

The "Niagara Rhodo"

The Niagara Chapter,
Rhododendron Society of Canada
March 2007 Newsletter



Website: <http://www.rhodoniagara.org>

Our Purpose

We are a non-profit organization whose aim is to promote, encourage and support interest in the genus *rhododendrons*, including *azaleas*. **Our goal is to encourage gardeners to grow and appreciate these plants, by providing educational meetings with knowledgeable speakers, access to topical publications and hosting joint meetings with other chapters.**

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Upcoming Events

*** All events are open to the public. Bring a gardening friend. ***

Eastern Daylight Time Starts at 0200 hrs March 11, 2007

March 11, 2007 (Sunday). 2 P.M. EDT

BULBS, CORMS & RHIZOMES WITH RHODODENDRONS

Best Western Beacon, Harbourside Inn, Beacon Blvd., Jordan, Ontario, Canada.

Sally and John Perkins, Growers and Hybridizers in Salem, New Hampshire, will speak on hardy rhododendrons & azaleas and bulbs, corms & rhizomes as companion plants. John is a rare find, a computer scientist who brings his precise style to all things horticultural, especially to growing rhododendrons and sharing information about them. Sally, a trained botanist developed her passion for horticulture from her parents. They are humorous, avid and knowledgeable gardeners who, since 1985, have attempted to grow more than 500 different cultivars of rhododendron in the potentially hostile environment of New Hampshire. They speak with humour, passion and knowledge to convey their experiences with a wide range of plants. A one hour talk is planned for rhodos and a one hour talk for Bulbs Corms and Rhizomes. An intermission will follow the first hour.

See <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/activities.htm>

Saturday, March 24, 2007 1:30 P.M. – 2:30 P.M.
Niagara College Open House
TOUGH LOVE FOR RHODODENDRONS
Glendale Campus
Speaker: Nick Yarmoshuk

April 21, 2007 (Saturday) 10:00 A.M.
ANNUAL PLANT SALE
HRIO (Guelph University), Victoria
Avenue,
Vineland Station, Ontario, Canada

April 18, 2007. Wednesday,
6:30 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.
SUCCESS WITH RHODODENDRONS IN
NIAGARA & DESCRIPTION OF PLANTS TO
BE AVAILABLE ON APRIL 21.
St Catharines Public Library sponsored
event at Grantham Library.
Grantham Plaza, L2M 3W4. Scott St.
between Vine St. & Niagara St.
Speaker: Nick Yarmoshuk

May 13, 2007. Sunday, 2:00 P.M.
Special sale - Plants for Members
120+/- Plants now in poly-house ready for sale
to members.

HRIO (Guelph University) Victoria Avenue,
Vineland Station.

President's Message – Sondra Meis

The year 2007 was off to an excellent start when 50 people turned out for Dr. Pellett's talk on developing ornamentals for extreme environments. The meeting was an excellent opportunity to socialize with longstanding friends as well as our new members. We welcomed three new members to the Board of Directors. Darshan Bahtia, Lyall Crober and Peter Phelps bring their love of gardening, knowledge of plants, considerable organizational skills and collective wisdom to an expanded Board.

Friendly rivalry over special rhododendrons and azaleas, donated by Jack and Jackie Looye of Rhodo Land Nursery, spurred the bidding in the plant auction following the talk. Chequebooks can be useful at these events.

Let's Spring forward on March 11, together with the clocks, to The Beacon Motor Inn to hear Sally and John Perkins.

As you can see from the list of upcoming events, The Niagara Rhodo Society has a full program this spring. I look forward to seeing you there.

Niagara College Rhodo Project

Full information on this project is now available on our website. Pictures showing progress of work to the middle of January are shown on two links. A third link provides information on the vision and conceptual design of the project.

The Niagara Chapter will be working with teachers at the College to select the rhodos and companion plants during the next two months for planting this spring. If you would like to be involved in this phase of the project, please contact Nick Yarmoshuk.

Membership

Membership is open to anyone interested in the growth and culture of rhododendrons and azaleas. If you are interested in becoming a member, please contact our Membership Chairman: Mr. Bob Dickhout, 5200 Timothy Drive, Niagara Falls, L2E5G3, Telephone # (905) 356-3432. Remember, a yearly local membership costs only \$10.00. A full membership in the American Rhododendron Society is \$45 CDN per annum which includes quarterly copies of the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society.

