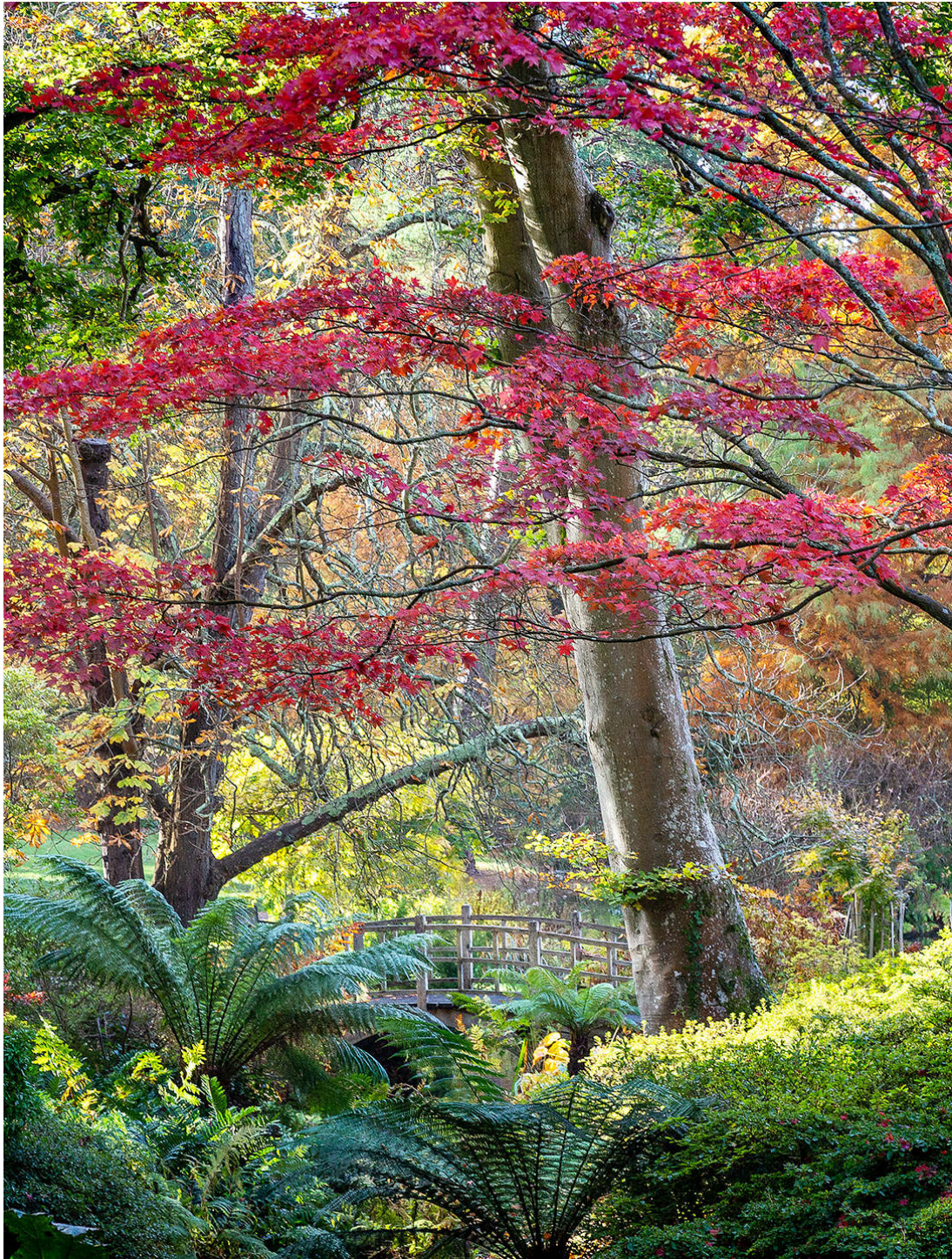


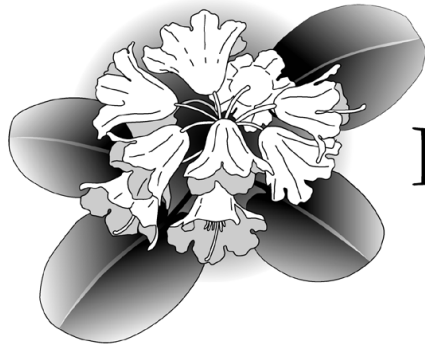
# AtlanticRhodo

[www.AtlanticRhodo.org](http://www.AtlanticRhodo.org)

Volume 43: Number 3

November 2019





# Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society

## Our Mission

ARHS supports and promotes the development and exchange of expertise and material relating to the practice of creating and maintaining year-round garden landscapes featuring rhododendrons and other plants.

## Inside this Issue

The President's Column

Deadheading Rhododendrons Don Wallace

Remembering Bill Wilgenhoff

A Seed Growing Primer Sharon Bryson

A Conversation with Christopher Clarke Interview by John Brett

Exbury Gardens 1919 – 2019 Lionel de Rothschild

Hartwig Schepker - Trends in Gardening with Rhododendrons in Germany Review by Bob Howard

Photos in articles are by the authors, unless otherwise identified.

## Membership

### Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society.

The current membership period is September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020. The membership fee is \$20.00 if paid between September 1, 2019 and November 30, 2019, and \$30.00 after Nov. 30, 2019. For benefits see ARHS website [www.atlanticrhodo.org](http://www.atlanticrhodo.org)

**American Rhododendron Society:** ARHS is a chapter in District 12 of the American Rhododendron Society. Combined ARHS and ARS membership cost is \$74.00 Canadian. For benefits see [www.rhododendron.org](http://www.rhododendron.org)

Cheques, made payable to Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society should be sent to **Rebecca Lancaster, 22 Walton Dr. Halifax, NS B3N 1E4**

Please include name, address with postal code, e-mail address and telephone number, for organizational purposes only.

*AtlanticRhodo* is the Newsletter of the Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society. We welcome your comments, suggestions, articles, photos and other material for publication. Send all material to the editor.

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Cover Photo: Autumn view from Mrs. Lionel's Seat, Exbury Gardens, Hampshire, UK. (photo ©Cathryn Baldock).



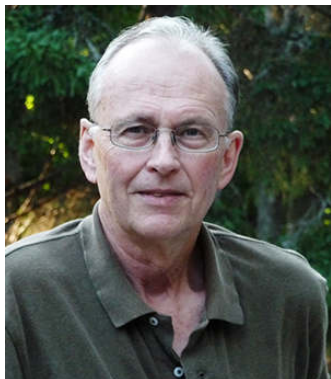
## Calendar of Events

ARHS meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month, from September to May, at 7:30 p.m. usually in the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History Auditorium, 1747 Summer St., Halifax, unless otherwise noted. Paid parking is available in the Museum lot. We welcome anyone sharing our interest in plants and gardens.

- September 3** **The Art of Gardening at Chanticleer.** A talk by Joe Henderson, long time horticulturist and garden designer at Chanticleer Gardens, located near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and celebrated as one of the most romantic, imaginative and exciting public gardens in America. His talk will be based on the book he co-authored, **The Art of Gardening - Design Inspiration and Innovative Planting Techniques from Chanticleer.**
- September 7** **Master Gardeners One Day Workshop with Joe Henderson.** For more information on attending this workshop with Joe, master horticulturist from Chanticleer Gardens, please get in touch with Jim Sharpe at 902 425 6312 or email: sharpe@ns.sympatico.ca. Also, learn more about this exciting opportunity at Atlantic Master Gardeners Association website: <http://atlanticmastergardeners.ca/html/events.html>
- October 7** **Steele Lecture: Trends in gardening with Rhododendrons in Germany.** An eye-opening presentation by Dr. Hartwig Schepker, director of the 46 hectare (114 acre) Rhododendron Park and Botanic Garden in Bremen, Germany, where he is in charge of the world's second largest rhododendron collection. Dr. Schepker will talk about the many exciting research projects the garden undertakes, including the breeding program to develop both autumn-flowering rhododendron hybrids, and new foliage forms and colours.
- October 8** **Exploring Rhododendrons in Arunachal Pradesh -** Hartwig Schepker will give his second talk at **7:00pm at the BMO Community Room, Central Library, Halifax.** He has made four expeditions to Arunachal Pradesh, a remote and little explored part of Northeastern India that was closed to foreigners until 2000. As well as recounting his adventures, he will be showing photos of many unknown or rarely seen rhododendron species in flower, as well as some very beautiful landscapes.
- November 5** **Landscape Design and Plant Choices at the Lightfoot and Wolfville Winery.** Nina Newington, plantswoman, landscape designer and author, last spoke to our club about her collaboration with Beverly McClare at Tangled Gardens in Grand Pre. This time around she'll be offering insights on the plantings and site design at the new Lightfoot & Wolfville winery, a couple of miles down the road.
- December 3** **Annual ARHS Christmas Party.** Please bring up to five (5) of your images on topics horticultural – but no more than five! – to share with your fellow members. All picture files should be in .jpg format and at full resolution (original file size, not compressed).
- Jan. 7, 2020** **Gardens of Historic Interest in Nova Scotia.** Anita Jackson, a longtime ARHS member and Certified Landscape Designer, will show images and talk about the history of various gardens and other designed landscapes in our region.
- Feb. 4** **Preview of Advance Order Plant Sale and of Tissue Culture Sale.** Lynn Rotin, ARHS organizer of our Advance Order Plant Sale, will show pictures and describe many of the plants available in this year's sales. It's the perfect opportunity to make your garden wishlist for the coming spring!
- March 3** **A Garden Traveler in Brazil.** Cora Swinamer, ARHS past president and garden designer, will introduce us to some very impressive gardens in Brazil, including that of the renowned landscape architect, Roberto Burle Marx.
- April 7** **Success with Growing Plants from Seeds.** A panel discussion with four seasoned ARHS plantspeople who will share their experiences and their methods for germinating seeds and growing them on. Come to this meeting and find out how to succeed with this most satisfying and economical method of propagation. Panel participants TBA.
- May 5** **Member to member plant sale.** An annual event at our May meeting. If you are a member and you have extra plants to sell, this is your chance to do so. Please arrive at 7pm to secure a table and get set up. And for other members, here's a chance to purchase some terrific plants at very reasonable prices.
- June** **Garden Tour and Potluck.** Date, Time and Locations to be announced after the new year.

## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by John Brett



Because not everyone was in attendance at our AGM on November 5, my column is a summary of my annual report delivered to the membership.

It's been a very busy year for your board of directors. As with many not-for-profit groups, the board carries out the day to day business of the society, as well as the longer term planning. This last year, the board met seven times between Nov. 18/18 and Nov. 5/19. An especially notable meeting was hosted by Syd and Sandy Dumaresq at their Chester home on a lovely June evening. Sandy prepared a delicious meal, while Syd toured the board around the harbour in his motor launch. Such are the perks of being an ARHS director – a modest reward, considering the time and effort involved, most of it behind the scenes, often unglamorous, but so necessary to the operation and improvement of the society. Of course, there are also projects and activities with a glossier and more public face. A very brief listing of both kinds hardly does them all justice:

Secretary Jean Henshall-White mastered a program called 'mail chimp', which facilitates email communications with the membership.

Membership coordinator, Rebecca Lancaster, has been making improvements to the membership spreadsheet and to membership data tracking.

Past-president, Sheila Stevenson, with assistance from Director-Education, Bob Howard, and ARHS member, Stephen Archibald, completed the Kentville Interpretive Panels project. Three large interpretive panels are now installed on the grounds at the Kentville Agricultural Research Station. They interpret the plantings there, as well as telling the story of rhododendron culture in Atlantic Canada. This wonderful asset, executed at a very high level, was collaboration between the ARHS and the research station, which is part of the federal government department, Agri-Food Canada.

Over the past year, our Director-Education, Bob Howard, curated a diverse range of outstanding speakers who came to us from all over the horticultural world. Some of the presentations were collaborations with other groups, including the Rock Garden Society, Champlain Garden Society, Master Gardener's Association, the Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens, and the Halifax Public Library.

Chris Hopgood continues to do great work with our outreach gardens: Stratford Way Park, the John T Meagher garden at Regatta Point, and the Kentville Research Station Rhododendrons. Our work on these diverse sites further strengthens our good name and reputation for gardening expertise throughout the region.

Trudy Campbell has been managing a different kind of out-reach on our behalf. She continues to administer two ARHS passionate plants person awards – one is bestowed upon a Dalhousie student, the other on a King's Tech student. Again, both awards strengthen our good name within the regional gardening community.

