

# Indumentum

## Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 34, Number 6, March 2003



The  
Vancouver Rhododendron Society  
is a chapter of the  
American Rhododendron Society

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This Month's Meeting: March 20<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 pm, Floral Hall,  
VanDusen Botanical Garden

Program: **David Gilliland** on 'Brook Hall: The Demesne, its  
Gardens, and its Arboretum'

Education: **Gerry Gibbens** on 'The Good Earth'

### Plants in Bloom – *Rhododendron praeevernum*



photo: Daniel Mosquin, UBC Botanical Garden

Southwestern British Columbia is having another English-style winter. UBC's minimum recorded temperature this winter is only -3C, but the frosty weather has been untimely, coinciding with flowering the of a number of species. *Rhododendron moupinense*, *ririei*, *oreodoxa* and *mucronulatum*, all plants growing in the open, had flowers hit this way. Blooming plants with overhead protection (primarily from the branches of nearby conifers) suffered little damage, however.

*continued on page 4*

## President's Message

Spring has sprung (almost)! Lots of early rhododendrons, such as "Christmas Cheer" (photo below), are in bloom in our garden. And the smorgasbord season has begun. As herbaceous perennials start to appear, so do the local deer.



However, following my slide presentation on "Battles with the Beasts" in January, you'll be happy to know that Carla and I have decided against turning the creatures into venison burgers. Instead, we have just finished installing 900' of deer fence around the three sides of our garden not bordered by water. The fence is 80" high and made of 12 gauge galvanized steel (from Fraser Valley Steel and Wire @ \$1 per foot). Nine feet above the ground is a single strand of barbed wire with 2' ribbons of yellow survey tape suspended from it at 4' intervals. The place looks like a very festive concentration camp although the fencing will eventually be hidden by climbing vines such as *Clematis montana*. Deer psychologists have assured us that the beasts will not attempt to jump fences with top wires that are flexible and have fluttering things on them. Apparently deer prefer fences with wood top railings that give them a wide, solid target to shoot for. I'll keep you posted on the success of our fencing strategies.

Many thanks to **Todd Major** for the excellent education session on Pruning at the February VRS meeting. Be sure to visit Park and Tilford Gardens this summer to see the results of the pruning that Todd and his staff do. The Japanese maples are especially magnificent.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the raffle table at the last VRS meeting. It had a greater number of items and a more creative selection than we have seen for a long time. According to **Jim Hall**, the raffle money for February totalled \$96 and the record is \$105. Thanks also to **Frank Dorsey** for the amazing flexibility he displayed by handling the raffle ticket draw in the middle of the meeting instead of at the end as he has done for many, many years.

During March and April, **Doug Justice** and his phoning committee will be contacting you to ask for a few hours of

your time at our **Spring Sale and Show** on the first weekend in May. This is the VRS's one yearly fundraiser and is being held this year at Park and Tilford Gardens in North Vancouver. Doug will be asking you to volunteer to help out with set-up on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, cleanup on May 4<sup>th</sup>, clerical work for the judges or treasurer, membership sign-up, publicity, plant sales, etc. Please respond positively. You can choose the type of work you wish to do and the times. We need a large number of helpers to make the Sale and Show a success.

*Ron Knight*

## March Program

**David Gilliland**, our speaker for the evening of March 20<sup>th</sup>, writes:

I was born in 1932 in County Donegal. My father was a very keen gardener and was also busy creating a small arboretum. Because of the Second World War it was not possible to travel and I spent my time helping my father and learning the botanical names of the trees he was planting. His teaching and enthusiasm has remained with me ever since.

In 1957 on the death of my father's cousin, Commander G.F. Gilliland, I inherited Brook Hall, and came to live there in 1958. The House looks out down a slope to the fast flowing River Foyle about two miles downstream from the City of Londonderry. [And a very beautiful slope, and house, it is; Joanne and I have had the privilege of being houseguests of David and his wife Jennifer Johnston at Brook Hall on a couple occasions, and were assigned a large, elegantly furnished room overlooking that slope, with gardens in the foreground, and grazing cattle and the river in the distance.] During the last two centuries sailing ships carried Irish emigrants to the New World from here, and returned laden with grain or timber.

