

Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 35, Number 2, October 2003



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

2003 Executive

President: Ron Knight

Vice President: Louis Peterson

Past President: Gerry Gibbens

Treasurer: Barbara Sherman

Secretary: Bill Spohn

Membership: Carole Conlin

Newsletter: Douglas & Karen Justice

Program: Joe Ronsley

Directors:

Bill Herbst (3 years)

Todd Major (2 years)

Joanne Ronsley (1 year)

Education: Louis Peterson

Advertising: Tony Clayton

Publicity: Gail Lehman

Library: Jasbir Gill

Refreshments: Mary Dorsey

**This Month's Meeting: Thursday, October 16th 7:30 pm,
Floral Hall, VanDusen Gardens**

**Program: Douglas Justice: 'Observations on Recent Asiatic
Maple Introductions to UBC Botanical Garden'**

Plant Sales: Gifford Robb and Les Clay

2003 VRS Show Trophy Winners

Many thanks to everyone for their assistance in bringing the 2003 VRS show to fruition. All those who helped in setting up, as well as those who judged, succeeded in bringing this event to the interested public. As the new Show Chair it was an overwhelming job that I could not have done without the enthusiasm and knowledge of all those who participated.

A review of the trophies found that many were outdated; some were not in good repair, while others were filled. Over the next year we will be soliciting previous contributors in the hope that new trophies can be offered for awards. This said, there were fewer trophies awarded this year—not to say that the standard was not high—but in several cases the trophies themselves were not to a high standard. Trophies awarded this year are as follows:



The Greig Memorial Trophy for Best Rhododendron Species Truss is presented to **Margaret Coe** for *R. rex* subsp. *fictolacteum*.

The Trophy for The Best Rhododendron Plant is awarded to **Diane Kehoe** for *R. serpyllifolium*.

The Wally Zeglat Memorial Trophy for highest aggregate points in Divisions 2200, 2300, 2400, 2500 is awarded to **Lilli-Ann Hemminger**.

The Trophy for The Best Container Grown Plant is awarded to **Diane Kehoe** for *R. serpyllifolium*.

The Park and Tilford Trophy was awarded to **Margaret Coe**.

The Otto Memorial Trophy for highest aggregate points in Division 2100 is awarded to **Lilli-Ann Hemminger**.

Gerry Gibbens, Show Chair

President's Message

Only a few dwarf rhododendrons with their sparse, off-season blooms are left to remind me of all the wonderful flowers that my rhodo patch produced in 2003. However, at this time of year, it's nice to be able to admire rhododendrons that have colourful foliage, such as *R. bureavii* and 'Sir Charles Lemon' in the accompanying photographs.

Last spring, **Louis Peterson** purchased a pH pen and made it available on loan to any VRS member. I took advantage of his kind offer, having previously obtained dismal results from two other pH-testing products. The first was a roll of pH paper purchased from a chemical supply company in Richmond. This broad-spectrum paper seemed unable to measure anything beyond pH 6, 7, and 8, even when I dipped it into acidic and basic solutions that should have registered at the far ends of the scale. The other product, purchased at a local garden shop, was a green pH meter with a long metal rod attached. Everything I measured with this device, from soap to vinegar, resulted in a reading of pH 7.

On the other hand, Louis's pH pen proved to be an amazing piece of technology (not surprising, since it cost over \$100). It was simple to use and gave extremely precise readings. And it taught me some very valuable lessons about my garden.

For example, I was surprised to learn that the mulch I put into my rhododendron planting mix had a pH of 7. I had always assumed its pH would be acidic, near that of the



topsoil I purchased from the local dump (made from decomposed fish parts, sand, and hog fuel). I also found that the native soil on my property (all six inches of it) had a pH only slightly above that of Sunshine peat moss (pH 4.8). Based on these findings, I figured that I could stop using peat moss and instead combine the native soil with the mulch to produce a mixture with a pH between 5 and 6 that would be perfect for rhododendrons.

Again, the pH pen proved that my assumptions were wrong. Even when I combined large amounts of native soil with the mulch, the pH stayed above 6. However, when I added small amounts of peat moss to the mulch, the pH quickly dropped below 6.



With further testing, I learned that I could produce an ideal rhododendron planting mix for my garden, with pH 5.5, by combining 4 parts mulch with 3 parts topsoil, and 1 part peat moss. I could never have figured out that ratio without the pH pen's help. An added benefit is that this mixture results in a huge saving of peat moss, which I had previously been dumping into the wheelbarrow at one-third of the planting mix.

The moral of this brief dissertation is that if you're not sure about the pH of various materials that you're putting around your rhododendrons, talk to Louis and borrow his pH pen. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised, as I was, with the amount of useful information that this amazing little gadget will give you.

Ron Knight

Membership

Congratulations! Membership renewals are approaching the halfway point. Well done and thank you!

You can mail in your renewal or drop it off at the membership table at the October meeting. New members receive the remainder of 2003 and all of 2004 for the annual rate. Avoid *ARS Journal* Jeopardy and renew before November 20th.

