

The *“Niagara Rhodo”*  
The Niagara Chapter,  
Rhododendron Society of Canada  
*January 2008 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.**

## Inside This Month

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## *President's Message*

We have entered a New Year and your Board of Directors looks to 2008 with hopes of building on the broad range of activities that have been accomplished in 2007 with members' support.

At the end of 2007 the Niagara Region Chapter of the Rhododendron Society of Canada (NRC) is alive and well with a solid financial balance sheet, a growing membership, has established constructive relationships with several community agencies and was instrumental in helping to develop a demonstration garden.

NRC collaborated with the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture and Botanical Gardens through discussion of cultivars of rhododendrons and azaleas that are likely to be good doers in Niagara. Lorne Fast spoke on climate zones and their relevance to gardeners to a well attended October NRC meeting.

Following a written submission which discussed elements of the Vineland Renaissance Report, (see [http://www.rhodoniagara.org/Vineland\\_Renaissance\\_Cover\\_Letter\\_and\\_Review.doc](http://www.rhodoniagara.org/Vineland_Renaissance_Cover_Letter_and_Review.doc)) NRC obtained status as an interest group in the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre (VRIC) ( <http://www.vinelandontario.ca>), the new Corporate Structure for the former Guelph University Vineland Research Station.

Lil Haworth represented the NRC at a community meeting at Vineland to share our specific interests in Vineland. Lil and Peter Phelps met with Donald Ziraldo, Chair of VRIC Board of Directors and with Dr. Jim Brandle, Chief executive officer of VRIC, concerning the future of the Rhododendron and Azalea gardens on the grounds of VRIC. Further discussions on this topic will be held in the early spring with a view to preserving and enhancing the heritage collection of rhododendrons and azaleas at the Vineland Research station.

The Niagara Region Chapter's picnic in July was attended by 28 people who purchased more than \$200 worth of cultivars from the "Plants for Members" collection.

Finally, the Niagara Region Chapter provided \$8,500 and technical advice towards the development of a Rhododendron – Azalea display garden at Niagara College. Work has been completed on this project. We look forward to evaluating the results at the end of the first winter.

In the coming year we plan to further develop our relationship with the Massachusetts Chapter of the ARS through which we expect to develop a wide range of commercially unavailable cultivars that will provide a wider range of colour combinations and tolerances to the varying weather conditions that we have been experiencing. These, of course will be part of our Plant for Members (P4M) program.

Donald Hyatt, our speaker on Sunday, March 30, 2008 continues the tradition of first rate speakers we attract to our program. An introduction to Don and his talk is provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

The annual General Plant Sale on Saturday, April 19, 2008 will have something for everyone: traditionally offered hardy plants for those who want to start a garden with a few reliable plants, or for those who have a special place for a big splash of colour early in the season; difficult to obtain good-doers for those who wish to expand their collections; and, unique offerings of commercially unavailable cultivars.

On Saturday May 10, we combine two events that have been popular in the past: A tour of the Yarmoshuk's garden in which the garden's strengths and weakness will be assessed in a discussion led by a local landscape and horticultural authority. This event will also provide an opportunity to acquire unique cultivars that you may have missed at earlier meetings.

We invite you to avail yourself of these opportunities to broaden your rhododendron and azalea experiences, to meet fellow growers and enthusiasts and to acquire unique plants at very low cost.

Details for all of these events follow.

## *Program 2008*

**Sunday, March 30, 2008. 2 P.M.**

**Best Western Beacon Motor Inn, on the QEW at Jordan Station**

**Speaker:** Donald Hyatt. Stonehouse Nursery, Blue Ridge Mountains, Amherst County, Virginia.

Don is recognized as a national authority on azaleas and rhododendrons and a speaker of great knowledge and charm. He has served on the national boards of both the [Azalea Society of America](#) (ASA) and the [American Rhododendron Society](#) (ARS), received the Bronze Medal from the Potomac Valley Chapter of the ARS in 1978, was awarded the prestigious Silver Medal from the national organization in 2002 and was presented with the ASA Fredrick P. Lee Commendation for distinguished contributions in furthering the knowledge and appreciation of azaleas. These awards reflect his life-long passion for the genus Rhododendron and his many contributions to the ARS and its goals. Don is the current President of the [Potomac Valley Chapter of the ARS](#).

Don is also a highly regarded teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology where he was the Computer Systems Laboratory Director from the time the school opened in 1985 until his retirement. One of the highlights of his career was when a team of his students won the largest prize ever awarded in an educational contest, a million dollar ETA10-P supercomputer in the 1988 SuperQuest competition. His students also received over \$300,000 in scholarships and prizes in a web education contest called the *International ThinkQuest Internet Challenge*.

