

"Niagara Rhodo" Newsletter of the The Niagara Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada

February 2009

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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A Rhodophile's Plea for Forgiveness

I do humbly ask for forgiveness of all the rhododendrous which died through my ignorance or through bad advice. Hopefully our website (and by extension this Newsletter) will atone for my errors and help the novice grower avoid the same mistakes.

Edited from http://www.rhododendron.fr/indexgb.htm

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

March brings with it the promise of warm weather, blossoms, new stamps from Canada Post and our Spring Program.

March 13 is the date of issue for these lovely two stamps, R. yakushimanum 'Mist Maiden' and Dr. D. L. Craig's R. Minas Maid.

This spring's program reminds us that year-round colour, provided by a host of perennials, adds interest to our garden before and after our rhododendrons and azaleas bloom.

The Beacon Motor Inn at Jordan Station on the QEW just past Victoria Avenue, Vineland is the venue for the March 1 and April 5 meetings. Invite your friends, Share driving in a car pool, and enjoy an afternoon of sharing stories with gardeners from a wide range of our region's gardening Clubs. The Niagara Rhododendron Chapter welcomes all gardeners to its events. Sondra Meis

1. 2009 SPRJNG PROGRAM

On Sunday, March 1, 2009 at 2:00 P.M at the Beacon Motor Inn in Jordan Station on the 2EW, PETER HANNAM from Woodrill Farms in Guelph will describe efforts to provide colour in the garden for the entire growing season. Peter will describe his rhododendrons and azaleas and a wide range of plants that grow under conditions similar to rhododendrons and azaleas. Peter's particular challenge is to overcome a short growing season, cold winters and high pH soil. Peter brings a fresh, new approach to gardening with rhododendrons that only a plants man with his extraordinary wide world view and experience can provide. For more information log into our web site at http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2009_program.htm

The following month, On Sunday, April 5, 2009 at 2:00 P.M. at the Beacon Motor Inn in Jordan Station on the 2EW, BARRIE PORTEOUS will talk about companion plants for rhododendrons and azaleas. Barrie has an extraordinary depth and breadth of experience in horticulture. He brings to us, his sharp humour, his Scottish homeland love for horticulture, and his well honed knowledge of plants through gardening in Thornhill and in Muskoka. Barrie has been active in the RSC, The Rock Garden Society and knows "companion plants". For more information log on to

http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2009 program.htm

Our ANNUAL PLANT SALE will be held on Saturday, April 25, 2009 starting at 10 am at the Garage Vineland Research & Innovation Center (formerly 74270) on Victoria Avenue, Vineland. In addition to the not readily available cultivars of rhododendrons and azaleas, this year, we will have an interesting selection of perennial companion plants. Also, this year, we continue our well received members' only advance order program. Members of the Niagara Region Chapter, RSC and all members of District 12, American Rhododendron Society, regardless of Chapter affiliation, receive a 10% discount off the price of each plant purchased.

For full details on cultivars that will be available for advance order, and at the plant sale, please go to the web site at

http://www.rhodoniagara.org/plantsales.htm

The HAPPY ROLF RHODODENDRON GARDEN TOUR.

on May 15, at Port Weller, St. Catharines has been a long awaited event. Back in 1976-78 Rudy Behring cooperated with the City of St.Catharines to develop a Rhododendron Garden at the Bird Sanctuary in the Happy Rolf property at the foot of Read Road in Port Weller, St. Catharines. For many years it appeared that this was a restricted area and tours to view the flowering shrubs could not be arranged. In January 2009 the Niagara Board, through the office of the Mayor and St. Catharines City Council, was introduced to members of the St. Catharines Parks Department. It has been decided that tours could be organized for members of the Niagara Region Chapter of ARS District 12. Full details for this tour, i.e. meeting time, meeting place and an access map will be provided in the Niagara Rhodo Newsletter that will appear on April 15, 2009. For a history on development of this garden and an early site map, follow the link to the www page at ... http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf/rudybehringgarden.pdf

Our final Spring event will be a Tour of Nettle Creek Garden Saturday, June 13, 2009. Plants for Members will be available at this time. Nettle Creek Nursery, 1830 Hollow Road, Fouthill. For a view of the gardens follow the link to http://www.rhodoniagara.org/nettle-creek-2009-P4M.htm

2. Membership Information

Membership renewals for 2009 are now due. There are 2 classes of membership **Local** and **ARS Membership**.