The walled garden at Brook Hall runs along the edge of the river. It is considerably older than the present house, having probably been built in the early part of the 17th century. The lands around the house had been well landscaped and planted by the end of the 18th century, with oak, beech, Spanish chestnut and an avenue of fine lime trees. Very little further planting was done until the end of the 19th century when some choice conifers and a *Eucalyptus globulus* were added.

Commander Gilliland started to plant his 30-acre arboretum in the late 1920s, and his planting continued unabated until his death in 1957. He made much use of the many nurseries in England and Ireland to purchase a wide variety of species—conifers and hardwoods such as acers, betulas, and *Nothofagus*, as well as rhododendrons and azaleas, eucryphias, *Berberis*, cotoneasters and many others.

*Continued next page*



*March Program, from previous page...*

Unfortunately, he made the all too easy mistake of planting too many plants in the available space, without giving sufficient, or any, thought to adequate space or light. When I came here very many plants had insufficient space to grow and develop as they were intended, and many were actually growing into each other. During my first 30 years living here I probably removed about 40 percent of all the plants in order to give the others a chance to develop naturally. I had very little opportunity to do any planting of my own. In the last 14 years, however, damage by gales and hurricanes along with some new ground introduced by myself gave me the chance finally to begin my own planting. I have tried to introduce more flowering plants with bright colours and also plants for autumn colour to contrast with the darker colours of the conifers. In particular I have concentrated on Japanese cherries, camellias, kalmias, magnolias, embothriums, buddleias and select others. I recently acquired the National Collection of escallonias.'

David joined the International Dendrology Society (International Dendrology Union, as it was then called) in 1962, and has been active in it ever since, participating in many of the Society's tours, some of which have included his own arboretum. He served as a Council Member of the Society from 1965 to 1970. In 1988 he became a member of the Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Committee, and has been its Chairperson since 1991. 'The Committee acts as a pressure group with government, planning agencies, and local authorities in an effort to persuade them to assist in the preservation of heritage gardens, past present and future.' The Committee is active in both parts of Ireland.

The evening of March 20<sup>th</sup> David, who is a superb photographer, will speak about his estate in County Londonderry, **'Brook Hall: The Demesne, its Gardens, and its Arboretum'**.

Joe Ronsley

## Membership

New Members are always welcome and renewals for 2003 are being accepted. Chapter membership offers excellent value at \$25 VRS (single or family); \$50 ARS/VRS (single or family; includes four quarterly journals) or Associate Memberships \$10 (single or family; must be member of another chapter). See details and benefits of membership on our website <http://www.rhodo.citymax.com> or contact me (details below).

The **ARS District Convention** in Olympia, Washington, April 29-May 5, 2003 advertised in the Winter 2003 edition of the ARS journal has been reprinted

and is available to our Members. Please stop by the Membership Table when you get your name tag and raffle ticket and pick one up.

Please look for new members who are sporting an ARS logo on their name badges. The logo will identify them to us as joining within the year. The Executive will welcome these new members in a special 'planting' ceremony at the March meeting.

Carole Conlin, VRS Membership Chair

Tel: 604 921 7260 [conlin@sfu.ca](mailto:conlin@sfu.ca)



*Magnolia sargentiana* 'Robusta'

photo: Daniel Mosquin, UBC Botanical Garden

## Education: March

On March 20<sup>th</sup>, **Gerry Gibbens**, VRS member and gardener in the Sino-Himalayan Garden at VanDusen Botanical Garden will enlighten us on "The Good Earth," i.e., soils. As a bonus, we will demonstrate the use of our latest purchase, a new **pH pen** that gives a measure of soil acidity or alkalinity. If you wish to bring in a sample (about a pound or 500 grams) of your garden soil, we will endeavour to do measurements for you.

At our Feb 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, **Todd Major** gave us a cutting edge talk/demo about pruning, leaving this author aghast with memories of past blunders. Todd showed how to clean and sharpen his trusty secateurs to razor-like effectiveness, and soon the floor was littered with the byproducts of his handiwork. Todd's handout is reprinted on page eight.

