



Newsletter



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Volume 28:7 October 2017

President's Message



What a busy time of year! See you on Wednesday!

Barrie Agar, President

**October Special Guest
Speaker: Garth Wedemire**

Wed, Oct 4 @ 7:30pm

Choosing Species

**Rhododendrons for Your
Garden**

(More details on page 2)

**CVRS Book Club First
Meeting:**

Wed, Oct 11 @ 2:00pm

(More details on page 8)

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Garth Wedemire

Guest Speaker

Wednesday, October 4, 2017 at 7:30 pm

“Choosing Species Rhododendrons for Your Garden”

As a 4-year-old, Garth was caught picking roses from the rectory garden in his hometown of Seaford Town, Jamaica. Explaining to the priest that the little bouquet was meant as a gift for the priest, Garth demonstrated early on that he was not only fascinated with plants and flowers, but also quick-witted and keen to share his love of plants with others.

He first joined the Vancouver Rhododendron Society in 1975, and remains a member to this day. He was also one of the founding members of the Fraser Valley Rhododendron Chapter. Garth is the recipient of two Bronze medals – one from the Vancouver Chapter and one from the Fraser Valley Chapter. He received a Silver Medal from the American Rhododendron Society in 2013. Relying on the knowledge he gained as a mathematics and computer studies teacher, Garth has been instrumental in developing and maintaining many of the websites of the chapters in District 1, and currently is the web-master for the District 1 site.

His love of the genus rhododendron is manifested in his plant-hunting travels to Nepal and China and his visits to many gardens throughout Canada, the U.S., New Zealand, and Great Britain. He is an avid photographer and chronicler of species rhododendrons as well as a Board member of the Rhododendron Species Foundation.



R. ambiguum

Photo: Garth Wedemire, April, 2006 Agassiz B.C.

He lives with his wife Sue in Comox, where he is always ready to set a new cutting, to create a new garden bed, to mentor anyone interested in growing rhododendrons and a myriad of other plants, and to read any book on plants and plant-hunters. As a life-long learner Garth is keen to learn from others, and as a life-long teacher he is always willing to share his practical know-how with anyone interested.

Letter *from the Editor*



Are we already beginning to change our minds about how much we longed for cooler and wetter weather? It is the month of October, and we have been harvesting and processing abundances from food gardens, and are now beginning to prepare our gardens for the winter resting season. Certainly, cleaning up and mulching are our primary fall tasks.

However, let's remember that as some growth dies back other growth just begins. New life begins now, in the propagation season. Ian Efford is looking for that eager individual to adopt the CVRS propagator for this next year. In this issue, you will read the full report of Ian's carefully monitored first year experience in initiating the **Propagation Project**, and you will have all the support you need to carry on this effort. What a nice title: Ms. Ali, Propagator!



Moe Massa with *R. sinogrande* in his Sooke area garden (May 2015)

Our October speaker, **Garth Wedemire**, will build on the information we gathered last month about our own Vancouver Island species garden, as he describes how to select the species for our own gardens. I am wondering which big leaf rhododendrons I might grow successfully in my garden. Will *R. sinogrande* like the one Moe Massa had grown from seed, and proudly pointed out in his garden several years ago, work in mine? What about *R. kesangiae*, which I purchased at the conference in Federal Way, Washington in spring?

This is also the time for scheduling enjoyable winter activities, such as gathering together to flip the pages of some extraordinary books in the **CVRS Library**. Plan to come for tea, coffee and light snacks on Wednesday afternoon at 2 pm on October 11th, 2017 at George and Verna's home at 3908 Cowichan Lake Road.

In honour of the life of a friend and fellow rhododendron lover, book devourer, and author, Norman Todd, the October issue of our newsletter features a selection from his book, *The Complete Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd*. His book will be also be the first, of perhaps more, book reviews as you, fellow CVRS members, are inspired by the works of other authors.

Most importantly, October is the month when we deliberately set aside time for gratitude. We are indeed blessed to live in the Cowichan Valley, **Canada's Provence**, where, admittedly, we have just struggled with a cold winter and a hot, dry summer. Relatively speaking, however, days of immense disaster have not fallen on us to test our endurance and force us to face and express what is actually most important in our lives. For all that, and so very much more, we must be deeply thankful!