Local membership provides members with full access to all meetings, participation in the Plants for Members Program, Advance Sale program, Garden Tours as well as a 10% discount on purchases at the Annual Plant Sale. Local members may also receive advice and home visits to discuss rhododendron & azalea issues that may develop in their gardens. The Chapter's Lending Library is available to local members. Local members receive a newsletter published approximately 5 to 6 times each year. Local members' fees are \$5.00 for those who elect to receive their Newsletters by e-mail. The membership fee for those who elect to receive their Newsletter by Canada Post is \$10.00.

ARS Membership entitles a member to all privileges of Local Membership plus receipt of the quarterly Journal of the American Rhododendron Society. The annual seed exchange is an important and valuable feature of ARS membership. Details are provided in the Journal and on the ARS www site http://www.rhododendron.org . ARS Membership fees are US\$35 per annum. Currently this is CND\$42. Please make renewal cheques payable to ARS-RSC-Niagara Region Chapter

Mail to Nicholas Yarmoshuk, 57 Highland Avenue St. Catharines, Ontario, L2R4H9

Save on stamps, writing an envelope, searching for a mail box.... membership fees may be paid at the next meeting.

3. RHODOPHILES' COMPANION PLANTS

The Yahoo rhododendron and azalea chat groups provide two important international venues for information exchange. Here, novices ask for information, knowledgeable rhodo & azalea growers share experiences, rhodoholics exchange and debate a wide range of sophisticated ideas. On any day, up-to-date techniques are debated, esoteric issues are explored and even useful information is shared among knowledgeable people. This is a great place to lurk in silence in order to learn of growers' experiences, to learn of what is new in this area of gardening, and to experience contrarian views.

At the end of the first week of February, at a time when postings were dormant, a flurry of postings suddenly appeared focusing on companion plants for rhododendron and azalea gardens. This treasure trove of information is reproduced here.

Recommended Companions (Original prepared by

Bruce Clyburn and edited for the Niagara Rhodo by N. Yarmoshuk. We are grateful to Sally Perkins who edited the nomenclature for accuracy and consistency. As always the editor is responsible for any errors that remain.)

The list below summarizes recommendations that appeared in February on the rhodo chat line. It started with astilbes but quickly expanded to include a significant range of companions. Bruce Clyburn plans to research the list over the next few weeks to obtain images off the internet and to learn more about cultural preferences. His objective is to soon place a personal order for his own use for a cross section of these plants. This list should be helpful for new gardeners or anyone who has spent 20 years developing the 'back bones' of the garden with rhododendrons, and azaleas. These plants could provide those extras that tie parts of the garden together and add flashes of colour and texture that add interest all summer even into the winter in some cases.

The list below is organized by date of recommendation, person making the recommendations and their recommendations.

	B. Clyburn Al Fitzburgh	astilbes, hostas, ferns astilbes, dwarf conifers, Primroses
Feb. 8	R. Flavell	(<i>Primula</i>) astilbes
Feb. 8	W. Brack	Anemone sp.: A. pulsatilla (now Pulsatilla vulgaris) A. nemorosa, A. japonica
Feb. 8	D. Brophy	astilbes, Galium odoratum
Feb. 8	D. Pertson	astilbes, Galium odoratum, Lily-of- the- Valley (Convallaria majalis), epimediums, native Salal (Gaultheria shallon) and Oregon-grape (Mahonia aquifolium)

Feb. 9 B.Gehnrich pulmonarias, Arisaema, hellebores, Brunnera

macrophylla, Asarum (aka Hexastylis)

Feb. 9 S. Perkins hellebores, Trillium sp., Galium odoratum, Shortia sp., Jeffersonia diphylla, & J. dubia,

Tiarella cordifolia, Phlox stolonifera, Primula kisoana, Asarum sp. (aka Hexastylis)

