AtlanticRhodo

www.AtlanticRhodo.org

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Rhododendron Society of Canada - Atlantic Region

Positions of Responsibility 2003 - 2004

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Membership

Fees were due on January 1, 2004. Annual dues are $ 15.00 for individuals or families. Make cheques payable to Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society. Send them to **ARHS Membership Secretary, Betty MacDonald, 534 Prospect Bay Road, Prospect Bay, NS B3T1Z8.** If you have not renewed your membership please do so now. When renewing, please include your telephone number and e-mail. This information will be used for Society purposes only (co-ordination of potluck suppers and other events) and will be kept strictly confidential. Thanks!

The Website address for the American Rhododendron Society is **www.rhododendron.org** for those wishing to renew their membership or become new members of the ARS.

AtlanticRhodo is the Newsletter of the Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society. We welcome your comments, suggestions, articles, photos and other material for publication. Send all material to the editor.

Published three times a year. February, May and October.

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Cover Photo:
Helleborous X nigercors. [Photo John Weagle]

Calendar of Events

All ARHS meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month, from September to May, at 7:30 p.m. in the Nova Scotia Museum Auditorium, 1747 Summer St., Halifax, unless otherwise noted. Paid parking is available in the Museum lot. Friends, guests and anyone interested in rhododendrons, azaleas or companion plants are always welcome at meetings or events.

2 March	**Meeting:** Gwen Romanes: Earl Mountbatten of Burma goes to Labrador. Gwen spoke on the 2003 species plant hunting expedition to a wild and wondrous place of our own.
6 April	**Meeting:** Captain Dick Steele: All Roads lead to Bayport Plant Farm. Captain Steele, a founder of our Society and a well-known plantsman and hybridizer on some of the other plants he loves, alpines, companion plants and natives.
1 May	**Pickup for Pre-ordered plants.** Plants pre-ordered from the 2004 Advance May Sale list are to be picked up at 5 Sime Court, Halifax, on **Saturday, May 1, between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.** See Special Notices in this Newsletter.
4 May	**Meeting:** Alex Wilson will speak on Great Gardens of the Eastern Seaboard. Alex has been photographing gardens up and down the Eastern seaboard. Be prepared to be inspired. A great start to summer. **Members' Plant Sale:** See Special Notices in this Newsletter.
8 May	**2004 May Plant Sale** at Le Marchant – St. Thomas School. **1:00 to 3:30 p.m.** See Special Notices in this Newsletter.
12 June	**Annual Potluck Supper, 6:00 p.m.** Home of Bob & Bonnie Pettipas, 12 Edmond Drive, Dartmouth See Special Notices in this Newsletter.
12 June	**Garden Tours** See Special Notices in this Newsletter

Please Note: Some members, who have environmental sensitivities, are asking their fellow members please to use no perfumes, scented soaps, etc., on the days or evenings of RSCAR events, in order to minimize the risk of allergic reactions.

A very warm welcome to our new and returning R.S.C. Atlantic Region members who have joined since the February 2004 Newsletter:

Carley Agnew	**Lunenburg, NS**
Linda & Lewis Brown	**Wrightsville, PA, USA**
Bob Branton	**Dartmouth, NS**
Bryan Johnson	**Brighton, ON**
William Jamieson	**Fall River, NS**
Carol Loncarevic	**Bedford, NS**
Joan Loomis	**Dartmouth, NS**
Rachael Martin	**Halifax, NS**
Martha Rogers	**Halifax, NS**
Donna Silver	**Prospect Bay, NS**
Richard Spencer	**Lower Wolfville, NS**

Special Notices

2004 Advance May Sale Pickup

Plants pre-ordered from the 2004 Advance May Sale list are to be picked up at 5 Sime Court, Halifax, on **Saturday, May 1, between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.** Plants not picked up on this day will be sold at the public sale.

Sime Court is in the Kingswood subdivision off the Hammonds Plains road. Take Kingswood Drive (between Kearney Lake Road and Farmer Clem's) to Brenda Drive (the first street on the right) and follow it to the first left which is Sime Court. For more information contact Ken Shanik at 422-2413, InsigneGdn@aol.com, or Duff and Donna Evers at 835-2586 or devers@eastlink.ca.

Members' Plant Sale
During Regular Monthly Meeting
Tuesday, May 4, 2004

Members are encouraged to bring plant material to sell at the regular monthly meeting in May. Plants should be rare, unusual or hard to find varieties of perennials, annuals, shrubs, etc., that are not readily available commercially. Rhododendrons, either species or hybrids (seed grown or rooted cuttings) are especially encouraged. Members are required to price and sell their plants themselves. This is a great way to find homes for those surplus plants while recouping some of your expenses for pots and soil. Please participate, especially as a vendor!

Venors are encouraged, but not required, to provide information about their plants. You may have great plants, but if the members don't know them and they don't look particularly spectacular at sale time, they are apt not to sell.

2004 May Plant Sale
Le Marchant – St. Thomas School
6141 Watt Street, Halifax
Saturday, May 8, 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

This sale is one of our major fund raisers and it relies heavily on donations from our members**.** In addition to the nursery stock we bring in, we hope to have a good selection of tree and shrub seedlings, rooted cuttings, perennials, annuals, etc. donated by you. Please keep this sale in mind this spring when you are sowing seed, transplanting and dividing. Your donations will be greatly appreciated. Members are requested to drop off donations between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon.

Many varieties of rhododendrons that were not available for preordering in the advance sale will be offered. They include 'April Mist', 'Bluenose', 'Calsap', 'Haaga', 'Helsinki University', 'Hong Kong', 'Ingrid Mehlquist', 'Vinecrest', *schlippenbachii*, azalea 'Stewartstonian', azalea 'Coccinea Speciosa' and *Magnolia stellata* 'Royal Star'.

Donors and sale volunteers will be able to select two plants prior to the sale opening. This will not include nursery grown stock. Plants must be selected, paid for and taken to your vehicle an hour prior to the sale opening. This rule will be strictly enforced. No exceptions!

Plan to attend and bring your friends. This event is always popular and the lineup to get in is usually long. For the best selection we recommend that you plant to arrive earlier than the 1:00 p.m. opening time. While you are waiting a handout with descriptions of nursery stock will be available.

For more information contact Duff & Donna Evers at 835-2586 or devers@eastlink.ca.

Special Notices

Annual Potluck Supper

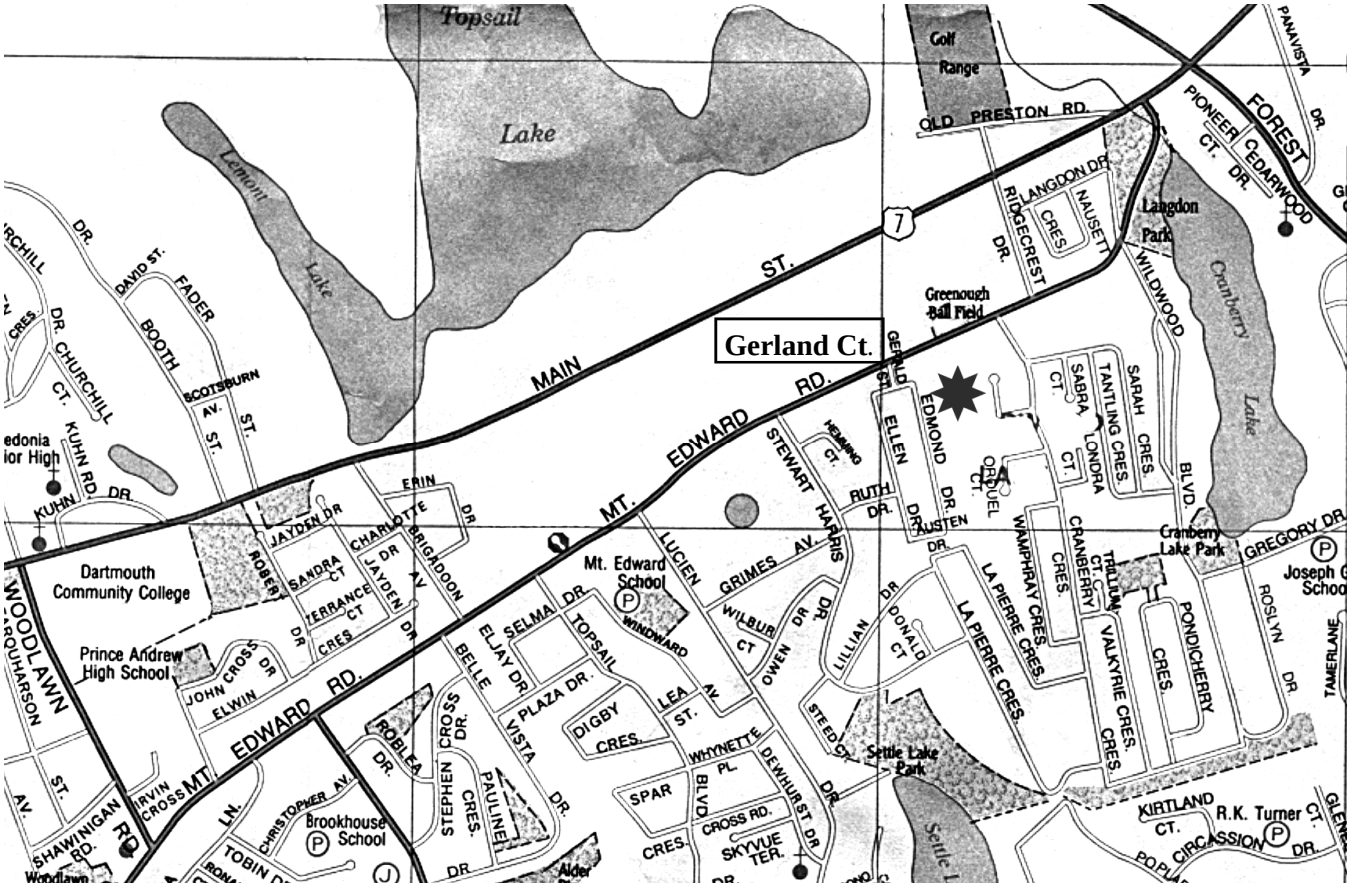
Saturday, June 12, 2004, 6:00 p.m.

