

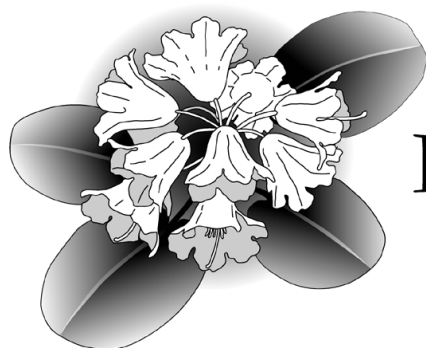
AtlanticRhodo

www.AtlanticRhodo.org

Volume 30: Number 3

October 2006





Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society

Positions of Responsibility 2006 - 2007

President	Sheila Stevenson	479-3740	Director - Social	Available	
Vice-President	Ruth Jackson	454-4861			
R.S.C. (National) Rep.	Sheila Stevenson	479-3740	Director - Horticulture	Audrey Fralic	683-2711
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Director - Communications	Mary Helleiner	429-0213	May - Advance Plant Sale	Ken Shannik	422-2413
			May - Public Plant Sale	Duff & Donna Evers	835-2586

Membership (Please Note Changes)

Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society.

Fees are \$15.00 from January 1, 2007 to August 31, 2007, due January 1, 2007. Fees are \$20.00 from September 1, 2007 to August 31, 2008, due September 2007. Make cheques payable to Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society. ARHS is a chapter in District 12 of the American Rhododendron Society. For benefits see ARHS website www.atlanticrhodo.org

American Rhododendron Society

Fees are \$50.00 Canadian per year and include ARHS membership. Make cheques payable to American Rhododendron Society District 12. For benefits see www.rhododendron.org

Cheques should be sent to ARHS Membership Secretary **Betty MacDonald, 534 Prospect Road, Prospect Bay NS B3T1Z8.**

Please include name, address with postal code, e-mail address and telephone number, for organizational purposes only.

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.

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Cover Photo: R. "R. A. S." (See page 5). [Photo John Brett]



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.

- Tuesday September 5** 7:00 p.m. Annual General Meeting of ARHS
- Tuesday September 5** **Don Hyatt: East Coast Native Azaleas.** Don is an authority on deciduous azaleas. He will talk about their selection and culture and show photographs of native azaleas in the wild.
- Saturday September 30** **3:00 p.m. at the Museum. 20th Annual Steele Lecture.**
Jens Birck : Building a Peat Garden. See Special Notices.
- Tuesday October 3** **20th Annual Steele Lecture.**
Svend Hansen: Why Plant Hunting in China. See special Notices.

Cutting exchange with demonstration. See Special Notices.
- Tuesday November 7** **Caye Harris-Allum : Clematis.** How to grow and care for these spectacular vines and pair them with roses.
- Tuesday December 2** **Christmas Party** with members' slides. This is our **annual wine and cheese party.** There will not be a speaker. Come and enjoy an evening of food, wine and conversation. Please bring five to ten slides of your garden, other gardens or plants of interest, and also finger food or sweets. Wine will be provided by the Society.

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 ARHS events, in order to minimize the risk of allergic reactions.



A very warm welcome to our new and returning ARHS members who have joined since the February 2006 Newsletter:

Sharron & Richard Brown
Bonnie Cook
Thelma Costello
Bob Howard

Dartmouth
New Ross
Halifax
Halifax

Francine McIntyre
Jane Seabrooke
Carol Ann Wien

Shubenacadie
Fredericton
Halifax

Special Notices

Our 2006 Steele Lecturers

Jens Christian Birck

Long time members of the American Rhododendron Society will recognize the name Jens Birck for his *Journal* articles and for the seed of his rhododendron crosses, seed which is among the most coveted offered by the ARS Seed Exchange. Our local members will also remember his impressive talks in Halifax. He has been a driving force in the Danish, Swedish and South Sweden chapters of the ARS. As well as his expertise in rhododendrons, he is skilled at peat gardening. Recently he and **Svend Hansen** built peat gardens at the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen. They also constructed one for the Hachmann Rhododendron Nursery in Barmstedt, Germany, the source of many well known rhodos. Jens will speak on the construction and planting of peat gardens at **3:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 30 at the Museum.**

Svend Hansen

Svend Hansen is the owner of a prestigious nursery in Danstrup, Denmark, and is one of the great collectors of original rhododendron plants, both grafted material from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, and species collected in the wild. He has been to China six times to collect seed. He now has more than 20,000 rhodos from these expeditions growing on his property Kernehuset. Together with **Jens Birck** he has constructed peat gardens in Europe. His talk at the regular meeting on **Tuesday October 3 at the Museum** will be “Why Plant hunting in China.”

Cutting Exchange

There will be a rhododendron and azalea cutting exchange at the **Tuesday, October 3** meeting. Many of the members have now acquired rare and unusual plants from ARHS tissue culture sales, May sales and other sources and have them growing successfully in their gardens. Some of these plants are no longer readily available so this would be a good chance to share them by taking a few cuttings and bringing them to the meeting for others to try. Even if you don't have any rare plants please share whatever cuttings you can provide.

Cuttings should be taken from this year's growth wood and be at least 3 – 4 inches long with a good set of leaves. We're looking for both elepidote and lepidote rhodos and azaleas. So if you can find some new shoots on your plants, snip them off using a clean pair of pruning shears, label them accurately and bring them to the meeting.

A brief demonstration of how to plant the cuttings will be held. ☐

ARHS Activities

April. A workshop was held at Coastal Queen's Place, near Liverpool. Svenga Dee spoke about her organic cutting garden where she produces flowers for local markets; Alice D'Entremont of Ouestville Perennials discussed growing with tufa and brought some samples for sale; and Sharon Bryson demonstrated her use of computers for garden records.

Also in April ARHS members, organized by Chris Hopgood, once again helped out the Kentville Research Station with a work day on the rhodo beds.

May. The May meeting and Members' Plant Sale were held at the LeMarchant – St. Thomas School auditorium. This change of venue was necessary because of overcrowding when the same events were held at the Museum last year. Lloyd McLean's talk on flowers of Mount Halla, Korea, was a success in spite of a shortage of chairs. The members' sale was mobbed as usual.

