



"Niagara Rhodo" Newsletter of the The Niagara Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada February 2012

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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6. Book Review. *Decoding Gardening Advice: The Science behind the 100 Most Common recommendations.*

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

Winter Came one Night in January & **A Glorious Morning in January**



Harvey Wrightman's talk on February 4, 2012



Irene & Harvey Wrightman

Harvey Wrightman and his alpine plants attracted 48 enthusiasts on a day characterized by bright skies and comfortable questions. It was an interesting talk, with information on how to build trough gardens, what to plant and how to do it. Irene and Harvey brought a few cultivars readily snapped up by members. Harvey's alpines may be available at the April Annual Plant Sale.



Change of Date for one April 2012 Event

In order to avoid conflicts with other horticultural events in Southern Ontario, the Board has decided to change the date of one meeting, that of the **Sales Preview & Discussion**; this meeting will now be held on **Sunday, April 15, 2012**. Dates for the remainder of the 2012 program follow. **All meetings, unless otherwise stated, will be held at Rittenhouse Hall, Vineland Research & Innovation Centre (VRIC), Vineland Station.**

Sunday Mar. 4, 2012, 2 P.M. Dan Meier.

Horticulturalist. ARS District Director Olympia Chapter. A program in two parts, "Brigg's Plant Propagators & Boo-Shoot Bamboo: Who they are. How they operate. What they offer. How they decide to select the plants they propagate. Why we should be interested." (See story Page 3.)

Sunday, Apr. 15, 2012, 2P.M. Description of cultivars in Annual Plant Sale and discussion of cultivars in P4M program.

Saturday Apr. 28, 2012, 9 A.M. Annual Plant Sale. Vineland Research & Innovation Centre.

Sunday, May 13, 2012. Mother's Day

Saturday May 19, 2012. Distribution of Cultivars in Brueckner Evaluation Project. **Venue TBA.**

P4M Sale & Distribution: Date and proposals for venue to be discussed at the March 4 meeting.

Report - Business Meeting, February 4, 2012

Five items were discussed in the business portion of the meeting. The detailed talking points discussed at the meeting are available on the Niagara Chapter's web site at http://www.rhodoniagara.org/pdf/2012_02_05_Business_Meeting.pdf Please note that this link is provided here only to readers of this Newsletter. No link is available to this file at this time on the web site. A brief summary of the discussion follows.

Scope of Activities - What happens behind the scenes:

The Chapter's self-evident external products were listed and the detailed activities involved in each of these activities were described. These are listed in the top of the panel to the right. Discussion explained details required to produce any given product.

Financial Position: While the Chapter is not a wealthy organization, it is solvent with cash resources of \$7,500, a Plant Inventory valued at \$2,500 (at cost), without significant financial obligations. This inventory of P4M and Brueckner cultivars to be distributed over 3 years.



Scope of Activities

Out in Front

- a) Newsletters
- b) Web site
- c) General Plant Sale
- d) P4M Program
- e) Brueckner Distribution
- f) Public Meetings

- g) Organizing raffle
- h) Niagara College demo
- i) Advertising in community

Behind the scenes

- a) Identify & Write stories
- b) Update with New material
- c) Deciding on Plants & Ordering
- d) Set up plant sales venue
- e) Staffing sales venue
- f) Identifying, contacting speakers
- g) Hosting Speakers
- h) Getting plants & tickets
- i) Rhodo bed work, maintenance
- j) Relations with community groups
- k) Preparing coffee & goodies

The Chapter is a not-for-profit organization. Accordingly, revenues match expenditures and from time to time, as appropriate, expenditures exceed revenues. The annual revenue and expenditures are shown below.

