



# "Niagara Rhodo"



Newsletter - The Niagara Region Chapter,  
Rhododendron Society of Canada  
District 12, American Rhododendron Society  
February, 2013

**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 Issue:

1. Evaluating plants and flower trusses. The Fellers.
2. *Rhododendron vaseyi* – what it is, where it grows.
3. Challenges of an Urban Garden – by Colby Feller
4. What's Going On? Special News!
5. A Brief review of February 10, 2013 Meeting

### 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

### **2013 Spring Summer Program**

All Meetings at  
Rittenhouse Hall

Vineland Research & Innovation Centre  
Victoria Avenue, Vineland Station, Ontario

**Sunday, March 10, 2013, 2 P.M.** Bruce Feller & Marianne Feller. Flower show organizers and judges. Bruce Feller is Eastern Vice President, American Rhododendron Society. **Topic:** Evaluating rhododendrons.

**Saturday, April, 6, 2013, 9 A.M.** Description & Discussion of "What Plants are Available this Year".

**Saturday, April, 27, 2013, 9 A.M.**  
Annual General Plant Sale. All gardeners welcome.

**Saturday, May, Date & Venue TBA.**  
Plants for Members (P4M) Plant Sale & Distribution.

**Saturday, July, Weather Permitting - Date TBA**  
Members' Appreciation Pot Luck, Picnic & Garden Tour.  
South Coast Gardens, St. Williams. Guided Tour & Discussion by Kevin Kavanagh



### **Bruce & Marianne Feller:**

Landscapers, Flower Show Organizers, Flower Show Judges, will discuss criteria used in evaluating gardens and rhododendron and azalea flowers.

### **Sunday, March 10, 2013 2 P.M. EDT**

Bruce & Marianne Feller are avid gardeners and landscapers on Long Island. They are recognized as major contributors to rhododendron education in the American Rhododendron Society.

**Please Note: EDT returns on March 10**

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**Sunday, March 10, 2013 2 P.M. EDT**  
**(Please Note: EDT returns on March 10)**

Bruce & Marianne Feller have been active in the New York Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society for many years. They are avid gardeners and landscapers on Long Island.

Retiring in 1998 from successful business careers in New York City, Bruce and spouse, Marianne, assumed full time residence at their Long Island home in Old Field to pursue other interests – largely horticultural. Over the last 23 years, they have designed, installed, and continue to maintain and enhance an extensively planted landscape of two acres, intended to provide a tapestry of color, texture and form. Rhododendron, azalea and Japanese maples are integrated with conifers – large and small – for riotous Spring color and seasonal interest throughout the year.

Both Bruce and Marianne are active members of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), having each been awarded the organization’s Bronze Medal in 2009 for their tireless efforts in the domain of public education about, and appreciation of the genus rhododendron.

Bruce has served as President of the ARS New York Chapter, Director of District 7 Chapters, and presently holds the position of Eastern Vice President of the Society, concurrently serving on the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors. He is a member of the Long Island Horticultural Society, the Azalea Society of America and the American Conifer Society (ACS). In 2004, Bruce chaired a successful initiative to establish a special “legacy” collection of rhododendron cultivars hybridized by Long Island gardeners at Planting Fields Arboretum in Oyster Bay. He has been published on several occasions in the ARS Journal. Bruce’s speaking engagements include presentations at many Chapters of the ARS, the Long Island

Horticultural Society, and the Port Washington and Massapequa garden clubs. He conducted a continuing education course offered in 2007 by Suffolk County Community College, titled Residential Landscape Design. The garden in Old Field is open seasonally for instructional tours for members of the ARS, ACS, Long Island Hort, Long Island Rock Garden Society and other local garden clubs. In 2008 it was included on a HORTUS tour of Long Island landscapes. The Feller garden was also featured on the “Garden Conservancy” Open Days Program in May 2011 and 2012. It has been extensively photographed and appears on the cover and as the frontispiece of a recent book by Vincent Simeone, titled “Great Landscape Evergreens”. It was also featured in the Newsday Home Section – Winter Gardens - in February 2007. Bruce, and his son, Colby, collaborate from time to time in the public and private sector on landscape design situations with which they share some expertise. The design and installation of a dwarf conifer



display garden on the Arsenal rooftop in Central Park is a recent example of their collaboration, along with an opportunity to place specimens of a native azalea cultivar in Carl Schurz Park to evaluate that plant’s performance in this city park micro-climate. The azalea test planting at Carl Schurz was the subject of an article by Colby in the Winter 2012 edition of the ARS Journal.

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Bruce and Marianne will provide us with a wealth of information about plant and floral evaluations. They welcome your questions about floral evaluation. Bruce will respond to questions about the American Rhododendron Society from the perspective of the Executive Committee.

### ***Rhododendron vaseyi***

*Rhododendron vaseyi* is a deciduous, upright narrow shrub that can grow to 5 meters in height with appealing erect branches. Its root system is compact and shallow. Scentless, pinkish white flowers begin blooming in April and are thought to attract hummingbirds. Much admired along the Blue Ridge, it was found in 1878 in western North Carolina by G. R. Vasey. The first plant was acquired for cultivation by the Arnold Arboretum in 1880.