The Public Sale later in May was also held at the Le Marchant – St. Thomas auditorium. This year the sale went very well with lots of purchasers (unlike last year when wet weather dampened buyers' enthusiasm – they stayed away.) Duff and Donna Evers organized the sale as well as the pickup of pre-ordered plants in April.

June. John Weagle conducted a special evening tour of Hall's Road in Boulderwood, where an exceptional bud set made for a spectacular flowering.

The garden tours in the Annapolis Valley were successful in spite of drenching rain. One Wolfville garden had between 70 and 80 visitors! The potluck was held at Janice Henderson's (not King's Tech) because of technical difficulties. ☹

The 2007 ARHS Seed Exchange

We are anticipating the upcoming 2007 Seed Exchange with great interest. Mike Creel from South Carolina has promised us an interesting selection of native azalea seeds; most have never been offered in our exchange before. We have been trying to encourage members to grow more of the species azaleas in their gardens. They are beautiful, unique and easy from seed. Many lend themselves to extending the bloom season into mid-late summer.

Last year's contributions were very well received, and we thank all who participated as donors or as purchasers. We encourage any member to donate seeds from an interesting plant(s) in their garden; be it rhododendron, azalea or a companion plant. We also encourage members to give growing rhododendrons and azaleas from seed a try. Cultural information is readily available, and the rewards are heartening. Results, from a bloom standpoint, often appear in as little as 2-3 years.

The Seed Exchange includes seed of rhododendrons and azaleas, wild and cultivated, species and hybrids, both hand pollinated and open pollinated. It also includes other unique shrubs, trees and perennials.

Seed should be fresh, clean and labeled. Please ensure that the envelopes used to transport seed are sealed along the seams to prevent leakage.

We welcome questions and feedback. sbryson@ns.sympatico.ca

Send seed by December 15, 2006, to:

Sharon Bryson, #407 Old Maryvale Rd. RR#3 Antigonish NS B2G 2L1

Rhododendron BLWD #72-2 becomes *Rhododendron* 'R.A.S.'

By Captain Richard Steele

Rhododendron hybrid BLWD #72-2 has been recently named in memory of our son who died of cancer five years ago. His name and mine are the same and in order to avoid confusion and conflict...the plant name is *Rhododendron* 'R.A.S.'

This plant (which is *yak* x 'Road Red'), and *R.* 'Barbara Hall', as well as two others which will be named in 2007, are from crosses made about 1961-62. They have proved to be very fine plants, despite an unintended and unpretentious background.

When in 1959 I decided it would be important to use certain newer species plants as one of the parents in breeding hardier plants with more interesting colours, I remembered an article and pictures of *Rhododendron yakushimanum* in one of the 1940s Rhododendron Yearbooks. I ordered it from Exbury and when the plant arrived, along with several other species, there was a very thoughtful and kind note advising me that "this plant has not produced a single significant hybrid". The plant however was budded and bloomed... regrettably *R.* 'Catalpa' that I intended as the seed parent was not budded.

I had just prior to this found a group of rhododendrons growing in the wild around a pond overshadowed by trees and wild shrubs. When I went there I found that several of these rhododendrons were well budded. When they bloomed I used the *yak* pollen on a red blooming plant (that we named 'Road Red' because it was growing next to the farm road). I also took pollen from that plant and pollinated my new *fortunei*.

From the first of these crosses we got the plant now named 'R.A.S.' and from the second we got the beautiful 'Barbara Hall'.

Thus by fairly weird chance and the awkward bumbling action of an inexperienced innocent, came interesting rewards for all of us.

Why don't you also try it?? ☹

Plant Portraits

Baptisia australis



Baptisia australis. [Photo John Proctor]

Baptisia australis, (blue wild indigo, plains false indigo), is a North American wildflower with an endemic range covering much of the eastern US from Georgia to Texas and Vermont to Nebraska. What I didn't know when I planted my *B. australis* seedling in 2001 was that it would take several years to flower. My sweet wife kept asking why I was growing "that scruffy thing" in our front yard, until in its fourth growing season it produced a splendid show of deep blue flowers and earned its position as one of our favourite plants.

Typical of plants of the plains it is very drought tolerant. It never needs watering in Dartmouth; ours has never received any irrigation. Good drainage is probably more important for surviving winter, which it does without extra protection. It has thick roots and is said to resent disturbance. The entire plant is completely pest free. When crocuses are passing their peak and snowdrops are nearly finished flowering, its purple-black shoots emerge at odd angles, none pointing vertically. Sturdy stems quickly become upright to hold the mass of foliage well off the ground. Our plant receives full sun until 3:00 p.m. and grows to 140 cm. Though quite sturdy it does benefit from staking if exposed to high winds.

The leaves are bluish-green, smooth and palmate with entire margins. The foliage does not develop fully until after flowering, giving a vigorous, rounded shrubby appearance. The foliage is topped by long spikes of deep blue pea-like flowers, opening here from mid-June to mid-July. It can be used as a cut flower, providing a chance to see the sap turn purple on exposure to air. When mature the inflated seed pods turn black, of interest to flower arrangers, and the ripe

seeds rattle like a child's toy. The foliage also turns black with hard frost and can remain attractive for weeks after.

Seeds respond to treatment like other legumes, i.e., light sanding and soaking before planting. They do not require cold treatment. Germination is reliable but sporadic over up to two months. Dry stored seeds remain viable for years.

Apart from *B. australis*' need for staking, my only regret is not having more of it. This past spring I started seed of *B. minor* (*B. australis* var. *minor*), advertised as identical to *australis* but growing only to 60 cm, and I am eager to see it flower in three years. Seeds of both are available from The Fragrant Path, Box 328, Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, 68023, www.fragrantpathseeds.com, or by chance from various seed exchanges.

—John Proctor

(John Proctor is the Editor of the Nova Scotia Rock Garden ClubNewsletter.)

***Rhododendron* 'Weston's Innocence'**

We acquired the deciduous azalea 'Weston's Innocence' as a small plant from the Society's order in 2001. The following year it began blooming with pretty, heavily scented white flowers. Unfortunately it did not do much growing. A year or so later it put up one very long shoot, giving it a giraffe-like appearance, but continuing to bloom. But at last, in 2006, it has decided to behave and has several growths, making it a more or less shapely bush. Fertilizer may be the key.

