



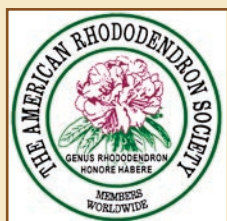
INDUMENTUM



VANCOUVER
Rhododendron
SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

End of Season,
No General Meeting.
Potluck Dinner hosted by
Joe and Joanne Ronsley
250 Ocean View Road,
Lions Bay.
Time: Starting at 3:00 pm
Date: June 12, 2005



Vancouver Chapter

VRS Website: www.rhodo.citymax.com

Title Photo Design by
Grant Oberg and Todd Major



What's flowering at UBC By Douglas Justice

Following the VRS tour of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at UBC Botanical Garden, the co-editor has been hounding me for an article. Perhaps a better title for this, an article for a rhododendron society newsletter, should be "What's Not in Bloom." Though the assembled throng that day was treated to many plants, few of them were blooming rhododendrons. Being primarily a "species" garden, UBC has little to offer past the middle of May in this regard. But as I'd like to avoid being contrary, at least in print, I'll provide a list of what is still in bloom (writing at the end of May).

Rhododendron campylogynum: The tiny tubular pruinose-purple flowers of this species are unusual as they stand like miniature sentinels above the tight, aromatic foliage. Darling. Photo right *R. campylogynum* by Kenneth Cox.



R. cinnabarinum subsp. *cinnabarinum* and subsp. *xanthocodon* (photo left by Eleanor Philp): While there are only a few remnants of bloom left, the remarkable colours of these narrow bell-shaped flowers are remarkable. It doesn't hurt that the leaves are also beautifully glaucous and aromatic.

R. 'Daphnoides' (photo right by Eleanor Philp): In my estimation, this is a filthy hybrid with little to recommend it, made worse by its masquerading as a species in many collections. Purple flowers above distorted convex leaves.



R. fauriei: The form at UBC has squinny flowers (perhaps they're all like this) with faint candy striping. Photo left *R. brachycarpum* ssp. *fauriei* by Sally & John Perkins.

R. fortunei Houlstonii Group: These were spectacular during the tour—fragrant, ample flowers of the palest pink on sturdy, handsome plants. The flowers are now marked and fading fast. Photos left and right, by UBC Botanical Garden, *R. fortunei* 'Mrs. Butler'



See "Species in Bloom" on page 2

R. kiusianum: Every form of this diminutive, variable evergreen azalea species is worth a look.

R. 'Maxwellii': Now just going over, this azalea deserves wider recognition and use. Large (really large), orange-red flowers punctuate low, wide plants with clean, pointed evergreen foliage. Nearby, a number of un-named (labels lost) Satsuki azaleas are in flower. One particularly attractive plant has pink flowers, white flowers and pink-and-white striped flowers on different parts of the same plant.

R. degronianum subsp. *yakushimanum*: The extensive display at UBC is impressive, with plants at every stage of flowering and leaf emergence. Like other dense, rounded plants, this species is rather inelegant and often lacks the exuberance one generally expects from a species rhododendron. En masse, however, a different character becomes apparent. Photo above *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum* by Stuart Imrie.



R. 'Mucronatum': Not to be confused with the February-flowering deciduous rhododendron, *R. mucronulatum*, this stunning azalea has masses of enormous, pure white flowers. It was finished weeks ago, but it is so good, it deserves to be mentioned. Like 'Maxwellii' this broadly spreading plant has clean, dark evergreen foliage.

R. trichanthum: This is the latest flowering and one of the darkest of all the triflorums (the flowers are purple with a biscuit-coloured throat flash). Its hairy leaves are also attractive. Photo right, *R. trichanthum* by Hans Eiberg.



I've said it before (and I'll say it again): sod the flowers!; the best reason for growing rhododendrons is for their foliage. There are 12 months in the year, ... the best foliage is generally found on species, not hybrids (there may be exceptions, but I'm unaware of them), and right now is the very best time to see developing leaves. The most obvious attraction with leaves is indumentum, with



R. campanulatum subsp. *eruginosum* (very cool indumentum) its subtle textures and contrasts and ultimately, its colour transitions (usually from light to dark), but I find that waxes, which are usually confined to upper surfaces in indumented species are also an overlooked feature, and that the posture of the expanding new growth is at least as appealing as vestiture (Photo left by UBC Botanical Garden). Then, there's leaf scent, a subject on which I've suffered some ridicule, as a number of my friends and correspondents think I'm imagining the soap-and-essential oil fragrances produced by the glands on the leaf-backs of a number of species, especially those of the subsection Taliensia. Vindication of a sort came when a previous article of mine (Good Foliage is Hard to Beat, Indumentum 34:1, September, 2002) extolling the virtues of these plants and their understated perfumes appeared in the recently published 2005 ARS Convention commemorative book. So there.