Louis Peterson

Tel: 604 921 7260 [lpeterse@sfu.ca](mailto:lpeterse@sfu.ca)

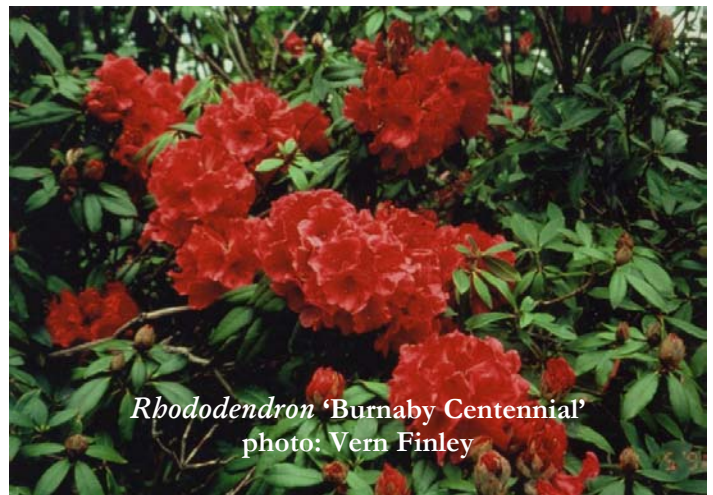
*Plants in Bloom, from page 1...*

Included in the unscathed category at the time of this writing are *R. dauricum*, *calophytum*, *fulgens*, *lutescens*, *pachytrichum*, *leucaspis*, *barbatum*, *praevenum*, *sutchuenense*, *thomsonii*, *principis*, *glaucophyllum* and *lanigerum*, among others.

*Rhododendron praevenum* is among the earliest of Subsection Fortunea rhododendrons to flower (Latin: *prae*- before, *venum*- spring), but it and the closely related *R. sutchuenense* are commonly in flower together. The former differs primarily in the smaller stature and narrower leaf, and in the absence of indumentum (*R. sutchuenense* has a downy midrib). Among individuals, flowers range from white to pink to mauve-pink. There is always a wine-purple blotch. The differences between these species are admittedly slight; Ernest (Chinese) Wilson considered *R. praevenum* merely part of the normal variation within *R. sutchuenense*.

In the garden, *R. praevenum* revels in woodland conditions and requires considerable space, ultimately growing 5m or more in height. In the wild, the species is found on forested mountainsides in the Chinese provinces of Hubei, Shaanxi, Sichuan and Yunnan at 1600 to 2500m elevation. The plant pictured on page one is a **Del James** selection growing in the David C. Lam Asian Garden at UBC.

Douglas Justice



## VRS Bronze Medallists and Their Related Hybrids:

### The First in a Series by a Long-Time Observer.

In 1954, the Vancouver Chapter of the ARS became the ninth Chapter, later becoming the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, a Chapter of ARS District 1. In the years between 1955 and 2002, there have been 22 single and 6 shared ARS Bronze Medals awarded. It is the highest ARS award that a chapter can give to one of its members for service to the chapter membership or the genus *Rhododendron*. However, it wasn't until 1972 that the first one was awarded to one of our members.

**Ed Trayling** was the first recipient of ARS Bronze. Ed was a jeweller and silversmith; he and his wife gave the Silver E.J. Trayling Award for Best Rhododendron Plant in Show (now best in Division 1000). That was when we first began to hold annual judged truss and plant shows and, of course, always it was Ed's shop that did the engraving of winners' names on the trophies, at no charge. He created a great garden and collection of hybrids, and made crosses, which he never sold, but gave away. Ed always favoured those hybrids created by Hjalmer Larsen (1897 -1983) of Tacoma, Washington.

The hybrid that this writer associates with Ed is not a Larsen hybrid, but a Bill Whitney creation, 'Virginia Richards'. There is elegance in form, flower and foliage in 'Virginia Richards', attributes which gave it an RHS - A.M. in 1984. After Ed died, his collection went to his Surrey neighbours "Doc" and Vern Finley. In it they found one of his crosses, a strong red hybrid that, when Vern entered this large growing, big-leaved specimen, it won the 4 year juried selection to bear the name 'Burnaby Centennial'. It honoured both Burnaby's 100 years and represented the rhododendron that had been declared the official flower when Burnaby was a municipality. It should prove better than 'Earl of Athlone' and as good as 'Anna Rose Whitney' as a rhodo for everyone. Ed would have been pleased.

