 'Charity' is a cross between M. japonica and M. lomariifolia, the selected cultivar 'Charity' was raised by Slieve Donard Nursery in Northern Ireland in about 1950.



Mahonia x media 'Charity' prefers a semi-shade/shade area, in moist fertile soil. Hardy to Zone 6, the scented flowers are frost resistant. They are generally pest and disease free, a great evergreen for the mixed shrub border. They can become leggy over time, but respond well to pruning. To rejuvenate, plan on a three year period, taking a third of the plant down to 18 inches. Pinching out spent flowers of small plants will help keep them bushy. There are some lovely specimens along the ravine at the park.

The third little wonder is Jasminum nudiflorum, commonly known as winter jasmine. The plant, originally from China, was introduced to the west in the 1800's by Robert Fortune. This deciduous rambling shrub produces small yellow star-like blooms about an inch across, with six pedals as early as October. They will continue blooming throughout the winter. This plant is perfect for growing over a wall. If you want it to grow upright, you will have to give it support.

It flowers best if given a sunny spot, but will still flower in

partial shade. Tolerant of many soils, as long as it is well drained, it becomes drought resistant when established.

Pruning to keep tidy can be done after flowering. Flowering branches can also be cut for indoor decorating.

There is a Jasmine nudiflorum growing against the wall of the Filberg Lodge. All of these plants are deer resistant; the park is a true test for deer resistance!!

These plants are just a few of the many winter wonders. These flowers may be small, but are so welcoming in our dreary winters. Mother Nature planned these flowering times perfectly. If they were in summer with all the excess of strong colors and large showy blooms, we would not appreciate them as we do!



25 Years Young - A Look Back

In this, the 25th year of the North Island chapter, we begin a series of reprints of articles and letters reflecting on the growth and accomplishments of the club and its members. As the founding President of the Society back in February 1984, Harry Wright says....

"My training has taught me to look ahead, not back, but for the next while I'm going to look back over the past 25 years since we formed the NIRS. During this time we have welcomed many new members, developed a beautiful public Rhododendron garden, and toured gardens all over Vancouver Island, the lower mainland and Washington State.

Many people have been shown that rhodos require nothing special, just the basics, a lot like people. It has been the membership of this Society that has made these past many years so enjoyable. Gwen and I have met so many people on this trip and have developed many lasting friendships."

Next month we will be reprinting a welcome letter dated November 1984, from the President of the American Rhododendron Society. We also have an early letter of welcome and explanation from the ARS executive secretary. Following the ARS articles, we will be reprinting some pertinent information from past Newsletters and various letters and documents we might unearth. Anyone having any historic documents or photos is asked to contact myself or President Diana.

