



"Niagara Rhodo" Newsletter of the The Niagara Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada January 2011

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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DR. HENRY 'HANK' GEORGE HEDGES (1924 – 2010)

Hank passed away peacefully in early November at St. George, Ontario. He was a founding member and for 36 years secretary of the Rhododendron Society of Canada; a teacher, author, television and radio personality, superb nature photographer, and director of many organizations, his interests were wide and varied. Often he would appear at events with gifts of his own honey, special eggs or lily bulbs. A memorial service and gathering was held on December 11, 2010 in St. George to celebrate the life of Hank Hedges. Our condolences are extended to his family.

Program Reminder

Sunday, February 6, 2011, 2 P.M.

A Serendipitous Garden: The MacDougall Garden

James MacDougall will talk about his garden and its evolution. It is located on the lakeshore at Beamsville. The garden was developed from scratch about 5 years ago and has evolved into an eclectic selection of plants with roses, peonies and of course rhododendrons. The emphasis in the garden is on landscaping with cutting beds, grapevines, fruit



trees and vegetables all with a whimsical approach. James' description of the development of a unique cantilevered deck, overlooking Lake Ontario, using recycled bridge I-beams, is a fascinating story in its own right. Mary, James' spouse was responsible for the many artifacts that are so well displayed in and around the garden. Finally, his lawn cutting techniques to develop a Union Jack pattern in the lawn provides interesting content.



Sunday, March 6, 2011, 2 P.M.

New Directions in Rhododendron Development.

Dr. Stephen Krebs, Director, David G. Leach Research Station, Holden Arboretum, will speak on his interest in increasing the popular appeal of new introductions of rhododendrons and azaleas by adding disease resistance and heat tolerance to them. These traits may improve their performance under challenging conditions and broaden their marketability to regions where rhododendrons currently have a limited presence.

Sunday, April 10, 2011, 2:00 P.M.

Slide Show, Description, Coffee, Sweets & Discussion

Description of varieties to be available at the Annual Plant Sale, April 23, 2011. Also, discussion and review of members' interests and questions. Review of critical factors in caring for rhododendron and azaleas during summer heat.

Please Note Date Changes

It has become necessary to change the dates of the annual Plant Sale and of the date of the meeting at which plants offered at the sale will be described and members' questions and interests will be discussed. Please note the new dates shown for events on April 10 and April 30.

Saturday, April 30, 2011, 9:00 A.M. to Noon
Annual Plant Sale

Location: Vineland Innovation & Research Centre, Garage & Implement area, at the former (HRIO), Victoria Avenue, Vineland Station.

Note: *Plant Sale closes before Noon when all plants are sold out.*

Saturday, May 14, 2011. 10 A.M. to Noon.

Garden Tours, Rhododendron Gardens in Mississauga. Members Only:

Tour 1: Mrs. Marta Brueckner's Garden in Mississauga. A 2 acre garden containing Dr. Brueckner's hybrids and rhododendron specie from which the hybrids were developed. *(Program details to follow in April 2011)*

Saturday, May 28, 2011. 10 A.M. to 2 P.M.

P4Ms Plant Sale. For Members only. Venue TBA

Please note: All meetings, unless otherwise stated, will be held at Rittenhouse Hall, Vineland Research & Innovation Centre (VRIC), Vineland Station, Ontario, starting at 2 PM.



President's Message

Our first speaker of 2011, on February 6th, is a local, eclectic gardener, who developed a garden from scratch and achieved notable success within a relatively short time frame of 5 years. In our speakers' program, we strive to profile our own local talent, as well as bringing in speakers from outside Niagara. By featuring local gardens and their owners, we can learn from their experience in dealing with our micro climates and various challenges. This is a great source of ideas and inspiration for us to continue to develop our own unique gardens, featuring rhodos.

Please reserve Saturday, April 30th the date of our Annual Plant Sale. Once again we are offering the Pre-Order Program for members, enabling you to select plants in advance, for pick up on the date of the sale. On February 6th, you will be able to renew Chapter (local) memberships or to sign up as a new member. Membership enables you to receive the 10% Members' discount on plants purchased at the Annual Plant Sale, to participate in the pre-order program, to attend garden tours and also, to buy Plants for Members at a subsequent sale in June.

Our February 6th event provides an opportunity to beat the February blahs and to mentally fast forward to Spring. It is open to the public. Encourage friends to attend with you and "car pool". We look forward to renewing friendships and meeting new gardening enthusiasts.

