



"Niagara Rhodo" Newsletter of the

The Niagara Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada

December 2008

Our Purpose: We are a non-profit organization whose aim is to promote, encourage and support interest in the genus *rhododendron*.. **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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Word of Caution

By becoming a successful grower, the reader will be exposed to a contagion for which there is no cure. Once infected with an appreciation of rhododendrons and azaleas most gardeners spend a lifetime collecting these most beautiful of all plants.

H. Edward Reiley

1. President's Message



Here we are, embarking on a New Year! Time flies for Rhodo Niagara members and other avid gardeners. Each season our work is cut out for us by Mother Nature, plus we prepare for the next season. Winter could be described as our "down" time but, in fact, it can be our most creative season. That's when we have time, to reflect, to dream, to pour over catalogs, and plan how to enhance our gardens for the coming year. In our palette, rhododendrons and azaleas are the aristocrats ~ they provide the "wow factor" in early and late spring.

Your Rhodo Niagara Board is also busy, and committed to enhance what members value: (1) We have expanded the P4M Program, to be able to offer you a wider assortment of Niagara hardy plants that cannot be obtained locally. (2) Our Rhodo Demonstration Garden with Niagara College is heading into its first Spring display in 2009. (3) We are now looking for a new Community Project. We seek your suggestions. Please write to us with your thoughts. (4) Speakers have been lined up for the March and April 2009 Meetings. (5) As in 2008, you will be able to check out on our Web site the plants that will be offered at our April 25th 2009 Annual Plant Sale. The popular Advance Order Option, an innovation introduced in 2008, will be available again in 2009.

None of this would have been possible without the support of all members and indeed of the larger community of gardeners. A group of Board members and other volunteers participated in various activities: Bruce

Clyburn, Sue Gemmel, Lil Haworth, Dave Hinton, Suzie Janzen, Ray Kaczmariski, Alice Klamer, Marian Little, Mike Little, Neil Miles, Peter Phelps, Gordon Polych, John Perkins, Carolyn Poulter, Irma Purchase, Elly Smith, Louise Story, Nick Yarmoshuk, Wanda Yarmoshuk, Pete Zwaagstra participated, assisted or offered their help in one way or another. If someone's contribution may have been inadvertently overlooked, so please forgive me.

To one and all, Thank You.

Best wishes to you and your families for a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Sondra Meis



2. Meeting of November 2, 2008

Who would have thought that at the beginning of November there would be much interest among gardeners to talk about fall rhododendron and azalea colours and preparation for winter. Sixty-four people came to the fall meeting held at the Vineland Innovation and Research Centre (formerly Vineland HRIO). Members from Mississauga to Guelph, Fonthill, Grimsby and Fort Erie and members of several Garden Clubs and the Master Gardeners group heard a slide show assisted talk, explored their horticultural interests, gardening techniques and participated in friendly, controversial exchanges. For notes and photos of the talk and slideshow see <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/index2.htm> . Carole Warkentin talked about the Vineland azalea display beds and the rhododendron woodlot. For a

map and details about the Vineland Azalea and Rhododendron plantings see http://www.rhodoniagara.org/Explore_the_Woodlot.PDF

A free raffle was held through which a dozen 2-3 year old Cornus Kousa 'Chinensis' seedlings and a few 2-3 year old Japanese Maples were distributed at random to willing winners. . Fifteen new local members were welcomed to the Niagara Chapter while tea, coffee with cookies and conversation continued until 4 P.M.

3. Program for 2009

Sunday, March 1, 2009, 2 P.M.

Peter Hannam, **Building a Rhododendron Garden in Guelph.** Beacon Motor Inn, Jordon Harbour on the QEW.

Sunday, April 4, 2009, 2 P.M.

Barrie Porteous, **Rock Gardens for Rhododendron Growers.** Beacon Motor Inn, Jordon Harbour on the QEW.

Saturday, April 25, 2009 9:00 A.M.

