

The Yak

FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

March 1996

In The Garden



*The lady who grew meconopsis
Was asked to give a synopsis,
How can I? she cried
When all of them died
Do more than describe their autopsies*
—Anonymous



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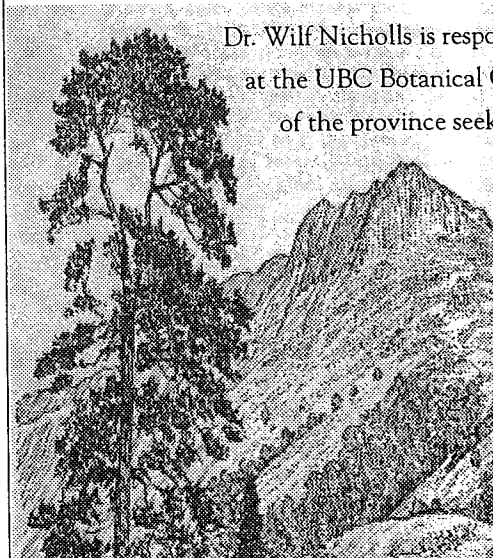


Meeting
Wednesday, March 20, 1996
8:00 P.M.

St. Andrews Anglican Hall
20955 Old Yale Road, Langley

Guest Speaker: Wilf Nicholls

Plant Hunting in B.C.



Dr. Wilf Nicholls is responsible for the Plant Introduction Program at the UBC Botanical Garden. He has travelled to remote regions of the province seeking native plants with horticultural

potential for introduction into the nursery trade. Wilf will show slides of plants in the wild and illustrate the process of developing suitable plants with garden potential.

Wilf has a Ph.D. in Botany from UBC and joined the Botanical Garden as a Research Scientist in 1988. He is also Registrar of new plant introductions for the Canadian Ornamental Plant

Foundation and is a regular columnist in the Vancouver Sun newspaper.

Vern Finley will also treat us to some rhododendron trusses in bloom in their garden.

YAKALENDAR

✿ MARCH 20

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Speaker: Wilf Nicholls

✿ MARCH 23

Fraser South Mulching Party
Williams Park, 10:00—noon
Come one, come all, with your
wheelbarrows, rakes, shovels, etc.

✿ MARCH 31

Fraser South Rhododendron Sale
Clay's Nursery, Langley,
12:00—4:00

✿ APRIL 10—14

Diamond Jubilee of Orchids
Vancouver Orchid Society
Hotel Vancouver
Contact Wally Thomas 921-7383
or Marjorie Disher 538-3592

✿ APRIL 13

Rhododendron Species Fdn
Plant Sale, 2525 S. 336 Street
Federal Way, Washington
9:00—3:00

✿ APRIL 17

Fraser South Chapter Meeting

✿ APRIL 20

Fraser South Truss Show and Sale
Willowbrook Mall, Langley
9:30-5:30

✿ MAY 15

Fraser South Chapter Meeting
Members' Night and Truss Show

What Norman Todd has learned about rhododendrons

Norman Todd entertained us with anecdotes, jokes and limericks at our February Meeting. He also had some spectacular slides of some of his favourite rhodos. It was a dark and rainy night but Norman kept us warm and amused in his own inimitable style. One of his limericks is featured "In The Garden" (in this issue of *The Yak*).

Tentative Trip to Sikkim

In response to numerous requests, work to organize group rhododendron tours of Sikkim has been undertaken. Two groups are contemplated, one trekking the high, steep trails up to altitudes of 15,000 feet or higher, and the other riding buses up to 12,000 feet. The road system, though narrow, sometimes steep and with "switchbacks", is all paved and provides for delivering passengers to within 50 to 100 yards of spectacular areas of native rhododendrons. Both groups will spend nights "in the field", thus the need for good sleeping bags—rated down to 40° or below, or better yet, to 20° degrees or below.

