

Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 35, Number 3, November 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, November 20th
7:30 pm, Floral Hall, VanDusen Garden**

**Program: Chip Muller: 'People, Plants and Peaks: Sixty Years
of Family History in the Nepal-Sikkim-Tibet Himalaya'**

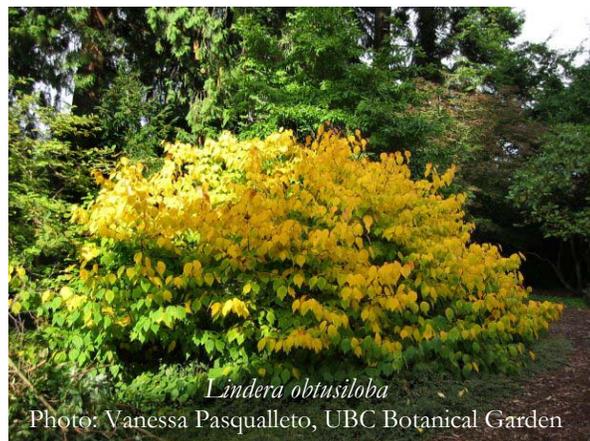
Education: Claudia Ratti, SFU Biology student: Pollination

Sales: Rosemary Burnham (paintings), Ron Feicht (pottery)

Plants in Bloom - the autumn woodland palette at UBC Botanical Garden

As temperatures fall inexorably toward the freezing mark at this time of year—though after the last few winters, one wonders if we'll actually get much below that—there are obvious signs of decline and decay. However, in the David C. Lam Asian Garden, the spectacular yellowing of *Lindera obtusiloba* (broadleaf spicebush) and the ripening of the fruit of *Decaisnea fargesii* (dead man's fingers) are a signal that autumn can be a colourful end to the season. Both are large shrubs, the lindera occasionally making a sprawling tree, and the two are worth making room for in the woodland garden. Many other plants are notable at this time, including *Disanthus cercidifolius* (disanthus), with its almost unbelievably rich fall colour, *Camellia sasanqua* in full flower, *Sorbus* species packed with berries, and rhododendrons. For example, *R. thomsonii* and *R. hanceanum* are throwing precocious blooms, as is their habit. The climbing aconites are still in flower (they were featured in the October *Indumentum*), but more on climbing plants later.

Lindera species are dioecious (male and female flowers are borne on separate plants—from the Greek, *di* + *oikos*, meaning two houses) and both kinds of flowers of most species are an attractive soft yellow or chartreuse, borne before the leaves. Small, black, berry-like drupes ought to follow on females if males of this species are close; however, in spite of seemingly appropriate proximity of males and females, they never produce fruit at UBC. This could be due to an absence of suitable pollinators, the weather, which is usually very cool and damp at flowering, or insufficient summer heat for proper fruit development. Whatever the cause, it is frustrating, as the drupes apparently contrast beautifully with the colouring foliage. Seed production would also be useful to distribute plants more widely, although cuttings are also a source of new plants.



Lindera obtusiloba

Photo: Vanessa Pasqualeto, UBC Botanical Garden

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President's Message

At our October meeting, you saw a number of new faces in leadership roles. There was no coup d'état; we just had several people pinch-hitting for others who were unavoidably absent. Thank you to **Barb Sherman** for taking over the membership table; to **Charlie Sale** for handling the raffle; to **Carla Knight** for preparing the refreshments; to **Gerry Gibbens** for hosting and introducing **Doug Justice**, our speaker; and to **Louis Peterson** for giving the membership report.

Our executive has taken on three new projects this year:



- 1) Creating a VRS logo which can be used on our stationery, web-site, sale banners, publicity brochures, bumper stickers, etc. **Todd Major** and **Gerry Gibbens** will be ready to present the logo to you at our January meeting. Thank you to all of our members who submitted logo suggestions. No single submission was chosen; rather, the new logo was created as a compilation of ideas from several sources.
- 2) Publishing a history of the VRS. Over the years, **Clive Justice**, our club historian, has written many articles in *Indumentum* about various aspects of the club's history. He has kindly agreed to use this information to write a single article, which **Bill Spohn** will format for inclusion on our website. If anyone has photographs of club events in the "early days," please loan them to Clive.
- 3) Producing a brief questionnaire which will allow us to gain feedback from members about our club's organization and programme. This questionnaire will be available at our January meeting for everyone to complete. At all future meetings, copies will be available from **Carole Conlin** at the membership table, so that members can comment about any positives or negatives that they would like to share with the executive.