Verna Buhler



R. kesangiae in Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, Federal Way Washington

The Propagator: Our First Year

Ian Efford

At the end of our first year, we have had only partial success with the propagator but, on the other hand, we have learned quite a lot and there are a number of recommendations that will result in greater success this coming year.

Procedure

Last autumn, about ten members took cuttings of their favourite rhododendrons and I contributed additional ones from the gardens of members or friends as well from as a couple of public gardens. The result was a full propagator with all the cutting potted up in groups of five in individual pots. The pots were made by cutting soft-sided 1gallon pots in half so that the new roots would develop near to the heating cables in the sand bed. We modelled our design on those of Ken Webb and Moe Massa which have the cuttings planted directly into the growing media in the propagator. As it was felt that a number of people using the propagator might result in the cuttings being disturbed by different individual, it was decided to use the pots so that each contributor planted their cuttings in their own pots. In the coming season, I think that we should abandon this approach and follow the usual set up of Ken and Moe.

The growing medium was based on an expanded block of coir to which was added half a bag of volcanic grit and half a bag of perlite. For this first run, we are thankful to Rose Rogan for donating the growing medium. The heater was set at 19-20C throughout the winter and only disconnected on April the first. A fine spray of water was given to the cuttings about twice a week from a hose.

Cuttings were re-potted into 1-gallon pots in June so that they did not experience a significant

temperature shock at this stage. All have been kept in a shade house under a tree canopy and watered regularly.

Results

We have about 150 rooted cuttings growing in the shade house. This is a rather low efficiency rate and there are a number of possible reasons why the number is not higher. These are:

In the propagator

1. The spraying regime was not consistent as the plants received a fair amount of water intermittently rather than continuously. This means that they could have lost water in the day or so before the next spraying. Usually, the sides of the propagator remained moist but the atmosphere may have experienced a lower humidity for a time.
2. Around the beginning of 2017, there was a patch about half a metre in diameter where all the plants went black and died. Those at either end of the growing bed were fine and I assume that this was caused by a fungus although there were no clear signs. It is suggested that there was a "hot spot" that caused these deaths but I can see no explanation why one area would have developed significantly more heat than the rest of the propagator as the heating cable was uniformly laid the whole length of the sand bed.

In the shade house

3. In transplanting the rooted cuttings from five cuttings in a half-gallon pot, to one per 1-gallon pot, we may have stressed the cuttings. The suggestion is that the normal procedure in nurseries is to go to 4" pots for a while and then repeat the process into a 1-gallon pot later. My understanding is that the Webb's plant directly into 1-gallon pots in order to avoid the additional work.
4. Another suggestion is that a regular watering of the 1-gallon pots may have resulted in them being over watered.

Plants died in the propagator and in the shade house and this resulted in a loss of about two thirds of all cuttings. A higher percentage of large leaf rhododendrons died than others.

Recommendations

1. This summer, I have been installing drip irrigation in half of our garden and my seedling shade house. I have found that in the shade house a fine intermittent spray can be achieved easily and for very little cost - less than \$100 where most of the cost is a timer.
2. We should return to the accepted arrangements where the cuttings are all planted in rows in the general bed in the propagator without the use of individual pots. It would just mean that anyone using the facility would have to be careful in planting and labelling in order not to disturb the neighbouring rows.
3. A wide range of cuttings should be contributed this coming season including a higher percentage of species.
4. Commercial greenhouse growers in the Netherland are installing LED lighting in their greenhouses that have very selected colour wave lengths. It has been shown that these specific waves length stimulate rooting and produce bushier and stronger plants. I have spent the last year in discussion with Philips experts in the Netherland and the U.S. They have recommended specific lights that would best suit the rooting of rhododendrons. I recommend that we install such lights in the propagator for next season.

Conclusion

We did not do as well as I hoped, but it was not a complete failure. We have about 150 new plants and I am sure that we will be able to achieve a much higher percentage next year.