In the commentary below, Nick Yarmoshuk draws our attention to the Vineland Renaissance Project and expresses concerns about the future of the Rhododendron and Azalea beds at the Vineland Experimental Station. Please go to our website <http://www.rhodoniagara.org> and in the NEWLY ADDED SECTION click on *Vineland Renaissance Project* for his comments. There you can download the complete report and additional information

Vineland Renaissance:

Need to Protect Heritage Rhododendron Garden

By Nicholas Yarmoshuk,

These comments are the personal interpretation (of the Vineland Renaissance Report) by the writer and must not be interpreted as the opinions of the leadership of the Niagara Region of the Rhododendron Society of Canada.

The Vineland Renaissance Report is the work of an Ontario Government appointed committee, chaired by former Inniskillin president Donald Ziraldo, whose task it was to "devise ways to breathe life into the 100-year old facility rendered virtually obsolete by years of cutbacks." The basic recommendation of the report is to create a new research station enterprise, funded by a public-private partnership, to house a greenbelt think-tank, an agribusiness incubation center, and laboratories where agricultural scientists from various universities would work cooperatively.

The Committee's report is an important document for horticulture in Niagara. Its focus on the economic synergies possible for sustaining and advancing local horticultural pursuits must be supported and implemented. The interests of commercial enterprises will be well served by such an introduction. It is doubtful, however, that the interests of the ornamental landscape horticulturalist will be well served by this new enterprise.

Although ornamentals are mentioned in the vision statement of the report, there is no industry group underpinning them, as is the case for grapes, tender fruit and the floriculture green houses. Hence, proposed initiatives for this category are barely mentioned in the report. The report pays only lip service to floriculture and then only in the context of greenhouse floriculture.

The report declares that there is a need to raze out-of-date buildings and to preserve and protect heritage structures that currently exist. It mentions the Station's land resources only as an adjunct to the physical plant.

The Report discusses water rights and states that water is taken from Lake Ontario for irrigation. However the Report ignores the fact that the pumping equipment is barely functional and in need of replacement. This oversight is a threat to grounds maintenance and preservation of heritage plantings.

The physical plant holdings of The Vineland Research Station include a number of buildings and some two hundred of acres of research plots, trial gardens, landscaped lands and a heritage woodlot.

The woodlot and the beautiful Azalea garden are our prime concern. They are eloquently described by Emil Andersen (see pp 139 - 140, *Campus Grounds Landscaping in "Celebrating a Century of Success"*, Horticultural Experimental Station, University of Guelph, Vineland.2006) as a resource that has served as a . . . "valuable source of tree and shrub species for student use . . ." The woodlot contains . . . "unique specimens and/or Carolinian types. The Caucasian Wingnut has grown to a remarkably large size. In trunk diameter and branch spread. It may be one of Ontario's largest trees and attracts much public attention. Other interesting trees are the Turkish Filbert or Hazelnut, Paperbark Maple, Metasequoia (close relative of the giant Redwoods of California), Blue Ash, Kentucky Coffee Tree, White Fir, Sycamore, and mature Rhododendrons alongside the creek, now very large and still very attractive."

Starting more than 50 years ago Rhododendrons were first grown at Vineland by the late Bob Fleming. Hybridizing research on Rhododendrons and Azaleas was carried on at "Vineland" from 1971 by a succession of individuals starting with R. R. Forster. Rhododendron research stopped at Vineland with the passing of A.W.Smith. Jack Looye, probably, the only serious hybridizer of Rhododendrons in Ontario today, independently carries on this legacy at Rhodo Land, Nursery.

The woodlot was used as an ideal location for testing selected rhododendron and azalea hybrids. These plants have matured and demonstrate the strength of the hybridizing program that no longer exists. A beautiful Azalea bed exists in front of the main administration building. Over the years, with financial cutbacks, the woodlot has struggled to survive. Old, ten foot, rhododendrons have been cut down to allow room for tractors to maneuver more readily; trees have been felled on freshly planted stock and general neglect has characterized the maintenance provided to plants in the woodlot.

Members of the Niagara Region Chapter of the Rhododendron Society of Canada have attempted, over the years, to provide volunteer services to help maintain the Rhododendron and Azalea gardens. They have also contributed new varieties to help revitalize the appearance of the landscape. The expended energy has too often resulted in unexpected setbacks after the volunteer maintenance work and additions were completed.

The Vineland Renaissance Report makes scant mention of floriculture research let alone maintaining the heritage of the Woodlot plantings. The 90 acre woodlot and the azalea plantings contain the remnants of what at one time was a magnificent collection of rhododendron and azalea cultivars derived from the hybridizing work of Roy Forster, Ken Begg, Bob Fleming and Al Smith. This work brought international recognition to the then Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario.