Feb. 9 N. Beaudry epimediums, Ladyslippers (*Cypripedium*),

hellebores

Feb. 9 B. Stelloh Primula kisoana, Hyacinthoides non-scripta, Stylophorum diphyllum, Polygonatum biflorum,

Iris cristata, I. verna, and I. reticulatata, Asarum sp. (aka Hexastylis), Geranium maculatum,

epimediums

Feb. 9 D. Hyatt Phlox divaricata, Trillium sp. (T. grandiflorum is

favorite), Cypripedium acaule, Cypripedium parviflorum var. pubescens, (Special grouping: Trillium luteum beside Hakonechloa macra

'Aureola')

4. In Spring a Young Man's Fancy Turns to Thoughts of Tall, Hardy Rhododendrons

Editor's Note: Paul Chafe, a recently enrolled member of Niagara Chapter ARS District 12, is a graduate student in Botany at York University in Toronto and gardens in Sydenham Ontario, just outside of Kingston.

Breeding Zone 5 Hardy Tree Rhododendron with Big Leaves by Paul Chafe

Rhododendrons offer far more than attractive flowers and architectural shape; the genus has an amazing diversity of growth form, from small creeping alpines, to massive 40 meter giants. Leaf form is also just as varied, from 1 or 2 cm in some species, to 70cm or more in others. The potential to breed plants for any quality is almost unlimited. Until now, most of the breeding has focused on plant shape and flower quality. I can assure you that the genus offers much more. If you've visited the mild Pacific coast, or England then you know that we are lacking in large growing broad leaf evergreen trees suited to our climate. If you've seen the luxurious leaves of *Rhododendron sinogrande*, or *Magnolia grandiflora*, then you'll know what I have in mind.

This spring I am starting a project to hybridize Rhododendron that are tall growing, to 20 feet or more, with large exotic looking foliage, at least a foot in length, and with consideration of other interesting traits, such as exfoliating bark. Most importantly however, is that the plant must also be able to take serious cold, fully adaptable to USDA zone 5a. David Leach's 'Spellbinder' might spring to mind, and indeed, this cross is large growing with large attractive leaves, but it's not quite hardy enough for my needs.

When first considering this project, I read about *Rhododendron maximum*, the Rosebay Rhododendron, and I thought that this would be the perfect mother. This plant has potential to reach large sizes (over 5 meters) and it already has fairly large leaves (to 20cm or more). However, when I suggested using this species to a series of experts, the reactions were mixed.

Some thought it would be a great parent, while others warned of potential disappointment.

On further research, it seems that although *Rhododendron maximum* is extremely hardy, it's native as far north as Vermont and New Hampshire and listed to -32C (-25f), northern forms can likely take much more cold; it has a bit of a poor temperament and a reputation for plants producing poor quality offspring. Additionally, the second generation progeny, possessing the qualities bred for, are often not hardy. This species has the potential for superb hardiness and excellent growth form, though perhaps it's not the ideal candidate for the project.

If you've read up on the work of local hybridizers, especially David Hinton and Dr. Brueckner, or of those in Finland, specifically Dr. Tigerstedt, you'll know that *Rhododendron brachycarpum ssp. tigerstedtii* is present in a large number of the hardiest elepidote hybrids. This species, listed as hardy to -43C (-45F) is known for its amazing ability to pass on cold hardiness to its offspring. Even second generation offspring pass on a great deal of the positive qualities. For my purposes brachycarpum has a few draw backs including its leaves and its size which are both smaller then the Rosebay.

To maximize my chances for success, I've decided to make all of my crosses, at least initially, on both Rhododendron maximum and Rhododendron brachycarpum ssp. tigerstedtii. The first generation seedlings will then be tested and a thorough analysis of survivorship, growth rate, attractiveness, leaf size, etc. will be done to determine which species is better used for my purposes. However, in order for genetic recombination's to occur the first generation plants will need to be crossed again, selfed, or backcrossed in order to allow the attractive qualities to emerge along with the ability to endure extreme cold. Additionally, I've selected a few other potential seed parent plants based on expert knowledge and the ability of these particular hybrids to handle cold weather and extreme conditions. First on this list is David Hinton's hybrid, 'Sandra Hinton' (Rhododendron brachycarpum var. Tigerstedii x [smirnowii x yakushimanum]) which bloomed well after exposure to -36C. There is also the possibility of employing Rhododendron catawbiense and its hybrids in this project, however, these plants will need to prove their hardiness in my USDA zone 5a location before I will consider their use as seed parents.