At the residence of Bob Pettipas, 12 Edmond Drive, Dartmouth

Bob is well known to members for his enthusiastic involvement in many areas of ARHS activities, and particularly for organizing the tissue culture sale for many years. He has passionately collected rhodies and hostas; about ten years ago he began to arrange them into a garden; he considers this to be a "new" garden. This garden will be well worth seeing!

PLEASE let Bob know if you are planning to come, preferably by e-mail pettipas@sympatico.ca or call 462-5654, to ensure enough plates, wine, etc. This is a true potluck – bring whatever you wish. Keep in mind that it's a buffet, so easy to manage items work best.

Directions: Travel east on Hwy # 7 (Main St.) past Chebucto Ford & Akerley Community College, and continue past Brigadoon to the lights at the intersection of Main St. & Ridgecrest Dr. (approx 3 km after Chebucto Ford). Turn right on Ridgecrest Dr., at top of hill turn right onto Mount Edward Rd. Proceed west on Mount Edward Rd. to 3 way stop. Go straight and then turn left onto Gerland Ct., proceed to T junction with Edmond. No. 12 Edmond is a gray bungalow with a privet hedge. See star on map below.



Special Notices

Plant and Garden Tours 2004

Saturday, June 12

All Gardens 2:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Garden of Ann Huestis, 7 Summit Street, Dartmouth

This is a collector's garden. The plants have been chosen because Ann likes different textural shapes and forms. She gardens on a small city lot, sloped, and has a small pond, with the added challenge of too much heat and sunshine. Her collection includes Japanese maples, bamboos, grasses, hellebores and groundcovers.

To reach this garden from Halifax, follow Portland Street (Hwy 207) to Maynard Street, turn left on Maynard Street to Summit Street.

Sullivan's Pond, (between Ochterloney Street and Prince Albert Drive) Dartmouth

In the February 2004 issue of this Newsletter we printed an article by Bob Pettipas about moving some of the Muntz rhodos from Clementsport to Sullivan's Pond. These plants are located near the gazebo on the north (Ochterloney) side of the pond. It will be interesting to observe them in bloom and see how they have survived the winter.

From Halifax take the MacDonald Bridge, turn sharp right onto Wyse Road and follow it into Alderney Drive, turn left on Ochterloney Street and follow it to the small lake on the right which is Sullivan's Pond.

Garden of Nelson & Jean Watson, 68 Lorne Ave., Dartmouth

This garden features heaths, heathers, spring flowers, rhodies, azaleas grown from seed and rock garden plants. Like all gardeners, Nelson and Jean say their garden is a work in progress.

Lorne Ave. is a dead end street off Sinclair Street, close to Prince Albert Road, near Lake Banook.

Special Magnolia Offer

The following three cultivars of *Magnolia sprengeri* are being specially propagated and will be available to members. These magnolias are for gardens in Zone 6b. These will be ready in the Spring of 2005 or 2006 and will be supplied as balled and burlapped 1-2 metre plants. Prices have not been determined but we have decided to proceed because of their rarity. If you are interested in obtaining any of them please contact John Weagle - Taliensia@aol.com or call 902-422-2413 - as soon as possible. We have to sign up for our requirements now and no late orders will be entertained.

Magnolia sprengeri 'Claret Cup'
Magnolia sprengeri 'Copeland Court'
Magnolia sprengeri 'Eric Savill'

For the very adventuresome *Magnolia campbellii* 'Lanarth' can be ordered at the same time.

Dutch International Rockgarden Conference of Alpine Plants

13 – 17 April 2005 A large scale conference organized by the Dutch Alpine Garden Society, with internationally known speakers and garden visits.

For further information:

Bookings Manager, Martijn Jansen
Tondensestraat 5,
6975 AB Tonden, Netherlands
e-mail: martijnjansen@zonnet.nl.

Garden Spreadsheet

By Bob Pettipas

Hello fellow garden enthusiasts. Like many of you my garden is expanding. The small tissue culture plants have grown. In addition you start collecting way too many plants and the obsession to have that better blue or yellow or the one with the great indumentum takes over. So out goes the lawn and in go new beds.

The problem with any new space is combining these plants to make a garden. The colour, time of bloom and ultimate size of the plant are important factors in planning a garden. As an example I remember the first time I saw rhodos 'Ginny Gee' and 'Patty Bee' planted together; they really complemented one another. Another great combination is Captain Steele's early yellow 'Bpt 80-5' planted near a star magnolia.

With that in mind I created a reference spreadsheet that contained the plants I grow and when they bloom. This spreadsheet is an average of the seasons. Some years are later than others and it will also depend on where you live. This spreadsheet is based on my garden in Dartmouth. If you live in Yarmouth or Sydney your bloom time will be different. What should not change is the sequence of bloom time.

Our web page designer has placed my spreadsheet on our website. It can be downloaded to your own computer for you to use and to add the plants that you grow. If you grow plants not listed please send me the information on them. Please feel free to compare my findings to yours and send me your comments. We will be much better off if we share our knowledge.

The spreadsheet can be found at

http:/www.atlanticrhodo.org/unique/f_unique.html

Please send any updates to me at pettipas@ns.sympatico.ca

Jelena de Belder

By M. J. Harvey

In 1952 two brothers, George and Robert de Belder in Belgium bought an acreage of derelict land covered with weeds and clumps of shrubs and trees. The area, called Kalmthout, had been used for growing vegetables in World War II but early in its history had been a nursery started in 1856 by Geer and taken over in 1896 by Antoine Kort who raised rhododendrons and conifers on the sandy soil. Kort was also involved in hybridizing numerous shrubs including Hamamelis species. The nursery business closed in World War I, Kort retained the property but eventually the rows of shrubs grew into each other forming impenetrable tangles in places.

While the brothers were restoring the old nursery they were visited in 1954 by Jelena Kovacie, a recent graduate of horticulture from Slovenia in what was then Yugoslavia. Robert and Jelena fell in love, married and carried out the restoration of Kalmthout which is now one of the world's more famous arboreta. Handing Kalmthout over to a trust they later created an even larger arboretum, Hemelrijk (kingdom of heaven in Flemish), near Esschen on the border with the Netherlands.

Robert and Jelena were responsible for not only the Kalmthout restoration but introduced several shrub cultivars. The witch hazel *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Jelena' was teased out of one of Kort's thickets as was 'Diane', named for their daughter.

Here in Victoria 'Jelena' is one of the best winter shrubs existing. In fact let me throw caution to the wind and say it is the best. The narrow, ribbon- like petals are a coppery orange with a bit of yellow and start to bloom in mid December. A bunch of twigs arranged in a vase in the house open their blossoms in three or so days in December and put out a perfume resembling the Christmas mandarin orange peel. Frost and snow damage neither the buds nor the open flowers - they bounce back the next warm day. The flowering period, being in the cool season, lasts into March. There is no better value in winter shrubs and in the fall the leaves change to vivid orange and yellow colours.

Other cultivars for which the couple were responsible include *Hydrangea serrate* 'Spreading Beauty', *H. paniculata* 'Brussels Lace', 'Burgundy Lace', 'Unique', 'White Moth' and 'Pink Diamond'.

Jelena de Belder was elected a Royal Horticultural Society Vice-President in 1998 and part of this account is derived from the obituary in the RHS journal 'The Garden'. Jelena died 31 August 2003 aged 78.

(This article was originally written for the Finnerty Gardens newsletter). It is a fine winter's tale (ED.)

Reprinted from The Newsletter of The Victoria Rhododendron Society, March 2004.

