Niagara Rhodo

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

July, 2020 Special 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

As restrictions begin to ease up during the pandemic, we hope our membership is safely navigating through these tough times and anticipating a return to some form of normalcy, soon. We have all discovered different ways to spend our time, with new interests and hobbies, or reclaiming some that have been neglected. Our gardens, and our rhododendrons, have no doubt been a pleasant haven.

This issue will give you another brief glance into Members' gardens, posted on our Facebook page and reprinted here, but without the descriptions, which are available on the Chapter's Facebook. You can also view the floral delights in several public parks. No need to register, just click here!

Several short articles by Nick Yarmoshuk will provide excellent advice and tips on the importance of correct watering and mulching in our current weather experience.

Your Board is working on programs for the Chapter going forward, knowing that any plans will be subject to unavoidable changes. Stay tuned for notices; feel free to contact Directors of the Board with your questions and suggestions.

Keep safe, keep well,

Sondra Meis, President

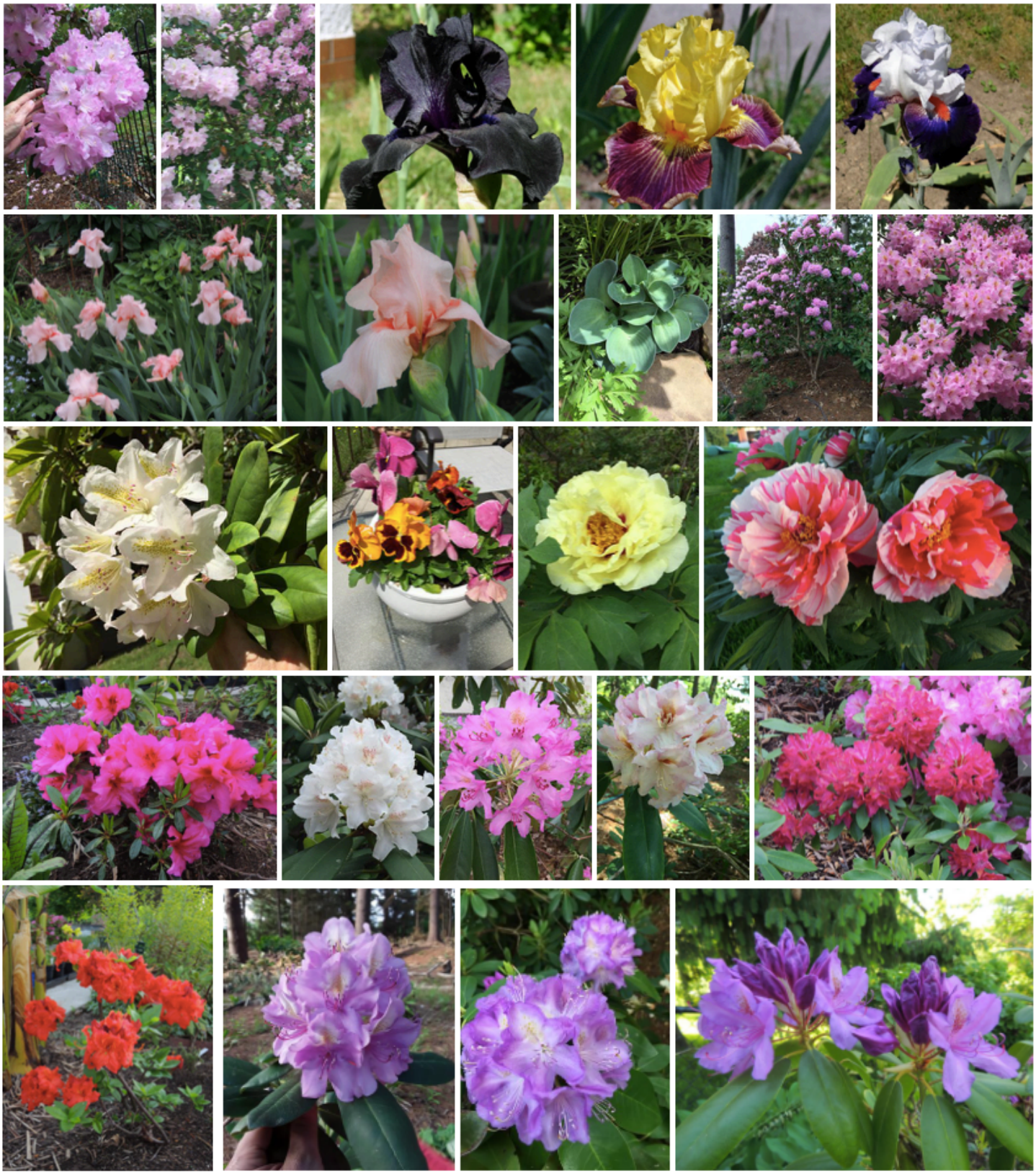
Chapter Members' Gardens

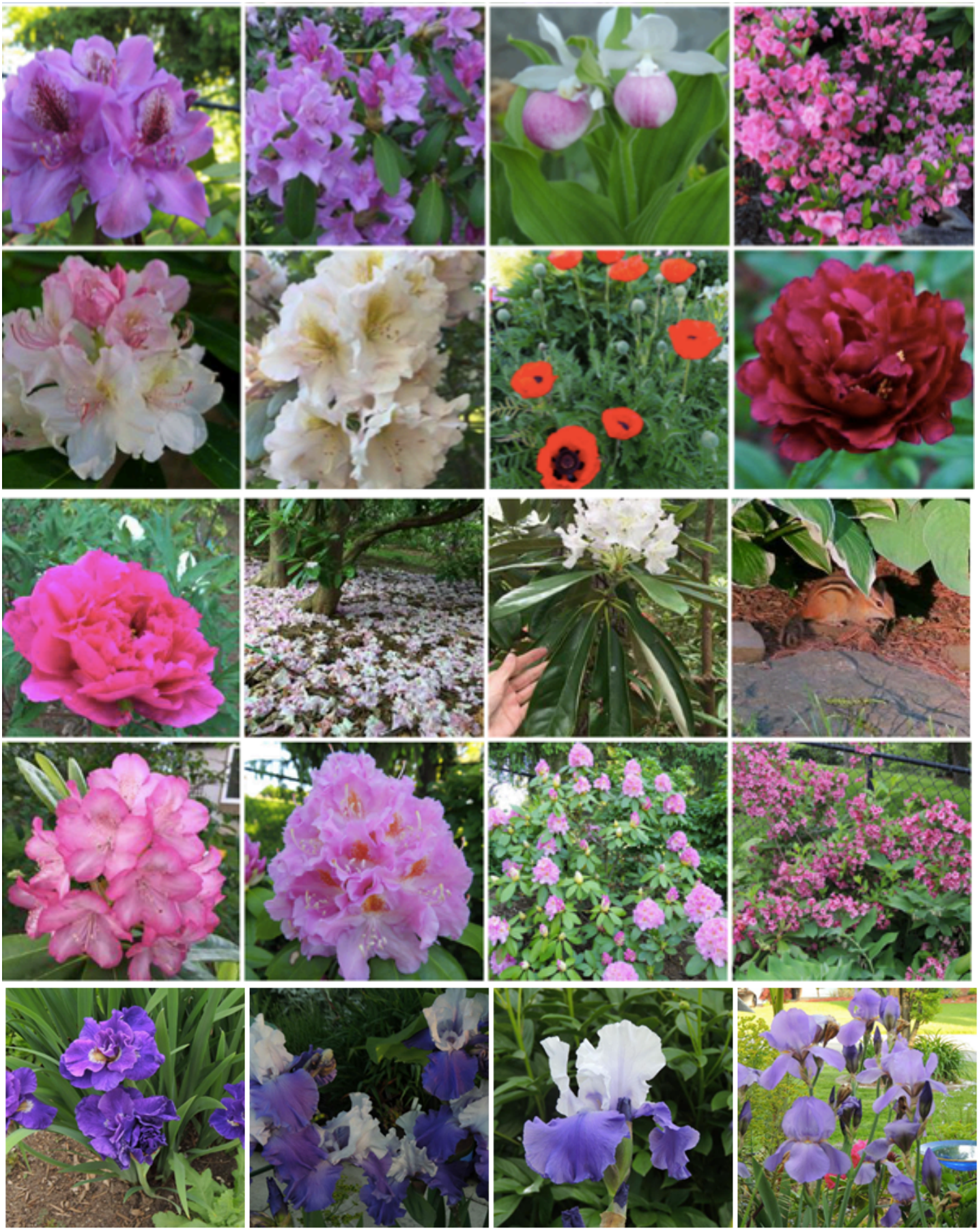
Many Chapters of the American Rhododendron Society found unique ways to virtually share the floral beauty in their Members' gardens. Some arranged contests, others, like the Scottish Chapter, showcased rhododendrons by colour category, many included all manner of garden delights in their virtual activities during this time of isolation and shutdowns.