Sandra Meis

Rhododendrons in Pots in Winter

How many of us have found that as the first snowfall of November is upon us that we have rhododendrons or azaleas that are waiting for a spot in the garden. Then there are those who may find "bargains" in a nursery late in September that cannot be resisted. So we pick them up and then can't seem to find the time to plant them. We then wonder what to do. How do we deal with potted plants through the winter?

A recent post on the Yahoo rhododendron chat line asked, "A local big box store has all it plants from last year marked 50% off; this includes azaleas and rhododendron ,peiris, etc.. These plant have been exposed to temps below 10 degrees several time this winter; while being in containers. My question, how much root damage might have taken place."

No direct response to the question appeared but there were several postings that were interesting and potentially useful. A grower in Bavaria provided photographs of how he overwinters potted rhodos in the open in freezing temperatures.



He wrote . . . *“I have grown azaleas in containers for about 12 years in lowest temperatures of -26C and without snow cover. I doubt there will be problems with rhodo’s or azalea’s roots.”* (edited original)

A grower in Michigan wrote and provided photographs, *“I keep about 5000-7000 container pots of both evergreen and deciduous azaleas out in the open every year. Once a plant is 2 years old, out it goes. This past Sunday, the temperatures got down to -10F below, extremely cold for container plants. Every year we get below zero, and every year the azaleas bloom their hearts out. I have yet to see root damage on any container azaleas.”* (edited original)



Here, in Niagara, growers use unheated poly- houses for winter storage of their pot grown plants. Rooted cuttings, growing in pots since spring, and 2 to 3 year old plants are housed in this way; external temperatures drop to -15C to -20C (5F to -5F) for several days and then may rise to 0C to 5C (32F to 40F) for a few days, returning to below freezing for extended periods. Their rhodos and azaleas do not seem to suffer damage. The plants within the plastic houses are protected from wind desiccation. But temperatures within the poly-house are likely to reach outdoor temperatures at night and perhaps warm up during cold but sunny days.

Our experience is to store potted rhodos along a North wall, covered with oak leaves and/or pine needles, through such winters. Again, with no apparent ill effects on young rhodos, azaleas or on young seedlings of Cornus Kousa, Liriodendron, oak or "Bloodgood" Japanese Maple. . The examples of outdoor storage of small rhodos & azaleas provided by the growers in Bavarian & Michigan are somewhat more extreme examples of our own experience.

We searched for information on the physiology involved in the process of freeze/thaw in containers and potential for root damage or plant desiccation? We found no direct information on root behaviour in pots during winter. But, we did locate 2 articles that dealt with root behaviour of tree roots in winter. The following extract may be of interest to

all gardeners. It may be that the dynamics of root behaviour described in this extract apply to rhododendrons and azaleas but we have not been able to identify articles that specifically focus on rhododendrons and azaleas. The following may be relevant.

Source: Micheal Snyder Northern Woodlands, Winter, 2007

“Unlike the aboveground parts of most trees that pass the winter in a prolonged dormancy – marked by unbroken inactivity until spring – tree roots seem to maintain a readiness to grow independent of the aboveground parts of the tree. That is, roots remain mostly inactive but can and do function and grow during winter months whenever soil temperatures are favorable, even if the air aboveground is brutally cold. **While roots tend to freeze and die at soil temperatures below 20°F, minimum temperatures for root growth are thought to be between 32 and 41°F. So, if soil temperatures warm to or stay above this minimum, winter roots can break dormancy and become active.** (editor’s emphasis)

This winter quiescence – where roots are resting but ready – is extremely important for the health of individual trees and, by extension, for forests in general. Indeed, it is this trait that allows evergreens to absorb soil water and avoid winter desiccation in their needles, and it is this trait that allows all species, including deciduous hardwoods, the opportunity to expand their root systems in search of water and nutrients in advance of spring bud break.