Plant Portraits: Shrubs and Trees

Clethra alnifolia 'Hummingbird'

Clethra alnifolia 'Hummingbird' has been a resident in my garden for a little over two years and it has been moved twice so, as the books say, it does not appear to be difficult to grow. I think it must be very forgiving of my amateur gardening techniques. It requires moist, acidic, well drained soil, in full sun to dappled shade. My plant gets a few hours of afternoon sun and the soil is more dry than moist. So I would add adaptability to its character traits. It does not appear to be bothered by pests or disease. One of my books suggests propagation by cuttings or layering. If necessary, prune the old wood lightly in the spring. It appears to be a good companion plant for our rhododendrons.

'Hummingbird' is a compact shrub and can grow to about three and a half feet. Its glossy dark green leaves are finely serrated and turn golden in autumn. In August this little shrub is covered in spikes of tiny white blossoms that can last from four to six weeks and the fragrance whispers up and down our garden. If this wee shrub does not survive this miserably cold winter I shall be looking for a replacement. It is definitely a keeper if only for the fragrance.

- **Donna Evers**

Spirea x *Vanhouttei* – Bridal Wreath

In praise of a stalwart shrub, *Spirea x Vanhouttei,* Bridal Wreath. It is a deciduous plant with graceful branches arching to the ground. It annually blooms profusely, unaffected by cold, drought, insects, disease or wind, and is highly recommended by the US National Arboretum as an unclipped hedge for an exposed location. It prefers full sun but does well in my garden under a high canopy. Its white blossoms in early June stand an inch or so above the foliage and they are showy day and night. It blooms with the lily flowered tulips so it's possible to make plant marriages in white, pink or yellow depending on your preference. A frothy spirea could form the background for pink peonies in various shades and blue Siberian iris to make a cool colour combination with varied and long lasting foliage. The leaves are small, trilobed and blue-green. They turn red and gold in the fall, then fall daintily around its base. For twenty-five years this plant's performance has made it an enduring favourite.

- **H. Ruth Jackson**

Rhododendron 'Bellefontaine'

About 15 years ago, I purchased this exceptional plant from Bayport and centred it on the property line in my backyard city garden, knowing it would grow to be large but not sure what to expect. Since that time, Bellefontaine has given my family, my neighbours and many little songbirds great pleasure in all seasons. A cross of *R. fortunei* and *smirnowii*, it was bred by R.B. Pike in Lubec, Maine, and selected for propagation by Dr. Don Craig here in Nova Scotia. Joe Gable also crossed these two beautiful species plants to create *R.* 'Katherine Dalton'.

Our stately 'Bellefontaine' is presently over seven feet high with graceful arching branches in a mostly sunny, protected setting. Like *smirnowii*, its old leaves turn golden in August and drop to the ground by September. Some of its lowest branches have reached into the soil and, anchored by new rootlets, have "layered", creating a few healthy offspring for me to dig up and give away!

From *R. fortunei*, it has inherited dark green oblong leaves with creamy undersides that curl tightly in bitter winter weather and fan out to encircle soft lavender-pink trusses. The new stems are burnished, dark red throughout the year, a striking contrast to the long green glossy leaves. Large upright buds start swelling dark purple in late May, emerging to lavender-pink, prolific blooms in early June and fading to softer shades over the next few weeks. Like its *smirnowii* parent, our 'Bellefontaine's trusses with frilled edges contain ten or more funnel shaped campanulate corollas, adding a lush opulence to its regal stature.

Withstanding the hurricane winds of Juan last September, the open exposure to frigid January temperatures and 95 cm of blowing snow on February 19, 2004, everyone's plants will display their true hardiness over the next few months. Bud hardy to -26C, 'Bellefontaine' scores 4 out of 5 on Greer's rating scale for its flower, foliage, plant and performance (*Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons*, 3rd ed., 1996). This spring in my garden, despite the previous fall and winter, I expect Bellefontaine will retain its status as one of my all time best performers.

- **Jan Riddell**

Weeping European Beech

Fagus sylvatica pendula is a weeping form of the European beech, with elliptic-ovate wavy margined silky haired leaves. The leaves are pale green in the spring, turning a glossy green in the summer and yellow to orange-brown in the fall. Zones 5 to 7.

My interest in the European beech probably stems from my early days in the United Kingdom, when I knew a garden surrounded by a beech hedge in Northumberland, and mature beech trees in the grounds of the school I attended in Edinburgh. The word *pendula* (weeping or drooping) also seems to be a reason for me to buy plants.

The weeping beech in my garden is about twenty years old and thirty feet high and wide. I understand this is not by half the full height; someone may have a challenge in the future. The structure of the tree is very interesting in all seasons and makes an excellent feature. To date I have not experienced any problems with this tree. I am, however, now trying to grow my second *Fagus purpurea pendula.* The first died above the graft after three or four years but the rootstock continues to thrive in Ken MacAulay's garden. My second is now, I hope, surviving its third winter.

Fagus sylvatica pendula in winter.
[Photo Bill Hepell]

I recommend this tree for the larger garden.

- **Bill Heppell**

Stewartia pseudocamellia

We bought our stewartia some thirty-five years ago from Sheridan Nursery's special Fiftieth Anniversary list. This was a gamble, as the plant was supposed to be hardy only to zone 7. The tree in our Halifax garden is now about twenty-five feet high and has never looked back. What the winter of 2004 will do to it, who knows.

Stewartias are members of the *Theaceae,* the tea family. Camellias belong to the same family, and our stewartia in flower resembles a single camellia. It is deciduous, unlike camellias, which probably helps it survive cold winters. There are several other species of stewartia, two found in the south eastern US and the others in east Asia, but as far as I know only the Japanese *pseudocamellia* is available here.

Our stewartia flowers in late July and in most years blooms well, perhaps most heavily after a warm sunny summer. The flowers are satiny white with a central mass of golden stamens, and fall while they are still almost perfect, so that the ground under the tree is covered with white blossoms for several weeks in mid summer. In the fall the leaves turn red and purple where they receive sun, and yellow where they are shaded. Almost the most impressive aspect of this tree is the bark; on a mature specimen the bark is mottled in quite vivid patches of mahogany, tan and grey. This makes it attractive in winter as well as summer and fall.

S. pseudocamellia bark and flower.
[Photos Chris Helleiner]

Our tree grows in a damp spot in part shade; the only other large stewartia I know in Halifax is much more compact and dense, growing in full sun. Once our plant was established we never fertilized or watered it and have only recently started to do some pruning of encroaching low growing branches.

Sometimes gambles pay off.

- **Mary Helleiner**

Growing Hellebores

By Ken Shannik

Once only grown by the most avid of gardeners, hellebores have been wildly popular for the past two decades in the UK and are now rapidly growing in popularity in North America. They are prized for their early spring bloom, long bloom period and lush foliage.

Flowers appear in a broad range of colours dependent on the species and can vary from whites to almost blacks, greens, purples, reds, yellows, pinks and combinations thereof. All species consist of 5 sepals (petals) but flower shape can range from flat-faced to cup-shaped to bell-shaped. Once pollinated the flowers lose their stamens and nectaries. The sepals, however, remain until the seed ripens in the summer gradually fading in colour – usually to pale green but remaining ornamental.

All parts of the plant, not unlike many other garden plants, are poisonous. Like rhododendrons, hellebores seem to have garnered an unwarranted elitist and difficult to cultivate status. A few species can be tricky but most are easy to please by following a few simple rules.

The genus *Helleborus* encompasses a broad range of deciduous and evergreen perennial species. These can be classified into three different groups: caulescent, acaulescent and *H. vesicarius*. The first two have distinct growth habits and this affects their cultivation. *H. vesicarius* is a unique and unusual species that I will not discuss here.

Caulescent Species

Helleborus species in this group are evergreen with somewhat woody stems on which both leaves and flowers are born. Flowers are born on stems produced the previous year. After flowering (and seed set), these stems die off, quickly being replaced by new stems which will bloom the following year. Species in this group are *H. foetidus*, *argutifolius*, and *lividus*. *Helleborus x sternii* and *x nigercors*, both hybrids, belong in this caulescent grouping.

These are perhaps the trickiest to grow. They require careful siting to ensure spring bloom. Since these species bloom on stems produced the previous year, stems damaged over the winter are unlikely to bloom. They should be sited where they will be protected from winter winds and sun by shrubs or structures. Where ideal siting is not possible, protection with boughs or other methods can be successful. Avoid areas where falling snow or ice is a problem as crushed stems are more detrimental than burnt foliage.

In early spring it is advisable to prune out any seriously damaged stems. If seed is not desired flowering stems can be pruned out after the bloom has waned. This will improve the appearance and allow more energy to go into new growth. Damaged leaves may be removed before flowering. In cold climates many gardeners forego the flowers and simply enjoy the incredible foliage.