2016 – 17 CVRS PROPAGATED PLANT LIST

Horizon Monarch	6	White Swan	3	Knaphill azalea	1
Helen's Child [Rosie's mix]	1	Blue and Gold	2	<i>R.pachysanthum</i> x Rothchildii	1
Double Date [Rosie's mix]	5	Annie Orange	1	[Joe Harvey Cross]	
Mrs T. H. Lowinsky	2	Haggard Anne	1	Helsinki U	5
Wild Ginger	4	Naomi Hope	1	Jingle Bells	2
Unk	1	Trail Blazer	1	<i>R. sutchuenense</i>	1
Unk	11	Aloha	1	Horizon Serenity	1
Tiana	10	Fabia	1	<i>R. morii</i>	1
Teddy Bear	5	<i>R.augustinii</i> x B. Simpson	3	English Rose	1
Starbright Champagne	2	R.minus v chapmanii	5	Anah Kruschke	4
Golden Gate	3	Arneson's Gem	7	Arnold Piper	5
King George	2	Azalea	1	Anna Rose Whitney	1
Naselle	9	<i>R. tschonoskii</i>	2		
Cherry Float	2	Bob's Blue	2	Total: 142	
<i>R. trichanthum</i>	3	<i>R. augustinii</i>	6	+ a few with neither name or source.	
Mrs J. E. Millias	2	Redwood	1	Cuttings were provided by Carrie Nelson, Joe Hudak, Sharon Tillie, David Annis, Bill Dumont, Ian Efford, Doug Kitts and Trudy Muiser.	
Gretzel	1	Airy Fairy	1	I apologize if I have missed anyone.	
Whitney's Late Orange	2	Ukn	2		
Snow Sprite	1	Grandma's Hat	6	Ian Efford	
Lem's Monarch	2				



R. tricanthum Photo: Hank Helm



R. 'Mrs T H Lowinsky' Photo: Garth Wedemire



BOOK REVIEW

By Verna Buhler

Norman Todd, *The Complete Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd*, 2011, Victoria Rhododendron Society

Norman Todd, was born October 11, 1930, in Scotland, and passed away just recently, on July 21, 2017. In the 1960s, Norm worked for the federal government while earning a post-graduate degree from Carleton University. He moved to Victoria in 1972 to oversee construction of the Institute of Ocean Sciences (Patricia Bay). He remained there as Chief of Management Services until his retirement in 1987. Norm helped establish the Victoria chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, “an organization he propagated as carefully as any cutting in his greenhouse.” As a “lover of rhododendrons, a devourer of books” and inspired by Victoria's rhododendrons, Norm “shared his passion without reservation: he published extensively, lectured and consulted, organized conventions, and charmed countless visitors over the years at Firwood Nursery”.

This charming and informative book is a collection of seventy-four articles written by Norman Todd. The first in this collection “The Ten Best Dwarfs for the Rock Garden” was written in October 1984, and the last, “A Spring Surprise” in April 2008.

Each article informs, as from a knowledgeable and experienced gardener, but presents as entertaining reading. While some readers exclusively choose informative reading material when selecting a book, some of us are drawn to choosing narratives, often fiction. To recall what I have read, I generally require the “story”. Thus, Norm Todd’s writing suits me perfectly!

There is a very good chance that, although I might wish to remember what a rare and lovely rhododendron *R. roxieanum* var. *oreonastes* is, I could search my brain files with deliberate effort without success. However, knowing that my “cat would sense the precise minute *roxieanum* var. *oreonastes* crosses [my] lot line” certainly helps me file and access this information. Norm goes on to comically explain this “reactionary feline phenomenon” of “hallucinogenic rapturous paroxysms” and the corresponding effects

on his own plants. He leaves the reader with a question of “[w]hich comes first, cats or rhododendrons?”

On the advice of Mark Twain in the second Forward of this book, I am monitoring my reading indulgences so as not to “unwisely overdose” and thereby have had no issues with nausea. Every article that I have read so far has been a delightful and enlightening reading experience. I definitely look forward to another sixty-nine sessions of learning by means of Norm Todd’s wit and wisdom. This writing is so effective that I could permanently absorb wisdoms, even while enjoying a glass of wine or two in front of the fire!



R. roxieanum var. *oreonastes*

Photo: Garth Wedemire, 2005

Note: *This book is currently not in the CVRS Library collection, but it became part of my personal collection when I became the fortunate owner having outbid all other potential owners at the silent auction at the December 2016 Christmas Dinner. I could probably share it once in a while, but really it should become a permanent and readily available book in the CVRS Library.*



FIRST MEETING:

Wednesday, October 11, 2017
at 2 pm

Enjoy an afternoon of browsing thru the CVRS Library; chatting over coffee, tea, and snacks; sharing stories

Verna and George's

3908 Cowichan Lake Road

Duncan, B.C. (250) 748-8889

Last Year's Surprises

Norman A. Todd, October 1991

It's therapeutic to stand back from all of the cataclysmic geopolitical events and reflect on some of the things that have been surprises in the last twelve months --- things that happened in our own little bit of dirt right under our own little noses and caused us to stop and wonder.