Congratulations to **Gerry Gibbens**. He was recently elected, by acclamation, as a Director for the American Rhododendron Society's District 1. In this capacity, Gerry will be offering valuable leadership to the District 1 executive, which includes all of BC's rhododendron club presidents.

At our last executive meeting, we debated the merits of continuing our traditional open-gardens programme this spring, as opposed to replacing it or supplementing it with a one-day bus tour of outstanding rhododendron gardens in the Lower Mainland. I would appreciate feedback from members before we make a final decision in January. Please relay your comments to me by e-mail or phone message: rcknight@shaw.ca or 604 929 5670.

The November VRS meeting is our last one for 2003. At our first meeting of 2004, on January 15th, we will be featuring member slides, but with a difference. We want to highlight recent photos of gardens created by VRS members, both home-owners and professionals, emphasizing rhododendrons and companion perennial plants. If you would like to show 20 or fewer slides of your garden as part of that programme, please contact me by January 7th (see e-mail or phone number above).

Ron Knight

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

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
¼ page	\$25.00	\$67.50	\$160.00
½ page	\$40.00	\$108.00	\$256.00
full page	\$70.00	\$189.00	\$448.00

Decaisnea never fails to make an impression. In spring, its long stringy racemes of yellow, spidery flowers accompany inky-green unfolding leaves. Plants are monoecious (i.e., producing male and female flowers on the same plant—from the Greek, *mono* + *oikos* = one house), but fruit set is often better if cross-pollination has occurred. The extraordinary, distended, dull metallic-blue, finger-like fruits develop in autumn, hanging in large, limp clusters beneath the tropical foliage. The fruits eventually split open, displaying their black seeds imbedded in a suspicious looking mucilaginous pulp. **Gerry Gibbens**, VRS past president and gardener in the Sino-Himalayan Garden at VanDusen Botanical Garden is an acknowledged expert in the theatrics of eating these in front of school children. And they are actually very tasty. By the way, *Decaisnea* is pronounced deh-**kane**-ee-a (at least by those who recognize a French name when they hear one). The name commemorates Joseph Decaisne (1807-1882), Belgian botanist and director of the Jardin des Plantes, Paris.

At this time of year, climbers are often at their best. *Vitis coignetiae* (tapestry vine) puts on an unbeatable autumn display of scarlet and burgundy leaves and *Celastrus orientalis* (Oriental bittersweet) is a lovely sight with its clusters of tiny pumpkin-orange fruits. Both can easily climb to the tops of mature conifers. Sadly, the bittersweet cannot be recommended, as it is a pernicious weed, increasingly seeding itself and becoming invasive, and strangling more efficiently with age. Another handsome climber, as yet not threatening, is *Elaeagnus glabra* (smooth oleaster). This is a little-known evergreen Japanese species that climbs slowly by hooking its arching shoots and backward pointing branches over suitable tree limbs. Leaves are lustrous, dark green above, bronze under. In bloom in early November, the gland-dotted white, tubular flowers are small, but intensely fragrant—gardenia-like with a hint of orange blossom. The UBC plant is halfway up a *Thuja plicata* (wetsern red cedar), duking it out with the late summer



Decaisnea fargesii

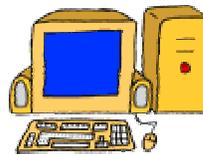
Photo: Daniel Mosquin, UBC Botanical Garden

flowering, semi-evergreen *Lonicera japonica*, the earlier, evergreen *L. aleuosmoides* (a superb and completely underappreciated species) and the fragrant, spring flowering *Clematis tongulensis*.

The rhododendron woodland is often a surprisingly beautiful place at this time of year, particularly if one's senses are tuned to the more delicate gradations of nature. The varied aromas and subtle visual delights change with temperature, humidity and light, and with the shortening days. I invite VRS members to visit a local woodland garden soon, to enjoy what this splendid climate has to offer.

Douglas Justice

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.