In the June 2003 issue of *Indumentum* we welcomed seven new memberships and in September's an additional three. Last month we received the following seven new memberships:

- James Bobick
- Robert Pounder & Terry Hadford
- Radojka & Les Harris
- Sue & Chris Klapwijk
- Ralph Kuhn & Teresa Tiemstra
- Stuart & Wendy Scholefield
- Pamela Hodgson Whitehead & Phil Whitehead.

New members will be wearing the ARS logo on their nametags, so look for them at the meeting and join me in welcoming them to the VRS.



Thank you all for encouraging membership. We grow, share and enrich our knowledge because you do!

Carole Conlin, VRS Membership Chair, 604 921 7260
conlin@sfu.ca

◆ Contributions to the Raffle Table help offset the rental of the Floral Hall. Plants, books, fresh eggs, etc. are always welcome!

◆ For the Refreshment Table, donations of cookies, cakes, cheese, and other snacks are greatly appreciated.



Plants in Bloom - *Aconitum vilmorinianum*

The plant pictured above growing through *Rhododendron rubiginosum* is *Aconitum vilmorinianum*, one of a number of climbing *Aconitum* species from Asia. Although hardy (Zone 6 or perhaps hardier), vigorous and exceptionally free flowering, the climbing monkshoods are poorly known in gardens. There are at least five different ones at UBC Botanical Garden from wild collections made in China and Korea; their flowers (shape as above) are produced at the ends of the branches in the autumn and range in colour from light blue to purple. Leaves are handsome, mostly deeply cut and arranged alternately and sparingly along the stems.

In all climbing species the stems start erect—much like their non-climbing kin—then twine and scramble up to 2 or 3 metres. They work and look equally well scrambling over twiggy shrubs, such as rhododendrons, or growing through more restrained, formal hedging. Growth starts very late—June, with some species—which elicits considerable consternation from even experienced gardeners. I know of one whose confidence was fairly shattered by the experience of anticipating re-emergence in the spring (I might feel the same had I paid what she did for one). This tardy behaviour not only upsets gardeners, but seems to dupe some slugs, as well. In case of more intelligent slugs, however, measures must be taken to protect the succulent new growth.

We could learn a few things from the slugs. Aconitums are in all their parts extremely poisonous to people, and handling should be kept to a minimum (thoroughly wash hands following exposure). These plants are easily grown from seed or division of the tuberous roots in autumn.

Douglas Justice

Please patronize our advertisers; they support the VRS and make the newsletter possible

Subscription Rates

VRS + ARS Membership (US & Overseas)	\$50.00 \$US 28.00
VRS Membership (no ARS Quarterly Journal)	\$25.00
Associate Membership (member of another ARS Chapter in Canada)	\$10.00
Associate Membership (member of another ARS Chapter outside of Canada)	\$US 10.00

Advertising Rates

	1 month	3 months	8 months
Business card	\$10.00	\$25.00	\$50.00
$\frac{1}{4}$ page	\$25.00	\$67.50	\$160.00
$\frac{1}{2}$ page	\$40.00	\$108.00	\$256.00
full page	\$70.00	\$189.00	\$448.00

Vancouver Rhododendron Society Executive Nominations - 2003 - 2004

President	Ron Knight*
Past President	Gerry Gibbens [§]
Vice President	Louis Peterson*
Secretary	Bill Spohn*
Treasurer	Barbara Sherman*
Membership	Carole Conlin*
Newsletter	Douglas and Karen Justice*
Programme	Joe Ronsley*
Director (3 years)	Lothar Mischke
Director (2 years)	Bill Herbst [§]
Director (1 year)	Todd Major [§]



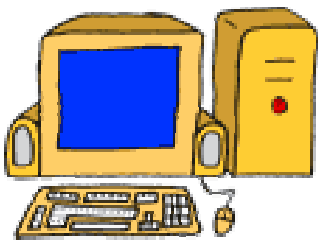
According to the VRS Constitution, Members of the Society may make further nominations by obtaining the written consent of the candidate, and also the signatures of five members who support the nomination. These nominations must be in the hands of the Nominations Director by 15 December 2003.

Joe Ronsley, Nominations Director

* Incumbent

[§] Ratification not needed

To advertise in *Indumentum*, contact **Tony Clayton** Tel: 604 921 7947 tclayton@telus.net



Have you seen the VRS website? Go to <http://www.rhodo.citymax.com/> to see up-to-date news, views and more!

The ARS website, <http://www.rhododendron.org/> has news with a more international flavour.

Found! A silver earring was found at the September VRS meeting. If it's yours, contact Carla Knight at 604 929 5670.

News and Notes - Rhododendron Species Foundation Plant Distribution Changes

Gardeners will be interested to know that the Rhododendron Species Foundation has inaugurated a new plant distribution system for Canadian RSF members living in southwest British Columbia. Until now, members have had to go to the RSF Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington, at a certain time on a certain day each spring to pick up the plants they had ordered. This often involved considerable inconvenience: in the matter of the members' personal plans; in the time, expense and energy spent making the trip; and in the hassle at the border.