The flowers are attractive, but there are two other features that make this azalea very much worth growing. One is the scent; the other is the bloom date. Every year from 2002 it has opened its flowers between July 2 and July 9, when the rhodos are finished, and the flowers last well, so it is in bloom for some time.

According to the American Rhododendron Society, this azalea is a hybrid between two eastern North American species, *arborescens* and *viscosum*. Both are late bloomers and both are scented. The ARS rates 'Weston's Innocence' as hardy to -32° C. It has never been below -23° C in our garden in recent years (thank goodness) so we have not tested it. However the ARS 10 year height of three feet seems inaccurate; our plant is already five feet tall and shows no signs of stopping. One of its parents, *R. viscosum*, is described as a tall shrub or small tree.

If you are looking for something to extend the rhodo bloom season, I can highly recommend 'Weston's Innocence'.

—Mary Helleiner

ARHS 2007 Tissue Culture – Advance Sale

It's time again to order your tissue culture plants for spring 2007. This year again we have some new varieties and also some older ones that our newer members may not have. The cost to you for these plants will be approximately \$5.00 each. We try to keep the price as low as possible.

DO NOT SEND ANY MONEY WITH YOUR ORDER. YOU WILL BE BILLED WHEN YOUR ORDER IS PICKED UP OR SENT (*special shipping charges may apply.*)

These plants will be available for pick-up in early April. The time and location will be announced at a later date. All members will be advised of the date and location once confirmation is received of the plants' arrival. In addition to your order you may be able to purchase leftover plants if any are available on the day of pickup.

An order form is included with this Newsletter. Please make sure your phone number and if possible your e-mail address is included on the form. If your order cannot be picked up in Halifax please indicate this on the order form. Sorry, this sale is only available to our members in the Atlantic region.

Orders that are not picked up in Halifax on the pick-up date will be sent collect by the method indicated on the order form. Where shipping options are limited, the parcel will be shipped by Canada Post at your cost. **Please remember to make a copy of your order.**

Please send your orders to

ARHS
c/o Audrey Fralic
RR#1
Port Mouton NS BOT1T0
1-902-683-2711

RHODODENDRONS (all rhododendrons are elepidotes unless otherwise stated)

VARIETY	HYBRIDIZER	DESCRIPTION
Anah Kruschke	Kruschke	This is a heat tolerant plant with reddish purple flowers that bloom late midseason. It has excellent foliage and will grow in full sun. Reaches 6 ft. x 4 ft and is hardy to -23C.
April Song	Mezzitt	This is one of the best of Mezzitt's hybrids. The flowers are blush pink to white and open early in the season. 5'x5'. Hardy.
Boule de Neige	Oudieu	A tough, reliable and hardy rhodie that proved its mettle in many parts of the world for decades. Its midseason flowers are pure white. Hardy to -30C. Grows to 4'x 6'.
Bubblegum	Briggs	<u>Lepidote</u> . A polyploid version of the tried and true standard Weston's Aglo. This one has larger flowers that make a terrific show against its more substantial foliage. Just as hardy and more showy than 'Weston's Aglo', its hoped that this new lepidote will standard. Size 3'x3'. Hardy to -30C.
Catawbiense 'Grandiflorum'	Waterer	A very hardy plant with rounded trusses of lilac-purple flowers with a yellow blotch. Blooms late midseason. Grows to 5'x6'. Hardy to -25C.
Dreamland	Waterer & Crisp	Frisly soft pink flowers with darker edges show up against the dark green foliage in midseason. The new growth is silvery. Compact habit 4'x4'. Hardy to -20C.
VARIETY	HYBRIDIZER	DESCRIPTION

Ingrid Mehlquist	Mehlquist	An exceptional “yak” hybrid. In late mid-season clusters of large pink buds open to ball shaped trusses containing 20 or more pure white blooms. The very attractive foliage is deep green and with light indumentum on the underside. Compact, well branched habit. Blooms at a young age. 2’x3’. Hardy to –28C.
<i>yakushmanum</i> ‘Mist Maiden’	Leach	One of the best <i>R. yakushmanum</i> selections. It offers bright pink buds and ball shaped trusses of purplish pink flowers that mature to pure white. Silvery new growth. Dark green leaves have fawn indumentum. Blooms mid-season. 5’x5’. Hardy to –25C.
Sapporo	Hachmann	This Hachmann hybrid has a somewhat compact habit. The flowers open pale purple in late midseason and quickly turn white with a strong purplish- red blotch. Size 5’x5’. Hardy to –23C.
<i>mucronulatum</i> ‘Cornell Pink’		<u>Lepidote</u> . A deciduous rhododendron with clear pink flowers that appear before the leaves. Very early bloomer. The soft green foliage turns yellow and bronze in the fall. AGM winner. 6’x6’. Hardy to –25C.
<i>mucronulatum</i> ‘Alba’		<u>Lepidote</u> . Another deciduous rhododendron but with white flowers. Hardy to Zone 5b. May bloom. Willowy habit to 8 ft. Bright yellow autumn color. Early.
<i>tomentosum</i> ‘Milky Way’		<u>Lepidote</u> . Blooms in early spring with what appears to be a blanket of a million white stars. The distinctive foliage is small and hairy. It used to be classified as the genus <i>Ledum</i> but now belongs to the rhododendron genus. Great plant. Size 3’x3’. Hardy to about –15C. Zone 6b.

DECIDUOUS AZALEAS

Cannon’s Double	Pale yellow hose in hose flowers with deep pink veins. Blooms in midseason. The foliage has a soft red color all summer. Open habit. Size 5’x 6’. Hardy to Z5.
Mary Poppins	Nasturtium-red flowers and deep reddish green leaves. Very reliable and disease resistant. Midseason bloomer. 4’x 4’. Very hardy.

