

The Yak

FRASER SOUTH
RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
A Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society

January 1996

In The Garden



*To make charming nooks
for cosy bowers,
To grow the ferns, heaths
and Alpine flowers.*

—James Pulham, 1877



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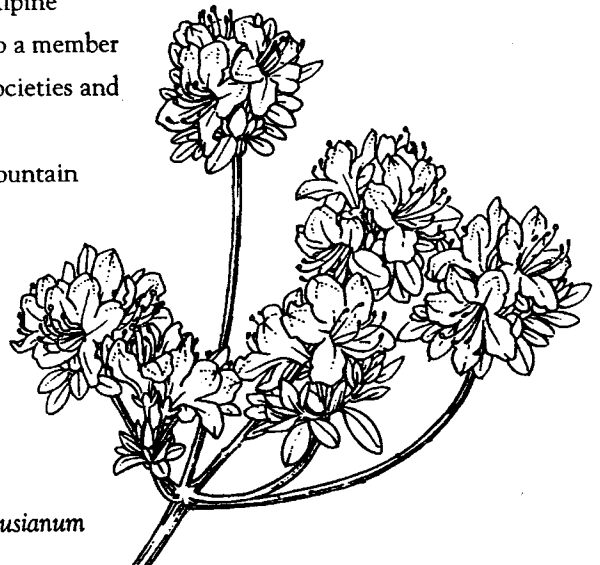


Wednesday, January 17, 1996 Meeting
8:00 P.M.

St. Andrews Anglican Hall
20955 Old Yale Road, Langley

Guest Speaker: Frank Dorsey Rhododendrons for the Alpine Garden

Frank Dorsey has been growing rhododendrons and alpine plants for the past twenty years. He is a past-president of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society and an Executive member of the Alpine Garden Club of B.C. He is also a member of many other alpine garden societies and happily grows his alpines and rhododendrons on a former mountain slope in North Vancouver.



R. kiusianum

YAKALENDAR

*JANUARY 17

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Speaker: Frank Dorsey
Elections of the Executive

*FEBRUARY 21

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Speaker: Norman Todd

*MARCH 20

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Speaker: Wilf Nichols

*MARCH 31

Fraser South Rhododendron Sale
Clay's Nursery, Langley

*APRIL 17

Fraser South Chapter Meeting

*APRIL 20

Fraser South Show and Sale
Willowbrook Mall, Langley

*MAY 6-11

ARS Annual Convention
Oban, Scotland

*MAY 15

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Members' Night and Truss Show

*JUNE 19

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Annual Picnic

*OCTOBER 4-6

ARS Western Regional
Conference, Ocean Shores, WA

LIBRARY NEWS

We have some new books...

- Rhododendron Species, H.H. Davidian, Vol. IV Azaleas
- Flowering Crabapples, Fr. John and Fiala
- The Book of Rhododendrons, Marianna Kneller. It is a collection of paintings of rhododendron species illustrating an eight-month growing cycle and includes the flowering branch, bud, flower division and profile, new leaf, growth and seed head. Over fifty world specialists discuss their favourite plants.

Harry Wright from the Haida Gold Gardens in Courtenay has donated a copy of his up-to-date list of material of garden inventories supplied by members of all the rhododendron chapters in B.C.—great reference material for our library. He is looking for more submissions to add to this material so try and take time out this winter to revisit your rhodos and make a list of what has performed well this year. You can give me the list or send it to Harry Wright, 769 Cheslie Road, Courtenay, B.C., V9N 5P2.

Our September newsletter mentioned several vacancies on our Board, one of which is the Librarian. I have had the pleasure of setting up and accumulating our library since inception of Fraser South Chapter and have appreciated the Board's support and trust in my decisions. As members we have all benefited. We have early reference books and journals, over 100 books on all plants,

not only rhodos, and thanks to Mike Bale, a comprehensive video library. My special thanks to Jeanette and Sandy Paul and Dave Crabb for their support and help.

