

The Yak

FRASER SOUTH RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

September 1996

In The Garden



*There is a Flower,
the lesser Celandine,
That shrinks, like many more,
from cold and rain;
And, the first moment that
the sun may shine,
Bright as the sun himself,
'tis out again!*

William Wordsworth



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Wednesday, September 17, 1996
8:00 PM

St. Andrews Anglican Hall
20955 Old Yale Road, Langley

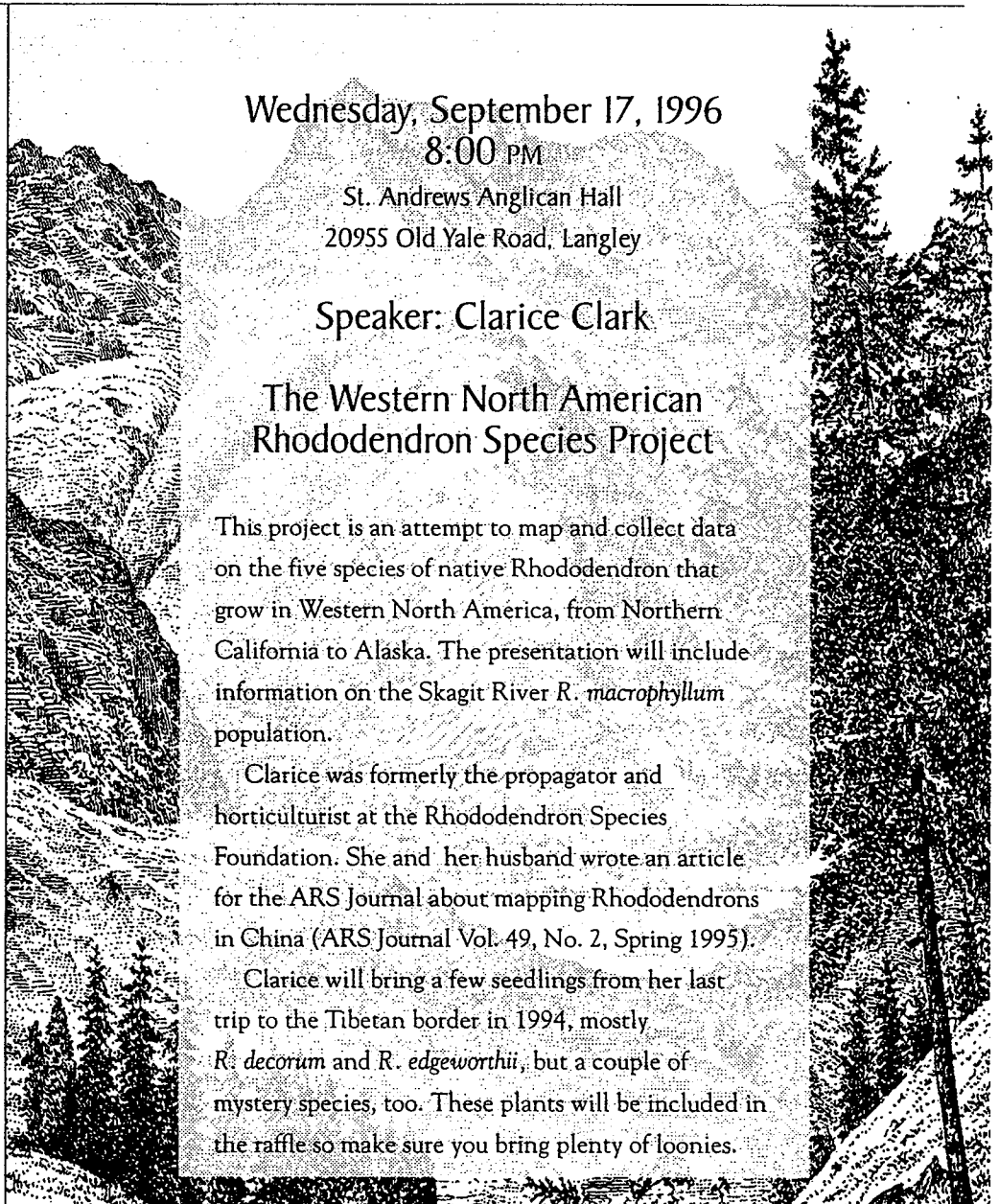
Speaker: Clarice Clark

The Western North American Rhododendron Species Project

This project is an attempt to map and collect data on the five species of native Rhododendron that grow in Western North America, from Northern California to Alaska. The presentation will include information on the Skagit River *R. macrophyllum* population.

Clarice was formerly the propagator and horticulturist at the Rhododendron Species Foundation. She and her husband wrote an article for the ARS Journal about mapping Rhododendrons in China (ARS Journal Vol. 49, No. 2, Spring 1995).