One of the hardy native American azaleas, *Rh. vaseyi* is very shade tolerant, also tolerant of soil compaction, poor drainage, and floods. It demands wet to moist growing conditions and moderately acid soil (pH4.5-6.0). However, once established, pinkshell azalea can tolerate a wide variety of conditions and even survive droughts. Having been cultivated in the Arnold Arboretum since 1880, it proved to be hardy in Boston and is valued for cultivation all over the USA and in Europe. The flowers are frost resistant, so that it is successfully grown in Scandinavia. **(Source: Centre for Plant Conservation)**

*R. vaseyi* grows in mountain ravines, swamps, bogs, banks of streams, coniferous and oak forests at high elevations (3,000-5,500 ft.). *R. vaseyi* appears to spread to clearings at places where the forest overstory has been logged. Therefore, logging does not constitute an immediate threat.

It was once found in the wild in Massachusetts, near Halifax, where it appeared to be naturalized

Rh.vaseyi



on the territory of an abandoned nursery in a swamp as well as on sandy soil. This species was found only in six sites in the mountains of North Carolina. It is now found from the Blue Ridge from Ashe County south to Macon County, Transylvania County in western North Carolina and Balsam Mountain near Webster in Jackson County, western North Carolina.



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## ***Opportunities and Challenges of the Urban Garden*** by Colby Feller.

My father and I have long discussed using *Rhododendron vaseyi* in an urban setting, believing that they would be resilient, good performers and offer something new to the surrounding environment. They are native, deciduous azaleas with a narrow, upright, irregular habit, growing from five to fifteen feet tall. The flowers are appealing and unique, appearing before the new foliar growth. They lack the tube of most azaleas, with petals joined at the base, creating a more open flower form. Colors range from pink to pure white, with yellow or white throats and spotted lobes. Fall foliar color ranges from a striking red to maroon. Although the flowers are not fragrant, they are believed to attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

During my brief career, in both public parks and with private design and installation firms in New York City, I have most enjoyed working in, and for, the public sector, sharing the beauty of plants with the general public. My design philosophy is influenced by my formal education in environmental geography, as I seek plants that are eco-sensitive and explore the ways in which human societies conceptualize and interact with their environment. Manmade parks in an urban setting, and the plants that exist within them, can serve as the nexus of these interactions. They can also provide opportunities to explore correlations between a plant's native habitat, and that of created, urban, public spaces.

Potential sites for a test garden in the City of New York are endless, but it was important to assure that it would be enjoyed by the public. After installing a conifer test garden on the rooftop of the New York City Parks and Recreation headquarters in Central Park earlier this year, it was time to come back down to street level.

How to "top" the Park's HQ? How about the "Mayor's Backyard"? Approval to proceed was arranged by John Tweddle, the gardener in charge of Carl Schurz Park, which surrounds Gracie Mansion, the official residence of the Mayor of the City of New York since 1942.

This urban test garden will be of special interest because of the conditions it presents. While many believe urban settings are effortless, with milder climates and smaller spaces, the challenges are formidable. Plants in an urban site contend with soaring summer temperatures, compacted soil, unnatural sunlight patterns, mechanical damage from snow removal efforts, salt, urban wildlife, and last, but not least, people and their pets. The challenge is the identification of plants that are rugged, durable, relatively inexpensive to install, can be maintained with minimal care (e.g. few public parks have irrigation systems), and can tolerate a variety of poor soils lacking in nutrients. It is hopefully anticipated that our *vaseyi* test planting will survive these challenges and achieve the design goals for color, flower, seasonal interest, and the creation of habitat to promote biodiversity.

Carl Schurz Park, on the upper eastside of Manhattan, covers 14.9 acres, consisting of shaded, winding paths, numerous elevation changes, rock outcroppings, and areas of open lawn. The park was created in 1939, when Robert Moses built the FDR Drive, the most active thoroughfare in Manhattan. To assure that it would not be visible from the surrounding neighborhood, grade changes were made to create a waterfront promenade built atop the roadway with views of the East River, Hells Gate, and Wards Island. The soil in the garden areas was largely generated from the project and consequently contains construction debris and silt from the East River.

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There are two prominent, opposing slopes in Carl Schurz Park, referred to as the "S" hills, which descend to a wide "East to West" walkway for pedestrian traffic. These areas are named for the volunteer "zone gardeners" who maintain them (Susan's Hill on the south side of the walk and Scott's Hill on the north). In many of the parks and gardens throughout the City, volunteer gardeners are assigned specific beds or zones to tend and maintain on a day-to-day basis. Judy Howard has been caring for Scott's Hill since he moved out of New York City, and Susan Bernstein continues to maintain the south side.