Julie Garland, a new member, has volunteered to take over and I have agreed to help her. So go over and meet Julie at our next meeting.

Thanks Julie.

—Pat Dahl

JACKET—FOUND

Did you lose a jacket at the Blast Off to MARS Conference? Description of the jacket is:

*two-toned beige/tan, reversible,
cotton poplin, zipper front,
zippered pockets, bomber/
windbreaker style, size about
medium*

Contact Dot Gibson of Mt. Arrowsmith Rhododendron Chapter at 604 • 725-3476.

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The Book of Rhododendrons

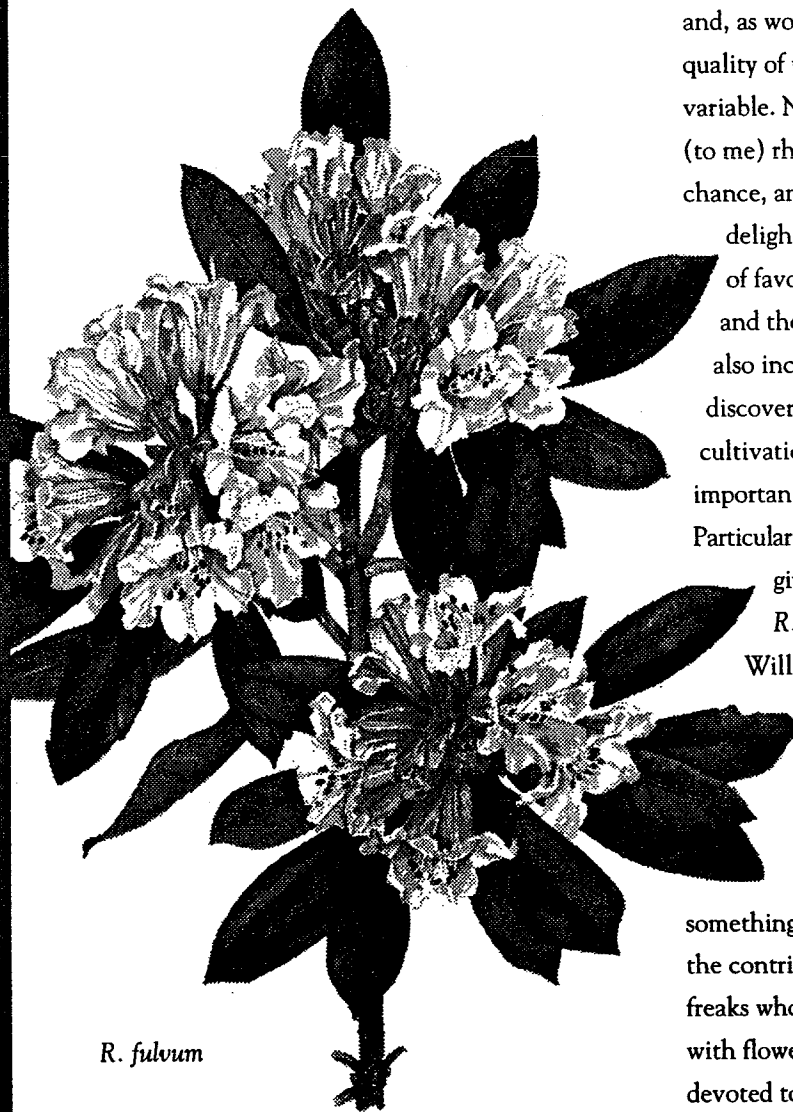
Rhodoholics tend to be readaholics, especially if the material is about our beloved rhododendrons. Most of us have acquired all the good books on rhodos which are not always as comprehensive as we would like. Marianna Kneller's book fills an important gap by providing detailed taxonomic illustrations of key species accompanied by descriptions, often of a personal nature, by fifty rhododendron lovers from around the world.