***Helleborus argutifolius* (Corsican Hellebore)**

Helleborus argutifolius is a vigorous and persistent species with thick, medium green, coarsely toothed trifoliate leaves. It is ideally suited to a northern exposure and does especially well against a foundation. It has a procumbent habit with the stems flopping along the ground with the flower panicles growing upright. Staking tends to create an awkward appearance but discretely propping them up works well. Its 1½ to 2 inch (38-50 mm) diameter pale apple-green flowers are slightly cupped to flat-faced in shape and are densely born in large panicles. The foliage is excellent in flower arrangements. It has proven reliably hardy in Zone 6.

There are several strains available including two variegated ones:

'**Pacific Frost**' is a variegated strain originating in the Vancouver garden of Pam Frost. The foliage is pale green and heavily mottled white and cream. New shoots have a red flush.

'**Janet Starnes**' is similar to 'Pacific Frost' but appears to be less vigorous.

***Helleborus foetidus* (Stinking Hellebore)**

Helleborus foetidus is an elegant species with dark green deeply divided foliage reminiscent of a cut-leaf Japanese maple. It is the most "shrubby" of the genus with an upright habit. Small pale green cup-shaped flowers droop pendulously in large open panicles above the foliage. In flower it grows 18 to 24 inches (45-60 cm) high. It flowers so heavily that it can quickly exhaust itself, thus it tends to be a short-lived species. Yearly fertilizing with a generous top-dressing of rich compost or well-rotted manure is essential. Ideally allow a few to self-sow to ensure that you will not be without it. Established plants are very difficult to transplant or divide. It does best in light shade and is hardy to Zone 6. The far from flattering common name is apt only if grown indoors where its unpleasant scent is noticeable only when brushed against or closely observed.

Many strains are available. Amongst them:

'**Wester Flisk**' is a beautiful cultivar and the most commonly grown. It has beautiful grey-green leaves and red stems and petioles. The flowers are tipped with red on the inside. The grey leaf colouration intensifies in winter and develops a reddish cast. Strive to find a location where it is protected yet can be enjoyed in the winter.

'**Bowles Form**' is a vigorous cultivar with more finely divided foliage, more profuse and denser bloom and red inner tips to the flowers.

'**Green Giant**' is a McLewin introduction, much larger growing with paler foliage and brighter flowers. The long narrow leaf segments droop giving a lovely lacy effect.

'**Green Gnome**' is a compact lower growing selection from Plant Delights Nursery.

'**Ruth**' is another McLewin selection, large with dark green foliage and bright green flowers.

'**Red Silver**' is new strain from the O'Byrnes in Oregon. The foliage is silver-grey with red stems and petioles. The flowers very striking with the dark red tips inside and out contrasting beautifully with the medium green body of the flowers.

Helleborus lividus

Helleborus lividus is not hardy in Zone 6 and many references recommend over-wintering indoors even in the U.K. I mention it here as it is a beautiful plant amenable to pot culture and because of its parentage in *H. x sternii* which follows. It is similar to *H. argutifolius* but is reduced in all its parts and grows perhaps a foot (30 cm) high. The foliage is grey-green with brighter grey-green veining. Its stems, petioles and leaf undersides are dark purple-red. Its flowers are pale green flushed with red and are slightly more cup-shaped.

I have been growing a reliable strain of plants which I refer to as "*H. lividus*/lividus hybrid?". The leaf margins are toothed while the "true" species is supposed to be untoothed. Aside from this it fully resembles the species. This strain has proven fully hardy in Vancouver and is reportedly much easier to grow than the type/true species. Here in Halifax, it has proven an excellent specimen for pot culture for its early bloom and beautiful foliage. It enjoys the root competition of a mixed tub planting. Excellent drainage is essential in both summer and winter.

Helleborus x sternii

Hybrids between *H. argutifolius* and *H. lividus* with either species as the mother plant are grouped under this name. Plants are intermediate between the two parents with the majority available having darker foliage with a varying degree of silver veining and cast. Flowers are pale green sometimes with a red flush. It is root hardy in Zone 6 but is unlikely to retain its stems and foliage in all but the mildest winters. It is best treated and well worth growing as a herbaceous foliage plant.

Two seed strains are commonly encountered:

'**Boughton Beauty Strain**' more closely resembles *H. lividus* with a strong silver-grey cast and veining, purple-red stems and leaf undersides and a reddish cast to it flowers. With its obvious strong *H. lividus* influence it may prove more tender than most.

'**Blackthorn Strain**' is a strain with silver-grey foliage and flowers lightly flushed with pink.

H. seedling bred by Elfie Rahr of Bellevue, WA. [Photo John Weagle]

Helleborus x nigercors

Helleborus x nigercors is a hybrid between *H. niger* and *H. argutifolius* (formerly *H. corsicus*). It is an unusual hybrid as caulescent and acaulescent species usually do not interbreed. There is little evidence of *H. argutifolius* in the flowers which closely resemble *H. niger* (described later). The leaves have the texture of *H. niger* and more closely resemble that species. The leaves and flowers are true to the caulescent group**.** They are born on stems and the flowers unlike *H. niger* are born in large panicles. The large flowers are white to creamy white, sometimes with a green center. The number of flowers in a panicle can vary greatly. It appears to be much more vigorous and easier to please than *H. niger*.

The plants are sterile; they do not set seed making it rather rare in cultivation. Propagation has traditionally relied on divisions or repeating the cross which typically yields little seed. Strides have been made in tissue culturing and it is becoming more available.

Acaulescent Species

Helleborus species in this grouping can be evergreen or deciduous. The leaves and flowers emerge from rhizome-like growth beneath the soil surface. Several flowers are usually born on each stem. The vast majority of species belong in this grouping. These species, with the exception of *H. niger* are very promiscuous, freely hybridizing both in

the wild and in cultivation. Validation of true species can be difficult for all but the most scholarly. For this reason, I am restricting my observation to the more distinct and commonly available species and hybrids.

Plants in this group are more easily cultivated as winter damage to foliage does not affect spring bloom. Winter damaged foliage can and should be removed before spring bloom. Most are easily grown in light shade to full sun given adequate moisture.

***Helleborus niger* (Christmas Rose)**

H. niger, an evergreen species, is unique in this grouping and perhaps should have special status along with *H. vesicarius*. Its thick, fleshy foliage with blunt lobes is distinct from other species in this group and it does not hybridize with them. The large flowers are flat-faced to slightly cup-shaped and vary from nodding to out-facing in its better forms. They are usually pure white and can develop a pinkish cast with age. Usually they are borne singly.

I have always found it ironic that *H. niger* is the most commonly available hellebore here yet it is perhaps the most difficult to grow in our acidic soils. The healthiest plants I have encountered here are near foundations. This would indicate that neutral to alkaline soil is essential to the success of this species. Incorporate plenty of lime and bonemeal when planting and top-dress annually for better results.

This species is commonly known as the "Christmas Rose" but in North America at least, it is not worthy of this name. Here in Halifax it often commences bloom after the Lenten Rose. Plants grow 12 inches (30 cm.) high and are hardy to Zone 5.

Several strains and a subspecies may be encountered. Amongst them:

ssp. micranthus is a subspecies with shorter stems and larger flowers.

'**Potters Wheel**' is a large flowered strain.

'**Sunset**' is a McLewin strain that quickly and reliably develops a strong pink colouration.

***Helleborus atrorubens* (of gardens)**

The use of "of gardens" in brackets distinguishes the plant that is readily available in commerce from the true species as it occurs in the wild. The commonly available "*H. atrorubens*" is in fact a hybrid and not the true species. It may be encountered under a variety of different names such as *H.* 'Atrorubens', *H. orientalis* 'Atrorubens', *H. orientalis* ssp. abchasicus 'Atrorubens Group' and *H.* 'Early Purple'. It is extremely early blooming with reddish-purple flowers flushed with green. It is only semi-evergreen - the leaves will have dried out when it flowers. Plants are hardy to at least Zone 6.

Helleborus purpurascens

H. purpurascens is another very early-blooming species. In fact, the flowers open almost as soon as the buds emerge from the ground. They range in colour from green with a reddish cast to maroon on the exterior and green on the interior to entirely maroon. The foliage is deciduous. Each narrow leaf segment radiates narrowly from the petiole and flares out into numerous lobes giving a lacy effect. It is a smaller growing species reaching only 12"(30 cm) high in bloom and hardy to Zone 5.

Helleborus cyclophyllus

H. cyclophyllus is a deciduous species with large green to greenish-yellow flowers. It can easily distinguished by the heavy downy silver coating on its newly emerging foliage. The foliage is broadly lobed with the lobes overlapping giving a rounded outline. It has a vigorous strongly upright habit and grows 16-24"(40-60 cm) high. It is rarely offered but is well worth growing and should be hardy to Zone 6 if not colder.

Helleborus torquatus

H. torquatus is a charming deciduous species with finely dissected foliage. The small cup-shaped and pendulous flowers are borne many to a stem. Colour can vary but they are generally violet-purple or green with varying degrees of violet-purple covered with a greyish bloom on the exterior and green on the interior. The flowers are particularly attractive when surrounded by the bright green emerging new foliage. It grows to 16 inches (40 cm) tall and is hardy to Zone 6, possibly colder.