Clarice will bring a few seedlings from her last trip to the Tibetan border in 1994, mostly *R. decorum* and *R. edgeworthii*, but a couple of mystery species, too. These plants will be included in the raffle so make sure you bring plenty of loonies.





YAKALENDAR

✿ OCTOBER 4-6

ARS Western Regional
Conference, Ocean Shores, WA

✿ OCTOBER 16

Fraser South Chapter Meeting

✿ November 20

Fraser South Chapter Meeting

Reminder

Goodies for the Chapter Meetings are provided on a volunteer basis so a big 'thank you' to those who brought in treats last year. We need others to contribute their favourite goodies too.

Librarian Checked Out

Julie Garland has decided to follow the yellow brick road to Nanaimo. As a result we are left bereft of a librarian. Pat Dahl has generously agreed to step in on an interim basis but we urgently need a replacement. If you would like to be our Librarian *please* contact Bob Ogdon at 583-7434.

40% off all Plants

Les and Bev Clay are retiring from their nursery business and are selling all stock at 40% off. Visit Clay's Nurseries at 3666 - 224th Street, Langley.

Third Annual Beer Bottle Truss Show

Last May, the Fraser South Third Annual Beer Bottle Truss Show was another fun event. Judging was by the traditional method with everyone getting to vote for their favourite. With the flowering season a week or so late last spring, the trusses were more varied than usual. Arnim Roeske's entries were voted the best in five categories. Other winners included Trevor Badminton, Jane Whitehead, Wendy Sellars, Bob Ogdon and Michael and Vicki Neyedli. By popular demand, a vote was held to decide 'Best Truss in the Show'. This went to a truss of Nelda Peach entered by Wendy Sellars with Arnim Roeske's Lem's Stormcloud a close second.

June Picnic

We had a great turnout to the picnic at Williams Park. Delicious dishes and fine weather was enjoyed by all. Our thanks to Diane Scott for organizing this very successful event.

Garden Tours

Thanks to the Huffmans and Mike Bale who opened their gardens last spring. The tours were a great success and we were pleased to see such a good turnout. We will be looking for volunteers for next spring—please contact David Sellars at 535-0763.

Fraser South on the Internet!

Fraser South Rhododendron Society has joined the stampede and has a home page on the Internet courtesy of Hedgerows Garden Tapestry, a web site dedicated to B.C. gardening. You can see a list of our favourite rhododendrons and a picture taken on our tour of Mike Bale's garden last May. Point your web browser at www.hedgerows.com.

More Plants For Sale

Robert Bishop needs to make room for some recent acquisitions and has some larger hybrids at bargain prices. Interested?—phone Robert at 538-1288.



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Going for the Alphabetically Challenged

by Norman Todd

One word that jumps out at me from the printed page and makes me all twitterpated is 'oxymoron'. A few years ago this word was a complete stranger to me. Now I see it used in literal overdoses, in newspaper and magazine articles by writers who should know better. Last night I cringed at Peter Newman's use of it in McLean's. William Safire, that prophylactic proctor at American-English usage in a recent article, used the phrase 'oxymoron rhetorical trick'. My understanding is that 'oxymoron' means something like 'acute falsity' or 'a blatant contradiction'. 'Rhetorical' has the sense of artificial persuasion, and 'trick' means fraud. What the semantic sum of Safire's phrase equals is not very clear to me—but that is not my point.

The significance here is the use of words containing the letter 'x'. Letters at the end of the alphabet have been getting short shrift for a long time and now they are out for revenge. This is the advent of the Glottal Charter of Rights. Zealous watchers will also have noticed increased use of words with an intermediate, not terminal 'y', as in 'oxymoron' and the present zestful fervour for the use of words with 'z' in them.

As an example, one word that's getting the tops and bottoms of its letters abraded by overuse is 'xerophytic'. One cannot read a gardening magazine or attend a horticultural meeting without being deluged (a super word in this context) by 'xerophytic', 'xeriscaping', and 'xeromorphic'. The popularity of these words, no doubt, reflects the perceived need by their users of probity, prudence and political correctness in broaching sensitive subjects like global warming and raising the Sooke dam. But to me their overuse makes the message more xerotic and less germane. Do you not agree with me that there is something oxymoronic, about a xerophytic garden?

Recently a customer called wanting *R. xanthostephanum*. I was impressed. I had never had anyone ask for this plant before. The prospective grower said he wanted it because he didn't have a rhododendron in his garden that started with an 'x'. He also said that he wanted it to add to his collection of rhododendrons but you will immediately see how 'au fait'

he is in attempting to meet his quota for the alphabetically deprived.