A Halifax Hospice Fundraiser, led by ARHS member, Jane Rostek, was another community focused initiative that put us in the public eye. For this, the ARHS contributed \$250 towards sponsoring a special screening of a film on Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf. It was held at the Music Room last March. The ARHS set up an information table manned by our own Syd Dumaresq. This effort recruited several new members to the society.

In order to elevate our profile within the American Rhododendron Society, of which we are a chapter within district 12, I attended two ARS conventions this year: Philadelphia in the spring and Parksville, BC, in the fall. As the district director I was representing the three chapters within district 12. I was also promoting attendance at the ARS Spring Convention 2021, to be held in Nova Scotia.

And that's the really big news for this year. The ARHS is hosting the ARS 2021 Spring Convention, to be held in early June, 2021, at the Old Orchard Inn in Wolfville. This is a very big undertaking. There will be garden tours, a plant sale, a top notch speaker's program, flower truss displays, a photo show, entertainment events, and more. We can expect 250-300 to attend, and we are hoping for a good showing from our own local membership. In charge of this undertaking are two very able co-chairs: Jim Sharpe and Rebecca Lancaster. Many hands are going to be needed, and I encourage everyone to volunteer. Our membership coordinator is Lynn Rotin; she'd love to hear from you.

The newsletter continues to provide a diverse range of articles from inside and outside of our region. It aims to be entertaining, informative and – at times, we hope – inspirational. To this end, we have understandings that allow us to reprint notable articles that appear in *The Journal of the American Rhododendron Society*, *The Rhododendron Species Foundation Yearbook*, and other publications. A very special thanks goes to Sterling Levy, who has been doing the newsletter layout for many, many years. His vast expertise makes this the attractive publication it is.

We continue to hold plant sales and operate a seed exchange. Our goal has always been to provide plants that are unusual and hard to find. This has become a challenge, partly because the local nurseries are so much better! But also, seed exchange contributions and acquisitions are down, plant sale profits are down, and our traditional suppliers have, in some cases, considerably narrowed their offerings. We also hear from many older gardeners that their gardens are full! To counter this trend, we have renewed our own propagation efforts. This includes working with various propagators in the Maritimes and elsewhere. One of these is ARHS member, Jack Looye, now living in Centreville, Nova Scotia. Currently we have well over 1500 cuttings being rooted at Van Veen Nursery in Oregon. Jack will be growing these on when they come back to us as small plants. Many are terrific species and hybrids, proven performers in our region, and hardly available any more. Most are destined for the ARS 2021 convention plant sale. However, if we're successful with these, we hope to do more propagation in future years.

Another challenge faced this last year has been the setting of annual membership dues. We have two classes of membership: a local ARHS membership set at \$20/year, and a combined ARS/ARHS membership set at \$74/year. The latter fee was raised a year ago, and we have heard complaints that it is now too high. On the other hand, the local membership is on the low side, given the scope of our activities and the benefits the society offers to members. The board will be considering an adjustment to these fees early in the new year. Speaking personally, I am a strong supporter of our affiliation with the ARS and would like to encourage combined membership. For this reason I'd like to see a lowering of the combined membership fee. However, this is only my personal view; any change to our fee structure is a board decision.

Several members of our board resigned this year: Dennis Crouse, Ben Westhauser, and Bob Howard. Many thanks to them for their valuable services to the society. Bob has done an exceptional job on developing the monthly speakers program, and Dennis the same on the tissue culture plant sale.

Before closing off my report, I want to single out several more of our wonderful volunteers: Lynn Rotin is doing terrific work on the members' plant sales, the spring garden tour, and as volunteer coordinator. Sandy Dumaresq – our treasurer – is doing a terrific job managing more and more line items as the ARS 2021 Spring Convention expenses start to roll in. Sharon Bryson continues to manage the seed exchange with an apparent ease that belies the time and effort involved. She is particularly in my mind now, as her partner, ARHS member Bill Wilgenhoff, passed away recently. Many of us have favorite Wilgenhoff rhodos and azaleas in our gardens, and we will think of Bill whenever we admire them. Our condolences go out to Sharon.

Our librarian, Bony Conrad continues to ably manage, expand and improve our book collection. Recent additions are: *Dream Plants for the Natural Garden*, by Hank Gerritson; *Art of Gardening* by Piet Oudolf; *Design, Inspiration & Innovative Planting Techniques from Chanticleer* by R. William Thomas. Ken Cox's new book, *Woodland Gardening*, is back ordered. All books in the library are available for loan through Bony. The easiest time to borrow them is before or after our monthly meetings.

So it's been a busy year. And it will be a busy year to come. The ARS 2021 Spring Convention is going to stretch all of us. We are fortunate to have a terrific group on the board. But they are going to need lots of help - volunteers for the ARS 2021 convention, and to sustain our regular activities. So please talk to Lynn Rotin and find out how you can participate.

Over a period spanning close to half a century, the ARHS has grown into more than a local garden society. We are involved in projects that reach far beyond our own backyards. Local by nature – yes - but with a community and even, I would suggest, a global perspective. As president, I feel it's an honour and a privilege to play a part in such a worthy organisation. And I look forward to working with you – our members - to further build upon this legacy. ☺



One of the ARHS interpretive panels newly installed at the Agri-Food Canada Research Station, Kentville, Nova Scotia. (photo John Brett)



A very warm welcome to our new members who have joined ARHS since February .

Marie Axler,  
Wenda Bennett,  
Bridgewater Garden Club  
(Susan Barrett),  
Kelly Grant,  
Amy Soosaar Joseph,  
Pauline Kemp,  
Dr Fazal Rahman,  
Tara Ralph,  
Susannah Starnes,  
Cynthia and Xi Wong,

Halifax  
Waverley  
  
Bridgewater  
Hammonds Plains  
Dartmouth  
Halifax  
Bridgewater  
Hammonds Plains  
Lunenburg  
Hubley

*Are your dues paid up to date?* Our records show that some members are not. If you are a local ARHS member please consider renewing as a dual member of both the ARHS and ARS (American Rhododendron Society). This gives access to the ARS Journal, a full colour magazine published quarterly, as well as access to the ARS seed exchange, ARS conventions, and other benefits. Please see page 2 for information on payment methods. And our website: <http://atlanticrhodo.org/about-us/membership-info/>

## Deadheading Rhododendrons

by Don S. Wallace

*Atlantic Rhodo would like to thank the author and the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society for kind permission to reprint this article. – John Brett, editor*

Every year, after they bloom, rhododendrons are covered with seed heads, which replace the flower trusses. I am always asked if they should be removed, and my answer is "yes, if you want more flowers". In theory, if the plant puts its energy into seed production then fewer flower buds are created for next year's bloom. This theory was validated by an interesting experiment done by Oregon's Portland Parks Department. One large rhododendron was selected in the park that always bloomed reliably. After blooming, only the bottom half of the plant was deadheaded, leaving the top half untouched. The following spring the bottom half, previously deadheaded, flowered heavily, while the top half had few flowers. To confirm these results they repeated the experiment, only this time they deadheaded the top half of the plant, leaving the bottom half untouched. The next spring, as suspected, the top half of the plant

flowered heavily, while the bottom half did not.

So, while this experiment was great proof that deadheading is an effective practice for those wanting more flowers, there is the question: "What about my 50-year-old rhody that flowers with abandon every year with no deadheading?" My only answer to that question would be that some varieties, once mature, will bloom very reliably every year even without deadheading. In such cases, my advice would be to deadhead those plants that can be done easily. When they get too tall, don't bother, as there are many other constructive gardening chores that can fill up your time. ☺



Removing seed heads.



Deadhead this Rhododendron after blooming? Absolutely not!



Deadhead this Rhododendron after blooming? Yes I would.

## Remembering Bill Wilgenhof (1921 – 2019)



(photo: Sharon Bryson)

### Ken MacAulay, Liverpool, NS.

I joined the ARHS in the mid '90s. My first visit to The Willow Garden in Maryvale, near Antigonish, was for an annual garden tour and pot luck, at which Bill told his visitors that he needed some more space for planting and that they could have any of his rhododendrons growing on a certain plot behind his shed. In the ensuing enthusiasm,

members were digging up plants energetically, and the result was labels lost or trampled. Consequently, many of the plants which came home with me had questionable labels or no labels. Many of these plants went on to establish a sort of hedge, now around 8-foot high, along part of my property. Most appear to have *R. fortuneii* as one parent.

Bill invited me to visit several times after that pot luck. As I had a small truck at the time, he seemed determined that it never come back empty to the “banana belt”, here in the Liverpool region. Bill was a prodigious seed grower and I was always amazed to see his basement, crammed with a variety of seedlings, not just rhododendrons and azaleas, under batteries of lights. He was always generously insisting that I try this or that. Of course, no visit was complete without a sampling of Bill’s wines, usually accompanied by a story or two.

I don’t have many of Bill’s “named” hybrids, but many of his seedlings are growing in my yard, which has become a bit of a jungle in recent years. (I’m told I created a monster!) Bill’s many creations have found homes in countless Nova Scotia gardens, and I’m sure his abilities and generosity will be long remembered.

### Sheila Stevenson, long-time ARHS director. Fergusons Cove, NS

It was long ago, but I remember the sense of relief at the time when Sharon and Bill Wilgenhof took on our Seed Exchange. I had no idea: who were these people living near Antigonish and willing to do so much work to promote propagation by seed?

I remember the ‘dig-in, dig-out’ pot luck hosted by Sharon and Bill that Ken Macauley writes about, when quite a crowd saw, for the first time, The Willow Garden and Bill in his element. Then we were able to appreciate that seeds were clearly the thing for Bill. It was clear as well that Sharon was not going to discourage his passion.

The blurb about their presentation, “**Growing Rhododendrons from Seed**”, for the November 2004 ARHS meeting, says: *Bill and Sharon’s garden near Antigonish, ‘The Willow Garden’, is filled with rhodos in all*

*stages of growth. They have been very generous, giving many seedlings to members.*

The blurb for their March 5, 2012 presentation eight years later, “**Yes, you can grow that from seed**”, goes into more detail: *They (Bill and Sharon) will show us some of the plant forms they’ve grown from seed over the years. The wide assortment has a strong lean towards Rhododendrons and Azaleas, but will include many trees, shrubs, and perennials... ARHS members Sharon and Bill are long-time ‘seedaholics’...*

Bill was one of those seed people, enchanted by the magic of seeds transformed into plants, who loved to share the enchantment. My co-gardener, Stephen Archibald, and I cherish the two Wilgenhof-grown ARS-seed-exchange rhododendrons we brought back to Rockburn from that pot luck as much for their association with joy and friendship as for the pleasures of the plants themselves.

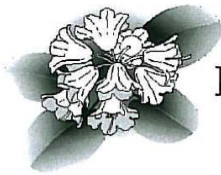
Search the ARHS website for “Bill Wilgenhof” or “The Willow Garden” to see how often those names come up: <http://atlanticrhodo.org/?s=bill+wilgenhof> and <http://atlanticrhodo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Oct04ars.pdf>

### Jamie Ellison

I’m sitting in my basement sowing copious amounts of rhododendron seed and reflecting on why I get such enjoyment from such a tedious task. One of the last packets on my table is an azalea mix donated by Bill Wilgenhof in 2019. I started to think about how many packets of seed Bill has donated and sowed over the years. The results of his efforts are evident throughout Atlantic Canada and beyond. In my own garden I have a beautiful *R. calophytum* that came from him, and several other plants he’s given me over the years. I am sure this has already been said, but his generous spirit will live on in his plants and in people’s gardens, for many years to come.

I recall my first visit to The Willow Garden during peak Rhododendron bloom a few years back. Tim Amos and I were on our way back from a conference. Bill always had time for visitors and treated both novices and experienced gardeners in a respectful way. Both Tim and I were speechless when we saw what was growing in this challenging climate. I admired the endless rows of *Cornus kousa* and tree peony seedlings arranged in a very orderly and considered manner. We also were in awe as we watched him whizzing around on his tractor and generously digging up clumps of *Clematis recta* for us, while talking about his methods for successful propagation from seed. As we came around a corner, we were both taken by one Rhododendron that stood out from the group. The truss was large, and each flower had a freckled blotch. Bill told us it was called *Rhododendron ‘Sproeten’*. We both thought it an unusual name until he told us ‘Sproeten’ means “freckles” in Dutch. A perfect name for such a lovely plant. The remainder of our trip back home we talked about Bill, his youthful energy, and the fantastic setting he and Sharon had created.

