

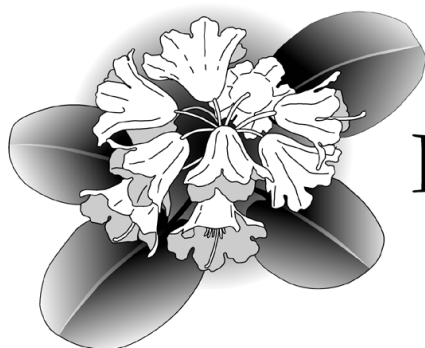
AtlanticRhodo

www.AtlanticRhodo.org

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Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society

Our Mission

ARHS supports and promotes the development and exchange of expertise and material relating to the practice of creating and maintaining year-round garden landscapes featuring rhododendrons and other plants.

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Photos in articles are by the authors, unless otherwise identified.

Membership

Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society.

The current membership period is September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019. The membership fee is \$20.00 if paid between September 1, 2018 and November 30, 2018, and \$30.00 after Nov. 30, 2018. For benefits see ARHS website www.atlanticrhodo.org

American Rhododendron Society: ARHS is a chapter in District 12 of the American Rhododendron Society. Combined ARHS and ARS membership cost is \$74.00 Canadian. For benefits see www.rhododendron.org

Cheques, made payable to Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society should be sent to **Rebecca Lancaster, 22 Walton Dr. Halifax, NS B3N 1E4**

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 & 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: ARHS member Gordon Wood posing with Rhododendron 'Taurus', May 27/19 at Morris Island, Nova Scotia. Bloom is late this year, but worth the wait! [Photo by John Brett]



Calendar of Events

ARHS meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month, from September to May, at 7:30 p.m. usually in the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History Auditorium, 1747 Summer St., Halifax, unless otherwise noted. Paid parking is available in the Museum lot. We welcome anyone sharing our interest in plants and gardens.

- May 14-19** **ARS Spring Conference** 2019, to be held in the Philadelphia area, Pennsylvania. The convention includes tours of some of the really outstanding gardens and arboretums to be found in the eastern USA.
- June 9** **ARHS Annual Garden Tour.** A tour of two private gardens, a magnificent woodland park with rhododendrons, and a really unique garden centre and sculpture garden, all in the Liverpool area. No potluck supper will be held this year. A list of restaurants in the area is included in the May 17 email with garden tour information.
- September 3** **The Art of Gardening at Chanticleer.** A talk by Joe Henderson, long time horticulturist and garden designer at Chanticleer Gardens, located near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and celebrated as one of the most romantic, imaginative and exciting public gardens in America. His talk will be based on the book he co-authored, **The Art of Gardening - Design Inspiration and Innovative Planting Techniques from Chanticleer.**
- September 7** **Master Gardeners One Day Workshop with Joe Henderson.** For more information on attending this workshop with Joe, master horticulturist from Chanticleer Gardens, please get in touch with Jim Sharpe at 902 425 6312 or email: sharpe@ns.sympatico.ca. Also, learn more about this exciting opportunity at Atlantic Master Gardeners Association website: <http://atlanticmastergardeners.ca/html/events.html>
- October 7** **Steele Lecture: Trends in gardening with Rhododendrons in Germany.** An eye-opening presentation by Dr. Hartwig Schepker, director of the 46 hectare (114 acre) Rhododendron Park and Botanic Garden in Bremen, Germany, where he is in charge of the world's second largest rhododendron collection. Dr. Schepker will talk about the many exciting research projects the garden undertakes, including the breeding program to develop both autumn-flowering rhododendron hybrids, and new foliage forms and colours.
- October 8** **Exploring Rhododendrons in Arunachal Pradesh** - Hartwig Schepker will give his second talk at **7:00pm at the BMO Community Room, Central Library, Halifax.** He has made four expeditions to Arunachal Pradesh, a remote and little explored part of Northeastern India that was closed to foreigners until 2000. As well as recounting his adventures, he will be showing photos of many unknown or rarely seen rhododendron species in flower, as well as some very beautiful landscapes.
- September 27-29** **2019 ARS Fall Conference**, Parksville, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The conference will feature twelve distinguished speakers, and bus tours of some extraordinary gardens. For more information visit the Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society website: <http://marsrhodos.ca/ars2019/>
- November 5** **Landscape Design and Plant Choices at the Lightfoot and Wolfville Winery.** Nina Newington, plantswoman, landscape designer and author, last spoke to our society about her collaboration with Beverly McClare at Tangled Gardens in Grand Pre. This time around she'll be offering insights on the plantings and site design at the new Lightfoot & Wolfville winery, a couple of miles down the road.
- December 3** **Annual ARHS Christmas Party.** Please bring up to five (5) of your images on topics horticultural – but no more than five! – to share with your fellow members. All picture files should be in .jpg format and at full resolution (original file size, not compressed).

Thank you for avoiding the use of perfumes and scented products when you come to ARHS events.



A very warm welcome to our new members who have joined ARHS since November .

Joanna	Dickson	Hammonds Plains
Dorothy	Elton	
Nancy	Levo	Westville
Beatrice	Milner	Dartmouth

