

Niagara Rhodo



Newsletter of the Niagara Region Chapter

*Rhododendron Society of Eastern Canada
American Rhododendron Society | District 12*



November 2021 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.

A Message from the President

Your Board Continues to plan for when we can resume “normalized activities.” Just as Zoom-conducted meetings have enabled ongoing interaction among members during this period, your Board must continue to improvise...

We are advised that supply chain and other issues are affecting the availability of rhodos, azaleas and companion plants and this is already having a negative impact on our projected offerings for our Annual Plant Sale. If we are able to hold a public meeting next April, and in the event our Plant Sale is totally compromised due to lack of product, we are considering doing a Live Auction of a limited number of rhododendrons available to us (don't worry, we won't be sending out vigilantes to dig up your choice plants in the middle of the night!). In the past, our plant auctions have been successful both in terms of the value offered to our members and the excitement of bidding. You will remember the fabulous auction in March 2020 with master Auctioneer, Kevin Kavanagh.

Remember to send a Photograph of your choice for our December meeting Slideshow, *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly!*

Keep well, stay safe, enjoy the Season to its fullest,

Sondra Meis

Next Chapter Meeting
December 8, 2021 7:00 pm EST

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY!
Sharing our Joy and Wisdom with Rhododendron

Kevin Kavanagh, Master of Ceremonies

Join us as Kevin hosts a ZOOM slideshow of photographs contributed by Chapter Members and others, featuring rhodo faves, failures, seasonal decorations. Accompanied by commentary and banter - lots of fun!

(remember to send your photo by Dec. 5th!!)

ARS Spring 2022 Convention

Registration opens December 1st.

<https://ars2022.org>



Convention Hotel and HQ is located at the Heathman Lodge, Vancouver, WASHINGTON:

<https://ars2022.org/hotel/>

ARS Membership is not required to attend

The Convention Schedule: <https://ars2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Schedule-revised-10-15-21.pdf>

Of interest to all, but especially for **Students**, is the Poster Session:

➡ https://ars2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2022-Call-for-Poster-Presentations-rev-to-2022-dates_JSM.pdf

➡ Limited funding is available to support attendance of **Student** poster presenters:

http://www.rhodo-research.net/student_conference_awards.htm

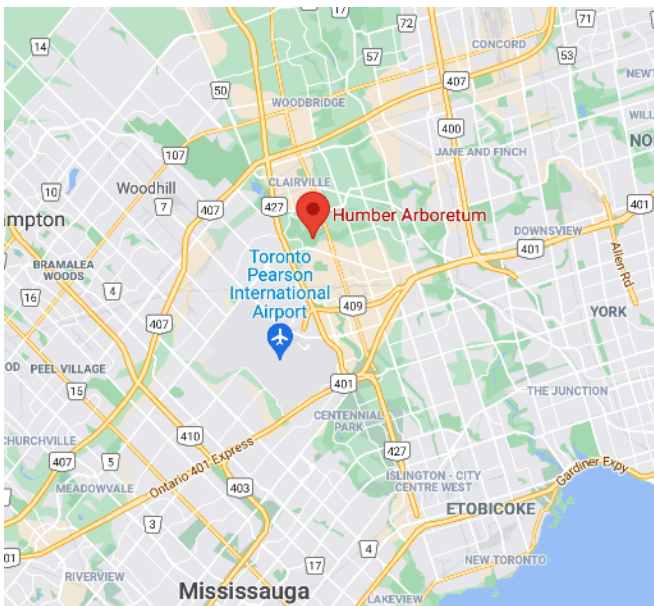
The Humber Arboretum

The Old and the New: Rich with Possibilities

During the Pandemic restrictions over the past two years many of us sought new outdoor spaces and places in search of things to do, for exercise, for pleasure, for safe places to meet friends, have an in-person chat. So it was that I invited a good friend to join me for a visit to the Humber Arboretum. It was a first visit and neither of us were familiar with the location, the history, or the vastness of the Arboretum.