R. edgeworthii Photo: Susan Lightburn

The first noticeable thing about last year was the severity of the winter. Some plants that complainingly struggles through and survived the effects of February 1989 took the easy way out in January 1990 and called it quits. Still a few that looked as though they had made the final decision had second thoughts and have pushed up new growth from the roots. The *R. edgeworthii*

has done this and although not vigorous is proof of that strange power of survival. A *R. davidsonianum*, which had never flowered but had reached a height of over 6 feet, which was given up for dead in '89, recovered to reach 8 feet and was mourned again this spring. August saw it pushing up new shoots. Twice a cryogenic phoenix!

The message here is not to give up on an apparently dead plant too quickly. Even a year after apparent death the resurrection can take place. Conversely, things that appeared to have survived have recently turned up their toes. A mature 'Unknown Warrior' has suc-

cumbed; its only use now is to be cut up for Margaret Buffam's membership tags.

This was the case where a plant had its roots swamped in the heavy rains of early winter --- there was standing water followed by a hard freeze. It croaked --- no oxygen.



R. edgeworthii Photo: Garth Wedemire

With roots deprived of oxygen for several weeks, other smaller plants have also passed away this summer. Some of these were *R. johnsoneanum*; some were forms of *R. arbo-retum* and some were the big leafed ones like *R. arizelum*.



R. falconerii

Photo: Garth Wedemire

Surprisingly, a good form of *R. falconerii* lost all its leaves but has come back and looks in excellent health. One 20-year-old *R. sidereum* is clearly brain dead but has put out one miniscule shoot from the old truck. The Duchess of Montrose's rhododendron, *R. montroseanum* alias *mollyanum*, had its 16 inch leaves freeze to a tobacco brown, which then fell off. It has now developed new, half-size leaves and with no more unpleasant surprises, could be back to its usual voluptuous self next year. (it didn't make it.)



R. falconerii

Photo: Garth Wedemire

It is a really serious whammy to broad-leaved evergreens when they lose their leaves. These plants store their nutrients in their leaves --- deciduous ones in their twigs and branches. If the roots can't supply the nutrients they draw them down from these folial reserves. Evergreen rhododendrons are actively growing all year round, as long the ground is not frozen. Work at Oregon State University showed that winter feeding was beneficial, so I now feed 5 times a year starting in November, then in January, March, April and the last one on Canada Day. It is true that the winter applications are wasteful as most of the fertilizer is leached or washed away. If you still have some of the 10-8-6 special formulation, which is available from the club, perhaps you should give it a try starting in November. Small amounts are adequate for the three early feedings.

I get surprised every summer at how hot and dry things get. Every summer I realize just



R. 'Vulcan' Photo: Coen Zonneveld

what a rotten place Victoria is for growing plants whose provenance has wet, wet monsoon summers. Victoria is a summer desert. Vancouver is a much better place to grow rhododendrons, but we get brainwashed here in Victoria by Vancouver forecasters who feel that they have to prove their worth by catering exclusively to cancer-seeking sunbathing Victoria apartment dwellers with their constant apologies for anything other than blistering sunshine.

Well, to some of the good surprises. 'Vulcan' was a knockout. This was a plant hat I had dismissed as plebian, unrefined, couth-less, and good only for \$1.49 day. I have never propagated it and was almost proud that I didn't stock it in the nursery. What prejudice! This year it took me three goes to deadhead it. On the last effort I counted the open trusses --- 246. So this plant, which is probably 16 years old and about 6 feet through, had more than 600 trusses. Each truss conservatively has 12 flowers. So there were over 7000 flowers on it! That made for what Ed Sullivan used to call a "really big shew".

One of the other great shows of the garden was 'Cinnkeys'. I'm afraid that such a splendid profligacy will signal a terminal climax. It started blooming in April, which is a month before it usually does and it still has some blossom --- five months of flowering. It is one of the most trying plants to deadhead under normal circumstances --- this year impossible. The *cin-nabarinum*-type multi-pedicelled inflorescences have tiny seedpods that defy pulling and have to be pinched off, which usually results in pinching off the new growth. Excellent vision is needed to do a good job, but I have to do this with moderately impaired vision because if I wear my bifocals, the distance at this precise



R. 'Cinnkeys' Photo: Dennis McKiver

nipping range coincides with the line where neither the reading nor the long distance part of the lens is effective.