Annual Plant Sale. Vineland Innovation & Research Centre, Former (HRIO), Victoria Avenue, N. Vineland

Saturday, May 16, 2009. Garden Tour, Members

Only: Happy Rolf Rhododendron Garden, at Port Weller, St. Catharines. For details on this garden see <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf/rudybehringgarden.pdf>

Saturday, June 13, 2009. Garden Tour and P4Ms Plant Sale for Members only, Nettle Creek Nursery, 1830 Hollow Road, Fonthill.

4. What's New on Niagara's www site

Several items have been added to the Niagara Chapter web site.

- Notes & photos from November 2, 2008 meeting.
- Map & Notes: Vineland Woodlot & Display Gardens
- Fundamentals of Rhodo & Azalea Culture – from ARS
- Rhododendron & Azalea winter colour in Niagara
- Niagara College - Rhodo & Azalea Demonstration Garden
- Complete Archive. *Bulletin, Rhododendron Society of Canada, 1972 - 1991.* With searchable and linked index. <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/index2.htm>

5. What is Hardiness ?

Edited by Nicholas Yarmoshuk from contributions by Bruce Clyburn, Alexander Fitzburgh and John Perkins

How often has anyone of us looked at a plant label and noticed an assertion that the rhodo or azalea is hardy to -25F or that it has a hardiness rating of H1 or H2. Or, we often hear of plants promoted for their hardiness to -??°C. Seeing this, we may be encouraged that the plant will survive in our garden because, “it never gets that cold in my yard”. Several years later the plant has bloomed sporadically, or poorly. What’s happening? you may ask.

In a recent exchange of ideas on the Yahoo Rhodo chat line John Perkins, Bruce Clyburn and Alexander Fitzburgh posted comments of what is meant by “Hardiness” and the environmental elements that together influence hardiness in rhododendrons and azaleas. Indeed Mr. Fitzburgh suggested that reference be made to a plant’s adaptability to environmental conditions since there are so many aspects to hardiness. He believes a plant’s ability to adapt to changing conditions is a better gauge of “hardiness”; unfortunately there is no way to put a numerical value on this property. What then are the many aspect to hardiness?

John Perkins who grows rhodos and azaleas on Canobie Lake in New Hampshire listed 6 types of winter “hardiness”, i.e. rhododendrons’ and azaleas’ adaptability to the environment of Canobie Lake.

Ability to go dormant based on day length. In late fall temperatures drop from 60°F to teens in less than 24 hours. Rain often accompanies the fall or rise in temperature. Plants receive inconsistent signals as to when dormancy is triggered

Absolute cold. Every drop of 5 degrees F in absolute cold means a lot. This is the typical hardiness criterion

Total cold doing the winter. A week of -10°F is worse than one night of -15°F for most of our Rhododendrons.

Ability to stay dormant even when we get a long midwinter warm up. The most winter damage south of Boston occurred after a long midwinter warm spell followed by a colder than normal late February

and March. Rock garden people lost many alpine plants that winter. This has been a factor in Niagara in recent years as well. When the leaves have browned, growers should wait until summer to decide whether or not branches survived the browning of the leaves.

Ability to survive a long sunny March with the ground frozen. Plants do not usually die but the leaf burn can be very extensive. In bright winter sun plants transpire water from their leaves, but the frozen roots are not active and cannot supply water to the leaves.

Length of time the ground is frozen. Some rhododendrons just cannot take 5 straight months of the ground being frozen. We had one winter that the ground froze on Nov 15 and did not unfreeze until April 15. The need to replenish water in the cells is even more severe during a consistently cold winter.

What varieties do well or poorly in response to these factors? In general Weston's selections take these 6 conditions, in total, better than most hybrids do. These include PJM, PJM Elite, PJM Regal, April Snow, Blue Baron, Midnight Ruby, Olga Mezitt, Thunder, Weston's Aglo, Weston's Pink Diamond.