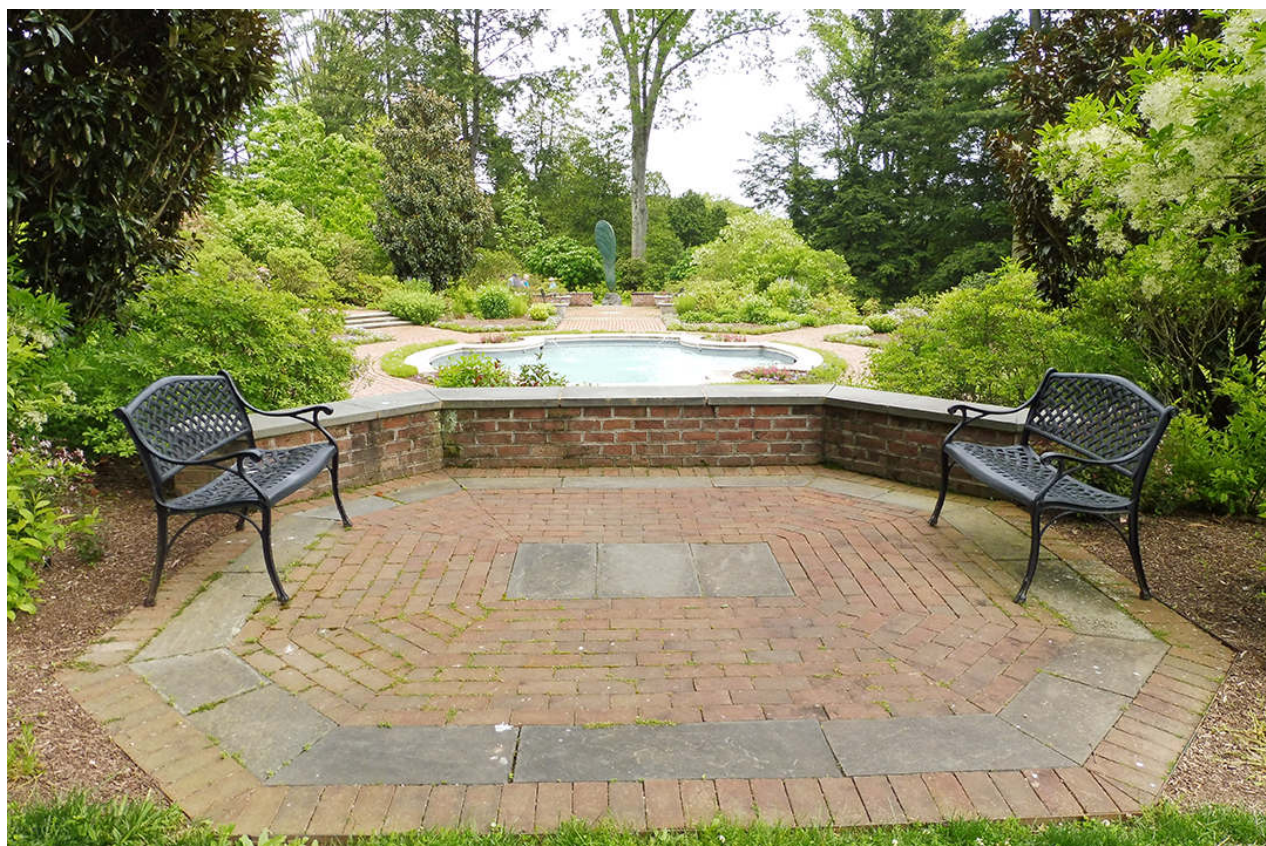
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Are your dues paid up to date?

Our records show that some members are not. If you are a local ARHS member please consider renewing as a dual member of both the ARHS and ARS (American Rhododendron Society). This gives access to the ARS Journal, a full colour magazine published quarterly, as well as access to the ARS seed exchange, ARS conventions, and other benefits.

Please see page 2 for information on payment methods. And our website: <http://atlanticrhodo.org/about-us/membership-info/>

For your convenience a Membership Application/Renewal form is provided on page 26.



Mt. Cuba, Delaware – the view across the Round Garden Pond with large bronze sculpture, “Samara Turning in the Wind” by André Harvey, in the Formal Garden beyond. This was one of many memorable views experienced during the ARS Spring Convention tours in May 2019. [Photo by John Brett]

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

by John Brett



On the ARS 2019 Spring Convention at Philadelphia and Related Topics

I recently returned from the ARS Spring Convention, held this year in the Philadelphia area. Two other stalwart members of the ARHS also attended: Jenny Sandison and Peggy Gael. It was a memorable four days, with well-organised visits to many outstanding gardens in eastern Pennsylvania, and one just across the state line in Delaware. Take a look at the photos on the back page of this issue for a small taste of what we experienced. The weather cooperated, after what we were told was many weeks of rain, so everything was very green and lush, with pleasant temperatures. The rhodo bloom season was mostly passed but this didn't detract from the magnificence and diversity of the landscapes – from the impressive woodland bowl at WynEden to the grand fountain plaza at Longwood, where it appears that Pierre DuPont was determined to out-Versailles Louis IV. Attending an ARS convention is a wonderful way to survey a large number of impressive gardens – some unavailable to the public – and to meet many expert gardeners, within a short period of time.

Another highlight for me, was the final convention banquet, where I had the honour of giving a brief presentation announcing the ARS 2021 Spring Convention in Nova Scotia, which is being hosted by us, the Atlantic chapter of the ARS. A one sheet promoting our convention was handed out to everyone at the convention, a copy of which you will find here in the pages immediately following. I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiastic response. A number of people said to me how much they were looking forward to visiting Nova Scotia. I also have to confess that I felt a certain level of anxiety. This is a big undertaking, and the Philadelphia convention set the bar for excellence very high. However, I do believe our convention co-chairs, Rebecca Lancaster and Jim Sharpe, both with experience organising big events, are up to the task. And I'm confident that you, our members, will come forward to help us make the Nova Scotia convention one to remember. I encourage any and all of you to seek out Jim and Rebecca and offer your assistance. Both regularly attend our monthly meetings. Much planning and organising is required and the work is already under way. You can also contact our volunteer coordinator, Lynn Rotin. Her email is: lynnrotin@gmail.com. She also regularly attends our monthly meetings.

Our ARS colleagues from the Portland, Oregon chapter, were also in Philadelphia to make sure everyone knew what a wonderful time awaited them at the ARS 2020 Spring Convention to be held in the Portland area next year. 2020 is the 75th anniversary of the founding of the American Rhododendron Society – so this will be a big event - and judging by my experience of the 2011 Spring Convention, also held in the Portland area, the upcoming one will be marvelous. I strongly recommend it to any of you who want to see rhodos growing to perfection in some of the magnificent gardens to be found in the Pacific Northwest. For more information see the Portland chapter website: <https://www.rhodies.org/>

For those who might think otherwise, based on its name, the American Rhododendron Society has had strong Canadian representation from the beginning, and this continues to the present. Currently, Ken Webb (president), Linda Derkach (secretary), and Glen Jamieson (Editor of the ARS Journal), all members of Canadian chapters, hold key executive positions. And in fact, the largest concentration of ARS members anywhere, is found within the five chapters on Vancouver Island. So I think it's fair to say that the ARS is just as much our society as it is that of our southern colleagues.