The Humber Arboretum and Centre for Urban Ecology is located behind Humber College's North Campus¹ and next to the Humber River Watershed in North Etobicoke, part of Greater Toronto. Its inception dates back to 1972 when Humber College horticultural students successfully lobbied for the 250 acre space to become a living lab in which to learn and hone their skills for future careers. Opened in 1977 the Arboretum to this day continues as a partnership between Humber College, the City of Toronto, and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA). Read its Vision and Mission at

<https://humber.ca/arboretum/about.html>

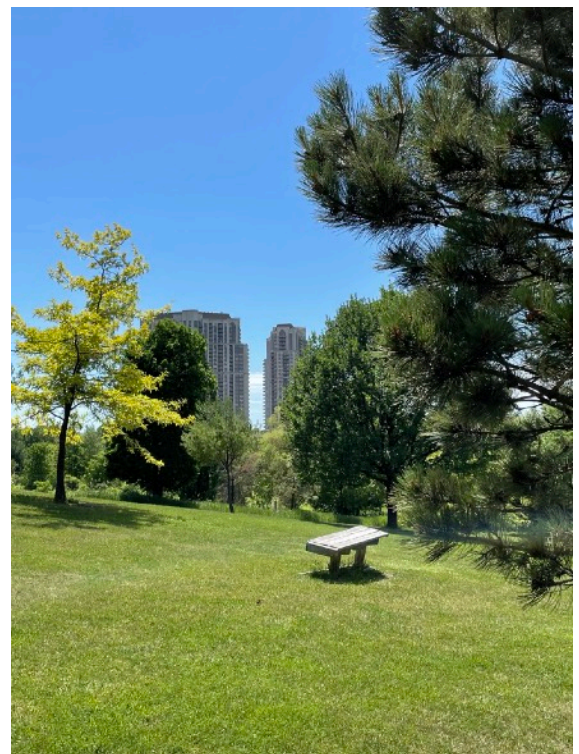


The Arboretum's extensive trails are open to the public, as are its gardens which feature ornamental gardens, woodland gardens, wildlife gardens, and ecologically diverse environments centred on the west branch of the Humber River. This Carolinian bioregion offers premier research and education opportunities, as well as providing hands-on conservation and restoration

practices for students of horticulture.

The College grounds, naturally, were empty. There was no activity to indicate an industrious place of learning or active student engagement, in keeping with the Pandemic context. Our entry point was on the Western side. With no other soul in sight we had the well-trod trails that meander through Carolinian forest and meadows hugging a hilly terrain, all to ourselves. The variety of tree life was astonishing. This stretch of land is the farthest northern reach of the 'Carolinian Life Zone' which supports naturally occurring plant and animal life. It is unique to Canada.

We rested on the summit in an aging lookout shelter. With no map, we sensed our direction by the vistas that unfolded towards Greater Toronto in the distance.



¹ The Humber College Institute of Technology & Advanced Learning - <https://humber.ca/arboretum/about.html>



As we made our way down the hill another view opened up for us: a panorama of cultivated gardens designed with care and purpose, ponds, bridges, solid pathways, resting places,



markers and pergolas. There was ample evidence of good maintenance in this huge tract of public gardens; later, we learned that the gardens are planned, planted and maintained by the students of horticulture as part of their learning experience. This year, student activity in the gardens was somewhat limited. It was already mid June and Spring blooms had not yet been replaced with colourful annuals. The site was no less picturesque as we strolled the pathways joining a handful of visitors seen here and there.





But here I must confess I was in search of something other than flower gardens: indeed, I was on a mission. Late in 2016, the Arboretum was approached with an invitation to participate in a five year cross-border Test Project to evaluate the horticultural merit of cold-hardy rhododendron hybrids developed in Ontario by Dr. J. Brueckner (for details: <http://rhodoniagara.org/projects/>). There was understandable reluctance to accept this invitation because time constraints weighed heavily on the horticultural staff already burdened by numerous commitments. Nonetheless, 20 plants were accepted. Over the years, while I had confirmation the specimens

had been planted, there was no clarity whether bi-annual evaluations were being taken. More recently, the Pandemic created further complications. Now that I was on site, I was curious to know if the test plants were alive, and where might I find them?



As luck would have it, a few staff were engaged in maintenance of the area.

Max Haber, the Arboretum's *Nature Interpreter*, set aside his garden tools and was most obliging in his welcoming response to our questions. He was generous with giving us good information about



the Arboretum and while he had little knowledge of "test plants" he guided us in the direction of the rhododendron beds. He explained that due to the Pandemic restrictions, some of the gardens had not received regular maintenance; we understood, and were not surprised to find the adjacent forest understory encroaching on what once must have been prime rhododendron territory.