<u>Annual Revenue</u>		<u>Annual Expenditures</u>	
Profit from General Plant Sales	\$1,500	Speakers' Honouraria	\$ 600
Revenue from Memberships	\$ 300	Speakers' Travel expenses	\$ 800
Revenue from Raffles	\$ 250	Web Site Hosting	\$ 400
Transfer from RSC	\$ 500	District Director's Travel to ARS meetings	\$ 500
Gross Revenue	\$2,550	Annual Expenditures	\$2,300

Potential New Areas for Member Participation:

- (a) Members were reminded of the Rhododendron Research Heritage at Vineland. This dates back to "Vineland" as an institution of the Ontario Government, the Horticultural Research Institute of Ontario. Important rhododendrons and azalea hybridizing was carried on by a number of researchers, the most recent of whom were the late Bob Fleming and the late Al Smith. It was proposed that an attempt be made to preserve the unique genetic material resident in the Vineland azalea hybrids based on the azalea "Chelsea Reach". A "steering committee" to guide this idea was proposed and accepted. The goal of this "Steering Committee" would be to explore the possibility of developing a rhododendron rooting facility in collaboration with a nursery or other horticultural enterprise in the immediate Vineland/Jordan area. This steering Committee is currently comprised of John and Angela Calixto and others yet to be identified.
- (b) Members explored the potential interest of actively participating in the ARS Seed Exchange. It was felt that this could be an interesting direction to focus interest, but there was general belief that the idea of helping to preserve the heritage of rhododendron and azalea hybridizing be preserved to the extent possible.

- (c) Members explored the potential interest of actively participating in the ARS Seed Exchange. It was felt that this could be an interesting direction to focus interest, but there was general belief that the idea of helping to preserve the heritage of rhododendron and azalea hybridizing be preserved to the extent possible.
- (d) Continuation of Brueckner Evaluation Program. For this year, the Chapter will have available approximately 59 Brueckner hybrids for distribution in the current Evaluation Program. This raises the question of what interest is there among members to continue to participate in this program or to enter the program as new participants. The response was very favourable and indicated that all available plants are likely to be subscribed this year.

Program evaluation and Call for Volunteers: Members were asked to comment on ways in which the Chapter may not be meeting their expectations. It appears that members are well satisfied with the Chapter's programs for members. Some pointed to the high attendance at each of the Chapter's winter meetings as an indication of high acceptance of and interest in the Chapter's activities. Suggestions were made to intensify Chapter advertising in various Community outlets. News that the Chapter's website received approximately 60,000 hits per month with more than 10,000 of these hits remaining to view more than one page was encouraging.

At the end of the meeting, a call for volunteers and areas of their interests was made. Fourteen volunteers came forward expressing interest to help in 9 different areas of the Chapter's activities.

This response was most welcome and adds to the 6 volunteers who now serve on the Brueckner Steering Committee and the 10 volunteers who have been active in Plant Sales over several years. It bodes well for the longer-term continuity of the Chapter's activities.

Growers Circle – A Growing Request

Recently, one member observed , “. . . while the Chapter's winter meetings provide interesting and useful information, a casual and friendly environment, with good coffee and yummy cookies, there was little opportunity at these meetings to share information about cultivars and garden experiences, to explore successes and failures and to share information about solutions to problems experienced in the garden”. He suggested that a portion of each meeting be devoted to a “growers’ roundtable” where members could bring their special gardening interests and issues for open discussion and to share ideas and experiences.

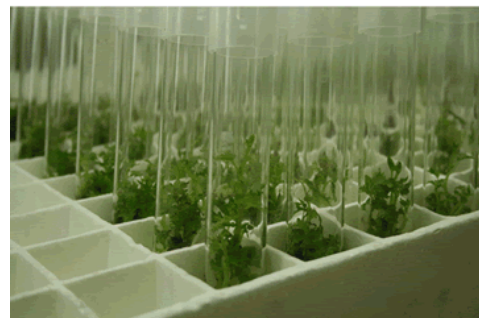
*Continued **Growers Circle – A Growing Request***

In order to provide for full expression of this interest, the March 4 meeting will include a “Grower’s Roundtable” following the speaker’s portion of the meeting. Furthermore, at the April 15 meeting where cultivars for the Annual plant Sale will be described and discussed, a large part of the meeting will be open to members’ contributions by way of full and open discussion of members’ choosing.