To further prove my point, one of our Vancouver Island chapters, Mount Arrowsmith, will be hosting the ARS 2019 Fall Convention, September 27-29, 2019, in Parksville on Vancouver Island. Twelve distinguished speakers will be featured, and there will be bus tours to some extraordinary gardens. It may not be rhodo bloom season but there will still be lots to see and do in this most favored growing region, where the diversity of plants on display is truly astonishing. For more information visit the Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society website: <http://marsrhodos.ca/ars2019/>

My column in our February issue described our two-tiered organisational structure, and I think it's worth going over again, since I am enthusing so strongly on our relationship to the ARS. The Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society is also the Atlantic chapter of district 12 of the American Rhododendron Society. Though all of you are members of the ARHS by virtue of paying your annual \$20.00 fee, some of our members also opt to pay a small amount more (an additional \$54.00 CDN this year) to become members of the ARS, Atlantic chapter. Included with membership is a very informative and entertaining full-colour journal which comes out 4 times a year. This alone is worth the price of membership, which also includes access to the ARS seed exchange, an extraordinary seed bank for rhododendrons and companion plants. On top of this, you will be part of a network of expert gardeners and growers from across the continent who are, from my experience, always willing to share their expertise. So when renewing your dues, I strongly encourage everyone to consider joining both the ARHS and the ARS. It's easy to do, because both options are on the ARHS renewal form. For more information see page 2 of this issue or go to our website: <http://atlanticrhodo.org/about-us/membership-info/>

I hope to see many of you at Parksville and Portland. Make the decision to go and I know you won't be disappointed. ☺



Rhododendrons Down East in Nova Scotia

American Rhododendron Society 2021 Spring Conference

June 3-6, 2021 | Old Orchard Inn

Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, Canada

Come join us “down east” as Nova Scotians say.

Experience our unique blending of history, contemporary culture and natural beauty. Come to see our splendid rhodos and lush gardens, of course! We'll throw in dramatic seacoasts, a vibrant capitol city, and the world's highest tides as extras, along with historic sites that go back to the founding of New France in the early 1600's. The American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, called this the Land of Evangeline; to the native indians it is Mi'kma'ki. By whatever name, Nova Scotia is a special place to visit.





Garden tours will include

Annapolis Royal Heritage gardens: www.historicgardens.com

Halifax Public Gardens: www.halifaxpublicgardens.ca

Harriet Irving Botanical Gardens: botanicalgardens.acadiau.ca/welcome.html

Private gardens by the North Atlantic

Wineries and gardens of the Annapolis Valley

The conference will be based at the Old Orchard Inn

next to the charming university town of Wolfville, with panoramic views of apple orchards, Cape Blomidon, and the Bay of Fundy's sweeping tides, oldorchardinn.com.

The opening reception, banquet, plant sale, workshops and speaker's program will all take place here. The hotel is an hour's drive from the Halifax International Airport and airport shuttles can be arranged. Or plan a road-trip "down east" to explore the many natural and cultural attractions we have to offer.

Don't miss "Rhododendrons Down East" in June 2021

We will be posting further information on the Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society website atlanticrhodo.org



A Conversation with Jenny Sandison, Gardener Extraordinaire.

Interview and editing by John Brett

(Editor's Note: We are so fortunate to have, within our membership, many expert gardeners and garden designers. The following conversation with Jenny Sandison is an opportunity for all of us to get to know one of them better. I was entertained by her good humour, and informed by her extensive practical experience as both a gardener and a professional garden designer. I think you will be too. In future issues of Atlantic Rhodo, I hope to present more of these conversations with gardeners who are also, by happy coincidence, your fellow members.)

JB: Tell me about the beginnings of your garden. What was here when you arrived?

JS: Behind the house, it was a meadow. I think I had one forsythia bush, two bridle-wreath spireas, and at the front, a huge yew bush which obliterated the front door and was very ugly, and a wall which was falling over, and quite a large parking lot. So basically it was a blank slate.

You see, when we first came to Canada we bought land in Northern Vermont and built a house, so I did quite a lot of gardening there. But I discovered in the course of 20 years that much of what I'd done was all wrong. We had a nice house and the usual area around a new-build house which became the lawn, and I innocently just put my flower beds around the edge of the lawn, which was okay, but it was too far away from the house.

So when I came here I knew that I wanted a lot more structure because when I go around gardens, what I love is the hardscaping, and I wanted things much closer to the house so that I could see them out the window. The other thing in my experience is the land tends to dictate what you do with it. For most of us, we have to take what's there and work with it.

JB: And what year did you buy the house?

JS: 1992.

JB: Can I ask what brought you down here?

JS: My dear husband, John, was Scottish, and he was retiring. I had some vague idea that we're going back to Edinburgh. But he got on his motorbike one fall and drove down from Montreal to the South Shore to visit a mutual friend, Penny Gael (editor's note: a long time ARHS member), and he came back and said, "We have to retire to the South Shore." And I'm saying, "What!" but I didn't say, "Over my dead body!", but it seemed like the end of the world. So I thought I was being smart and I said, "Oh, well, let's go and have a look. Let's go in November."

So we came to the South Shore in November for four days. I was astonished! I mean Nova Scotia in November is fabulous. You've got the light on the water. You've got a lot more evergreens than you do in Quebec. So we did start to look at property and we drove to Mahone Bay, and we drove down the Oakland Road and there was a "for sale" sign - "Well, that's quite a cute house!" - and two days later, we'd bought it. Yes! And then you go back thinking, "What have we done?"

JB: It must have been right!

JS: Serendipity. Yes. And I think that, at first, Penny Gael was very worried that we'd hate it. So she got me to join the Rhododendron Society (now the ARHS) and I met all these people that knew much more than I did. So it was a wonderful move.

JB: So tell me about the process of creating a garden.

JS: I was prepared to start from scratch. In fact, I think I preferred the idea of starting from scratch. This house faces south and although the soil has problems, it's actually very rich. We're on what's called the Windsor loams, these very fine, silty soils. There's also a high pH here, which is unusual. Maybe the fact that the property here was quite small - it's only just half an acre - was appealing too, because it wasn't too much.

I did have a general plan. We had added on a larger kitchen extension at the back and I had this idea that I'd have two garden doors and look out the garden doors, and then I wanted a patio for the usual table and sitting around and eating, immediately outside the back door. I knew the dimensions of the patio, the back lawn behind the house, so I could put that on my plan.



Jenny Sandison in her back garden at Oakland, Nova Scotia, April 30, 2019.

Basically when you're trying to do a plan, how you get around dictates what you need to do. So you need to get from the garage where the lawn tractor is stored, to around the back of the house. You have to create a path. So now you have some division of the space by the hard landscaping. And we were going to have to have a retaining wall behind the patio. And I could grow some Alpine plants on top of that, so that's what happened there. And we needed steps up to the next level. And I think, "I want a bit of grass there." So the backhoe came in and scooped a lot of that soil out and created a flat level for the grass. And then there was this informal bank around that area of the (back) garden, and I knew I wanted some holly bushes, some evergreen interest and something tall, so I got a gold thuja, which is still there, and a weeping hemlock, and then a crab apple tree. And at the front, I certainly didn't want the parking lot. I wanted to develop a garden there that was fairly easy.