Thank you Bill, you were an inspiration to me, and to many of us. ☺



**Atlantic  
Rhododendron &  
Horticultural Society**

**The Atlantic Rhododendron &  
Horticultural Society (ARHS) &  
American Rhododendron Society  
(ARS) District 12**

[www.atlanticrhodo.org](http://www.atlanticrhodo.org)

Join our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/groups/340130989363045/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/340130989363045/)

**ARHS Annual Membership – September 2019 – August 2020**

	Amount	
Local Membership in ARHS (with e-mail newsletter) (after Nov. 30 <b>add</b> \$10 late fee )	<b>\$20.00</b>	<input type="text"/>
<u>OR:</u> Combined Membership: ARHS/ARS (ARHS = \$20; ARS = \$54 (\$40 US))	<b>\$74.00</b>	<input type="text"/>
Printed Newsletter mailed 3 times per year (b/w with colour front and back) <b>additional</b>	<b>\$21.00</b>	<input type="text"/>
Associate Membership in <b>additional</b> ARS Chapter (Must be member of ARS):	<b>\$10.00</b>	<input type="text"/>
Chapter Name:		
	<b>Total</b>	<input style="border: 2px solid black;" type="text"/>

If making payment by cheque, please complete this form and return with cheque made payable to ARHS to:  
**Rebecca Lancaster, 22 Walton Drive, Halifax, NS B3N 1X7**

Payment can also be made by e-transfer or Paypal to [atlanticrhodo@gmail.com](mailto:atlanticrhodo@gmail.com)

If paying electronically, please complete a **copy** of this form and return it as an email attachment to:  
[arhsmembership@gmail.com](mailto:arhsmembership@gmail.com)

NEW MEMBERSHIP  RENEWAL  (Please complete all information)

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

POSTAL CODE: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to volunteer with the ARHS Board, programs and/or activities? Yes

Volunteer interest: Sales  Garden Tours  Programs  Board  Gardens  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in being mentored by an experienced ARHS member? Yes

Are you interested in being a gardening mentor? Yes  Location \_\_\_\_\_

**Rhododendrons Down East in Nova Scotia: American Rhododendron Society 2021  
Spring Conference**

**June 3, 2021 - June 6, 2021**



**American Rhododendron Society**  
 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
**20/20**  
**VISION**  
 ARS75.org  
*Looking forward, reflecting back*  
**Portland-Vancouver, April 29-May 3, 2020**



*You're invited to the celebration!*



**World-renowned Keynote Speakers**  
 Kenneth Cox • Jens Nielsen • Steve Hootman • Juliana Medeiros  
 Lionel de Rothschild • Steve Krebs • Valerie Soza • & more!

**Tours to the Northwest's  
 Outstanding Gardens & Nurseries**

**April 29-May 3, 2020, Hosted by ARS District 4  
 Heathman Lodge, Vancouver, WA.**

**20/20 Vision international speakers to include:**

- Kenneth Cox from Glendoick in Scotland
- Lionel de Rothschild from Exbury in England
- Jens Nielsen, plant explorer from Denmark
- Steve Krebs and Juliana Medeiros from the Holden Arboretum
- Steve Hootman from the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden
- Valerie Soza from the University of Washington
- and more.

**Garden tours to include:**

- Crystal Springs Botanical Garden
- Cecil & Molly Smith Garden
- Portland Japanese Garden
- Lan Su Chinese Garden
- Iseli Nursery
- Woodburn Nursery
- The Stewart Garden (formerly Dover Nursery)
- Sebright Gardens

**Plant sale, photo contest, poster session, special clinics, plus:**

- **Around the Sound *pre-tour***
- **Willamette Valley and Oregon Coast Excursion *post-tour***

[ars75.org](http://ars75.org)

**Registration opens December 2, 2019**

# A SEED GROWING PRIMER

by Sharon Bryson

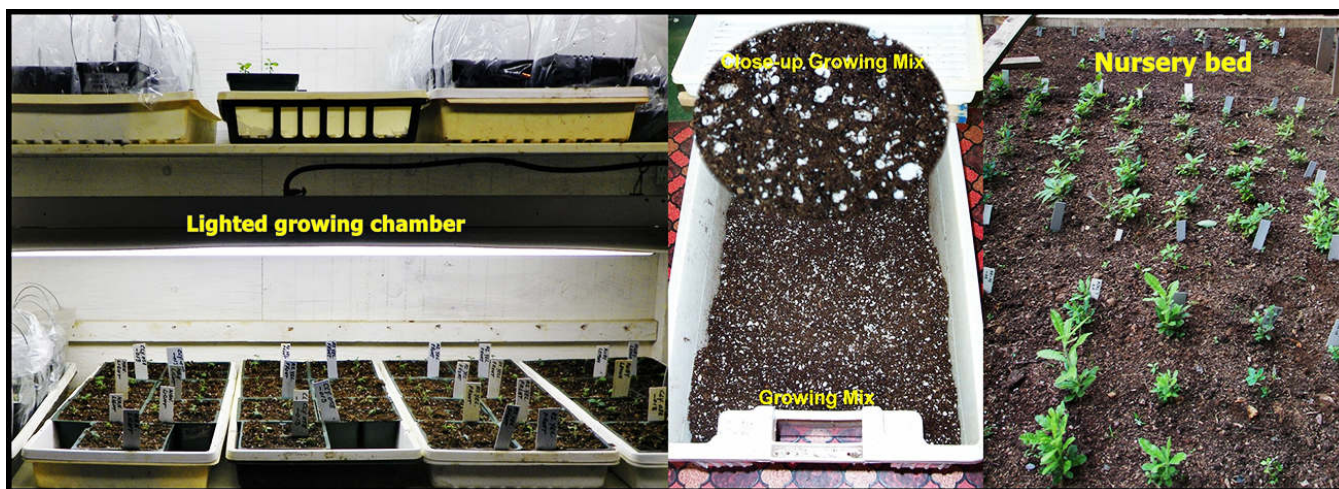
After years of administering the annual ARHS Seed Exchange, I'm taking this opportunity to supply a seed growing primer to our membership. Bill and I have been starting plants from seed for many years - rather a daunting number when tallied – and this will be the first of a series of “seedy” articles, based on our experience, covering the propagation of the various seed categories offered in seed exchanges.

Growing a wide range of plants from seed serves several purposes which might not be immediately appreciated. Over time there is certainly a great sense of satisfaction, as you watch small seedlings grow into beautiful, mature specimens; this is also the most economical way to create a garden.

There are many different seed exchanges offering many different kinds of seed. Our own ARHS Seed Exchange is only one of many. Over the years we have acquired interesting seeds from other plant societies, specialty seed houses, as well as by personal collecting in the field. Everyone can do the same.

Growing requirements for propagation from seed are fairly basic:

- A modest indoor lighting set up
- Propagation trays and seed packs, standard sizes optimize space
- A quality non-soil starting mix, pre-done or custom mixed
- Garden nursery bed space for growing on outdoors
- A modicum of patience ( no picture for that)



## Understanding Seeds

Not all seeds are created equal. There are huge variations in the way they must be treated if they are to germinate and flourish. There are the ephemeral seeds which ripen very early in the season and need to be planted right away. And the typical warm germinators that will stand storage; these are the easiest to grow. Then there are many that require a period of cold stratification. This requires the seeds to be sown in damp medium, covered in plastic, then placed for a period of time - a few weeks to many weeks - in the refrigerator. This simulates winter conditions. Germination can be expected after bringing the seeds out of the cold and exposing them to warmth and light. Again, the time to germination may vary greatly depending on the species and genus of the plant. To sum it up, we need to emulate “Mother Nature” to get the best results.

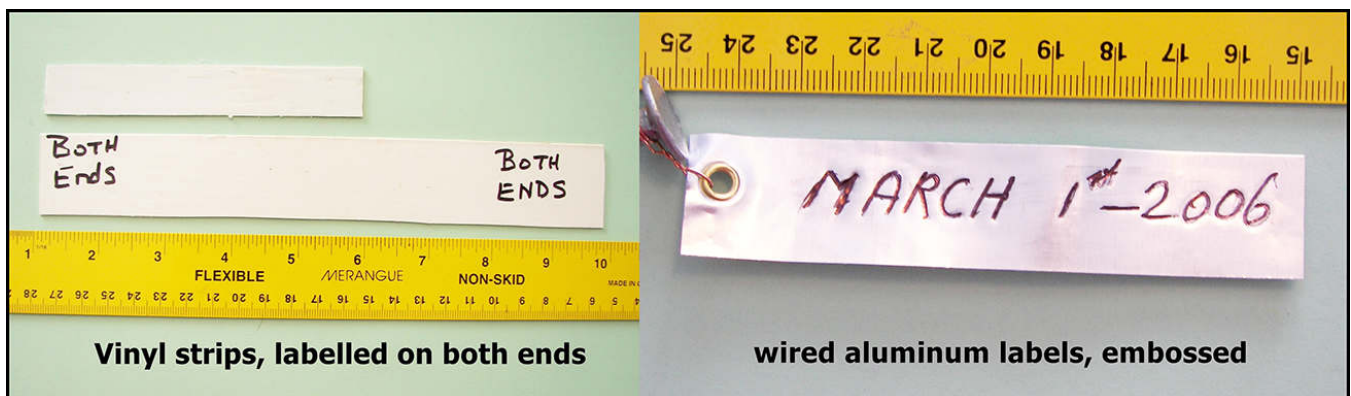
Specific information on the germination requirements of almost every kind of seed has become very accessible. There are a variety of online data bases. Those of worthy mention are the Ontario Rock Garden & Hardy Plant Society, The Missouri Botanical Garden and, until recently, Garden’s North. Many commercial seed catalogues come with quite good germination information. In our own ARHS seed exchange, I try to include germination instructions with all seed dispensed.

One aspect of growing plants from seed which might be neglected is record keeping. Knowing what was planted, when, and the subsequent result, is quite important. Computer files, an old fashioned notebook, a printed list, are all ways to keep track. My favourite way, for many years, has been an excel file which I title ‘Planting Calendar’, with the year attached. In excel it is possible to have successive years all in the same file, a new page for each year. Each sheet is easily customized with as much information as you require.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1												
2	Heat	cold warm	<b>Planting Calendar 2006</b>									
3	#	Plant Date:	Planted		To Transplant Next *			NEXT				
4		'week of'	Name	Treatm't	Germination Notes	Transplan t Date	~ No.	Harden Off Record	Plant'g Site	Source		
19		warm	Lilium philadelphicum var. philadelphicum	Press into soil at 20C. Germ. In ~ 2-12 wks & more	to fridge ~Apr15				Nursery Bed Annex	Gard.North		
20		warm	Lilium pumilum	Press into soil at 20C. Germ. In ~ 1-3 wks & more	up Feb19			red bloom, 2007	Nursery Bed Annex	Gard.North		
21		warm cold	Lilium speciosum album	Delayed HYPOGEAL- warm for ~3 mos. Then cold for ~3mos. Back to 20C for shoots	sprouted!			bloom, late 2007	Nursery Bed Annex	Gard.North		
22		warm cold	Lilium superbum	Delayed HYPOGEAL- warm for ~3 mos. Then cold for ~3mos. Back to 20C for shoots	to fridge ~Apr15				Nursery Bed Annex	Gard.North		
23		Feb12th cold	Aquilegia bertolonii(Blue Berry)	8 wks cold( -4 to +4) or outdoors overwinter	sunporch, few sprouted. Neolected!					Gard.North		

An extension of this record keeping is actually labelling plants once they go into the nursery area or garden beds. We have labels for in-ground use comprised of strips of vinyl siding cut to desired sizes and labelled both ends. The end in the ground will remain legible should the upper part fade in the sun. Finding a fade-proof marker has been a challenge.

The labels used on the plant are wired aluminum tags that are embossed with a pen. These last almost indefinitely, but may need to be moved as a plant gets larger. We have sometimes coupled them with a piece of vinyl to increase their visibility on the tree or shrub.



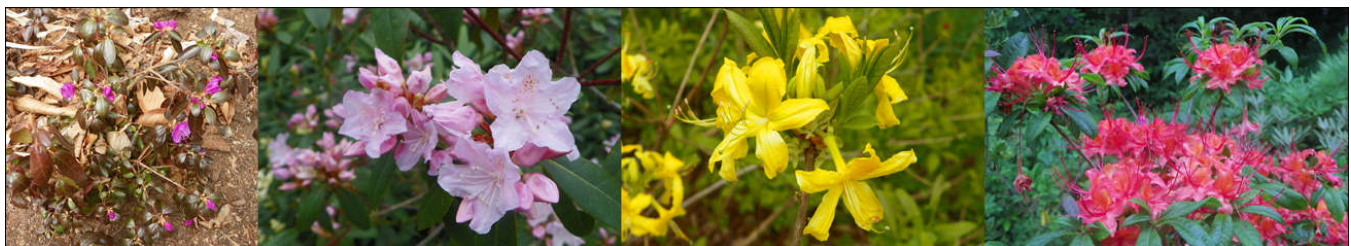
**Vinyl strips, labelled on both ends**

**wired aluminum labels, embossed**

These aluminum labels are available at C. Frensch Ltd., Beamsville, Ontario. The company doesn't have much of an online presence, but has an email, cfrensch@idirect.com, and is very good to deal with.

