



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

Inside This Month

1. President's Message
2. What's Happening in April
3. Rejuvenating Tired Rhododendrons
4. pH & Nutrient Absorption
5. Horse Manure & Herbicides
6. Insects & Rhododendrons
7. Book Review



Rh. reticulatum

Thinking While Waiting for Spring

I find that a great part of the information I have was acquired by looking up something and finding something else on the way.

Franklin P. Adams



President's Message

March came in like a lamb and brought Peter Hannam to Niagara to share with us his passion for rural landscapes. Forty-five members and friends enjoyed Peter's talk and show featuring tree peonies, hydrangeas growing with rhododendrons.

Mid March saw the introduction of Canada Post's new rhododendron stamp. We thank Anitra Laycock of the Atlantic Chapter for providing the photo of Dr. Don Craig (right), developer of Rh. Minas Maid, with Dr. Andrew Jamieson, the current Director of Plant Breeding at Kentville Research Station, during the introduction of the stamp at the Research Station in Kentville, Nova Scotia.

April's speaker continues our emphasis this spring on year-round colour provided by a host of perennials that add 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 meeting on Sunday, April 5, 2009. Invite your friends to experience Barrie Porteous' knowledgeable and entertaining discussion of unusual perennials. Enjoy an afternoon of sharing stories with gardeners from across our region's gardening Clubs. The Niagara Rhododendron Chapter welcomes all gardeners to its events. **Sandra Meis***



R.A. Minas Maid

2. WHAT'S HAPPENING IN APRIL

Unusual Perennials to go with Rhododendron & Azaleas. On Sunday, April 5, 2009 at 2:00 P.M. at the Beacon Motor Inn in Jordan Station on the QEW.

See the new pages for BARRIE PORTEOUS on the web at http://www.rhodoniagara.org/BP/2009_porteous_plants.pdf

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 HRIO) 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, 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>

3. *REJUVENATING TIRED RHODODENDRONS*

In the February 2009 Newsletter we dealt with cutting back of PJM with the hope of encouraging new growth. This topic returned to the Rhodo Chat line this past month with a discussion of cutting back elepidotes, i.e. large leafed rhododendrons. It was started by **Mark Wright who wrote**, “I have several rhodys which are about 3 ft tall. Because of their location in heavy shade they are very leggy with most foliage being at the tips of the branches. Some are naturally more open growing types, but some are not. If I cut them back to say 1 ft and place them in more sun can I expect them to set multiple growth buds and come out when they start their growth cycle this year? None have growth bud expansion yet. I wasn’t sure whether I should let them start growing before trimming or do it now while they’re somewhat dormant”. His question was answered by a number of people who have had extensive experience in observing rejuvenation of tired rhododendrons.

Werner Brack succinctly responded, “best time for pruning Rhodies is just before new growth starts”.

Tom Scheutz provided more detail: “I saw the technique practiced at Longwood gardens where a grove of large rhododendron was cut back severely in the spring. I had a 10 foot tall **Rh. Scintillation** on the north side of the garage which was encroaching on a neighbor’s property line. I cut it back to 14 inches above ground on 6/6/2007, after it had completed blooming but before new growth emerged. It sent out several branches of new growth before winter and continued to prosper in 2008. It now has eight fat flower buds. In 1997, I had to deal with an area in which I had planted evergreen azaleas on 18 inch centers in rows 18 inches apart. They were neglected and had become overgrown (I called it the azalea jungle) and needed to be cut back for transplanting. I was way behind in timing and went ahead and cut them back severely at the beginning of August. Almost 35% did not survive through the next spring”. Tom provides photos of his experience which may be seen on <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/cutback.htm>.

Sally Perkins provided a cautionary note to Tom’s experience. “I remember seeing the stump when it was just starting to sprout. I distinctly got the impression that your missus was none too happy about the pruning. But I tried to be encouraging. I have always maintained that you cut in the spring to encourage growth and in the fall (late summer) to discourage. **Pruning before new growth is the key**. That’s why the old adage prune after flowering is really not applicable when it comes to the late mid-season to late season bloom. A light shearing sure go ahead but if you really want a plant to survive, cut it back hard before growth, which may or may not be after flowering. I know that here in Salem, if you prune after flowering on a late arborescens you will lose next year flowers as they have already formed when the plant is in flower”. Sally Perkins also reports that **Rh. Anna H. Hall** has responded very well to severe pruning with loppers to 2 feet off the ground.

