

Indumentum

Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

Volume 36, Number 2, October 2004



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

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This Month's Meeting: Thursday, October 21st 7:30 pm
Floral Hall, VanDusen Botanical Garden

Program: Des Kennedy: 'The Gardens and Landscapes of Ireland'

Education: Louis Peterson: 'Perspectives of a Retired Chemist'

Plant Sales: Les Clay and Gifford Robb

Plants for Late Summer and Autumn Interest Part II – Novelties

In looking for plants that add depth to a late summer/autumn garden, one has to consider many qualities. Deciduous plants have obvious appeal. The subtle (and not so subtle) changes that leaves go through provide us with seasonal signposts, and no garden should be without them. Broadleaf evergreens are another matter. With a few exceptions, they change little from one season to the next. Gardeners here often associate "evergreen foliage" with the shiny, dark green, oblong leaf of the rhododendron. I do, and admit I like the look very much, particularly where my eyes come to rest for extended periods—I grew up looking out our dining room window at *Rhododendron fortunei*, which I still find curiously relaxing (like other people do, looking at fish in an aquarium). Leaf changes in broadleaf evergreens are subtle. When they're new, the leaves stand up and show silver-green undersides; in cold weather, they hang limp and roll up like parchment, but these alterations are essentially fleeting. In my mind, I have the image of the leaves on a summer's day, and they don't really change much from that.

That said, I do occasionally want to be jarred awake with bright flowers, unusual foliage, flashy berries, exceptional bark effect or an interesting aroma. However (and I'm always at great pains to convince people of this), the extraordinary becomes tiresome if it's common, particularly on a small

...continued on page 2



Eucalyptus coccifera

... *Novelties continued from page 1*

residential lot. Rhododendrons work, precisely because the leaves are plain and the flowers, spectacular as they are, don't last very long. I'm as in favour of crazy plants as the next guy, but prefer them in limited quantities and somewhat out of the way, so that when happened upon they are unanticipated and potentially, lifting. In the right place, the exotic can look right.



Australia is home to a number of interesting looking plants, but we grow only a handful because of our sodden, cold winters. People—ok, gardeners and maybe cough drop manufacturers—immediately think of eucalyptus when they think *Australia*. I certainly do, but the majority of the 600 or so species can't be grown here. This is probably a good thing, as most would stand out oddly amongst rhododendrons in a cedar-hemlock forest. At UBC, the eucalypts inhabit the dry, sparsely planted, boulder-strewn landscape of the Alpine Garden, and I think this suits them. The blue of their leaves is often startling (e.g., *E. cordata*, above; photos by the author), but some are more subdued, such as *E. coccifera* (stems pictured on page 1).



Other Australians can be equally impressive. *Grevillea victoriae* (photo left) is the hardest of the grevillea clan (to Zone 7b); it has grey-backed green leaves, and spidery, vermilion flowers produced increasingly from late summer onwards, often into spring without a break. It should be more widely grown, as it is a good shrub that attracts hummingbirds, but intelligent siting

is of paramount importance when dealing with such outlandish (for this area) colours. In a sunny climate, hot colours like those of grevillea flowers look appropriate, and one generally sees orange, red and yellow used freely and effectively in those places.

Despite the brashness of its exceptional lantern-like flowers, the Chilean *Crinodendron bookerianum* (photo below, by Daniel Mosquin) is a better fit because its leaves are a more familiar green. Unfortunately, it is rather tender and only survives in the most protected gardens locally. Paradoxically, the cold blue of *Eucalyptus* (or *Rhododendron cinnabarinum*) also looks best in bright sun. I know nothing of colour theory and would love to be enlightened if someone can help me out, but I know what looks weird or out-of-place.



For cool blue to work in rainy, dull, rhododendron-heavy Vancouver, it seems that there needs to be lots of it, or at least, several transitional plants that can echo and soften the more saturated tones. For example, groupings of different eucalypts with other blue-grey- and blue-green-leaved plants seems to look natural, or at least more so than single specimens embedded in the dark green of the typical rhododendrons and conifer plantings.

