

The Yak

FRASER SOUTH
RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
*A Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society*

February 1996

In The Garden

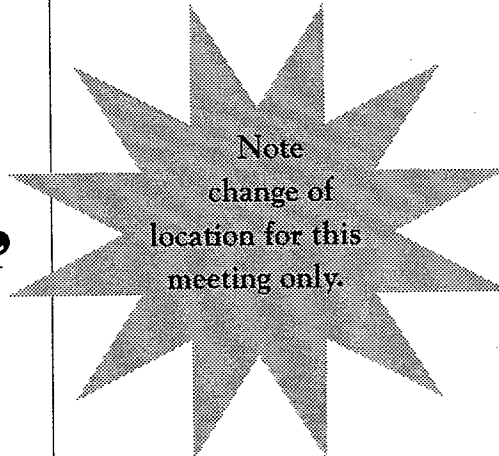


*Gardener, if you listen, listen well:
Plant for your winter pleasure, when
the months
Dishearten; plant to find a fragile note
Touched from the brittle violin of frost.
—Vita Sackville-West*



What's Inside

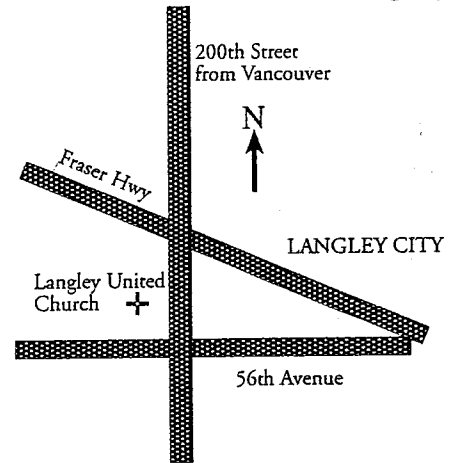
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Note
change of
location for this
meeting only.

Wednesday, February 21, 1996
8:00 P.M.

Langley United Church
5673 – 200th Street, Langley



Guest Speaker: Norman Todd "What I've Learned About Rhododendrons from Other People"

Norman is a retired Naval Architect and came to Canada from Scotland in 1953. He has operated Firwood Nursery on the Saanich Peninsula for the past 16 years and sells many interesting rhododendron hybrids and species.

He is well-known for his writing in the Victoria chapter newsletter and has been featured in *The Yak* with his classic article on deadheading (June 1993), "You have to be a dead head to deadhead."

Norman will bring a few choice plants from his nursery for sale to members.

YAKALENDAR

❖ FEBRUARY 21

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Speaker: Norman Todd

❖ MARCH 20

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Speaker: Wilf Nichols

❖ MARCH 23

B.C. Council of Garden Clubs
Annual Conference. To register
call George Powell at 926-5796.

❖ MARCH 31

Fraser South Rhododendron Sale
Clay's Nursery, Langley

❖ APRIL 13

Rhododendron Species
Foundation Spring Plant Sale
Federal Way, Washington

❖ 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 Annual Picnic

Frank Dorsey— Rhododendrons for the Alpine Garden

Frank Dorsey provided us with a fascinating lecture in January on dwarf rhododendrons. He began with a general discussion on the principles of Alpine Gardening with wonderful photographs, particularly of the Edinburgh Botanic Garden. He featured many small rhododendrons suitable for rock gardens including *R. kiusianum* and *R. impeditum*. He is not that fond of large leaved hybrids—"laurel bushes with flowers". Some of the most interesting slides were of rare alpine plants growing in the wild, such as a plant only found on rock ledges in the Olympic Peninsula and nowhere else in the world!

Thanks Kay Huffman

At the January meeting, Kay Huffman treated us to a lovely display of shrubs in bloom in their garden.

Reminder—Name Tags

Some of us have been a bit remiss in wearing our name tags at the chapter meetings. Misplaced yours? See Phil Anderson to arrange for a new one.

Chapter's Constitution

Ten copies will be available at the February meeting and a sign-up sheet if more copies are required.

Upcoming Work Party at Williams Park in Langley

Mark your calendar—Saturday, March 23, 10:00 to noon. It's a mulching party to complete the rhododendron planting that we started last October in honour of Harold Johnson. Bring your wheelbarrows, rakes, shovels, etc.

1996 Executive/Committees

President: Bobby Ogdon

Vice-President: David Sellars

Treasurer: John Warner

Secretary: Janet Warner

Directors: Trevor Badminton, John Anderson and Arnim Roeske

Newsletter: Wendy and David Sellars

Librarian: Julie Garland

Ways and Means: Diane Scott

Programs: David Sellars and Les Clay

Membership: Arnim Roeske (interim)

Publicity: Hedy Dyck

Hospitality: Phil Anderson

Refreshments: Melba Johnson

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BOTANISTS RETURN FAVOUR TO SAVE CHINA'S RHODODENDRONS

Rare rhododendrons at risk of extinction in the wild are being returned to China nearly a century after being discovered by an intrepid British botanist.