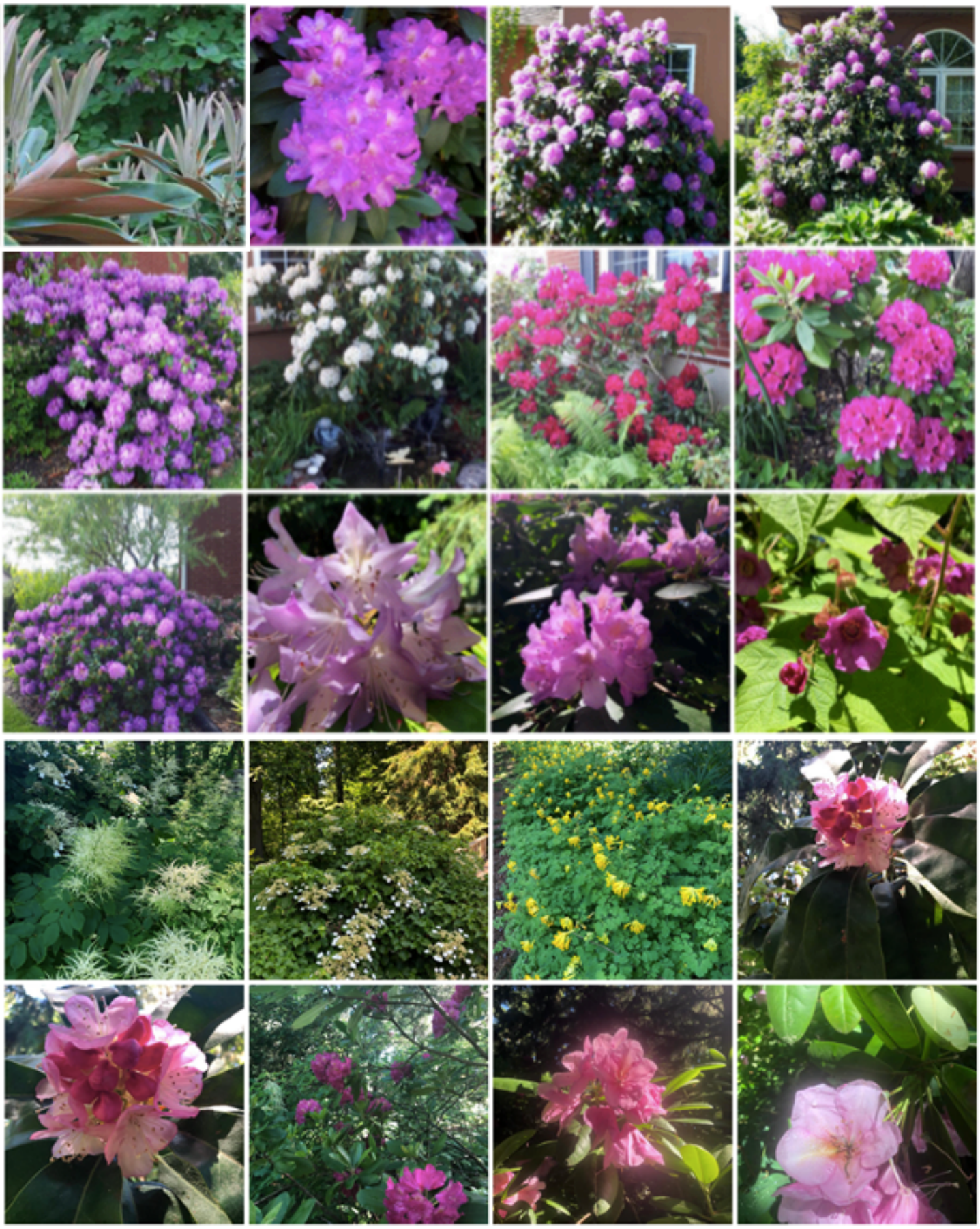
I hope it's been as satisfying to readers of *Niagara Rhodo* or visitors to our Facebook page, as it has been for me to gather your photographs for this interim project and display them for everyone's enjoyment.