The plants I've chosen as pollen parents would all be considered 'big-leaf' species. Of particular interest are those big leaf species that already possess good hardiness and are large growing, such as *Rhododendron* sutchuenense and *Rhododendron* calophytum, as well as numerous hardy hybrids like 'Spellbinder' and 'hardy giant.' These plants tend to have leaves growing up to 30cm (1 foot) and growth that is upright and tree like.

The next group of pollen parents are the half-hardy truly big leaved species, with cold tolerance ranging from -15 to -20C (5F to -5F). Foremost in this list is Rhododendron sinogrande with massive leaves up to 70cm in length. Other species with great potential are the beautiful Rhododendron macbeanum, R. rex, and R. hodgsonii, all with leaves over a foot in length and tree type growth habits. Also on the pollen parent list is Rhododendron arboreum, the giant of the Rhododendron world. This species has slightly smaller leaves (to 20cm) than the other pollen parents, but, is known to grow to over 30m (90ft) in the wild. Amazingly, Dr. Brueckner of Mississauga made a cross of Rhododendron brachycarpum ssp. tigerstedtii x Rhododendron arboreum which has persisted in his Mississauga garden from the early 1980's to the present. Unfortunately, this has not been relocated to the waterfront Rhododendron garden in Port Credit. If you do have an opportunity to get to Mississauga this spring I highly recommend a trip to see many of Dr. Brueckner's hybrids firsthand.

The bulk of the work for this project will be conducted on a 2 acre property to the north of Kingston, Ontario, (Sydenham) in an area that is on the borderline between USDA 4b and 5a. The soil is Bondhead loam, shallow series, with a pH of around 7.0. Raised beds of amended soil will be constructed to house the seedlings and trial plants. The raised beds will be treated once or twice a year with agricultural sulphur to ensure that the pH remains low. The project begins this spring, and donations of pollen from hardy local plants with large leaves are greatly appreciated. A preliminary list of interesting plants has been constructed, but it is by no means complete. With luck, I'll have some interesting plants to share with members in a few years time!

I'd like to acknowledge some of the many people who have been very helpful in guiding me thus far. I've been blown away by the support and advice that I've received. Thanks to: Bruce Clyburn, David Hinton, John Weagle, Kristian Theqvist, Mike Little, Jack Looye, and John and Sally Perkins. Your advice has been incredibly helpful!

Hybridizing Plan: List of Proposed Parent Plants

Primary Goals: Rhododendron's that are: Zone 5 Hardy (at least), Large Growing (i.e. tree), and Large Leaved

Secondary Goals: Exfoliating Bark, Indementum, Interesting flowers (red, yellow, orange)

Maternal Parents

Rhododendron maximum
Rhododendron brachycarpum ssp.
Tigerstedt

Rhododendron catawbiense Rhododendron 'Sandra Hinton'

Paternal Parents

Rhododendrons: arboretum, arboreum var cinn, auriculatum, basilicum, calophytum, crinigerum, falconeri, fortunei, glactium, grande, hodgsonii, macabeanum, obliculare, praestans, rex, rex var ficto, sidereum, sinogrande, sutchuenense var geraldii, sutchuenense, brachycarpum ssp Tigerstedt x rex

5. PRUNJNG PJM & AZALEAS

NR editor: Recently I had a question posed to me by a Niagara Chapter member, "how far back can one cut-back a 20 year old, 8 foot PJM (that is bare at the bottom) and hope to have it sprout from the part that is left. I want to cut off the top and rejuvenate the bare bottomed plant". I had, for some time, been thinking about the same issue concerning several of my plants. I knew that Al Smith had very successfully, regularly used hedge trimmers to form a PJM hedge; and, at one time I took 4 feet of straggly branches and top growth off an elepidote Hotline Beauty to produce a lovely low growing compact shrub. But I was still paralyzed into fear-induced non-action. So, I thought it was time to get over it and pose the question to people in the know, those who inhabit the rhodo and azalea group chat lines. Ron Rabideau, Steve Henning and Bruce Clyburn came through with suggestions.

