



JUNE 1993

The Yak

A CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
6835 232ND STREET
LANGLEY, BRITISH COLUMBIA
V3A 6H4, CANADA

Wednesday, June 16 Meeting

Fraser South's Annual Picnic at Williams Park

(Williams Park is north of 232nd on Glover Road in Langley)

The park has been reserved for us from 5:00 p.m. to dusk. The phoning committee will be contacting you soon to see if you are coming. As in past year's it's a potluck picnic. Don't forget to bring your own dishes and cutlery too.

Tribute to two very special members

At our May 19 Chapter meeting Harold Johnson presented Dave and Ella Crabb with bronze medals and a plaque in recognition of the many many contributions they have made to our Chapter.

Members were treated to an informative presentation by Dave Crabb (with help from Ella in the audience) on a selection of beautiful trusses from their garden.

Following Dave's presentation members were invited to sell, buy or trade plants. Thanks to everyone who brought plants and for selling them so reasonably!☘

New members

We are pleased to welcome *Cheryl and Marvin Downer of Surrey, Carol Fisher of Aldergrove, and Robert Crosby of Sechelt.*

It's great to see our membership continuing to grow.☘

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BULLETIN BOARD

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Don Martyn

Many of you realize what a great job Dave and Ella Crabb have done as Fraser South charter members—helping to start the chapter and ensuring that Fraser South ran smoothly.

Dave faithfully kept track of the membership and helped with plant sales, while Ella did our newsletter and helped organize local tours and attended to many organizational jobs. At every club event you could find them pitching in where help was needed most.

Dave professes to be a beginner but he really is a very successful propagator who has helped distribute many rare and unusual plants that he has collected.

One example of the kind of people the Crabbs are was when they were the first to organize a work party to help out Milton Wildfong at Silver Creek Gardens in Mission when he was ailing. Ella lead the charge inside to make sure Milton would be comfortable when he returned home from hospital and Dave organized and built the wheelchair ramp, fixed windows and got hot water hooked up in the house. Supplies and materials were 'subsidized' and provided without question or comment.

We are a volunteer organization dependent on our members for all that we undertake. Our greatest thanks to Dave and Ella for the great job that they have done and for the continuing help and support that they provide to Fraser South. ❀

FOR YOUR VIEWING PLEASURE

Mike Bale videotaped two recent Chapter meetings—Clint Smith's slide presentation on the species Rhododendrons blooming in progression from December to Canada Day; and Bill Stipes' presentation on Meerkerk Gardens. Mike has kindly donated these videos to our library.

The Yak WILL BE BACK

The next issue will be sent out at the beginning of September. Submissions to *The Yak* from members would be most welcome—mail or fax them to Wendy Sellars. Fax number is 583-5113 (office fax so be sure to address the fax to Wendy Sellars).

SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Our September 15 meeting will include a speaker (to be announced) and a cutting exchange. On Saturday, September 18, from 1:00 to 2:30(ish) there will be a workshop at Clay's Nursery on how to root cuttings—bring your *Willow Water*! Les Clay has kindly offered to give us a tour of his lab also.

EXTRA RHODOS? GOOD HOME AVAILABLE

The Anglican Parish of St. Andrew at 20955 Old Yale Road in Langley could use some more rhodos if anyone has some spare ones. Recently several of our members donated rhodos and their time to landscape the front of the church. We received a very nice letter from Mrs. Ina Branson, Coordinator of the Gardens, expressing the parish's appreciation for our members' generosity.

DEADHEADING

by Norman Todd

You need a dead head to deadhead. There is no doubt I can be totally dead in the head quite often on any given day on a wide variety of topics but after about five minutes of deadheading, I start to estimate how many more five minuteses will be needed to remove all of those pesky capsules. Even with our contemporary appreciation of astronomical numbers—those with strings of zeroes on their tails—the task becomes incomprehensible. Paradoxically, I have an appreciation of the meaning of infinity.

Why do rhododendrons not have good fruit? If they had nice brightly coloured berries we would gladly leave them on the branch. If there were edible...oh, what a pleasant thought. I even try to convince myself that all this spent biomass that is being strewn at the base of the plants must be the best mulch in the world for rhododendrons. But that only makes the plants more thrifty, which compounds the problem next year.

There is a school of thought that says, "Why deadhead? It only makes the critters bloom better next year." I recommend you weigh this advice carefully. It has merit.

I think that there should be an extra number used in rating rhododendrons—one for ease of deadheading. One of my most favourite rhododendrons is *auriculatum*. The plant is at least twenty years old and I enjoy it every day, twelve months of the year. It has never flowered. *Auriculatum* would get a 5 in my rating scheme—so would most of the *talienses*—they never flower either. For plants that do flower, I would rate things like Loder's White quite highly. I'd give it a 4.5 (5 is reserved for plants that never flower and for plants where the darn things fall off by themselves). The spent rachis on Loder's White has the attribute of breaking off at the right point on the plant, assuming one is reasonably careful. Frequently on other varieties I end up with a whole whorl of

leaves in my hand and more often than I like to admit, whole branches.