Christina Woodward

JUNE







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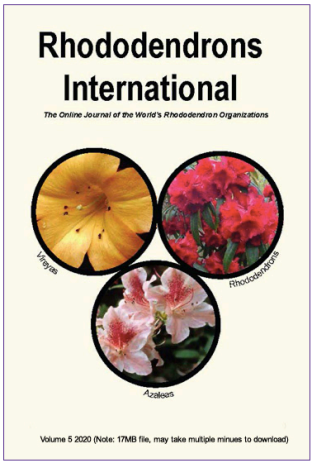
Interesting articles in the recent edition of *Rhododendrons International*, Vol.5, 2020. Read online or download the PDF at http://www.rhododendron.org/ri/v5.pdf#zoom=175



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Attention to watering in current weather is important: With soils dry, time to immerse yourself in ways of watering

Nick Yarmoshuk

In 1982 I started to grow rhododendrons and azaleas on a double city lot measuring 125 ft. wide and 100 deep. In the early stages of the garden's development the plants were all small. In each succeeding year, small plants were added while those planted earlier slowly grew larger. While they were small and few it was an easy task to water these shallow rooted plants reliably with overhead "rainmakers". By "reliably" I mean that the soil area for each plant received adequate water with no area around the root ball remaining dry. In the year 2010, when the number of plants eventually reached close to 500, many had been growing for at least 28 years. The beds were filled with growth, and certainly the weeding under these shrubs was not a consideration. However watering was a different matter.

The addition of some Oaks, Dogwoods, Redbud and Magnolia offered overhead sun shade and also contributed to the "water shadow" already present from the now large rhododendrons and azaleas.

An authority on rhododendrons once discussed this issue during a conversation on the Yahoo Rhododendron Chat Line. He said, "Water from an overhead sprinkler system can be unreliable as to coverage. Each plant needs to be checked to make sure it gets enough. I would guess that for newly planted shrubs, with the heat we've had, 20 min every other day was not enough. That amount of water is probably fine for established plants.

"Very often water applied to newly installed plants, especially from an automatic system, fails to wet the actual root ball and runs off into the surrounding soil. Once a root ball gets very dry it can be difficult to re-wet it. The best method is to put a hose on a very slow trickle right next to the trunk for an hour or so. Another thing you can do is when planting build a dam of soil round the root area. Then you can fill that with water and it is less likely to run off."

In my situation, my overhead "rainmaker" provided sufficient water, but little of that water reached the appropriate area around the root ball. In the seven years from 2010 to 2017, we experienced intense summer heat and drought, the plants were deprived of sufficient water. By 2017, I recognized that some 150 plants had succumbed to this "rain shadow" effect resulting from dense planting and misdirection of water away from the shallow roots.

During the past 3 years, I have started to rebuild the garden. During this process, we noticed that the soil was dry in late spring to a depth of 12 inches. Clearly, **mulching and more careful deep watering** must also be attended to.

From time to time, we all see folks out watering their gardens and lawns by hand. I know they have good intentions, but they may only end up harming the plants.