Speaking of the out-of-place, variegated plants (these shouldn't be confused with yellow-leaved plants) are probably the most common novelties in cultivation. Few variegated plants could be considered visually restful, so their placement amongst more subdued plants is critical. Some variegations are so strident that they require being placed in someone else's garden altogether, but many can be reasonably used as punctuation in the greater "text" of the garden. As you might expect, I have more to say on purple-leaved, conical, fasciated, curly, bun-shaped and weeping plants, too. But another time.



Douglas Justice

Education



Todd Major gave us a very instructive talk on landscaping principles at our September meeting. He jokingly suggests that "the members have had enough of me for the time being;" consequently his workshop on "Tools and Secateur Maintenance" will be delayed, probably until February. I will attempt to fill in with some thoughts about "Elements, Compounds and Plants – Perspectives of a Retired Chemist."

Louis Peterson

President's Message

September's meeting marked a milestone in VRS history. It was the first time that all presentations used digital photography and LCD projection. Thank you to **Douglas Justice** for handling the engineering and showing us "the way of the future." Thanks also to **Bill Spohn** for helping me take the photographs of our Sale and Show, and to **Todd Major** for preparing a superb digital slide show to accompany his talk.

Also at our September meeting, I was very pleased with the large number of trophies that we were able to award. Thank you to all the members who entered trusses in our spring show and congratulations to the trophy winners whose names and awards are listed on page 6. Special thanks to **Karen Shuster** and **Vern Finley** who prepared our list of winners and spent megahours during the summer sorting, culling, cleaning, and engraving the trophies.



John Priestman has taken on the task of compiling a list of rhododendron "Proven Performers," which will be handed out to new VRS members and published on the ARS website. Proven Performers are the best performing rhododendrons in a particular area, which, for the VRS is the Lower Mainland. The list shows hybrids or species with good form, foliage and flowers that are hardy and

resistant to pests and diseases. The listed plants have proven their ability to perform well in members' gardens and are recommended to others. (It would help new members if the recommended plants are also available for purchase in the Lower Mainland.) Please bring your list to our October or November meeting or send it to John's email: johnpriestman@shaw.ca

On the questionnaire that was distributed to members last winter, the VRS executive received a number of very worthwhile suggestions. One such involved the setting up of a "Dollar Table" at all meetings. The table would contain surplus plants from members' gardens, produced from divisions, cuttings, seed germination, over-planting, etc. The plants would go on sale at the end of the meeting for



Schizophragma hydrangeoides photo Daniel Mosquin

one dollar each. The VRS would use the money towards the rental cost of the Floral Hall, and members would benefit from being able to choose from a wide variety of plants at a very reasonable price. Please bring perennials, trees, shrubs or houseplants to our October meeting, labelled with the common name or horticultural name.

And a final reminder, **Harry Wright**, who is a Director for ARS District 1 (BC) is producing a second edition of a book that lists rhododendrons found in British Columbia gardens. He would like all members of rhododendron clubs to send him an inventory of the rhodos in their gardens by December 1, 2004. Please send your list to Harry's email: haidaau@mars.ark.com

Ron Knight

Membership

Fall is membership renewal time. Forms were available at the September general meeting and picked up by attendees; those not in attendance were mailed their renewal notices or their 2005 membership cards (for new members since May 2004 and life members).

If you don't get yours, see me at the October 21 meeting, or drop me a line or telephone call. (conlin@sfu.ca or 604 921 7260)

ARS members who wish to avoid "journal jeopardy" (missing the mid-January journal) must renew on or before Thursday, November 18 or pay US\$4.00 more in membership fees for the mid-January journal. Membership fees remain unchanged.

New members receive the remainder of 2004 and all of 2005 at the current prices. Guests are always welcome at our meetings.

Visit our website at <http://www.rhodod.citimax.com> for an electronic copy of the membership application/renewal and the benefits of membership in the VRS and discounts at selected nurseries.