R. maximum when planted in shade with wind protection responds well to all of the above noted conditions.

Some Finnish hybrids seem to have problems in the fall with softening flower buds resulting in very poor spring bloom. Bruce Clyburn, who grows rhodos and azaleas on Cape Breton Island, noted that, Helliikki, a Finnish hybrid, rated at -34°C has never bloomed fully in 5-6 years since it started to flower, and the dwarf Finnish hybrid Elviira could take no winter sun in Cape Breton. On the other hand, Haaga, Helsinki University and Mikkeli have been rather good in Cape Breton. It appears that Peter Tigerstedt (R. brachycarpum v. Tigerstedtii x R. cat. v. album, one of the parents of the Finnish hybrids, is intolerant of winter sun.

This problem of poor flower performance has been noted in Niagara. Observers in Niagara tend to attribute this lack of flower performance to the hot dry summers and to the cultivars' inability to adapt to the freeze/thaw conditions which have been normal in recent winters in Niagara

Recommendation: Think of where you are planning to grow your selection and then ask a knowledgeable person. "how has this plant performed in my area". See also <http://rhodyman.net/rhodyho.html#anchor1075997>

6. Book Review

H. Edward Reiley. **Success with Rhododendrons and Azaleas.** Revised Edition. 2004. 284 pages. Timber Press. Portland, Oregon. ISBN 0-88192-637-X (pbk) *Reviewed by: Nicholas Yarmoshuk.*

If you have only one rhododendron book in your library, it should be this highly acclaimed one. It will be very well used and will quickly become well worn.

Edward Reiley was a retired educator and a past president of the American Rhododendron Society. He operated a small nursery specializing in field-grown rhododendrons and azaleas and had a private four-acre garden in Woodsboro, Maryland. Here he evaluated new cultivars among thousands of plants.

His opening sentence in the Preface sets the tone for the book: "Rhododendrons and azaleas are more exacting in their cultural requirements than many commonly grown plants and so will not readily grow in every garden". He provides, clearly, what you need to know to be successful with rhodos & azaleas.

The 1st chapter gives a brief, readable and interesting 11 pages of Taxonomy and History that describe the origins of varieties available to us today.

His chapters, Site Selection and Growing Requirements, Selection of Rhododendrons, Transplanting to the Landscape and Care in the Landscape are models of clarity. They provide details on how to prepare soils, what to look out for in clay or sandy conditions and what nutrients the plants require for successful development. He describes planting techniques in detail. Many garden talk show hosts could benefit from studying these pages.

Mr. Reiley provides excellent information about plant disorders derived from insect and plant disease. He includes detailed discussions of Deciduous Azaleas, Evergreen Azaleas and Rhododendrons. Not the least of his contributions is an appendix on rhododendrons tolerant to drought, heat and sun and a Good Doers list for various North American Regions including Southern Ontario; the latter provided by Niagara's own Brian Schram and the late Bob Dickhout.

Ed Reiley passed away on March 16, 2008.

7. A Technique for Propagation of Rhododendron

Cuttings. (original from Diane Kehoe, Riverbank, Ladner, B.C., edited by Nick Yarmoshuk)

Editor's Note: The following describes a technique and process used by Diane Kehoe to root cuttings. The same could be used for seed propagation.

I use bottom heat in a basement room in an old house that is quite cool – but I don't use a mist bench.

I pot up 4 to 10 cuttings per pot depending on the size of the plants and cuttings, and plastic bag each pot individually. This technique is suitable for rooting small number of cuttings.

I put a ½ “ of perlite in the bottom of each pot and then use my regular potting mixture:

- 1 part sharp sand,
- 1 part perlite,
- 2 parts peat.

The peat I can get here is pretty average – mostly fine peat with a few small sticks or chunks in it. I wet my potting mix until it clumps well and until only a little water drains out if I squeeze a handful.

I fill each pot a little over half full.

Once the plastic bag is closed with a rubber band, I leave it for two or three months.

I'll look at the bags occasionally to make sure the cuttings aren't rotting.

When I see new leaves forming on all the cuttings I'll take the elastic band off the bag and check to see whether the pot is light and needs some more water.

I will leave the bag closed lightly without the rubber band and over the next six weeks or so I will gradually open the bag and roll it down until it is level with the top of the pot.