Don claims to be a "plant person" at heart rather than a computer scientist. The spectacular private garden he developed over 50 years (<http://www.donaldhyatt.com/garden.html>) has been on many garden tours. In his nursery, Don propagates a small number of rare rhododendrons, azaleas, and wildflowers. He is currently focusing on the preservation of hard-to-find native azalea species and natural azalea hybrids in the wild. Stonehouse Creek Nursery is not open to the public nor does it ship plants at the present time, but Don does provide a contact point for landscape design and limited local sales of plants.

## Native Eastern North American Azaleas

A detailed description of native eastern American Azaleas has been assembled into a web page by Donald W. Hyatt. The detailed compilation may be found at the following web page.

<http://www.tjhsst.edu/~dhyatt/azaleas/>

The fifteen eastern American Azaleas are: [R.vaseyi](#), R.canadense, R.canescens, R.austrinum, R.flammeum, R.periclymenoides, R.alabamense, R.atlanticum, [R.calendulaceum](#), R.prinophyllum, R.viscosum, R.arborescens, R.cumberlandense, [R.prunifolium](#), [R.eastmanii](#). **Photos and other description are available at <http://www.tjhsst.edu/~dhyatt/ars/natives.htm>**

## **Annual General Plant Sale: Saturday, April 19, 2008, 10 A.M. Vineland Center for Research and Innovation (formerly the HRIO, Vineland), Victoria Avenue, Vineland, Ontario.**

Only 200 plants will be available; approximately 35 varieties, and approximately 5-6 of each variety, will be selected for their uniqueness as local offerings, and adaptability to the southern Ontario growing environment. The selected cultivars are listed below and photographs of their blooms are shown on the web site at [http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008\\_Annual\\_Plant\\_Sale.pdf](http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008_Annual_Plant_Sale.pdf). Furthermore, an additional unique 50 plants will be made available from our *Plants-4-Members* lists which were available on previous occasions. These are now plants in 2 gallon pots, which have grown over the past year, having been re-potted to ensure proper root development and some are budded ready to flower. Descriptions of these plants are provided on the web site. Unfortunately, because of their uniqueness photographs of plants or trusses are not available at this time and will not be available until we can take photographs of these specimens.

This year we are introducing an innovation to complement the on site sales at Vineland. Members who wish to guarantee availability of their choice are invited to send their request with a cheque for the appropriate amount to Lil Haworth, 4 Deer Park Court, Grimsby, ON, L3M 2R2. Your request will be collated and plants will be available ***for pick up*** at the sale at 10 A.M. on Saturday, April 19, 2008.

A list of plants to be available at the Annual Plant Sale and the price of each cultivar and size follows on Pages 4 & 5. For photos of these cultivars please see:

[http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008\\_Annual\\_Plant\\_Sale.pdf](http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008_Annual_Plant_Sale.pdf)

**Saturday, May 10, 2008, 10 – 12 A.M. Garden Tour and Plants 4 Members.**

Members are invited to a garden tour and discussion forum at The Yarmoshuk's, 57 Highland Avenue, St. Catharines. Successes and failures pertaining to growing rhododendrons and azaleas in raised beds will be described. Members will have an opportunity to see the results, favourable and unfavourable of growing many plants in a relatively small area. A manually controlled selective area watering system is on the site and may be of interest to members who wish to water their yards yet minimize water usage.

Unique selections of *Plants-4-Members* will be available for sale at cost.

## *Do you have a wish for a special cultivar?*

Following the Perkins' talk last March, 2007, a member asked, "Where can I get a 'Cornell Pink'?" At that time the Newsletter editor did not know of a local source. Since that time our information about potential sources has improved. We are now ready to suggest that if any member wishes to provide us with a "wish-list" of varieties that they would like to see available at a plant sale, or, at a P4M sale, please write to [postmaster@rhodoniagara.org](mailto:postmaster@rhodoniagara.org). Or, if you prefer call Nick Yarmoshuk at 905-684-4703. We will do our utmost to see what we can acquire on your behalf.

## *Membership Renewal*

Renewal notices for membership in District 12, (Rhododendron Society of Canada) American Rhododendron Society were sent in November by the new National Membership Director, Lynne Melnyk, who replaced the late Bob Dickhout. The new membership fee reflects the fact that the Canadian Dollar is at or near par with the USA Dollar. The slight difference in fees in each currency, i.e. \$35 US compared to \$37 CDN, reflects the fact that it costs approximately 3% to 4% to buy or sell currency.