COMPANION PLANTS

<i>Corylopsis spicata</i> ‘Gold Spring’ (Aka ‘Aurea’)	<i>Corylopsis spicata</i> (winter hazel) is an open, spreading shrub which bears flowers that hang in slender, pendant racemes in spring before the leaves emerge. This is a new cultivar so we know very little about it but I think it’s safe to say that the flowers are more gold than yellow and it is hardy to Z5. Grows from 6-8 ft .
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VARIETY	HYBRIDIZER	DESCRIPTION
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<i>Hakonechloa macra</i> ‘ Beni-kaze’		A very hard to find Japanese selection. It forms a flowing mound of green foliage that takes on striking red tones in the fall. The cultivar name can be translated as “red wind” which describes the plant’s autumn look perfectly. 2-3 ft high and wide. Z5.
<i>Kalmia latifolia</i> ‘Galaxy’	Jaynes	Each deeply lobed star shaped bloom is marked with swirling rings of burgundy. Handsome glossy green foliage. Z5 . 4.5’x 3.5’.
<i>Kalmia latifolia</i> ‘Little Linda’	Jaynes	A ‘little leaf’ mountain laurel that is red in bud, then turns white maturing pink. Glossy dark green foliage. AGM winner. 3’x 3’. Z5.
<i>Pieris japonica</i> ‘Flaming Silver’		A very choice variegated selection. Silver edged foliage is set off by spectacular rosy red new growth. White flowers in early spring. Best in partial shade. Compact habit. AGM winner. 4’x 5’. Zone 5.



The Saga of the Tissue Culture Sale

By Audrey Fralic

As many of you know I have been in charge of the ordering , receiving and coordinating the annual ARHS Tissue Culture sale for several years and I was asked to write an article on the process that is necessary to hold a successful sale.

First, a bit of information on how tissue culture plants are grown. The use of tissue culture to increase plant production was introduced in the 1960’s in Washington State. It’s the process of taking small bits of plant shoots or flower buds and allowing them to grow on in a lab under controlled temperatures and light until new shoots appear. These tiny shoots are then rooted under the same sterile conditions. Rhododendrons are one of the plants that can be successfully propagated this way and it has greatly increased the availability of rhodies from other parts of the world. The plants that are produced this way are genetically identical to the original (mother) plant.

Getting back to the sale, the order for the plants is placed at least a year prior to the sale. Therefore most of the plants for the 2007 sale were ordered in January, 2006 with a few changes and additions being made throughout the year. It’s necessary to order so early to ensure the availability of the ones we want. Each plant must be ordered in multiples of 50 and to start I only order 50 of each. Briggs Nursery in Washington State is our supplier and the quality of the plants is usually very good. They put out an availability list every month or so and that is followed for any new additions that may be of interest to us. In July the order has to be finalized so the information and order forms can be written up for the October Newsletter. This entails some research of plant hardiness, size and general descriptions. A deadline for the orders is set for mid December.

As the orders are received they are dated and numbered. The orders are done up on a first come, first served basis. In mid to late October if many orders have been received the orders are totaled plant by plant so it can be determined if some are sold out yet and to try to order more of that particular plant. If it’s a popular plant it’s almost always not available. As the orders continue to come in a running total is kept of each plant and we try to get more if we can. By the deadline there are usually 65 – 70 orders and 1200 – 1300 plants ordered.

Sometime in early fall the venue for the sale is booked and for the past few years we’ve been fortunate to get a room at St. Andrew’s Centre on Bayers Road.

In January the list of plants is sent to Jill Covill at Bunchberry Nursery to have labels made. With so many plants it would be almost impossible to do the labels by hand and we greatly appreciate Jill doing them for us.

During February and March the orders are rewritten. By this time we know for certain if any plants have been cancelled by the supplier or not and can do them up accurately.

We like to have the plants arrive in late March or early April; the longer we wait to have them sent to us the less likelihood of getting the best plants. The plants are shipped on a Monday that we specify and should arrive by Thursday at Air Canada Cargo for us to pick up. They cannot be released at the airport until they are inspected by a Dept. of Agriculture Representative. Tax forms have to be completed and the taxes have to be paid at Customs. This can take almost an entire day to complete with many emails and phone calls. Bob Pettipas has been a wonderful help in getting all this organized and completed. If everything goes okay the plants are picked up Thursday night.

The week prior to the sale the orders are all checked, reminder emails are sent to all members who ordered plants, and to all those who have volunteered to work at the sale.

The day of the sale arrives and the plants are unloaded, unpacked and labeled by the many wonderful volunteers that come out to help. After labeling they are sorted and put in near alphabetical order and the members' orders are processed. In an hour or two all the orders have been processed including those that are being shipped to Newfoundland, New Brunswick and sometimes further. Those orders are taken to the airport or to the bus terminal and the others are given out as the members arrive to pick them up. On a good day all the orders are picked up within an hour or so and the room can be tidied up and we can all go home pleased that we've had another successful sale.

At this point I want to again thank Bob Pettipas, Jill Covill and all the many volunteers who show up each year and work diligently to make the ARHS Tissue Culture Sale a success. This sale is one of only two fundraisers for the society and it's wonderful that so many of our members turn out to help to make it a success.

We are now looking for a volunteer to work with me as an assistant ; to learn the process so that should something arise she/he could take over. If anyone would like to join me in going through the process from start to finish please contact me either at a meeting or by email or phone. My phone is 902-683-2711 and email is alfralic@excite.com ☞

Preparing for Winter

By John Weagle

(John wrote this article for us in the fall of 2002. It seems appropriate to reprint it now.)

With the recent 10 year bout of mild winters it hardly seems appropriate to speak on this subject. However the lesson of the last 30 years is that the winter of our nightmares will appear when we are least prepared. So, pre-emptive action is in order as another winter of 1992/93 may be just around the corner.

For well established plants hardy in your zone little need be done unless conditions are somewhat short of ideal. I need not lecture anyone on planting a wind-sensitive rhodo in a windy spot, if the site is quite windy plant a rhodo that will tolerate wind - the old right plant / right place scenario. Why plant a rhododendron intolerant of wind and look at burlap all winter long? Now if the burlap is up just until a suitable rhodo gets established that's quite another matter. Here are a few of the concerns I have about my rhodos as winter approaches, including a few misconceptions. Our past newsletters contain zoning information for most of the plants we have brought in for members. If in doubt don't hesitate to ask other members on a zone rating or conditions suitable for your plant.

Cleanup. After all the leaves have fallen from nearby trees and shrubs it is imperative to make routine checks through the late fall and early winter to make sure none of your dwarf rhododendrons are smothered with wet soggy leaves. These leaves can cause the rotting of some precious rhododendrons. Keep in mind many of these dwarfs grow in full wind-swept sites in the wide-open in their natives haunts. The sites are oftentimes above the tree line far away from large deciduous material. With careful cultivation there is no question they can enhance a garden filled with some of our favourite trees like magnolias and the like. They cannot however tolerate those soggy leaves smothering them. *R. aureum*, *proteoides*, *pronum*, *forrestii* and many of the dwarf lepidotes of low stature can easily be lost without a good cleanup.

