

# Indumentum

## Newsletter of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society

January Meeting:  
Thursday, January 20th 7:30 p.m., Floral Hall at VanDusen Botanical Garden

Program:  
Annual General Meeting and Election of the 2005 Executive Members &  
Members' Slides



*Vancouver Chapter*

### 2004 Executive

President: Ron Knight  
Vice President: Louis Peterson  
Past President: Gerry Gibbens  
Treasurer: Barbara Sherman  
Secretary: Bill Spohn  
Membership: Carole Conlin  
Newsletter: Justice / Major  
Program: Joe Ronsley  
Directors:  
Lothar Mischke (3 years)  
Bill Herbst (2 years)

Education: Louis Peterson  
Advertising: Tony Clayton  
Publicity: Gail Lehman  
Library: Jasbir Gill  
Refreshments: Mary Dorsey

*Photo above of East Creek valley,  
by Adrian Dorst,  
at [www.wildernesscommittee.org](http://www.wildernesscommittee.org)*

### President's Message - January 2005

This month, my two-year term as VRS President ends. The time has passed very quickly for me and the job has been most enjoyable. I have especially appreciated all the volunteer hours that members have donated behind the scenes to help make our VRS meetings and special events run smoothly.

The purpose of this final President's Message is threefold:

- 1) To provide a report to our members about the "health" of the VRS and the changes that have occurred over the past two years.
- 2) To thank the wonderful people on my executive for the leadership and support they have given.
- 3) To look to the future and suggest issues that may be worthy of consideration.

**Sale and Show** improvement has been a major focus for this executive. Early in 2003, we decided to take on all of the Sale and Show leadership positions, to have the president assume the responsibilities of Sale and Show Chairman, and to use executive meeting time for planning. We also decided to go to another location, rather than VanDusen Gardens, because of high rental and equipment costs, major setup problems, and a cold, windy sales area. That decision led us to Park and Tilford Gardens in 2003 and to UBC in 2004. At both sales, we made enough profit (\$3200 in 2003 and \$2500 in 2004) to meet all of our yearly commitments and to make a \$1000 donation to the UBC lath house project. However, we saw the need to move our Sale and Show into a much busier, and developing area of the Lower Mainland. As a result, our 2005 event will be held at the Port Coquitlam Recreation Complex on April 23<sup>rd</sup>.

## President's Message continued

A **Membership Questionnaire** was given out one year ago to find out what changes members would like to see in the VRS. For the most part, the questionnaire showed that our regular attendees are happy with the current program. Some good suggestions from members were implemented, among them, a Dollar Table and a new raffle format.



**Membership** in the VRS at the end of 2004 was down almost 10% to 179. Although we took in new members during the year, their numbers were exceeded by people who did not renew. **Carole Conlin**, as Membership Chair, has taken extremely good care of all of us. In addition to assisting in distributing our newsletters and handling our membership table, Carole has introduced new members in each meeting and given them gift rhododendrons. She has also instituted a Ways and Means Committee to find new ways to raise money for the society.

**Finances** have not been a problem for the VRS in the past, nor should they be in the foreseeable future. **Barbara Sherman**, our Treasurer, has done a superb job of keeping our books and managing our investments. We now have approximately \$8 000 in our operating account and \$30 000 in savings. We have been able to avoid increasing our membership dues. Dollar Table, raffle, food table, and Ways and Means money (totaling \$965 in 2004) covered almost all of our Floral Hall rental and refreshments. Thank you to all of our generous members who donated to these fund-raising

The **VRS library** has been reorganized and the catalogue has been made available for publication on our website thanks to Vice President, **Louis Peterson**. In addition, Louis has arranged for members to purchase Whitecap books at a 35% discount, with a small profit going to the Society. As Education Coordinator, Louis has offered a wide variety of topics at the beginning of our meetings, in response to feedback from members on an Education Questionnaire. Louis has been a very hard-working and enthusiastic Vice President and I have been most grateful for his support.

**Programming** has continued to be of high quality thanks to the outstanding international and local speakers that **Joe Ronsley** has invited to speak at VRS meetings. A richly deserved Bronze Medal was awarded to Joe in 2004 for these efforts and for his long standing commitment to the VRS. Thanks also to **Joanne Ronsley** for serving on the executive as a Director in 2003 and for helping billet and entertain speakers over the past 8 years.

**Technological change** has had a very positive effect on the VRS during the past two years. Our monthly newsletter now appears in full colour on our own website on the internet, e-mail has become the preferred method for executive communications, and we recently experienced our first VRS meeting with 100% digital audio-visual presentations.