When watering, you need to continue till the soil is soaked about five centimetres down. When the soil becomes very dry and you try to water or if we get a flash thunderstorm where the water comes too quickly, all it does is run across the top of the ground and down the storm drain. If you apply just a sprinkling of water to a garden, often what happens is plant roots stay close to the soil

surface to get at that water; with no roots going deep into the soil, the plant has nothing to hold it upright.

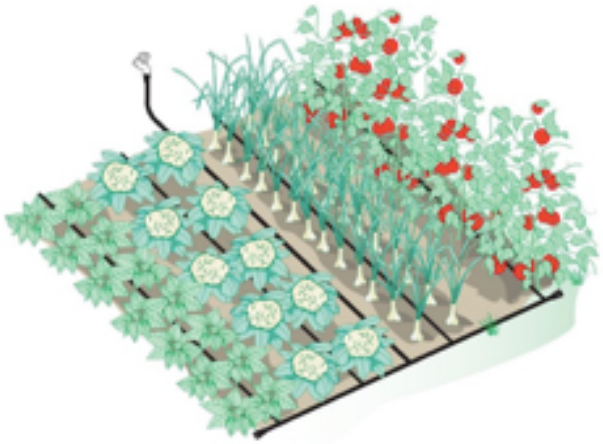
It is important to apply water slowly and let it be absorbed into the ground. In the perfect world, gardens and lawns need about 5 to 8 cm of water every seven to 10 days. I find the best way is to use a soaker hose in the garden; I prefer the kind that tends to sweat or release continuous drips. The closer the water is kept to the ground, the more that can be absorbed and the less that is lost to evaporation.

The best time to water is between 4 and 6 a.m., when Mother Nature produces dew. This lets plants absorb the water deep into their roots while giving leaves enough time to dry before the heat of the day. Now let's face it, most of us aren't up at that hour; I suggest setting up the sprinkler or soaker hose the night before and using a timer to turn it on and off while you sleep.

No matter what you do, your garden is going to need you to supplement its water supply a few times over the season so plants have a fighting chance to stay alive.

Some thoughts about Soaker Systems

100' Soaker System Item XC355, 100' Soaker System



Considered one of the best methods of irrigation. This 1/4" inside diameter porous rubber pipe connects to your water supply and sweats evenly from end to end. It can be placed on top of the soil or buried to directly feed the roots.

As it doesn't throw water into the air, it greatly reduces water loss from evaporation. It is also the most suitable method of irrigating plants that don't like to get their foliage wet (not suitable for lawns). Best of all, it can be cut and shaped to meet your specific needs.

The leak rate is 20 gallons of water per hour per 100'. The starter system includes 100' of soaker hose, 50' of 1/2" poly header (main line) hose, ten 8" stakes and a selection of connectors.

Most parts are also available separately to expand the system. Can be attached to any of our other watering kits. Instructions included. https://www.leevalley.com/en-ca/shop/garden/water-and-irrigation/irrigation-systems/10383-100-foot-soaker-system To reach the Care and Use pdf file, scroll down the page that appears and click on the Care and Use link.

The use of the soaker irrigation system depicted above applies to a vegetable garden[1].

For rhododendrons and azaleas, which are likely to be planted in an indeterminant random design, the arrangement of the hose must meet the demands of the location. Fundamentally, a soaker system must meet two conditions:

[1] Source: Lee Valley Niagara Falls Store online catalogue

1. The root ball must never be allowed to become dry. A small root ball, growing in a 2-gallon pot can be rehydrated by soaking in a large pot of water for a few hours. Once planted in the garden, I write from sad experience, a dry rhododendron root ball is virtually impossible to rehydrate.
2. The soaker hose is best used on a flat surface or placed along the higher part area of a sloped surface. Gravity will move water down the gentle slope.

