



Challenges of Rhodos in Guelph: Designing for Year Round Colour

Some would say that being an world expert in soy bean production does not qualify this man as a Rhododendron specialist. However, a brief tour of Peter's gardens, talking with him about soils and growing conditions, following his approach to "gardening" with rhodos and seeing the hundreds of plants he is growing around his home on Woodrill Farms, quickly identifies him as a plants man who can easily move between agricultural experiences and horticultural requirements. The several gardens he has developed with a large number of rhododendrons and companion plants would be the envy of any gardener let alone anyone who "knows rhododendrons". He has much to offer to every gardener.

To address the challenge to provide year-round colour he will describe how Rhodos fill that goal superbly from late April to mid June. By choosing different varieties of rhododendrons, hydrangeas, heath, heather and other genera he achieves superb colour throughout that whole period. To achieve colour year round elsewhere around the house, he has about 20 tree peonies, heritage iris from a friend's farm that goes back about 100 years, daylilies, and Orchids year round, the latter mostly in winter. But that is not as straightforward as it may sound.. He must fulfill his goals within the context of a short growing season, cold winters and high pH soil.

Peter has been a member of the Niagara Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society for many years and has been a pivotal leader in Canadian agriculture for more than 25 years. He was central to the proliferation of soybeans in Ontario, where they are now the largest crop with exports worldwide, including to Japan. A University of Guelph graduate and former president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Peter is founder and president of First Line Seeds Ltd. in Guelph. Recently, he has turned his attention to the global role Canada can play in helping other nations improve their food production, processing and handling systems. Peter's contributions to Ontario's agricultural industry have been widely recognized. Among them is his family's Hannam Soybean Utilization Fund at the University of Guelph to promote innovative medical, industrial and nutritive uses for soybeans and Project SOY, a contest to encourage University of Guelph students to develop new uses for soybeans. Scenes from Peter's gardens are shown below.