So that took probably four years, and the rest of the garden was just mowing grass, and John's vegetable garden, and scrubby trees at the back that happened to be there. So the next thing was I thought I would do another long garden. And now I'm into John Brooks, who talked about the shrubs and the trees being really the most important thing. And then you do the perennials - the pretty bit - but they're not terribly important. You've really got to think about the structure of the trees and the shrubs. So I thought, well, a long (perennial) border, and it can have maybe two trees in it, like dogwoods and locust, which don't get huge but they'll be structure, and then I'll have a pointy evergreen here and a round evergreen there. And I saw in a magazine quite a pretty idea for a sitting-out pergola area. And I thought, "Perfect! I'll do that." And I decided I wanted a diagonal rather than having everything very rectangular because the land is higher on the left than on the right. So this diagonal goes up the hill and you get this little vista going towards the pergola.

So that was the next four years, I suppose, and then dear John died, and I inherited the vegetable garden and that actually was a bit of a problem because you find when you're suddenly just one, you can't do all the work. So I abandoned the vegetable garden. It's become my holding bed, because I'm always buying stuff from the Rhododendron Society (ARHS), and from the nurseries, and sometimes you don't have anywhere to put them so you stick them in the ex-vegetable garden until you can see what they're like.

JB: It sounds to me like you developed a gardening philosophy as you were going along.

JS: I read a lot. I traveled a lot and looked at a lot of gardens, and you develop quite a good idea of what's possible and what would look good here. And as Vita Sackville-West would say, be ruthless. If it doesn't work, rip it out and try something else.

JB: Can you trace any of this back to your growing-up period? Was there any formative influence?

JS: My father was a very good gardener. He was in the Army, so we moved continuously. We were in Singapore and then we came back to Britain and it was post-war Britain. Things were starting to move and, where he was stationed, they had built five new houses for military accommodation and they were very traditional British houses with these long gardens. And it was barren. Daddy had "Mr. Middleton's Garden Book", and it had a plan: a little patio, two rose beds, a lawn, flower borders on either side, and a rather hoaky trellis thing, and you grew roses up that, and behind that was the vegetable garden which is what you were supposed to do in Britain, hide the vegetable garden. And we were there for four years. I remember the hyacinths he planted, the smell of them. And we also visited gardens. That was becoming more of a thing in Britain, the aristocracy started opening their gardens up.

Then, of course, you train, you have a profession, you have no interest in gardening. But it was interesting how the moment we bought the Vermont land you felt you needed to get out there and do something on it.

JB: So before you became a landscape designer you had another profession?

JS: I was an x-ray technician and I worked in Montreal at the neurological hospital for 20 years, and I enjoyed it very much. Funnily enough, all my friends kept saying when they looked around my garden, "Jenny, you should be a garden designer." Then I thought I would, and I did!

JB: Were there any particular challenges in developing your garden that stand out?

JS: This back lawn I was wanting to create, with the dreadful subsoil, was a problem, and the grass was always incredibly poor there. And after probably 10 years, I got the local lawn care company to come, and they were making compost at the facility in Lunenburg, and they brought four loads of compost and roto-tilled them into the grass. And that was wonderful. I'm always telling people that if your plants are struggling you need to improve the soil.

The other thing that I found was, coming from Vermont, where it was free draining soil but a lot of snow cover in the winter, the perennials in Vermont did fabulously. I'm not saying they don't do well here but what I notice is because the soil is so rich in the early summer, they are lush and big and then the wind goes around to the southwest and blows hot and dry for a week and they often burn on the edges. They get too luxuriant, they think it's a rainforest but it isn't, and the droughts in the summer are getting quite severe.

JB: How do you manage water?

JS: I have a well but occasionally I run out so I can't really irrigate and that particularly bad summer - was it three summers ago? - when we didn't have rain for about two months and the rhododendrons, first they curl up their leaves, and then the



The front garden area before (1991). [Photo by Jenny Sandison]



The front garden area after. [Photo by Jenny Sandison]

whole new stem starts to droop, and I had some rhododendrons - *Oreodoxa 'Fargesii'* - that I didn't want to lose, but I was carting buckets of water physically and that's not easy at my age.

So the watering is a problem. And I think you've got to be realistic about that. So some things have to go. The other thing I've discovered is that there's a lovely guy who comes around and fills up people's swimming pools, but he'll also fill up your well. So in the really dry Summers I do that. So at least I can water, even if it's only with the watering can.

JB: Do you have any pest problems? And how do you deal with them?

JS: Deer are the major problem. I'm a landscaper and it's getting almost impossible to put in a garden. Because what don't they eat? There's not much. Now here, I think on the third winter, I looked out the back door and the deer had been browsing the Japanese maples down to 18 inches, and they'd grow up, and the next winter they'd browsed them down to 18 inches. And then I looked out and there were two deer on the holly bush. They looked beautiful, but I said, "Enough!" I'd always seen this little ad for Benner's deer fencing, and so I sent off for 300 feet of plastic deer fencing and we fenced in two sides of the back garden. And that's been a god-send. I eventually had to fence in the third side of the back garden.

The deer fencing is black plastic, it's seven and a half feet, and I've been extremely pleased with it. It was guaranteed for 10 years and I guess some of it is probably getting on for 18 years. This past winter the deer managed to break it down because I think it's getting brittle, and they got in while I was away. So I'm going to replace the deer fencing in the fall. It wasn't a huge amount of money. It was easy to put up and I can plant anything.

JB: You say it's easy to put up. Did you put it up yourself?

JS: John and I did. It's very lightweight, it comes in a big roll.

JB: What about stakes?

JS: Originally, all these rinky-dinky little pine trees around the edge of the property, you just unrolled it to the next pine tree and stapled it. Then my neighbors, bless them, sold me a little strip of land, so the property line is further out. I got a young man to come and do super spikes and four by fours and they run up the side of the property. So where there are gaps I use those.

JB: Super spikes being like a wooden stake you put in?

JS: Yes, a 4 by 4, which is also 7 to 8 feet tall.

JB: So he has to do some digging to do that?

JS: Well, the super spikes, you just have to pound in. I mean as long as you can find a space without a rock. The front garden hadn't been a problem because it's the road. But no more. They're in the front garden. So now I have, in the summer months, a water scarecrow, which is fairly effective.

JB: Explain that to me.

