



NEWSLETTER
MARCH 2006



VANCOUVER
Rhododendron
SOCIETY

www.rhodo.citymax.com

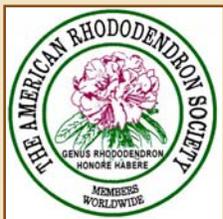
GENERAL MEETING:

THURSDAY MARCH 16, 7:30 P.M.
VANDUSEN BOTANICAL GARDEN

LECTURE PROGRAM:

DR. BEN HALL,
SO MANY RHODODENDRON
SPECIES - HOW THEY CAME TO BE
AND HOW THEY MOVED ABOUT
GROWERS:

SUE KLAPWIJK AND
HAROLD FEARING

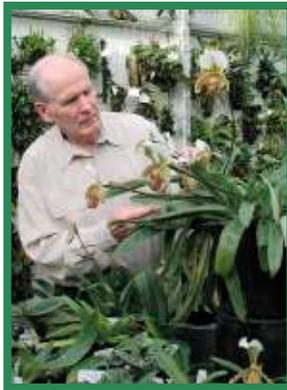


Vancouver Chapter

So Many Rhododendron..... By Joe Ronsley

With our March speaker, Ben Hall, the VRS will become seriously scientific. Ben is a Professor of Botany (as well as of Geome Sciences) at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Faculty information on him begins: 'Dr. Hall received his PhD in biophysical chemistry at Harvard. His thesis research . . . involved discovery and characterization of the two large ribosomal RNAs, which he named 18S and 28S. From 1958-63, he was a Chemistry faculty member at the University of Illinois. His research there demonstrated sequence complementarity [sic] between a newly discovered class of RNA molecules (mRNA) and genomic DNA.



Dr. Hall joined the UW faculty in 1963'. VRS members should not be put off by all this, however, (though it gets much worse), because I know Ben as a most pleasant man who is accessibly articulate, and his garden in Bellevue, Washington, is extremely beautiful. "Rhododendron Evolution

and Biogeography' is a subject indicated as one of Ben's current research interests. 'The nearly 1000 species in the genus Rhododendron are remarkable', the summary continues, 'for their wide range of size, of flower types and for where they occur.' And, following a list of places for naturally occurring rhododendron species: 'For most of these groups, a few species are dispersed to other continents, far from the center of diversity.

By carrying out systematic studies on the DNA of Rhododendron species, our goal is to discover how and when vicariance [sic] and dispersal events occurred that led to the current geographical species distribution.

Of particular interest are the historical geologic and climactic factors leading to the radiation of 300 species of Vireya Rhododendrons in and near the islands of Malesia.' Photo right *Rhododendron zoelleri*: Subgenus *Rhododendron*, Section *Vireya*, subsection *Vireya*, series *Javanica*.



See "Chairman of the Research Committee" on Page 2

Ben has been **Chairman of the Research Committee** of the ARS, and is on the Executive Committee of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, as well as being a member of the Botanical Society of America, the Genetics Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Society of Plant Taxonomists. He has had a year in Munich, Germany, as a Fulbright Scholar, has been awarded the highly prestigious John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship for work in Cambridge, England, occupies the endowed Chair of Washington Research Foundation Professor of Botany and Genetics, and was 'Inventor of the Year' at the University of Washington School of Medicine.