Augustinii I would give a 1. By the time the flowers are faded, the new growth buds are elongated to just the right length to make it easier to knock off than the immature seed container. Actually, on some *augustinii*s the old flower pedicels are not attached all that well and a lateral blow will detach them quite easily. Try placing a curved index finger on the pad of the thumb and flicking quickly while taking careful aim at the object to be beheaded. With practice, you will soon knock them flying. My

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neighbour returning from his daily ten mile jog saw me executing this method. Reflexively, running on the spot, he half-raised his arm in greeting - paused - then hurried up the road shaking

his head. I am now careful to use this method only when I am sure no one is watching.

Incidentally, I don't know why *augustinii* is classed as Triflora. I swear all of our plants have at least four flowers in the inflorescence.

All of the *lapponicum*s get a Zero - a big fat goose egg. The fungus-like excrescences on *impeditum* just have to be ignored. There is no way they can be removed.

But the worst rating goes to *racemosum*. I would rate it right out there in negative numbers. I furtively pick a few of the cursed blobs and give up quickly. I always have a ready supply of seed of *racemosum*. When some ingenue asks "Are all rhododendrons hard to grow from seed?" I put on a benign smirk and reply with feigned generosity, "Here, let me see if I can find you some seed of *racemosum*; it's a good one to start with". The seed capsules on *racemosum* are more persistent than the leaves. The deer occasionally browse on the leaves—never on the seed. Come to think of it, have you ever seen a weevil notch on a seed capsule?

In this deadheading business we also have to take account of the stickiness factor. I wonder if the manufacturers of 'Crazy Glue' know about Ruby Bowman? Maybe I'm onto something and can make a million. I know now why Lem (or was it Elliot?) called Jingle Bells 'Jingle Bells'. You deadhead the plant and you'll be hearing Jingle Bells on the radio every day before you get the gunk off your fingers.

It's no use using gloves. They do more damage than enough and the cloth fingers are soon irreparably forever fused. Scissors are needed to get the intended protection off.

Talking of scissors, they are quite an effective tool for deadheading the long sturdy pedicels of the *campylogynums* and *glaucophyllums*. I used to think that using scissors was an affectation, like using sugar tongs to pick up slugs, as the ladies in Oak Bay do. But it really is a good method for these species of rhododendrons and for this reason I would give them a 2.5. If you try to pull off three or four of the old flowers at one time on a *campylogynum* you risk pulling the plant out by the root. The stalks have remarkable tensile strength.

The deciduous azaleas have very high stickability indices. It's strange how the leaves fall off regularly as clockwork every year but the seeds seem to know another Ice Age is on the way. They are going to hang on until it's over.

I occasionally find a dead bee inside a wilted flower—stuck to its supposed feeding source. It is a good thing that we are quite a bit bigger than bees or every rhododendron grower would be trapped in early efforts and all of this would be academic, which, on reflection, is what it is supposed to be.

There has been a high increase in the number of hybridizers of late. I know why this is so. It is much easier to pull off the petals and the anthers before, or just as the flower opens, than it is to pull off the entire flower when it has wilted. The excuse they use is that the seed capsules may contain the next wonder of the world.

These are, however, superficial thoughts. Sooner or later, even if you are only a five minute spurter like I am, you have to ask yourself the fundamental questions, "What am I doing? What are the consequences of this act? When does the life a

rhododendron begin?" I hesitate to say it but perhaps we need a free vote on the subject.

(reprinted from Rhododendrons on a Western Shore, published by the Victoria Rhododendron Society, April 1989).

Our thanks to Norman Todd and the Victoria Rhododendron Society for permission to use this seasonal and very entertaining article.☼

rootstalk

by Indumentum

Itō Ihei, a Japanese nurseryman, wrote *A Brocade Pillow* in 1692. This remarkable book, illustrated with 154 woodblock prints of azalea flowers and foliage provides an insight into azalea cultivation in Japan during the Edo period. The book demonstrates that azalea culture was very sophisticated at that time and many azaleas were grown that are very popular today. However, kurume azaleas were not introduced into the West until the twentieth century and satsuki azaleas did not reach the United States until 1938. Propagation methods are described in detail by Itō Ihei except for the selection of softwood cuttings. The author states that this is a secret! Times haven't changed much.

Last month, I mentioned a few local nurseries where rhodoholics can obtain desirable rhododendrons and readers were invited to write in with their special sources. The response was pretty thin—actually zero, zip, nothing. It would be very helpful to all members to share some of this type of information. Let's try one more time. To get the ball rolling again, I'll add another to last month's list...Doc and Vern Finley of South Langley have been stalwart members of Fraser South for a number of years and many of their rhododendrons have been raffled off at meetings. Their nursery has a huge variety of rhodos and azaleas and is well worth a visit.☼