JS: It's a motion-detecting gadget that, when the deer come through the front garden, since it's attached to your hose pipe, it sends out quite a strong jet of water, and it frightens them off. I have to remember to turn it off in the morning in case people come and they get sprayed!

JB: Do you have a lot of rocks in the soil around here?

JS: Oh, yes. Don't we all?

JB: What aspects of your garden give you the greatest pleasure?

JS: Since I was a child, I was very interested in British wildflowers. There were these little books called The Observers Books. My brother had the birds and I had the flowers, and wherever we went I would find them and tick them off.

JB: So it's the plants?

JS: Yes, I mean, they put on these beautiful flowers, wonderful colors, interesting shapes, wonderful shades of green. So I have to walk around the garden every day and this time of year there's always a new flower. "There's an Erythronium, there's a Hellebore! It's my white Hellebore!" Sometimes it can take me over an hour to walk around the garden. And that's the pleasure.

JB: What are some of your favorite plants in the garden? What plants are you really passionate about?

JS: Well, the list is so long. And it all depends on the year. Right now, *Anemone blanda* is coming out, one of my favorite spring flowers because it's little purplish leaves come through the ground and then that blue... and then the wood anemones, which I'm really fond of, because I remember them when I was a child, and the bloodroot -the double bloodroot -it's only there for three days, but it's exquisite.

JB: If I asked you this question in the middle of July, you might have different answers?

JS: Totally! As a gardener you're always looking forward. You know, now the snowdrops are out, "Oh, is there a crocus?" And somehow you can run through the whole year looking for the next thing without really sitting down. A few more benches around the garden would be good, so you're forced to sit down and look at things.

JB: I think it's a problem for gardeners where we have to both be the gardener and the observer.

JS: Yes. The trouble is you sit down to observe and, "Oh damn! I better go and get that dandelion out!" Anyway, important plants... Well, this is the theory and in practice I agree with it, when you're planning a new area, you have to think about, first of all, the evergreens - not too many - I think they say one third only, otherwise the planting gets a bit heavy with evergreens. But evergreens are going to be there for six months of the year when nothing else is there so they are essential and they are wonderful shapes.

Ones that I really love are 'Ramapo' – the rhododendron – because it's compact and it has interesting colored leaves as well as quite pretty flowers. The *Chamaecyparis* (genus) is I think my favorite of all. I've got several. Dwarf Hinoki Cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*) is in my view one of the most exquisite plants in the world. Serendipitously, in the rock garden, it's planted next to the "Little Gem" spruce, which is a very tight ball, and the interplay of those two is perfect.

And some rhododendrons, but I have to say the trouble is, rhododendrons tend to get tall and lanky after 25 years and I'm in the process now of chopping some of them almost to the ground, and starting them over again. And it works.

JB: There seem to be some that will sucker from old wood.

JS: You chop them down and they break from the old wood, and now you've got this compact little mound again, and away it goes.

JB: You just have to cross your fingers and hope it breaks from the old wood.

JS: So far, I've had great luck. I did it with a very old rhododendron in a client's garden, which was probably more like 50 years old, and it was obscuring the view of the Cove. We took it down to three feet and it loved it.



The back garden in 1993, after leveling the yard and installing a retaining wall. [Photo by Jenny Sandison]

And then when it comes to perennials, I still love *Alchemilla mollis*, Geranium 'Roseanne', gorgeous pink peonies, if I could only buy more single flowered peonies. You don't actually have to stake them. I adore catmint because it's so easy, especially this one called 'Walker's Low'. It covers 36 inches of ground and it's beautiful. Japanese Iris, I adore. I would have loved a water feature. But from what I read, and what I see with other people's water features, they are lots of work.

JB: Any trees you particularly like in a garden? And what the about sizes of trees?

JS: Well, my garden is not big, so I don't want huge trees. What I really love are the Chinese dogwoods (*Cornus kousa*) because they're smallish but spectacular in flower, and my Golden Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'frisia'), which is a gold form of the Black Locust, but the only thing is it's getting much bigger than I anticipated. So it's been topped twice. So mostly I plant what I call medium sized trees like

the weeping cherry, the crab apple... My advice to people about large trees is that you really have to remember, they're going to get big.

I do like flowering trees. I like Magnolias. I've got so many from the Rhododendron Society (ARHS). But even there, I planted two of one variety called 'Legacy', and it's started to flower beautifully. But what I didn't realize was, Magnolias have these very large leathery leaves and when they come down in the fall, they get stuck in under all my beloved evergreen azaleas and they are a right pain.

JB: Tell me how you see rhododendrons and azaleas fitting into a Nova Scotia gardening scheme?

JS: The regular rhododendrons, which are going to get five to six feet tall, are excellent for what I call background plants. But what I really like are the evergreen azaleas, which are lower. They get smothered in blossom - gorgeous colors - and I can prune them. In fact, the deer have done a great job at it this last winter! They're more foreground plants, and what I really like about evergreen azaleas is I can do them like a small, low hedge, and have the perennials behind it and they prop up the perennials. So they have a dual purpose.

JB: Is there anything particular about the placement of them that people should know?

JS: I just find they do extremely well. Now I think John Weagle (longstanding ARHS member) used to say they need to get their wood ripened in the summer to have a good show and maybe because Mahone Bay is quite a long way inland, it's much hotter in the summer than say, Prospect, so maybe that helps me with their growth. They just do fabulously: full sun, semi-shade, and John Weagle's are some of the ones I have and they grow fabulously.

JB: Do you find that they are prone to any pests or diseases or animals?

JS: I suspect the deer love them if they're out in the wilderness.

JB: Tell me about your professional activities related to garden and landscape design.

JS: I got into it because I had become slightly disenchanted with working in a hospital and I had discovered this passion for gardening. And my nice friends said I did a good job. So I put an ad in the Westmount Gazette (editor's note: the neighborhood of Westmount in Montreal), and surprise, people hired me.

And then - this would have been in the 90s - there seemed to be an explosion of interest in having something else rather than just foundation plantings, and the English garden style became very popular all of a sudden, this idea of the perennial garden and lots of flowers, as opposed to just cutting the grass and trimming the shrubs. So I rode that wave, you might say. And when I came here, I remember somebody saying to me, "Oh, well, you're going to go and live in the country. People know how to grow things in the country. Nobody wants you." But again, there's a lot of people who buy a property and they want a garden but they have no experience. So they hire you. And I find that my job is trying to advise and to be realistic: How much time are you going to put in? What's your knowledge level like? I think that's what my job is, to put appropriate plants in the right places.

