

The *"Niagara Rhodo"*
The Niagara Chapter,
Rhododendron Society of Canada
May 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.**

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1. YOU HEARD, YOU CAME & THE PLANTS DI SAPPEARED

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE ANNUAL PLANT SALE! Members, and the general public, came early and as always, vigorously examined each plant, discussed cultivar's respective merits, sought and obtained advice, made their choices and left with their arms filled with a fine collection of well grown plants. By noon most of the plants were on their way to plant lovers' gardens; at 1 PM, of the 300 rhododendrons and azaleas (including 100 Plants for Members – P4M's) only 40 P4M's remained to be available for those who have long term visions in their gardens plans and are prepared to be adventurous in growing rarely available cultivars. Also, during this period, we welcomed 20 new local members and one new ARS member. Given the significant number of pre-orders that were received, it appears that the opportunity for members to pre-order their selections was a popular innovation.

Proceeds from the sale of course go to support our popular Speakers Program, hosting and operating the web site, Newsletter printing & mailings and preparing plants for the Plants for Members (P4M) program. **THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE SOCIETY'S TOTAL PROGRAM.**

The success of the plant sale of course is due to your enthusiasm for the high quality plants offered. Behind the scenes, there are those who do the planning, organizing and executing the sale; and we also appreciate the stellar work of all who set up the sale and of those who actually were there to assist in the selection and sales . . . volunteers all . . . namely: Lil Haworth, Suzie Jansen, Sondra Meis, Mike & Marian Little, Peter Phelps, Irma Purchase, Elly Smith, Wanda & Nick Yarmoshuk. We thank the *Vineland Innovation and Research Station (formerly known as HRIO)* for making the facilities available to us and Ray Kaczmariski for making it so easy to set up the sale.

2. Saturday, May 10, 2008, 10a.m. – 12 Noon. 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**. This garden has evolved over the last 30 years into a collection of about 300 rhododendrons and azaleas with 6 different Magnolia, several Cornus Kousa and a number of other trees relevant to a rhododendron setting. 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. Photos and descriptions may be viewed on http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008_P4M.pdf. Some of the plants in the P4M collection were taken from mature plants in this garden and the mother plants may be flowering on May 10.

HOW TO GET THERE? For a map of the City of St. Catharines that pin-points the site go to the Niagara Rhodo Society web site using this address <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2008openhouse.pdf>. It is impossible to locate this file from a link posted on the web site; but, if you enter this address in your web browser, the file will open.

MEMBERSHIP: While this garden tour is open to members only, members are invited to bring fellow gardeners with an interest in rhododendrons and azaleas to the Open House. We welcome all gardeners and we will be pleased to enrol new members at the Open House.

WHAT'S IN BLOOM NOW? The first blooms to appear this year in this garden did so on April 1. Of course these were the yellow aconites, *Eranthis cilicica*, followed by various species *crocus chrysanthus* and then by *Scilla Siberica*, *Galanthus woronwii*, various *Chionodoxa* and "Firespray" Tulip. On May 4, daffodils and bloodroot, *Sanguinaria Canadensis*, are in bloom.

The first rhododendron bloom appeared in mid April it was, an otherwise unspecified, *dauricum*. This was followed in rapid succession by *reticulatum*, "Cornell Pink" and PJM. Elepidote Vernus and Lepidotes, "Isolla Bella", "Midnight Ruby", "New Patriot", "Karen Selegar" bloomed around April 29.

In the past few days Deciduous Azalea *Schlippenbachii* has come into bloom. This collection of nine seedlings from the 1982 ARS seed exchange varies in colour from white to a very deep pink. One half of this collection is now in bloom and the others are about to do so. This year, PJM happens to be in bloom at the same time, providing an interesting contrast between the two sets of colours.

The evergreen azaleas are showing strong colour in their buds and are likely to be open on May 10.

The flower buds of the mid-season, elepidote rhododendrons, are swelling and should start to open by May 10, depending, of course, on the temperature and amount of sunlight in the period May 4 to May 10. We expect to have *rh.sutchuenense* to be in bloom by May 10, for the first time after 10 years of growth.

Five magnolias have provided a lot of colour in the past 2 weeks. They bloomed in this order, *Stellata* "Roseum", "George Merrill", Butterfly, Supreme and Spectrum. The heavy frost of April 30 did some considerable damage to the flower petals of these magnolia but they seem to have recovered to a large extent by May 4. This frost did not seem to damage any rhodos or azaleas that were in bloom.

