

Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 35, Number 5, February 2004



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

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This Month's Meeting: Thursday, February 19th

7:30 pm, Floral Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden

Program: John Schroeder, Valleybrook Gardens: 'Shady Companions: Herbaceous Partners for Rhododendrons'

Education: Basic Computer Workshop Session 7:00 pm

Plants in Bloom - *Lonicera x purpusii* - winter honeysuckle

Because this winter has been a bit colder than usual, many rhododendrons that would normally be in flower now seem to be biding their time, at least at UBC Botanical Garden. One of my recent forays into the garden reminded me (again) why we make space for non-rhododendrons. If the reader still wants to know which rhododendrons are in flower locally, please see the list on page 4.

It's often said that one of the most powerful memory triggers is one's sense of smell. For me, the Christmas "smell" is that of Douglas fir, for example, because that was the species we always dragged home and decorated. Others may have similar recollections, but attach it to the fragrance of a different conifer species, depending on what was commonly available; balsam fir in eastern North America, Norway spruce or Scots pine in western Europe. An exceptionally common memory trigger is honeysuckle. Here, as in much of the



Lonicera x purpusii (× 2)

warm temperate world, vining honeysuckles are common garden plants. Blooming as they do in early summer, and smelling strongest in the evening so as to attract night-flying pollinators, their heady fragrance is associated with romantic

memories on the porch swing, or with sneaking out on long twilight evenings (depending on the age of the one who is reminiscing). Which is all a bit far away from Vancouver in February. Or is it?

The honeysuckles (*Lonicera* species) are a diverse lot, and not all of them flower when it's warm. Two such honeysuckles are distinguished from the

...continued on page 3

Education Notes

1. A **Basic Computer Workshop Session** will be held at our meeting on February 19 (starting at 7:00 pm), for members wishing to learn more about using a computer to send out e-mails, access websites containing vast amounts of information on many interesting topics, access our *Indumentum*, print documents, etc. Ideally, the number at each workshop table should be small (say six people?), to provide for “hands on” instruction. Please advise me of your interest (e.g., the computer you use, any immediate questions or difficulties) and your intention to attend.

2. Your replies to the **Education Questionnaire** indicated interest in the following topics, in approximate descending order: (a) Origin of Soils; (b) Chemistry of Plant & Flower Colour; (c) Composition & Improvement of Soils; (d) Light on Photosynthesis; (e) The Evolution of the Atmosphere; (f) Cycles in Nature; (g) Cuttings; seeds; mulching. Thanks to Karen Shuster for a very interesting suggestion “Vignettes by Members: 5-minute presentations on my favourite plant.” Volunteers welcome! Other suggestions include: Plant Diseases, Taxonomy of Rhodos, Genus Relationships, Why Species?, and DNA Research. Thank you for suggestions – now it’s our turn to deliver!

3. **40% Discount on Books:** A reminder that VRS members can benefit by 40% on group orders of certain books from Whitecap and the Timber Press trade

catalogue (not all Timber Press books are discounted; see the catalogues Whitecap provides, or go to <http://www.whitecap.ca>). This appreciable benefit is based on a non-returnable policy. I will handle the VRS group order. Please give/send your “must have” list to me, and provide a cheque, payable to “VRS”, for 60% of the current listed price **plus** 7% GST, by March 31, 2004. Orders over \$200 are shipped free! I will email or call you when books have been received, and bring your items to our April and May meetings, unless you wish to make alternative arrangements.

Louis Peterson, PO Box 91, Lions Bay, BC, V0N 2E0.

4. To follow up on Todd Major’s very informative talk and notes about “**Basic Soil Philosophy**” [see page 5 for a full account], you may wish to look for supplemental published material. For example, Whitecap Books has “Ecology for Gardeners,” and a search of www.chapters.indigo.ca gives hits on key words as follows: **soils** (483 hits); **composting** (21); **fertilizers** (16); **pesticides** (85); **herbicides** (9). If you want to avoid soils altogether, there’s **hydroponics** (19 hits), and a Whitecap book “Gardening on Pavement and Hard Surfaces”!