Renewal notices for local memberships will not be sent to current members. Memberships may be renewed at one of the regular scheduled meetings, at the Plant Sale or at the garden tour. The membership fee for local memberships is \$10. This fee covers the cost of printing and mailing 4-6 newsletters each year. Local fees for members who provide e-mail addresses are \$5 starting in January 2008.

## *A Note about this Mailing & a Request*

We have segregated our mailing list into two parts: 1/3 of the Newsletters are being distributed to members' e-mail addresses. 2/3 of the newsletters are being distributed by Canada Post. If possible, we would like to reduce the number of Canada Post mailings. If you have an e-mail address which you use frequently, please e-mail us at [postmaster@rhodoniagara.org](mailto:postmaster@rhodoniagara.org) to provide us with that address. This form of communication will reduce the workload on those who prepare the envelopes for distributing the Newsletter. It will also reduce your local membership fee from \$10 to \$5. Thank you, this will be much appreciated.

*See you all on Sunday, March 30, at 2 P.M. for Donald Hyatt's talk at the Best Western Beacon Motor Inn, Jordan Station.*

## **Plant Lists and Prices**

**Photographs of all plants that will be available may be seen on the web site of the NRC:  
[http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008\\_Annual\\_Plant\\_Sale.pdf](http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008_Annual_Plant_Sale.pdf)**

The following cultivars will be available at \$25 per plant. A 10% discount applies to all members' purchases. These cultivars are made available to us by Blue Sky Nursery a wholesale grower in Beamsville, Ontario.

Azalea Evergreen	Girard's Hot Shot	2 Gal
Azalea Evergreen	Mother's day	2 Gal
Azalea Evergreen	Stewartsonian	2 Gal
Az Northern Lights	Mandarin Lights	2 Gal
Lepidote	Aglo	2 Gal
Lepidote	Arctic Pearl	2 Gal
Lepidote	Blue Baron	2 Gal
Lepidote	Checkmate	2 Gal
Lepidote	Cornell Pink	3 Gal
Elepidote	Consolini's Windmill	3 Gal
Elepidote	Cunningham's White	2 Gal
Elepidote	Edith Bosley	2 Gal
Elepidote	Fantastica	2 Gal

Elepidote	Ingrid Mehlquist	2 Gal
Elepidote	Lees Dark Purple	2 Gal
Lepidote	Manitou	2 Gal
Lepidote	Mary Fleming	3 Gal
Lepidote	Midnight Ruby	3 Gal
Elepidote	Milk Way	2 Gal
Elepidote	Roseum 2	3 Gal
Elepidote	Vernus	3 Gal 40 cm
Elepidote	Wojnar's Purple	2 Gal

Plants listed above will be available at \$25 per plant. A 10% discount applies to purchases by members.

Additional cultivars, listed below, will be available at the prices shown. A 10% discount applies to all members' purchases from this listing. These cultivars are made available to us by Nettle Creek Nursery, a dedicated grower in Fonthill, Ontario. Prices for each cultivar will be as shown below.

R. Anna Hall	\$15	R. April Song	\$12
R. Fantastica	\$15	R. Peppermint Twist	\$12
R. Skookum	\$15	R. Arctic Pearl	\$12
R. Crete	\$15	R. April Mist	\$12
R. Molly Fordham	\$12	R. Aglo	\$12
R. Isola Bella	\$12		
R. Thunder	\$12	Azalea Trilites	\$25
R. Checkmate	\$12	Azalea My Mary	\$20
R. April Rose	\$12	These two azaleas are very large plants and are well budded. A small number will be available.	
R. Manitou	\$12		

*See Photographs and descriptions of each of these cultivars  
[http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008 Annual Plant Sale.pdf](http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008%20Annual%20Plant%20Sale.pdf)*

*Editor's Note: The following article was originally printed in the Bulletin of the Rhododendron Society of Canada in the mid 1980's. At that time Fraser Hancock was associated with Woodland Nursery.*

## **Feeding Rhododendrons: PLANTS SHOULD EAT WHEN THEY ARE HUNGRY** *Fraser M. Hancock Mississauga, Ontario*

A common quandary for gardeners - when is the best time to fertilize their rhododendrons? Of course, the best period is when the plant is best able to utilize those nutrients which you are providing, but the plant growth being so complex, this period is very difficult to determine.

A clue to the best period to fertilize is to observe the way the plant grows. This can denote what is happening within the plant and even what is occurring below the soil surface.

In general, there are two types of growth patterns observed in plants. Some plants such as Juniperus and Thuja (cedars) have indeterminate growth. Once they come out of dormancy in the spring, the shoots grow fairly steadily, with no definite growth spurts followed by rest periods. Plants of this type have root systems which grow steadily throughout the growing season, drawing essential nutrients from the soil for the above ground parts.