Wind. As mentioned there are plenty of rhodos for super windy sites: lepidotes like *impeditum*, 'Ramapo', 'L'Abeille', 'Karen Seleger' and most of the really small leafed species (and their hybrids - all with leaves fingernail sized) along with *R. kiusianum* and *R. yakushmanum* revel in open windy sites when established. If you feel your plants are not quite settled in then by all means erect a burlap or spruce bough screen to cut the wind. Boughs can be stuck cut end first into the ground in

early December but it can be a race against frozen ground. The screen should not touch the plants. Snow-fencing is another possibility - plastic or wooden, but be sure your stakes are deep enough in the ground and stout enough to take a hurricane. Crashing screens are another unforeseen hazard.

Anti-desiccant / anti-transpirant sprays. There are plenty on the market these days. In a word, avoid them. Rhododendrons have evolved mechanisms to deal with winters. By losing a bit of water through transpiration they roll their leaves and hence protect themselves from greater winter water loss and sunburn. In my experience these sprays seem to restrict their ability to roll somewhat and this can result in increased injury.

Snow and snowload damage. There is a common misconception that snow on your plants is bad, that is: snow equals cold. Rather the opposite. Snow can keep frost out of the ground or more importantly, keep the ground from freezing and thawing repeatedly. Mulches of bark, pine needles, oak or beech leaves are excellent mulches and help minimize freezing of the ground until it gets really winter-like. (This is in addition to their necessity when properly planting rhodos to keep the soil cool, moist and furnish a slow supply of nutrients to those shallow roots of rhodos). This mulch, combined with snow, is very beneficial. A word of warning, evergreen azaleas should be mulched sparingly and NEVER excessively, especially in the fall; serious bark-splitting can occur. So, any screens or structures should never be arranged in such a way that a roof is formed to prevent snow covering the root area or the whole plant if snow is deep. Plants under snow can hover at or just below freezing while the air temperature above plummets. (I can be frequently seen shovelling snow onto my plants in winter!) One problem we all faced in the winter 2000/2001 was deep snow that persisted from late January till early April. In many areas each snowfall was followed by rain or brilliant sunshine which caused a layer of ice to form in layers between each successive snowfall. The net result was tremendous weight bearing down on branches causing breakage. Cape Breton and Newfoundland were particularly hard hit with rhodos' central stems being snapped. Short of building a large lath house over big plants there is really not much you can do to protect large plants from such devastation. The aforementioned dwarf lepidotes seem quite immune from such damage; this is not surprising considering they originate at high snowy altitudes in their homelands. Only when grown in shade do their structures become too weak to withstand such pressures, grown hard in sun and wind they can withstand a steam roller. A few hybrids susceptible to breakage come to mind: 'America', the ironclad red, is very susceptible to breakage until it gains a height of about 2 meters, the Brueckner hybrid 'Azuray', 'Olga', the bright pink PJM look-alike, is very brittle as a young plant. Smaller more delectable plants can be protected by sturdy lath structures sufficient to take the weight, these again must be open enough to allow snow to fall on the soil beneath AND over the plants. Spruce boughs can be used to cover smaller plants to protect from sun and wind: early December seems to be the time to apply though I often wait till the spent Xmas trees are put out. Another favourite item is the hefty plastic milk crate with which many are familiar. They measure about a foot by a foot by a foot - perfect for covering those choice dwarf seedlings. The top mesh is a bit too dense to allow snow penetration though it bears weight perfectly. These are an often found item at yard sales.

Wet Snow in November. The night of 6 November 2002 was a horror which many of us will not soon forget. Some of our most prized plants were heavily damaged structurally by an unseasonal dump of 10 cm of wet snow mixed with rain. Normally such weather is taken in stride but this year many trees and shrubs were still in full leaf and barely coloured up. *Cornus kousa* and some magnolias were bent to the ground or snapped off entirely. The rhododendrons, at least in my garden, popped back up as nicely as the flattened bamboos and seem unscathed. A 3 meter high *mucronulatum* was flat out but with a little prodding was erect after some gentle shaking of limbs. One member noted that the good blue Brueckner hybrid 'Azuray' failed to bend and snapped off cleanly. A word on dealing with flattened plants is in order. When brushing snow off such plants use your hands and try to avoid using brooms or rakes. Grab a branch and lift and shake gingerly, starting with the lower branches working your way up the plant. By starting at the top you are likely to cause further breakage to the already laden lower branches. When major branches are broken or severed it is always tempting to tape them back up and in the hope they will repair themselves. This is seldom successful. I close my eyes and prune away the damage; my guilt is lessened if many cuttings can be gleaned. Otherwise bury in the compost heap, never on top as the pain will never go away! A few plants will be damaged at the point of the bend and respond next spring by sending out water-sprouts - long upright shoots with tremendous vigour; one should watch that these sprout at a sharp angle to the mainstem otherwise they too can be snapped in ensuing snowfalls. Pruning paint is entirely unnecessary, better to spend time cleaning up the point of severage so fast healing can take place next year.

Winter sun: the big culprit. Sun on a borderline or poorly established plant in winter combined with frozen ground is a killer. Consider these points: the ground is frozen, the plant cannot take up water because the roots are frozen, the sun bears down causing the rhododendron leaves to unroll and lose water. The net result is burnt leaves. How many times have we boasted this or that hybrid has come through the winter after a stroll through the garden in early March? The ground is still frozen, the warm March sun - we are at the same latitude as Milan, Italy and Eugene, Oregon! - seems so harmless even though the temperature may feel miserably cold. Then to our horror burnt leaves appear in April or later and, even worse,

the plant is dead as a nit by May. The culprits: March sun and / or drying wind; most likely sun. The dilemma: most rhodos need sun to grow and bloom here, we plant early and they are in part sun in June but by November the leaves fall and suddenly the plants are in full sun in winter. With careful siting - this involves watching where the winter sun falls - you can choose a spot for that borderline or young plant where it gets spring, summer and fall sun but misses the winter sun entirely with the aid of buildings or evergreen trees. Note: early blooming plants are best planted to avoid the rising sun - such frosted blossoms can survive nicely if they have time to thaw the next morning before the sun hits them. Western sun - the setting sun - is the worst scenario in winter: the leaves can be warmed by day and then the temperature suddenly plunges after sunset; the result burnt leaves, bark-split or death.