The author and his father completed the installation of the vaseyi test planting on the "S" hills in November, under the watchful but enthusiastic eyes of the respective zone gardeners, garden volunteer director and resident gardening staff. The plants were sited, three on each slope, among a wide variety of suitable companions in a densely inter-planted context. Soil was a heavy, sandy loam consistency, which, along with the steep grade, is expected to provide adequate drainage. A high, hardwood canopy offers dappled summer shade. The installation provided the added opportunity to demonstrate appropriate planting techniques for the benefit of interested spectators. Offering a running dialogue as they worked, the author and his father illustrated the steps necessary to prepare the root system of container grown material for planting and such other important matters, as the preparation and depth of the receiving hole and the need to plant "high" to stimulate a shallow and wide root growth pattern.

Well-established and nicely budded plant material for the test/display installation was obtained from two sources through the generosity of the New York Chapter. Three specimens were purchased from Whitney

Gardens in Brinnon, WA – bench grown, rooted cuttings taken from a tissue culture, source-plant distribution made some time ago by the Rhododendron Species Foundation. Three additional plants were obtained from RareFind Nursery in Jackson, NJ – container grown seedlings, produced through the controlled pollination of the Nursery's venerable stock plant of *Rh. vaseyi*. The admittedly modest scale of this display/test installation reflects the restraint typically imposed upon urban gardeners who are compelled to work within comparatively small spaces, and judiciously limit the addition of new plant material.

How the *vaseyi* will fare in the challenging, urban environment of Carl Schurz Park will help determine its applicability in similar situations, and may provide the impetus for the expansion of test and display installations of this kind in other public parks in New York City. The placement of these beautiful, deciduous azaleas in an area highly visible to pedestrian traffic is intended to kindle interest in, and appreciation of, this and other members of the genus. Of further instructional value to Park visitors is the fact that these plants are among a growing number of stunning, native varieties that may, at the end of the day, represent a wiser choice for gardeners than their exotic competitors.



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## **What's Going On? Recent News!**

April and May promise to be busy and interesting months for members of the Niagara Chapter. Here's what's in store:

**1. Special Recognition by Briggs Nursery.** Laura Grant, ARS Executive Director, has announced that Niagara and 3 additional ARS Chapters have met the growth criteria that qualifies them to receive special plants from Briggs Nursery. We expect that these plants will arrive in late April and will be distributed to Niagara's ARS members as soon as possible.

**2. Species from the Rhododendron Species Foundation.** The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden has made arrangements for rhododendron species to be conveniently delivered to St. Catharines. Accordingly, an order for plant species appropriate for conditions in our members' gardens will be submitted. Members who have a wish for specific species should get in touch with Nick Yarmoshuk for more information. [rhodosrus@gmail.com](mailto:rhodosrus@gmail.com) 905-684-4703

**3. General Plant Sale & P4Ms. What will be available this year?** The Annual General Plant Sale will be held on Saturday, April 27. Once again, members will be invited to submit advance orders for pick up on the day of the sale. Varieties to be available will be described in a slide show presentation on Saturday, April 6, 2013 at 9 A.M. Order forms will be available for all members at that time. Of course these plants will also be described in the March Newsletter.

We would expect to have full information about the state of our current inventory of P4Ms by early April. We hope to include detailed information about P4M varieties to be available, and time and place for their delivery, during this presentation.

**4. Brueckner Project Evaluation and Distribution.** The propagation of additional Brueckner hybrids is in progress with the expectation that inventory will be available for distribution to members in May. Once again, we will have to wait until April to determine the state of the inventory of rooted cuttings before we can say what will be available and when. We expect that distribution will be possible early in May 2013.

On February 10, 2013 Wendy Fletcher was confirmed as Chair of the Brueckner Hybrid Evaluation Project. A new evaluation form was developed under the leadership of Marie Johns; this form will be distributed to current participants in the next several weeks and will be made available to all Chapter members through the March Newsletter.

## **Brief review of February 10, 2013 Meeting**

Steve Hootman provided members with colour, adventure, humour and insight into collecting rhododendrons in China. He also described how the natural conditions under which native species grow differ from conditions that are available for these beautiful specimens in Ontario. Notable among these conditions in the natural habitat are excellent drainage, cool, humid environments in the high altitudes, availability of magnesium from the limestone, humus from decomposing plant materials and cool night-time temperatures. A more complete report on Steve's talk will appear in either the March or April issue.

In the business part of the meeting, a financial review of 2012 operations was provided and membership of the Board of Directors was confirmed.

<u>Niagara Region Chapter, RSC</u>		
<u>Revenue &amp; Expenditures</u>		
<u>2012</u>		
Bank Balance	31/12/2012	\$8,791
Bank Balance	01/01/2012	\$8,293
<b>Revenues</b>		
Memberships & Raffles		\$2,269
Plant Sales (Gross)		\$5,206
Total Revenues		\$7,475
<b>Expenditures</b>		
Plants for Plant sales	\$3,245	\$6,977
Brueckner - Plant propagation	\$253	
P4M Acquisitions	\$404	
Speakers' Travel & Fees	\$651	
Web Hosting & Newsletters	\$407	
ARS Member fees	\$761	
RSF Membership	\$100	
District 12 Director Travel Subsidy	\$500	
Bank Charges	\$66	
Refunds & Cash Float	\$590	