Hank Helm, who grows rhododendron on Bainbridge Island on the west coast in Washington State near the Olympia Peninsula, provided [very interesting photos](#) of the effect of clear cutting on regeneration of native west coast rhododendrons. Clear cutting of course is the controversial mechanized cutting of all growing trees and shrubs exposed to a cutter’s blade at a certain height. They show how *R. macrophyllum* comes back from severe pruning. His photos, taken on the [Kitsap Peninsula south of Seabeck and on the west slope of the Olympics](#) in National Forest areas, were from clear cuts where all the growth was cut to the ground and in some cases burned! Obviously, clear cutting does not endanger *R. macrophyllum*! One should note that in the photos, examples of old **Rh. macrophyllum** are extreme examples of how plants get drawn up in shade. Many examples are present in the forest of plants with more foliage and smaller trunks. Growth comes quickly after clear cutting, but bloom would not appear before five or six years after clear cutting. Viscous cutting back of *Rh.* is an extreme form of cutting back, but it does allow a lot of light to penetrate to the forest floor. The photos reveal very effective plant regeneration.

Closer to home in St. Catharines, Ontario, two years ago, your editor decided to cut back, almost to the ground, a gangly, neglected, 12 year old elepidote, Delp’s Hotline Beauty. The stem was about 4-5 cms in diameter. This plant had been growing in a shaded, and crowded jungle-like location. He did the drastic cutting early in the growing season, soon after the last blooms faded and after he noticed that 6 shoots of new growth seem to have appeared at the very base of the plant. Two years later the shoots are now about 12 inches tall and have set bud with every expectation that flowers will appear in mid May.

Conclusion: It appears that elepidotes respond in ways similar to lepidotes and azaleas to hard pruning. Apparently only 2 conditions are necessary for successful regeneration of growth on cut-back rhododendron: (1) Cut back before new growth begins. (2) Be certain that the cut back plant is growing in bright light conditions. Note that meeting the first requirement may result in losing the current year’s flower.

(W.J. Brender à Brandis wrote on [Pruning Rhododendrons in 1977](#), his advice matched these conclusions. <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf/RSCBulletin1977v62.pdf>

Two examples of growth after hard pruning. [Left](#), plant just starting to send out shoots. [Right](#), same plant one year later. Click links for larger images.



[Click Here for larger Image](#)



[Click Here for larger Image](#)

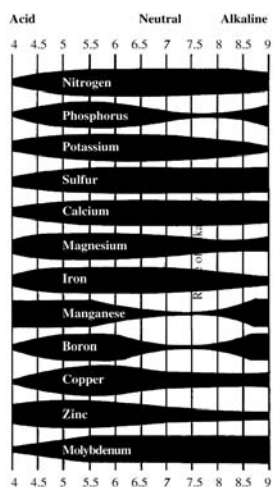
4. PROBLEM SOLVING: *pH and Nutrient Absorption*

In 1974 Fred. R. Davis, Ph.D., of Kent State University, discussed the importance of micronutrients for rhododendron. (*Bulletin RSC, 1974, V3, N1, pps. 10, 11, 12, 13*). In what follows we reproduce parts of this article and add other, more current, material. The original article is available at <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf.htm> . The importance of micronutrients for plant health is recognized by today's producers of fertilizers. A wide range of fertilizers is available, all containing carefully determined amounts of micronutrients. In this section we describe the importance of micronutrients to rhododendron and azalea health and describe the limits placed by soil acidity (pH level) on availability of micro nutrients. **But first, what is pH? And What are micronutrients?** (*Paraphrased from <http://www.rhododendron.org/v46n2p77.htm>*)

pH refers to a measurement scale graduated from 0 to 14 that describes the acidity or alkalinity of any substance or liquid. A pH of 7.0 is neutral; reactions above 7.0 are alkaline and below 7.0 are acid. The degree of alkalinity or acidity increases or decreases by 10 times the previous level for each whole number change. Thus, a pH of 5.0 is 10 times more acid than a pH of 6.0 and 100 times more acid than a pH of 7.0. White vinegar has a pH of about 2.5, very, very acid. Soil for rhododendrons and azaleas should be acid, somewhere between very strong and medium, that is, a pH of 4.5 to 5.5 or 6.0.