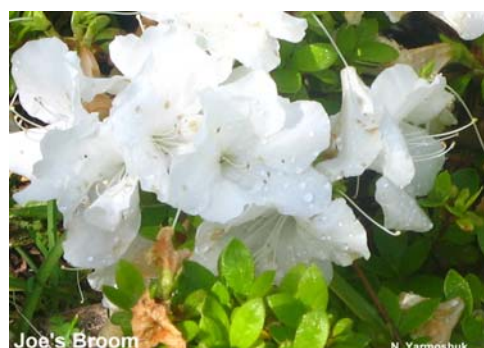
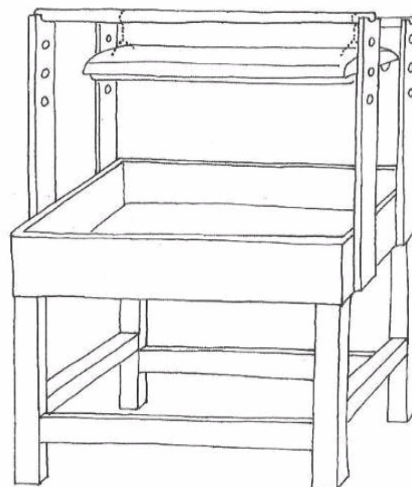
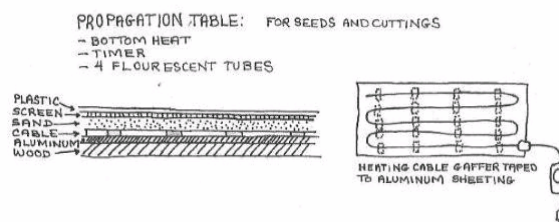
Then the pots come off the heat and, after a week or so of conditioning them without heat in a cool basement, I can move the pots outside, after danger of frost is past. I leave them in a sheltered place.

If I'm not rushing to get the plants going, I will leave them out in their cutting pot for almost a year before potting them on.

The Propagation Bench

The bench pictured below was built with safety in mind. There is no guarantee that it won't short out or burn up -

only that in close to 20 years, it hasn't done so for Diane Kehoe! The heating cable was replaced only once since the table was built. The heating cable runs 24 hours a day and probably costs only pennies to run. I didn't notice any change in my electrical bill when the old cable shut down. The lights are connected to a simple timer. Because I get seed from a variety of sources, I prefer keeping a little isolation between various plantings. If there is a problem in one plastic-bagged pot, it doesn't automatically become a problem with all the seedlings. Go to http://www.rhodoniagara.org/propagation_bench.pdf for a large image of this bench.



Why Buds Do Not Bloom!

There is nothing more frustrating to a rhodo or azalea grower than to see a plant with a heavy set of flower buds just sit there all spring and not bloom. Why should this happen?

Recently, on the Yahoo azalea forum, a question was raised about buds not blooming. “ In previous years I have had excellent blooms, however this season there were plenty of buds with only about 5% opening. The conditions under which these plants were growing have not changed over the years. Why should this be happening this year?

Steve Henning got this answer from his website: <http://rhodyman.net/rarhodyvhop.html> :

There are several possible reasons. The most common is drought in the spring. The plants will compensate for dry conditions by not opening flower buds. Some individual branches may die. Other possibilities are: (a) Bud blast is a symptom of the fungal disease Seifertia azaleae; (b) Bud blast may also be caused by a late frost or (c) Bud blast may be caused by application of a nitrogen containing fertilizer too late in the preceding season which prevents the buds from hardening off.

In all cases the buds turn brown or black. If it is a Seifertia azaleae (or Pycnostysanus or Briosia azaleaea) infection, the dead bud will be covered with short hair-like structures. Seifertia azaleae is best controlled by sanitation, but may be reduced by spraying buds with fungicide.

Fall Blooming. Some causes of fall blooming include a dry summer and moist fall and/or warmer climates including a warm fall. Plants which are not sufficiently hardened off or are exposed to unseasonable warm spells can start bloom prematurely. These blooms are seldom satisfactory. In any case, the seasonal bloom is lost.