Funnily enough, the business has developed more into a garden maintenance service. We have about 40 Gardens which we look after. Every five weeks we'll go in, do the weeding, the deadheading, the shearing, the pruning, whatever needs to be done at that time. That's one of the lovely things about being involved with a garden over a long period of time, you get to help develop it. It's absolutely fabulous to walk in, in July, and go, "Wow! And we did all this!" That is what I call real gratification.

JB: And does the business have a name?

JS: Yes. It's called English Garden Design.

JB: Can you give me an idea of what you think are the greatest garden challenges we face here? What are the things people starting a garden should really be looking at?

JS: Well, around here it's going to be the deer. It's terrible how limited we are, planting things. 25 years ago, it wasn't like this.

JB: So building a fence would be one of your first pieces of advice.

JS: That's right. But not many people take me up on it.



The backyard as it appeared in the summer of 2013.

[Photo by Jenny Sandison]

JB: You're gardening down here alongside the Atlantic, with the exposure to the open Atlantic, and the winds. Does that have any effect on what you advise people to grow?

JS: It doesn't. I mean surprisingly, I can remember thinking about that when I was first coming here and I'm looking around, thinking, "What do you plant when there's salt in the air?" But oddly enough, I haven't really noticed that there's been a problem.

JB: What are some of your favorite gardens to visit?

JS: We all find the Historic Gardens in Annapolis Royal fabulous. It's a high standard. I love the different areas they've created. I love Tangled Garden. She's (ARHS member Beverly McClare) always doing something new. The public gardens (in Halifax) are a joy. For a city garden, that's great.

For (ARHS) member's gardens, well, I always enjoy Sheila's and Steven's (Sheila Stevenson and Stephen Archibald). Going further afield, out in BC, the Van Duesen Garden in Vancouver. The Montreal Botanical Garden is extraordinary. Wisley, of course, which is the headquarters of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS Wisley Garden) is always fascinating, in that they're always redoing things and trying to keep up with different trends.

Iford is a fabulous garden in the Cotswolds, and Bodnant Garden in Wales. I went back to Sissinghurst with a friend two years ago and I was a little disappointed in that the original vision seemed to have faded. Oh, there's a wonderful garden in Suffolk called Helmingham Hall. That's an old-fashioned Elizabethan moated manor house, and they've done wonderful borders, with stuff growing on the walls and wonderful perennials.

JB: Are there any current trends in gardening that particularly interest you?

JS: Well the current trend in gardening is the grass garden and I think it's very appropriate in some areas. I've got "Karl Foerster", a reed grass, which I like. It's a very vertical, easy thing and it flowers early. We've just done some flower beds next to the flagpole in Mahone Bay, and because that's by the sea it seemed maybe grasses would be appropriate. So we've got what I call the better ones in there and we'll see how it goes. But I have to say my heart isn't in it. There's not enough interest in the grass garden.

JB: I'm somewhat familiar with Piet Oudolf's work and...

JS: The prairie garden, I think that's what they call it... lots of mixed meadow flowers. So that's one trend, but I have deep suspicions because, again, it's all about maintenance and at Wisley they had done these two borders, the Piet Oudolf borders, and I can remember looking at them and thinking, "But how do they get in there to do the weeding?" The idea is wonderful, but practically... and the last time I was there, I said to one of the gardener's, "How do you find the Piet Oudolf borders, now they've been there for a while?" and they said "We've had to make a lot of adjustments and Piet wasn't very happy with us. So we're no longer calling them the Piet Oudolf borders." Well, isn't that interesting?

So most of us are looking for less work than that. So that is a trend which I think is not very practical for the home gardener. The other thing that occasionally people want is the wildflower meadow. And from what I understand, because I have been to gardens in Britain where they have wildflower meadows, they plow it up every spring and re-sow. And you can get a wonderful effect that way, but is that what the individual gardener wants to do?

JB: Is there any particular private garden that you've worked on in the last while that you really like?

JS: There's a property on Martin's Point and it's got copper beeches that are 80 years old. So we've been helping them for 18 years and that's been lovely. It's at the end of the point and when you go around the front of the house, the view is astonishing. You see from Chester to Tanook Island, all the way around to the end of Indian Point. And I often say that about gardens, the plants and the landscaping can be glorious, but sometimes it's the fact that you're in this very unique place. That's one of the things, professionally, that I really enjoy.

JB: Getting back to your garden. How do you see the future of your garden evolving?

JS: I'm now 73 and, you know, gardening is quite hard on you. So I am actually doing a lot of replanting. And I'm trying to put things in that don't need a lot of labor and are going to be easy to look after. So I just took out a dwarf blue spruce. It's about 25 feet across and sprawling over the wall and it had to go. So half of the space has gone back to lawn, because lawn is the best ground cover in the world. You just have to mow it. And the rest I've planted with dwarf *Berberis*, because that I find fairly easy, and I've replanted winter heathers which do quite well there. I'm trying to introduce more shrubs into some areas and I've gone back to day lilies, the single colors - the yellows, pinks - and they are fabulously easy plants to cover a bank with. Rhododendrons are good because they cover a lot of ground. And so that's what I'm trying to do in the next 10 years, to get it to the point where it's less work. And I'll have to hire a company to help me at that point.

JB: But you'll still have lots of visual impact.

JS: I hope so, and I'll have an electric golf cart to go around. (laughs).

JB: Thank you for taking the time to chat with me, Jenny. It's been both very entertaining and informative. ☺

Useful and Beautiful – Some Groundcovers to Grow

by Bob Howard



Thyme (*Thymus* sp.) growing through crevices in flagstones.



A textured mat of False cypress, Cotoneaster, Woolly veronica, Thyme and Erigeron.

We start weeding on our hands and knees with a trowel and soon discover that a hoe is easier. Eventually we decide that planting into thick mulch is even less work than the hoe, but the dead look of mulch disappoints our horticultural aspirations. Could we somehow fill up all the garden spaces with living plants? A groundcover, which acts as a living mulch of low plants with flowers, foliage, and fruit, is a pleasing solution.

We have several native plants that make elegant groundcovers: three-toothed potentilla, bunchberry, mayflower, teaberry, vacciniums, and more. From a practical point of view, three-toothed potentilla (formerly *Potentilla tridentata*, now *Sibbaldiopsis tridentata*) is my favourite. It divides and transplants easily. The foliage, nearly evergreen, is a deep, bright green changing to autumn colours with the season. Three-toothed potentilla grows readily, without being aggressive, and produces numerous small, white, rose-like flowers in early summer. I wish this plant were available at nurseries and plant sales.