Our new **VRS Website** at [www.rhodo.citymax.com](http://www.rhodo.citymax.com) has continued to expand and improve with Secretary **Bill Spohn** as web-master. The site is beautifully illustrated and provides marvelous publicity as well as a wealth of information about rhododendrons and the VRS. Visit our website for an electronic copy of the membership application / renewal and the benefits of membership in the VRS and discounts at selected nurseries.

Photo above  
R. 'Bric-à-brac' by  
Ron Knight.



## President's Message continued

**Improving communication with growers**, has been another goal of the executive during 2003/2004. Bill Herbst has taken on this task and has made significant improvements. In addition, as Parks Foreman for Port Coquitlam, Bill has made the arrangements for our 2005 Sale and Show to be held at their beautiful, and busy, Recreation Complex.

The **Indumentum**, with **Doug and Karen Justice** as editors, has evolved from a black and white monthly newsletter to a magnificent, full-colour, on-line magazine, available for downloading from the UBC website at [www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org/vrs](http://www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org/vrs). As I attend meetings of B.C. rhododendron club presidents, I often hear comments that indicate that The Indumentum has become the standard by which other rhododendron club magazines are measured.

Editorship of the **Indumentum** has been taken over in 2005 by **Todd and Shannon Major**. As a Director on the VRS executive, Todd made arrangements to host our very successful 2003 Sale and Show at Park and Tilford Gardens and revised and updated our publicity and media database for that event. He also began work on a new VRS logo and has been a popular speaker at our meetings.



**Garden tours** for VRS members have always been a highlight of the spring season. **Lothar Mischke**, as coordinator, introduced new gardens for us to visit in 2004 and opened up the program to members of all rhododendron clubs in B.C. He is currently exploring possibilities for bus tours that will take our members to outstanding gardens outside of the Lower Mainland. Photos of *R. 'Bo-peep'* (above) and *R. 'Christmas Cheer'* (left) by Ron Knight.

Finally, I want to thank **Gerry Gibbens** for his work on the executive as Past President. Gerry's advice proved to be invaluable, especially in my rookie year as president.

Looking to the future, I see a stable, prosperous, well-organized Vancouver Rhododendron Society that will continue in the fine traditions that members have enjoyed over past decades. Leadership for the next two years will be provided by an excellent executive, composed of many of the same people who have served during my term as president.

As you can see from the above report, the 2003/2004 executive's agenda has been a full one and they have accomplished a great deal in two years. However, there are five major issues that they have discussed but have not had time to deal with completely. I leave these issues for future consideration by the society.

- 1) Developing a plan for using the \$30 000 that has been on our accounts for a decade.
- 2) Finding ways to attract to our meetings, the large percentage of our membership who live in the Lower Mainland but do not attend regularly.
- 3) Publishing a history of the VRS, which Clive Justice is compiling, on our website.
- 4) Exploring the use of our garden tours as a major fundraiser.
- 5) Evaluating the relevance of all programming to both novice and veteran members, with the ARS mission in mind:  
"to encourage interest in and to disseminate information about the genus Rhododendron".

In conclusion, I want to thank the membership for allowing me to serve as VRS President. Since joining the society ten years ago, I have benefited immeasurably and have welcomed the opportunity during the past two years to give something back.

*Ron Knight*



## NEWS AND NOTES

### SPECIES STUDY DAYS 2005



Steve Hootman has hosted the Species Study Days for the past three years and has indicated a willingness to host again in 2005. The study sessions will be held at the Rhododendron Species Foundation (RSF) in Federal Way, Washington. The sessions will take place on Saturdays from 10:00 am - 4:00 pm occurring January through to April.

The study sessions will follow the format of previous years with formal instruction and plant identification in the morning from 10:00 am – 12:00. In the afternoon, a tour of the garden and identification and discussion of rhododendrons in bloom at that time. The dates have yet to be confirmed but will be arranged to avoid conflict with the ARS Convention in Victoria in April and a visit to China in May. The cost will remain \$140.00 for all four sessions.

Participants from Vancouver Island are most welcome and to reduce the expense of an overnight stay, accommodation has generally been available with a host from the lower mainland on the Friday evening. Arrangements will be made to provide lunch for those interested and car pool arrangements have worked well in the past.