With rhododendrons, the growth characteristics of the upper part of the plant are different. Like Taxus (yews) and many other plants, rhododendrons have growth flushes. In the spring, the vegetative shoots flush, usually after the flowering period. This initial flush is at first succulent, but growth slows and a hardening of the initial shoot is seen as the leaves fully expand and the tissues become mature. For quite a long period, depending on the season and species studied, the plant seems to be resting, as there is a lag phase in the growth cycle.

Then there is often another flush of growth from new vegetative buds which were forming during the lag phase. Similarly, the new shoots harden up after expanding, and vegetative and floral buds are formed for the next season's growth and bloom.

What are not seen, of course, are the events taking place within the plant and below the soil surface within the root system.

First of all, let us start in the springtime as the frost is leaving the ground. Once soil temperatures reach 2°C - 3°C (40°F) root systems begin new growth. This root activity is taking place long before there is any vegetative growth. In fact, root growth slows, and virtually ceases as the upper plant commences growth. What is happening is that the roots begin rapid elongation when the soil temperatures are sufficiently high for proper cell division and differentiation. They are growing rapidly in order to build up critical levels of essential nutrients. These levels are sometimes termed "threshold levels". Once the specific amounts of nutrients are reached for the plant's needs, vegetative growth can commence. As the buds break dormancy and begin to grow, the root growth slows drastically.

The growing shoots are utilizing stored nutrients which are assimilated and combined through photosynthesis into building blocks for tissue generation. As the leaves expand fully and the tissues harden the upper part of the plant enters the lag phase of the cycle.

The root system now resumes growth in order to explore new sources of nutrients within the soil matrix. Again, these nutrients are translocated from the roots and stored until the "threshold levels" are reached, for resumption of the next vegetative flush. If a single element is deficient, the threshold level for that element will not be reached, and the time lag will be longer between growth flushes, relative to a plant which has sufficient nutrients available to its root system.

In our area, on young plants, two flushes of growth are seen in a normal growing season with elepidote rhododendrons. The second flush is usually the one which forms the terminal flower bud if the plant is mature enough and has been provided with the proper nutrient levels.

***Fertilizers are best utilized by the plant while the roots are actively growing. Therefore there is little benefit in feeding rhododendrons while the shoots are developing, since the roots are relatively inactive.***

Application of a well-balanced fertilizer should be made shortly after the ground frost has disappeared, prior to any activity of the upper part of the plant. As mentioned, this fertilizer will be absorbed by the growing root system and stored for subsequent shoot elongation. Once the first shoot flush appears to have hardened off and the new leaves become a mature green, fertilization should be resumed to supply the necessary nutrients for the next flush of growth. Of great importance at this feeding period is the application of a high phosphorus/low nitrogen type of fertilizer, to encourage flower bud development rather than more vegetative buds.

Another neglected period of feeding is the time of root growth which occurs in the fall, prior to true dormancy when the soil temperatures drop below 3°C (40°F). True, ***fertilizing in early fall*** can cause rhododendrons to enter the winter in a non-hardened state and can result in winter damage, but ***fertilizing in late fall*** will not predispose the plant to tissue damage from winter injury. A good indicator of timing is when deciduous plants begin to colour heavily and leaves begin to drop. The root systems are still active and will absorb the nutrients given, converting them to organic forms for use the following spring. Many plants in fact, have been shown to winter better when fed in the fall as they are then entering the winter without being under stress due to a lack of essential nutrients. ***When feeding in fall, the fertilizer should be diluted to half strength, since absorption is somewhat slower in the cool soil media and leaching of the full application rate wastes fertilizer.***

By studying the growth behaviour of plants which exhibit this flushing type of growth, fertilization timing can best be correlated with the plant's needs. This method is more suited to the actual behaviour of the plant in a particular season than a rigidly-dated method of application.

## **SURFACE ROOTERS**

The fact that rhododendrons and azaleas are "surface rooters" (i.e. their roots grow just below the soil surface) makes certain cultural techniques essential. At planting time, for example, the upper surface of the root ball must be placed at the same level as the surrounding soil surface (or even an inch higher) so that the roots can continue to function normally; nor should too much pressure be applied in packing down the soil lest the roots be damaged. Later, weeds should be pulled by hand (or prevented by mulching), as even light hoeing will damage the roots; moisture must be supplied whenever the upper levels of the soil begin to dry out. There is one advantage to this surface rooting feature, however: even relatively large specimens can be moved with a minimum of damage since relocation does not require digging a deep root ball.