Looking at the wide variety of seeds typically available from our ARHS seed exchange list, it's clear that first of all you must decide what you want to grow. By way of example, I will assume you decide on rhododendrons and azaleas, so I can outline a few considerations and procedures you'll need to take into account.

As you review your choices on the list, you'll see that rhododendron and azalea seed is identified as being either from a species or a hybrid. Species seed usually gives a plant very similar to the seed parent. Four species that give very good results growing from seed can be seen in the following photo:



(Left-right) *R. dauricum* Nana, *R. minus*, *R. luteum*, *R. cumberlandense*

Hybrid seed is variable, and the progeny should have qualities inherited from both parents, though the results are not predictable. The aim of the hybridizer is often included in the seed exchange description or, at the very least, implied by knowing the qualities of the parent plants. Now, in some cases, the seed will be listed as OP or “open-pollinated”; this means that bees or other wild creatures, not a person, are the hybridisers. In such cases, the female or seed parent will be known, but the source of the pollen (the male contribution) will not. So the qualities you can expect from the progeny are even more unpredictable, though such seed may produce fine plants.

Species x species, hybrids x species and complex hybrid x hybrid crosses often create pleasant surprises. One of the very best we have grown resulted from (*R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushmanum* 'Exbury' x *R. pachysanthum* RSF 78/064.) This one we have dubbed “Blue Heaven”.



‘Blue Heaven’ foliage

Often a cross between a hybrid and a species will produce a plant with species characteristics as well as some feature of the hybrid seed parent. Such is the case where *R. pachysanthum* is used as the pollen parent. Here in Northern Nova Scotia, that species doesn’t quite make it. The offspring of several crosses have proven to be very hardy. All exhibit characteristics of both parents.



Another plant which is a particular favourite of ours is “Sproeten”. This hybrid was propagated and now resides in the gardens of several ARHS members. The cross is ‘Barbara Cook’ x ‘Janet Blair’. We aren’t sure of the aim, but love the result.



'Sproeten'

Good yellow flower colour has been a favourite objective as well, combined with hardiness and good plant habit. Of the many we've produced over the years, here are four yellows:



(L-R) Janet Blair x Sun Spray, complex Cat's Pajama Cross, ARS96#887, one of several from ARS92#608

Open-pollinated seed is sometimes frowned upon because the results are so unpredictable, but like all seed-grown plants there are nice surprises.



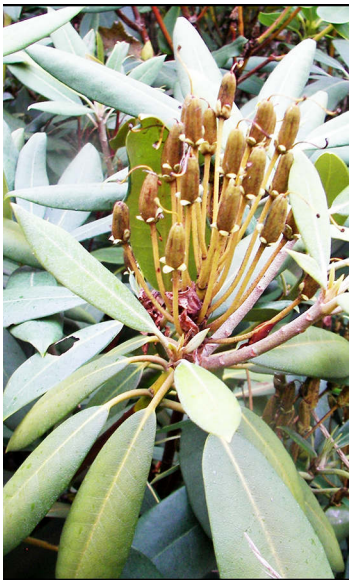
(L-R) Peaches OP, Moonshot (OP), Jenny Tabol (OP), "608"(OP) aka 'BigWhite'

Azaleas are often more precocious than rhododendrons, quicker to grow, and flowering about their third year. We have often said there is no such thing as an ugly azalea, so growing almost any azalea seed is liable to yield lovely plants. One can, of course, narrow the choice for color, time of bloom, and so on by selecting the right parent plants. The native azalea species provide an interesting selection to give plants which extend bloom time much later than the typical June bloom season. One lovely plant we have grown is (*R. arborescens* x *R. cumberlandense*).



*R. arborescens* x *R. cumberlandense*

To make things easier, here is a summary of what you need to know to get started propagating rhododendrons and azaleas from seed. It's easy, it's economical, and speaking personally, it has been the source of much delight and satisfaction for both Bill and I, over many years.



#### SEED COLLECTION & SOWING – THE BASICS

- Pods are dark when ripe
- Dry inside in a container
- Dry pods may split, if not do manually
- Separate seed from chaff
- Store in a sealed, leak proof envelope
- Sowing in late autumn ensures plants big enough for outdoor transfer by late spring
- Surface sow on peaty soil, under plastic
- Maintain 100% humidity until 1-2 sets of leaves
- Transplant to small pots or cell packs
- A second transplant may be necessary
- Harden off little plants in June
- Move to nursery bed or cold frame, mulch
- Shade rhododendron and azalea seedlings through the summer
- Provide some winter protection, year one

#### SPRING DUTIES – THE BASICS

- Renew mulch
- Reset labels, if necessary
- Weed out rejects
- Fertilize modestly
- Nip tops of baby azaleas
- Pinch vegetative shoot of rhododendrons to encourage branching
- Maintain moisture levels



Finally, they say a picture is worth a thousand words. ☺



## A Conversation with Chris Clarke.

Interview by John Brett

Many of us had the pleasure of touring Chris Clarke's property in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, during our spring garden tour last June. He's a long-time member of the ARHS, and it was wonderful to see what he's accomplished in this seaside setting over the past 30 years. Last September I met him at his home for a wide-ranging discussion of his gardening interests and enthusiasms. They turned out to be many and various, embracing his own garden, the town of Liverpool and all of Queens County. One further note: Chris refers often to his friend and fellow gardener, "Dick". This is Dick Steele, a founding member of our society, owner of Bayport Plant Farm and Nursery, friend and mentor to many gardeners in Atlantic Canada. Dick passed away in 2010. – John Brett, Editor, *Atlantic Rhodo*



Chris Clarke in the back garden with his *Rhododendron calophytum*.

John: What brought you to Nova Scotia?

Chris: I grew up in England near a town called Guildford in Surrey. My father had a farm and the person who owned the land next to him was a man by the name of Sir Eric Bowater. Bowater was head of the Bowater paper corporation and Bowater owned a paper mill in Liverpool. So I came out here as a trainee for two years and that was 60 years ago. I worked for the paper mill for thirty five and a half years and I've been retired since 1995.

John: Can you tell me about your background in relation to gardening?

Chris: I grew up in a gardening family. My great-grandfather had a large house and a fairly significant garden but his son, and that would be my great uncle, started a garden in Sussex called Borde Hill, which is still going. My father's brother, Desmond Clarke, got the Veitch medal (Veitch Memorial Medal) and the Gold Medal for Horticulture (Royal Horticultural Society) for work he did on the book, *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*. It had been done by

W.J. Beane in the 1920s, and Desmond Clarke updated it. It was a four volume book and he wrote volume five. As a small child, if we went out to lunch somewhere, we were always going around the garden afterwards. So it's just part of my being.

John: You got here and you settled into your new job. Tell me about the development of your garden.

Chris: Well, it was a smaller house than it is now - very little garden. It had small beds with perennials and annuals and not all of the property had been landscaped. My kids had horses, so part of the property was given over to the horses for quite some years and it wasn't until my younger daughter had left that we really started to garden. That would be about thirty three years ago.

John: So once the horses had cleared out how did you proceed from there?

Chris: I started a bit before that. The horses were up behind, so I started down in front, and the most significant thing I did there was in 1975. Bowater also had paper mills in the U.S. South and I had seen dogwoods - *Cornus florida* - growing there and was really impressed by them. So in 1975, I bought a dogwood - that would be *Cornus kousa* 'chinensis' - from Sheridan Nurseries in Ontario. It's still in the garden now. It came balled and burlaped. It was in transit for 39 days because things were shipped by rail in those days. And when I went to plant it, all of the soil fell off like powder. However, it thrived and it's now about twenty three feet high, forty five feet across. It's been the inspiration for a project that I did for the millennium. Should I go into that now?

John: Sure.

Chris: So, at the time, a lot of people used to drive down here just to see the dogwood when it was in bloom. And I was mayor here from 1996 through 2000. There was some money available from the federal government to celebrate the millennium. And we were able to get some funding. We spent much of it on subsidizing *Cornus kousa* - two cultivars, 'Chinensis' and 'Satomi' - as our millennium trees and sold over 700 of them. And now, 20 years later, these have grown into big plants. People come all the way from Halifax just to see the dogwoods in bloom.

John: Can you tell me where they're placed?

Chris: The rules were, they had to be planted within 50 feet of the sidewalk. They had to be visible. What we were hoping was it would beautify the community, but we realized then that a lot of people don't have big enough lots. So we relaxed



that so they're really scattered everywhere. There are a few in north Queens but most of them are scattered all through south Queens County.

John: Getting back to your garden and its development, your first gardening effort was this dogwood you had bought from Sheridan Nursery. Tell me how you proceeded from there? Did you end up having to do any kinds of landscaping or hardscaping?

Chris: There was quite a lot of water that would come down from up above. It would lie up against the house which caused significant problems in the basement. So I dug a trench across the top of the lot as it was then, and off down one side to shed the water off to the side. I started gardening from the house down and there had been a row of big white spruce trees as you look towards the ocean and they all died and it was fairly wet. So I filled the land with bark - I said I worked for a paper mill - so I got bark right out of the flume from the mill - smelled like mad - great strings of bark, pieces of wood actually in it, and I planted magnolias directly in that. No soil at all.

John: It was like a berm of bark.

Chris: Exactly, and they thrived and they're still there and quite big, and I planted some rhododendrons in that too. I had two or three rocks in the lawn that used to catch my lawnmower and drive me mad. I was doing some work around the place and I said to the guy who's doing the construction, "Bill, take that bulldozer and push those two or three little rocks out of there for me, would you?" Well, in Nova Scotia, there is no such thing as a little rock, so he pushed them as far as he could and then he couldn't get them any further. So I back filled in behind those with more bark and probably some soil by this time and we planted in there.

John: What sort of things were you planting in there at that point?

Chris: Quite a lot of rhododendrons: I had PJM's, Hancock's True Blue; then I put in a *Weigela* called Pink Princess, and now we're getting right down by the water, so I picked rhodos that were as hardy as I could find. There's Janet Blair, Catawbiense Album, Everestianum, Boursault, there's a red one that came from Kentville - I can't remember if it has a name or not - there's Olga, and then there's a plant that was sent to Dick Steele by (Peter) Mezzit as being a *Kalmia*. Dick said to me, "I don't think it's a *Kalmia*. Do you?" And I said, "No". It's *Rhododendron wilsonii*, so it's down there too - doesn't look very healthy at the moment, I don't know why. So that got that side done. Then the last horse went some thirty some years ago, so I was able to start developing up here.

John: That's when you started to expand beyond the front of the garden?

Chris: Yes. So I'm going up the side and I started with a small area. And again I put in the *Magnolia* 'Betty', and Dick sold me a *Chamaecyparis* 'something something something nana', and 'nana' was not a very good description of this particular plant, which is now about 27 feet high. We put in some *Pieris*.

My design is done with a glass of scotch in my hand and standing back. My wife would say to me, "Why do you just stand there?" Well, you sort of visualize what could be, or how you might develop it as a garden or a bed. So we kept on inching up that way with plants. And in the meanwhile, I mentioned I dug a ditch across the top to shed the water and there was quite a berm there. Well, I added bark to the berm, and I started planting evergreen azaleas, and I have now a wall of evergreen azaleas up there.

I continued on with the other side with some elepidotes. I planted *Magnolia* 'Leonard Messel', and Leonard Messel - the man - started a garden in Sussex and he was a friend of my great-uncle Stevie Clarke, and the garden he started was Leonard's Lea, and I bought *Magnolia* 'Leonard Messel' because of that family connection.

And again, I put in evergreen azaleas, and some kalmias, and that pretty well fills in this house lot, and I thought, well, I don't have much color after all the rhododendrons are over, so I built a bed for day lilies - the bed is about 50 feet long, about 8 or 9 feet wide - and here again my theory was if you plant day lilies close enough together, you won't get any weeds. Not true. Well, I guess part of the problem is I used compost that I made from the garden to increase the soil and to lengthen the bed, and there must have been quite a lot of weed seed in the compost. Even now - and it's been there for quite some years - it's still needs a fair amount of weeding until the day lilies get big enough and then they do start to shade out the enemy.