The illustrations are a delight. They convey the magic of the species in a way not always achieved by a photograph. The accompanying drawings of growth buds, seedpods and parts of the flower, provide insights into the taxonomic differences between species. Ms. Kneller, who has the unusual title of "artist-in-residence" at Exbury Gardens, has a skill which is a remarkable blending of art and science.

Each species subsection is described by a different individual and, as would be expected, the quality of the writing is highly variable. No matter, a number of new (to me) rhodo writers get their chance, and there are some delightful anecdotal descriptions of favourite species in gardens and the wild. The best articles also include notes on the discovery of the plant, tips on cultivation and references to important related hybrids.

Particularly good descriptions are given by Dr. Hugh Dingle on *R. auriculatum*, Julian Williams on *R. williamsianum* and Dr. Siegfried Sommer on *R. schlippenbachii*.

Biographical notes are provided on all the writers so you can find out something about the background of the contributors. For those species freaks who eschew anything to do with flowers, there is a whole chapter devoted to nothing but foliage!



R. fulvum

FRASER SOUTH

CHRISTMAS PARTY

About fifty merry-makers made it to our annual Christmas Party at the Church Hall. It was a pot luck event and what luck we had with the pots as dish after dish of amazing culinary perfection were spread on the tables. We had an immense number of door prizes which were distributed by RhodoLot, a new game of chance which had its world premiere at the event. Everyone was given a rhododendron name when they arrived which they had to wear all evening. At the appointed time, each rhodo had to find another of the same colour. Easy enough for Bob's Blue but a little more challenging for Sir Charles Lemon! Rhodo names were then drawn from a hat and the first couple with both names drawn won a prize. Trivial Pursuit watch out!

We also had the traditional Les Clay "Name that Rhodo" contest and in keeping with tradition it was too hard despite efforts by Les to make it easier this year. Most of us can just about tell the difference between Polar Bear and Mrs. Furnivall but one red rhododendron looks very much like another! The winners were Joan Bengough and Chris Klapwijk.

Many thanks to all who brought dishes (especially the sherry trifle) and the members who organised the decorations and setting up the hall. Particular thanks to Melba Johnson and Diane Scott who organised the event.

ROOTSTALK

BY INDUMENTUM

Like all native plants in their natural habitat, wild rhododendrons eliminate competitive plants and co-exist with plants they find useful. Large-leaved rhodos need a forest canopy to provide shade and shelter. Small-leaved varieties at high elevations colonise rocky ledges and form huge alpine gardens, often of a single species. When we grow these discriminating species in our own gardens, we need to give some thought to their special requirements.

Unfortunately our native trees, especially the deciduous types, are all shallow rooted. The reason for this is probably because of our high rainfall and heavy clay soils. Trees like to keep their roots just above the water table and most of the nutrients in our natural forests are in the thin layer of decaying humus at the surface. As rhododendrons are also shallow rooted and surface feeders, it is not very considerate to plant them near native trees.

It is interesting to note that the two rhododendron species native to B.C. exist in special habitats. *R. macrophyllum* grows in dry, gravelly soil in open woodland and is extremely drought resistant in order to survive the long hot summers in the open. *R. albiflorum* grows at high elevations in the mountains on wet gravelly sites and is so successful at colonising large areas that it forms dense thickets and is known to hikers as Mountain Misery. Both native rhodos do not have to compete with the greedy, shallow roots in the clay soils of our coastal rain forest. Another way of looking at this is that the native species gave up long ago trying to establish themselves in the Lower Fraser Valley.

It is the essence of gardening to care for the plants that we choose to grow by ensuring they get what they need for food, water and light and by eliminating competing plants. This is called weeding. We also need to remove the larger weeds such as the alders, birch and bigleaf maples. You will hear cries of horror from the indiscriminating tree huggers of South Surrey but let them keep their scruffy bush. Plant some pretty trees from Asia such as *Davidia involucrata*, *Stewartia pseudocamellia* and Magnolias. Your rhododendrons will be happier.