Wanda and Nick Yarmoshuk look forward to welcoming you to the Highland Avenue Rhododendron & Azalea Garden on **May 10, 2008, between 10 am and 12 noon**, and to sharing with you their gardening experiences there over the past 35 years.

3. *Razzle-dazzle garden has a heart*

By Theresa Forte, April 17, 2008. Reprinted with permission from the St. Catharines Standard and the Niagara Falls Review.

It's not every day Tom Laviolette, superintendent of the Niagara Parks Botanical Garden, calls to suggest I might want to visit a certain garden within the next 48 hours.

It was almost the end of May 2007, and temperatures were starting to soar; the garden's spectacular display of rhododendrons and azaleas would soon be winding down.

"I call this the razzle-dazzle garden," he said.

Intrigued, I made the call.

Comfortably settled in a neighbourhood adjoining the St. Catharines Golf and Country Club, the Yarmoshuk garden is home to about 350 rhododendrons and azaleas, lovingly displayed in stone-edged raised beds and sheltered by a collection of unusual trees.

Japanese maple, tulip tree, magnolias, large-flowering dogwoods (*Cornus kousa* and *C. florida*) and a beautiful pin oak (*Quercus palustris*) with great horizontal lines.

"Our son would not let me pull the sapling out; now it's 27 years old. It was grown from an acorn," Nicholas Yarmoshuk said.

That same philosophy is what makes this garden so interesting. While the small property houses an amazing collection of rhododendrons and azaleas, it is not a sterile library or museum of plants - this is truly a garden with a heart.

Yarmoshuk started growing rhodos and azaleas because he found perennials and annuals too much trouble to grow in the hard clay soil in his yard.

"But aren't rhodos and azaleas hard to grow?" I ventured.

"I found them easy to grow once I learned that they have very fine roots that require moisture and oxygen. All that I had to do was create a 15- to 20-centimetre raised bed (using railroad ties) above the level of the clay. The raised bed contains nothing but one part good top soil mixed with two parts coarse peat moss and two parts composted pine bark mulch," he explained. "Once the plants are situated, there is very little work to do. The mulch is topped up every second year and there is a little bit of weeding. Of course, one has to be attentive to watering the plants during drought."

There are a few myths about growing rhododendrons that Yarmoshuk would like to dispel.

"Ignore the general comment that rhodos are hard to grow, and the more common opinion that evergreen deciduous azaleas are not hardy. You can ask folks at the Niagara Region Rhodo Society for advice: <http://www.rhodoniagara.org>."

I was surprised to learn that rhododendrons and azaleas bloom best in a sunny location.

Yarmoshuk was introduced to his hobby by the late Al Smith, of the former Vineland Research Station, and Brian Schram, his colleague and friend.

"I actually started with azaleas because my better half, Wanda, disliked huge rhododendron blossoms. She preferred the more gentle but bright blooming azaleas. That is why I actually have more azaleas than rhodos in the garden."

Yarmoshuk, a retired electrical engineer, waters his garden with the precision of a scientist. Automatic misters recycled from a greenhouse are rigged over seedlings to ensure the young plants receive the humid, misty conditions they demand.

"I have no grandchildren, so I have the time to spoil my plants with water," he muses.

While photographing the decadent flowers in shades of red, pink, violet, salmon, orange, yellow and white, I asked if I could set my foot in the garden, just for balance.

"Of course," he replied. My foot sank ankle deep into his special soil mix - it was as soft as a down-filled duvet. I lifted my foot and the soil sprang back into place. Amazing - little wonder the plants were happy.

We headed into the back garden as the sun was setting for the day. The tapestry of lush colours absolutely glowed in the soft light. Toward the back of the garden, gentle magnolias skirted with fluffy azaleas marked an opening. The lawn seemed to flow seamlessly onto the golf green beyond the garden's boundary.

I noticed certain plants had been severely pruned. "To revitalize an older rhododendron or azalea, prune it hard; it will bounce back after about three years," Yarmoshuk advised.

"The winter of 2006-07 was very hard on these plants. The mild December temperatures caused the buds to swell, and then they were killed when the extra cold February weather arrived. The spring of 2007 saw lighter blooming than usual because of this."