R. wightii



R. megeratum



R. lacteum

NEWS AND NOTES

Show & Sale Review By Louis Peterson

The Show & Sale meets several of the purposes of the VRS, one of which is to promote interest in and knowledge of the genus rhododendron. We do this by advertising the Society to the public and to potential members at our Truss Show and Plant Sale, and by raising funds in various ways for the programs of the VRS. Our Show & Sale (like others) is a somewhat fragile event, in that its success depends on factors over which we have little or no control, among them the weather and other competing events. Success also depends in very large measure on the contributions of time (often many hours) and energy by volunteers who work in a collegial fashion on the various parts of the event to make them all work well. These parts include advertising to the public, site set-up and take down, the truss display, the judging of displays, grower participation, cashiers table, information/membership table, and last but not least, provision of refreshments for volunteers and other associates. All of these aspects have to work well for the common good, and hopefully everyone has some fun in participating in the whole enterprise. (Moving those heavy tables is a great joy!)

This year the Show & Sale was held at a new spacious indoor site – the PoCo Recreation Centre, well liked by the growers and, though sales were down approximately 50% compared to last year's Show and Sale, the venue was an attractive one for the public. A special note of thanks goes to our volunteer "workers", to members exhibiting trusses, to the poster distribution group, to the judges and their assistants, and to the Executive, all of whom neglected their own gardens on a beautiful sunny Friday and Saturday in favour of our important VRS Show & Sale event.



Thanks To Our Volunteers

To our knowledgeable growers who supply a fabulous selection of rhododendron species and hybrids:

Trevor and Doreen Badminton, Les and Bev Clay, Harold Fearing, Diane Kehoe and John Eastman, Sue and Chris Klapwijk, Vern Finley and David Shantz.

Our Judges and their assistants:

Alleyne Cook, Bill Herbst, Douglas Justice, Garth Wedemire Justine Crawford, John Priestman, Sean Rafferty and Kathleen Share.

The staff at the Port Coquitlam Recreation Complex for their help setting up and taking down all those tables.

A special thank you to Gail Lehman, who retires from her position of publicizing the VRS and the Show and Sale!

To Roger Low for his fantastic Bonsai display.

To those who helped in one or more other areas of Show and Sale operation and planning, we could not have done it without all of you!

Meg Brown	Jackie Clayton	Lothar Mischke
Tony Clayton	Carole Conlin	Cindy Mischke
Ron Feicht	Barbara Forsyth	Bill Spohn
Ian Forsyth	Bill Herbst	Todd Major
Sue Liam	Louis Peterson	Shannon Major
Glen Patterson	Norm Moysa	Frank Dorsey
John Priestman	Barb Sherman	
Elaine Stevens	Vern Finley	




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R. luteiflorum

NEWS AND NOTES

2005 Vancouver Rhododendron Society Show and Sale Trophy Winners

Winner	Category		Trophy
Diane Kehoe	Best Species Truss	<i>R. metternichii</i>	Ted Greig Memorial
Vern Finley	Best Spray	<i>R. augustinii</i>	Milton Wildfong Cup
John Priestman	Best Species Plant	<i>R. asterochnoum</i>	Gerry Emerson
Vern Finley	Best Blotched Truss	'Mrs. G.W. Leak'	Claydian Cup
UBC	Best Species Collection		W.M. Stephen Memorial
Frank Dorsey	Best in Show	'Biskra'	Park & Tilford Silver Tray
Bill Herbst	Best Yellow or Orange	'Lady Chamberlain'	Dr. Robert Rhodes
Vern Finley	Best Red Truss	'Halfdan Lem'	Teamsters
Vern Finley	Hybrid Aggregate		Wolfgang Zeglat
Vern Finley	Species Aggregate		Tom Tatum
John Priestman	Best Plant	<i>R. rex</i> - cross	E.J. Trayling
Vern Finley	Best Hybrid Truss	'Snow Queen'	B.C. Nursery Trade
Vern Finley	Best Azalea Spray	<i>R. albrechtii</i>	George Fraser
John Priestman	Best Container Plant	<i>R. rex</i> - cross	Container Grown 7"



R. concayenensis



R. dekatanum



R. valentinianum



R. xanthostephanum



R. luteum

50TH GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY



R. flavidum

A FINLEY STORY

What possible links, you might ask, could exist among a violinist, a rural forest, the medical profession, short wave radio, exotic postcards of the West Coast, the genus rhododendron, small planes and a teaspoon? And thereby hangs a tale.