Our two most beautiful native Nova Scotian groundcovers, bunchberry and mayflower, are a challenge to propagate and to coax into growing. Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*), not surprisingly given its genus, has dogwood flowers. Mayflower (*Epigaea repens*), the more beautiful of the two to my eye, is also the more difficult one to get started. They both want peat and leaf mold, lots of humus in the soil, and good drainage while staying moist. They are both shade plants, with bunchberry tolerating a bit more sun if kept moist. It's critical to not let them dry out, especially in August, and to give bright woodland conditions.

But the main hurdle is to get starter plants in the first place. Digging up clumps in the woods leads to almost certain failure with mayflower. It needs to be started from seed or from semi-hardwood cuttings, for rooting in July or August. Collect some soil with native fungus from where they grow and add that to the humusy soil you prepare in your garden. In his book, Rock Gardening, Lincoln Foster writes "... (lightly) cover the plants with pine needles or oak leaves and water frequently until the plants are established." I've tried digging up clumps and each one that I've planted has died. So I'd be an eager buyer if someone would raise mayflower plants from seedlings or rooted cuttings.

With bunchberry, after a humbling start, I have in recent years had a little success, both with clumps and with seedlings. It's the same procedure as for mayflower: woodland soil, constant moisture, good drainage, and half-shade to full shade. Bunchberry just seems to survive a little more willingly, and I may have become a little better about regular watering.



Teaberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*).

Wild lily-of-the-valley (*Maianthemum canadense*) is a lovely groundcover that cheers up the low, wild grasses on the woodland floor where I grow rhododendrons, hydrangeas, Japanese maples, and so on. It's easy to transplant.

Teaberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*) is probably the most commercially available native groundcover and easy to transplant. It grows in my peat and leaf-mold enriched woodland, as well as along the driveway in a sandy woodland soil to which I did not add anything.

Beyond the natives, the range of groundcover plants seems limitless, extending from low thyme to all-sizes of juniper. I encourage you to develop a list of favourites and reasons for using them. The benefits go beyond weed prevention. Groundcovers also conserve moisture and keep soil temperatures more even. As a design element, by covering the soil, groundcovers make the planting look more natural. They serve to visually connect individual feature plants and to give a feeling of fullness to the planting. For example, I like to plant thymes and other groundcovers around perennials or where bulbs come up in the spring. See the accompanying photo of *Aconitum napellus* growing up through wooly thyme.

Dwarf conifers are often surefire weed suppressors, and likeable in their own right. See the accompanying photo showing dwarf Korean fir, Canadian hemlock and Mugo pine, along with a rhododendron, dianthus, wooly thyme, a yellow heath and a heather in seed. The fallen red maple leaves add sparkle to the matrix of textures.

Another accompanying photo was taken while standing directly above the plants. You have to imagine standing on a flagstone walk and looking directly down almost at your feet at the edge of the garden. This image includes a false cypress, an erigeron, wooly veronica, a cotoneaster and thyme. As you can see, I like to create interesting texture combinations. And within this miniature landscape – it's fun to have it near the front door of our house – there is something in flower from spring to late summer, with red berries from the fall into winter.

I include one more image, which shows various thymes in a flagstone walk. As the thyme grows along the flagstone joints it acts as a groundcover, preventing - well, let's say reducing - the weed seeds that might germinate in the cracks between the stones. In this situation, where a hoe or mulch would just not work, it is both useful and beautiful, and those two words, "useful" and "beautiful", pretty much summarize the virtues of the groundcovers I've highlighted in this article. Some are easier to grow than others, but all are worth trying. ☘



Aconitum napellus growing through a carpet of Wooly thyme (*Thymus pseudolanuginosus*).



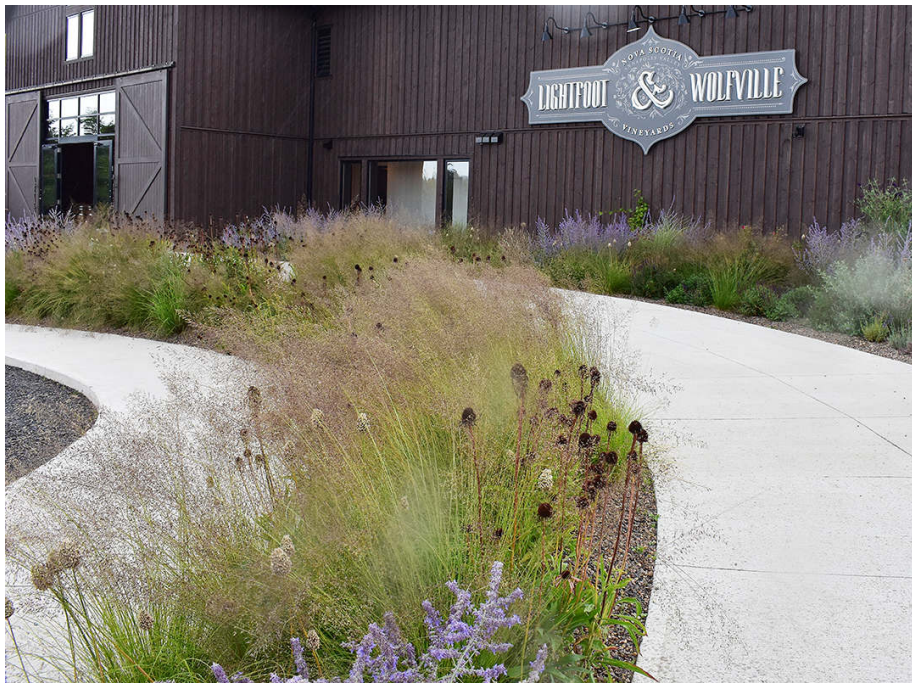
Three toothed cinquefoil (*Potentilla tridentata*).

Creating Gardens for the Lightfoot & Wolfville Winery

by Nina Newington

The ground under our knees shivered. Overhead, cranes swung sections of roof into place. Each time the machine tamping down the gravel parking lot passed by, diesel fumes engulfed us. Also, it was late July and very hot; we were planting plugs that had arrived in May, and the crew consisted of workers hired for the not-yet-open store and restaurant.

It wasn't how I'd pictured planting day a year earlier when I met with Mike and Jocelyn Lightfoot to discuss the landscaping for the Annapolis Valley's newest winery. Jocelyn, a licensed sommelier, had visited wineries all over the world. They wanted some of that classic Mediterranean vibe but at the same time we were on land farmed by Mike's family for generations. The building itself would evoke the long, plain barns of the area.