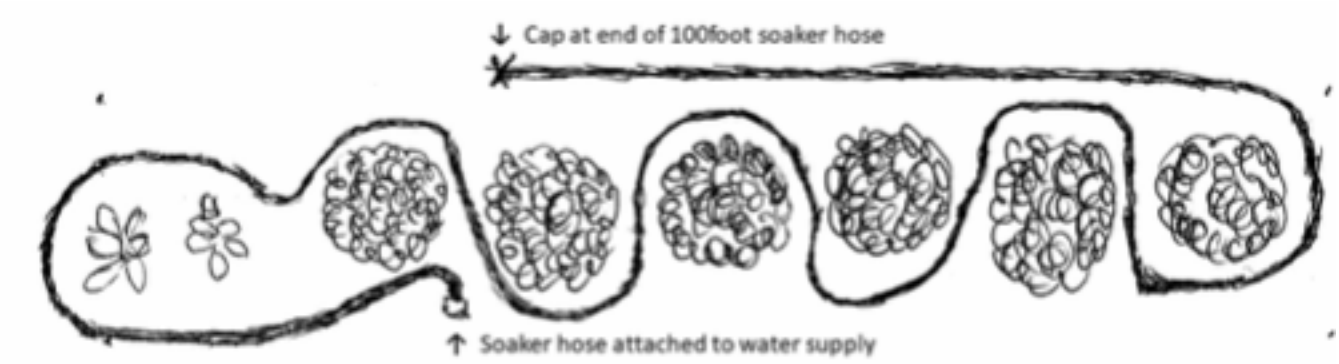
Regardless of location, the entire root area must receive water to be properly hydrated.

Depicted below are two different layouts of a soaker hose for shrubs

In the **photograph to the left**, a newly planted tree (or shrub) has a permanently installed soaker hose wrapped around the rootball and extends, probably 30 cms outside the perimeter of the root ball. While this technique will provide the required moisture to keep the root ball well hydrated, the area outside the rootball will remain dry during drought and the roots will not be encouraged to grow into the surrounding soil. Notice that the other plants in this photograph have not been provided with a watering system. Ideally, in this situation, a 100 foot soaker hose may be snaked through the entire planting so that the soaker hose would lie on the soil between plants and pass along both sides of each plant. When covered with fine mulch, and allowed to drip for no less than 3 hours, the entire area and the root ball will become well hydrated. A simple example of this exists along one stretch of about 40 feet where I have 8 rhododendrons planted in a straight line.

The figure below and the photographs describe the arrangement of the soaker hose.

Soaker Hose Arranged Around a Group of Rhododendrons



How to Mulch Rhododendrons and Azaleas

There's no arguing that mulching trees and shrubs is a good idea. The same thought apples to rhododendrons and azaleas. Among its many benefits, mulch conserves soil moisture, suppresses weeds, and protects the trunks of plants from damage from mowers and string trimmers. However, while mulching may be a seemingly easy task, it does take a little understanding to be done well. Though the benefits of mulch are many, if improperly applied it can do more harm than good (pictured left).

Organic mulches are the best choice for trees and shrubs, and bark mulch and woodchips are probably the most common materials used. Composted pin-bark mulch is probably the single best material to use with rhododendrons and azaleas. Begin by weeding the area where the mulch is to be applied. Next, spread two to three inches of mulch evenly from trunk to the dripline of the plant, keeping the mulch at least three inches away from the trunk or branches. It's as simple as that!

While a little bit of mulch is good, too much can be detrimental. It may be tempting to apply a fresh layer every spring, but it may not be necessary. If much more than three inches of mulch is spread, problems can begin to develop. Deep mulch can create excess moisture and invite insect, rodent, and disease to take up residence. Many well-meaning gardeners injure their plants by creating "mulch volcanoes" by piling mulch up around the trunk. When excess mulch is piled against the bark, it may begin to rot, causing further disease and insect problems. Trees that escape issues with rot may start to develop new secondary roots from the trunk. These secondary roots are prone to girdling the trunk and primary roots. Excess mulch can also provide habitat for voles which eat the bark off of trees, often killing them.

The symptoms and results of over-mulching may take years to appear, but it is safe to assume that an over-mulched tree is in for a long, slow death.

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Nick Yarmoshuk, Special Advisor: Director Emeritus, NRC Board of Directors

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