Louis K Peterson 604 921 7260 lpeterso@sfu.ca

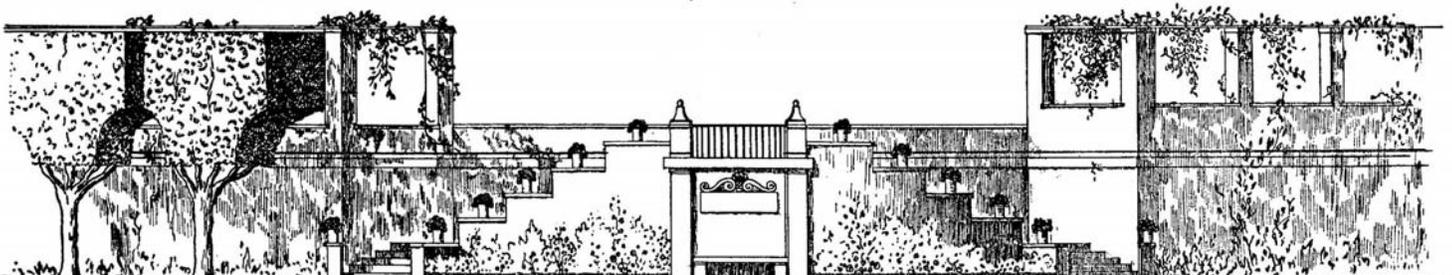
To advertise in *Indumentum*, contact Tony Clayton 604 921 7947 tclayton@telus.net

Subscription Rates

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

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



rest by their reliable winter flowering. *Lonicera fragrantissima* is a rampant, semi-evergreen shrub that quickly grows from a prostrate groundcover to a respectable 1.5m in a few years. The small flowers are fragrant, but often hidden amongst the foliage. Small red berries follow in the summer, though birds are more likely to see them than you are. The related and similar *L. standishii* is considered less attractive overall, presumably because of its floppier leaves and more open habit (it can reach the size of a small car in a similar time), but it has showier and more strongly scented flowers. Their hybrid, *L. × purpusii*, marries the best features of each, flowering locally anytime between December and March, with showy,

exquisitely lemon-scented flowers (see scan on page 1). These are produced in pairs or quads on fine, often leafless stems—perfect for cutting and forcing into bloom indoors.

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

Like *Chionanthus praecox* (see *Indumentum*, January 2004), *L. × purpusii* won't win any prizes for looks, particularly out of flower; however, the shrub was given an Award of Merit in 1971, presumably on the basis of its floral effects. In the open, it forms a rounded bush up to 2.5m across. As it is a vigorous shrub and apt to get out of hand, it can be pruned annually after flowering, removing older congested growth back to its origin near the base of the plant. Such treatment enables the gardener to maintain a smaller (1.5m), more manageable specimen that will flower reliably.

I'm unable to pass by this shrub in flower without being immediately transported to Kew Gardens. As an intern gardener at Windsor Great Park more than a decade ago, I had the opportunity to attend weekly winter evening lectures at the Royal Botanic Garden. Halfway between the train station and Jodrell Gate (one of the entrances to Kew) was a specimen of *L. × purpusii* in someone's front yard. I don't recall ever seeing it, as I never passed that way in daylight, but I was able to detect it for nearly a block on either side. It was a helpful way-finding device for the return trek from the Greyhound (pub) following the lectures, come to think of it.

Douglas Justice

News and Notes

SPECIES STUDY DAYS 2004

A comprehensive study of rhododendron species will again be held for the third year at the **Rhododendron Species Foundation Botanical Garden** in Seattle on the following dates: **February 28, March 27, April 17 and May 8**. All sessions are personally conducted by Steve Hootman, co-director of the R.S.F. Sessions are held from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

In previous years we have found that crossing the border by 7:00 a.m. permits a leisurely travel to the garden in time for the commencement of the sessions at 10:00 a.m. The sessions are completed by 4:00 p.m., enabling a return to the Lower Mainland by 7:00 p.m. Every effort is made to carpool and this will be sorted out once registration has been completed.