The aged rhododendron beds displayed mature plants, many with trunks 5" in diameter. Despite their frailty they remain nostalgic reminders that once they were the object of visitors' interest and delight. But wait! Under the scrubby foliage there was a glint of green metal; a weathered metal label inscribed with an accession number. We were looking at a heritage hybrid, Dexter's r. Victoria! Now, Charles O. Dexter (1862-1943) was a prominent hybridizer from 1921 until his death, known for his successful experiments growing Asian introductions successfully in colder climates, and for his generous distribution of seeds and seedlings from his





breeding program at his 76 acre estate in Massachusetts, now a Heritage Museum and Gardens. For an excellent, brief review of Dexter rhododendrons see <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/v43n4/v43n4-valigorsky.htm> and David G. Leach, **Rhododendrons of the World**, Charles Scribner's Sons, NY, 1961, p. 256-9.

This exciting find was just the beginning. Peering closer into the brush, most of these ancients bore labels, many hidden under layers of compacted mulch at the base of the trunk. Clearly the labels were a mark of good curatorial practice that had withstood the test of time, waiting to be found for a new purpose. Adding to several Victoria's we came across other Dexters and one interesting hybrid, r. Caroline from the famed

cold-hardy hybrids of Joe Gable; multiple copies of 'Ironclads' r. Roseum Elegans, r. Catawbiense Boursault; two white azaleas with noteworthy parentage: Palestrina Kaempferi and Shammarello's r. Desiree. And more.



Many of the labels were attached to rhodos past their prime, or rather, past their time, some still struggling with a few remaining leaves. The impression created was of a garden being phased out.



Here I must pause.

Interspersed amongst this unexpected and interesting collection was a section that had recently been cleared of the larger invasives so that we could readily rummage around the remaining old growth. It was here that I came across a label familiar to me and with my own hand writing, faded but distinct!



Here was **Test plant No. I 28 (Parson's Gloriosum x Cowslip)!** It was healthy, branched, and average height for its age. It was sporting 6 flower buds.

Next to it was **No. II 10 (Keiskeii x Fletcherianum)** equally happy and branched.

VIII 77 ((Yak x King Tut) x Shammarello OP) is budded with at least 3 buds.

IX 55 (parentage unknown) also had flowered and shows evidence of budding.



No. II 10



No. VIII 77

Most of the test plants were little more than 10" at distribution. In this patch we found 14 of the original 20. They were healthy, disease free, well hidden and protected by the tangle of ferns and other vegetation. To my knowledge, no evaluations or records of the plants' progress had been taken these past five years. Nor had they received attention other than what Mother Nature offered.



No. IX 55

Dear Reader, you must appreciate there is no test or evaluative process that is more constructive than the natural field test arrangement found here! Humber Arboretum's participation, while unusual, will furnish valuable data and comments for the report to be written upon the conclusion of the project!

In early July I returned for a 2nd visit. It was an opportunity to meet with Lynn Short, Environmental Stewardship Coordinator at Humber College, who was suggested by Max Haber to be a resourceful contact. Prof. Short's area of expertise and interest are with invasive plant control. In 2017 she was the recipient of the Severn Sound Bob Whittam Environmental Award for developing a method for the control of phragmites. She took the time to walk me through the rhododendron gardens and explain the deadly effects of the invasive

plants she was dealing with, in and around the rhododendron garden plots and adjacent areas, and the techniques that are useful in their control. With fewer staff and students resulting from the Pandemic restrictions, these practices have recently been compromised. The information and suggestions she shared were invaluable, especially as they relate to rhododendron plantings in public gardens where invasive plant control can be especially problematic.

Prof. Short also turned my attention to another, even larger rhododendron collection in the Arboretum, perhaps not as aged as the first one, but just as exciting for its selection of rhododendron species and cultivars. I knew I would be returning for a third visit.



September, then, found me at the Arboretum to more fully explore rhododendron Garden No. 2. Many of the rhododendrons were repeats to what I found in Garden No. 1, but most appeared to be younger, much healthier, with decent to full foliage.



r. Gloxineum - Photo: Jon M. Valigorsky

As before, several copies of Dexter's Victoria had been planted here, this one with viable leaves and growth. Judging by the seed pods its 2021 flowering was ample.



r. Victoria

It was disappointing to find only labels for two Dexter hybrids, still in commerce today. I believe both are also still in use in hybridizing programs. The label for r. Gloxineum was attached to a lifeless trunk and r. Scintillation was succumbing to serious dieback. Perhaps there is another copy which eluded my search.



r. Scintillation - Photo: Boris Bauer

The collection in Garden No. 2 also included at least one *R. fortunei*, several Mezitt cultivars, at least one PJM, and one r. Cunningham's White, in addition to various Ironclads and azaleas mentioned earlier, and more.