Dan Meier – Briggs Plant Propagators & Booshoot – A new Ecological Frontier

DAN MEIER is a horticulturalist, plantsman, and supporter of activities that encourage the growth of Chapters of the American Rhododendron Society. He was associated with **Briggs Plant Propagators** for 31 years. Until recently, he was their production & operations manager and currently remains a part owner of the enterprise.

Briggs Plant propagators is an internationally recognized nursery that introduces a wide range of premium performance, broad leaf evergreens and deciduous flowering plants including kalmias, azaleas, lilacs, and perennials. **Briggs** is the largest producer of Rhododendrons in the world by



volume. Annual production of the genus Rhododendron ranges from 2.5 - 3 million. Every year Dan literally travels the world to visit gardens & nurserymen to source some of the very best plants to introduce into the nursery trade.

Established in 1912 by Orson Briggs (yes, 100 years ago) the nursery is best known for their long history with Rhodos. Each year they also grow lilac, Blueberries Kalmia and Daphne.

What's So Interesting About Bamboo?

Abstracted from the New York Times, July 5, 2007. Original by ANNE RAVER.

"BAMBOO is a versatile, ancient plant that shows up in creation myths as well as in pots on Manhattan terraces. It comes in clumping varieties that behave themselves and running "timber" types that spread by rhizomes — great for a grove, but not so good when they are planted as a property screen that escapes into a neighbor's yard.

But it's that very vigor that has environmentalists hailing bamboo as the new "It" plant for saving the earth.

Bamboo is a workhorse at sequestering carbon dioxide and pumping out oxygen. It is a tough plant that manufactures its own antibacterial compounds and can thrive without pesticides. And its porous fibers make a cloth that breathes and is as soft as silk. In fact, there is such a stampede of fabric designers to China and Japan, where it is farmed and processed — no such industry exists in the United States — that in its May issue, National Geographic predicted that "this upstart fabric may someday compete with King Cotton."

- Bamboo is a grass, but with a woody stalk. There are over 1250 species of bamboo growing from sea level to 13,500 feet, with varieties found on every continent but the frozen poles.
 - Today's bamboo comes primarily from indigenous bamboo forests in Asia - and that supply is quickly being over-harvested due to current high demands . . . According to a UN report . . . as many as half the world's woody bamboos are now extinct. Bamboo has a reputation for being an aggressive, fast-spreading menace. Not all bamboos are runners.
 - In recent years, newly introduced, non-invasive clumping bamboos, have become increasingly available to the general public, more so since the advent of **Boo-Shoot's** tissue-culture propagation process.
 - These clumping plants offer extreme cold hardiness, variety of form and texture, myriad cane colors, and - most importantly - both tight and open clumps that do not spread when planted.
- Why Bamboos may be on their way to extinction**
- Gardeners may think of bamboo as an invasive plant, but . . . it's actually extremely difficult to propagate. Replanting isn't possible in sufficient quantities without advanced plant production technology. Rhizome divisions suffer a very high mortality rate.
 - Bamboo generally flowers only every 60 to 120 years and then dies, therefore, it is hard to propagate from seed. And growing it by dividing existing plants is notoriously difficult.

Members will recall Steve Kreb's talk about plant introductions from Holden Arboretum in Ohio. In the photo below, Holden's Solar Flair is on the left and Holden's Spring Herald is on the right. Briggs is now producing these plants for the broader trade.