Participants from Vancouver Island Chapters who may be interested would be made most welcome and we have found previously that traveling over on the Friday evening before the session and staying overnight on the Lower Mainland provides the most convenient arrangement. The Lower Mainland members will provide overnight

accommodation to the Island members if needed, in order to defray the cost of attending these sessions.

Attendance is restricted to 24 participants, due to the limitations of the study area and the practicality of addressing a larger audience in the garden. Lunch is provided for a nominal sum of \$5.00.

The cost for the four sessions is \$140.00.

Fourteen of the previous year's participants have already confirmed their intention of participating again this year. Please confirm and advise as soon as possible if you would like to participate.

For further information, contact Mike Bale at 604 853 8839, or forward cheque to:

**Mike Bale *Species Study Days
33623 Wildwood Drive
Abbotsford BC V2S 1S2**



VRS Executive 2003 – 2004

Congratulations to the 2004 VRS Executive who were all elected by acclamation at the January meeting, and particularly to **Lothar Mischke**, who is new to the executive.

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

What was that Rhododendron?

According to long-time VRS member **Margaret Charlton**, Ron Knight's mystery rhododendron from that gardener's home in Gibsons could be *R. brachycarpum*, or its subsp. *fauriei* [the major difference being the absence of leaf hairs on the the latter subspecies]. Margaret says that "the flowering time is rather weird, though, but this does happen occasionally to some individual rhodies."



Louis Peterson notes that there is an interesting article on fertilizers in "Tips for Beginners" in the current ARS Journal, Vol 58, #1, Winter 2004, page 38.

More on *R.* 'Lillian Hodgson'

Bob Rhodes was quite right in pointing out the misidentification of the illustration in my thesis as the namesake of our dear departed Lil. After all, he was the one who registered it in 1979. I recently found among the hundreds of photographs that I collected for my thesis, a print of the real *R.* 'Lillian Hodgson', the same plant that appeared in the November *Indumentum* [the image of which was supplied by Bob Rhodes]. I know this is the real thing, as written on the back in my handwriting is "R. 'Lillian Hodgson' (*R.* Angelo/Solent Queen × *R.* Old Copper)."

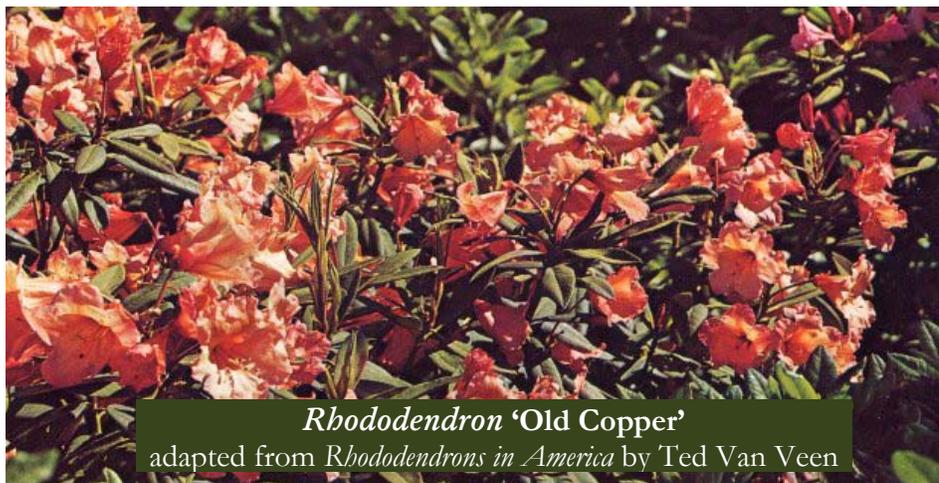
The illustration shows a bit of the hybrid's grand heritage. The hybrid