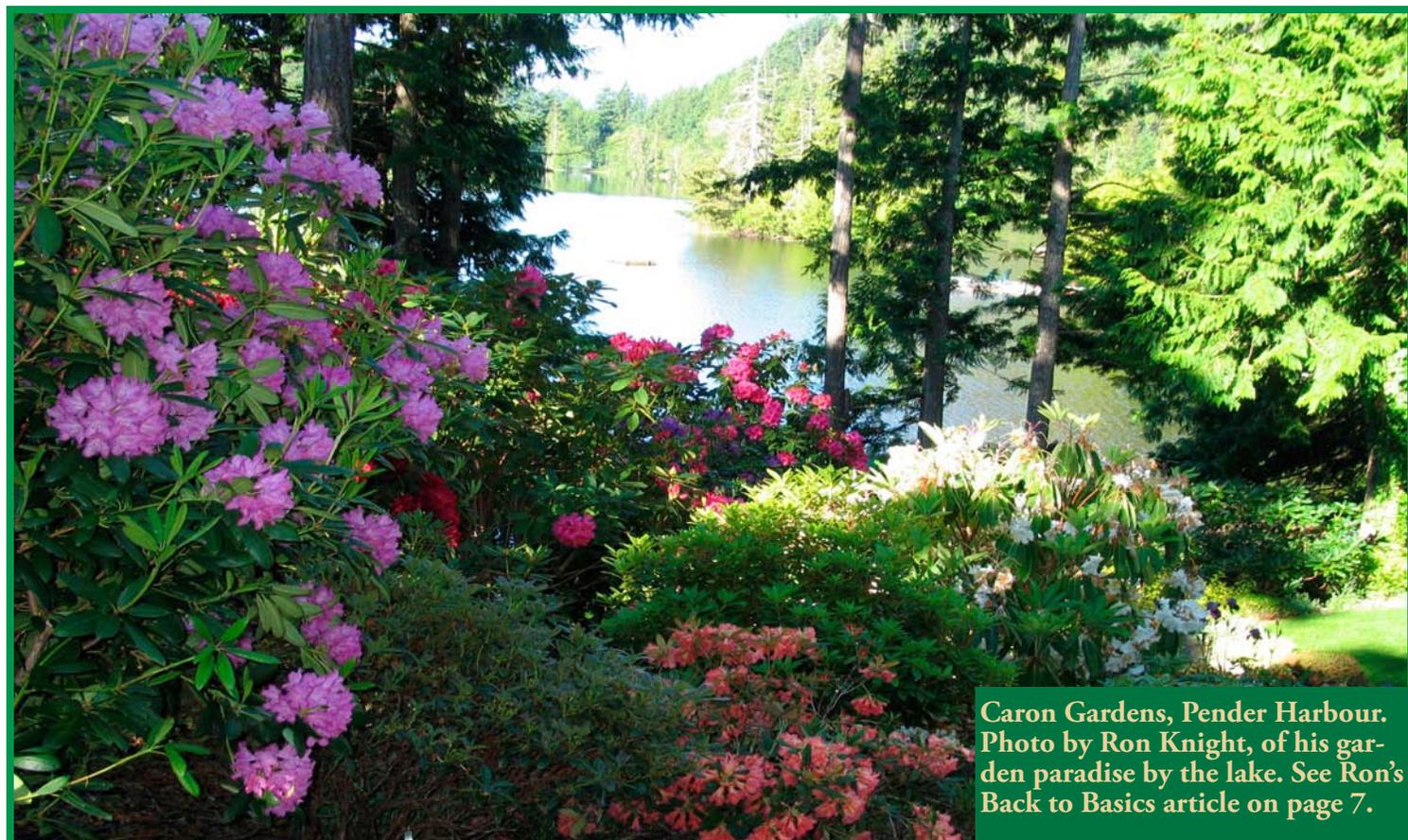
He has worked in a collaborative programme with high school students involved with, among other things, cancer research and field and laboratory research on the phylogeography of *Rhododendron macrophyllum*, and has participated in an exchange programme for students at Sichuan University in Chengdu, China.

The title of Ben's talk to the VRS on the evening of March 16 is "So many Rhododendron Species- How they Came to Be and How they Moved About", a title which suggests both interest and accessibility for all of us. It will be a privilege to have Ben Hall at the VRS.

Ben Hall's Research, A Little Deeper

For those VRS members more imbued with science than most of us, Ben's other 'current research interest' is as follows: Molecular Evolution of RNA Polymerase: We view RNA Polymerase evolution through the prism of the gene families that encode the two largest subunits of RNA polymerase. The eukaryotic nuclear genome contains three different members of each of these families, encoding the two largest subunits of RNA Polymerases I, II, and III. In fungi, each of these six genes exists as a single copy in the haploid genome. Their large size and slow rate of evolution makes the RNA Polymerase structural genes very well-suited for ascertaining phylogeny. Our work on molecular systematics of fungi has utilized RPB1 and RPB2, encoding subunits 1 and 2 of RNA Polymerase II.