***Helleborus x hybridus* (Lenten Rose)**

H. x hybridus is a relatively new name now used to refer to hybrids of *H. orientalis*. The name *H. orientalis* should only be used to refer to the true, albeit highly variable, species as it is found in the wild**.** *H. orientalis* crosses with many species in the acaulescent group. *H. x hybridus* refers to any hybrid with *H. orientalis* in its parentage.

The Lenten Rose, in its wild or hybrid forms, is an elegant and aristocratic plant. Their flowers are usually large and vary immensely in colour and shape. Colour covers a broad spectrum - whites, pinks, yellows, greens, burgundy, purple-pink, purple-red, blue-black, slate-gray, near black, etc. Some are clear colours. Some have a grey bloom. Some are spotted from light freckling to almost blotched with reds or purple-reds. Picotees (pale flowers with darker edges and veining) and reverse picotees or blotched (dark centres with paler edges) are highly coveted. Add to this the central ring of nectaries that can be yellow to green to purple-red; these, when contrasting with the sepal colour, can be very dramatic.

Flower shape is also highly variable. Flowers can be demure, nodding and bowl-shaped to bold, flat-faced and out-facing. The sepals in the more prized forms are broad, rounded and overlapping and form a perfect bowl shape. They can be pointed giving a starry effect - either with fully overlapping sepals or narrower giving a more open, spidery effect. The latest rage is double flowered (the nectaries replaced with sepals) and anemone flowered (with petaloid nectaries) ones. These are generally very pricey and to me lack the elegance of the singles.

H. x hybridus is a vigorous plant with evergreen dark green leathery evergreen lush foliage. It can grow up to 18"(45 cm) high and in time can form a 36"(90 cm) wide mound. It is hardy to Zone 5.

There is a multitude of named varieties and most are highly desirable. Tissue culture has not yet been commercially successful so propagation of these is by division. As a result, while beautiful, they are rarely if ever obtainable. A great deal of work has been done developing seed strains, which yield quality plants, but they are highly variable. Some strains such as the 'Royal Heritage Strain' encompass a range of colours and good quality plants. Newer strains such as the "Lady Series" are purported to come 80-90% true to colour. Shades, patterning and shape can vary greatly and some of the strain names are misleading. For example the "Blue Lady" strain will require a great deal of imagination to see any blue.

The best way to buy *H. x hybridus* is of course in bloom. In our climate, unfortunately, potted plants are well past their prime by the time the garden centres are up and running. If you are just beginning your journey into the realm of the Lenten Rose start with some inexpensive seedlings or grow your own from a good seed source. Do some research with books and on the internet to see what is possible and become discerning before plunking down large sums of money on individual plants.

Cultivation

Hellebores prefer deep rich moist well-drained soil that is alkaline to neutral. Most however will grow quite happily in moderately acidic soil. Avoid areas with standing water in fall and winter. They prefer light shade but will grow in full sun here if irrigated during dry spells.

When planting prepare the soil as deep as you can manage – 18 inches (45 cm) deep if possible – and amend with rich compost or manure and bonemeal. If your soil is highly acidic add lime as well. Acaulescent species should be planted at pot-level or with the crown slightly below the soil surface. Young caulescent species can be planted slightly deeper. Early spring planting is best as root growth ceases during the hotter summer months and does not resume until the cooler fall months.

Damaged and dead foliage should be removed from acaulescent species in early spring before flowering. The foliage of plants in this group in our climate is usually flattened by our winter snow. If desired all of the foliage can be removed. As previously mentioned, with caulescent species, only badly damaged stems and individual damaged leaves should be removed at this time. Flowering stems from both groups may be removed at any time after flowering has peaked.

They are heavy feeders and should be top-dressed annually with well-rotted manure or rich compost - preferably in early summer after flowering. If your soil is very acidic, apply bonemeal or a bit of lime annually. This may seem tedious but if done a plant that when first planted yielded one or two flower stems will reward you will scores of flowering stems annually.

In our climate flower buds often are pushed to the soil surface, particularly when dry summers are followed by long wet falls. This is especially true with *H. niger*. Faced with very cold temperatures and no snow cover the buds can be killed or damaged. If this occurs cover the crowns with several inches of bark mulch or oak leaves late in the fall. Remove this protection very early in spring during a cloudy period.

Division and transplanting of Hellebores is risky and should be avoided. If plants must be moved they should be moved in spring with as large a root ball as possible. They may take a year or two to re-establish. If you should wish to divide a plant, the entire plant should be dug and the soil washed away from the roots. Growing tips should be careful cut away from the clumps with as many roots intact as possible. Divisions when successful will take several years to establish and gain vigour.

Early spring bulbs such as scillas, chionadoxas, reticulate irises, galanthus, muscari, etc. make excellent close companions. Other woodland plants such as epimediums, uvularias, disporums, trilliums, hepaticas etc. also make

Helleborus naturalized in Bellevue, Washington. [Photo John Weagle]

excellent companions given their own space.
Hellebores, as a rule, perform poorly as stemmed cut flowers as the stems quickly wilt. Individual flowers are best floated and can be spectacular when many are displayed in a shallow dish or pan. They can be beautiful in arrangements but the stems must be wired.

Growing from seed

Seed of most Hellebore species is ephemeral. Seed that has been stored dry for more that a few months loses viability and takes longer to germinate. It is best sown soon after it has ripened. Most species having been sown during the warm summer months will germinate after several months of cold (40ºF) temperatures. Seed which has completely desiccated will yield some germination but will likely require two warm/cold cycles.

Ideally the seed should be sown in individual pots. Seeds sown communally should be planted in a loose mix and transplanted when the first true leaf emerges. The seedlings should be handled only by the cotyledon leaves and the deep roots gently teased apart. Do not handle the young seedlings by their stems. They are easily bruised and death will result.

H. foetidus may need two cycles to germinate, even with fresh seed. *H. argutifolius, lividus* and *x sternii* often germinate as soon as the temperature falls.

Recommended Reading:

Mathew, Brian. *Hellebores.* Alpine Garden Society, 1989

Ahlburg, Marlene Sophie *Hellebores: Christmas Rose, Lenten Rose* B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1993

Schmiemann, Gisela - Editor *Helen Ballard - The Hellebore Queen* 1997

Rice, Graham & Strangman, Elizabeth *The Gardener's Guide to Growing Hellebores.* David & Charles, 1993

The latter is widely available in an edited and updated form at www.hellebore.com ¤

Jens Birck on Rhododendrons

Jens Birck gave the annual Steele Lectures in the fall of 2003. His talks are summarized here by Chris Helleiner.

Thirty Years with Rhododendrons

Jens Birk began his first lecture, "Thirty Years with Rhododendrons" by commenting that it would be good for us if we had one or two more hurricanes, to blow down some more trees. Rhododendrons, he said, do better in full sun than in shade, a point he reiterated several times in the course of his talk.

His garden is in Denmark, at a latitude about the same as Nain (in Labrador), but the climate is moderated by the Gulf Stream. The mean January temperature is –1° C; in July it is +17°. The average annual precipitation is 650 mm. Only when the winds blow from the east, bringing intense cold from Siberia, does he see much damage to his rhododendrons. At his latitude, with very long daylight during the summer, some of his rhododendrons flower a second time in the autumn.

In his view, all rhododendrons in the wild are probably natural hybrids. The descriptions of species in the books are based on dried herbarium material and single specimens, ignoring the natural variability of the species. Furthermore, the characteristics of the plants change when they are grown in cultivation. For example, seed of *Rhododendron proteoides*, (a species with which he has a lot of experience) collected in the wild at elevations of 4000 – 6000 meters resulted in plants which initially had small leaves, but which after a few years had much larger leaves. Furthermore, there was great variability among the plants from the same seed lot.

He told us that the descriptions of species often did not match the appearance of the plants he saw in China. Within an area of 1 square meter, he found three distinct varieties of *R. phaeochrysum*, and the morphology of the flower buds varied even on the same plant. Should classification be based on DNA? Maybe that's what taxonomists want, but gardeners want descriptions of the habit of the plant, not the underlying genetics.

What about collectors' numbers? He does not trust them. The label sometimes does not correspond to the plant on the herbarium sheet, and the origin of the plant is not usually stated. Was it collected from the wild, or was it in a garden?

He said we should be critical of collectors' descriptions. The collector of seed from the wild may have been looking for the "best" plant, but his choice would depend on the stage at which he saw the plant. Was he looking for superior flowers or better leaves?

Taxonomists are constantly changing names of plants; he recommends that you should stick with the name given to the plant when you acquired it. The labels in botanical gardens are often wrong.