'Angelo' was J.C. Williams' (of Caerhay's Castle, Cornwall) cross of Hooker's Sikkim-native, *griffithianum*, with Robert Fortune's China-find, *fortunei* subsp. *discolor*. Williams called it the Cornish Loderi. However, the same cross was made by Lionel de Rothschild of Exbury Gardens (on the Solent across from Southampton) in 1930. 'Solent Queen' is larger growing and later blooming. The flowers are blush pink outside and white with green spots in the throat; this cultivar received an RHS Award of Merit in 1939. You can catch up with Lionel de Rothschild in Philips and Barber's *The Rothschild Rhododendrons*.

American hybrid 'Old Copper' (see picture below) is more complex, a composite of two hybrids: 'Vulcan' and

'Fabia'. Together, they have the 'blood' of three species—Joseph Hooker's *griffithianum*, a goodly amount of George Forrest's *griersonianum*, and a splash of Frank Kingdon Ward's *dichroanthum*—and a bit of 'unknown'. 'Old Copper' was created by the Pacific Northwest's pioneer rhododendron grower and propagator, Theodore Van Veen Sr., father of Ted Van Veen and grandfather of Kathy. Ted wrote *Rhododendrons in America* and Kathy now runs the Van Veen Nursery. Their full story is told in Sonja Nelson's book, *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story*. Bob Rhodes chose parents with a rich and diverse heritage to create the hybrid he called 'Lillian Hodgson'. It truly embodies some of the greatest of the rhododendron finders, collectors, creators and propagators. Some of Bob's other hybridizing exploits are told in Sonja's book. By the way, there is a hybrid rhodo named 'Lil'; but that's a story for another time.

Clive L. Justice



Rhododendron 'Old Copper'
adapted from *Rhododendrons in America* by Ted Van Veen

Rhododendrons blooming in members' gardens, reported at the January meeting:

R. dauricum, *R. mucronulatum*,
R. riviei and *R. stenopetalum*
'*Linearifolium*'.

Healthy soil is a primary requirement of a healthy garden. Important components of a healthy soil are good water- and nutrient-holding ability. These qualities are usually provided by the finer textured components, such as clays and partially decomposed organic matter. Good aeration is also essential to the various biological processes necessary for plant growth. Aeration in soil is provided by a variety of particle sizes throughout the profile, including larger materials, such as sands and gravels, and by natural soil aggregates (crumbs), which are made up of both mineral and organic soil constituents.

In general, the deeper the soil, the healthier plants will be. Microorganisms, including fungi and bacteria, and macroorganisms, such as soil insects and earthworms, all contribute to building healthy, productive soil. Encourage them to live in the soil by maintaining good soil structure and avoiding the use of herbicides, soil sterilants or other chemicals that kill or discourage beneficial organisms. Finally, good drainage is essential in our winter-rainy climate.

Examples of Poor Soil

- Sand and gravel, because neither has the ability to retain water or nutrients.
- Clay, because it has very little air-filled porosity (large pore spaces) and retains excess moisture.
- Hardpan, because water and air will not penetrate it.