Many of the previous participants have already indicated their intention to attend in 2005. The renewal by many previous participants is a direct reflection of the immense pleasure and joy that we have experienced as a result of Steve's enthusiasm. Facilities at the RSF garden are limited and a maximum of 30 individuals can be accommodated.

Those individuals who would like to secure their attendance are requested to contact Mike Bale at (604) 853-8839 (day time) as soon as possible.

### Advertise your Event:

To advertise in *Indumentum*, contact Tony Clayton at 604 921 7947 or e-mail him at [tclayton@telus.net](mailto:tclayton@telus.net) or contact the *Indumentum* Editor by visiting [www.rhodo.citymax](http://www.rhodo.citymax) and click on Contact Us.

### Indumentum Subscription Rates

*Canada - 9 issues \$25.00*

*US & Overseas - 9 issues \$28.00 US*

### Membership

*VRS Membership \$25.00*

*Associate VRS Membership \$10.00  
(Member of another ARS Chapter  
in Canada)*

*Associate VRS Membership \$10.00  
US (Member of another ARS  
Chapter outside of Canada)*



## NEWS AND NOTES

### VRS Executive Nominations

The Nominating Committee presents the following Executive slate for 2005, to be ratified at the January Annual General Meeting:

President : Louis Peterson

Vice President : Lothar Mischke

Past President : Ron Knight\*

Treasurer : Barbara Sherman

Secretary : Bill Spohn

Membership : Carole Conlin

Newsletter Editor : Todd & Shannon Major

Program : Louis Peterson & Carole Conlin

Director : Gerard Picher (3 years)

Director : John Priestman (2 years)\*\*

Director : Bill Herbst (1 year)\*

\*Does not need ratification.

\*\*Completing the term of Lothar Mischke.

Any VRS members who wish to make further nominations for any of these positions should send in the name of the nominee, along with his or her acceptance of the nomination in writing, and the endorsement of five VRS members. No additional nominations for this Executive were submitted before the annual January 1 deadline.



### Library Pages

Check your bookshelves for possible VRS library books languishing there—they may wish to join their fellows in the VRS Library! To summarize our holdings, we not only have many books on Rhododendrons and Azaleas (of course), but also on categories

such as Alpines, Bonsai, Climbers, Companion Plants, (Bulbs, Ferns, Hellebores, Hostas, Irises, Paeonias, Primulas) Roses, Garden Design, Greenhouses, Native Plants, Perennials, Pests & Diseases, Plant Explorations, Propagation, Pruning, References and Dictionaries, Trees & Shrubs, Succulents, and more!



Photos: *R.* 'Olive' (opposite), *R.* 'Snow Sprite' by Ron Knight

### Fundraising at the Dollar Table

*As suggested by the membership, we are experimenting with a dollar table at each VRS meeting. Here's how it works; members can bring divisions, rooted cuttings, or seedlings from their gardens to each VRS meeting. All healthy plants are welcome as long as they are labelled with the correct common or scientific name. 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.*

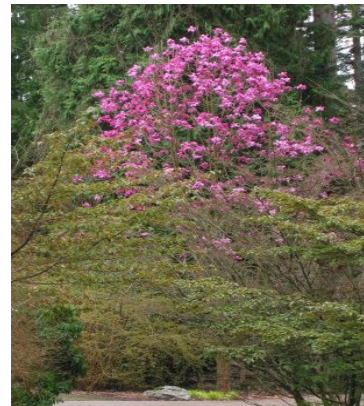
*Contributions to the Dollar Table and the Raffle Table help offset the rental of the Floral Hall. Plants, books, fresh eggs, and old bricks are always welcome.*



## NEWS AND NOTES

Each spring, the tree magnolias at UBC Botanical Garden attract visitors in-the-know, and always make an impression on any who happen upon them unaware at that time. Rarely-seen selections of beautiful Asian species, the magnolias in the David C. Lam Asian Garden were originally brought to UBC from some of the great estates of southern England. Many of these beautiful plants are now more than twenty years old, and are over 10 metres (30 feet) tall. Regrettably, most of these spectacular plants are never commercially available in Canada; however, a plan to propagate some of the choicest of them was put into place a couple of years ago, and a limited number of these (*Magnolia sprengeri* and *M. campbellii* cultivars) are now available for sale. Thanks are due to VRS member and UBC Friend of the Garden Charlie Sale and Fraser Valley Rhododendron Society member Don Martyn for hatching and organizing the plan, and to commercial nurseryman Paul Reimer for his propagation expertise and growing facilities.