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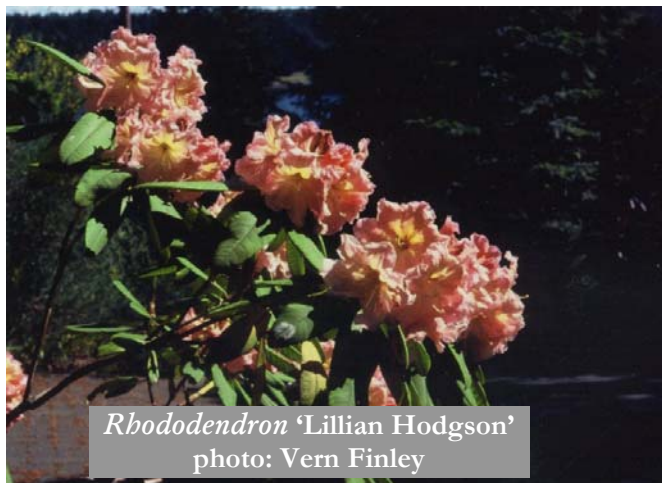
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*Rhododendron* 'Lillian Hodgson'  
photo: Vern Finley



*Rhododendron* 'Bob's Blue'  
Photo: Jean Rhodes

*continued from page 4*

**Lillian** (UEL Lill) **Hodgson** was our second Bronze medallist. Lill and husband Bill, through a garden designed for them by Desmond Muirhead,<sup>1</sup> was a charter member of the Vancouver, BC Chapter of the ARS when it was formed in 1955. Lill fell in love with the rhodos that Desmond had selected for their University Endowment Lands garden. After Ellen Hailey, our first Secretary, left when her Captain husband took the Nanaimo Harbour Master's position, Lill took over as Vancouver Chapter Secretary and began the first chapter newsletter soon after. These early monthly newsletters were mimeographed on legal size paper—the writer has always found this size the devil to punch and file in a regular three-ring binder, but Lill insisted on that size. All relevant rhodo news that was fit to print could be included on a side of one page that could then be folded, addressed and held together with a 7-cent stamp. Lill has written articles for the ARS Journal and judged our annual shows, and was the Registrar for the ARS National Convention held at the Bayshore<sup>2</sup>.

Lillian is a great photographer: the photograph she took overlooking her garden out across Spanish Banks to Point Atkinson and the snow-covered Tantalus Range on the Sechelt Peninsula beyond, made it onto the cover of the Spring 1979 Quarterly Bulletin that announced the second ARS Vancouver Convention. There is a hybrid named for her created by Dr Bob Rhodes, then of Maple Ridge: 'Solent Queen' × 'Old Copper'. I've never asked her whether she likes it or not; however, I do: 'Lillian Hodgson', sweet and pink on the outside, fire inside;

with a heritage to fit the *grande dame* of the VRS. Watch out, though—Lill may remember it a little differently than the writer!

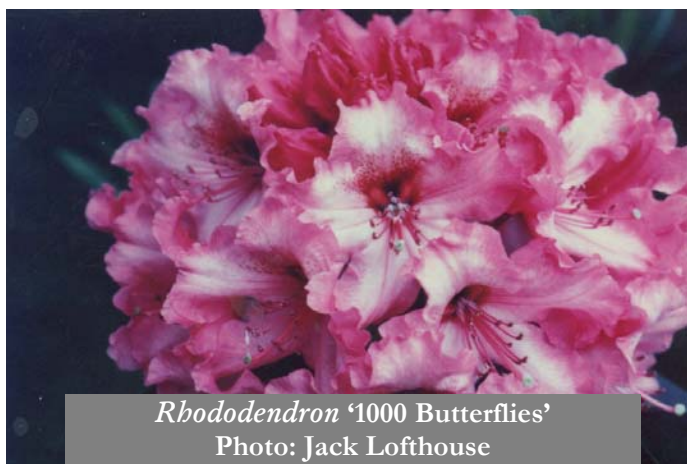
The aforementioned **Bob Rhodes**, creator of R. 'Lillian Hodgson', registered it in 1979, going through a much more difficult registration process than would now be required. Bob received the Bronze Medal that same year when Dr (Botany) Keith Wade of Capilano College was President of the Vancouver Chapter. Dr (Medicine) Bob Rhodes had a large garden in Maple Ridge. His office was in Haney and he was on staff at the Maple Ridge Hospital, but found time to chair the program committee, making the speaker arrangements for the first ever ARS Annual Meeting outside of the US, held at the then just completed Bayshore in 1970. It was the best attended of any ARS convention up to that date.