For green plants the evolution of nuclear genes encoding subunits of these two gene families has additional dimensions, due to complex gene structures (>20 introns in several genes) and changes in gene number occurring at several junctures in dicot evolution. Research is ongoing with plant genes encoding other RNA Polymerase subunits. Because the subunits for different polymerases evolve at different rates, the set of six genes provides a well-balanced toolkit for ascertaining phylogeny at different levels.



Caron Gardens, Pender Harbour.
Photo by Ron Knight, of his garden paradise by the lake. See Ron's Back to Basics article on page 7.

Rhododendron Sale and Show



Saturday May 13th

10:00 am - 4:00

At the Park and Tilford Gardens

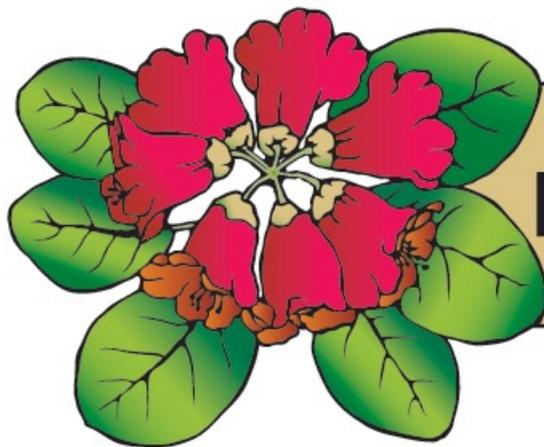
333 Brooksbank Avenue and Main Street

North Vancouver

Rare Varieties Direct From Our Growers

View our Rhodo Flower Show

Free Admission and Parking



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Visit our website at www.rhodo.citymax.com

VRS Sale and Show

The VRS Executive has already begun planning for the annual Sale and Show. This year we are holding our annual fund-raiser at the Park and Tilford Gardens, in North Vancouver. The annual plant sale is a very important fund-raising event and the revenue generated provides our Society with the resources to provide the benefits that members enjoy.

Please note that the **sale poster** on the previous page (**page 3**) is designed for all members to **print off and distribute** in their neighbourhood to help promote our Sale and Show. Please help promote our VRS Sale and Show!

Thank you,
Todd Major

Volunteers Needed for the Sale and Show

May 13th is the SALE & SHOW at the Park & Tilford Gardens in North Vancouver, from 10 am to 4 p.m. VOLUNTEERS are needed for the following positions, training is provided:

Cashiers:

- 4 people from 9:30 to 11:30
- 4 people from 11:15 to 1:30
- 4 people from 12:45 to 2:30
- 4 people from 2:15 to 4:15

Membership, Raffles, Teddy Ball and Card Sales Table

- 3 people from 9:30 to 11:30
- 3 people from 11:15 to 1:30
- 3 people from 12:45 to 2:30
- 3 people from 2:15 to 4:15

Volunteers are also needed for rhodo SHOW duties Friday evening, as well as set up Saturday morning and take down Saturday evening. We need members to contribute flowering trusses to make the show beautiful and interesting for the public. Please contribute a truss or two, just for Show, not for competition.

If you can help, please let me know which positions you would like to participate in. A sign-up sheet will be available at the March meeting, please look for it and sign up for your preference. Refreshments are provided for those who assist in the Sale & Show. Your help on the Golden Anniversary Sale & Show would be appreciated.

Thank you,
Carole Conlin
VRS Membership Chair
(Phone: 604-921-7260; Email: cconlin@alumni.sfu.ca)

UBC Shop in the Garden

The UBC Shop in the Garden and Plant Centre is nestled at the entrance to the UBC Botanical Garden, the Shop in the Garden and Plant Centre features unique treasures for gardeners of any experience. The Plant Centre offers seasonal choice selections of perennials, shrubs and vines for the garden and patio. Of special note to gardeners seeking hard-to-find or unusual plants. The Shop in the Garden supplies seeds from plants in the UBC Botanical Garden.



The Shop in the Garden and Plant Centre is operated by the garden's volunteers, the Friends of the Garden. All proceeds from the Shop in the Garden and 100% of the purchase price of the seeds fund research, education, and garden improvements at the UBC Botanical Garden.