He then went on to describe the way in which he grows rhododendrons in his garden. His garden measures 20 x 22 meters, so he prefers compact plants. For 98% of species and 100% of hybrids, he says: No shade! Full sun! Lots of wind! He protects the buds on his plants from the sun from January to March with fences; after that, they are in full sun. The pH of his soil is rather high, and he grows in pure peat, about 25 cm deep, adding about 5 cm fresh peat each year.

(His peat is imported from Sweden). Under his conditions, the roots are most active from October through December; he fertilizes them at that time, using potato fertilizer. Many other plants also do well in pure peat, including cyclamens, gentians, primulas, lilies and *Lewisia tweedyi*.

If plants from his garden don't thrive for you, don't blame him! Success depends on your conditions and your skill. When growing plants from seed, use the best parents, and select those seedlings that meet your needs – in his case small, low-growing, and resistant to fungi. He also recommends selecting for superior leaves; flowers are fleeting, but leaves are visible all year. One of the few hybrids he has named, 'Great Dane' (*R. yakusimanum* x *rex)* was actually selected for its leaves; the flowers are a bonus. When you choose plants in a nursery, go back several times, to observe the plants at various stages and choose ones that look best not only at the peak of flowering. He recommended cutting back the flowering shoot when the bud has matured, leaving a stub of about 2 cm. The plant will then make several new flower buds below the cut within a few weeks, and the plant will be more compact. This is what he does with hybrids, but he prefers to allow species to grow in their natural shape.

He showed pictures of hybrids of *R. yakusimanum* with *R. pachysanthum, tsariense, longisquamatum, adenogynum, bureavii* and *strigillosum.* The present trend is hybridizing with *R. proteoides.* Possible parents with good leaves include *R. barbatum, roxieanum, proteoides, glischrum* (not hardy, but a possible parent) and *bureavii.* Just get started!

And when you have got everything you can grow, what next? How about making bonsai rhododendrons, or growing Vireyas in a greenhouse?

Jens Birk concluded his first lecture with pictures of China and of many plants that have passed the test and continue to thrive in his garden, including *R. campylogynum* (needs to be propagated from cuttings in the cold frame each year) *oreotrepes* (good even in shade!), *strigillosum* (flowering in March, partly covered in snow), *taliense* (the leaves smell like honey) and *thayerianum* (the latest flowering, in mid July).

Grafting Methods

In his second lecture, Jens Birk described the methods he uses for grafting rhododendrons. He gave four reasons for propagating rhododendrons in this way.

1. Tissue culture often results in a weak root system. The outcome is more certain when grafting is used.

2. Grafting provides a method of multiplying scarce material.

3. Grafting can be used when a plant is difficult to root.

4. Grafting is a way of ensuring that good clones are kept alive.

The understock he uses most often is 'Cunningham's White'. Yellows are often not compatible with this understock, and for these he sometimes uses the German hybrid 'Rosa Regen'. *R. barbatum* (probably not hardy in Nova Scotia) and *R. fortunei*, which result respectively in smaller, compact and larger plants are also used occasionally. He suggested, however, that we should look for an easily rooted understock that does well in our area rather than relying on those he found most useful.

He said that the understock and the scion should be matched as closely as possible, both with respect to diameter and growth rate.

He prepares understock by rooting cuttings under fluorescent lights, two 40 watt tubes at about 15ºC, 30 cm from the tubes. The cuttings are grown for about 18 months, and can be used at any time of the year, but he usually does his grafting in February. He makes matching oblique cuts about 2.5 cm long on both understock and scion, leaving three or four leaves on the scion. The two are then fastened together using a rubber band or a pair of clothes pins. It is important to leave a cut end open (a "church window") to encourage callus formation, thereby excluding fungi. The resulting grafted plant is then returned to the fluorescent lights in a plastic bag or a larger container if many plants are to be grown; humidity must be maintained at 100%.

It is also possible to combine rooting of the understock and grafting in one operation, but he said that he thought this was not a good idea for beginners.

In answer to questions, Jens said that the graft should be as low as possible on the understock. He said that one can pinch hybrid plants to encourage compact growth, but he thought this was inappropriate when grafting species, when it is desirable to maintain the growth habit of the wild plant. If grafts of a particular scion do not take, this is probably the result of incompatibility with the understock – just try another understock. Wild species are sometimes thought to change when they are grafted, but he thought this was more likely to be the result of differences in light, growth medium and temperature between the natural and the garden habitats.

The lecture concluded with a demonstration of the method of binding scion to understock. ¤

The Evolution of a Newfoundland Garden

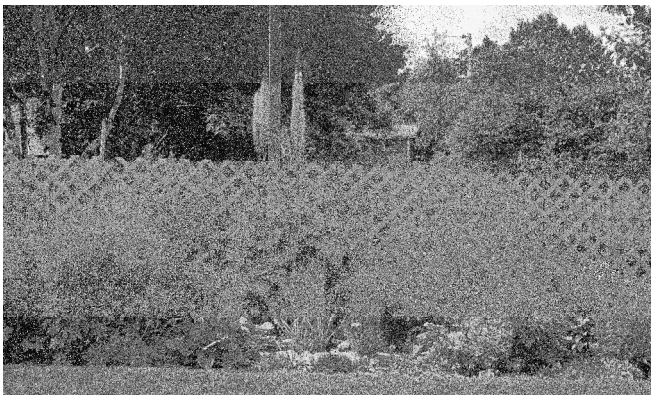
By Todd Boland

My love affair with gardening began many years ago. At first, vegetables were my thing. For some ten years, I grew them pretty much exclusively, but as I read more books and became more knowledgeable on the subject of gardening and landscaping, my interests grew away from vegetables and moved towards ornamentals. By the time I finished my MSc in Plant Ecology in 1992, I was thoroughly hooked on trying to obtain the unique or unusual. If someone told me it couldn't grow in my area of St. John's, Newfoundland, it inspired me to prove them wrong. Over the last ten years, I've pushed the envelope with several plants; some were a success, some a failure. Such are the risks in gardening. There is no doubt that meeting John Weagle in 1996 and Jamie Ellison in 1997 helped inspire me to try new and untested plants for the St. John's region.

Initially, my vegetable gardens gave way to perennial borders. The fact that the soil was well dug and fertile for the vegetables made the perennials grow as if they were on steroids. Soon, I started to devote certain areas of the garden to certain 'theme' gardens. This was the easiest way to deal with my ever growing collection of plants. I guess at this point I should note that my garden is not particularly large; the backyard is about 40 ft X 60 ft. while the front is a mere 30 ft X 18 ft. Despite a collection of nearly one thousand different cultivars of plants, I still have about 50% lawn-cover; mind you, that decreases a bit each year! One of the earliest 'gardens' was the rockery in front of the house. Two years ago, a dry-stone retaining wall was added to that area to complement the existing garden. The side yard has been devoted to shade plants as it located on the north side of the house. Here are housed mostly hostas, lamiums, aquilegias and asarums. In my back are three perennial borders, another rockery, a small woodland bed and two mixed shrub borders. Due to the naturally acidic soils here, I have devoted these borders to ericaceous shrubs, dwarf conifers and their companion plants.

Starting with Rhododendrons

The first rhododendron I obtained was *R. luteum*. The plant came as a sucker from a nearly one hundred year old Pontic azalea growing in a local municipal park. Despite the fact that I've had that azalea since 1982, it really wasn't until 1996 that I really started to get a little more serious about this group of plants. Since then, my rhododendron collection of one has grown to 60 cultivars. My original azalea became the starting point for the first shrub border. This bed, on the north side of the yard, receives pretty much full sun except for a small portion under a young 'Shubert' chokecherry. My Pontic azalea is growing in this part-shade area, as are two pieris cultivars; 'Brouwer's Beauty' and 'Mountain Fire'. The fence (and now part of the chokecherry) along the back of this border is covered in *Clematis alpina* 'Willy', *Clematis viticella* 'Royal Velors' and *Schizophragma hydrangeoides* 'Moonlight'. The shrubs closest to the fence include a sixfoot bamboo, *Fargesia murielae* (thank-you John!), *Viburnum* x *bodnantense* 'Dawn' and a 'Bloodgood' Japanese maple. The rest of the border is pretty much dwarf and semi-dwarf rhododendrons, with an 'Omure Yama' Japanese maple as the focal point. The fence behind this border offers protection from NW, N and NE winds, making it the most sheltered area in my garden. It is also a spot that gathers snow. So here I grow some of my 'borderline' rhododendrons including 'George's Delight', 'Brickdust' and 'Bremen'. These last two are *R. williamsianum* hybrids and have inherited the lovely large bell-shaped flowers and round foliage of that parent. Other elepidotes in this border include my favourite 'Carmen', but I also have several other dwarf reds such as 'Sumatra', 'Rangoon' and 'Baden Baden'. The central 'Omure Yama' maple is surrounded by five azaleas, 'Klondike', 'Sweet Caroline', 'Snowbird', 'Weston's Innocence' and unnamed orange-pink Exbury type. Along the front of the border are low lepidotes; *R. keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy', 'Maricee', 'Ptarmigan', 'Curlew', 'Ginny Gee' and 'Patty Bee'. To keep the floral display going, and because my other passion is alpine plants, I have some gentians, campanulas and saxifrages planted between the lepidotes. There are a few homemade hypertufa troughs strategically placed among the perimeter of this border. The only other shrubs in this border are *Daphne alpina*, *D. tangutica* and, to say I have ericaceous plants from A to Z, I have a *Zenobia pulverulenta* planted for good measure.