Dan's new position is that of Vice President of Production at **Boo-Shoot** in Mount Vernon, Washington. Boo-Shoot leads the world in the tissue culture of Bamboo. They are in the midst of launching a major campaign with Bamboos that behave (clump forming Bamboo that does not run). Dan has a number in his yard and, he reports, "they work very nicely with the Rhododendron Garden". **Boo-Shoot** also is the leader in bio-fuel grass production in North America. And of course, there are a large number of perennials that they sell primarily at stage 3 (directly from the lab). Growing the world's most diverse product line of ornamental bamboo, **Boo-Shoot Gardens** is a full-service commercial tissue culture lab and greenhouse. **Boo-Shoot** also offers a diverse line of perennials such as Geranium 'Rozanne', Hakonechloas, Yuccas, and other plants based upon customer request.

Members may wonder, why it is that a Rhododendron Newsletter would be interested discussing bamboo as a species of interest to rhododendron growers?

One reason is that rhododendron growers, except for the dedicated rhodo-holics, are usually interested in growing other species that may be compatible with their plants and that may enhance the appearance of their landscapes and broaden their experience in their gardens. Others may be interested in new directions that are being taken to deal with environmental issues. For these reasons we have discussed Alpine plants and currently are delighted to have in our midst, someone who is expert in both rhododendrons and a new direction in dealing with some environmental issues, and which may ultimately be relevant to rhododendrons..

- **Clumping Bamboo:** The base diameter of most of these bamboo clumps expand slowly - only a few inches a year. Some are more open and command a bit larger space. All of these bamboos make a fantastic addition to the garden. The list of garden-worthy attributes - such as cane color, growth habit, and zonal diversity - is spectacular. None of these bamboos requires a barrier.



Clumping Bamboo

- **Running Bamboo:** Bamboo is a fast-growing evergreen that makes a strong, visual statement in landscapes. Species range from smaller screening plants at 2 feet to giants well over 100 feet in height, providing an excellent backdrop to our modern day landscapes. Water species have air canals in the rhizome system, allowing them to tolerate a more saturated soil. Many mid-size runners work beautifully in containers and can add a tropical flair to the most temperate of gardens.

Running Bamboo



- Finally, there are many products to which the fibers of bamboo are applicable for everyday home needs.

Dan will have a lot more to say about all this with interesting detail. For more about Boo-Shoot Gardens, visit their informative website <http://www.booshoot.com/Homepage.cfm> or, have a look at **Boo-Shoot's** president's video on You-Tube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TooMSbuZR6c>

Dan Meier will be with us on Sunday, March 4, 2012 at 2 P.M. at Rittenhouse Hall, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Vineland Station, Ontario. Exit the QEW at Victoria Street, going north toward Lake Ontario.

Back to Dennis Bottemiller's - Rooting Cuttings

In our last Newsletter we reported on Dennis Bottemiller's discussion of variables that affect rootability of rhododendrons and azaleas. He emphasized his fundamental approach as that of maximum flexibility without adherence to rigid rules. He explained the role of four basic categories of variables that impact on the rooting process:

- (a) Variables at cutting time
- (b) Variables at cutting preparation time
- (c) Variables on the cutting bench
- (d) Variables at transplant time

A full report of this discussion is available by clicking [here](#).

Annual Plant Sale, April 28, 2012

Saturday, 9 am to when plants are sold out
Service Garage, Vineland Research and Innovation
Centre, Victoria Avenue, Vineland Station

We are looking forward to having an impressive collection of perennials and alpiners to go with the usual interesting azaleas and rhododendrons .

As usual, members will have an opportunity to participate in a members-only pre-sale. Full colour announcement and description will be published in this Newsletter in the mid-March issue. The date for closing of the pre-sale will be **April 19, 2012**, with order pickup at the Plant Sale on **Saturday, April 28**. At the Vineland Research & Innovation Centre. Note that the annual talk about the plants to be offered, and growing suggestions, will be on **Sunday, April 15**. You may wish to mark these dates on your calendar.

Decoding Gardening Advice: The Science Behind the 100 MOST COMMON Recommendations

by
Jeff Gillman & Meleah Maynard
 Timber Press, Portland & London, 2012
 ISBN: 978-1-60469-220-4

Everyone seems to have advice for you, if you garden – divide perennials only in spring, never water plants in direct sunlight - but how much of this advice is grounded in science, reality, or even common sense?