Two hybrids did grab my attention. Unique to me was r. Mrs. T.H. Lowinsky. It is not to be confused with Mrs. Tom H. Lowinsky. I hesitate to reproduce a photo of either one because in the sources I've consulted there remains a lack of clarity on which



r. President Lincoln - Photo: Stuart Imrie

photograph is correctly matched to which cultivar. But you might be tempted to read a brief and compelling history of both hybrids, at [https://www.eugene-chapter-ars.org/Feb 2014.pdf](https://www.eugene-chapter-ars.org/Feb%202014.pdf)).



The other hybrid which was new to me was r. President Lincoln. It is said to be hardy and adaptable. The colour of this cultivar is lavender-pink, which appears to be the dominant colour of many cultivars in the Humber Arboretum collection. Did colour preference have anything to do with choices for the original collections? Or was the colour palette simply

incidental to the genetic value of the plant? What, in fact, was

the motivation for introducing a rhododendron collection? When was the first group planted? What specific learning opportunities for Horticulture students came with the introduction of rhododendrons and are they still included in the College program? Have the records of this collection been maintained?

These are some of the questions that prompted my interest in the Arboretum's collection which, surely, is one of the largest and most prominent in our region and deserves attention. It has certainly attracted the interest of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) through its Niagara Region Chapter. The ARS recently initiated several programs specific to a new, younger generation, and which might be of value to the horticulture students at Humber College. The **ARS Next Gen Program** encourages and supports rhododendron-related initiatives, invites student participation in the annual ARS Convention and Poster Session (https://ars2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/2022-Call-for-Poster-Presentations-rev-to-2022-dates_JSM.pdf) and more. See https://www.rhododendron.org/next_gen.htm.

This rich eclectic rhododendron collection offers prime research opportunity; as a living lab the plant material is ripe for further study, whether it's by rejuvenation of select plants, conservation efforts, or propagation methods that might have commercial possibilities. Not to mention that today Rhododendron is regarded as a useful tool in gauging the impact of climate change. I'm looking forward to continuing earlier conversations with the Arboretum's faculty to discuss these questions and exchange ideas.

Of course, visitors value the Arboretum for reasons other than research and study. We are blessed to have it in our midst. As I write, I think back to those pleasant summer days, walking the paths, sitting down to rest and contemplate, enjoying the sheer pleasure of embracing the beauty around me. I hope you will have opportunity to walk the same paths.



Christina Woodward, Interim Editor, [Niagara Rhodo](#)

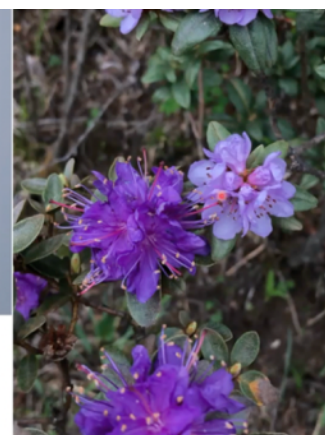
Recap from our November 10th Speaker

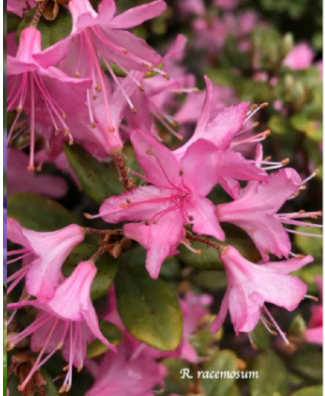
For those who were unable to attend **Ryan Fuller's** presentation and for those of us eager to listen once more, the recorded version is available at http://www.rhodoniagara.org/img/202111_fuller.mp4

A plant collecting adventure in *Rhododendron's* most diverse mountain range



Ryan Fuller, currently a PhD candidate, Evolutionary Biology, University of Chicago, has far more photographs and stories than his 60 minute presentation could accommodate. We must have a return visit at a future date! It would be impossible to do justice to his talk by summarizing his extraordinary trek through a portion of China's Hengduan Mountains; but we can share a few photographs to give you a taste of the rugged, breathtaking terrain, the extremes, the vistas, the risks, the joy of locating the desired plant life, and so much more that gave us a vivid, vicarious experience with seamless and compelling dialogue. All captured in superb photographs.



