

# The Victoria Rhododendron Society

## *Newsletter*



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

February 2014 Thirty-third Year of Publication

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web page – <http://victoriarhodo.ca>

Meeting 7:30

**Monday, February 3, 2014**

NOTE: it is the FIRST Monday this month

**GARTH HOMER CENTRE, 811 DARWIN AVENUE,  
VICTORIA, B. C.**

**Agnes Lynn “Native Ericaceous Plants”**

**Agnes Lynn** is a long-time Rhododendron Club member who especially likes trees and shrubs, and one of her favourite groups of plants is in the Heather or Ericaceous family. She'll show you some examples of these fascinating plants. If you want to learn more, come along on one of the Botany trips that she leads for the Victoria Natural History Society or visit her Open Garden on Mother's Day.

### REFRESHMENTS

Please let Betty Gordon know at 250-479-0210 or at [bbgordon@shaw.ca](mailto:bbgordon@shaw.ca) if you are coming to the meeting and bringing goodies.

Roy and Lois Blackmore, Jacqueline Bradbury, Stephen and Marjorie Brice, Archie and Norma Brown, Bert and Norma Buckley

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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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### NOTES FROM THE BOARD

Next meeting, March 10, is our Annual General Meeting. We need new members for the board, and it is fun—so if you would like to find out more .....

The Board decided that no printed copies of our Newsletter would be mailed to members who have email addresses. The cost of paper, ink, and especially stamps continues to rise.

We were pleased to offer lifetime membership in the Victoria Rhododendron Society to Norm Todd who has made such a major contribution to the club over the years—Norm was honored to accept.

## VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY BOARD

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## January's talk, "The Gardens of Oak Bay"

by Theresa McMillan

John Lucas's talk showed how gardens can lead the mind to the larger world. For instance, the Abkhazi Gardens remind people of the great love affair the Abkhazis had. Another garden was a change from a dreary expanse of grass and a concrete pad to a world of its own, one that would perfectly illustrate the gardens in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", complete with fairies such as Puck. The new gardens at the Oak Bay Beach Hotel lead one's imagination to the sea and its possibilities behind it. John's garden in Royal Oak features a long shaded wall garden that can seat several people for a summer's lunch or dinner.

Other parts of the garden feature varying textures such as a windmill palm, a smoke tree, magnolias and firs. Shade contrasted by white flowers such as Japanese clematis as well as a water feature with hundreds of white stones, with a samurai fisherman at the stream's edge are all conducive to contemplation.

The Memorial Garden in Oak Bay in remembrance of veterans of Vimy Ridge also expanded our minds and thoughts. As John sang "Dominae", and showed pictures of the horrors of the World Wars, we remembered those years.

Now, the Memorial Gardens and flowers lead to another view of the sea.

John Lucas's talk included pictures, poetry and music, and was one of the most original we have ever heard.



## **Bless This Mess: How Being Less Tidy Can Improve the Ecology of Your Garden**

Colleen Miko  
WSU Extension  
Horticulture Educator  
Kitsap County, Washington

Bless this mess, I say of my garden as I ignore some weeds, stack up a brush pile, and let debris lie. The more I read about backyard wildlife habitat, the more I understand that a “messy” garden provides shelter and food for wildlife—everything from soil fauna to black bear.

I didn’t use to be a laissez-faire gardener. A type-A personality, I believed that a tidy garden was a healthy garden: no weeds in sight, detritus banished. Now I know that a balanced garden where disease and pests are kept in check naturally requires a network of creatures that thrive in the presence of debris.

Does your garden have deciduous trees? Lucky you with that free source of mulch. Leaf litter is nature’s way of conserving soil moisture, moderating soil temperatures and generating humus. A thick layer of leaves serves as a weed barrier and shelter for overwintering insects and amphibians like salamanders. You don’t even need to shred the leaves; songbirds like towhees and juncos will tear at it, looking for a meal. In this way, it’s good to be a “litter bug.” And what of other garden remnants? If it weren’t for branches, twigs, bedraggled mops of ornamental grasses, spider webs, and moss in the lawn, birds would lack nesting materials.