This got me thinking. If my theory on the resurgence of having a plant of the alphabets nether extremities is not all wet, i.e., xerophobic, and holds water, then the best selling rhododendron species are going to be *xanthostephanum*, *xanthocodon* and *zaleucum*. *Xanthocodon* has been having its lumps recently having been demoted to a sub-series of *cinnabarinum* by Cullen and Chamberlain. (Good old Davidian, the gardener's taxonomist, still gives it specific rank and says it differs markedly from *cinnabarinum*). I will keep giving it its majority not only because of its distinctive appearance but mainly because of the noise the word makes. To ensure it makes the top ten all we need is to have Ian McTaggart-Cowan say it to as many people as possible. One usually hears it as zan-tho-co-don; the way a six-year old who is still being taught to read phonetically would pronounce it. Ian must have learned the 'whole language' way and it rolls off his tongue with a dynamism that brings back youthful memories of hearing the famous locomotive—'The Flying Scotchman'—roaming through the border country.

Anyway, after my customer's quest, I immediately struck some cuttings of *xanthostephanum*. I have to admit that I had forgotten all about *xanthostephanum* in the garden but quickly rediscovered it. I also put in some *zaleucum* but couldn't find a *xanthocodon* (go on, say it) and so had to do with *concatenans*.

I will now make another prediction which, if I were truly selfish I would keep to myself. There will be a huge splurge in the popularity of that cousin of the rhododendron—the Sourwood or Sorrel Tree—*oxydendrum*. My goodness, does this have a lot going for it! Not only does it suit many suburban gardens with its modest nature, August blooming, lily-of-the valley flowers and great fall colour, but its name carries a double merchandising whammy. We've got the hot ticket 'oxy' at the first and then the tympanic shocking beat of the 'drum' at the end, it's almost too good to be true.

The 'drum' part is especially good because many people like to call our favourite plants 'rhododendrums'. It is, arguably, easier to say it that way but it is probably too late to change. No

matter, 'oxydendrum' has a virile vibrancy to it and gardeners are going to be visually and aurally satisfied by growing it. (I have not been able to trace why the 'drum' ending became accepted. It seems to come from the same 'tree-dendros' Greek root.) In any event Bailey (New Encyclopedia of American Gardening) called it oxydendrum years ago. Another plant in the same band is *clerodendrum*.

Concurrent with the craze to grow plants without water is the one to grow only 'native' plants. The 'Newfies' call people not born on the Island "Come from Aways". Newfoundlanders are such friendly people that this is surely not a xenophobic appellation. For some new gardeners there is, however, a real phobic about growing "Come from Aways". I have a challenge for them. One of the most majestic of our B.C. natives is Bear Grass. I remember being so impressed by it the first time I saw it growing among widely spaced Ponderosa pines. *Xerophyllum tenax*—what a name! It meets all the specifications of our politically sensitive contemporary gardener. It has two 'x's', it is native, and it wants a dry environment. Unfortunately, it needs other conditions not easy for us in Victoria to provide but that should just add some cultural zest for the anti-exotic enthusiasts.

I am sure readers can think of many more examples of 'new wave' plants. Share around. One I would caution about is *Zygadenus*. It has locution, it is native, but the overall flavour is not good. The Death Camus was carefully culled out from the beds of nourishing Camus by our native people. We should do the same no matter what the trendy political mores are. And remember, don't be an oxymoron, whatever that means.

A reprint with thanks from the Victoria chapter's November 1995 newsletter.

ROOTSTALK

BY INDUMENTUM

Those of us who are interested in landscape gardening are losing our right to design our landscapes as we choose. The forces of mediocrity and political correctness are gaining control. First it was xeriscaping and sprinkling restrictions neither conducive to rhododendron growers. Now we have the imposition of tree bylaws which results in your landscape being dictated by a City Hall bureaucrat.

Supporters of a tree bylaw generally admire large specimens of rare tree species. On private property, these trees were originally planted by dedicated landscape gardeners who almost certainly would have had to remove other trees to give them room to grow. Landscape gardeners also remove trees to admit sunlight to allow the growth of flowering shrubs, perennials and smaller trees such as Japanese maples and dogwoods. The famous private garden *Dartshill* in South Surrey could not have been developed if the native trees had not originally been removed. It is noteworthy that the UBC Asian Garden is soliciting donations to remove trees for new plantings of rhododendrons.

The new tree bylaw in Surrey does not allow tree removal for the development of a landscaped garden. Apparently it is not legally feasible to allow this exception. Naturally trees on property owned by the City are exempt from all provisions of the bylaw. As a result of this bureaucratic intrusion on our private lives, the diversity of tree species in the city will be constrained and the urban landscape will be mediocre and monotonous. The native tree species are shallow rooted and will starve our gardens of both light and nutrients. Flowers will be banished to hanging baskets. If the public good is measured by the attractiveness of city gardens this is not the way to enhance our environment.