In the early 1930's, a young son of a railway conductor, whose performance in Grade 12 was less than spectacular, had a special interest in playing the violin. This pursuit led to an affection for a young nurse with similar interests. Perhaps it was the nurse, and an interest in ham radio, that contributed to lack lustre Grade 12. From the nursing connection there blossomed an aspiration to become a doctor, resulting in a diligence that led to admission to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Alberta. Meanwhile, the aforesaid nurse went a separate way, "The lucky one", quote Vern. But as fortune would have it, another Nightingale-follower, the daughter of a railway engineer, with roots in the small towns of Jasper and Hanna, Alberta, took up the mantle of caring for the sick and needy. It was at the Misericordia Hospital in Edmonton that Cupid arranged nurse's training for Vern, and an internship for Gordon.

Both Gordon and Vern moved to Vancouver, Gordon to intern at Shaughnessy Hospital "There was too little to do at Misericordia", and Vern to Grace Hospital "The West Coast was so extraordinarily beautifully green", says Vern. Gordon secured and built up a successful medical practice in Surrey, and he and Vern were married in 1949. Several years later they acquired an inaccessible, heavily wooded hillside acreage a few miles to the South of the Pattullo Bridge. To the North lay the sweep of the broad Fraser River, the expanding City developments, and the view of the distant North Shore mountains. A house in which Gordon and Vern have lived for 47 years, a ham radio tower and an access road were soon completed. The early rhododendron horticulturists – the Trembaths, Len Living, Bill Flavell, Ed Trayling, and others were the friends, mentors and associates of the Finley's.



The Forest Vincennes, Painted By Camille Bombois in 1928

One fine day in 1962, Jim Livingstone presented Vern with a teaspoon of germinated seeds, with the vision that their place was ideal for the growing of rhododendrons, a vision that has indeed come to pass. Many 40-year veteran plants stand today as magnificent testimony to those early ventures. "For Pete's sake, what is a rhododendron?" said Gordon at the time. The teaspoon was soon followed by regular orders to the ARS and RHS seed catalogues. Shortly thereafter, on a memorable Mother's Day, Gordon was enticed to Len Living's nursery on Lulu Island, where he was relieved of many dollars in exchange for a commensurate number of these dubious plants. Thus the Finley Nursery was born.

While Vern sought out or created the best yellows of the day, the luteums and other fragrantissimas, the yakushmanum crosses, and her seed growing, hybridizing and species propagating enterprises flourished. Gordon also applied his scalpel skills to the propagation and grafting of cuttings, using the proven rootstocks of *R. ponticum* and *R. 'Cunningham White'*. It is possible that even now the rhodos quake at his approach.

With a young family of five to nurture, Vern considered the rhodo the ideal garden plant – "once established, they look after themselves" (wish my plants would do likewise!). The high canopy of mature native maples provided ideal light conditions for the young garden, but was a source of concern during the mid-1960's Freda hurricane and 1999 gales. The latter event, replete with downed trees and power disruption, added considerable drama to the family's Golden Wedding Anniversary celebration.

From teaspoonful beginnings, the Finleys have established a nursery of considerable significance for rhododendrons in the gardens and parks of the Lower Mainland. The family enterprise - Dad, Mum & kids, would pot on an annual production of 5-6,000 seedlings in a remarkably short time. How many is that over a 30-year period? Probably every club and society sale has benefited from the Finley plants, as do many of today's landscapers. The Vern trusses have long been a mainstay of the VRS Show. While many of the Finley hybrids are worthy of registration, this honour is currently reserved for one, the Burnaby Centennial, a brilliant *R. 'Leona' x R. 'Etta Burrows'* cross. The Vancouver Rhododendron Society awarded the Bronze Medal of the American Rhododendron Society to Vern in 1984 for her exceptional contributions to rhododendron horticulture. It is the highest award that local Chapters can bestow.

See "A Finley" on page 6

During my visit, a small plane droned high overhead. At one with the pilot in the sky, Gordon reflected on his own flying days, a sport taken on (no doubt with encouragement from ham radio colleague Dr. Jim Trembath) as he approached his fiftieth year. And, to be on the safe side, Vern soon obtained her own pilot's licence, "just in case Gordon fell out". Following in parental footsteps, the "children" are excellent gardeners ("it's in the genes"), and Sue, a horticulturist in her own right, has her wings too, just like Mum and Dad. May the rhododendron tradition of Vern and Gordon continue to flourish in the hands of Sue and husband Chris. Call Finley's Rhododendrons in the evenings for an appointment, 604-888-0920 or 604-581-5100. This article is based on conversations during a visit to Gordon and Vern Finley's home on May 21, 2005, with apologies for inaccuracies and authorship licence taken.

By Louis K. Peterson.