Micronutrients are chemical elements needed in small quantities for normal plant and animal growth. They generally include iron, boron, magnesium, manganese, zinc, molybdenum and copper. Macro nutrients are the more familiar Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K), identified in fertilizers as N-P-K in percentages of each element. This percentage is usually boldly displayed on obvious parts of fertile packaging. Micronutrient percentages are usually displayed in fine print.

The Effect of PH on Plant Nutrient Availability
The thicker the bar, the more the available nutrient



Why is pH important? Soil pH influences the extent to which nutrients, of various kinds, are available to the plant for proper use of available sunlight to develop chlorophyll and to make important biochemical interactions possible. The table (left) shows the extent to which pH will assist in making certain nutrients available to the plant. In this graph where the line, for a nutrient, is thick, the nutrient at that pH level is likely to be very much more available than where the line is thin. Nitrogen is available at all soil pH levels from 4.5 to 9. Phosphorus and

Potassium are most readily available at a soil pH between 4.5 and 6.5. Similarly, all the other elements are most readily available in the range 4.5 to 6.5. It is commonly accepted that the best range for rhododendrons and azaleas is between 4.5 to 6.0. Plants growing in a low pH soil of 3.5 to 4.5 will be healthy, but will often grow at a slower rate than normal. Foliage of these plants growing in a soil pH of 6.5 and above may appear yellow, an indication of chlorosis.

Why are Micronutrients Important?

In 1974 some people remained skeptical about the importance of these elements in the health of rhododendrons and azaleas. Today it is clear that in growing rhododendrons and azaleas there is a need for micronutrients to correct chlorotic and chronic conditions that sometimes exist. Let us be clear, however, that drainage and appropriate micronutrient supplements are not a substitute for good cultural practices in growing rhododendron, and are not a panacea to all plant nutrition problems.

Function of micronutrients and Deficiency Symptoms of micronutrients in rhododendron and azalea culture.

Iron Deficiency: Chlorosis is caused by a reduction of chlorophyll in the leaves. An improper relationship between soil pH and availability of iron causes chlorosis. Iron is most available to plants in an acid soil of pH 4.5 to pH 6.0. The symptom of rhododendrons and azaleas deficient in iron is leaves are yellow with prominent dark green veins - a warning sign to the grower for making the necessary adjustments.

Chlorotic leaves may sometimes have a high iron content, but the iron has been converted to an unusable form due to an excess of calcium carbonate. Chlorosis may be also be caused by other factors; poor root growth, over fertilization, soil nematodes, or poorly drained soils causing root damage will lead to chlorosis. If the plant is suffering from iron chlorosis, quick but temporary results can be obtained by spraying the foliage with iron sulfate (ferrous sulfate or copperas) at the rate of one ounce per two gallons of water. Chelated iron or iron sequestrenes are also effective as a foliage spray or soil application. Check for root damage and/or apply agricultural sulphur pellets for longer term resolution of iron chlorosis.

Magnesium Deficiency: Plant leaves in the early stages of magnesium deficiency look very similar to those affected by iron chlorosis. The yellowish leaves later develop reddish purple blotches, followed by a browning of the tip and margin. Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate) should be applied as a foliage spray at the rate of one ounce per gallon of water. This symptom appears on the young leaves rather than on the older leaves.

Boron Deficiency: The first visible sign of this deficiency is the turning inward of a shoot tip and dying. Also, flower buds become light green; roots are brown in the center; flowers do not form. Leaves are small, crinkled, deformed with areas of irregular areas of discoloration. Boron deficiencies may be corrected by using boric acid.

Other "metal" deficiencies may be present in the soil such as Manganese, Copper, Zinc and Molybdenum. It appears that

these are infrequently discussed and are probably of less practical importance than those mentioned above.

What conclusion can we reach about how and when fertilizers should be applied? **Should they be used?**

For an answer we turn to H. Edward Reiley and Fraser Hancock; Peter Hannam will have the last word on nutritional requirements.

First of all, H Edward Reiley, (in his book, *Success with Rhododendrons and Azaleas, reviewed in the December, 2008, Niagara Rhodo*) clearly shows that **providing proper soil structure and drainage is more important to rhododendron and azalea health than feeding nutrients to these plants.** We arrive at this conclusion by noticing that he devotes 6 pages of Chapter 2 to the importance of soil pH in growing rhododendron, one page to fertilizing and spends the remaining 12 pages discussing soil structure and drainage concerns.

Reiley emphasizes that moderate, careful fertilizing in the presence of proper soil structure is critical.