I really wanted a blast of different colors, and was fortunate Coral Kincaid lives down in Upper LaHave, and she's got an acre of land that she uses to breed day lilies and when she culls the ones that are not good enough to register, I bought quite a lot of day lilies from her, very inexpensively. And so they're in there.

In addition to all of this, I bought the building lot behind me. And I had a passion at one time for orange azaleas and double azaleas - that passion has evaporated somewhat - but the best of the oranges in my opinion is Gibraltar. I found that Gibraltar clashed with anything with blue in it. You know those pinks that you get with a hint of blue in them and put an orange next to it and it really screams at you. So I moved all the orange azaleas up above, and then whenever I had a plant where I didn't have any room to put it, I'd stick it up there.

John: When it comes to garden design, do you have any general guidelines that you follow?

Chris: My father's sister – the sister of Desmond Clarke – she was also a gardener, much more of the English cottage-type garden, but she said to me, "Remember your vistas, darling." You know, you can crowd your garden in, and that's why I'm gardening with a power saw at the moment. You need something to take your eye back. I've used white and I've used purple leafed things to take your eye back as my garden is getting crowded. So those are the only two principles I had. I'm a pretty unprincipled person.

John: Are there any particular rhododendrons, azaleas, or other plants that you have found particularly satisfying and would recommend highly to other gardeners.

Chris: Yes. Walter Ostrom gave me, some years ago, *Rhododendron calophytum*, which is the largest leafed Rhododendron we can grow in Nova Scotia, and it must be almost 20 years ago that he gave it to me and he kept one for himself. And you know I say to people that gardening is not about beauty at all. It's not about the loveliness of plants. It's one-up-manship. And if you can grow something that somebody else can't grow, you blow out your chest - you burst a couple more bottoms off your shirt. So Walter's own *calophytum* really didn't do very much. So every time he comes around the garden I make sure we walk up and have a look at mine, and it bloomed for the first time in 2018. When it flowers, it's absolutely stunning and it flowers about April the 23rd, I think.

John: How many years have you had it?

Chris: It's pushing 20 years.

John: That's one that's given you great pleasure. Any others?

Chris: *Rhododendron* 'Consolini's Windmill', which I think is a really nice plant. I'm big into strong colors, and not very strong on wishy-washy lilacs, pale pink's. So *Rhododendron* 'Francesca' is a good deep red. I don't like it as a plant because, after a couple of days, it has a blotch that looks as though it's been rained on and it looks a sort of brown. It's not as good a red as *Rhododendron* 'Henry's Red', which I don't have. *Rhododendron* 'Firestorm' I think is a better one, but it blooms a little later than the other elepidotes so that if you want it to complement a display, it hasn't come into bloom and then it comes into bloom and all the other ones have gone over.

Another one I really like is Mrs. Furnival. I really like *Rhododendron* 'Yak number 7'. It's not always bud hardy for me. This past spring it was gorgeous. I did a little research on why it was called Yak number 7. Whoever did the breeding had seven of these plants and he named them after the seven dwarfs and this one is very unfortunately registered as 'Dopey'. Yak number 7 is a pretty banal name, but 'Dopey'? For this really lovely plant! It's the nicest rhododendron in my garden!

John: What about companion plants? If we were looking at a young gardener starting to create a garden, are there any foundation shrubs or small trees that you would say, "absolutely, you should try this!"

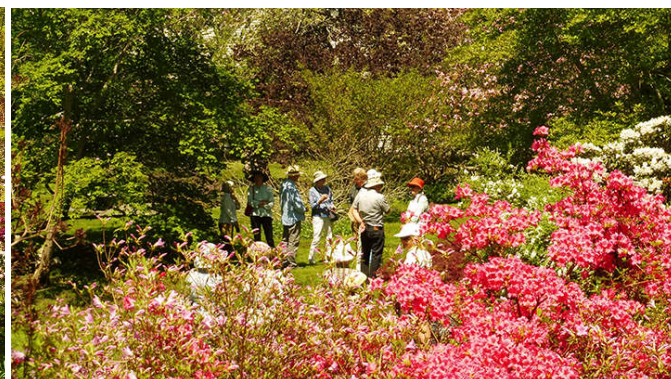
Chris: I had planted *Exochorda* 'The Bride' (*Exochorda X Macrantha*, common name: Pearlbush), which I had brought in from Sheridan Nursery in Ontario. I had seen it growing in England and saw it in the catalog. So then the society (ARHS) brought it in, I think, and now quite a lot of people grow it. *Fothergilla* is a nice plant, gives you good fall color; there's one called 'Blue Mist' which is worthwhile. There's *Zenobia* - it's one of my very favorite foliages - it's common name is Dusty Zenobia – *Zenobia pulverulenta*. And it's a member of the blueberry family. It grows in the southern U.S.

John: You mentioned orange azalea's – 'Gibraltar', which you said clashes...

Chris: ...but is a very good orange. I decided that I was lacking color down in front, my wife wouldn't let me dig up the lawn. I managed to steal a bit off the side of it and put in a bed of deciduous azaleas. So I go down to Bayport (Plant Farm and Nursery) and I pick out four. And I said, "Dick, I'm awfully busy at the moment. I'll come back and get them in a week or two." The next day when I came back from work, they were all sitting on my doorstep, which was Dick for you. Three of them are seedlings from Windsor Great Park. Dick had collected the seed there, and the fourth is called 'Madame Charles Jolie' which is a very good - almost shocking - pink.



The back garden looking towards the house.



Massed evergreen azaleas in the back garden

Then I had been around a garden in Stamford, Connecticut, and it was in August and *Rhododendron prunifolium* was in bloom in August. So I got a couple of *prunifoliums*, which do bloom for me in August. I've added one that's called 'July Jester', which is primarily *Rhododendron bakeri* (also known as *R. cumberlandense*) and it blooms at the end of July, a really strong scarlet - good plant.

I put in one called Millennium, again because it blooms late July. I really dislike it. It doesn't seem as vigorous as it should be. It's got a different kind of foliage that doesn't seem to blend with the other deciduous azaleas. It's not bad enough for me to give it a heave-ho over the stone wall. But it's on thin ice.



The front garden looking towards the house.

John: From what you've said, you obviously have a great love for dogwoods. If you had to say one or two dogwoods a person should grow what would they be?

Chris: I mentioned earlier that I'm chair of the local Queen's Manor (editor's note: Nursing home located in Liverpool) board. I'm actually right in the middle of doing a fundraising project for them next year and I'm working with Jill Colville (of Bunchberry Nursery) and I've ordered 200 dogwoods, and I've ordered Venus and Scarlet Fire. Venus is a cross between *Cornus Kousa* and *Cornus Nutalii*. I have one and it is absolutely gorgeous. It's about 12 feet high. It has 8 inch blooms. Stunning. Okay, that's number one, and the Scarlet Fire is supposed to be as red as any that Rutgers have produced. The authority on dogwoods is Rutgers University and this is has just been released within the last couple of years. So I've ordered a hundred Scarlet Fire and a hundred Venus.

John: I think I can safely say that two of the dogwoods you would recommend for the novice gardener would be Venus and Scarlett Fire.

Chris: I'm not sure about Scarlet Fire. Definitely Venus. We've got quite a lot of Satomi's growing here. I'm lukewarm on Satomi (*Cornus kousa* 'Satomi'). Some of them are gorgeous. Some of them aren't. I also had one called Heartthrob, and I could stand equidistant between Heartthrob and Satomi when they were blooming and I couldn't see any difference between them, so I gave Heartthrob away. I mean you can get four to six weeks bloom period out of one of them, which is another reason why people should grow them, because they last so long. Just *Cornus kousa* 'chinensis', the straight species, is a wonderful plant.

John: Any magnolias you recommend?

Chris: I think I have 28. I don't think I would do any of the secretaries again, or whatever people call them – Betty, Jane, Susan, Ricky and so on. I think they're okay, but they're not stunning. I certainly would grow Merrill and Leonard Messel.

I've tried *Magnolia ashii* - John Weagle gave it me in a coffee cup as a seedling - and mine is not a very good plant, but when it does bloom its scent is absolutely stunning, the blooms are fantastic, but they're very short lived. It looks really like a banana tree, with the long leaves. Obviously, *Magnolia sieboldii*, it's so easy to grow.

Thinking of yellows, the first is Ivory Chalice. I would recommend that. It is a very beautiful form, as a tree. It's a pale primrose yellow - nice plant. Butterflies is the best yellow - a smaller flower but a nice, strong yellow. There's one called Gold Star, which I wouldn't bother to grow. I saw in the National Arboretum in Washington, Elizabeth and Goldfinch planted side by side, and in that planting Goldfinch had more yellow than Elizabeth. I have Yellow Bird and I'm lukewarm on it.

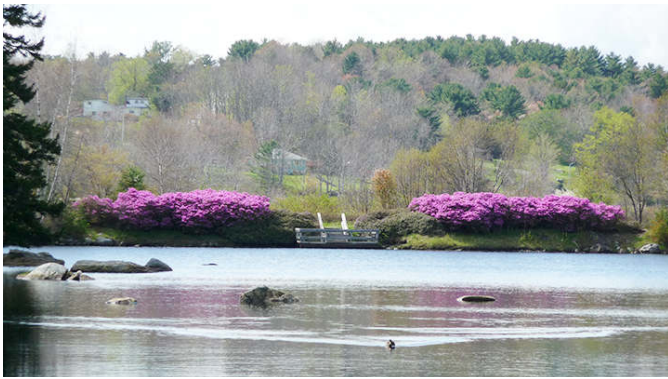
*Magnolia* 'Legacy' is stunning. Another one called Felicity, that Dave Veinotte gave me, is interesting because it's sort of fastigiate in its growth habit, but otherwise not all that exciting.

I tried to get Rustica Rubra (*Magnolia x soulangeana* 'Rustica Rubra'). I'd seen it growing at Kew Gardens and I fell in love with it so I ordered it from Hortico Nursery and I got, I think, 'Alexandrina'. It certainly isn't 'Rustica Rubra'. One I'm really excited about because it's got two flower buds on it is *Magnolia* 'Black Tulip'. I brought in five of them from Jill (Jill Colville, Bunchberry Nursery).

John: You've mentioned Jill a couple times. So, which nurseries do you patronize the most?

Chris: Briar Patch Nursery, as an Arab goes to Mecca, so Christopher Clarke is to Briar Patch. I go and see Jill as a personal friend quite often because my farm in Bear River is only 10 minutes away. Bunchberry Nursery and Baldwin's Nursery are also great.

John: I want to go now to Pine Grove Park. Could you start by describing what it is now. I think a lot of people probably think it's just a standard town public park.



The mass planting of *Rhododendron* 'PJM' at Pinegrove Park in mid-May.



*R.* 'PJM' and *R.* 'Ramapo' bordering the pond and causeway at Pinegrove Park.

Chris: Let me start with what it was. It was a piece of land that came with a parcel of land that Bowater (Paper Company) bought back in 1942. It's significant because there are photographs in the Queens County Museum going back into the late 19th century of Pine Grove. So it was obviously a beauty spot back in those days.

Bowater had leased it to the Lions Club and the Lions Club had developed it as a camping ground, and the two people in the Lions Club who were really interested in the project, they both died and the Lions Club gave it up. So Bowater decided to develop it as a community park and we needed some help because we knew how to make paper and we knew how to grow trees, but we weren't big on community Parks.

We engaged a couple called Eric Mullen and Millie Evans. And they came in and they looked at it and they recommended two or three things. First of all, there was a small ball field there which was overgrown. We developed that as a thing called 'Trees of Friendship'. The stand of pines was impressive, and they suggested that we contact Dick Steele to see what his advice would be for planting in and around the pines. There was also an area that lent itself to being a picnic ground and there was a pond that was brackish - the tide came in and went out of it.

John: What years would we be talking about?

Chris: I started to work with Dick in '79, which was the year that Queens county was the Forestry Capitol of Canada, which is a designation that comes from the Canadian Forestry Institute, I think. So the company owned the land at Pine Grove, and as our project for the Forestry Capitol of Canada year - it was also the mill's 50th Anniversary - we took Pine Grove and started to develop it as a community park.

Then we started with Dick and we just did two paths in the first year: one was where the campsites had been and the other was the straight road going down to the water (Mersey River). And we planted those gradually and we put in a lot of rhododendrons - English Roseum, Bellefontaine - those are the ones I can remember quickly. I had a fairly large budget for this project so I could send truck-loads of bark down to Dick, and he would fill up the truck with rhododendrons and we'd bring them back to Pine Grove.