Pollinators like bees, butterflies and other insects love weeds whose flowers are rich in pollen and nectar. Allowing parts of our gardens to host non-aggressive weeds—lawns and wilder areas, for instance—provides habi-

tat and gives one more spare time. This is my second year of leaving garden cleanup until spring. Wow, is that liberating! I used to work in a frenzy in late fall to cut back all the perennials, grasses, and deciduous vines. I took satisfaction in the “clean” beds. Then I read about native bees and other beneficials who overwinter in the hollow stems of tall perennials—insects that don’t become active again until late winter or spring. My autumn cleanup was cutting their life cycles short.

The untidiness of delayed cleanup has grown on me. I like to see the seed heads glistening with frost or bobbing under the weight of a feasting bird. Other benefits: decaying foliage protects the crowns from cold, acts as a weed barrier, and improves soil fertility.

Tree snags are a reminder of the cycle of life: from death springs life. Bees, songbirds, some species of bat, and other creatures are housed and fed in dying and dead trees. If you leave snags, branches, cones and needles, they’ll eventually break down into fertile, well-draining soil teeming with the microorganisms that feed plants and wildlife.

It’s true that both beneficial and not-so-beneficial creatures will take advantage of suitable habitat. One does need to watch for slugs and rodents who nibble on plants, out of sight. And the foliage of diseased plants should be removed to prevent further infestation. But the eventual goal is an ecologically balanced garden that attracts amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals who will feed on the slugs, rodents and other “sometime pests” that all have a place in the “messy” garden.

*Reprinted with permission from Seeds for Thought, a newsletter from the Master Gardener Foundation of Washington State, and the author, and from the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society, Fall 2013.*

## From the editor:

The preceding article “Bless this Mess” describes the benefits of leaving garden debris to act as a natural mulch and source of food for wildlife.

The following article, written several years ago by Alex McCarter, reminds us that some weeding is necessary: invasive species. His problems were a weedy kind of aster and another weed, false garlic. When we see bits of Scotch broom or Himalayan Blackberry in our patches of lawn (between our rhododendrons) or sprigs of Morning Glory that have escaped from our neighbors’ gardens, then we must go into attack mode!

### The Neglected Garden

by Alec McCarter 2001

A garden cannot be untended long without showing signs of serious neglect. To the casual observer, the lush growth may appear impressive. So it was recently, when I showed an old friend around our garden. As we walked about, he commented on the bronzy new foliage of *Rhododendron luteum*, the vivid watermelon-coloured and black-centered oriental poppies and the handsome arrangement of flower and leaf of a *Rodgersia*. I was painfully aware of the background foliage being a mass of weeds.

The garden-worthy plants that we have in that particular border are New England Asters. Mimicking them in structure and leaf were hundreds of plants, which I think we identified some years ago as a species of *Epilobium*. It grows much branched from a shallow tuft of roots, to a height of 75 cm., branching from the axils of the elongated, willow-leaf-like leaves. These are slightly serrated and very narrow, tapering to the tip. Each branch terminates in a flower atop a four-sided seed receptacle that is less than 2 mm. wide but 5 cm. long. The flowers are 4 petalled, only 4 mm. long, and pink – which accounts for my wife and me calling it ‘pink-weed.’ When ripe (and this happens all too soon), the pod splits lengthwise to release many tiny

seeds, each with a tuft of silky hairs that permit the seeds to be carried by the wind to distant locations.

The area that I cleaned out, that where the asters grow, contained enough of these plants to fill a wheelbarrow. There were far more here than elsewhere in the garden. Perhaps we missed seeing them last year, or seeds might have been deposited here in the lee of shrubs where the air currents were still enough to allow the seeds to collect.

If this is an *Epilobium*, it is not the familiar fireweed, *Epilobium angustifolium*. We have that in another part of the garden where it has been for more than twenty years without spreading. It is a welcome sight when it blooms, reminding us of so many places where we have seen it – from sea to sea in Canada, and north to the Arctic. Masses of it grew in the burned-out bomb-sites near St. Paul’s Cathedral in London after the war. Why it should be so well-behaved in our garden is a bit of a mystery. We wish its cousin would learn from example.

In another area of the garden, three huge plants of *Angelica*, left because they did a good job of obscuring the compost boxes, had grown to block the path to those amenities. Their umbels were a mass of immature seeds. Had they not been cut down, these seeds would have fallen mainly in the



compost with disastrous results next year when Angelica would have turned up everywhere. Behind the Angelica, unseen until it was taken down, were two plants of *Notoscordum inodorum* – the un-smelly relative of False Garlic. I removed the plants but I am certain not to have removed all of the bulblets on which this plant depends for its claim on eternal life. After digging out what can be dug, I immediately deposit this terrible nuisance in the garbage. Perhaps it would be better to kill it by putting it in the microwave, but I doubt I would be allowed in the house afterwards.