Steve Henning: "healthy azaleas that are planted in a fair amount of light usually come back if cut to just a foot or two high. This is what they did at Tyler Arboretum to rejuvenate some old plants. Those that were in dense shade didn't do too well".

Bruce Clyburn: "Nick, I'm wondering how hurried you are to get the big "fella" back to a decent size and fuller growth on a smaller version? I say this because I've done quite a few deciduous azaleas using the "1/3 principle". That is take out 1/3 each year to about 3-4" above ground for three years. The plant reacts to this by sending up new basal shoots and in 3 years you have a new rhododendron/azalea. It's a more prudent approach but takes a bit longer. I think the only elepidote I did this to was Gable's County of York which gets to be a big rambling thing here in no time.

Ron Rabideau: "I've done this with PJM a number of times. They re-sprout readily. As long as the plant is healthy and not stressed from grossly inadequate light it will be fine. I've chopped some 6-7 footers down to about 1-2 feet growing in half sun and in 5-6 years they're back up to 6 feet again".

Zen and the Art of Pruning

An e-mail conversation between Bruce Clyburn and John Perkins as edited by Nick Yarmoshuk

Bruce Clyburn: Two azaleas were planted in the mid 1980s as foundation plants. These have been maintained as 'cut-backs'. What I mean is during the time 1986-2008 they have outgrown space limitations and began to block windows twice and rather than attempt to move them, I severely pruned the plants. When the plant gets to that maximum size much of the wood is very old and the flowering has not been as productive as in its youth.

I remove 20%-40% of the largest older branches the first year. The following year there is a flush of young sprouts from the base. After flowering the 2nd year I then remove the remaining old wood. For all practical purposes this gives me a new young azalea. In the 3rd year flowering occurs but is reduced compared to previous years. After the 3rd spring flowering is superb. I have two Gilbraltars in close proximity to each other and stagger the 'cut-back' process so in any year there is at least one azalea delivering maximum flower power.

Sally & John Perkins: I am very interested in hearing more about how you prune, hard, large rhododendrons. we have decided that experimenting with pruning larger rhododendrons would be an entertaining activity We have been removing a few good plants we have had for 20 years and I am amazed how much I enjoy having them gone from the yard. There was simply nothing more to gain from having them around longer. I never looked at them because there was nothing interesting about doing so. The longer you have plants the more you realize that a really good plant is one that has multiple seasons of interest. My problem with most elepidotes especially those without indumentum is they simply are not interesting out of bloom. I am attempting to figure out how to better utilize the existing plant material to increase the area under my enjoyment curve. Watching the older ones simply bloom once again adds little such value, especially those that bloom in May unless I can use the blooms for some other purpose such as breeding.

Bruce Clyburn: I'm afraid I don't have any detailed instructions to pass on to folks on "Zen and the Art of Pruning". I've read various articles and combine some basics with common sense. Once gardeners get past the fear of damaging or killing plants and begin thinking in terms of providing a 'haircut' I think you're half way there. I think I mentioned a while back I prune regularly. The Cape Breton Regional Municipality provided me with a I cubic meter green bin for their solid waste organic composting program. I found it wasn't enough and got a second one. I fill both each week with prunings from the garden. This is not only rhododendrons, azaleas, and magnolias but pine trees, alders, maple and anything that I think would benefit from a trim. I do this every week until there's too much snow to get around the garden (3 months).

- **a.** I don't stick to specific times of the year to prune but it's common sense if a budded plant is involved then why not wait until it flowers?
- **b**. My 'cut-back' for those deciduous azaleas is a more aggressive approach to what some folks call the 1/3:1/3:1/3 method where old growth is eliminated yearly at a 1/3 rate.
- c. A few years back I detested 'bare-ankled' rhododendrons. Now I frequently find on large old plants I take away the whole of rhododendron lower branches leaving a tree shape versus a shrub. Those exposed old trunks give a bonsai like look that has appeal for me. Often times you find small plants in the vicinity you forgot you had because of the invasiveness of the big rhodies.

d. Motherhood - always take a few minutes daily to run a file over your pruning shears, loppers and don't leave them out in the rain; match the tool to the task at hand

6. BOOKS

50 HIGH-IMPACT, LOW-CARE GARDEN PLANTS

by Tracy DiSabato-Aust. Paperback. 168 pps. 141 color photos. Timber Press. 2008. ISBN-13: 9780881929508 CND\$22.95

Tracy DiSabato-Aust first book — *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* — is Timber's best-selling title and widely considered the bible of perennial maintenance.