A section of the perennial border. [Photo Todd Boland]

On the other side of the chokecherry is a perennial border that leads to two very large mock-oranges. It is under and around the mock-orange that I have developed a woodland garden, housing arums, arisaemas, actaeas, erythroniums, trilliums, disporums, hepatica, *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost'

(expensive but a must-have!), hellebores, some dwarf hostas and my favourite ornamental grass, *Hakenochlora macra* 'Aureola'. Shrub-wise, the woodland garden has three cultivars of skimmia (shouldn't be growing here, but don't let them know that!), *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum', *R.* 'Milestone', one of Dick Steele's unnamed 'blue' hybrids and a mystery rhododendron bought as 'Yak #7'. John tracked down the origins of this plant, and believes it to be 'George Munroe's Favourite'. Either way, the orange-rust indumentum and coral-pink flowers are spectacular.

Fantastic Foliage

Due to their fantastic foliage, I quickly found the indumented rhododendrons to be particularly choice. I found John Weagle's obsession with this group to be certainly infectious. It was the purchase of these rhododendrons that spurred the shrub border on the south side of the garden. This area is partly-shaded, due to tall trees on my neighbours property. Locally, I obtained 'Mist Maiden', 'Teddy Bear', 'Crete', *R. bureavii* and 'Fantastica' (the latter has light indumentum but what a fantastic flower...no pun intended!). In the spring of 2000, the RSCAR offered many indumented species. I jumped at the chance and purchased *R. roxianum* var. *oreonastes, globigerum, sphaeroblastum, haematodes, pachysanthum, recurvoides, campanulatum var. aeruginosum* and *wasonii*. Only *R. roxianum* var. *oreonastes* has bloomed (at only eight inches high!), and since then, seems to be going downhill. Both *R. recurvoides* and *R. campanulatum* died due to being crushed by a record snowfall in 2001. On the plus side, I am delighted that *R. pachysanthum* has seven buds for this spring.

The taller shrubs in this bed consists of a 'Suminigashi' Japanese maple, *Magnolia sieboldii, Ribes sanguineum* 'King Edward VII' and *Rhododendron oreodoxa* var. *fargesii*. I saw my first *oreodoxa* var. *fargesii* in late April 1999, when John Weagle showed me around Boulderwood. I found the foliage to be particularly attractive and the early blooms would certainly be welcome after our long winters. Later during that same trip, I visited Dick Steele and upon mentioning my interest in that rhododendron species, he promptly went to his holding bed, pulled up a three foot plant and stuck it bare-root in a garbage bag! Needless to say, I got some funny looks when I boarded my flight back to St. John's. I'm happy to say the plant will be flowering for the first time this coming spring.

Like my other shrub border, I have a mix of other dwarf shrubs and perennials in this bed as well. Some of the dwarf shrubs include *Andromeda* 'Blue Ice', *Andromeda* 'Kiri-Kaming', *Gaultheria miquelliana, Ilex aquifolium* 'Angustifolium', *Berberis gagnepainii, Acer palmatum* 'Sharp's Pygmy', several dwarf *Chamaecyparis, Juniperus, Tsuga* and some of Newfoundland's native arctic willows; *Salix reticulata, vestita, arctophila* and *candida*. Companion perennials consist of saxifrages, primulas, podophyllums, glaucidiums, gentians, pulmonarias, lilies and alliums. The fence behind this border is now completely buried under *Lonicera x tellmanniana, Clematis alpina* 'Pamela Jackman' and another 'Willy'.

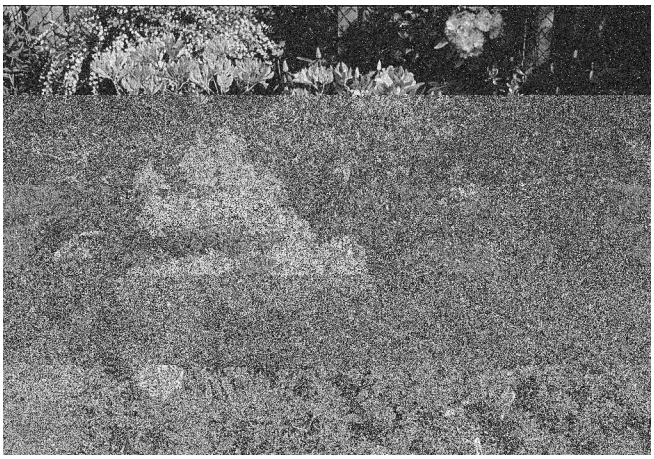
Evergreen azaleas have been disappointing for me. For the first couple of years, they seemed to do well, but in 2001 and 2003, we had record and near record snowfalls. Come the spring, the evergreen azaleas were a sodden, brown mess that either died outright or struggled to put out a few stunted leaves. Alas, only 'Komo Kulshan' and an alba form of *R. kiusianum* are still doing reasonably well.

The west and east sides of the back yard are more-or-less exclusively perennials, with the only shrubs being *Viburnum* x *Carlcephalum, Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Boulevard', *C. lawsoniana* 'Elwoodii' and *Rosa* 'Evelyn'. Among the mix of perennials, my favourites are *Ligularia* 'The Rocket', *Iris bulleyana* (the original seeds were wild collected in Nepal), *Iris kaempferi* 'Ocean Mist' and, despite the fact that it clashes with everything else in the border, a large clump of *Crocosmia* 'Lucifer'.

My front garden is open to N, NE and E winds. Only the toughest plants survive here. Besides the rockery, there are foundation plantings of yew, dwarf Alberta spruce, Spirea, Potentilla and a Korean maple, *Acer pseudosieboldianum.* If any readers live in an area too cold for Japanese maples, I strongly recommend the Korean as it is nearly two zones hardier, and while the summer foliage is green, in autumn they turn fiery shades of orange and scarlet. In the rhododendron department, there are 'Mandarin Lights', 'Spicy Lights' and 'White Lights' azaleas, *R.* 'Besse Howells' and another 'Yak #7'.

Hybridizing

With John and Jamie's encouragement, I have also tried my hand at making my own hybrids. In 2001 my *R. roxiaenum var. oreonastes* produced a single truss. John said to cross it with everything! I tried my best, crossing it with some of my more tender rhododendrons such as 'George's Delight' and



Part of the rhododendron collection. [Photo Todd Boland]

'Brickdust', whose seeds I sent to the ARS. Some of the more potentially hardy crosses I sent to the RSCAR and kept for myself. These included 'Fantastica' x *R. roxieanum var. oreonastes* and 'Besse Howells' x *R. roxieanum var. oreonastes*. I have about eight plants of each cross. Some are showing some lovely foliage and no two seedlings are alike. I also crossed 'Fantastica' with 'Rangoon'. These seedlings are very vigorous and with luck, may bloom within the next year or two. My other crosses involved azaleas. 'Snowbird' X 'Sweet Caroline' bloomed this past year with flowers mid-sized between the two parents. The deep pink buds opened to white fragrant flowers with pink filaments and style. I was quite pleased with my first attempt and more pleased that it only took 3 years to obtain the first blooming offspring. My other azalea cross was between 'Sweet Caroline' and my unnamed orange-pink Exbury-type. I have two seedlings from this cross with buds for this spring.

I am still trying to push the limits as to what can be grown in St. John's. This will be the first winter for *Osmanthus* x *heterophyllus* 'Variegata', *O. delavayi* and *Vaccinium ovatum*. Despite one of the coldest winters on record in the Maritimes, as I write this article, we have not dropped below -15 C. So far, the plants in question appear OK. As proof of how far we Newfoundland gardeners are willing to push the limits, a gardening friend of mine in St. John's has had *Fatsia japonica* outside for 5 winters now, and the plant, despite looking a bit frayed by spring, flushes out to look stunning by summer (I wish my garden were as sheltered). I guess my advice is not to take hardiness zones too literally. Many micro-climates exist and you may be fortunate enough to live in a zone warmer than you think.

As I noted earlier, most of my rhododendron purchases were only made in the past eight years, many of them originating from RSCAR tissue culture plant sales. As a result, despite my garden being over twenty-five years old, the 'new and improved' garden is quite young and the plants still small. My garden is proof that having a small lot does not mean you have to skimp on plants. And with nearly 50% lawn still existing, I still have room to indulge in my passion for plants. ¤

The Answer Lies in the Soil!