Taking nothing for granted, the authors, back up every recommendation with information based on horticultural or botanical research. And, they are not reluctant to drag a few sacred cows out of the garden. Will applying compost tea enrich your soil? Is tilling the best way to prepare for planting? Will extra phosphorus increase bloom? Should you release beneficial insects into your garden? Should gardens always be mulched? They cover them all plus more. Here is an excerpt from the book on what they have to say about use of burlap for winter protection. Judge for yourself the quality of this advice.

Advice that’s Debatable: Wrap evergreens in burlap for winter protection.

*Honestly, if you live in a cold snowy climate and want to plant evergreens for winter interest, does it really make sense to wrap them up in burlap, like mummies, once the temperatures drop? a Google search turns up scads of gardening sites offering tips for using burlap to wrap evergreens. Gardeners are also urged to even build ugly screens out of burlap to protect trees from sun and cold, drying winds. That’s just what you want to look at all winter, right? Well, no . . . but we do admit that screens can help prevent evergreens from losing moisture by blocking wind. Burlap wrapped around a tree can be act as a big wick, potentially creating even drier conditions. **What happens if you wrap evergreens in burlap?** Burlap is purportedly good at keeping evergreens safe from harsh sun and wind in winter. It is also said to protect evergreens from street salt spray. . . . wrapping evergreens in burlap just is not effective and its wicking action may even create drier conditions. Burlap screens work much better.*

*If you do not wrap or provide a screen for evergreens during the winter, your landscape will certainly look better. But without screens, evergreens may be more susceptible to winter burn, depending on where you have them planted. **A BETTER WAY:** . . . whether you use burlap or not watering well through the autumn will*

go a long way toward protecting evergreens against winter burn. Evergreens should not be planted on south side of buildings or in excessively windy or sunny spots. If you really want to plant evergreens, (such as rhododendrons)¹, and are concerned about winter burn, don’t wrap them but instead build an unsightly wall out of burlap for the first couple of winters. Once the plants are established, they should not need it anymore. (this should work for fine needled evergreens but probably not for rhododendrons)². The barrier should be constructed so it protects the evergreen from south and southwest sun, as well as wind, and it should be at least 3 or 4 feet from the tree itself. In other words, in other words, this could be one heck of a large barrier.

As one can see from this abstract the authors’ use of science is limited to non-technical use of ideas to explain suggested techniques. They have provided useful pro-con discussion of issues dealing with Soils, Watering, Pest, Disease and Weed Control, Mulching, Planting of Trees and Shrubs. But, alas, nothing specifically to do with rhododendron ! For your editor, a very interesting chart provided information about various types of organic fertilizers. Here is part of that chart.

Note that Cow, Horse and Chicken Manures must be composted for at least 6 months before use in the garden.

Major Nutrients in Common Organic Fertilizers

Organic Fertilizer	N (%)	P (%)	K (%)
Alfalfa Meal	3	1	2
Fish emulsion	5	2	2
Bat Guano	10	4	2
Milorganite	7	3	0.5
Cotton seed Meal	6	1	1.5
Corn Gluten Meal	10	0	0
Seaweed	1	0	4
Cow Manure	1	0.3	0.5
Horse Manure	1	0.3	0.5
Chicken Manure	25	15	10
Rock Phosphate	0	30	0
Soybean Meal	7	2	1
Blood Meal	12	1	1
Bone Meal	3	20	0
Feather Meal	10	0	0
Fish Meal	10	4	0

Editor’s Note: We are informed by a soybean grower that nutrient composition of Alfalfa meal and Soybean meal may vary according to the soil in which they are grown.

In summary a very useful book that challenges conventional thinking and provides insights into why some practices work and others do not. Well worth the cover price of US\$16.95 but available on amazon.ca at CDN\$15.80 .

^{1 & 2} Editor’s comments