But there is an important tradeoff. **To maintain this quiescence, a tree’s roots necessarily tend to be much less cold hardy than its stems and branches. This is fine, so long as the soil is sufficiently insulated by a covering of snow against extremely low air temperatures. A good early season snowfall – if it persists – can keep soil unfrozen throughout the coldest of winters. In such years, sustained winter root activity may replace previously damaged roots, may ready the tree for spring bud break, and may translate into excellent aboveground growth during the following summer.**

Conversely, a deep snowpack coming later in winter, after the soil is already frozen, can also insulate the soil – but in a different way. These late snows actually keep soil frozen for extended periods – even during January thaws and despite the heat of the earth’s core. The surface layers of forest soils do commonly freeze, and when they do, it is not good for roots or the stems and branches dependent on them. Not only do the roots remain inactive under such frozen conditions, but the freezing, heaving, and cracking of winter soils physically damages roots – particularly the fine feeder roots in the uppermost organic layers.

Editor’s question: If what these authors say about tree roots applies directly to rhododendrons, how do we understand the success that many have in overwintering rhodos and azaleas, in pots, in open fields, in very cold winter conditions?

Follow this link to the two articles
http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf/Tree_Roots_in_Winter.pdf

ARS Convention

“The World in Your Garden” [the 65th Annual Convention](#) for the American Rhododendron Society will be hosted by The Oregon Chapters (District 4) of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS). May 11, 2011 to May 15, 2011 at Vancouver, Washington, USA. This convention features a host of exceptional speakers from around the world and tours from an array of outstanding public and private gardens and nurseries. Noted hybridizers will discuss their best efforts. Meetings and banquets will be staged in the much touted [Heathman Lodge](#).

[Twenty speakers](#) over 4 days, among them Linda Beutler, Harold Greer, Don Hyatt, Herb Spady, Gordon Wylie will cover a host of topics: Clematis, native azaleas of the eastern US mountains, hybridizing and rhododendrons around the world.

[Twelve garden tours](#) over 3 days embrace a number of internationally acclaimed designs Two of the gardens hail from Asia -- Portland’s Japanese Garden and Portland’s Classical Chinese Garden. Each shows features that represent the highest aesthetic in each culture.

The Garden at Bishop Close contains magnificent towering conifers, Oregon white oaks and notably large magnolias. This high canopy surrounds and surmounts undulating acres of lawn with a magnificent view of Mt. Hood to the east. With rhododendrons companion plants fulfillings a woodland garden’s highest aspirations.

The Jane Kerr Platt private garden, at approximately two acres, is one of the most beautifully designed and horticulturally endowed premises of its kind in the world.



For more information go to
<http://www.ars2011convention.com/>

and to

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcqOPvmeGo8>
for a lovely video of the area where the convention will be held.

ASA Convention

[The Lake Michigan Chapter and the Tri-State Chapter of the Azalea Society of America](#) welcome all to visit Evansville, Indiana, the home of the Tri-State Chapter, chartered in 1981. This will be the first time these chapters will be hosting a convention in this area, where there are many lovely gardens to view.

The program includes twelve sites to be visited over 2 days. If your editor’s experience at the Virginia convention in 2009 is any predictor of the quality of the program, the venues in Illinois promise an extraordinary experience for those attending.

Participants will also be visiting beautiful gardens in neighboring Vincennes, Indiana to the north, well known for being the birthplace of the famous comedian Red Skelton.



Speakers will be **Gene Bush** (*Using Perennials and Shade Loving Plants*); **Tom Johnson** (*The Azaleas of Magnolia Gardens: America's Romantic Garden*); **Jack Brown** (*Deciduous Trees and Conifers in Our Landscape*).

Evansville is Indiana's third largest city, and is the metropolitan hub for the Tri-State area of Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky, with a combined population of 350,000 people. It is situated along a horseshoe bend of the Ohio River, where you can watch the barges go by with their cargo.

The convention dates are Thursday, April 28 thru Sunday, May 1, 2011. The venue is the [Clarion Inn and Conference Center](#), 4101 US Highway 41 North, Evansville, Indiana 47711. It is conveniently located south of town near the airport, with restaurants and other attractions nearby.