Loss of Flower Bud Dormancy. Another concern with extremely early bloomers is that the January thaw or the March sun will cause the buds to start moving too early; should that happen a mere frost down to -4° to -7°C or lower can kill those buds which have survived lower dead-of-winter temperatures. A winter covering of boughs can avoid this; it seems strange that *R. lapponicum* rated to Zone 1 or 2 is one very early rhodo that I routinely cover to avoid late bud blast!

Water. The books tell us to water evergreens heavily before the onset of winter. Since our wettest month is November in coastal Nova Scotia - and I'm talking monsoon-like - I doubt anyone has ever bothered to go out with the hose in mid-November. Indeed the only dry fall followed by a dry snowless winter I have ever witnessed here was in 1991-1992; perennials were particularly hard hit. It would have helped immeasurably to have watered that year. The lesson: if it is dry by mid November don't hesitate to give precious plants a good drink even if the neighbours look on thinking you're as mad as a hatter. I wouldn't water too early as plants need a little stress to harden off for the winter. A fall drought is especially important after the coast has a cool foggy summer.

Heaving. A notorious problem here on the coast of Nova Scotia. Many low pressure systems pass by this way in winter; cold followed by melting or the reverse. An event every three to four days is to be expected. Heavy rains and freeze - thaw - freeze. After the first good hard freeze in the fall it is wise to check small or newly planted rhododendrons to make certain they have not been heaved out of the ground. In my garden the first hard freeze causes the most dramatic heaving, after that usually all's well; in other gardens I've seen repeated heaving the entire winter. By April you may very well have replanted several times, replanting is very difficult if you discover this problem after a good freeze. The only remedy is to throw some bark (if the pile hasn't frozen solid!) over the roots and hope for the best.

Plants in pots / tissue culture plants / very tender plants/ young seedlings of unknown hardiness. Obviously these plants will need to go into a coldframe for the winter. A coldframe is ideally situated where no winter sun falls. Usually coldframes are built where the sun falls. Remedy: If the plants are planted in the coldframe a lath lid and solid sides are recommended. A lath lid should have the lathes arranged running north-south so the winter sun moves over the plants; running east-west you can sometimes see burnt leaf stripes where the sun shines through. Potted plants must be heeled into wood chips to the brim, a light covering over the soil surface helps as well. Roots in the ground rarely go below -7°C, and if snow covered much less cold. Potted plants will be killed dead if their roots freeze sitting above grade. To assure complete (well almost) success cover the entire frame in white plastic around early to mid December and seal it tight after the plants have had a good drink. This is how the professional nurserymen deal with their leftover stock in winter and you will find the results amazing. A large lath house can achieve the same results; Walter Ostrom near Peggy's Cove has routinely grown and bloomed Zone 8 plants in his large walk-in lath house.

Root damage. Although this was discussed earlier the question often arises on how to handle rhododendrons received bareroot in early spring; such bare-rooting is mandatory for importation from Europe. I doubt these plants will be fully established to take on a Maritime winter outside. Having avoided direct sun from March till November, the only winter remedy is to store them in a (+1° to +7°C) cold greenhouse. After mid-November the plants can be safely acclimated to full sun in the cool greenhouse and planted out the next spring. There is little chance they would survive without such treatment.

Cold temperatures. Not much to be done about that aside from saying that the lath house and white plastic covered coldframe certainly can minimize the rapid temperature fluctuations for which the Maritimes are notorious. If extreme cold is prolonged nothing can ameliorate that aside from a cold heated greenhouse. The intelligent gardener will maximize the plants' requirements and pray a lot.

Deer/Vole damage. Accelerating lead for deer seems to be the best remedy but there are countless deer - at least in Nova Scotia. Not one of them has read that rhododendrons are poisonous. Keep in mind they are omnivores and can eat small quantities of many poisonous plants with no ill effects. On some rhododendrons they will eat the leaves and not the stems one year and do the reverse the next - even lepidotes are prone to spectacular damage. In my woods they never touched the

lepidotes for years and now that's all they eat. Electric fencing is said to be rather effective. Any other type of fencing should be 3 meters tall! Voles will eat very tender growth on small plants and chew bark on older plants causing leaves to flag in summer. Various baits are available but these sometimes tend to be eaten by the wrong critters. Small plants in rural frames must be protected with .8 cm wire mesh – top and bottom – if a vole problem exists. Voles are a serious problem every few years and particularly so in Prince Edward Island and in mainland areas with dense underbrush which defies flying predators. Small plants can be protected from rabbit foraging with chicken wire. None of the expensive foliar sprays for deer, voles or rabbits have proven very effective. A small amount of waterproof mousebait should be placed in coldframes before sealing.

Removal of screens, boughs, plastic etc. In the early days I'd rush out in mid March when the temperature warmed a bit and remove all the boughs. Shortly thereafter the plants would fry. In fact I had just removed the boughs when they were starting to do what they were meant to do: protect from the brutal March sun. Better to wait till the ground is thoroughly thawed and during a period of cloudy overcast weather that is predicted to persist for a week or longer. Plants shaded by boughs and screens can be suddenly fried when exposed to sun after a long winter in the dark. Snow of course lets plenty of light through if not meters high.

In summary: the right plant in the right place – optimum cultural practices for the rhodo in question. If you have to look at ugly screening all winter then your plants are too tender. N.B. Some of my favourite plants are tender plants. ☹

Extending the Season with Colchicum

By Todd Boland

Gardeners generally associate fall-planted bulbs with springtime displays of tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and crocus. However, some bulbs actually begin to flower in fall, just as most plants are going dormant.

The best known and among the earliest blooming of the fall-flowering bulbs are *Colchicum*. Commonly referred to as the autumn crocus or naked ladies, colchicums are not related to crocus at all, but are actually members of the lily family. Beginning in mid-September and continuing into early November, colchicums produce large, goblet-like blooms in shades of pink, violet or white. In spring, colchicums offer relatively large, broad leaves which are, unfortunately, a favourite food source for slugs and snails. They can look rather unsightly by July but must be allowed to die down naturally if you wish to maintain yearly flowering.