Past experience of groups in the field has been that the food is so good that it is almost unbelievable that it could have been prepared under the circumstances.

We will attempt to arrange extensions, such as a visit to the Taj Mahal, if there is interest.

Departure date: mid-April 1997

Time away from home: 3 weeks approx.

The two groups will be in Sikkim at the same time, although arrivals there may be two or three days apart.

Cost: the 1992 trip was \$3,000 so add perhaps 10%.

Minimum: 15 for each group.

Maximum: 18 for each group.

Interested?

Contact Britt Smith
25809—124 Avenue S.E.
Kent, WA 98031-7809
Telephone: 206 631-2162
Best time to contact Britt is 7:00 A.M.

The logo for 'The Yak' newsletter, featuring the words 'The' and 'Yak' in a stylized, cursive font. The 'Y' in 'Yak' is particularly large and prominent.

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Attracting Birds to the Garden

According to surveys about leisure time activities, two great hobbies, gardening and bird watching, are increasing in popularity. These activities go hand in hand, and like most gardeners, I find tremendous enjoyment watching the antics of our native birds. To attract birds to the garden, they need to be provided with shelter, protection from predators, water, and food.

Shelter for birds can take many forms, but groups of conifers planted together offer excellent natural shelter throughout the year. Conifers offer protection from winds, and especially during cold windy weather in winter, I find the spruce, red cedars, and pine trees planted around the edge of my garden give sanctuary to many species of birds.

There are hardy conifers available for all areas of British Columbia. In addition to the evergreens mentioned above, others to consider using include hemlocks, firs, yews, Douglas firs and junipers. Consult your local garden centre staff if you need help in selecting suitable species for your area. Some conifer species have the added benefit of offering good seed sources to birds at certain times of the year. Occasionally, birds also find small insects along the tree boughs to eat.

In addition to shelter, birds need protection from predators. While I love cats, it is very difficult to convince them that the local bird feeders are not fast food outlets. Try to place bird feeders in open areas that do not offer predators cover to sneak up on feeding birds. I have also had good results by growing a thorny climbing rose wound up and around the main trunk of a large pine tree where I hang a feeder. The spiny rose stems prevent cats from climbing this particular tree, and birds are able to feed in relative peace. Before I planted the rose, I would occasionally find my neighbour's cat perched on the tree branch directly overhanging the feeder. The other advantage to this is that the rose has grown up and throughout the pine tree, so when it is in bloom, I have scarlet roses, and later red hips, intertwined with the pine boughs.

In the summer, water for birds is as easy as providing a bird bath, and keeping it partially filled. Of course, if you are lucky enough to have some sort of water feature in the garden like a stream, pool or pond, you can also provide "landing spots" along the edge. Flat rocks that provide ledges along the sides of ponds or streams and just protrude into the water features can make good spots for bathing and drinking. Small birds need very shallow water for bathing, no more than about two inches deep. They can drown in water that is any deeper.

A winter time water supply is harder to provide. While this may not be an option for everyone, there are electric water heaters available for bird baths from specialty garden supply firms that can be used to keep water from freezing.

Another enticing item for birds is gravel. If you have a gravel driveway, you may find small birds regularly pecking at the gravel for fine pieces of grit. I find leaving out a clay saucer filled with a couple of inches of commercially available budgie grit near the bird feeder attracts many birds.

Food sources can be as simple as a bird feeder routinely filled with various commercial seed sources. Or, a more varied diet can be provided by careful selection of garden plants. Depending on the kind of bird and the time of year, food sources could include seeds, berries, insects, and flower nectar.

One of the things I like about attracting birds is that the garden should not be too neat. For example, instead of deadheading everything, I leave many flower heads to ripen into seeds, and even some of our common weed species provide seeds for birds. At any rate, it makes a good excuse to not be too compulsive about tidiness. Red and black-coloured fruits, in particular, are very attractive to many birds, but a word of caution in regards to fruit crops: birds can strip a crop of berries very quickly. If you want to protect some fruit for yourself, cover the fruit carefully with good bird netting well before the fruit ripens.