Details of the events and accommodations and registration forms are available at the following link:

<http://www.azaleas.org/convention11.html>

Thinking about Fertilizer

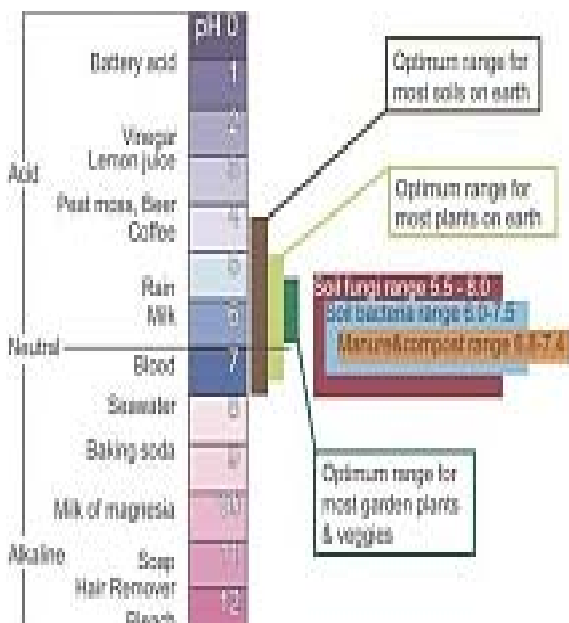
Recently your editor spotted a title “The sweet and sour of soil pH” for a story with the following content . . . *“There is an old saying that states: A purple hydrangea needs no lime, unless you want pink flowers. Another garden saying says: Rhodies and camellia like their feet tickled with acid soil.*

Both of these colloquialisms speak directly to the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. The science is that rhodos, hydrangeas and many other garden plants benefit from periodic lime application to adjust the soil's chemistry, thereby improving nutrient availability and plant health.”

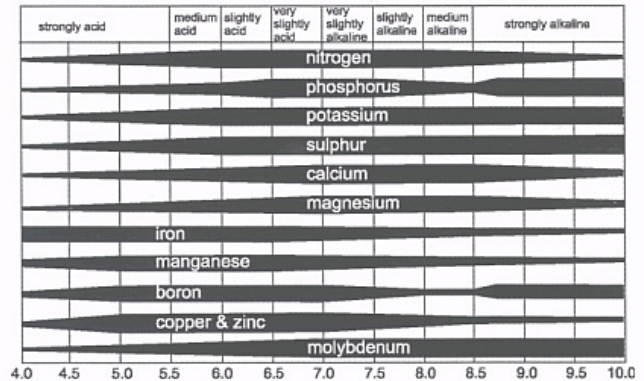
The story went on to suggest that dolomitic limestone rather than other forms of lime should be applied to trees or shrubs showing reluctant growth. Application of lime I thought, to rhododendrons? Good grief!

At first glance I thought that the author was way out of line. But then it turns out that I had forgotten about an article that I prepared for the Niagara Rhodo some issues ago. In that article I showed quite clearly that nutrient absorption by rhodos and indeed all shrubs and trees is affected by how acid the soil is.

The suspect article appeared in a North Vancouver publication, The North Shore News January 12, 2011. It turns out that in the west coast and anywhere that the soil is **too acidic**, the soils tend to be deficient in magnesium, iron and calcium. But treating only the single nutrient deficiency, for example treating magnesium deficiency by applying Epsom salts, does not treat the basic problem, which is a low pH. The real solution to rectifying magnesium deficiency is to apply dolomite lime to raise the soil pH thereby allowing the plant to access available magnesium in the soil. Dolomitic limestone, unlike other lime, is an excellent source of magnesium. Here’s what is meant by pH and how it varies across various commonly known liquids.



The optimum range for most plants on earth is between pH 5.0 and pH 6 . The following graph shows the values of pH at which rhododendrons and azaleas can best absorb various elements.



The importance of adding dolomitic Limestone to encourage a moderate pH is that it also provides magnesium Epsom salts, a purified form of Magnesium Sulphate is often used to provide magnesium widely deficient in soils in eastern North America. Moderate, not too low pH levels - between 5.0 & 6 - allow for maximum efficiency in absorbing major and micro-nutrients.

Azaleas vs. Lepidotes What's the Difference ?

How many times have you found yourself looking at a group of plants at a rhododendron sale and, while looking at the small leaved varieties, you wonder, is that an evergreen azalea or a small leaved rhododendron?

A rhododendron expert, who is interested in taxonomy, may puff up his chest and declare, “Azaleas are in the genus *Rhododendron*, with evergreen azaleas in the subgenus *Tsutsusi* and deciduous azaleas in the subgenus *Pentanthera*”. Your eyes may glaze over, you may think that doesn’t help me distinguish between the two types of plants, and, you may wish this fellow would go away or tell you something useful.

What are some of the distinguishing features that allow you to determine whether you are dealing with a small leaved rhododendron or an azalea?