Membership

A big thank you to all who have renewed so quickly. Your membership cards and receipts will be available for pick-up at the membership table at the November meeting—so once you pick up your name tag and raffle ticket, please find the white envelope with your name on it for your membership cards and receipts.

Those who wish to renew at the November meeting may do so and November 20th is the deadline for ARS renewals that wish to avoid Journal Jeopardy.

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!

Keep those renewals coming and I look forward to seeing you at the November meeting.

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

Education - October

Chemistry and Cultivars by Louis K Peterson

In thinking about possible education topics for our monthly meetings, it seemed like a good idea to dream up a number of wide ranging ideas for our membership to choose from.

When we reflect for a moment on the scope of the variety to be found in the Plant Kingdom, we might well ask, "how did it all begin?" A purist might wish to start at the beginning of time with an attempt to understand the enormous energies of the Big Bang, an event that gave rise to a primeval soup of fundamental particles that gradually congealed into elements, molten planets, galaxies and supernovae. "How were elements and molecules formed?"

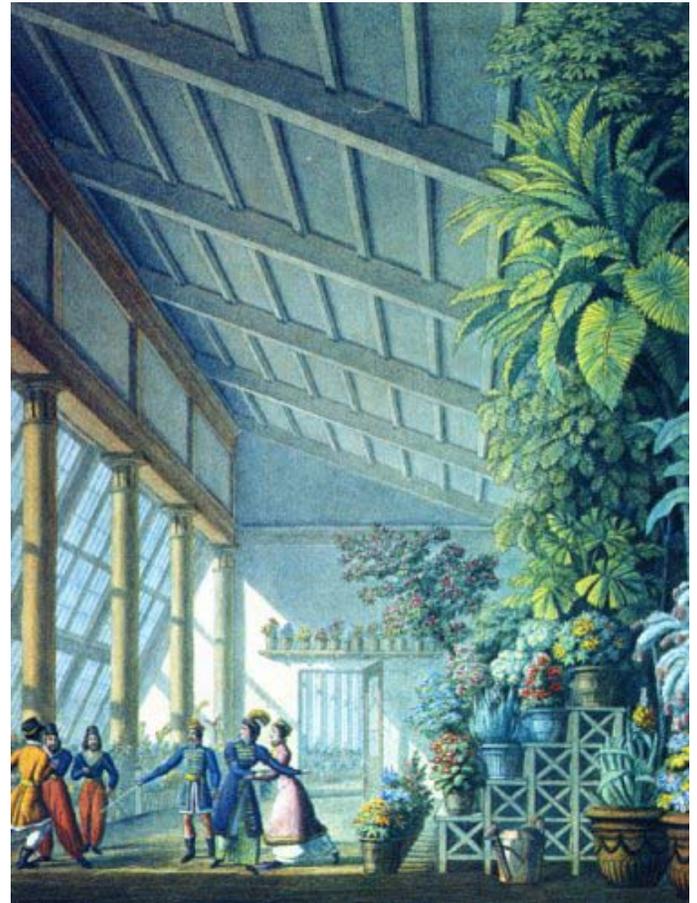
In time, the searing heat of our once molten planet subsided, and a varied geologic and geographic crust developed, and silica, the parent of an extensive mineral kingdom that includes the beneficent clays, talcs and micas, was born. From a primordial molecular methane-ammonia-water atmosphere, racked by unimaginable electrical storms, the first protein-like structures were created. The basis of procreating plant and other life forms was established. "What was the chemistry of creation?" "How did organic matter arise from such hostile beginnings?" "How did the life-nurturing qualities of our biosphere, our soils and our atmosphere, come to pass, from such sterile inorganic origins?" "From whence the remarkable evolutions and adaptations of the many flourishing plant forms?" "And of the flowers, what are the chemistries of their colours?"

While the high drama of the origin of the cosmos is enthralling to consider, the now gentler processes of nature that sustain not only our plants, but also us, are just as intriguing.

The energy of the sun gives us "photosynthetic chemistry" that provides a greener world while restoring the oxygen that we constantly need and consume. The fundamentals of birth, death and re-birth are to be found in the constancy of nature's creativity in using over and over the things she has already made, in processes such as the "carbon cycle", the "nitrogen cycle" and the "water cycle". A pretty good motto seems to be "waste not, want not!"

◆ **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.