No desperate but infrequent foray into the garden can make up for the continuous surveillance and constant removal of weeds and unwanted plants. Trees produce branches that need sawing-off, shrubs need pruning to constrain and shape them. Asparagus beetles attack their favourite plant, something has eaten all the leaves on the *Prunus subhirtella*, and the seed-pods of Columbines need to be removed before they drop their shiny black contents to propagate themselves. The rhodos and roses need dead-heading. I had better get with it!

(reprinted with permission from the Finnerty Gardens newsletter of July 2001) and from our VRS Newsletter Archives for 2001.



Aster



*Notoscordum inodorum*, “False Garlic”



*Rubus armeniacus* “Himalayan Blackberry”



*Cytisus scoparius* “Scotch Broom”

### ***SPECIAL EVENT***

The *Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden* in Federal Way, Washington, is preparing a special event to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Garden! This event is being held April 24-26, 2014 and we would like to invite all members of the American Rhododendron Society to attend. The full schedule of events as well as registration information and a link to the hotel is available on the RSF website, [RhodyGarden.org](http://RhodyGarden.org).

The cut-off for early registration is March 1. All rhododendron lovers will enjoy the opportunity to attend if possible.

## **RSF 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION**

**April 25 to 26**

**REGISTER NOW**

*Early Registration \$65 / After March 1st \$75*

*Meals Additional*

**Register at [RhodyGarden.org](http://RhodyGarden.org)**



**1964  
TO  
2014**

*Everyone  
Welcome*

### **Speakers:**

David Chamberlain, Harold Greer, Steve Hootman, Douglas Justice

**Garden & Nursery Tours, Reception & Banquet**

**at the Hampton Inn & Suites &  
the Weyerhaeuser Corporate Headquarters**



## California and Oregon Garden Tour

**May 7 to 12, 2014**

***Redwoods, rhodos, wine and west coast***

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society is hosting a tour of gardens and sights along the northern California coast and southern Oregon in early May 2014, peak flowering time.

The all-inclusive cost of this tour is approximately \$1000 per person (double occupancy) or an additional \$275 for single occupancy. Included in the price:

- ☐ 5 nights' accommodation in good and comfortable hotels
- ☐ Welcome California wine and cheese reception at SF hotel ( 6:30 pm on May 7)
- ☐ Complementary Airport Shuttle in San Francisco to the hotel
- ☐ 5 days of deluxe coach transportation from SF through California ,Oregon to Duncan /Victoria
- ☐ Ferry fares, garden entry fees, gratuities and taxes and US\$ exchange
- ☐ All meals (except suppers on May 7 and 11) including wine tasting in the Sonoma Valley
- ☐ Morning snacks, soft drinks and bottled water
- ☐ Special plant buying opportunity at the famous Greer nursery in southern Oregon
- ☐ A fun and exciting time with fellow gardeners and rhodoholics

You will need a valid passport for this trip to fly to the US. Please check expiry dates on your passports!

We also recommend you purchase travel medical insurance (BCAA or other) for your visit to the USA.

Participants should be in good physical condition but the sites are mostly well accessible.

**Deposit: A \$300 deposit per person is required by Feb. 15** with a cheque made out to Bill Dumont and mailed to 1753 Peerless Road, Cobble Hill, BC V0R 1L6. Indicate double or single room. Any questions call me at 250 743 9882 or email [wedumont@hotmail.com](mailto:wedumont@hotmail.com) Final Payment is due on **April 15, 2014.**

Please distribute this information about this exciting tour to your friends and fellow gardeners.

### Notice from the Board:

**The Victoria Home Builder's Association is having a HOME SHOW  
February 28, March 1 and 2 at the SAVE-ON-FOODS Memorial Center.**

**The Victoria Rhododendron Society has been offered a booth to feature  
rhododendrons.**

**Volunteers will be needed to man the booth.**

**The topic will be discussed up in February's meeting.**

## Early Spring Blooms



Purple crocus



R. dauricum in bloom



Mahonia "Winterset"



Double snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*)