

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



Box 5562 Postal Station B, Victoria BC, Canada V8R 6S4

April 2013 Thirty-Third Year of Publication

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MEETING 7:30

MONDAY, April 8, 2013

GARTH HOMER CENTRE, 813 DARWIN STREET, VICTORIA, B. C.

Speaker: Sean Rafferty, RSF Trip to China

SEAN RAFFERTY is from the Fraser South Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. and is editor of their newsletter 'The Yak'. He has entertained them with slide presentations on plant-hunting trips to China. As well, Sean manages the club's raffles and helps with plant sales including the sale for the ARS in the fall of 2006.

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March's Talk

By Theresa McMillan

Art and Sue Lightburn's talk on China April 2010 was narrated by Art and illustrated by Sue's photographs.

They had arranged the tour on their own, and found flights in China to be efficient and modern. They were much easier to use than getting from place to place by bus or train.

The trip began with the capital city of Beijing. Scenery such as the Forbidden City or the Summer Palace was beautiful, but the city's air was a smoky yellow, very

REFRESHMENTS

Please let Betty Gordon know at 250-479-0210 if you are coming to the meeting and bringing goodies.

Ann and Mikkel Schau, Norma Senn, George Schwartz, Gareth and Mae Shearman, Norm Thomas, Ev and Audrey Van Eerden

Please wrap your cookies or snacks.

Coffee and tea are supplied.

Assistance in setting out the food, and helping Betty in the kitchen cleanup is really appreciated.

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polluted.

The Lightburns visited the Great Wall of China, choosing to hike a mountainous, rural section of it. They saw the Terra Cotta Warriors of Xian, discovered not so long ago in 1974.

They visited many beautiful gardens, often featuring bonsais. Sue had to wait several times for the crowds to momentarily disperse. Only then could she get a photograph featuring the circular frames that accentuated the garden's structure and views of various plants. There were pictures of the photogenic karst mountains, pine forests and rhododendrons, adorable giant pandas, Tibet's Potala Palace and the base camp for climbers of Mount Everest.

Theirs was a seven week tour of China, moderate in cost, and a once in a life time adventure.



A NOTE FROM LOIS BLACKMORE About our Shows and Sales in April and May

Bottles, entry forms and sign up sheets will be available at our April meeting. Colored entry forms are for those who wish to keep their trusses and ribbons. We are also in need of clerks for both sales. If you wish to clerk (a great way of knowing what judges are looking for) please phone Lois at 250 478 6616 or email at loisb@shaw.ca

Victoria Rhodo Society Trophies Wanted!

Please bring in your trophies from last year to the April meeting and give them to Madeleine Webb. She is looking after them until the show.

Hellebores

By Brenda McDonald, with her permission, from the January 2013 issue of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society's Newsletter, The Yak.

Early January is a good season to be thinking about what might be blooming in our gardens already (well, perhaps blooming in your garden already), so hellebores it is.

Hellebores belong to the *Helleborus* genus, quite a small genus of between 15 to 20 species depending on which authority you are consulting. They are native to much of Europe, extending southward and eastward to the Caucasus, with a couple of outliers in western China and the border between Turkey and Syria. They are members of the plant family called Ranunculaceae (and isn't that a lovely word to



roll off your tongue? almost as good as my very favourite, Zingiberaceae), which includes buttercups and clematises.

For centuries they have been cultivated for their medicinal qualities, so much so that it is now difficult to know which are native populations and which are naturalized.

In recent years they have become very popular, as hybridizers develop and market an increasing number of colours and forms. Developing new hellebore cultivars has always been an exceedingly tiresome procedure. The acaulescent forms (think herbaceous peonies) can be divided, but they resent it, and often sulk afterwards for a year or so. The caulescent forms (think tree peonies) simply cannot be divided at all; and it seems as if no one has ever been successful



at propagation through cuttings. That left propagation by seed only, which meant that hybridizers had to spend many years roguing out less desirable plants in order to get a stable seed strain that (almost always) bred true to the parents. However recently they have finally been able to perfect a tissue culture process that allows the replication of particularly attractive specimens. So we will now be able to purchase a named cultivar that should look exactly like all the other plants of the same name.

