



Niagara Rhodo



*Newsletter of the Niagara Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada
District 12, American Rhododendron Society
Our website: www.rhodoniagara.org*

April, 2020 Edition!

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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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

A Message from the President

This message comes at a time of unprecedented crisis which affects us all. It's a challenging time for all of us, and it is my hope that our love of flora and gardens will help us through.

While the Niagara Chapter must forgo an April meeting, we are looking ahead and won't rule out the possibility of doing a social event later in the year, perhaps in the fall.

As consummate rhodoholics and plant aficionados, we are fortunate in that we can take solace in our gardens as the spring/summer seasons unfold. Not only does this give us great pleasure and satisfaction, it fortifies us against the perils of the Covid-19: a.k.a. Stay at Home. During this period of self-isolation, please use technology to reach out to your Rhodo Niagara friends and our friends in the broader horticultural community: Skype, Zoom, FaceTime...

At the same time, why not "use technology" to capture the magic of your favourite specimens in full bloom. Take photographs, particularly of rhododendrons in your, or others' gardens. These gems would add to our shared visual enjoyment in a proposed Summer Edition of *Rhodo Niagara* (see page 7).

Please continue to observe Covid guidelines and restrictions, and continue to enjoy good health. Stay tuned for special announcements, send us your questions. Before long we will meet again,

- Sondra Meis

March 8, 2020 Meeting

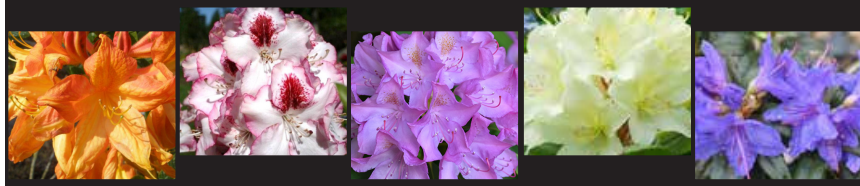
Plant Sale

Niagara Region Chapter Meeting

March 8, 2020 - Sunday - 2:00pm

Kevin Kavanagh, (Chapter Board Member, Plantsman, Botanist, Landscaper, Owner of South Coast Nursery in St. Williams, Ontario) will discuss this year's plant sale of new cultivars, old time favourites, and a collection of interesting perennials, trees, and shrubs.

As he goes through a colourful slideshow, Kevin will talk about each cultivar's strengths, weaknesses, growing conditions and his specific experiences with these plants. He will, of course, answer your questions, throughout this meeting, thus you are invited to ask.



As expected, Kevin Kavanagh of South Coast Gardens put all his energy and wealth of knowledge into fullsome descriptions of each plant listed in the Plant Sale. The excellent selection of photographs arranged by Angela Calixto for the corresponding slide show, supported Kevin's dialogue. The gorgeous photographs showed a series of select rhodododendrons, each more beautiful than the next. How could anyone resist placing an order! Few did, judging by the stack of order forms.

But the liveliest portion of the meeting was the auction of rare, single plants preceding Kevin's talk and slide show. It appears that Kevin has many talents, not least of which as a master auctioneer. Every single plant was taken, but not without a fight. Eyes widened, bids soared, wallets were emptied! The bids were generous, the buyers content, and the Chapter's coffers grateful.

Kevin in Action



Bronze Medal Award

Presented to Wanda Yarmoshuk, March 8, 2020 by Sondra Meis, President.

The Citation:

The value of Wanda Yarmoshuk's participation in the Niagara Region Chapter for well over a decade cannot be over-emphasized. She has cultivated a warm and welcoming milieu that encourages mingling and conversation, new friendships and networking. Wanda has independently fostered the social aspect of Chapter meetings. In her quiet, practised way she sees to all the details; if you missed lunch or have dietary restrictions, there is always something for you from her delectable baked goods. Over the years she expanded the complementary coffee to a full-on refreshment bar, and lately, has unwittingly motivated the formation of a core group to pitch in. Perhaps less known is Wanda's role as the Chapter's hostess. For years "Hotel Yarmoshuk" hosted the overnight stays for many of the Chapter's invited speakers. Together with her husband, Nick, they arranged dinners to include Chapter members for enhanced time with guest speakers, entertained and treated them to tours around the spectacular Niagara area. Over the years she has supported Nick in his various Chapter functions and in working and showcasing their azalea and rhododendron garden. Our Chapter couldn't be more pleased to honour Wanda Yarmoshuk for her unstinting and gracious contribution to the Chapter's well-being and success as we award her the Chapter's Bronze Medal for 2020, the highest award that it is within the Chapter's reach to confer independently.