Carole Conlin, Membership Chair

News and Notes

\$\$Dollar Table\$\$: On the questionnaires that the VRS executive handed out last spring, several members suggested that we have a dollar table at each VRS meeting.

Ron Knight explains how it works:

Members bring divisions, rooted cuttings, or seedlings from their gardens to each VRS meeting. Any perennials will do, as long as they are labelled with the correct common or horticultural name. (eg. Shasta daisies, irises, cotoneaster, self-seeding heather, rooted euonymus cuttings, hosta divisions, etc.) At the end of the meeting, the plants go on sale for one loonie each. Proceeds are used to pay for the rental of the Floral Hall.

We're going to implement this suggestion beginning with our October meeting.

Please bring plants with you. It's a great way for members to build up their supply of perennials at an extremely low price.

We will still have our regular raffle table, which usually includes rhododendrons, rarer perennials, pottery, books, preserves, etc. Please bring one item for this table, as well.

RSF Plant Distribution: The new procedure for the Rhododendron Species Foundation Canadian plant distribution, begun last spring, will be in place this fall. Canadian RSF members who have ordered plants will be able to pick them up at UBC Monday to Friday, from October 25th to October 29th. You must arrive at UBC between 10:00 and 11:00 am, or between 1:00 and 2:00 pm, on any of those days. **Douglas Justice** will provide further directions for all those expecting plants.

Bill Spohn writes: A series of horticultural mysteries has just started on Knowledge Network. See:

<http://tinyurl.com/6bm5x>

It stars Felicity Kendall, who some of you may remember from a series with Richard Briers (of Monty Python, and more recently Monarch of the Glen) called The Good Life (or Good Neighbours over here).

I enjoyed the horticultural content and She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed also found the whole thing quite enjoyable.

Note that the times quoted on the site may not be our time zone.

BC Rhododendron Inventory

Harry Wright, outgoing President of the ARS's District 1 (BC) is revising his book on rhododendrons in British Columbia. The book catalogues both hybrids and species from private and public gardens throughout the province. The second edition will be ready for sale at the ARS conference in Victoria next spring.

Harry would like all members of rhododendron clubs in BC to submit a list of the names of all the rhodos in their gardens. The deadline for submissions is December 1, 2004. Please send your list to this e-mail address:

haidaau@mars.ark.com.

As an alternative, you can give your list to Ron Knight at the October or November VRS meeting and he will forward it to Harry.

Christmas is Coming!

Louis Peterson (604 921 7260 or lpetero@sfu.ca) reminds us that books make excellent Christmas presents! Order your selections via the VRS from Whitecap Books and/or Timber Press, and receive a 35% discount (the society qualifies for a special discount and free delivery for orders above \$200).

A \$50.00 order would cost you \$34.78 (with GST) and benefit the VRS \$8.03, while a \$100.00 order costs \$69.55 with \$16.05 to the VRS. In addition to gardening books, Whitecap carries titles on cooking, health, crafts, children, nature, environment, arts, history and more! Timber Press deals solely with plants and gardening. I will bring catalogues to the September and October meetings and be happy to take orders from you then, or by e-mail (advance payment by cheque to the VRS is preferred). Order soon to ensure timely delivery. You may view the Whitecap and Timber Press listings at www.whitecap.ca



Rhododendron 'President Roosevelt'
photo Ron Knight

To advertise in *Indumentum*, contact Tony Clayton 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

Are Your Variegated Plants Reverting?

I like variegated plants. Their yellow, cream, or white streaks and blotches brighten up shaded areas and provide interesting contrasts in my garden.

However, most of them have a major problem. They occasionally produce a shoot that has lost its variegation and reverted to solid green. I've included photographs of the main offenders in my garden this fall, *Rhododendron ponticum* 'Variegatum' (photo above, far right), *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Maculata' (below) and *Elaeagnus pungens* 'Maculata' (above).

What causes variegation? It involves some complex genetics, but generally, a mutation in leaf cells results in the green chlorophyll being masked or absent. Chlorophyll going missing is not a happy event from the plant's point of view, since the pigment is needed to trap light energy that is used to manufacture food. That's why variegated plants are often not as vigorous as their solid green progenitors.