Colchicums are native to eastern Europe, north Africa, throughout the Middle East, through Afghanistan, northern India and east to western China. Most grow in sub-alpine to alpine meadows and gravelly slopes.

Colchicums are very rarely offered in local nurseries so for most gardeners, mail-order nurseries are the only alternative. However, colchicums multiply quite readily so if you have a friend with some, they should be able to part with a few corms on short notice. That is how I obtained most of the varieties I grow. One local gardener in St. John's has had a long-time interest in this group and purchased most of his plants from UK suppliers (at exorbitant prices!) over 20 years ago. Within a few years, he had colchicums all over his garden, so much so, he was starting to run out of space. The extras he brought along and sold to members of our local rock garden society. The first of these was *C. byzantinum*. I got my first corm in 1986.

Colchicum species

Colchicum byzantinum is sterile and is believed to be a naturally occurring hybrid developed from *C. cilicicum*. It has been known in cultivation since at least the early 1600's. Among the suitable colchicums for Atlantic Canada, this one has relatively small flowers but is among the most floriferous. I also like their upright flower stalks which presents the flowers so much better than those colchicums with floppy stems. This selection is among the first to begin blooming for me, generally starting around late-September. Its flowers are light lilac-pink.

The next colchicum to be added to my collection was 'The Giant', a hybrid developed from *C. speciosum*. The plant lives up to its name in producing quite large goblet-like flowers which are lilac-pink with faint tessellations. In contrast with *C. byzantinum*, 'The Giant' is among the last of my colchicums to bloom, in late October-early November.

That same year I obtained my overall favourite colchicum, *C. agrippinum*. This plant is another sterile hybrid, probably between *C. variegatum* and *C. autumnale*. It has more or less star-shaped flowers that are strongly tessellated purple-pink and white. The flowers are held on very short, upright stems so their presentation is perfect. While the leaves of most colchicum are large and floppy, those of *C. agrippinum* are grey-green and quite small and tidy. Overall, this colchicum is perhaps the best for a rock garden setting. They also bloom from relatively small corms.

More recently I added *C. speciosum*, *C. speciosum* 'Album', *C. autumnale*, *C. autumnale* 'Album', *C. 'Violet Queen'* and *C. 'Lilac Wonder'*. *Colchicum speciosum* and its white form have quite lovely flowers that are rounded goblets held on upright stems. They have not proven to be as floriferous as my others nor as quick to multiply, but are still very welcome additions. On the other hand, *C. autumnale* and its white form are very floriferous and quick to multiply. However, their flowers are rather small, especially the album form and have a tendency to flop if there is wind or rain (i.e. they always flop!). The worst offenders for floppiness are *C. 'Lilac Wonder'* and *C. 'Violet Queen'*. Their flowers are large and plants very floriferous but they can look like a beached octopus when sprawled out over the ground. This habit also leaves them exposed to major slug damage.

Three additional species that I don't have but should be suitable for our region are *C. bornmuelleri*, *C. bivonae* and *C. alpinum*. The former looks nearly identical to *C. speciosum* but can be distinguished by its purple-brown anthers (those of *C. speciosum* are yellow). *Colchicum bivonae* has deep purple-pink flowers that are distinctly tessellated. It is one of the parents in many of the popular colchicum hybrids. *Colchicum alpinum* is probably the hardest species but only produces 1-2 flowers per corm.

Last fall, one of our local nurseries offered the double-flowered colchicum hybrid, 'Waterlily'. My understanding is that this one is slow to increase and only produces a few flowers. However, the blooms are large, double and quite striking.

As a side note, there are spring-flowering colchicums and at least one has yellow flowers. However, I have not tried any and from what I've read, they are probably not hardy in Newfoundland although some success might be had in extreme southern Nova Scotia.

Culture

I grow my colchicums either in a rock garden setting (exclusively reserved for *C. agrippinum*) or along the borders of my perennial beds. The main key, at least in Newfoundland, is plenty of sun and well-drained soil. The above colchicums produce their leaves in spring, although *C. agrippinum* can have the first leaves emerging by late November. The leaves are quite lush, being smooth and bright green. They remind me of a *Convallaria* on steroids! I divide my more robust colchicums every 3-4 years. Divide them as soon as the foliage has withered. Their corms may be stored warm and dry for the remainder of the summer then planted in late August, or replanted immediately. The corms often work themselves close to the surface, so when replanting, plant them about 4-6 inches deep. The problem with mail-order colchicums is that they are often not mailed until late September-early October, which is really too late for these fall bloomers who ideally should be planted in late August-early September. So they may be disappointing the first fall but will reward you with typical flowering in the next season.

For the bulb enthusiast, colchicums are a must since in Atlantic Canada, there are so few reliable autumn-flowering bulbs. For the average gardener, they can provide you with a needed splash of colour late in the season; as the rest of the garden is winding down, the colchicums are just getting started. ☞

Recovering the Balance

By Barbara McLean

In September 2005, after more than two years teaching English in Korea, Lloyd and I returned to Chester Grant. When we left home, we left about two and a half acres of forest and rock, a passive solar house, a dog and a variety of gardens. When we returned, the house was in reasonable shape, the dog was great, but the gardens ...

None of our gardens have ever been immaculate or exceptionally maintained. We both love trees and wild flowers, and prefer swimming to weeding. Clumps of pearly everlasting, black knapweed, fireweed, Saint John's wort, Queen Anne's lace and daisies share space with our purchased plants and give the place a semi-wild, slightly ragged, but I hope welcoming feeling – a balance between nature and nurture.

When we looked around on our return, we hoped that *nurture* was somewhere under all that *nature*. In the raised garden that hugs the southern contour of the house, the previously pruned hemlocks had grown to obliterate half the view from the windows. They were flanked by waist high oregano which had taken over the balance of the garden. We had no idea what

other plants might be surviving under the mass of exuberant greenery. The wildflower garden near our small pond was choking with cinnamon fern, the pond itself was full of cat tails with a few straggly lily pad leaves struggling through. The gardens among the birch trees were overwhelmed by wild honeysuckle and lady's mantle. In Lloyd's shade area he found an abundance of buttercups and some suspicious holes from where some of his best primulas may have been "transplanted".