And then a year or two later we put in another loop that Dick did the layout for, and it's called 'The Woodlands Trail'. There's (*Rhododendron*) Christmas Cheer, there's quite a lot of Joe Gable plants because Dick was a great disciple of Gables. There's Caroline, Mrs. Tom Lewinsky, Snowflake, Scintillation.

Dick called me one day and said, "I wonder if you can help me out. I've got this problem. I've got all these (*Rhododendron*) 'PJM's', many more than we know what to do with, could you take some?" So I sent a truck down and he sent up 75 of them. So we have some plantings of PJM, which are really spectacular, out by the causeway. We took the pond area and we built a causeway across and we planted that with PJM's on top and (*Rhododendron*) Ramapo below the PJM's. The whole purpose there was you can see it from the other side of the river. It was a magnet to bring people into Pine Grove because they could see all this colour.

The 'Trees of Friendship' area, where the ball field had been, people weren't interested in developing. So much later, and after my day, Bowater was doing a project to try to use some of the effluent from when they cleaned out the effluent treatment facilities -the ponds - they wanted to try and use that as an agricultural amendment for soil. So they mixed it with fines from the sawmill - sawdust and so on - and they put a hundred loads of it on this 'Trees of Friendship' area.

And it took two or three years to settle down, it was a bit gelatinous. And then Jill Colville and I planted it with crab apples on one side because I wanted to get away from all of these rhododendrons. There are probably 2,000 plus - maybe 3000 rhododendrons in Pine Grove. It's a big understory of rhododendrons under all these pines, so we did crabs on one side and magnolias on the other. And then we also got from Dick some deciduous azaleas to give us color in that area. So that area is now developed.

John: So what is the current status of Pine Grove Park?

Chris: The paper mill closed in 2012. At that time, the premier, Darrell Dexter, was from Queens County. There was pressure put on Dexter to donate the land to Queens County, which he did, God love him, so it's now owned by the municipality. And when I was mayor, I was able to do quite a lot more with Pine Grove. Bowater gave us a quarter million dollars to maintain Pine Grove for 10 years. By that time the company wasn't called Bowater. It was owned by a corporation called Resolute.

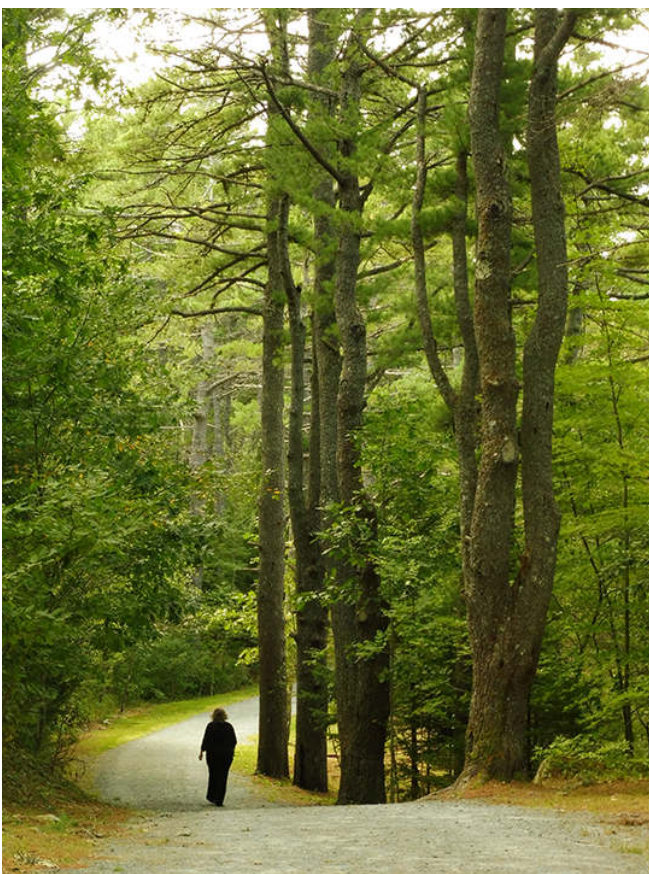
It was the Region of Queens 20th anniversary as an amalgamation of the town and the county, so to celebrate that we extended one of the roads out to what is really route 3 coming into Liverpool, so you can walk from there, under the (highway) 103, and up into Pine Grove. Then I tried to develop that as a magnolia walk. We got some fairly large magnolias that Dave Veinotte had developed. We also put in some whips and unfortunately it was a very, very dry year and most of the whips died. So we do have that Magnolia walk that comes in from route 3 and now, excitingly, the old trestle trail bridge that crossed the Mersey River - it had been closed - but just very recently they repaired the bridge. I think, the 21st of September this month they're going to reopen it, so you can take this walk around Liverpool, up the waterfront, up to the trestle trail bridge across to Pine Grove. it's going to be a very, very nice walking trail.

John: Can you reflect a little bit on your relationship with Dick Steele, who he was and how you got to know him?

Chris: Well, I got to know him through Pine Grove and I got to know him very, very well. He was just fun to be with. The last time I think I walked around Bayport (Plant Farm and Nursery) with him, there was a group, and as he was walking around he always liked to pluck a cluster of blooms and give them to a person. He did this to one particular woman and he gave her this cluster of blooms - he said they're scented - and she stuck her nose in and smelled it and when she took it away her face was covered with pollen. I said, "Now you can go home and tell your husband that you've been pollinated by Dick Steele!" (much laughter)

John: That's a real Dick Steele story. Okay, I'm going back to your garden. Can you briefly summarize your garden climate?

Chris: It's an odd contradiction. I think that parts of it are zone 7 - 7A probably. And yet we get a cold wind that comes across the Mersey River, these cold easterly winds that come in March and desiccate plants that would otherwise be hardy.



A view down the main path at Pine Grove Park.

But I've kept trying and testing and there's been a small fortune in failures that have gone over the sea-wall over the years, but I think it's fair to say that it's certainly a strong 6B, maybe 7 in parts of it.

John: And the soils, how would you describe them?

Chris: It is absolutely exceptional. Where it's natural soil it's deep brown-black soil and underneath that, about a foot and a half down, there's blue clay, that is pretty impervious to water. So you've got a foot and a half of this good soil and then moisture underneath it. And if something's going to grow for me, it's going to grow better here than it will almost anywhere else if it's in the natural soil.

John: And why do you think that is?

Chris: I think it's a combination of the deep black soil with the moisture underneath, held in there by the clay. It's not totally impervious but it holds it for quite a while. Now when it dries out it becomes that much harder to resuscitate.

John: So you would say this is, generally speaking, a pretty favorable gardening site.

Chris: Oh yes, indeed. My top lot doesn't have the same quality soil. It's better down here than it is up there.

John: Do you irrigate at all? How do you how do you deal with water?

Chris: I go down on my knees and pray to God that it's going to rain. It's a real problem. We're charged for water, so while we're on municipal water, it's not limited but it is expensive. Also, it's a real nuisance to undo all this garden hose and then

reel it back up when I want to mow. So I don't do much watering except for new plants and I lost some this year because I didn't water in time.

John: What do you like in other Gardens? What are you some of your favorites?

Chris: Well, obviously, Borde Hill would be one. The Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley, and I've walked around that with Desmond Clarke and a friend of his, and they kept telling me all the plants that were mis-labeled. Donna and Duff Ever's Garden (Halifax area) is well up there. I've only been around it in springtime. Where you are, Halls Road (Halifax), that whole street is stunning.

John: Is Borde Hill the one you have a family connection to?

Chris: Yes, exactly. It's about 80 acres and I'm probably going to get names wrong, but Stevie Clarke (Stephenson Robert Clarke), who was the one who started it, was very well off financially, and he was able to finance a lot of the plant collectors like (George) Forest and (Frank) Kingdon-Ward and so on. It started 1880's – 1890's and those plants have grown, and then his son, Ralph Clarke, continued with it. And it's in the fourth generation now, I think, but some very interesting trees, and large trees - great magnolia collections, very interesting rhododendrons. Dick sent me, one year - it's a four-hour drive across the south of England – to get some cuttings. I brought them back. Not one of them took!

John: Do you still go back Chris?

Chris: I was there last year. The current owner is a second cousin of mine, I think.

John: So it's still in private hands.

Chris: It's still in private hands. I think it's in a trust now.

John: Is it accessible to the public?

Chris: Oh yes.

John: Are there any other aspects or features of gardens that you find particularly appealing?

Chris: Well, I'm in love at the moment with *Buddleia*, of all things, because of the butterflies. And we have Japanese beetle here. You don't have them in Halifax, yet, I don't think.

John: The Lily Beetle?

Chris: No. Japanese Green Beetles. They're fairly new to Nova Scotia. They're the only thing I've ever seen that can eat and copulate at the same time. One of the reasons I'm keen on buddleias is that we're going to have to grow plants that the Japanese green beetle doesn't eat. They don't touch *Buddleia*, so I'm going to take out some roses which they do touch and put in more, for the bloom and for the butterflies. I had *Hydrangea aspera* for two years and the beetles would massacre it, but the beetles don't touch PeeGee Hydrangeas (*H. paniculata*). They don't touch *Hydrangea macrophylla*. They seem interested in *Hydrangea petiolaris*, they don't touch *Hydrangea serrata*.

John: What do they do to the plant?

Chris: They love grape vines and completely defoliate those. I have a purple leafed Hazel and you'll see that the whole leaves look like lace. They are big, big into Rose of Sharon.

John: How do you see your garden evolving from here?

Chris: ...maintenance really. I can get excited when something dies because it's an opportunity. I don't have many opportunities to plant so whilst I don't wish death on many of the plants - certain ones I do - it does provide an opportunity. I have been at it for quite a long time and now much of my gardening is done with a power saw, because things get so big.

John: Is there one piece of advice you would give to gardeners starting out?

Chris: It's an expensive hobby.

John: That's not encouraging, Chris! (much laughter here)

Chris: Being deadly serious, when you're busy and you're stressed, it's a great place to go and dislocate your mind from whatever is stressing you, and you can just submerge yourself in the garden. And yes, it's very rewarding.

John: Well, thank you very much, Chris. Now let's take a look at the garden. ☞

*Atlantic Rhodo would like to thank the author and the Rhododendron Species Foundation Year Book, for their kind permission to republish the following article. All photos by the author unless otherwise noted. John Brett, editor, Atlantic rhodo.*

## Exbury Gardens 1919 – 2019

by Lionel de Rothschild



Author with his dogs in front of a bank of azaleas. (photo Charlotte de Rothschild).

One hundred years ago my grandfather and namesake, Lionel de Rothschild, embarked upon the creation of his garden at Exbury, a woodland garden devoted above all to rhododendrons. By the time he died, aged only 60 in 1942, his garden covered some 200 acres (81 ha), and I have been told that had he lived, he had intended to incorporate a further wood to the north, partly in order to have the longest possible drive through the gardens to the house.

I did not know him, but all I have heard points to a man of drive and passion. He was also a man of good taste and determined to create not just a botanical collection but also a landscape garden with plants carefully placed using the contours of the land. In this he was inspired by William Robinson and also by James Hudson, who had worked for Lionel's father Leo at Gunnersbury outside of London. (Hudson, incidentally, was the first man ever to score full marks in the RHS exams.)

My grandfather also took the advice of those who had gone before him, especially the cousins J.C. and P.D. Williams from Cornwall, whom he referred to as his "gardening godfathers". This pair was joined by the formidable W.J. Bean. According to my father, however, Bean would not always commit, preferring to reserve judgement. This led to surreal conversations at the dinner table; with Bean suddenly blurting out the name of a tree they had been puzzling over hours earlier. Lionel sought Bean's advice on an arboretum he planned across the road that was to contain every tree and shrub hardy in the British Isles, thus following Bean's *magnum opus* entitled *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*. With characteristic directness Lionel blew holes in the ground with dynamite for planting. The arboretum survived the war but – criminally – was grubbed up afterwards; the only record was a photo taken by the Luftwaffe on reconnaissance.

Lionel's great-grandfather, N.M. Rothschild, came to England from Frankfurt in 1798 and first broke into the big league, as it were, by supplying gold and coin – "specie" – to Wellington's armies in Portugal and Spain (the Peninsular War) and again in the Waterloo campaign. I like the idea that a fortune made from specie was spent on species. New rhododendrons were flooding in, and Lionel was determined to have every one (except *R. afghanicum*, which he deemed too poisonous).