One characteristic of some lepidotes is blooming time. Early blooming dauricum or mucronulatum based varieties are likely to bloom before the trees in your neighbourhood start to open leaves. Evergreen azaleas tend to open after the tree leaves have started to come out. Of course this does not help when you want to distinguish the later blooming lepidotes from evergreen azaleas. Azaleas do not bloom early in the season.

To tell them apart, first look at a flower—most azaleas have only 5 or 6 stamens, while most rhododendrons have 10 stamens.

Then look at a leaf—azalea leaves tend to be thinner, softer, less firm, and more pointed than lepidote leaves, and azalea leaves tend to have long straight hairs parallel to the leaf surface, usually along the midrib on the underside of the leaf.

Membership Matters

Finally, using a magnifying glass, look at the underside of a leaf for tiny round structures called scales on their lower leaf surfaces, flower stalks and calyx as well as other surfaces. Azalea leaves *never* have scales, while small-leaved rhododendron leaves are *always* covered with scales which are more or less mushroom shaped but vary in size, structure, color, and density. (the more correct name for small-leaved rhododendrons is "lepidote" rhododendrons, where lepidote means "covered with scales").

Another identifying characteristic of this group is that the young leaves in buds are flat or curved. The growth habit of Lepidote Rhododendrons varies from almost prostrate spreaders to tall shrubs. Leaf size ranges from very small to medium sized. Flower color covers the spectrum except for true red. This group contains some of the most winter hardy and earliest blooming evergreen forms (e.g., *R. dauricum*) as well as the tender *Vireya* types. (*Abstracted from several sources including Oregon State University, Extension Services*)

Book Review

Our Life in Gardens, by Joe W Eck

Gardeners attached to the adventures of Joe Eck and Wayne Winterrowd, who chronicled more than 30 years of loving labor at their southern Vermont gardens in "A Year at North

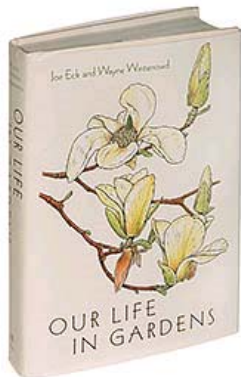
Hill" and "Living Seasonally," are in for a luxurious winter's read with "Our Life in Gardens" (\$12.64 through Amazon.ca), published two years ago by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Here lie the secrets of keeping African lilies blooming on the terrace from June to frost, how to grow primroses from seed,

and how to build a fence out of willow prunings over a trench planted with petites pois, those tiny peas Marie Antoinette cooked herself, we are told, "in a silver saucepan with her own butter." Each chapter, devoted to a plant (or, in one case, to the garden trowel), deepens the sense of this magical kingdom called North Hill, which the writer-gardeners share with their readers (and it is impossible to tell which one is writing when;

they swear they write with one voice).

This is a charming memoir about thirty some-odd years of building a house, creating large gardens, greenhouses, a woodlot, meadow on 23 acres of land in southern Vermont. Just the item to read at this time of the year.



April, May and June promise to be very busy months for members. While considering their gardening plans they will be integrating their rhododendron interests with what will be available in the Annual Plant sale, in the offerings of the P4M program and material to be announced for the Brueckner Test Program. And there will also be the garden tour in Mississauga to visit the 2 acre Brueckner family garden. The February and March Newsletters will provide more details for these events.

Ten percent discounts to prices at the Annual Plant Sale are available to Regional Chapter Members. **Participation in other activities, (a) advance plant orders for the Annual Plant Sale, (b) tours, (c) P4Ms and (d) plants for the Test Garden Project is open to paid up Chapter Members only.**

Full membership in the **American Rhododendron Society** affords participation in all of these activities and also provides members with access to the excellent ARS seed exchange and delivery of the quarterly Journal of the ARS.

Currently, a \$5 local Chapter Membership provides e-mail delivery of approximately 6 Newsletters and access to all activities mentioned above. A \$10 Chapter Membership provides delivery of Newsletters by Canada Post plus access to all activities mentioned above.

Membership is based on a calendar year. To participate in the various activities noted in the second paragraph above memberships must be registered by March 10, 2011.

The December Newsletter contained additional information. Double click on the following link to see the December http://www.rhodoniagara.org/2010_12_24_December_2010_Newsletter.pdf

Newsletter and to download membership information. Or contact the Membership Chair at ljhaworth@sympatico.ca



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