Re-evaluating

So how to **restore** the balance ... jungles are frustrating but they can also be liberating. This was no weed and trim matter. We were forced to re-evaluate and make decisions which we had avoided for years.

The garden around the house was the most in need of a rethink. Axe and pick proved as useful as shovel and glove. We hacked, dug, pulled and after that added more compost. With an almost completely bared bed around the house, we could begin at a *beginning*. We planted small-growing rhododendrons, (some that the Helleiners were moving from their gardens and some we got from the club later), and in front of them, additional spring bulbs. We did spare the woolly thyme, phlox and pinks that we had uncovered and still drape over the retaining wall. In May we planned to fill in any gaps with some bright annuals. We also left some blueberry bushes alongside the new rhodos. They seem to coexist happily, are not invasive, supply a few berries in season, are great fall colour, and I love them. What an improvement! We can see out the windows – and the lesson? – trees undoubtedly should be left to grow naturally in an appropriate place for trees, and oregano should be grown in a pot!

The next most overwhelmed garden was my pond and surround. I tackled it in the spring, when to my surprise, it proved to be an easy, if mucky fix. Hauled out the cat tails – which brought with them the water lily basket and a sundial and stand that had gone missing. I was a bit worried that I had been too rough on the water lily, but I reset the pieces and the first pink bud opened on July 16. The plant has now reclaimed the pond. In the boggy area that absorbs the overflow from the pond, I chopped out several huge cinnamon ferns and top-dressed the whole area with a peat-rich compost. Now that the larger ferns are a bit less dominant, trailing arbutus, hepatica, bloodroot and several other wild flowers, including a small bunchberry and some yellow lady's slippers are re-establishing themselves. I feel very fortunate not to have lost them entirely – in some cases it was close! To my delight, the Japanese painted fern I bought six years ago has proven to be a real survivor. Cinnamon fern, I have learned, will endure the roughest transplanting (including hacking away most of the roots).

The fresh look at our environment prompted us to cut many more trees than we would have done in our pre-Korea years. We love and want to preserve the forest appearance of our lot, but it was evident that we had to get more light to the plants. The biggest rhodo had mildew and it definitely needs more air and more sunlight. The *Stewartia* and established rhodos have shown dramatic improvement after tree removal and encourage us to continue the thinning process.

Lloyd's chipper, our substitute lawnmower, has proven its worth many times over. From the trees we cut, we renewed the chips around the gardens and on the paths through the woods. Our constant renewal of chips has been worth the effort. Slowly, what looked like a rocky desert when we bought the lot is becoming greener and lush.

Planning for the Future

The other gardens, and there are several, are still pretty needy. We are working on a plan to balance height and colour in a circular garden in which *Cimicifuga* 'Black Negligée' is the centre piece and held its own in our absence. An extension of the rock wall including an alcove for a bench and trellis is still under construction – the trellis I hope will support some *Clematis jackmanii* that I grew from seed years ago, and has survived in spite of terrible conditions. The vegetable gardens have been a little neglected this year, but the peas and lettuce have been good and next year will be better. Some new hellebores and other shade lovers have been put under the birches where the honeysuckle and lady's mantle have been subdued or moved and where several more fragile woodland plants have appeared late but are increasing in strength.

My hypertufa troughs probably fared the best in our absence. Most of the plants, including a dwarf daphne, several varieties of saxifrage and a couple of kinds of *draba*, *primula*, *dianthus* and *sempervivum* did fine with no attention. I have had to pull a little oxalis, and have added some lime, but other than that, they have maintained themselves.

We have done the obvious things – weed as well as we could, get some more compost in (I swear by Bonny Lee Farm products from Chester). Undoubtedly, I have pulled plants I would like to have kept and will make changes to what I have decided is the perfect solution. But the chance to see our layout with fresh eyes led to some much overdue changes.

Finally, I would like to say that Lloyd and I are very much in awe of the gardeners in our Society, but if anyone would like to visit our slightly shaggy but much loved plantings, give us a call at 902-275-5260, bring your bathing suit if it is warm enough, and we will welcome you. ☺

Photo Album



Hakonechloa macra 'Beni-kaze'. [Photo Brigg's Nursery]



Kalmia 'Little Linda'. [Photo Brigg's Nursery]



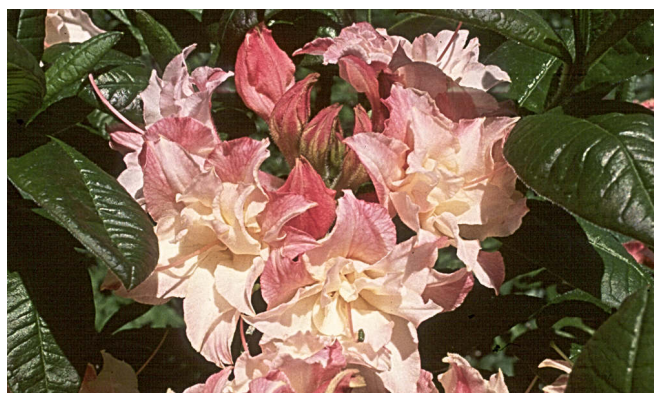
'Bubblegum'. [Photo Brigg's Nursery]



Baptisia australis. [Photo John Proctor]



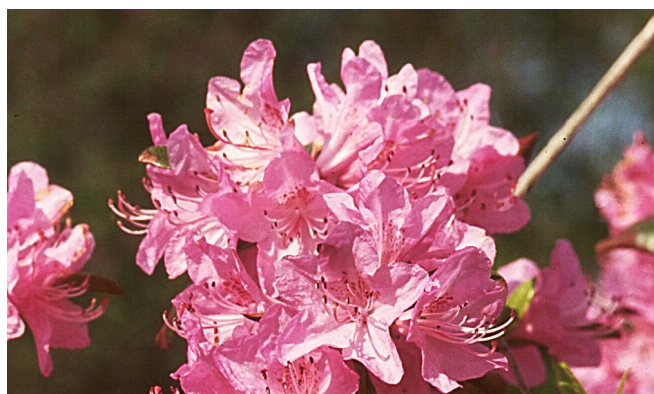
'Mist Maiden'. [Photo Don Craig]



'Cannon's Double'. [Photo Don Craig]



Kalmia 'Pink Charm'. [Photo Sterling Levy]



'Olga'. [Photo Don Craig]