Part of what makes hellebores so useful in the garden is their marvelously long lasting blossoms. And the reason for this remarkable persistence is that what we are looking at are not the



petals, but sepals. The calyx of a hellebore flower consists of five sturdy and deeply coloured sepals, arranged somewhat ingeniously with two sepals to the back, two sepals to the front, and one sepal with one edge in front and one edge behind. The sepals, which stay behind long after the flower has been fertilized and the petals have dropped off, continue to provide colour as they age, often gradually changing from one colour to another.

Generally speaking, hellebores are deep-rooted, stout plants that do best in deep organic soil that is neutral or slightly alkaline, with generous amounts of water during their growing season. One often sees them advertised as growing happily in the shade, but shade being a relative term it probably means they grow and blossom best in the filtered shade of a high deciduous canopy, not the perpetual gloom of a dense stand of conifers. In fact with ample soil and water they will do quite nicely in full sun here in the Pacific Northwest.

All in all, however, they are a most forgiving genus, and once established will tolerate almost anything.

Helleborus niger, the famous Christmas Rose, blooms anytime between November and June. It has a lovely, large (2"-5"), white, single blossom that ages gracefully to pink. It has been used extensively in hybridizing programs because it is one of the few species hellebores to have outward facing rather than nodding flowers.

Helleborus orientalis is another species plant used extensively in hybridizing, which has led to the unfortunate common usage of the term "Orientalis Hellebore" to mean any number of hellebore hybrids, whether or not they even had the *orientalis* species in their parentage.

The species itself has lovely nodding flowers of white through cream to pink, often with very attractive spotting, and blooms slightly later than *H. niger* hence its common name, the Lenten Rose, to coincide with a bloom time closer to Easter than Christmas.

Current nomenclature uses the terms *Helleborus* Mrs. Betty Ranicar (without any quotation



marks) for a particular seed strain; *Helleborus* 'Tutu' (with single quotation marks) for an actual cultivar produced through tissue culture; and *Helleborus* x hybridus for the many wonderful naturally occurring hybrids that are produced by this fairly promiscuous genus.

In fact it is the very prodigality of seed production that make hellebores such a welcome addition to the garden. Leave them on their own for just one season and you will be rewarded with dozens of seedlings popping up in the most unlikely places. Like cyclamens, hellebores pro-

duce seeds with attached eliasomes, which are fleshy structures rich in fats and proteins, and almost irresistible to ants. The ants carry them off to use the eliasomes as a food source and then discard the rest of the seed in places it would never reach by the mechanical means of wind or water. Truthfully, I kept weeding out these funny little seedlings with the leathery seed-leaves until I finally realized what they were. Hopefully this confession will serve as a salutary lesson about the inadvisability of a squeaky clean garden bed.



A new Hellebore hybrid, a pink double form.

Types of pruning

By Bill McMillan

There are three main categories of pruning: leaf bud pruning, woody pruning and deadheading.

Most rhododendrons make new leaves in one sudden burst, immediately after flowering. In fall, if growing conditions are good, a second much smaller flush of leaves may be produced. Leaves of this second flush may be twisted and chlorotic. In contrast, evergreen azaleas make leaves over a period of about a month after blooming and so can be lightly sheared immediately after blooming. Subgenus *hymenanthus*_ *elepidotes*_ (the most common garden rhododendrons) generally do not break out into leaf freely from old wood that has been cut back. In contrast, subgenus *rhododendron* plants_ *lepidotes*_ usually break freely from pruned old wood. Remember, plants have an inherent shape in nature. Plan your pruning to improve that shape, not to produce topiary.

Left to their own devices, *elepidotes* often become open and leggy. Once established, “legginess” is difficult to correct. Several factors contribute to legginess, but the best way to avoid it is by careful shaping in the early years. For *elepidotes*, shaping is best done by removing terminal leaf buds in the spring. This is generally impractical in azaleas and small leaved rhododendrons (*lepidotes*), because terminal buds are small and very numerous. For them, there are more appropriate procedures, such as shearing.