Experts in Scotland are helping to restore to China rare plants that are threatened with extinction by an expanding population and changes in the rural economy.

The scheme, intended to conserve species under threat from China's development and rising population, is being organised by the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

More than 200 rare and endangered rhododendrons, many of which were gathered by Ernest Wilson (1876–1930) on four expeditions to China, are being shipped to two centres, the main one being the Hua Xi subalpine botanical garden in Sichuan province. They will form the nucleus of plant-breeding centres from which cuttings and seeds can be gathered for replanting in the wild.

Gloucestershire-born "Chinese Wilson" collected more than a thousand trees, shrubs and cuttings and more than 50,000 dried specimens on his last expedition to China, in 1908. He travelled widely, also to Japan, Korea, India, Australia and Africa. His

work has helped the Edinburgh garden to become the world's biggest centre for rhododendron species, with more than 450 under cultivation at sites in Scotland.

David Paterson, assistant curator at the garden's arboretum department and an expert on rhododendrons, said Wilson's expeditions were very different from theirs. "He was looking for the best flowering plants because he was after material for the gardens of Britain, Europe and America. But our focus is on the survival of these species. So we are trying to identify a range of characteristics so we can preserve as much genetic diversity as possible," he said.

The scheme being funded to the tune of £53,000 under the Government's Darwin Initiative, is needed because of changes in rural China. Many rare rhododendrons, once found in forests or at high altitudes, had been safe in Wilson's day. But, Mr. Paterson said, China's growing population and the development of roads were leading to the exploitation of remote areas for crop-growing and grazing of sheep, cattle and yak. Forested areas were being felled for timber and fuel.

"Grazing changes the ecology of an area to such an extent that the natural regeneration of rhododendrons cannot take place," said Mr. Paterson, who is working with Chinese horticulturists.

Mr. Paterson said that the repatriation of rare species from Britain to the

Chinese centres meant that several sites would hold the plants so "we do not have all our eggs in one basket".

It meant that the plants would be less vulnerable to disease or inbreeding. Mr. Paterson said they were also collaborating with British universities, with a European Union grant, to screen rhododendrons for promising medicinal compounds. "Rhododendrons are used in Chinese medicine so there might be something in it," he said.

Among the rare species being sent back to China are examples of *Rhododendron balangense* which is found indigenously only on a remote mountain in Sichuan.

Mr. Paterson said many of those being returned could be extinct in China, and some were certainly different genetically from those left in China. "Because we have been collecting seed for nearly a hundred years from China we have germ plasm that has arisen from areas that no longer support rhododendrons. So we probably have different varieties that are genetically unique," he said.

Mr. Paterson said that China held the world's largest number of rhododendron species. Edinburgh Botanic Garden's interest in Chinese plant life goes further: scientists there are working on a 25-volume English-language account of the country's flora. China has the third richest plant life on the globe, behind Brazil and Colombia with more than 30,000 species of higher plants.

(THE TIMES OF LONDON,
December 30, 1995—thanks to our overseas
correspondents, Mr. and Mrs. O.P. Sellars,
Berkshire, England)

ROOTSTALK

BY INDUMENTUM

A few years ago we bought a new refrigerator complete with a 15 page User's Manual. It has a wonderful disclaimer regarding strange sounds emanating from the unit. It says that "Periodically, you may hear sounds which are unfamiliar to you. None of these sounds are unusual and they indicate the unit is operating and performing as designed". We are comforted that, even if we hear a gigantic explosion in the night, we can simply turn over and go back to sleep.

There is a similar disclaimer in the glossy coffee table book "Rhododendron Portraits" which was published in 1992. On page 14 the authors imply they are not responsible for the flower colours in the 1144 photographs because "A photograph is never a perfect copy of that which is seen by the human eye". While this is undoubtedly true it should not be used as an excuse for some of the obvious colour misrepresentations in the publication. In the photograph of Mrs. E.C. Stirling, the reddish-orange hue is quite disconcerting for a lilac-pink rhododendron. We have taken lots of photographs of Mrs. E.C. over the years and we have never found colours like that. The authors recognise the problem in the Introduction so it is a pity they did not find another photographer or printer. Fortunately, most of the photographs in the publication are very good and the book provides a useful photographic collection of species and hybrids.

The recent heavy snows are still with us so it is too early yet to assess all the damage. One plant that has suffered is our *Magnolia Grandiflora* which we planted about seven years ago. It had reached a height of about ten feet but it's now down to about six feet. The flat paddle shaped leaves are ideal for collecting snow and the long branches provide leverage for breaking. The only really tall *Magnolia Grandiflora* I know in the Lower Mainland is beside the Pacific Press Building on Granville Street. Perhaps the warm city and shelter provided by the high rise has prevented similar breakage from heavy snowfalls over the years.