Reiley writes, "Because nitrogen is lost from all soils rather quickly, it is necessary not only to dig this element in at the time the site is prepared but also to add it as a top dressing from time to time after planting. Nitrogen will leach down through the soil and thus is effective as a top dressing. Urea formaldehyde and ammonium sulphate are excellent forms of nitrogen. Urea formaldehyde is released slowly over a period of 6 to 8 months and will not burn or damage roots. Dig it in at the rate of 5.6 kg per 93 m². Nitrogen release from urea formaldehyde is slow to nonexistent in cold soils and speeds up as soils warm in the spring, which provides the nitrogen when plants are actively growing and need it. The slow-release nature of this form is also significant because nitrogen can leach from soil rapidly. Nitrogen in the nitrate form can damage ericaceous plants and it leaches rapidly. Therefore, I do not recommend it. Ammonium sulphate leaches slowly, and ammonium is a preferred form of nitrogen for rhododendron."

Phosphorus and potassium behave differently in soils. He says they, "... can be dug-in prior to planting because these elements remain for long periods in the soil. If these elements are supplied by chemical fertilizers such as superphosphate or muriate of potash, they should be dug in at least a month before planting. Organic sources of the same elements, such as rock phosphate, may be dug in at time of planting. Sandy soils, with their low nutrient-holding capacity, need more of these fertilizers applied more often than is needed in heavier clay soils. Organic forms of phosphorus and potassium remain in sandy soils longer than chemical forms.

Mr. Reiley briefly describes other forms of organic fertilizers, Cottonseed Meal and Soybean Meal. Both are expensive but excellent and safe sources of nutrients applied at a rate of 1.2 to 1.9 kg per 9.3 m².

In What Ways are Peat Moss & Pine Bark Important?

George Klump in a post on the Yahoo Rhodo chat line explains that incorporation of lots of "coarse chunky peat moss and pine bark mulch provides for rapid drainage which rhododendrons azaleas must have, else all is lost. The function of any good bark, is to discourage phytophthora [among other things] which will attack the ericaceae roots, if water sits around the roots for any length of time. The bark helps with the drainage but in the decomposition process also prevents root rot and some other plant diseases from getting a foothold. During the decomposition process, pine bark releases various enzymes, e.g. tannic acid, which have been shown to be anathema to various and sundry varmints you don't want around your plant roots. Pine bark and 'orchid bark' will do the same thing without the advantage of so many special enzymes and they both decompose more quickly than does redwood bark."

Conclusion

Peat Moss and Pine Bark provide air at the roots and facilitate drainage. During decomposition elements are released that provide protection against viruses and also facilitate absorption of nutrients.

When and How Often to Fertilize?

Ed Reiley concludes by saying, "Rhododendrons and azaleas do not require much fertilizer but do respond well to appropriate application. When properly mulched, large landscape plants may never need fertilizer. Organic matter in and on top of the soil releases plant food as it decomposes."

Fraser Hancock, 27 years ago, suggested that "plants should be fed when they are hungry."

<http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf/RSCBulletin1982V112.pdf>
<http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf/RSCBulletin1983V121.pdf>

Conclusion

After all this discussion what can we say that will be helpful to rhododendron growers? We offer the following conclusions:

- (1) Be certain you have sharp drainage.
- (2) Use a mix of coarse peat moss, pine bark and compost with some sand.
- (3) Fertilize weakly.

Peter Hannam, in his talk on March 1, 2009 reported that the following regime works very well for him in his alkaline soil; it covers all the bases we discussed above.

Miracid (30-10-10) April, once only, before flowering. Very weak solution 1 tblsp/gal

Epson Salts (Magnesium Sulphate) very weak 1 tblsp/gal, once in each of May, June, July

Sturdy (0-15-14 acid)(available at Woodland Nursery) weak 1 tblsp/2 gal, once in each of July, August, September.

Sulphur pellets 95% acidity is applied at freeze-up.

5. CAN ONE GROW RHODODENDRONS IN PEAT MOSS ALONE?

The short answer is yes. Jens Birck and others in Denmark do it all the time. A slide show is available at http://www.rhodoniagara.org/Peat_Moss_Dane.htm that shows rhododendrons being grown in blocks of Swedish peat Moss. Accompanying the slide show are notes of a talk given by the J.C. Birck in 2003 at the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture. His talk at the time was, growing rhododendrons in peat moss. The discussion in item 4 of this Newsletter is directly relevant to the contents of this talk. Indeed Peter Hannam's method of fertilizing is highly consistent with Jen Birck's discussion.