Contact Information

UBC Shop in the Garden
6804 SW Marine Drive, Vancouver
Tel: 604-822-4529
Website: www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org/shop.php
(Photo courtesy of the UBC Botanical Garden)

Species Study Days 2006

The Species Study Days (SSD) will be held again in 2006 for the 5th consecutive year at the Rhododendron Species and Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington on the following Saturdays: March 25th, April 29th & May 13th.

The programme is personally directed by Steve Hootman, Co-Director at the garden and plant explorer, extraordinaire. No prior knowledge of the subject is necessary as the course begins with the fundamentals and progresses in detail at each session.

The sessions begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. and end at approximately 4:00 p.m. The course fee is \$35.00 for each session and the entire proceeds are used to provide a stipend for instruction and a donation to the garden. A nominal sum of \$5.00 is charged for lunch for those wishing to participate.

In order to avoid disappointment, please confirm your interest and forward payment to:
Mike Bale, 33623 Wildwood Drive Abbotsford BC V2S 1S2
Ph.(604) 853-8839, Email: lu_zhu@telus.net

The Vancouver Orchid Society

Holding their annual Show and Sale. It will be a great show, with plenty of Orchids on display. As well there will be many sellers of Orchids, some from as far away as south east Asia and south America.

Vancouver Orchid Society
 29th Annual Orchid Show & Sale
 At the Richmond Winter Sports Club (Curling Club)
 5540 Hollybridge Way,
 Richmond, BC

Saturday, April 29 - 2006, 9:00 am to 5:00 p.m.
 Sunday, April 30 - 2006, 9:00 am to 4:00 p.m.

General admission is \$7.00. Present your valid membership card of a Garden or Horticultural society and get \$1.00 off.

For additional Orchid show information,
 Visit their website at www.vancouverorchidsociety.ca



Correction Notice

The February *INDUMENTUM* erroneously gave Ron Knight photo credit for *R. Faggetter's Favourite* (photo above). Credit for the photo belongs to 'Mike' Trembath.

How well do you know your Rhododendrons?

The answer to last month's first plant I.D. question, name the rhodo below (photo by Bill Spohn) is, *R. cinnabarinum* 'Cinkeys'



Membership

Guests are always welcome at our meetings. Check the website at www.rhodo.citymax.com for a list of speakers.

Membership renewals are still being accepted. You can see me at the Membership Table at our general meetings or mail me your renewal. Membership cards have been mailed to those who have renewed.

Membership rates:

- a) Vancouver Rhododendron Members \$25.00 per year (borrow ARS journals from the VRS library)
- b) ARS/VRS Members \$50.00 per year (includes 4 ARS journals a year)
- c) Associate Members - \$10.00 per year – must be a member of another ARS Chapter to be eligible for Associate membership.

If you change your name, address, email or telephone, please let me know so our records can be updated. If you have any questions about membership, please contact me.

Join Us As We Celebrate 50 Years! (June 1955 to June 2006) See you at the general meetings!

Carole Conlin
 VRS Membership Chair
 PO Box 91, Lions Bay, BC V0N 2E0
 Telephone: 604- 921-7260
 Email: cconlin@alumni.sfu.ca

John G. (Jack) Lofthouse, His Rhododendron Legacy Part II

For a superb backgrounder and introduction to Jack Lofthouse, creator of many fine Rhododendron hybrids right here in our back yard in Vancouver, see Clive Justice's excellent article in the March 2005 (Volume 36, No.6) issue of the Indumentum.

Last fall Louis Peterson and I had the privilege of viewing his garden with his daughter Sue Herd and were astounded at the diversity of Rhododendrons growing on his property. Drifts of smaller leaved compacts to a multi trunked large leaf, probably a *R. macabeum*, along with many others showing their age, reaching upwards of 12 to 16 feet towards the light among maturing Douglas firs and pines.

What must have been in the beginning a somewhat modest city garden now has the atmosphere of an overgrown, older urban estate. I look forward to seeing it in the spring when the blooms will turn the garden into a Rhododendron heaven, possibly for the last time since the ever advancing pressure of urban development in the area pose a real threat to one man's passion with the genus Rhododendron.