Here is a list of some commonly available garden plants recommended for attracting birds. Check to make sure trees, shrubs and perennial plants are hardy for your area.

Deciduous trees that provide fruit:

Alnus (alders); Amelanchiers (Saskatoons); Arbutus (Vancouver Island only); Betula (birches); Carpinus (hornbeams); Cornus (dogwood trees); Crataegus (hawthorns) all types; Diospyros (persimmons); Fagus (beech); Malus (crabapples) select small fruited varieties for birds; Morus (mulberries)

a word of caution—don't park your car or hang laundry in the general vicinity—birds love these berries and the after effects are very messy and colourful; Prunus; Sambucus (elderberries) same problem as with Morus); Sorbus (mountain ash).

Shrubs that provide fruit:

Arctostaphylos (kinnikinnick); Aronia (chokeberry); Callicarpa (beauty berry); Cornus (dogwood shrubs) all types; Cotoneaster—these vary in their appeal to birds, with the deciduous Cotoneaster species the best in attracting birds; Elaeagnus (Russian olive); Euonymus, all types, but these may take several years to reach fruiting size, and several plants may be needed to ensure pollination; Gaultheria, all types; Ilex (holly); Ligustrum (privet); Lonicera (honeysuckle); Mahonia (Oregon grape); Pyracantha (firethorn); Rhamnus (buckthorn); Ribes (currants) all types; Rubus (blackberries and their relatives); Rosa (anything); Vaccinium, all types—cover blueberries if you want some too; Viburnum, many species.

Vines:

Ampelopsis (porcelain berry); Clematis; Lonicera (honeysuckle); Parthenocissus (Virginia creeper and Boston ivy); Vitis (grape).

Flowers for seed:

Ageratum, Coreopsis, Cosmos, Helianthus (sunflower); Solidago (goldenrod); Tagetes (marigold); Sedums.

And, plants providing flowers attractive to hummingbirds:

Buddleia; Chaenomeles; Fuchsia (single forms); Holodiscus; Lonicera; Ribes; Weigela; Delphinium; Digitalis; Heuchera; Impatiens (single forms); Lobelia cardinalis; Monarda; Nicotiana; Pentstemon; Phlox.

—Norma Senn

ROOTSTALK

BY INDUMENTUM

We hear a lot of nattering these days about Baby Boomers turning 50 and changing priorities in society to reflect their needs. So it is timely to examine their effect on our rhododendron culture. Most people know "The Five Stages of Rhodoholism" which charts the increasing obsession of rhododendron lovers. Stage Four is when admiration for rhododendron species begins to take over and thus, as our Boomer population ages, we should expect an increasing demand for choice rhododendron species.

Surprisingly, it is not that easy to find named forms of species. There are a few specialty nurseries in the U.S. who sell select forms but most growers sell stuff that has probably been grown from seed and is likely to be quite variable depending on the species. Furthermore the ARS does not seem to encourage the recognition of select forms and most named forms originate from Awards of Merit given by the Royal Horticultural Society in England.

This is a frustrating situation for those of us who are not interested in yet another gross yellow hybrid and would rather that the species we purchase are choice. I have two plants of *R. fulvum* which should have wonderful cinnamon indumentum set off by dark, shiny green leaves. They both have nice indumentum but the top surface of the leaf is a light, almost olive green. Some may argue that this is all part of the natural variation of the species and mine represent the average. Well I am not interested in the average thank you very much. I think it would be appropriate for the ARS to take the lead in encouraging the development and recognition of select forms and perhaps our nurseries will eventually recognise the growing market.

Incidentally, I visited my favourite *fulvum* last week and noted that it is loaded with buds. Check it out when it is in flower in late March—it is located in VanDusen Botanical Garden about half way up the Rhododendron Walk on the left hand side.