*Rhododendron angustinii* in the old Triflorum Series [Subsection Triflora] is among those rhododendrons that have flowers closest to blue, so Bob took up the challenge and selected an *angustinii* he named 'Bob's Blue'. The argument continues as to which is the bluest of six or so *angustinis* that have been named and registered. The writer once suggested when consulting to Whidbey Island's Meerkerk Gardens that the garden send out the call for every known *angustinii* they could get, named or unnamed, and plant them all out against a half-mile long fence, to determine once and for all which was the bluest. 'Bob's Blue' is as good as they come, and better than most. Another hybrid Bob registered is 'Haida Gold', a

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1. Desmond Muirhead initiated the formation of the Vancouver, BC ARS Chapter in 1955. Norman Whittall, another client, was the first President. He had a rhododendron garden in Whonnock. Desmond was never able to get Walter or Mrs Koerner, another of his clients, to join the Chapter. The Koerner garden had the biggest 'Beauty of Littleworth' in Vancouver. Muirhead died in 2002 at the age of 79.

2. Dr Rhodes set a high scholarly tone with the program. Rhodo exploration was the theme. Alleyne Cook spoke on exploration in the Himalayas, Hooker et al., while Warren Berg spoke on Yakushima and the Korean islands he had just visited. The highlight was a tour of UBC Botanical Garden and the species that Evelyn Jack had raised from cuttings for the Species Foundation. Evelyn received the ARS Gold Medal for her work, the first ARS Gold for a Canadian.



*Rhododendron* '1000 Butterflies'  
Photo: Jack Lofthouse



*Rhododendron* 'Supergold'  
Photo: Jack Lofthouse

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*wardii* - 'Goldfort' cross. It was registered in 1985. It is quite low growing (4') and has pink buds, white-gold flowers and great green leaves.


As President of the Chapter, Bob initiated the club's donation of rhodos to the then newly opened Simon Fraser University atop Burnaby Mountain. The writer is forever thankful to Bob Rhodes, the first person to tell the writer about the nurseryman in Ucluelet who grew and hybridized rhodos. It started me on the road to become a plant and rhodo historian—thanks, Bob. He and his wife and partner Jean now live on Gabriola Island and are active in the Nanaimo ARS Chapter.

Vancouver's fourth Bronze Medal winner was one of the master rhododendron hybridizers of the Pacific Northwest. Bronze, and recently a Silver medalist, **Jack Lofthouse** is one of those rare guys who can create a bigger, better quality hybrid rhodo, with very different, even unusual flowers, both in colour and form. Not only has he created some great ones, but he has given these hybrids winning names that describe the qualities of his creations, Like the one he registered very early on: 'Pink Petticoats'. If I had to choose between a somewhat look-alike named 'Point Defiance', I'd choose Jack's more descriptive, sexy name. Even greater—the product always surpasses the name. The name ranks up

there with the holy grail of all rhododendron names: 'Pink Pearl'. For a rhododendron, it's superior to the loderis (all except my favourite, 'Beauty of Littleworth'). Even the American market would go for 'Canadian Sunset', though it's not the expected red of a Mountie's jacket. 'Butter Brickle' is my favourite; I see the colour in my mind's eye. Jack's Bronze Medal was awarded in 1979, not only for his superb hybridizing, but as Chapter president and publicity chairman for the 1979 ARS Vancouver convention; not only for giving us beautiful rhodos, but also through his writing, which shared his knowledge and expertise with Journal readers. One of his best articles described the construction of his simple but quite high-tech propagating box for rhodo cuttings and seeds. It worked much better than most I've seen. Jack's legacy is his rhodo expertise and the unique hybrids he created. Many thanks, Jack.