With the introduction of a for-profit business plan to manage the research at "Vineland," geared to commercial viability, there is little likelihood that heritage considerations and uniqueness in the environment will drive decision making. This may be especially true given (1) that the new entity is proposed to have authority to lease or sell land to raise additional capital to support the centre, and (2) that the Vineland Renaissance Report fails to identify the 90 acre "Vineland Rhododendron" woodlot and the azalea plantation as entities worthy of support and preservation as Heritage plantings.

From the perspective of horticulturalists in general and rhododendron growers in particular, preservation of the remaining symbols of this fine hybridizing heritage is important in its own right. Its neglect in the report is unfortunate.

Our purpose in preparing these comments is to highlight missing elements in the Vineland Renaissance Report and to suggest that attention be given to preserving the woodlot and the azalea plantings either by designating them as elements of "Vineland" requiring protection, or permitting the careful removal of these plants to a public horticultural institution where they will be protected and used as an object of study by future students of horticulture.

The full Vineland Renaissance Report is available on the web site of the Niagara Chapter of the Rhododendron Society of Canada. Please look at the report and convey your considered thoughts about it to the author, preferably at postmaster@rhodoniagara.org.

Book Review

F. F. Rockwell and Wm. G. Breitenbucher. *GARDENING WITH PEAT MOSS*. Algrove Publishing – Classic Reprint Series. Ottawa, 2002

This thin, 72 page book may be thin in volume but certainly it is not thin in content. Many suggest that what is old is new again. Here is an example of this. A recent guest speaker at a Niagara Region meeting in 2003 surprised his audience by stating that, in Denmark, rhododendrons and azaleas grown entirely in peat moss thrive better than when grown under usual soil conditions. Some 70 years earlier the authors of this little volume described the successes achieved in using peat moss as a medium for a long list of horticultural pursuits: planting seeds; rooting cuttings; growing roses, evergreens and shrubs; growing perennials, bulbs,, tubers and corms; for repairing lawns and so on. In that talk, in 2003, the speaker provided much the same perspective on peat moss as do the authors of *Gardening with Peat Moss*.

How did this book come to be written? The publisher notes that, "The genesis of this little gardening book can be found in the automobile industry. Cars had become so popular in the mid-1920s and horses so much less popular that manure, the gardener's friend, was in short supply. As people looked for substitutes, peat moss rose in popularity, resulting in this small volume, which assures the reader that peat moss is actually superior to its predecessor." We note that the peat moss, that our guest speaker and the authors of this book describe, is not the fine powdery stuff that one typically finds in all garden centers. They are talking about the rough chunky stuff that allows air and moisture to co-exist and provide a wonderful environment for plant roots.

The book is available from Lee Valley Stores on-line and in the store at \$2.95. No, that is not a typo, we repeat \$2.95. If you order on-line and ask that the book be delivered by mail, the delivery cost is \$6.00 per volume! We found it to be fun reading and instructive.

[New Content on http://www.rhodoniagara.org](http://www.rhodoniagara.org)

Those of our readers who regularly surf the "net" will have noticed new items on our Chapter's web pages, others will learn about them here. Two major changes will be found on the *Plant Sales page* and on a new page named "*Archives of the Bulletin of the Rhododendron Society of Canada 1972 to 1991.*" Each of these pages may be accessed from the main menu on the "home page." The *Bulletin* ceased publication in 1991.

Plant Sales: This page provides photos and brief descriptions of varieties that are likely to be available at the plant sale on April 21. At this time it is impossible to predict which plants will be available at the general sale. The best plants available in the poly-houses are selected for sale. The selection is made on the early morning of the day of sale. Also, a new page will appear in the next few days, describing varieties to be available to *members only* in May.

RSC Bulletin Archive: We suggest that the importance of the Archive is that it provides a historical view of the early days of the Rhododendron Society of Canada. It also allows any interested person easy access to a wide range of practical information about the development of rhododendron culture in Eastern Canada. The Archives page now has some 17 issues available for viewing and downloading. Our goal is to have the remaining issues available on the site by mid summer. A complete set (of issues of the Bulletin) is available at the Library of the Niagara Parks Commission, School of Horticulture.

Public Rhododendron Gardens: A new page that we hope will appear within the next two weeks is one that will list and describe seven public gardens in Niagara and vicinity that feature rhododendrons and azaleas. Final documentation is now being prepared for this new page and associated links. When it is ready it will be highlighted on the HOME page as **Regional Public Gardens** under the red, **NEWLY UPDATED HEADLINE**.

Need for Advice: Finally, as the person who manages the web site, Nick Yarmoshuk asks for your comments and advice on topics that you would like to see on our Chapter's web site. Please write to him at postmaster@rhodoniagara.org .