



"Niagara Rhodo"



Newsletter of the Niagara Chapter,
Rhododendron Society of Canada,

District 12, American Rhododendron Society

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.

January - February, 2017 Newsletter

Table of Contents

1. **Program:** February 5, 2017. Tom Laviolette.
A Rhododendron Garden Begins & Much More
2. New web site operational now.
3. **Book Review:** Communications among trees??

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

Program

Sunday February 5, 2017

Rittenhouse Hall, Vineland Innovation Research Centre

Victoria Avenue, Vineland Station, Just north of the QEW at Victoria Avenue Exit

Niagara Region Chapter

Rhododendron Society of Canada
District 12, American Rhododendron Society

2017 Program
All Gardeners are Welcome
to
Meetings & Plant Sales

Meetings are held on Sundays at 2 P.M.
Rittenhouse Hall, at the
Vineland Research & Innovation Centre
Victoria Avenue, Vineland Station, ON



Tom Laviolette

Director (Retired): Niagara
Parks Botanical Gardens,
School of Horticulture,
Butterfly Conservancy, Floral
Showhouses, Park Landscape
Design and Plant Production.

**TOPIC: Two Rhododendron
Gardens - One Older One
Newer.**

Tom Laviolette has had a distinguished career as an educator, designer, and leader at the Niagara Parks Commission. His work has been recognized in garden circles world-wide. In retirement he continues to express his interests in developing new rhododendron collections and in exploring these plants in their native habitat. Tom will discuss in detail the creation of his own garden and his most recent work in his daughter's garden. Tom will share the experiences of his own practical challenges, design considerations and the cultural methods he employs to continued success of his own rhododendron garden.

Tom asserts, "A plantsman/designer understands the efficiencies of the plants; he or she knows how to use plants to effectively achieve their desired goals.

Tom's recent interests.

Views of area in Bhutan in the Himalayas through which Tom travelled in the past year.



Left: Tom working with orchids

Right: Tom's rhodos to be planted May 2016

[New Niagara Web-Site](#) is Operational Now

Early in January the original contents of our Chapter's [website](#) were archived, some material was consolidated and made more readable, and a new, more modern, clean, easier to navigate design was posted. The Web-Site Committee, staffed by Addy Majewski, Christina Woodward, Kevin Kavanagh, Angela Calixto and Nick Yarmoshuk attempted to create a design that would have eye appeal, would be easy to navigate and which would allow members to locate information of value to them.

The Committee considers the current public iteration of the design as a first draft. As time permits, new material will be added and aids to navigation will be modified and added. To do this effectively the Committee must be assisted by members who wish to use the site as a resource for their rhododendron & azalea interests.

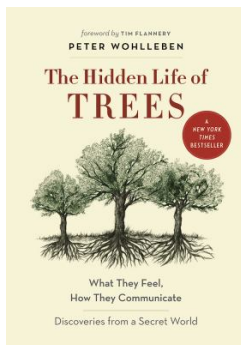
Please visit the new site: explore its sections and various pages; identify what is useful to you and what additional information and linkages you wish to see. Please know that comments we received at the last public discussion of the web site have not been forgotten while we built the fundamental structure of the new design. New comments will be added to those we already have, and will be implemented as soon as possible.

Please send your comments to Christina Woodward at canadacaw@yahoo.ca

Book Review: The Hidden Life of Trees.

Vancouver: David Suzuki Institute: Greystone Books, [2016]. ISBN 9781771642484

Peter Wohlleben¹ is a forester who believes trees are more like people than we think. He believes trees have memories, they have friends, they have enemies, and they talk to each other over what he calls, the 'Wood Wide Web.' Wohlleben writes about all this in his book, *The Hidden Life of Trees*.



Author Peter Wohlleben says there's a lot more to trees than meets the eye. There's a touchy-feely warmth to the book – an “ouch!” when he describes trees having branches hacked, roots cut or being gnawed by insects – and he talks about “brainlike things” going on in trees that enable them to learn over their long lifetimes. He points to scientific research – by [Aachen University](#), the [University of British Columbia](#) and the [Max Planck Society](#) – that he claims underpins all his vivid descriptions, but he writes as a conservationist and admits that much is still unknown. “It's very hard to find out what trees are communicating when they feel well,” he says.

Wohlleben – it translates as “Livewell” – has developed his thinking over the past decade while watching the powerful but self-interested survival system of the ancient beech forest he manages in the Eifel mountains of western Germany. “The thing that surprised me most is how social trees are. I stumbled over an old stump one day and saw that it was still living although it was 400 or 500 years old, without any green leaf. Every living being needs nutrition. The only explanation was that it was supported by the neighbour trees via the roots with a sugar solution. As a forester, I learned that trees are competitors that struggle against each other, for light, for space, and there I saw that it's just vice versa. Trees are very interested in keeping every member of this community alive.

The key to it, he says, is the so-called woodwide web – trees message their distress in electrical signals via their roots and across fungi networks (“like our nerve system”) to others nearby when they are under attack. By the same means, they feed stricken trees, nurture some saplings (their “most beloved child”) and restrict others to keep the community strong.

¹ This material edited from The Guardian, September 12, 2016.

Editor's Note: In October 2016, a CBC reporter met with Wohlleben to discuss ideas presented in this book. I hope these comments are as interesting to our readers as they are to me. Nick Yarmoshuk.
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/hidden-life-of-trees-1.3805050>



You write about trees as if they have human qualities, what do you mean when you say they talk to each other?

They do it not by sound, like we do, they do it... by scent. When a tree is hurt by an insect, which bites it, you can measure a reaction. There are electrical signals running through the tissue like when we feel pain but the tree thinks of its neighbours and warns them by scent. That's not the only thing, they also communicate by their roots system. They are connected via the roots and they send chemical and electrical signals.

You talk about them as social beings? Do you believe a tree is a social being?

An unmanaged forest is able to cool down more than three, perhaps 10 degrees difference to a managed forest because they sweat together. Because they sweat out water they can cool down the climate and therefore the trees support each other without any doubt. For example, they support by pumping a sugar solution to a weak neighbour so they stay alive so the forest will be complete.

So they give each other warnings, are there emotions attached to that? Is there fear and pain in those messages?

There's pain. For example, when trees suffer from heavy drought and the wood cracks inside and that hurts, the tree will always remember that. Trees have memories and will change its water management for the following years. When a tree feels pain from a drought, it warns the other ones so they can reduce their water consumption in advance.

There are other arborists and foresters I've talked to in the past who believe trees communicate with each other, but they don't really anthropomorphize them the way you are, doesn't that put you on a different spectrum amongst foresters you meet?

They think on the esoteric side, but the book is 100 per cent serious, scientific research. But scientists always write without emotion... therefore no-one wants to read it and we have so many wonderful discoveries.

When did this epiphany happen for you?

It was once when I felt an old beech tree and afterward I felt sorry for it. I realized it was a mother tree and nowadays I know mother trees care for their children. They suckle them — that's not a technical term I know — but they are pumping a sugar solution to the little ones and supporting them and when you put out those old fellows, then you destroy families.

Is it ethical to cut trees down?

It is. For example, this morning, I had breakfast, therefore I need farmland, or someone who owns it. And once there stood a primeval forest and I'm happy there is now farmland because I'm hungry in the morning. I just think we have to get things in a proper balance.