Many thanks also to **Martie Irwin** for assembling the VRS and District 1 Bronze Medal winners. Without such information, this and subsequent articles would not be written. Next time: the 10 Bronze medallists in the aging eighties.

Clive Justice



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### News and Notes

The VRS **June Pot Luck** will take place at Gordon and Vern Finley's house on **Sunday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>** at 5:00 pm. Details and reminders will follow.

**VRS LIBRARY:** We will be putting out a selection of our library books on two tables at the back of the Floral Hall, to make it easier for you to browse and check out texts that interest you.

**BOOK EXCHANGE:** As an experiment, we invite members to donate gardening books to our exchange table, where other members may "acquire" them for a small fee to our Society. Bring your unwanteds to our next two meetings!



### Bill Spohn's Internet Website Recommendation of the Month

While I tend to link any interesting rhododendron sites I come across to our home website (see the links section at <http://www.rhodo.citymax.com/>), once in awhile I come across something of a non-rhodo nature that merits attention.

For those who are interested in having some colour in the garden when most rhodos are waning, the *Hemerocallis* or daylilies offer some wonderful colour, and far more variety than most people realize. Take a look at a local grower, <http://www.beachwooddaylily.com/> with an excellent website that you can browse, and tell me if there aren't similarities between daylily breeders and rhodoholics. The proprietor is a very nice lady, Sian, and the location is in Aldergrove. If you look now, you can order for the upcoming release in April. If this sounds too much like an advertisement, it isn't (and I already have my order in). Check out the website and tell me what you think. For \$8, they mail the plants to your door. Peak blooming season is July.



- ◆ **Contributions to the Raffle Table** help offset the rental of the Floral Hall. Plants, books, ceramic pots, etc. are always welcome!
- ◆ **For the Refreshment Table**, donations of cookies, cakes, cheese, and other snacks are greatly appreciated.

### THREE BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR ALL PRUNING

- 1) **To maintain health and vigour.** This can be simple to accomplish by pruning out dead, diseased, and damaged (D3) plant tissue. For many plants, this is all that is required most of the time.
- 2) **To direct, control, or modify growth.** This is probably one of the most common reasons to prune. Some examples are: pruning because of obstacles, to control height, foliage touching power lines or buildings, pruning for views, thinning to reduce shade, etc.
- 3) **To enhance flower and fruit production.** A common practice in fruit orchards, useful for large vines like *Actinidia* because it also controls size, helps increase yield in roses, *Pyracantha*, *Callicarpa* and other non-edible plants.

### BASIC PROCEDURES FOR PRUNING ALL PLANTS

- 1) Cut out all D3 (dead, diseased, and damaged), as well as, weak or twiggy growth which does not contribute to the plants overall form.
- 2) Thin out or “drop-crotch” branching that is crossing, out of form or detracting from the plant’s natural shape.
- 3) Thin out branching as needed for spacing, to allow new growth, improve air flow to a lower crotch or side branch.
  - used for long term size control on trees and shrubs.
  - if done properly, thinning cuts are more appealing than heading cuts.
  - useful on cane producing shrubs to keep them healthy.
  - under used by most gardeners.
  - effective for size control on the vast majority of commercial landscape plants.

Before undertaking any pruning, learn the plant’s natural growth habit so you can enhance and maintain that habit or form during pruning. However, the natural form of a plant and its required pruning is dependent on the intended design.

**TYPES OF PRUNING CUTS:** All pruning cuts are one of two types, either heading cuts or thinning cuts.

#### Heading cut:

- any cut which removes the terminal end of a branch to a lower bud.
- used to increase branch density behind the cut.
- does not control size over the long term.
- removes apical control of the given branch which allows lateral branch growth.
- overused by most gardeners.
- useful for early training of young plants to build density.
- proper type of cut for hedging, topiary, *Erica*, *Calluna*, etc.

#### Thinning cut:

- involves the removal of an entire branch back to its source (e.g., to a side branch, a main stem or near the ground).
- does not disturb the natural line of the plant when performed appropriately.



**Todd Major, Director**  
**Park and Tilford Gardens**