5. HORSE MANURE AND HERBICIDES.

Composted horse manure, with its wood shavings, has been a popular and effective soil amendment. Recent developments have shown that horse manure can be toxic and may no longer be considered a safe amendment. **What is happening?**

It appears that crops such as potatoes, legumes, tomatoes, peppers and beets, raspberries, broad beans and ornamentals have died when planted in some beds where horse manure has been used as a soil amendment. There is no reported impact from this ingredient on rhododendrons or azaleas. But its effect on food crops is clear.

It seems that the culprit is a new herbicide, *aminopyralid*. Products with this active ingredient are used in commercial agriculture to kill broad-leaf weeds such as thistle, which are a problem in pasture fields.

It is reported that these products are remarkable because they can be sprayed on a field and grazing animals can go right back on the field, without any waiting time. The products appear to pose no threat to the animals because the herbicide is not broken down in the animals' stomachs and remains an active herbicide. The report adds that what goes into the horse or cow comes back out and it remains an active weed killer, even in manure form **How long does this herbicide remain active?**

Dow chemical, the developer of this product, has reported that, "*Aminopyralid does not bioaccumulate or build up in animal or plant tissue.*" They also state "*Animals high on the food chain... are not expected to acquire concentrated doses of this chemical by feeding on contaminated plants or animals*". Other reports suggest that the problem occurs when manure from animals grazing on fields sprayed with *Aminopyralid* has not been composted for a sufficiently long period of time. Required composting times have been variously suggested in the range from eight months to 3 years.

Whether this problem will impact on rhododendron and azalea growers really depends on whether or not gardeners use animal manure as a soil amendment and the length of time the manure has been composted.

6. Insects and Rhododendrons

The season is quickly approaching when azalea growers will be concerned about the little green caterpillars that one day may strip the leaves off your favourite deciduous azaleas. The little green caterpillar is the crawling larvae of the Sawfly. The sawfly larvae appears during warm, dry weather as the new leaves appear on deciduous azaleas. It is capable of stripping a plant of 50% of its leaves in 48 hours. Handpicking the larvae is a tedious but effective way of controlling the larvae. Your editor has used diazanon and sevin as an effective spray when the larvae first appear.



Sawfly larvae eating their way through an azalea.

For descriptions & photos of many rhodo pests & diseases, see http://www.rhodoniagara.org/RADP/RADP_0_COVERr.pdf

7. Book Review

Two books dealing Rhododendron and Azalea Problems and Diseases have come to our attention. The first is from the cooperative Extension Service of the College of Agriculture & Home Economics, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington. ***How to identify Rhododendron and Azalea Problems***, published in 1984, is still available directly from the University. Republished in 1999 this 30 page book is available on-line at <http://cru84.cahe.wsu.edu/cgi-bin/pubs/EB1229.html> for USD\$6.00. It is reproduced in its entirety on the Niagara web site <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/index2.htm>

The second book, ***Compendium of Rhododendron and Azalea Diseases***, edited by Duane L. Coyier and Martha K. Roane. **APS Press, The American Physiological Society. 66 pages. ISBN: 0-89054-075-8.** USD\$55.00 on-line at <http://shopapspress.stores.yahoo.net/40756.html> .

Twenty-five of the book's 66 pages contain a total of 120 photographs. Diseases are arranged according to causal agents. Infectious diseases caused by fungi, bacteria, viruses, higher plants, nematodes and algae are covered in Part I. Insect pests are the subject of Part II. Non-infectious diseases, caused by physiological problems, environmental unbalances, air

pollution, pesticide toxicity, and nutritional deficiencies and toxicities, are described in Part III. Beneficial mycorrhizae are discussed in part IV. A glossary and an aid to diagnosis are included. The index is particularly helpful in this case, it is unusually well done for a book of 66 pages.

PEAT MOSS AND SULPHUR AVAILABILITY

Course Chunky Peat Moss is once again in good supply at Niagara Nurseries near St. Catharines on old Hwy 8 (RR 81 on new maps). The price, for a 3.5 cu ft bale is \$12.95. \$12.50 in quantities of 3 bales or more.

Sulphur is available in pellet form at Vineland Co-op in Jordan Station at approximately \$32.50 per 22.5 kg bag.