He helped fund all the great plant hunters of the day, usually operating in a syndicate and sharing the seeds on the return. Seeds were also sent to Kew and Edinburgh, those great reservoirs of plants and knowledge. He paid for Forrest's burial in Tengyueh (now called Tengchong) in 1932, and for the return of what Forrest had collected. He circulated the seed, however J.B. Stevenson of Tower Court wrote to say how little had germinated. Lionel replied that his experience had been the same and lamented Forrest's untimely death.

He was involved in funding expeditions by Joseph Rock, Reginald Farrer, Harold Comber and above all, Frank Kingdon-Ward. He planted azaleas from the "Wilson 50" (the first azaleas to be introduced to cultivation in Europe/United States after Wilson's trip to the Kurume area of Japan in 1918) round the Lower Pond; we hope to add new azaleas from the area of the Noto Peninsula on Honshu Island.

Wearing my other hat for a moment, I am a trustee of The Rothschild Archive in London. There we have the correspondence between the plant hunters and my grandfather, and we welcome researchers who wish to view it. That period was a relatively quiet time for the family bank since, if I am honest, its glory days lay in the previous century. So most of Lionel's correspondence concerned plants – at a very rough count, maybe 90%.

There is no doubt that Lionel was held in some awe, even by men who had braved the rigours of the Himalayas. Kingdon-Ward visited often, even, according to my grandmother, when he really should not have: apparently he was at lunch and rather silent. "Kingdon-Ward, you look unhappy: are you alright?" she asked. "Yes, thank you Mrs Lionel. I just got married." "That is wonderful news. When?" "Today." "Today? What are you doing here then? You should be with your bride." "Mr Lionel asked me to lunch." "Lionel," she called, "Kingdon-Ward has just got married. Send for the Rolls-Royce." And off he went. While it is possible it was not the actual day of his wedding – stories do get exaggerated – there is



Lionel de Rothschild, grandfather of the author  
(photo: The de Rothschild Archive, London)

no doubting the awe in which Lionel was held. Nobody who visited Exbury could fail to be impressed. In 1923 Kingdon-Ward wrote to Wright Smith, Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, about his recent visit to Exbury, “Within five years it will be the eighth wonder of the world.”

Lionel managed everything down to the last detail. My cousin Barbara once asked my grandmother what her honeymoon had been like. “Oh, it was alright,” she said, not exactly evincing enthusiasm, “Your grandfather spent his time planning the menus for the next two years.” Some of the anecdotes make him seem rather out of touch, others rather too grand, but I think it was more that he was immersed in his own world. “No garden, however small,” he is said to have told the City Horticultural Society, “should contain less than two acres of rough woodland.” Only someone completely absorbed in a life which included a vast estate could pronounce such a dictum as a general rule of thumb.

Writing of subseries *Argyrophyllum* (now subsection *Argyrophylla*) in *The Rhododendron Year Book* of 1933, he declared that, “they must be regarded more as the Queen Anne walnut table, which just fits into the drawing-room beside the armchair and helps to make the room feel comfortable and homely and sets off the Reynoldses and Romneys that grace the walls.” Well, the Romneys and Reynoldses are long gone, and the Queen Anne walnut table, but the garden remains and I know which I would rather have – and you too, I imagine. I do think that sometimes he acted for effect. My grandmother was French and only 20 when she married my grandfather. Thinking she might value advice on English ways in the country, Lionel

arranged for a Mrs Crofton, who had run one of the farms, to be her companion; my father, uncle and aunts uniformly loathed her for getting between them and their mother. Mrs Crofton had firm views on everything, and one day saw some of the senior staff going off at lunchtime. “Where are they going?” she asked Lionel. “I imagine they are going off to have a glass of sherry,” replied my grandfather. Mrs Crofton duly inveighed against the drinking habits of the working man, only to be cut short by my grandfather: “Oh no, they would only drink the very best sherry!” Later my grandfather took them aside and said quietly, “Carry on: I really do approve.”

After Lionel’s death, my grandmother flourished out of his shadow. She kept the gardens going with only a skeleton staff of old gardeners till the war ended and clearly had considerable knowledge in her own right. She never lost her French accent, rolling her “r’s”, and I am afraid we children quickly learnt certain plants just so we could ask her their names –

*R. irroratum* and *R. ‘Rubaiyat’* for example.

Lionel’s attention to detail was phenomenal. He kept detailed card indexes showing the location of trees and shrubs and, separately, of rhododendrons, indicating the day they flowered each year and occasionally adding planting notes. For example, on *Magnolia stellata*, he scrawled (he had terrible handwriting), “An attractive picture is made by planting this shrub in a group, growing beneath it thickly grape hyacinths (blue). The two flower together.”

We now have a database with the vast majority of the rhododendrons (but not all the azaleas) and the key specimen trees tagged; we have over 20,000 accessions. Lionel did not write down how he saw his garden developing or how he planned it. It was always “a work in progress”, and he strode around (his “little walks”), pointing with his stick and saying, “plant it here”, or moving plants if he thought they were unhappy or that the colours clashed with those adjoining.

He did, however, write for *The Rhododendron Society Notes* when he was first starting, in 1920 and 1921, and for *The Rhododendron Year Book*, both on species and, to a lesser extent, on hybrids, between 1933 and 1939, with two sections published posthumously in 1953 and 1954. These (and head gardener, Francis Hanger’s article in 1946) are worth reading.

He makes interesting observations: “It is curious to note that in all cases where late flowering species have been crossed with earlier flowering species, the flowering period of the hybrid is invariably nearer the earlier date than the later date.” He praises





*R. bureavii*, foliage



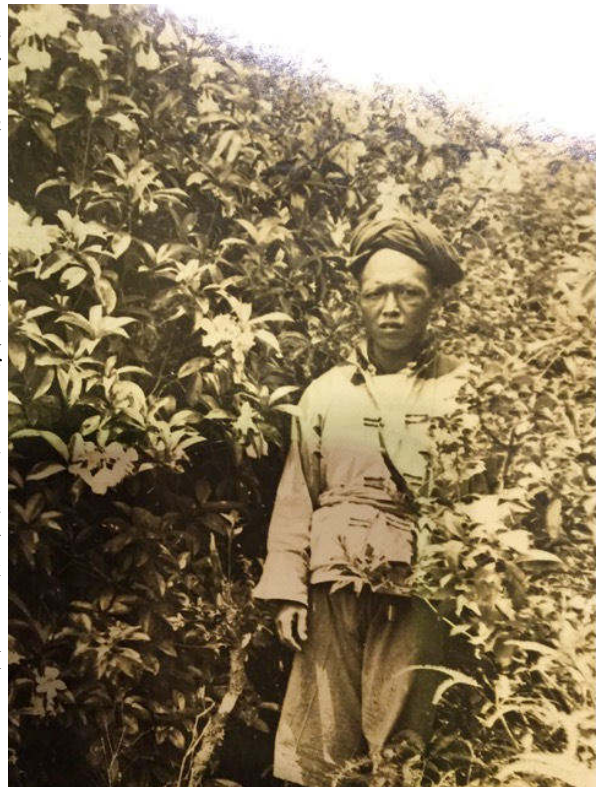
*R. nuttallii*

the plant hunters who brought him their treasures, for example ascribing *R. leucaspis* to “Kingdon Ward’s uncanny knack of picking seed from likely-looking plants, even if they are not in flower, and hitting on a ‘winner’”. He praises other people’s crosses – “The most remarkable cross made by Williams at Caerhays ...” – but is willing to be more critical of himself: “It [*R. cinnabarinum* x *R. ambiguum*] certainly is not a cross worth making and I shall have a glorious bonfire of my seedlings ...”

Again and again he reaches for superlatives, describing *R. schlippenbachii* as “one of the most beautiful azaleas that has ever come back from Asia to our shores” or *R. nuttallii* as “certainly the most glorious of all rhododendrons”. I wonder whether only with flowers did he lose a certain reserve and express himself with rapture – but perhaps I am reading too much into this with twenty-first century eyes. It is not just the blooms that attract him: he says *R. bureavii* “is worth growing if only for its foliage and, in my opinion, it ... should be in every garden”. He makes comments on placement which still hold true today: “It [*R. niveum*] has tight trusses of dull plum-colour flowers, which clash horribly with blood red *arboreum*, but are attractive by themselves in the woodland.” So concerned is he with avoiding colour clashes that sometimes he seems to be thinking aloud: “It [*R. reticulatum*] must, however, be kept by itself, or it can be grown alongside any white *Rhododendron* or *R. amoenum*, but must be kept away from clearer colours, though obviously it would go with any of the sulphur-coloured ones.” He exhibits wry self-knowledge: *R. rubropilosum* “not worth growing except for the rhododendron maniac who wants to have one of every species - I have it at Exbury, but one plant is enough ...” He also reflected on how his views had altered over time: “Tastes differ and change, and first it is blood-red that attracts a *Rhododendron* collector, but it is not long before he finds that white and pinks, yellows and even purples have as great, if not greater charm. I know that at first too many reds were planted at Exbury and these have long ago given place to others of softer hues, though of course reds still exist there in large quantities.”

Lionel was lauded in his own lifetime, though he remained, I think, a modest man: he never wanted any plant named after him – *R. ‘Lionel’s Triumph’* and *R. rothschildii* were both named after the war, years after his death in 1942. Hanger estimated that about thirty First Class Certificates and well over one hundred Awards of Merit had been given by the Royal Horticultural Society to plants shown from Exbury. Barber (*The Rothschild Rhododendrons*, pp. 110-1) lists 49 species that received awards between 1924 and 1965, and I wish to single out a few.

First, from the Rhododendron House, a wonderful structure fully 100 feet long by 50 feet wide, destroyed by a bomb in the war, there was a fine *R. edgeworthii* (as *R. bullatum*) and a *R. taronense* (now *dendricola*), both collected by Forrest, and *R. pachypodum* and *R. nuttallii* var. *stellatum* from Kingdon-Ward and Rock 59557. This



Lao Chao, chief collector for George Forrest (photo: The de Rothschild Archive, London).



The Glade, Exbury Gardens (photo courtesy © Cathryn Baldock).

last is described by Hanger as almost identical to *R. nuttallii* but having “a variation of leaf” and “was never named as far as my memory serves me”. However, I think Hanger’s memory did not serve him well, as the *Rhododendron Handbook* clearly listed R 59557 as *R. megacalyx*, but neither Barber nor any of the books on species that I have consulted list Exbury as having won an FCC with this flower, and I cannot see any other *Maddenia* in Barber’s list. Perhaps one of your readers can help? (I should add that Hanger was a fine gardener, but here at Exbury we have never quite forgotten that he took the FCC form of *R. yakushmanum* with him when he went to Wisley!)

Perhaps most exciting to me is that we received an FCC for one of my all-time favourite rhododendrons, *R. dalhousiae* var. *rhabdotum*. Those red stripes are quite unlike any other rhododendron. (However, I am also fond of *R. cerasinum* ‘Cherry Brandy’, which sometimes has a picotee red edge and is sometimes almost bicoloured, so perhaps my eye is drawn to the unusual.)

Now here I would like to correct an error I made over 20 years ago in *The Rhododendron Story*. I wrote in my article “Hybrids in the British Isles: the 19<sup>th</sup> Century” that poor Lady Dalhousie died of seasickness. Quite where I got that information from I no longer know, but in the days of the web it is now easy to check, and while many, myself included, may feel like death when sea-sick, and a very few may indeed perish from consequent symptoms, Lady Dalhousie, while she died far too young, was not one of them.

With the destruction of the Rhododendron House went Lionel’s tender species, but very recently we have acquired some lovely specimens from Ken Cox and I am anxious one day to restore a small greenhouse in the public area in which to display them, along with our small collection of vireyas. From the list of other species that received awards, I would single out *R. augustinii* var. *chasmanthum*, *R. lutescens*, *R. quinquefolium* and *R. souliei* ‘Exbury Pink’. The first two I mention because I am particularly fond of the subsection *Triflora*. Lionel preferred to breed in with *R. augustinii*, trying to achieve greater hardiness and a variety of purple and smoky lavender hues.

In the case of *R. quinquefolium*, Exbury won an FCC in 1967 for a beautiful form it had named *R. quinquefolium* ‘Five Arrows’, the ‘Five Arrows’ name linking the five leaves to the five arrows on the family’s coat of arms. This is a beautiful plant both in flower and in autumn colour. Finally, in the case of *R. souliei*, another beautiful plant, while I was wrong about Lady Dalhousie I was right about Père Soulié, who was tortured and murdered by Tibetan lamas.