Commercial growers produce variegated plants by taking cuttings from shoots where variegation has occurred. The cloned shoot is called a "sport."

Apparently, all variegated plants are field tested before being brought to market in order to select those that are least likely to show reversion. Still, in my garden, almost every variegated shrub has produced a pure green shoot from time to time.



In my rhododendron patch, the variegated inmates are 'President Roosevelt', *R. ponticum* 'Variegatum', and 'Goldflimmer'. Of the three, the variegation in 'Goldflimmer' is by far the most stable. The other two, every year or so, produce shoots that have mutated back to a solid green.



The cure for reverted foliage is simple; prune out the entire shoot that holds the solid green leaves. Otherwise, since the reverted foliage is often more vigorous than the variegated foliage, it can eventually grow to dominate the plant and ruin its appearance. The variegated hydrangea provides a good example. The pure green leaves are larger than the variegated ones and the reverted shoot grew much taller than two other shoots which originated at the same point on a main branch.

As you do your fall gardening chores, look closely and you may be surprised, as I was, to see how many of your variegated plants are showing reversion. Then, get out your pruners and perform a bit of corrective surgery.

Ron Knight

Book Review

Tales of the Rose Tree - Ravishing Rhododendrons and Their Travels Around the World, by Jane Brown, Harper Collins, 2004.

Despite what many people seem to think, there are never too many good books on rhododendrons. Jane Brown provides an exhilarating romp through the history of the rhododendron, including the main native sources world-wide and how they were first introduced to the British Isles as an elite "gentleman's" estate plant. The author has not produced another textbook, but rather, a concise, easy to read series of well-researched, interwoven stories or "tales," as her title suggests. These include heroic early plant hunters, jealous aristocrats, and the secret world of hybridisers. The book brings us up to the present day where urban gardeners are flooded with easily accessible plant material at the local garden shop. Early British Columbia pioneers are acknowledged, including George Fraser, Jennie Butchard, and the team of Ted and Mary Greig. There are "tales" about the American Rhododendron Society and current plant hunters (including the Cox dynasty) who are still challenged to track down the elusive genus *Rhododendron* in all its forms in the 21st Century. Some might suggest you put this book on your Christmas list, but I recommend you do not wait.

Jack Toovey

October Program

Whitecap Books describes **Des Kennedy**, our October speaker, as 'someone who tries to see the value in every living thing. A writer, gardener, and advocate of creepy-crawlies, he has made his own unique contribution to the world of nature, conservation, community development and social justice'. Of course, Whitecap Books is Des's publisher, so the praise is not unexpected. But in this case it is also entirely true.

About thirty years ago Des and his wife Sandy purchased and moved to a property on Denman Island. The property at the time had few amenities, to say the least. In fact, aside from the natural beauty of the place, it had no amenities at all. Des and Sandy built their own house, did the necessary clearing and made a garden. Clearly, they joined the 'back to the land' movement with enthusiasm and abandon, and have been devoted to it ever since, actually now feeling a little out of place while visiting the city. All this is described, sometimes in excruciatingly vivid detail, in his second book, *Crazy about Gardening*. So, considering his reluctance to leave the homestead, we are extremely fortunate in having him with us at the VRS.