Sondra Meis (L) & Wanda Yarmoshuk (R)

Nick Yarmoshuk Accepts a New Role

The Chapter's Board of Directors is very happy to announce that Nick Yarmoshuk's bill of health has been significantly upgraded and he is resuming a limited number of responsibilities. In this capacity, Nick and the Board have jointly agreed to a new **Special Advisor: Director Emeritus** position for him.

Nick's experience and knowledge of the Chapter's DNA will continue to underpin the activities of our Board, improve decision-making and execution of our initiatives, as well as enable our Board to strengthen ties with the ARS.

Over the years, the number of individuals who have been actively associated with ARS members and activities has slowly decreased due to member attrition. Until recently, Nick Yarmoshuk has been the sole member of our Board who has been intensely involved with any ARS members in other Chapters, and with any ARS committee.

We look to Nick as an ongoing source of information about events and individuals important to the range of activities that have made the Niagara Region a Chapter with a strong ongoing rhododendron program. Dynamic speakers with interesting ideas and experiences, exposure for local gardeners to new developments in rhododendron culture, and opportunities to add new, rare and difficult to locate specimens to their gardens, are some of Nick's invaluable contributions to the Chapter's ability to show such vitality.

We are truly delighted to welcome Nick back into active, though limited, participation, and will assist him in his efforts to maintain his good health.

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### ***R. Vinecrest at the Vineland Research and Innovation Center***



Members will be interested to know of a unique elepidote developed at the former Horticultural Institute of Ontario. The original site is now operated in part by Guelph University and the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. Vinecrest is a hybrid that has been used by hybridizers to attempt to develop hardy true yellow cultivars. The cultivar was hybridized in 1972 and grown by Ken Begg between 1972 and 1980. The cultivar was named, described and registered by Al Smith for the HRIO in 1980. Sixteen other rhododendron cultivars with Vinecrest as one of the parents have been registered with the International Rhododendron Registry. Until recently, Vinecrest has been used frequently as a parent in hybridizing. Although the photo above appears as a good yellow, the buds shown in the background are peach coloured as they prepare to open. The registration states that the the truss opens as a light greenish yellow with red brown rays in the dorsel throat. The Chapter hopes to have a small number of this lovely cultivar available for members by 2024.

*Nick Yarmoshuk*



# ***Planting Pot Grown Rhododendrons and Azaleas***

*Nick Yarmoshuk*

We frequently receive notes from members who describe difficulties with rhododendrons and azaleas that appear to have grown well for 2 years and then show declining health in the third and fourth years. So here is a typical report:

**The Question:** I am growing rhododendrons under a stand of Oak and Pine Trees in a lot that is about 150 feet square. I planted about a half dozen rhododendrons under these trees. At first the rhododendrons grew quite well. But now they are not doing very well. I have fed these plants with acid fertilizer and have put pine mulch around the plants. But they seem to droop and don't look as nice as they did during the first 2 years that I had them. The fellow at the garden center told me that you cannot grow rhododendrons under oaks. Other people tell me that it's OK to plant under oaks. Why are my plants not doing well?

**Our Response:** Of course, we know that the person at the garden center is wrong. One should avoid planting under mature Maple trees, which have shallow roots. And most folks experience difficulty when planting most annuals, perennials and shrubs under Black Walnut trees. Since the presence of Pine trees and Oaks suggests decent drainage and the potential for acidic soil, we will assume that the soil drains well and that the pH is adequate. We will also assume that the plants are thoroughly watered but only when necessary. We will also assume that the plants are not watered with an automatic sprinkler system. Such systems often provide inadequate watering through improper scheduling or inadequate setup and coverage. On the other hand, automatic watering systems may result in water being dispensed whether it is required or not. This would lead to root-rot and death of the rhododendron or azalea.

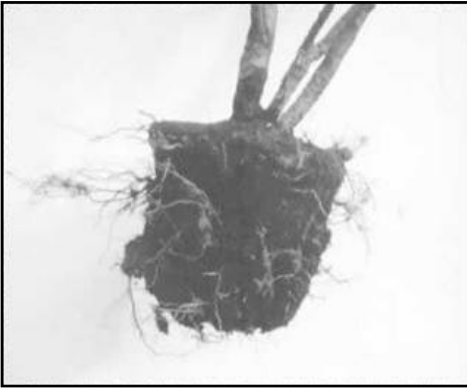
What then could be the source of difficulty encountered by our member? Typically, the majority of all plants sold in garden centers, including rhododendrons, are sold in plastic pots. Rhododendrons that have been kept in pots as they come to saleable size may have roots that have grown rapidly to the side of the pot, from top to bottom in the pot, and have created a tangled mass of roots around the circumference of the root ball. Typical examples are shown below.