Here and there, I discovered planting pockets fitted with trellises for clematis, another of Wanda's favourites. A sunny oasis just off the patio housed a bed of roses, under-planted with garlic and basil - essential ingredients for a tasty summer meal.

Tucked in a quiet corner, Yarmoshuk motioned to their large "nursery" bed.

"Plants in this area are given a second chance. They can take their time to recuperate."

Now, that's what I call a garden with a big heart.

Photos by Theresa Forte. Reprinted with permission.

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Razzle-dazzle garden has a heart



Theresa Forte
Your Garden

favourites. A sunny oasis just off the patio housed a bed of roses, under-planted with garlic and basil - essential ingredients for a tasty summer meal.

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Now, that's what I call a garden with a big heart.

The Niagara Rhododendron Society's annual plant sale is Saturday, 10 a.m. at the Vineland Centre for Research and Innovation, Victoria Avenue, Vineland.

Theresa Forte is a local garden consultant specializing in easy-care perennials and ornamental grasses. Reach her at 905-374-1505 or by e-mail at theresa_forte@sympatico.ca.





Above: Small leaved (lepidota), among the hardiest of rhododendrons and most tolerant of hot weather, according to Nicholas Yarmoshuk. Centre: This deciduous azalea is very hardy, it does best in very bright light. Right: Nicholas and Wanda Yarmoshuk's spectacular front garden - notice the raised beds edged in stone. Theresa M. Forte, Special to The Review

4. *Chunky Peat Moss*

We have learned that chunky peat moss is virtually unavailable at this time. Our usual supplier, Niagara Nurseries, located on the former Hwy 8 – extension of St, Paul Street west from St. Catharines, has been unable to obtain this material from his usual sources, and he is unaware of other sources. Every effort is being made to identify a potential source or a substitute.

Niagara Nurseries is carrying a peat moss product which could be used a substitute, but not as effective a product as the original Black Bale Chunky that is normally available from Lambert. This is a slightly coarser variety of Peat Moss made available by Fafard.

Following information available to us from other rhododendron growers in the eastern United States, we have been using the following mix as a substitute: One part shredded Pine Bark mulch mixed with 2 parts of the most coarse peat moss available. Be certain that the Peat Moss used is very wet when mixed with the shredded Pine bark mulch and that the mix is thorough. If you have access to compost that can be used in the mix as follows: 1 part shredded pine bark mulch + 1 part peat moss + 1 part compost.

We will attempt to keep you informed as we learn more about potential sources of coarse chunky peat moss.

5. *Community News*

GRIMSBY GARDEN CLUB:

PLANT SALE. WHERE: Grimsby Seniors' Centre, 18 Livingston Avenue, Grimsby. **WHEN:** Saturday, May 10, 2008 from 9 am until everything is sold. **WHAT:** Plants are local from members' gardens and they should grow well in yours. Come early for the best selection and bring a container to hold your choices.

ANNUAL FLOWER SHOW: WHERE: at the Grimsby Seniors' Centre, 18 Livingston Avenue, Grimsby, ON **WHEN:** May 26 7:30 pm. Contact Sharon at 905-945-4764 for details.

GARDEN TOUR: WHEN: Saturday, June 28, 2008 from 12 to 4 pm

Did you ever wonder what the garden behind the fence is like? Here is your chance to find out.

We have obtained permission to show you a number of wonderful and different gardens. This major fundraiser is only held once every two years, so grab this chance while you can. Refreshments will be served in one of the gardens. Tickets are \$10 each and will be available at the Flower Show on May 26, or at the Grimsby Museum from Colleen. Volunteers are still needed to act as Garden Club representatives in the gardens. Call Sue (905-945-0027) for more information.

LINCOLN GARDEN CLUB

LGC PLANT SALE MAY 9 & 10 The annual plant sale will be **Friday, May 9 from 2:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Saturday, May 10 from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.** at the cattle barn on the back/west side of the Beamsville Fairgrounds. This is a major event in the LGC calendar year because this sale provides us with the funds to operate the club as well as to provide community service projects. Participation from all Club members is encouraged. Please consider the following: **1.** Contribute plants from your garden to be sold on the Members Table. Pot up perennials from your garden at least 1 week ahead of the sale, label as best you can with kind of plant and variety if known and the price to be charged. Bring to the Plant Sale on Thursday, May 8. **2.** Sign up for a work period to help set up the sale and to participate in the sale. For further information contact Ralph Suttell, Plant Sale Chair at 905-945-5765.