During the summer, terminal leaf buds develop at the end of each new shoot. In very young plants, all terminal buds are leaf buds, but in healthy mature plants most will be flower buds. Flower buds can usually be readily distinguished because they are 3 to 4 times larger. The differentiation of leaf and flower buds generally is evident by fall. Beneath each terminal bud is a whorl of leaves, each with a small axillary leaf bud. If the terminal bud is a flower bud, then leave it alone. However if there is a single leaf bud (a common situation in young plants or in unhealthy older ones) then, as a rule, only one shoot will be produced. If this is repeated from year to year, the plant becomes leggy and tends to bloom poorly. Bud pruning often activates the underlying dormant buds to produce two or more shoots and a bushier plant. An article in an earlier ARS Journal suggested that you can even wait until new leaf growth starts, then cut the new leaves in half to activate the dormant buds and produce more shoots.

(Editor’s note: This article, including the sections on woody pruning of *elepidotes*, pruning and deadheading of *lepidotes* and pruning of azaleas, will be continued in May’s Newsletter.)

Upcoming Events

2013	Event	Place	Fee
Thurs Mar 28	View Royal Garden Club General Meeting Allan Mandell, Exploring Visual Art of Photography in a Garden Setting	Shoreline Community School 2750 Shoreline Drive Victoria More info 250-220-5212 7:30 pm	
Mon April 8	Victoria Rhododendron Society meeting, Sean Raffety talks about China	Garth Homer Centre, Victoria 7:30 pm	
Fri - Sat Apr 12- 13	VIRAGS (Victoria Rock and Alpine Garden Society) Spring Show & Sale	Cadboro Bay United Church 2625 Arbutus Rd., Victoria Fri 1 pm – 8 pm/Sat 9am – 3pm	
Sat Apr 13	VHS Fertilizer Sale	Integrity Sales & Distributing 2180 Keating Cross Rd, Saanichton 10 am – 2 pm	
Sat April 27	VRS Show	Tillicum Mall, Victoria 9 am –4 pm	
Sat April 27	Evelyn Weesjes Plant Sale & Garden Open Excellent selection of rhodos, ferns, shrubs and perennials	10629 Derrick Rd, Sidney 10 am – 12 pm	
Wed – Sun May 1 - 5	<u>ARS 2013 Convention</u> Hosted by the Olympia Chap- ter of the ARS	SeaTac Airport Marriott SeaTac, Washington	Variable
Sun May 5	Giant Plant Sale New & unusual perennials In support of Finnerty Gardens	UVIC Gym 10 am – 1 pm	
Tue May 7	Victoria Horticultural Society Plant Sale	Garth Homer Centre 7 – 9 pm	
Thurs – Sat May 9 – 11	2013 Cowichan Valley Rhodo Socie- ty Tour to Washington State	Gardens in Washington State area and one in BC	\$500/p. dbl or \$600/p. single occupancy
Sat May 11	VRS Rhodo Sale	Abkhazi Garden, –250- 598-8096 1964 Fairfield Rd, Victoria 9 am – 12 pm	
Sat May 11	Carmen Varco & Friends Plant Sale & Garden Open woodland perennials, hydrangeas, & Pacific Coast Iris hybrids	5450 Old West Saanich Rd, Victoria Parking available next door at the Gazebo B & B 10 am – 2 pm	

Upcoming Events

2013	Event	Place	Fee
Mon May 13	VRS meeting Panel discussion	Garth Homer Centre, Victoria 7:30 pm	
Sun May 19	Plant a Holics Sale	Abkhazi Gardens –250- 598-8096 1964 Fairfield Rd, Victoria Parking at Margaret Jenkins School 9 am – 12 pm	Free
Sat May 25	VRS Show	Westshore Mall, Victoria 9 am – 4 pm	
Fri – Sat May 31 – Jun 1	Victoria Cactus & Succulent Society Show & Sale	Tillicum Mall Fri 9:30 am – 9 pm Sat 9:30 am – 5:30 pm	
Sun June 23	VRS Potluck Picnic	The Massa's in Sooke	



Rhododendron “Seta”, an attractive early bloomer