2005 VRS Executive

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"Shape The Change"

Commentary on The Changing VRS

As with all things in life, change is good, even if it's difficult. 2005 marks 50 years of VRS success and like other societies the VRS is facing a crossroads. Our age demographic and membership mix is slowly but surely changing, to what, who knows. In some measure we are defined by how we handle change. One thing's for sure, we must prepare or suffer the same fate of other defunct organizations. Our membership participation rates are less than those of comparable clubs, we lack an abundance of new members to keep us vital and VRS membership has been declining. We are becoming irrelevant, outdated and eventually we will fade into the oblivion of time, nothing more than a pleasant memory in someone's photo album, unless we act. What can be done to prepare and prevent VRS extinction, that depends on our members, the Executive and our collective willingness to embrace new ideas and change with the needs of the times.

Some of the pressing issues we must deal with are:

1. Planning for the pending demographic change in our membership. by attracting new members to keep us growing.
2. Developing ways to attract to our meetings, the large percentage of our membership who live in the Lower Mainland but do not attend regularly.
3. Finding an affordable and permanent home for our activities.
4. Creating new ways to increase our revenue.
5. Developing and implementing education programs relevant to both novice and veteran members.

People are the most important asset of any organization, people who give of themselves to help the organization flourish. In the past two years, several of our VRS personnel assets have completed their service to our Society and moved on to other pursuits. The departure of Douglas Justice, Joe Ronsley, Joanne Ronsley, Ron Knight and Gerry Gibbens to name a few, has left a large void in the fabric of the VRS. The most difficult aspect of dealing with change is finding people to shape and manage the change. In 2006 we will need to replace several key positions on the Executive and we have no Nominating Committee Chairperson (NCC) to recruit and propose replacements. The NCC position plays an important role in shaping change through personnel selection, for the future.

As we end another year, it seems to me that the VRS is stuck in time, not able to escape the shroud of its own history and unwilling or incapable of embracing the future. We have exhausted much of the speakers pool, seen costs increase while our revenues shrink and new member participation is low compared to other societies. Perhaps the VRS is nothing more than a social club with an affection for Rhodies and that is enough for some people. Maybe a summer break will give everyone a chance to pause and reflect; how should we adapt to the times and what do we want to accomplish? Who among us is willing to help *shape the change*?

Enjoy the summer !

Todd Major



Members Asked The Indumentum, "Should I have my soil analyzed by professionals?"

A professional soil analysis is definitely worth the money. Here's my experience:



R. Trinidad planted on rocky soil

Our garden is on a rocky hillside and in most areas the soil is only about thirty centimeters deep. The top layer is decayed tree litter and moss while the bottom layer is a fine gray mixture of sand, silt, and clay. Gaultheria

(salal) and tree roots permeate both layers. By the time I dig a shallow planting hole and remove rocks and roots, there is not much useful soil left. As a result, the rhododendrons are planted in homemade soil composed of three materials:

1. 50% mulched garden waste from the local dump
2. 40% coarse "topsoil" made of fish parts, sand and hog fuel
3. 10% peat moss



Ron's homemade soil

Three years ago, I used a pH pen on this soil mixture and found that the pH of 5.5 was ideal for plants to absorb needed macronutrients. Still, I wondered if the soil mixture contained enough micronutrients (N, P,

K, Ca, Mg) to allow my rhododendrons to grow to their potential. I consulted Todd Major who recommended that I send a soil sample to Pacific Soil Analysis (604-273-8226) in Richmond. After taking several small samples at root depth, I mailed the laboratory a large sandwich bag of soil, with instructions to test for macronutrients and micronutrients.

For fifty dollars I received a comprehensive report with recommendations, followed by a telephone conversation with a soil scientist named Bill Herman. The chemical analysis of my soil sample showed that:

- the carbon/nitrogen ratio was too high because of the large amount of wood waste (Carbon) in the mulch and hog fuel.
- phosphorus (P) was not high enough for flowering plants.
- magnesium, copper and zinc were slightly low.

Recommendations included:

- Fertilize annually in April, May, and July with 18-4-8 fertilizer containing 75% slow-release nitrogen.
- Add 13-26-6 turf starter fertilizer to the soil mixture used for new plantings.
- Spray the leaves with Epson salts (Magnesium sulphate) and chelated micronutrients.

During my conversations with Bill Herman, I learned that bone meal is not a useful substance to add to new plantings, the phosphorus is not in the correct form for absorption by plant roots.

Do you know if your garden soil has the correct nutrient levels for your rhododendrons? Do you have reasons for adding specific amounts of fertilizer to your plants, or are you just guessing about their needs? A soil analysis report will give you the information needed to make wise decisions about your garden.

Article and Photos by Ron Knight



Healthy plants flourishing in Ron's Pender Harbour Garden