Shown here are a pot bound elepidote (right) and an equally severely pot-bound evergreen azalea (left). Such pot bound plants have been known to grow effectively for a year or two and then show rapid decline. In their third year they tend to show drooping leaves in mid-season and tend to resemble plants suffering from lack of moisture.



When carefully examined by removal from their location

they appear to have no root growth and all or part of the root ball has progressed to some stage of rot. Once a plant's root ball has reached this stage, such as is shown to the left, there is little that can be done to resurrect the plant. How can one avoid this experience?



Years ago, Al Smith recommended removing any pot-grown plant from its container and smashing its rootball against a sharp stone, thereby loosening the entire ball and freeing the root ends; then raking the side of the root ball with a fork to loosen and extend the root tips.

Other's, Marc Colombel in France and William Miller III in the south eastern United States recommend a gentler, but equally effective treatment. Miller suggests expanding the root-ball at the base of the

root ball to free the roots tips, stretching them to a horizontal position and planting the root-ball no deeper than just short of the top of the root-ball.

Miller writes, "In the photo on the right, it is being done by hand, and you don't have to be particularly gentle. If the azalea root ball or root mass is big enough you may want to use a sharp knife or the edge of your spade. You are freeing the roots and bending them up from the bottom. When you finally plant your azalea you want those roots splayed out so that the unbound roots are in the upper 6-10 inches of soil. An inch or



two of mulch (pine bark or pine straw are my favorite) will help retain moisture and protect the soil from large temperature swings. Water the newly planted azalea well and then leave it alone for 10-14 days. If you haven't had any rainfall, check the soil to see if it is still moist. Water only if the soil feels dry. With a little experience you can determine the approximate interval necessary to keep your rhododendrons and azaleas properly moist but not wet.

I always improve the soil when I plant an azalea. The hole should be about twice the diameter of your plant and about 12-14 inches deep. You can mix (in equal amounts) peat moss, perlite, sharp sand and fine pine bark with the pile of dirt that you created when you dug the hole. So for example, if you ended up with about a gallon of soil when you dug your hole, you would add a gallon each of the other constituents --- and mix it all really well. Creating your soil mix is not a precision exercise, so you can eyeball (estimate) the volumes. You want to plant the rhododendron or azalea a little high because it is going to settle over time. A couple inches of pine straw makes a wonderful mulch".



Marc Colombel's approach is more gentle but no less thorough. He writes, "Wash the roots with the help of a nozzle and a strong jet of water. This jet has to be soft enough not to break the smallest roots and strong enough to brush away everything surrounding them to a depth of about 4 to 5 cm.

Tease out the roots from their bound condition and try to fluff them out.

The roots at this time are similar to your hair after a shower; they are all together.

Keep the root ball in the shade for a few hours so that most of the water can drip off.

Place the root ball into a container that has moist, but not soggy course peat moss. Or surround the root ball with damp course peat moss on the ground in a shaded area.

Roots of a previously pot bound Rhododendron are now unbound and ready to plant.

Attaining this stage in opening up a root bound Rhododendron will enhance the probability of success of the plant 3 to 4 years after planting.”

Perhaps, as a Niagara Chapter member, your are often sought by your fellow gardeners to provide advice on rhododendrons; this article may furnish you with yet more information to share.

***Acknowledgments:*** *We thank Marc Colombel and William C. Miller III for permission to use their photographs and descriptions in preparing this article.*

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Summer Edition of Rhodo Niagara

During this time of isolation, many Chapters are devising different ways for members to stay in touch. It's a golden opportunity to make good use of our free time and take advantage of all that virtual methods offer. I won't go so far as to suggest creating virtual garden tours; but I'm convinced we can work together to assemble an album of YOUR rhododendrons in 2020.

Get your cameras/cell phones ready - take pictures, lots of them. Select your best and send them to me. It's a way for us to share the joy of favourite rhododendrons in full flower; to brag about our splendid specimens; vent over the puny few that disappointed; the thrilling prospect of planning for our collections, including companion plants. We furnish each other with ideas on how to make even minor additions to create: that wow factor in our gardens; or, receive advice on how to remediate that ailing specimen. All in all, your photographs will be thoroughly enjoyed and will make marvelous talking points.

Your photograph “album” will shape the proposed, and rare, **Summer Edition of Rhodo Niagara!**

I'll be sending out reminders, further information, instructions.

But you can already begin planning, photographing!

Remember, a picture is worth 1,000 words!

- Christina Woodward