Magnolias may be propagated from seed, from cuttings, or they can be grafted. Grafting ensures that the distinctive qualities of a selection are maintained (seedlings are variable and do not come “true”) and plants come into flower more quickly than those propagated from seed or cuttings. The cultivars that are presently available for sale are grafted on *Magnolia kobus* (northern star magnolia) under-stock. *Kobus* is hardy and adaptable to growing in a wide variety of soils. The scions (the upper part of the grafted combination) will grow normally atop these rootstocks, but will never achieve great size, as *M. kobus* rootstock does confer some size control (a further benefit for most customers). Ultimate heights will probably be in the range of 7 to 10 metres; i.e., suitable for smaller gardens. Sunny locations are preferred for best flowering, and rich, well-drained soil and protection from northeast winds is also recommended. Note that selections of *Magnolia sprengeri* are hardier than *M. campbellii* and are usually more successful in inland areas, away from the ocean, that experience temperatures of minus 18°C (0°F). Both species can be touched by late spring frosts as they generally flower early in March—*M. campbellii* a week or two earlier than *M. sprengeri*. For this reason, it is best to site them near large trees or buildings, which afford considerable protection when temperatures dip.



There are approximately 50 trees available for sale. All are well-rooted and most are in two-gallon containers. The majority of the trees are priced at \$55.00 and include the following.

***Magnolia campbellii* ‘Ethel Hillier’** is a superb cultivar originally selected at Hillier Nursery, Winchester, England. The large white tepals are flushed pink at their bases. This tree is one of the hardier selections of the Himalayan form of the species (*Magnolia campbellii* subsp. *campbellii*), and is rarely offered for sale in North America.

***Magnolia campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata* ‘Lanarth’** was a seed-collection by the great Scottish plant hunter George Forrest in 1924 in NW Yunnan, China. It is named after the Cornish estate where the seed was planted. ‘Lanarth’ has a narrow, upright habit and sumptuous magenta purple flowers.

***Magnolia campbellii* subsp. *mollicomata* ‘Borde Hill’** (photo above by Daniel Mosquin) came from the same Forrest seed-lot as ‘Lanarth’ and is named for the Cornish garden where it first grew. Both ‘Lanarth’ and ‘Borde Hill’ are among the darkest flowered of all temperate Asian *Magnolia* species selections.



***Magnolia sprengeri*** seed was collected by Ernest ‘Chinese’ Wilson in 1901 in western Hubei in China. Seed distributed to Caerhays in Cornwall, resulted in a single individual that flowered and was named ‘Diva’ (photo left by Daniel Mosquin). Its elegant cup-shaped flowers are rose-carmine outside and light pink inside.

***Magnolia sprengeri* ‘Eric Savill’** is a small- to medium-sized tree with cerise-pink-backed white tepals. Another ‘Diva’ seedling, it originated as a seedling in the Savill Garden at Windsor Great Park.

***Magnolia sprengeri* ‘Copeland Court’**, another of ‘Diva’s seedlings, is a small- to medium-sized tree with a symmetrical, spreading habit and ample, uniformly deep, clear-pink flowers.

To be added to the advanced sales list, call Charlie Sale (604 929 5706), or after January 16<sup>th</sup>, UBC Shop in the Garden (604 822 4529).





*Companions: fellowship, qualified to be agreeable in company.*

*Welcome to a monthly feature in the Indumentum called "Companions". I hope this feature will burst with submitted articles from all of our membership sharing their knowledge and insight describing favourite plants and accoutrements that are deemed suitable as companions for rhododendrons.*

***Camellia sasanqua***  
***by Philip Downey***

This fall has been exceptional for *Camellia sasanqua*. The long dry summer hot spell combined with minimal frost and moist mild weather to Christmas set up an extended period of flower from October on. If the weather continues to be cooperative, the flowers will continue to February. *Camellia sasanqua* has a range of forms which pass from white to pink-white fusion (apple-blossom) to pink-red. The subtle colour display this season is striking among the glossy, green leaves. What can beat arriving home in the gloom of a winter afternoon to this cheery sight? A personal favourite, only just, is the larger white form with a gold center. The plant is in a prime protected location by the garage wall. Mind you, the common apple blossom is showing how nice a plant it really is. The *Camellia sasanqua* I have at present are either hybrids or cultivars of species, I am still exploring. I got them haphazardly so names of forms are missing. Many years of soggy weather or early cold snaps (especially polar air) do the flowers in. Still, the plants all the same are quite hardy. Nevertheless, the delicate blooms that do come out, albeit ever so briefly, make this plant worthwhile.