Aside from working in the woods and the garden, Des is primarily a writer. As Whitecap describes his occupations, he 'enjoys gardening, working in the woods and camping in good weather, and reading, writing and listening to fine music in bad'. In other words, the good-weather experiences are expressed lovingly in bad weather. (I maintain a similar pattern, the only difference being—aside from the camping—that the results are more modest.) Des's first book, *Living Things We Love to Hate*, was described in the *Globe and Mail* as 'a howlingly funny, unbearably enlightening, relentlessly fascinating and endearingly charming collection of essays'. Even on slugs! Referring to his 1998 book *An Ecology of Enchantment: A year in a Country Garden*, the *Globe and Mail* said 'Des Kennedy proves himself one of the best gardening writers in Canada'. Des is also a novelist, with two novels to his credit: *The Garden Club* (1996) and his most recent book *Flame of Separation* (2004). He has contributed to several garden magazines, such as *Garden-Wise* and *Gardening Life*, and appeared on such TV shows as *Harrowsmith*, *Country Life*, *The Canadian Gardener*, *Guerrilla Gardener*, and the CBC's *Middy*. He was the host and co-writer of the 2001 documentary mini-series entitled *Reinventing the World*, and is currently working on another series. Anyone who is familiar with Des Kennedy through any of the above media will know that he disseminates knowledge and wisdom so painlessly that the recipient hardly knows it is being inflicted upon him. Both his gardening and his entertaining are 'extreme'.

Aside from bringing humour, irreverence and his passion for gardening, along with real substance, to his lectures, Des Kennedy 'has been active for many years in environmental and social justice issues, including co-organizing the civil disobedience campaign in Strathcona Provincial Park in 1988' and having the distinction of 'getting arrested at Clayoquot Sound in 1993'.

Des Kennedy has a distinct Irish identity. He has a spiritual home in Ireland. Which is a good thing, since he has never had a real home there. Born in Liverpool (which is about as Irish a milieu as you can get outside Ireland), he came to Canada

when he was 10. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in philosophy from the Passionate Monastic Seminary in Jamaica, New York, with the intention of pursuing a religious life. He has left that, evidently, far behind, but he has not left Ireland behind, and will lecture to the VRS the evening of October 21st on '**The Gardens and Landscapes of Ireland**'.

Joe Ronsley

VRS Trophy Winners (2004 Show)

Frank Dorsey

- Best Species Plant: *Rhododendron macrosepalum*
Gerry Emerson Trophy for Best Plant in Division 100
- Best Blotched Rhododendron Truss: *R. 'Mrs G. W. Leak'*
Claydian Cup for Best Blotched Rhododendron Truss in Division 2200 & Classes 2310.08 & 2320.08
- Best Species Spray: *R. austrinum*

E. & L. Hemminger

- Highest Hybrid Aggregate Points
Wally Zeglat Memorial Trophy for Highest Aggregate Points in Divisions 2200, 2300, 2400 and 2500
- Best Hybrid Truss: *R. 'Lem's Stormcloud'*
B.C. Nursery Trades Trophy for Best Hybrid Rhododendron Truss in Divisions 2200, 2300, 2400 and 2500
- Best Red Hybrid Truss: *R. 'Lem's Stormcloud'*
Teamster's Joint Council #36 Best Red Rhododendron Truss in Division 2200 and Classes 2310.08 and 2320.08
- Best in Show, of any type, species or hybrid: *R. 'Lem's Stormcloud'*

Gerard Picher

- Best Walloper: *R. 'Pink Walloper'*
Harold Johnson Memorial Trophy for Best Rhododendron Mega-truss in Division 2500

John Priestman

- Best Potted Plant: *R. asterochnoum*
E.J. Trayling Award for Best Rhododendron Plant in Division 1000
- Best Container Grown Plant: *R. asterochnoum*
Patio Plant Trophy for Best Container Grown Plant in Division 1600

Bill and Suzanne Spohn

- Best Species Truss: *R. yakushimanum* 'Ken Janek'
Milton Wildfong Trophy for Best Species Truss in Division 2100

Ian Forsyth

- Best Hybrid Spray: *R. 'Irene Koster'*
Langton Memorial Trophy for Best Deciduous Azalea Truss in Class 2232 or 2332
- Highest Novice Aggregate Points
Dr. Walter Otto Memorial Trophy for Highest Aggregate Points in Classes 3110 and 3120

Barbara Forsyth

- Best Novice Entry
Ron Round Memorial Trophy for Best Novice Entry in Class 3110

Jacque and Tony Clayton

- Best Triflorum Spray: *R. yunnanense*
Triflora Trophy for Best Species Truss or Spray in subsection 2112.25