While I think it is fair to say that his first love was rhododendrons, Lionel did collect and hybridise with other plants. He made a handful of amaryllis crosses; he made crosses of camellias and clivias, daffodils and freesias. He loved cotoneasters, wrote about them, and made three crosses: *C.* 'Cornubia' (an attractive red) and *C.* 'Rothschildianus' and *C.* 'Exburiensis', both yellow. But it is in two other genera that he really excelled, orchids and nerines. In the case of the former, Lionel had no intention of getting involved in the orchid world, but once interested in the early 1930s, went at it with characteristic vigour. By the time they were auctioned off for the Red Cross during the war some ten years later, he had 28,000 (yes, 28,000!) orchids, of which 21,000 were cymbidiums.

In the case of nerines, a lovely South African bulb in Amaryllidaceae, he focused on the tender (cool greenhouse) *N. sarniensis*. These he bred carefully, and my father kept the collection until the early 1970s, when they were sold. Two years later they were sold on, and that remarkable plantsman Sir Peter Smithers bought part of the collection. Peter was a truly extraordinary man: a friend of Ian Fleming and similarly involved in wartime intelligence, a politician, a diplomat, a photographer, but above all a gardener. I hugely recommend his memoirs, *Adventures of a Gardener*. He bred the nerines in a careful manner worthy of Lionel, and we bought the collection back in the 1990s. One small greenhouse-full has grown like Topsy, as is the manner with bulbs. We now have a rather large greenhouse-full and put on a magnificent display for our visitors each year in the autumn – their petals sparkle in artificial light.

The preceding anecdote segues neatly into the present, and the challenges facing us today. We are open from early March to early November plus three weekends in December. We start the season with a display of lachenalias – another South African bulb – shown, like the nerines, in the attractive Five Arrows Gallery (this used to be a boiler house, with potting shed above, but in true Lionel fashion is an attractive building). For the early season, we have magnolias, camellias and early rhododendrons. Though we are relatively mild, we cannot compete with Cornwall and our huge *M. campbellii* in the Home Wood are sometimes hit by frost. The *M. x veitchii* 'Peter Veitch' by Gilbury Bridge come later and usually escape. We now have three camellia walks, two in the Winter Garden and one nearer the entrance. In the middle of the season the rhododendrons and azaleas are a blaze of glory.

Inevitably some of Lionel's original plants have matured and died: we lost a giant *R.* 'Angelo', one of his early crosses, just last year. The garden has changed, but we will never extend it beyond its existing boundaries nor – climate change permitting – will we alter its fundamental focus on rhododendrons and other woodland plants.



Middle pond in spring, Exbury Gardens (photo courtesy © Cathryn Baldock).

As I have said, my grandfather was determined to avoid colour clashes at all costs. After the war my father had neither the limitless stock of plants nor the seemingly endless resources, and he frequently plugged gaps with what was available; he also delegated more. It also has to be said that his taste could best be described as kaleidoscopic – “anything goes” in the words of the song. Certainly his taste in ties and jackets – if left unchecked by my mother – bore this out! We are now edging back to more careful planting and placing, though most day-to-day decisions are made by Tom Clarke, the head gardener. Watering, weeding and general maintenance take up far more time than exciting new projects.

To be commercially successful, we need more visitors after the high season is over, from mid-May on. To this end, we have planted an herbaceous garden near the gallery, redeveloped the Iris Garden, planted a Hydrangea Walk, and have two enclosed gardens for summer interest. These are surrounded by yew hedges and have a different feel from the woodland informality of Exbury. The first is the Sundial Garden, with its beautiful stone gazebo covered in wisteria and a splendid stone sundial in its centre. This has been through a number of iterations: I have seen a photograph showing tulips in my grandfather’s day, then it was a rose garden in memory of my mother, and now it has a pair of Tasmanian tree ferns (*Dicksonia antarctica*) and a selection of herbaceous perennials and climbers on trellis pyramids.

The second enclosed garden, adjoining it, was a derelict tennis court and has been turned into our Centenary Garden by my niece, Marie-Louise Agius, herself a landscape designer. To some extent this mirrors the Sundial Garden. In its centre is a sunken circle in stone paving set with – you guessed it – the Five Arrows; around this are sash bars from an old greenhouse with wires supporting climbing roses. Again there are four beds, this time containing fastigate ginkgos and herbaceous plants and grasses, with a nice curved wooden bench at the end. Pink azalea (with a nod to cloud-pruning) curves behind the bench, flanked by a pair of *Heptacodium miconioides*.

A garden such as has been developed over all these years is a living organism itself, always changing, something to be treasured, nurtured, and enjoyed. ☞

*Editor’s note: See back cover for more photos from Exbury Gardens.*



The Centenary Garden, Exbury Gardens. (photo courtesy © Cathryn Baldock)

## The 2019 Steele Lecture : Trends in Gardening with Rhododendrons in Germany by Hartwig Schepker.

A review by Bob Howard.



Photo #1 A vista with massed rhododendrons, Rhododendron Park and Botanic Garden, Bremen. (photo Bettina Conradi)

On October 7, Dr. Hartwig Schepker, Director of the Rhododendron Park and Botanic Garden, Bremen, Germany, presented the Steele Lecture for this year. Before reviewing the talk, I would like to mention that Hartwig came with his family, stayed a couple of weeks, and travelled extensively in Nova Scotia, from the Cabot Trail and Meat Cove on Cape Breton Island, to observing the stars in our Dark Sky Preserve at Kejimikujik National Park. He and his family were delighted by the coastal fall colour of blueberry around Parrsboro, huckleberry at Peggy's Cove, and by the red maples, birches, and other hardwoods that paint the forests of Cape Breton.

In all, he gave three talks in Nova Scotia. The titles were: *Trends in Gardening with Rhododendrons*; *Plant Exploration in Remote Arunachal Pradesh*; and *Great Rhododendron Gardens of Europe*. His talk, *Trends in Gardening with Rhododendrons*, highlighted three themes that we also emphasize in our club: (1) using rhododendrons to make a garden picture, (2) valuing rhododendrons for their year-round foliage, and (3) associating rhododendrons with companion plants.

The Rhododendron Park and Botanic Garden in Bremen plays an active role, influencing trends related to the use of rhododendrons in German gardens. It displays new introductions and encourages the use of rhododendrons in landscapes both public and private. This amazing 46-hectare setting is home to the second largest collection of rhododendrons in the world: around 650 species and 3,500 cultivars, with displays in woodlands, historic collections, a rock garden and greenhouses for subtropical species. Both the garden vistas and the individual plants are splendid. (Photo #1)

The Park and Botanic Garden is also an educational facility and plant conservation centre, conserving both wild species and historic cultivars, such as Indian azaleas and early hybrids. As well, the area northwest of Bremen is an

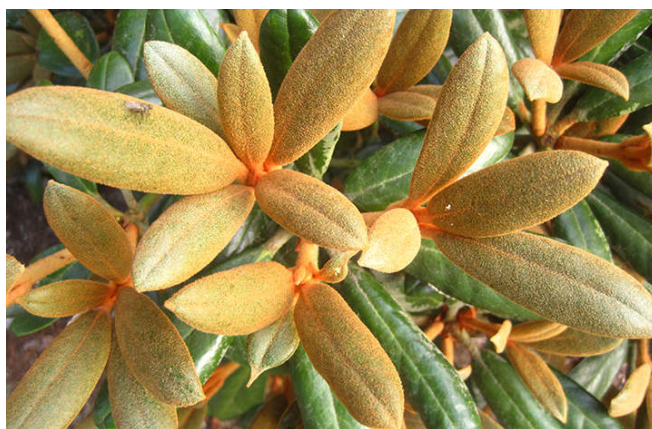


Photo #2 *R. 'Hyden Velvet'*

economically important nursery area for rhododendron production. Half of the rhodos sold in Europe are grown in northwest Germany.

Rhododendrons have been grown in Germany for over 200 years. However, diseases and insects, as well as changing garden design fashion, have made them less popular.



Photo #3 Svend Hansen's garden, Denmark.



Photo #4 *R. yakushimanum* 'FCC BS Hachmann'.

The Bremen Rhododendron Park, the nursery growers, and the German Rhododendron Society have joined forces to promote rhododendrons in year-round gardens. They want to replace the narrow idea of doing extensive plantings of huge specimens in a jumble of colours, with garden designs focused on smaller plants with beautiful foliage and an artistic use of flower colour. One plant Hartwig recommended is 'Golfer', a stunning Warren Berg foliage plant that is already a favourite here in Nova Scotia. A new variety to me is 'Hyden Velvet' which displays amazing, young, fawn foliage. (Photo #2)

In addition to 'Golfer', three more excellent foliage plants are, 'Rusty Dane', 'Silbervelours', and 'Teddy Bear'. By way of example, Svend Hansen's garden in Denmark is an exquisite demonstration of how to effectively design with rhododendron foliage. (Photo #3) There are also red-foliaged varieties being tested and introduced, such as, 'Everred', 'Rotor Korsar', *R. latouchae*, and *R. 'Maraschino'*.

I think many of us have been attempting to develop multi-genus gardens that include rhododendrons, rather than to focus exclusively on creating a rhododendron collection. To this end, Hartwig gave many excellent ideas for plant combinations. One motto he likes is, "Nature is a good advisor". For example, rhododendrons in nature often grow with firs or maples. They can work nicely in the garden, as shown in photo # 4: a Japanese maple 'Dissectum' with *R. 'Koichiro Wada'*. Personally, I also like the look of hydrangeas planted with rhododendrons.

To revitalize the reputation of rhododendrons with the gardening public in Germany, Hartwig has also suggested other companion planting ideas. For groundcovers, I particularly liked his pictures of rhododendrons with hostas, epimediums, brunnera, geranium, and 'Lady's Mantle' (*Alchimella mollis*). The foliage rhododendrons consort particularly well with perennials, grasses and bulbs. In illustration, he showed azaleas with *Allium giganteum*, and rhodos with 'Pearly Everlasting' (*Anaphalis margaritacea*) or Lamb's Ears (*Stachys byzantina*). *R. 'PJM'* and fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecurioides*) can be an appealing combination as shown in Photo #5. A picture of *Rhododendron bureavii* with Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa sp.*) was also stunning.

Using drifts and masses of colour, charms and captivates the eye. Hartwig showed an all-blue corner at Exbury Gardens and a sweep of orange *R. 'Coccinea Speciosa'* at Mount Stewart in Northern Ireland. His own Rhododendron Park at Bremen has many mass plantings that focus on narrow colour ranges as shown in photo #6.

All of Hartwig's talks were lively, entertaining, full of good humour and abounding with inspiring ideas. The Trends talk was especially rich in ideas for planting our gardens. To learn more, visit the Wikipedia site or the Rhododendron Park website: [www.rhododendronparkbremen.de](http://www.rhododendronparkbremen.de). Or better yet, Hartwig did invite us all to come visit. Someday I hope to take him up on his kind offer. ☺



Photo #5 . *R. 'PJM'* and *Pennisetum alopecurioides*



Photo #6 Shades of blue using rhododendron subsection *Lapponica*.

## Positions of Responsibility

### Officers and Directors of the Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticulture Society for 2019 – 20

<b>President:</b>	John Brett	902-999-3292
<b>Vice-President:</b>	Syd Dumaresq	902-456 4772
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<b>Past President:</b>	Sheila Stevenson	902 479-3740
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<b>Director, Education:</b>	Jim Sharpe	902-425 6312
<b>Director, Plant Material/ Horticulture:</b>	Lynn Rotin	902-346-2018
<b>Director, Social &amp;&amp; Volunteer Coordinator:</b>	Lynn Rotin	902-346-2018
<b>Director at Large and Membership Coordinator:</b>	Rebecca Lancaster	902-453-0251
<b>Tissue Culture Plant Sale:</b>	unassigned	

### Other Positions of Responsibility

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<b>Coordinator, Tissue Culture Plant Sale :</b>	Unassigned	
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<b>Spring Garden Tour and Potluck</b>	Lynn Rotin & Sophie Bieger	902-346-2018/902-422-3817
<b>District 12 ARS Rep (American Rhodo Society):</b>	Christina Woodward	email: canadacaw@yahoo.ca
<b>Co-chair ARS 2021 Spring Convention</b>	Jim Sharpe	902 425 6313
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Photo Album - Rhododendrons at Exbury Gardens. Photos by Lionel de Rothschild.



*R. quinquefolium* 'Five Arrows', flower .



*R. quinquefolium* 'Five Arrows', foliage .



*R. augustinii*.



*R. cerasinum*.



*R. 'Angelo'*



*R. macabeanum*.



*R. irroratum*.



*R. orbiculare*.