***Plants in Bloom: Winter Flowers***  
***by Douglas Justice***

Here on the mild southwest coast of British Columbia, a surprising number of plants are flowering at this time of year. Some of them are rhododendrons. By and large, however, these are the precocious blooms of normally spring-flowering species and hybrids. On my last walk round the Botanical Garden before the solstice, I noted scarlet trusses of *Rhododendron thomsonii*, barely open lemony flowers of *R. lutescens*, the yellow-green of *R. luteiflorum* and the white blossoms of *R. mucronulatum* f. *album*, but have to admit that I was more impressed with a number of non-rhododendrons that were in full, unrestrained bloom.

Some years are clearly better than others for winter flowering plants, and this looks to be a spectacular season, at least in Vancouver, although I'm writing this before the predicted January 3<sup>rd</sup> plunge to minus 9°C. *Jasminum nudiflorum*, the winter jasmine, is a case in point. Last year, it flowered sparingly and sporadically (its typical behaviour at the coast, I believe), but now each of its thin, grass-green arching stems is packed with clear, primrose yellow blooms. The flowers are so light that the whole shrub appears to hover, higher above the ground than its connection to the soil could possibly allow.

*Plants in Bloom: Winter Flowers continued*  
by Douglas Justice



Most people know of *Clematis armandii*, and some think it's the only evergreen clematis we can grow. Although a rather awkward, coarse plant, it has fabulous, glossy, ribbed leaves and impressive, flattened white flowers, and it is much coveted. Like many rhodies, it opens an occasional early raceme at this time of year, and can be impressive when this happens. Another evergreen, *C. cirrhosa*, is a smaller plant with delicate leaves, wiry stems and bell-shaped flowers. At UBC, we grow one in the Winter Garden against a sheltered wall where it thrives. This year, the plant is absolutely festooned with its tiny, spotty, coffee-stained flowers. Its Lilliputian beauty makes it a favourite of all who see it, but it is unfortunately rather tender and easily lost in a hard winter.

Nearby, *Sarcococca bookeriana* var. *humilis* (Christmas box), *Viburnum* × *bodnantense* (Bodnant viburnum), *Chionanthus praecox* (winter sweet), *Mahonia* × *media* 'Arthur Menzies' (hybrid mahonia) and *Lonicera* × *purpusii* (winter honeysuckle) compete for sweetest fragrance honours. Aromas associate strongly with memory and I can't mention winter honeysuckle without remembering my year gardening in England (see *Indumentum* Vol. 35 No. 5, February 2004). The entire Bodnant viburnum grex (a grex denotes all of the offspring of a particular hybridization—in this case *V. farreri* × *V. grandiflorum*) is planted in the Winter Garden. Their flowers all smell of jasmine and baby powder. The commonest cultivar is 'Dawn' (often called 'Pink Dawn'), which is probably the best overall in terms of flower power, but its siblings are not without charm. They are the nearly white 'Deben' and the smaller, more narrow-tubed 'Charles Lamont'.

Speaking of grexes, 'Arthur Menzies' is one of a half-dozen *Mahonia* × *media* offspring. The parents are two Asian species, the deliciously fragrant but sprawling *M. japonica*, and the tender, Chinese *M. lomariifolia*, which contributes spiny-tipped, long-pinnate glaucous leaves and a stiff habit to most of the hybrids. The cross has been made on a variety of occasions and has resulted in a number of excellent cultivars, including the more familiar, commercially available 'Charity' (photo right by the author). Their fragrance is wonderful, and I associate it with that of the even stronger, sweeter sarcococcas at Christmas time. My memories derive from the years I worked at Massot Nursery, where it was common practice to over-winter broadleaf evergreens in enormous plastic-covered shade houses. In my mind, I can see the plants, and smell (or remember the smell of) the mixing aromas of these flowers with that of mud, sawdust, fertilizers and rotting timbers.



Finally, plants with little or no fragrance are worth noting (and having), as well, since they're often very showy. High on this list are hellebores, particularly the pure white *Helleborus niger* (Christmas rose) and a number of camellias, including the delicately fragrant *Camellia sasanqua*, *C. cuspidata* and the diminutive *C. transnokoensis*, whose candy-striped flower buds are considered by many to be as attractive as its open flowers. There is more to admire (of course), and even with the coming minus 9°C, we'll have plenty to see in February. Rhododendrons, I'm sure.