50 High-Impact, Low-Care Garden Plants is packed with useful tips, practical hints, and Tracy's own gardening experience. It is sure to find a place on the shelf and in the heart of every gardener. Tracy has identified 50 showstopping plants that anyone can grow. Each selection is a dynamic choice for nearly every garden. Even better? All 50 plants have passed Tracy's test for toughness, beauty, and durability. These are Tracy's personal favorites, chosen after years of studying how to make beautiful outdoor spaces with a minimum of maintenance. Each plant has most or all of these important characteristics:

Multi-season interest, Colourful foliage, Long-lasting blooms, Outstanding texture, Lasts five years or longer, Tolerates heat and humidity, Cold-hardy, Deer-proof, Pesticide and insecticide free, Infrequent or no deadheading, No heavy fertilizing, No staking, Requires infrequent or no division, Requires infrequent pruning, Not invasive or overly aggressive, Tolerates drought, Architectural form.

Available at http://www.amazon.ca

BULBS

by John E. Bryan. Timber Press. 2002. 524 pps. ISBN: 0-88192-529-2

Seven years after being published, this book no longer appears in the Timber Press catalogue but is still available on amazon.ca. It was described in 2002 by the New York Times as, "One of the classics of technical gardening literature. . . . An absurdly informative volume, with nearly 1200 color illustrations." John Bryan's substantive revision to his original magnum opus published in 1989 then selected by the American Horticultural Society as one of the 75 great American gardening books - provides expanded coverage of some 230 genera and a staggering number of species, varieties, and cultivars. Genera are treated with detail appropriate to their importance, with information on history, classification, culture, propagation, pests and diseases, uses, and species and cultivars. Detailed encyclopedic plant listings are complemented by an equally comprehensive pictorial presentation. There are more than 1100 color photographs - many showing the plants in their natural habitats - and also 43 color reproductions of 19th-century botanical illustrations.

Travel - Conventions

We have been contacted by a number of sister organizations and asked to include information about conventions that will take place in the next year. Here are some interesting locales where interesting things will happen:

2009 AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY CONVENTION: RHODODENDRON RENDEZVOUS IN EVERETT, WASHINGTON.

Hosted by the Cascade Chapter. April 29 to May 3

Everett lies just 25 miles north of downtown Seattle and 84 miles south of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. It is home to two of the **premier** *Rhododendron* **gardens** in the world—The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden and Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens. Private garden tours will include the Rhody Ridge rhododendron garden that is usually closed to the public. There will also be numerous other private gardens open for visits on your own. Jens Birck, from Copenhagen, who is known for his discussion on the use of peat moss, will describe what can be done in the small garden with rhododendrons. Go to http://www.ars-2009-convention.org for full information about the convention

2009 AZALEA SOCIETY OF AMERICA CONVENTION: VIRGINIA CELEBRATES AZALEAS .

Hosted by the Northern Virginia Chapter, May 1 - 4.



Azalea Martha Hitchcock



THODODENDRONS IN

AUSTRALIA'

17TH TO 20TH OCTOBER 2010

GOLDEN JUBILEE OF THE

AUSTRALIAN RHODODENDRON

SOCIETY AND THE

MAGNIFICENT NATIONAL

RHODODENDRON GARDENS

CONFERENCE IS IN THE DANDENONG RANGES 1 HOUR'S DRIVE FROM MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

www.vicrhodo.org.au

secretary@vicrhodo.org.au or mnbegg@gmail.com

http://www.rhodoniagara.org/australia.pdf

Editor: Nicholas Yarmoshuk Contact: rhodosrus@gmail.com