During our visit Sue was kind enough to contribute Jack's inventory of plastic pots to the VRS which I sold and turned into 2 small 2'x5' banners sporting our new logo, which we'll use during our events. Along with the pots, Sue was also kind enough to contribute some 50 Rhododendrons in plastic pots to the VRS. These were the last of Jack's creations, some of which will be available for sale at our Show and Sale in May. Many of them have not been identified as the labels are either missing or have faded beyond recognition. Others are in dire need of some TLC and may not become sales worthy for another year. The good ones however will become available this spring so look forward to obtaining a Lofthouse Rhododendron not otherwise available in the trade and participate in Jack's legacy.

The last catalogue (1990) of Jack's creations lists 119 hybrids, about half of which are registered, a legacy spanning over 25 years and in Clive's words: "Jack Lofthouse has left us a much greater inheritance than we ever knew." More next month.

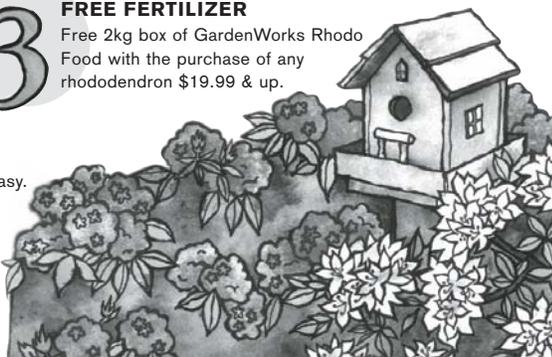
By Lothar Mischke
Email: cindymischke@aol.com

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Choose from a broad selection of rhododendrons & azaleas.

2 EXPERT ADVICE
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3 FREE FERTILIZER
Free 2kg box of GardenWorks Rhodo Food with the purchase of any rhododendron \$19.99 & up.



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SOCIETY MEMBERS RECEIVE A 10% DISCOUNT WITH MEMBERSHIP CARD.
 QUESTIONS? PHONE THE GARDEN LINE: 299-0621 OR CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE: www.gardenworks.ca
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 OCEAN PARK • 2124 128TH STREET NORTH VAN • 3147 WOODBINE DR (EDGEMONT VILLAGE) & MARINE DR AT BEWICKE

What's Your Opinion? Have You got Some News or an Announcement? Send us a Picture of Interest!

Letters to the **INDUMENTUM** editor, news, pictures and anything rhodo or otherwise can be sent to Todd & Shannon Major at stmajor@shaw.ca. We need pictures too! The larger the picture file size the better the result on screen and in print. If you don't send something, then you will have to live with what I print, so get involved!

Todd & Shannon Major, **INDUMENTUM** Editors



The answer to last month's second plant I.D. question, name the rhododendron above (photo by Bill Spohn) is, *R. sanguineum* ssp. *sanguineum* var. *haemaleum*.

New members asked the **INDUMENTUM**: How can I select the best rhododendrons for my garden?

By Ron Knight

When I first joined the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, I thought that flower colour and bloom time were the only factors I needed to consider in planning my new garden. However, after attending a few meetings, I heard things that made me suspect that club members were a bit more discriminating.

For example, certain purple rhododendrons such as *R. augustinii* (photo top right) were always mentioned with reverence while other purple ones, such as *R. ponticum* (photo middle right) were universally criticized. To complicate matters further, some club members seemed to consider any purple species rhododendron to be better than any purple hybrid. Overloaded with opinions, I decided that I needed some kind of objective reference to help me differentiate between mediocre and superior rhododendrons.

However, despite a decade of searching, I haven't been able to find any objective sources. Rather, I've learned that rhododendron selection is a highly subjective process. Still, I have discovered three ways to get excellent information that allows me to continuously replace mediocre performers in my garden with better varieties.

1) Visit the gardens of veteran rhododendron growers in April and May and ask about their favourites.

I never realized how magnificent *R. macabeum* was until I sat on Joe and Joanne Ronsley's cliff-side deck and looked at the huge yellow flowers below me. In addition to seeing this gigantic plant in full bloom, I was able to obtain advice on how to grow it. Now I have 2 specimens in my own garden.

The best way to get to see fabulous, mature rhododendron gardens such as the Ronsley's is to visit during the VRS Open Garden season. Watch for information in the April edition of "The Indumentum" or on the VRS website: www.rhodo.citymax.com



2) Rhododendron ratings in "Greer's Guidebook to available Rhododendrons." (H.E. Greer, Offshoot publications, Eugene, Oregon, 1996).