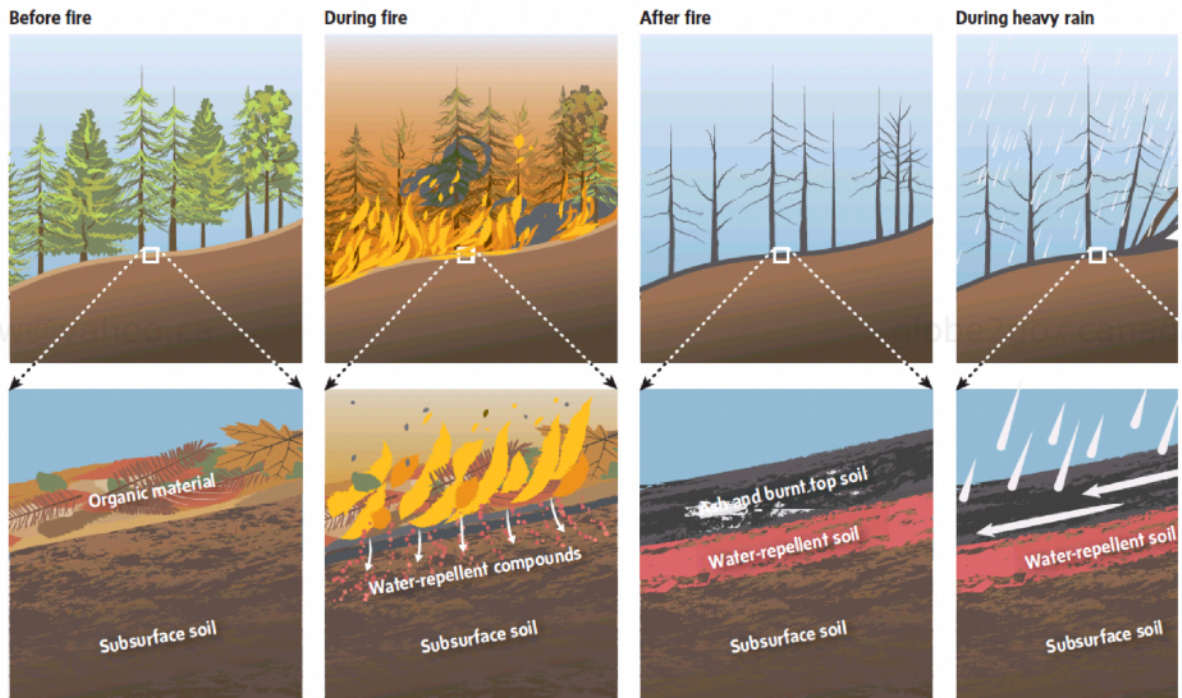


In Our Part of the World

Our hearts go out to the people of BC and their hardships during the recent forest fires and flooding.
You might find this depiction interesting - what contributes to flash flooding.

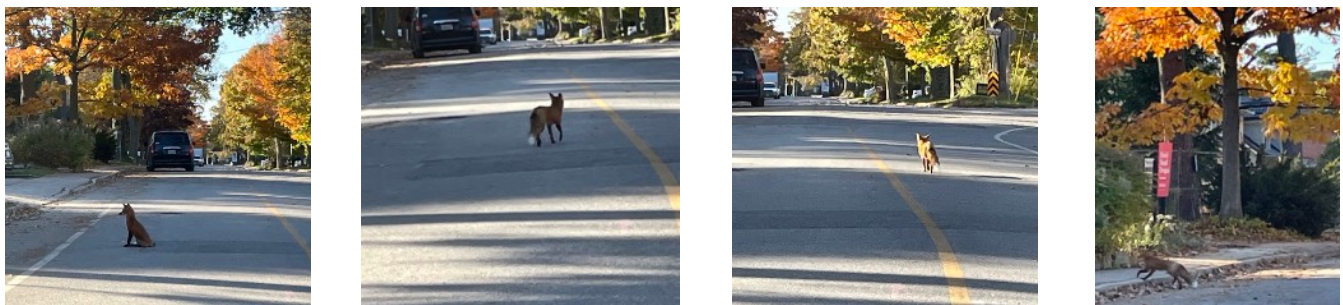
HOW WILDFIRE BURN SCARS CONTRIBUTE TO FLASH FLOODING, MUDSLIDES AND LANDSLIDES

When organic material burns at high intensity, water-repellent compounds are vapourized and condense on cooler soil layers below. Heavy rains run off the layer of water-repellent soil much as it would pavement, which can cause flash flooding. If the top layer becomes saturated, it can slide downhill, causing mudslides and landslides.



MURAT YÜKSELİR / THE GLOBE AND MAIL, SOURCE: NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

Closer to Home



Driving home one day I came across this fox sitting in the middle of the street, contemplating, and oblivious to traffic. A few minutes later he got up and sauntered away, then suddenly had a change of mind and turned back to where he came from, a shrubby divide between two homes. What beautiful creatures!

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