Beginning with the spring distribution in 2004, all plants ordered by RSF members living in British Columbia will be delivered together, to the Botanical Garden at UBC, which will act as a distribution centre, on a date to be announced. Customs will have already been cleared, and one Phytosanitary Certificate will be shared. A flat \$10.00 U.S. charge will be added to each order to cover, or at least contribute to these costs and that of the delivery. Members will then have one week in which to pick up their plants at UBC. UBC may not be especially convenient for some members—Vancouver Island residents, for instance—but will certainly be considerably more convenient than going down to Federal Way. As well, arrangements can be made for one person to pick up several orders. Further details will be available closer to the time of the plant distribution.

It is hoped that the new policy will be more 'user friendly' to Canadians and, as a result, that more Canadians



will become members of the Rhododendron Species Foundation. One benefit of the new system will be to those people who place small orders, where it was not worth their while going down to Federal Way to pick up, say, two or three plants. Other more 'user friendly' policies, both involving Canadians specifically and the RSF membership generally, are being discussed for inauguration in the near future. Certainly the RSF has a mandate of interest to anyone with an enthusiasm for rhododendrons, and is of special interest because of its making available to gardeners species rhododendrons not easily found elsewhere. Moreover, the RSF is probably the most reliable source of species rhododendrons that can be depended upon to be true to name.

Later this fall the RSF will be sending spring catalogues and membership forms to each of the ARS District 1 chapters, with the hope that the Canadian presence will increase in this international organization. Steve Hootman, Co-Director of the RSF

Garden, will give a talk on the RSF to the Vancouver Chapter the evening of March 18th 2004 (7:30 pm, Floral Hall, VanDusen Gardens). All District 1 ARS members are welcome.

Finally, special thanks to Quentin Cronk, Director, to Douglas Justice, and to the UBC Botanical Garden for its cooperation in making this new system possible. There is a long history of collaboration between UBC and the RSF, actually going back to the RSF's very beginnings, and it is good to see the relationship between these two important botanical organizations revived and strengthened, to the benefit of both.

Any questions about the Rhododendron Species Foundation or the plant distribution can be addressed to Joe Ronsley at 604 921 9444 or jronsley@telus.net. Or call up the RSF website, <http://www.rhodygarden.org>, which is also in the process of being improved.

Joe Ronsley



Please note that the annual **VRS Pot Luck Supper** scheduled for June 20th has been **CHANGED to June 13th**. It will take place at the home of Ron Feicht at 5:00 pm as previously reported.

October Speaker

No VRS member needs an introduction to our speaker for the evening of October 16th, **Douglas Justice**, except perhaps those who have just joined the Society, say, within the past few weeks. He is a member of the VRS Executive, and Co-Editor of our newsletter *Indumentum*. Most VRS members know all that, and also that, while he is not involved with the VRS, he is working at UBC. But what many members may not know is how he spends his time at UBC, that he is the 'Associate Director and Curator of Collections at UBC Botanical Garden. His primary responsibilities are the day-to-day operations of the garden and the living plant collections, which comprise some 8000 taxa from around the temperate world'. This means that he is responsible for the development, verification, documentation and interpretation of the Botanical Garden plant collections. Moreover, he directs plant breeding, clonal selection and plant development for the Garden itself and for its renowned Plant Introduction Scheme. He is also a liaison for the BC nursery and landscape industry, the BC Horticulture Articulation Committee, the H.M. Eddie Plant Development Foundation, and the UBC Faculty of Agricultural Sciences Horticulture Curriculum Committee. And he teaches (very successfully evidently), and works as a consultant in various horticultural areas. He is the author of numerous articles, particularly on maples and rhododendrons, but on other botanical subjects as well.

Recently he was Acting Director of the Garden while the search was taking place for its present Director, Quentin Cronk. So Douglas is a busy man indeed, and the VRS is fortunate in having him so active with us.

Douglas tells us that he 'trained at Massot Nursery (in Richmond) and has worked as a gardener in Vancouver (at VanDusen) and at Windsor Great Park, England', the latter under the direction of the late distinguished horticulturist John Bond. Most importantly perhaps, 'while in England, he also briefly worked as a bartender.' (I wonder if he is available for parties and weddings.) His more formal training involves a Bachelor's degree in Horticulture



Acer pectinatum subsp. *taronense*
Photo: Douglas Justice

and a Master's in Botany from UBC. He will shortly, despite his busy life, be embarking on his PhD. Before moving to UBC, Douglas worked as a horticulture instructor at Kwantlen University College. In addition to being an active member of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, he is currently 4th Vice President of the International Plant Propagator's Society (Western Region), 'a founding member and past President of the Native Plant Society of BC and a founding member and a North American Vice President of the North American branch of the Maple Society'. In

fact, his graduate work was on maples, and this genus will be the subject of his VRS lecture. He is also a member of the Great Plant Picks of the Pacific Northwest tree and conifer committee and Chairman of the Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society, which owes its existence to long-time VRS member Francisca Darts.

The title for Douglas's lecture to the VRS is '**Observations on Recent Asiatic Maple Introductions to UBC Botanical Garden**'. This subject has become a passion for him. For that matter, most of us interested in growing rhododendrons have a keen interest in Asiatic maples as well. They just go together.

Joe Ronsley