Most rhododendron clubs will sell this excellent reference manual at monthly meetings. It rates rhododendrons out of 5, on three factors: flower quality, plant and foliage, and performance.

When I first started collecting rhododendrons, I made a wish list composed of all the rhododendrons I could find with a rating of 5 for flower quality. That was a bad mistake for three reasons. First, the majority of these rhododendrons have large flowers that open in April or May.

However, many plants with smaller, less-striking flowers that appear in winter or summer receive lower ratings but are worth growing to extend the total time that rhododendrons are blooming in any one garden.

Examples are: *R. Olive*, *R. Sea-Tac*, *R. Bric-a-Brac*, *R. Praecox*, *R. moupinense*, *R. dauricum*, *R. mucronulatum* (photo left), (all early blooming); and *R. Good News*, *R. Royston Reverie*, *R. Polar Bear*, *R. prunifolium*, *R. brachycarpum*, and *R. nakaharae* (photo below) (all late blooming).

See "Planning a Garden" on Page 8



Second, **planning a garden** around top flower ratings, alone, lowers your chances of including rhododendrons, particularly species ones, with superb foliage. These plants are the types that can make your garden come alive in winter when few flowers are out. Examples with a foliage rating of 5 are: *R. Golfer* (photo right), *R. Teddy Bear*, *R. Sir Charles Lemon* (photo below), *R. Senator Jackson*, *R. bureavii*, *R. campanulatum*, *R. pachysanthum*, *R. fulvum*, and *R. elegantulum*. Interestingly, many *R. yakushmanum* selections are awarded a rating of 5 for both flower and foliage.

Third, high ratings do not guarantee high availability. For example, *R. Glory of Littleworth*, rated 5/5 for its white, blotched orange flowers, was on my very first wish list. However, I have never been able to find anyone in B.C. who sells it.

In general, I've found that taking a wish list, derived from Greer's book, to a rhododendron nursery, is a waste of time. Many of the top-rated varieties will not be available. A more efficient method is to deal with those well organized rhododendron growers who can provide you, by fax or website, with their nursery's availability list. Then, before you visit, you can use Greer's Guidebook to check the ratings of rhododendrons that you already know are in stock at that particular location.

A final suggestion regarding rhododendron purchasing: I've noticed that retail garden centres carry a predominance of rhododendrons that receive rather mediocre ratings for flower and foliage from Greer, but high ratings for ease of growing. Most garden centre rhododendrons, such as *R. English Roseum* (see photo on page 2- left side of picture) or *R. Anah Kruschke*, are easy to propagate, have excellent cold hardiness, and are simple to grow, all features which make them highly suitable for mass marketing. However, you are more likely to find all-round superior rhododendrons for sale at VRS meetings or from specialty rhododendron nurseries owned by club members. Lists of such nurseries will sometimes be published in rhododendron club newsletters.

3) Check Pacific Northwest websites that list "proven performers". Start with the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) website: www.rhododendron.org. Look at their "Proven Performer Lists" and Rhododendron of

the Year (ROY) winners. Here you will find many recommendations for superior rhododendrons, as judged by rhododendron clubs in various parts of North America. For example, 2006 ROY winners for the Pacific Northwest are *R. Point Defiance*, *R. Wee Bee*, *R. Silver Sword*, and *R. Washington State Centennial*.

Also visit the website for "Great Plant Picks": www.greatplantpicks.org. On an annual basis, this organization assembles a large committee of horticultural experts from around the Pacific Northwest. As a team, these people choose superior plants to recommend for that year.

In 2005, for the first time, their recommendations included a lengthy selection of excellent rhododendrons. For 2006, they added a deciduous species rhododendron, *R. schlippenbachii*, also called the Royal Azalea. Along with plant names, descriptions, and

photographs, the Great Plant Picks website includes hints on planting and care.

In summary, no single source will tell you the best rhododendrons to put into your garden. Too many factors are involved such as the size of your property or your climatic zone, not to mention your own personal preferences. However, if you consider all three of the information sources listed above, you will be able to find truly magnificent rhododendrons that you will be proud to display in your garden.

Ron Knight is a past president of the VRS, retired teacher and owner of Caron Gardens. His website: www3.telus.net/rcknight/. All photos are by Ron Knight.