Fine Ground Sulphur is available from Plants Products, a wholesale provider of agricultural chemicals in Brampton, at \$72 for a 22.5 kg bag. This product is now advertised as a safe horticultural fungicide.

Fine ground sulphur breaks down in the soil more quickly than pellet sulphur and therefore acts more quickly.

To lower soil pH by 0.5 use ½ kg of sulphur.

To lower soil pH by 1.0 use 1 kg of sulphur.

Questions Asked & Answered

At the last meeting, a number of members posed questions about taking material off the Niagara Web Site. They are:

Q. How can I copy a photo that appears on a web page?

A. Here is the sequence of steps to be followed. We assume Windows XP is the operating system. Earlier operating systems will operate similarly, but not identically:

1. Place cursor over photo.
2. Right click to bring down a grey menu sheet.
3. Left click on "Save Image As"
4. A dialogue table appears with the name of the photo already in bar at the bottom of the table. You can decide in which subdirectory you wish to store your photo.
5. Decide which directory you wish to use to store the photo.
6. Click "Save" to save the file in the subdirectory you have chosen.

Q. How can I download a pdf file from the Niagara Web Site?

A. Every pdf file is opened by Adobe Acrobat which has a SAVE facility attached to the FILE menu bar.

1. Select a pdf file and down load it. When content appears on your screen
2. Click on the FILE at the top left of your screen.
3. This brings down a grey dialogue screen
4. Select "Save Page As"
5. A screen appears which shows the file name on the bottom panel and the name of the subdirectory on the top panel.
6. Click "Save" and the file will be saved in the subdirectory you have chosen.

Q. I want to plant a small flowering tree in a sunny spot in my garden this spring. There are already dogwoods, cherries, plums and redbuds in my neighborhood. Can you suggest a few spring-blooming alternatives?

A. There are several underused North American natives that fit. They may not match the vividness of familiar Asian species in full bloom, like the frilly double-flowered **Kanzan cherry**, but their quiet beauty will draw many admirers. And most will grow no more than 30 feet high, the textbook definition of a small garden tree.

The graceful, **Carolina silverbell** (*Halesia tetraptera*), has dangling hoop skirts of pure white flowers followed by lobed fruit. In "Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia," Michael Dirr, a woody-plant expert, praises its merits: "The flowers, in a subtle, not boisterous way, are among the most beautiful of all flowering trees."

Halesia varieties may do the trick, **Rosea**, a pink form, **Variegata**, sports white flowers and variegated leaves.

Wedding Bells, has large white flowers and reaches 20 feet.

The **serviceberry** (*Amelanchier*), is a white-flowered shrub-like tree with several useful varieties. Sometimes known as the **Saskatoon Berry**, it blossoms into a cloud of white and looks at home in either a woodland or a small garden. Berries are very tasty and the birds love them. According to folklore, the serviceberry got its name from 19th-century settlers heading West who knew that when the tree was in bloom, the ground had thawed, so it was time to dig graves and bury those who had died during the winter.

The **fringe tree** (*Chionanthus virginicus*) is sculptural even when not in bloom, often has multiple trunks. In May and June, it produces a spectacle, covering its twisting branches with a fragrant threadlike bunting of delicate white flowers.

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) also occurs in a white variety, **Alba**, or **Forest Pansy** which has pink blossoms and dark purple leaves. A new, harder-to-find variety, **Hearts of Gold**, has vivid yellow foliage that leafs out after the decline of its hot pink flowers.

For something exotic, consider two non-native trees: the **Japanese snowbell** and the **yellowhorn** from China. The **snowbell** (*Styrax japonicus*) resembles a **Halesia** and, like other light-colored flowering plants, looks best against a backdrop like a solid wall or a dark hedge. The **yellowhorn** (*Xanthoceras sorbifolium*) has shiny dissected leaves and scented white crepe-like flowers with yellow and red centers. It is relatively rare but worth the trouble to find.

Abridged by N. Yarmoshuk for **Niagara Rhodo** from the original by **STEPHEN ORR**, *New York Times*, March 26, 2009.

[What's New on RHODONIAGARA.ORG ?](#)

The Niagara Chapter's web site is updated regularly. Not only are photos being added to the [Speakers'](#) and [Plant Sales](#) pages, information about [area gardens](#) is shown, [speakers' notes](#) are provided, and activities of sister organizations are included in ["Community Events"](#). Growing tips are provided as the season's unfold. Check out all the recent additions.

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