2008 Rhododendron JQ Quiz!

Modified from an original Quiz by Harlie Peterson

At the March 1999 Monterey Chapter Meeting, Monterey Chapter member Harlie Peterson tested the rhododendron knowledge of those in attendance. On that quiz your editor received a score of 8/20!! This revised version reflects other issues and probably better reflects Niagara members' interests. Your editor did better on it and therefore prefers it. Now it's your turn: the quiz follows.

A link to the answers may be found on the Niagara web site at <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/answers.pdf> on the first main page.

1. The word "rhododendron" comes from the Tibetan meaning "mountain flower"
T or F
2. Rhododendrons come under what division of Plantae?
 - a. Thallophytes
 - b. Bryophytes
 - c. Pteridophytes
 - d. Spermatophytes
3. As a "class" Rhododendrons are Dicotyledons:
T or F
4. Rhododendrons prefer a soil pH of :
 - a. pH 5.5
 - b. pH 3.6
 - c. pH 7.6
 - d. pH 8.7
5. Which one of the following were rhododendron hybridizers at Vineland HRIO from the 1950's to the last 1980's?
 - a. Frank Palmer
 - b. Roy Forster
 - c. Ken Begg
 - d. Al Smith
 - e. All of the above at different times
6. Laura Grant is _____ of ARS.
 - a. Treasurer
 - b. Secretary
 - c. President
 - d. Executive Director
7. Rhododendrons are in the "family" of:
 - a. Rosaceae
 - b. Ericaceae
 - c. Cruciferae
 - d. Compositae
8. The Montreal Botanical gardens has an extensive Rhododendron and Azalea collection of approximately 1000 plants.
T or F

9. The genus *Rhododendron* can be divided into several groups, two are:
- Acutes and Glabrous
 - Lepidote and Elepidote
 - Undulate and Viscid
 - Ciliate and Cordate
10. *Rhododendrons* should be pruned in late summer to encourage flower bud development:
T or F
11. Indumentum in *rhododendrons* means:
- bell shaped flowers
 - sharp pointed leaves
 - species difficult to hybridize
 - permanent woolly coatings on undersides of leaves
12. The terms compact, dwarf, prostrate and tall refer to:
- hardiness
 - color of leaves
 - habit
 - seed propagation
13. The seeds of a hybrid azalea will produce plants identical to that seed-bearing azalea.
T or F
14. A *rhododendron* propagated from plant tissue is known as a:
- clone
 - ligulate
 - strigase
 - Kleenex
15. The roots of *rhododendrons* and azaleas are . . .
- thick and fibrous.
 - are thick as those of a pine tree.
 - are very fine, thin & form a compact mass.
 - spread several metres beyond branches' drip line
16. A pot grown rhodo or azalea should be removed undisturbed from the pot and planted as is?
T or F
17. Aluminum Sulphate is an appropriate conditioner to make soil more acid for *rhododendrons*?
- Yes, this is an excellent choice.
 - It will help produce blue flowers.
 - Agricultural sulphur is conditioner to use.
 - Aluminum Sulphate removes calcium from the soil.
18. Composted Pine Bark is not an appropriate medium to add to soil for *rhododendrons*.
T or F
19. Which male and female parts of plants go together?
- stamen, anther, stigma; ovary, style, pollen
 - ovary, anther, pollen; stamen, style, stigma
 - stamen, anther, pollen; ovary, style, stigma
 - stamen, style, pollen; ovary, anther, stigma
20. One of the causes of chlorosis (yellowing of the leaves in *rhododendrons*) is:
- Potassium deficiency
 - Sun scald
 - Phosphorus deficiency
 - Iron deficiency

Answers:

1F, 2d, 3T, 4a, 5d, 6d, 7b, 8T, 9b, 10F, 11d, 12c, 13F, 14a, 15c, 16F, 17c, 18F, 19c, 20d

For details about answers go to

<http://www.rhodoniagara.org/answers.pdf>



***Happy New Year
to you, one and all***