By Jenny Sandison

Some of you may remember this quip that was part of a BBC comedy hour ("Round the Horn"?) It came to mind as being very pertinent to some remarks made by John Brett at our January meeting, when he talked about moving house, making flower beds and relocating plant material.

We often use bought topsoil when we make flower beds. John had been pretty disgusted with the so-called topsoil that he had had delivered some years previously. At the meeting there was a murmur of appreciation round the room. Many of us had been similarly dismayed by the yellow screened subsoil that is offloaded onto the greenhorn and quickly turns into cement.

The situation is now much improved. Many companies now are manufacturing different grades of specialty soils, as they are termed. These generally consist of mineral soil (some kind of general soil) mixed with peat and/or manufactured compost. Typically there are three mixtures that are offered.

The name may vary but the idea seems consistent.

Lawn (plain topsoil) typically priced at $ 12.00 per cubic yard

Garden $ 17.50

Flower Bed $ 25.00

This is one of those cases where it is well worth paying the top price for a product that will suit your plants. You will find that plants root quickly, grow well and thrive in situations where you have used a good soil or incorporated a lot of specially prepared compost.

John at present had had good success with Davis Specialty Soils. They specify their soils to be a mixture of compost, peat and sandy loam. Lawn soil is guaranteed to be 70% organic and costs $ 15.00 per cubic yard. Garden soil is 90% organic and costs $ 23.00 per cubic yard. Tel 865-0715.

It seems to me that these better soils are available these days as a result of the recycling and compost making efforts of various municipalities. I know Lunenburg compost is highly thought of. Some members refer to it as horticultural gold. However, it took Lunenburg several years to perfect the process to create a consistent product that wasn't too smelly. Tel 543-2991. I'm sure HRM will eventually be the same. At $ 15.00 per cubic yard it is a bargain.

Finally there was a product called Fundy Gold Compost which was mentioned. This company operates in Pleasant Valley, Colchester County, and uses human sewage to create a highly nutritious compost, and is certainly what should be happening with our sewage. However, I haven't been able to find a contact number for this firm.

One word of caution. Organic products do oxidize over time and you may find the level of the soil in your beds dropping. They just need to be topped up with more "gold". ¤

Nova Scotia Visit

By Jens Birck

The Ostrom Garden. [Photo Jens Birck]

I have been asked by the editor, Mary Helleiner, to write something of my impressions of rhododendron growing in Nova Scotia and my recommendations as well.

I was pleased to meet Captain Richard Steele and Dr. Don Craig, and to have a chance to visit the garden of the late Dr. Joe Brueckner in Mississauga. As a visitor it took me awhile to appreciate the great influence of these gentlemen. In almost all the gardens I visited this was the case, their plants and reputations abound.

As for recommendations from an all too short stay in Nova Scotia (one week+) I don't dare to do so. I was especially very pleased to see the way Dr. Craig tested his rhododendrons out in the open in full sun and wind. So… but not wanting not to step on any toes, I have to say I think "Hurricane Juan" might in the future be recognized as a turning point, a point where rhododendron growers in Nova Scotia tried their rhododendrons out in the open giving access to full light and air circulation. More ventilation and UV light could give less "fungus pressure" and better plant structure. You should at least try a few at first, give them a few years and see what happens. It might be a good idea as I was told Halifax has approximately 100 days of fog a year! (That was no recommendation, just a hint).

Travelling around NS I saw many rhododendrons placed out in open lawns and in perfect condition. It was obvious that people living there were not rhodoholics as there was but one rhododendron on the lot. In the garden of Wendy & John Cornwall they had placed *Rhododendron* 'Golfer' out in the open and it was a success -- very healthy and compact. At Ken MacAulay's in Port Mouton there was an area with not a single tree to give any shade. Everything was in full sun and the plants looked very happy.

A garden to my liking was the Ostrom garden in Indian Harbour - one with a very fine mix of rhododendrons and other plants. In my time I have seen many gardens but here were a lot of species and hybrids from Subsection *Lapponica* that could take your breath away. I have never seen such a perfect and healthy collection of these sometimes difficult to grow plants. Again they were in full sun and wind - a prerequisite for the well being of this group.

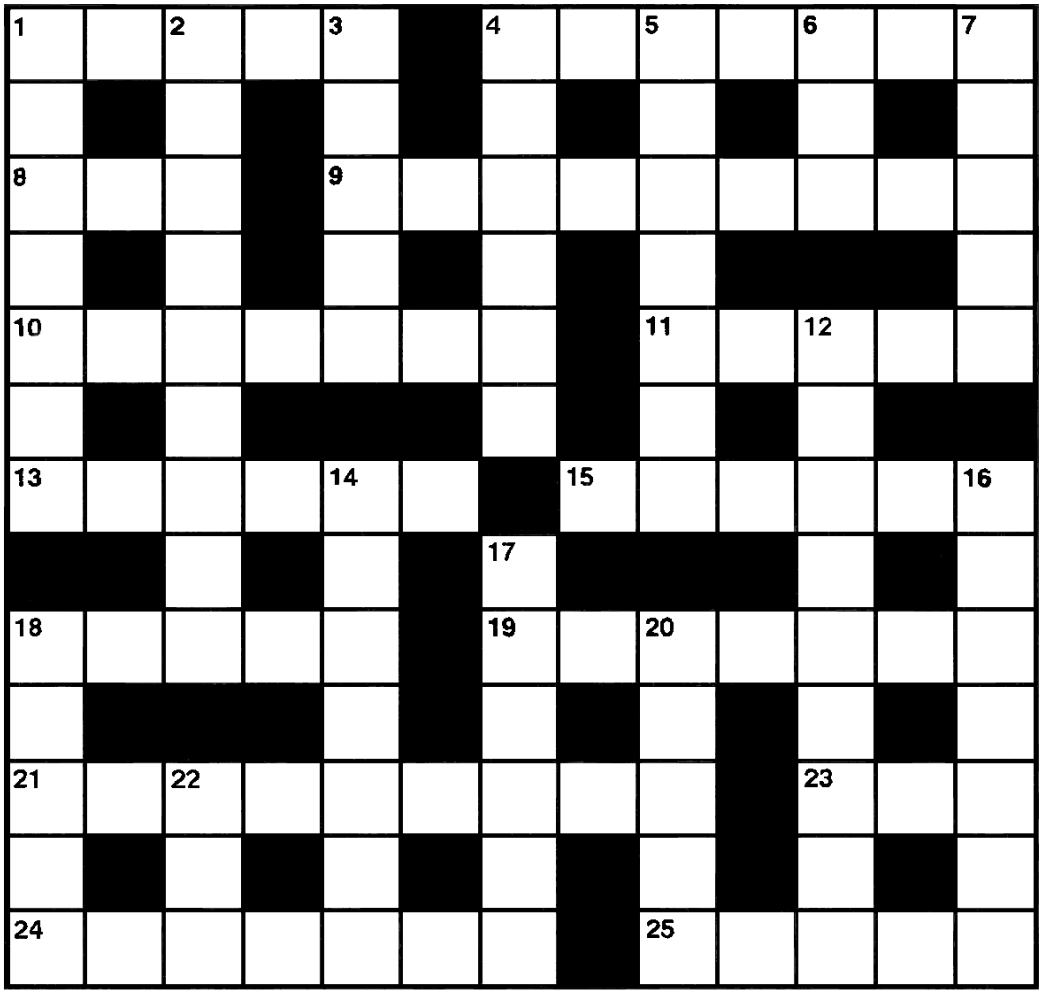
Having seen your growing conditions: "Juan", sometimes a "little" snow (via February e-mail pictures) and lots of mosquitoes, I am at present giving a talk on my NS trip, both to Swedes and Danes entitled "Why are you complaining here in Sweden/ Denmark?"

What amazed me the most was someone driving 450 km to attend the meeting. (And 450 km to get home.) If I did that I would end up in another country!

I had a great time in Nova Scotia and a special thanks to John Weagle for making it all happen.

* *(Jens Birck of Copenhagen, Denmark presented the Steele lectures of 2003)*

Garden Crossword



Across

1. Cedar not from Lebanon
4. Species name for far eastern plants
8. Thorny fruit
9. Deer??
10. Agricultural liquid fertilizer
11. Has an orange-red azalea species named after him
13. British owls say it
15. Very attached to stigmas
18. Rhodophiles never are
19. Our climate is not like this
21. Trees with the biggest flowers
23. Mrs. W.R. sits by Sullivan's Pond
24. If that were all we had to do in the garden!
25. Fibre from *Boehmeria nivea*

Down

1. Every canoe has one
2. Don't you wish you weren't one
3. From lily pollen on your clothes
4. This vine may be lax but it doesn't smile
5. Tidy mosquito eater
6. Earwigs do it
7. Source of scent in *R. fortunei*
12. Dwarf rhodo with a purple pansy flower
14. Where gardeners hate to be
16. Aphids do it to produce honeydew
17. Cut or prune
18. Lem has one
20. Part of a garden step
22. Everybody loves Ginny

Solution in the October issue.