Rhododendron
The genus name was officially recognized by Linnaeus in 1753, and at the same time he created the genus *Azalea*. Later, botanists united azaleas with rhododendrons, thus creating a certain confusion in the minds of gardeners and commercial growers, but for present day botanists the genus *Rhododendron* now includes azaleas and the genus *Azalea* officially no longer exists. The most important differences that had previously divided the two for Linnaeus was that rhododendrons have 10 stamens and are mostly evergreen, while the so-called azaleas have 5 stamens and are mostly deciduous; but there are several species of both genera where these characteristics are so intermingled that it now seems more logical to place them all in the genus *Rhododendron*. Their cultural requirements are broadly similar also, except in the case of certain species which require particular treatment.

From *Flowers, a Guide for your Garden*, by Pizzetti and Cocker, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1975.

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

News and Notes



VRS member **Bob Rhodes** writes: I wish to correct some mis-information published in *Indumentum* recently regarding the description of the plant named for Lillian Hodgson.

In early June 1979 when we were holding a post-convention roundup at Anne Aikens' I took the first blooming truss to show the group. Lillian was ecstatic about it and said it should be registered and asked me what I was going to name it. I said 'Let's call it after you' and she was delighted. The following week she had Mary Comber Miles come to our garden in Haney and take pictures in preparation for painting it.

When Clive was doing his thesis he asked Les Clay for a plant which is the one he then mistakenly described in his thesis, her obituary and in the article for *Indumentum*.

The picture above, is of the correct truss and is correctly described in Homer and Salley (1986), page 183. I recommend the plant to you as a June bloomer and it is an addition to any larger garden. There is enough confusion about plant identity anyway so we should try and keep things straight, but the plant as described by Clive really does more justice to Lillian's true personality!"



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.



These pictures (left and above) of a “mystery Greig plant” were submitted by VRS member **Ken Gibson**. He points out that the plant remains compact in his garden even after 20 years.

October Speaker

Chip Muller, our speaker for the evening of November 20th, is well known to most VRS members. Since he has not been with us for a couple years now, however, new members should know that he is an excellent speaker and most congenial friend, always welcome at the VRS.

Chip is on the faculty of the University of Washington Medical School, specializing in reproductive (human) technology. But that is not of much interest to us! Of more interest is the fact that he has had ‘a long relationship with mountains, and with mountain people and plants. He has hiked, climbed or trekked in the major ranges in the US, the Alps, Mt. Kilimanjaro, and the Himalayas’, most of this, at least in the last two places, having to do with exploration for rhododendrons.

As he tells us himself, Chip ‘grew up in Pennsylvania, where his father, George, was active in the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) and president of the Philadelphia Chapter. George traveled in India, China and Sikkim in the early 1940s [a difficult time to travel to these places I imagine], and returned to these areas with his son and daughter up to his 83rd year. Chip’s love of rhododendrons may have been “inherited” from his father, but his own enthusiasm for collecting species dates to his first plant exploration trip in the Himalaya in 1986.’ Chip is an avid and excellent, photographer, and has photographed rhododendrons, and other interesting things, in western China, Tibet,

Sikkim, and Nepal, and has shared his photographs in slide presentations and *ARS Journal* articles over many years.

Chip is currently President of the Seattle Rhododendron Society (a counterpart to the VRS) and was a co-Chair of the ARS Annual Convention in Seattle in 1999. He is a holder of the ARS Bronze Medal. He has also served for some years on the Board of Directors of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, and, most important, is an Associate Member of the VRS. He ‘and his [very lovely and charming] wife Angela Ginorio and daughter Emmy tend their wooded city garden of rhododendrons and companion plants, and help maintain his late father’s three-acre Himalayan garden on Whidbey Island. Besides species rhododendrons, his favorite plants are *Meconopsis*, *Primula*, *Arisaema*, and almost any Himalayan perennial, shrub or tree’.

Although he has gone on expeditions in recent years with Steve Hootman and others, Chip has, as he has indicated, done much of his traveling with his father and his sister, who are much admired by everyone acquainted with them. It is on this family team that he will be speaking to the VRS in a lecture entitled, **‘People, Plants and Peaks: Sixty Years of Family History in the Nepal-Sikkim-Tibet Himalaya’**.

Joe Ronsley