Amending and Preparing Soil Before Planting

- Break up any layer or barrier in the soil that prevents free drainage vertically through the soil profile.
- Ensure that surface moisture can infiltrate the soil so that it does not wash across your garden.
- Use prepared organic matter (i.e., organic substances that break down relatively easily) to improve your soil; e.g., well-rotted manure, compost (from yard and kitchen waste), peat moss, kelp, composted bark mulch or leaf mold.
- Do not use fine sand to improve drainage—it will fill in pore spaces and prevent drainage.
- Try to work the soil during dry weather; working the soil during rain will damage soil structure.
- Do not remove small sticks and rocks, as they help to build good soil structure.
- Do not break up soil crumbs (lumps of soil) fist size or smaller—they indicate excellent soil structure.
- Always operate a rototiller at the lowest speed and gear to avoid destroying soil structure; the more a soil is beaten to a uniform texture (homogenized), the less productive it will become. Repeated use of a rototiller often creates an impervious layer at blade depth.
- Test your soil **before** adding lime to raise the pH, so you know whether liming is necessary. Rhododendrons generally prefer a pH between 5 and 6.
- When adding bonemeal, remember that a little goes a long way. For a 5-foot tall tree, the appropriate amount of bonemeal to add is approximately 1 tablespoon in the root zone.
- Do not add granular fertilizer to the soil when amending it, as the granules begin to release immediately upon contact with the soil (and there are no roots to benefit from the released nutrients).
- Amend to a depth of 12 to 14 (even up to 24) inches for annuals and perennials. For trees and shrubs, amend 24 to 36 inches deep. If you can’t go down, build up above the existing grade.
- Do not leave the soil surface bare—always mulch to protect it.



Rhododendron dauricum

from an engraving by Weddell (1817) for
Curtis Botanical Magazine

John Schroeder, together with his wife Kelly, is the founder of Valleybrook Gardens Ltd., Canada's largest producer of herbaceous perennials. Valleybrook is famous for its Heritage Perennials brand of plants, and operates two nurseries in Canada, one in Abbotsford, BC, the other in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

John is a graduate of the University of British Columbia, where he obtained his B.Sc. in ornamental horticulture in 1980. He began growing heather and ground covers in Abbotsford that year, and moved on to perennial production in 1983.

In growing perennials on a very large scale, he has a real interest in remaining up to date with the newest varieties. Hundreds of new varieties are put on trial and sold each year in order to keep the mix interesting.

Valleybrook also publishes the *Perennial Gardening Guide*, which is now in its 4th edition, and has sold almost 150,000 copies. It is used as a definitive guide to perennials in Canada and the USA. A website at www.perennials.com has become a greatly used source of information as well.

Although he can trace his love of plants and flowers to when he was a young child, John's primary efforts have been directed at business management and marketing. In this regard he has spoken to numerous professional audiences on both plant and business topics, and he speaks occasionally to gardening groups. He is a former president of the *British Columbia Nursery Trades Association* [now the BC Landscape and Nursery Association], and has completed six years as the Canadian Director of the *Perennial Plant Association*. In 1995, he and Kelly received the *Canadian Outstanding Young Farmers* award, and in 1997 were finalists in the Entrepreneur of the Year competition, Pacific Region.

John travels regularly throughout North America and abroad to keep up with market and plant trends. His travels to visit nurseries in England, Holland, Germany, France, Italy and the US result in the trials of many new plants. "Of course," he says, "some might accuse me of actually enjoying these trips but I want to assure you they are all performed in the line of duty. After all, it gets tiring traipsing all over gardens in England or Tuscany or even South America." *Somebody* has to do it, evidently. He and Kelly also lead professional horticultural tours approximately once each year.

When not engaged in his 'tiring' travels, John and Kelly live in Abbotsford with their four daughters. John also has a keen interest in photography, especially in regard to plants



and his travels. In spite of the fact that they sell literally millions of perennials each year, it's a surprise that John only began gardening for himself in the last five years. "Being surrounded by millions of plants in thousands of varieties at work each day always helped provide my 'plant fix,'" he says. "But since I've finally started gardening myself, I've really begun to appreciate what gardeners go through in order to create and maintain great gardens. I think this will help me to do a better job in truly meeting gardeners' needs."

The more ephemeral herbaceous perennials are an essential and integral part of any real garden, even if its primary focus is on woody plants, such as, say, rhododendrons. John's lecture should be of considerable value to all of us.

Joe Ronsley

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Don't miss the following events:

Pacific Northwest Native Plant Sale, April 17, 11-3.

Collector's Plant Auction, April 21, 6:30 pm at the Roundhouse (tickets 604 822 3928).

Open 10:00 am – 4:30 pm daily
Free parking

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