3 LOCAL & 2 MORE DISTANT RHODODENDRON GARDENS

VINELAND: The woodlot and the azalea beds at the Vineland Innovation & Research Centre (formerly HRIO Vineland) should provide interesting colour in the next few weeks. The new leadership at the Centre has initiated a program to revive and enhance the rhododendron and azalea plantings. They are also working to locate sources for the Vineland introductions.

BOTANICAL GARDENS, NIAGARA PARKS SCHOOL OF HORTICULTURE: In October, 2007, as part of that Fall's program we visited the setting for the Bob Dickhout memorial planting and then toured the new rhododendron and azalea beds that had been developed by the School's staff. Although most of the plants are young, they should provide an excellent display this year. For an example of how well constructed beds, properly planted and nicely sited plants and how beds should be created, the current collection of rhododendrons and Azaleas at the Botanical gardens are worth every effort to make a visit.

NEW RHODODENDRON AND AZALEA BEDS AT NIAGARA COLLEGE, GLENDALE AVENUE: Construction of the new beds at Niagara College, sponsored by your Niagara Region Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada, were completed in the Spring of 2007 and the first 100 plants of commercially available rhododendrons and azaleas were installed last Fall. We look forward to seeing the early results of that work. The site is located on the south-east side of the main building adjacent to the principle entrance to the building from the parking lot.

2 RHODODENDRON & AZALEAS GARDENS NOT IN OUR BACKYARD IN AMHERSTBURG, ONTARIO: King's Navy Yard and Seagram's Park in Amherstburg boast of more than 700 Rhododendrons & Azaleas all lovingly planted and cared for by the AA&M Rhododendron Committee. Founded in 1985 by Bob Sutherland, this Committee is an incorporated group consisting of 11 enthusiasts who, since 1988, have worked with local City officials to create two outstanding public gardens, the King's Navy Yard on Dalhousie Street in Amherstburg and Seagram's Gardens on County Road Twenty adjacent to the Seagram's Distillery. Starting in 1988 with Roseum Elegans, the gardens today are comprised of equal numbers of lepidotes and evergreen azaleas. New beds are being created this Spring to house an addition 85 plants. The varieties include a large collection of the little known Stanton series of rhododendrons and azaleas, all developed on neighbouring Gros Isles, Michigan. Paul Morneau, current president of the Committee, says that growing rhododendrons and azaleas in these gardens is a challenge because of the clay that is the natural soil in the area of the gardens. "We grow these plants in raised beds", he says, and "we use a lot of shredded pine bark mulch mixed with whatever peat moss and compost we can get. If we can grow rhodos and azaleas, anyone can". Not only is the clay a problem, so is the heat and watering required. Paul employs a misting system, developed from greenhouse spray nozzles. This system creates a fine mist over the plants in the hottest of days, is parsimonious in the use of water and cannot waterlog the already very porous raised bed. Those visiting the area will find great interest not only in the rhododendron and azalea plantings, but also in the wide range of historical sites dating back to the war of 1812. For more information, Paul Morneau invites your inquiries at 519-734-7230.

LATE ARRIVING NEWS. The *Vineland Research and Innovation Centre* will be holding a Community Information Night. Please see <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/Vinelandmeetingmay152008.pdf>. **DATE: 7:00 PM** Thursday, May 15, 2008 **PLACE:** Rittenhouse Hall, Historical Building, Vineland Campus, 4890 Victoria Avenue North, Vineland Station.

6. Useful Links

- a. **Yahoo Rhodo Chat Line:** Members with computers may find that the Yahoo Rhodo Group chat line and the Yahoo Azalea group chat line provide interesting and very informative exchanges amount people in North America and abroad. Go to yahoo.com à Groups à "rhodo" search and then read the interactions that are shown.
- b. **Growing rhodos:** The site shown contains some 10 useful articles to stimulate experiences in growing rhodos and azaleas. <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/growingrhodos.htm>
- c. **Advice from abroad:** An excellent site for detailed information on how to deal with common problems in growing rhododendrons and azaleas. http://rhododendron.fr/dossiers_e.htm

We look Forward to Seeing you at 57 Highland Avenue on May 10, 2008 10a.m. to 12 noon