Maybe this is 'Cinnkeys' last hurrah, but I think not. Some of the new leaves are very small and some of the branches that held the 30 or more flowers are dead, but I think it will pull through. I have taken quite a few cuttings. Small plants need some coddling. I don't know which form of *keysii* was used in the cross with

R. cinnibarinum to make 'Cinnkeys', but some forms of *R. keysii* are definitely very, very tender.

The other surprising thing (to some people) about 'Cinnkeys' is that it is a rhododendron and not a honeysuckle. It is one of the more interesting of the taller lepidote hybrids. Another interesting one that surprises me every year is one I brought back from Scotland from Cox's. I grow it as *flavidum* x 'Lady Roseberry' and I thought it was a cross that Peter Cox had made. But he attributes it to Lester Brandt so when I brought it in I was only returning it to North America. Cox was intrigued by this cross, as 'Lady Roseberry' is a tetraploid hybrid and was consequently thought to be a difficult parent. Brandt evidently called this cross 'Flip' but it had not been registered. It is a narrow upright grower. It is surprising in the flowers not being tubular shaped, as one

would expect from the parentage. The colour is a curious mixture of pink and yellow, which seems to me to be crying out for tenancy in the traditional English country garden.

I have a small plant of a hybrid called 'Burnaby Sunset', which is the same cross. This has not flowered for me yet but evidently caused quite a stir when its peachy-cream flowers were shown in Seattle some years ago. Surprise happens everyday; a garden is not static --- the weeds most certainly are not. Currently I'm surprised that the plants are getting by with so little water, but don't be surprised if you hear me complaining about fertilizer that's been washed away due to too much rain, or about unseasonable temperatures. One of the easiest things for me to do is give the specifications for an ideal climate - -- not a surprising thing at all for a gardener.



Many hands
make light work.
John Heywood

From: Arthur & Susan Lightburn <slightbu@shaw.ca>

Subject: Milner Species Garden

To: Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society members:

Fall rains at last, much needed. The Rhododendron Species Garden has progressed nicely and is scheduled to officially open late April or early May next spring.

If you can spare some time, there are many jobs to be done this fall: mulch spreading, fence building, plant digging, moving and re-planting, etc. Please send me an email or phone (250) 468-7516, and we will put you on our volunteer list and keep you informed of the help requirements.



CHEQUE or CASH



That is all David Annis, our volunteer Membership Chair, is hoping for on Wednesday, October 4th, 2017.

David would wear a sunny face all month if we came prepared with either cheques made out to CVRS for \$45, or handed him tightly rolled wads of cash for the exact amount of \$45.



THANKS!

Our dear friends, Joe and Irene Hudak have decided to remain at their beautiful property at Bare Point for a while longer. That means that Joe would like to continue propagating some more rhododendrons and azaleas. He was wondering if any of the members, who will not be using the white pails that he uses for this purpose, would be kind enough to bring them to Wednesday's meeting, or arrange another time and place with him where he could pick them up. He is eager to begin the propagation process as soon as possible!! That is exciting news for the club!



IN MEMBERS' GARDENS

Rich colours and fragrances of fall



Tricyrtis hirta

- "Toad Lily" loves shady locations



Verbena bonariensis

- Fragrant, tall perennial
- Loved by bees, butterflies, hummingbirds
- A favourite of Joe and Irene's



Actaea

- Very Fragrant
- Moist, part shady
- Bold dark



Colchicum autumnale

- Fall blooms without leaves "Naked Lady"
- Poisonous
- Prolific in Sandra's garden

***Vitis vinifera* 'Siegerrebe'**

- Wine grape, ready for harvesting



2017-18 Executive

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Past President: Carrie Nelson

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Membership Chair: David Annis

Directors at Large:
Diane Allen, Alan Campbell, Ron Martin, Ali Morris

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale

Tea: Judeen Hendricksen

Raffle: Hilda Gerrits

Club Liaison: Alan Campbell

Library: TBA (due to change of Library venue)

Membership Recruitment: Peter Lewis

Program Co-ordinator: Vacant

History: Ian Efford

Garden/Bus Tours: Vacant

CV Garden Fair: The Team

Facility Liaison: Roy Elvins

Christmas Party: The Team



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American
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April 2018

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