August 30th, 2018: Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*), Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*), seedheads of *Echinacea pallida*.

"Fruitfulness and ripening will be a theme with a light, loose feel to the plantings and lots of grasses, Tangled Garden style," I wrote in my design notes. "Seed heads and silhouettes are as important as blossoms. Self-sowing plants will soften the edges, especially in the parking lot area. We all want the winery to feel as if it is among the vines."

Rows of vines, grown organically and biodynamically, wrap around three sides of the building. To keep this feel we chose not to plant trees in the parking lot, instead subdividing it with two long narrow beds of Little Bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*, enlivened by 'Daydream' tulips, *Allium* 'Purple Sensation' and, in future, self-sowing, pollinator-friendly *Digitalis lutea*, *Verbena bonariensis* and *Verbascum chaixii*. Little Blue Stem, a North American prairie grass, is stalwart and easy on reasonably well-drained soil. The fairly fine bluish leaves grow upright to about a meter. In the fall they turn purplish then a rich tawny amber, and they stay upright through snow and gale.

Except along the south face of the building, wind is a factor here. The grand view over the Minas Basin comes with a price tag. Plants native to Mediterranean hillsides are often well-adapted to drying winds but they need a bony soil, not the rich silt loam native to the site. This wasn't a problem on the north side as the dining terraces were laid on rubble. The chefs wanted an area with perennial herbs anyway, so we put globes of 'Green Gem' boxwood at the corners and planted lines of lavender, sage, tarragon and thyme in narrow beds around the terraces. All but a handful came through their first winter well in spite of having been planted late in the season. I suspect the use of pea stone mulch here (and in all the other well-drained planting areas) contributed to their survival.

On the south side, facing the parking lot, the beds along the building and between concrete walkways contained free-draining backfill, as did the giant planter near the entrance, built to conceal a flotilla of heat pump compressors. We deliberately did not enrich the soil too much. Here again we planted swathes of lavender, mainly 'Hidcote', this time combined with a fine, airy grass, *Sporobolus heterolepis*, or Prairie dropseed. This grass was a bit of a gamble because it can be finicky but it established beautifully here in combination with another gamble, *Echinacea pallida*. Wilder-looking and more delicate than the common *E. purpurea* (let alone its bloated cultivars), *E. pallida* is also more perennial. Even so, it is best to plant it close to an edge. It doesn't appreciate being leaned on. But oh, it is beautiful at every stage, from bud to skeleton.

Any large-scale planting needs its stalwarts. The key one here is *Salvia* 'Caradonna', chosen for its long blooming season and reliability, as well as its dark green leaves and upright habit. With a bit of dead-heading it flowers from June to the end



August 16th, 2018: Lavender 'Super Blue', rows of grape vines behind.

of October. The deep purple spikes of flowers and darker stems combine beautifully with the grasses and lavenders as well as with another stalwart, *Nepeta* 'Walker's Low'. A few David Austin roses, notably 'Munstead Wood' and 'Sophies Choice', add some sumptuous crimson and rich raspberry pink. Late summer blooming sub-shrubs, *Perovskia atriplicifolia* and *Caryopteris clandonensis*, keep the show going.

Silver leaved plants from lamb's ears, *Stachys olympica* 'Helen von Stein' to *Eleagnus* 'Quicksilver', add sparkle, as do the sea hollies, *Eryngium planum* and 'Big Blue'. In the low-lying areas near the entrance to the wine cellar, rosemary willow, *Salix eleagnos*, takes over the role of lightening the plantings. The same colour scheme continues in the areas with richer, damper soil. *Persicaria amplexicaule* 'Firetail' anchors the scene, along with *Veronicastrum virginicum* 'Lavender Spires' and Ironweed, *Vernonia noveboracensis*. *Camassia leichtlinii caeruleum* is the bulb of choice here, being native to wet meadows. In late May and June, the 1m. tall lavender blue flower spikes talk to the hundreds of *Allium aflatuense* 'Purple Sensation' spread through the rest of the plantings.

The bulk of the ornamental planting happened in the summer of 2017. I was amazed (and relieved) the next year by how well the plants survived the winter, and how quickly they established. This was in large part thanks to care and assistance that first year from winery workers, notably winemaker Josh Horton and his Dad. From the start, Mike and Jocelyn and I discussed the challenge of finding the right person to tend the garden. Wild-looking plantings, where

self-sowing is encouraged, require skilled, attentive maintenance. It was great good luck that Laurie Morin, hired for the retail side of the business, happened to have horticultural experience, a good eye, and passion.

There were certainly lessons learned, notably that people will walk on, and vehicles drive over, plants that they judge to be in their way. Those long strips dividing the parking area need better marked passages through them, and possibly a single rail fence down the middle. Also, people with pets do need some shade to park in. On the whole these were minor teething problems. The winery blew past all its targets for numbers of customers in its first year. To judge by their comments, people enjoyed the gardens as well as the wine. ☘



June 28th, 2018: *Eryngium* 'Big Blue', *Campanula poscharskyana* 'Waterfall', *Allium christophii*, *Salvia* 'Caradonna'.



June 28th, 2018: Lavender 'Hidcote', Rose 'Munstead Wood'.

Establishment of a New Rhododendron Species Garden – the Vancouver Island Experience.

by Glen Jamieson, John Deniseger, Marilyn Dawson and Tony Ansdell

(Editor's note: We would like to thank the authors and the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society for permission to reprint this article. Perhaps it will inspire some of us to think about big, public-spirited projects. That's something worth encouraging in Atlantic Canada, as elsewhere. All photos are by Glen Jamieson unless otherwise noted.)

The first Canadian rhododendron species garden has just been established on Vancouver Island, BC, and we thought it would be useful to document our experiences so that others considering the establishment of their own species rhododendron gardens might benefit. Some of our challenges were site-specific and parochial, but the unexpected seems to almost always occur, so how we overcame challenges may still be of interest to others.

Background

Vancouver Island is somewhat unique in the “rhododendron world”. It is home to five American Rhododendron Society (ARS) chapters with a total of about 375 members. The chapters, from south to north, are Victoria, Cowichan Valley, Nanaimo, Mount Arrowsmith and North Island. They are located in a relatively straight line 230 km (145 miles) long, about 45 km (28 miles) apart, so that Vancouver Island is perhaps one of the densest concentrations of dedicated rhododendron growers in the world. Members of the chapters interact extensively and collaborate in many ways, including sharing monthly speakers, assisting in plant propagation, and the sequential scheduling of plant sales.

There are many rhododendron gardens on the island, and gardening is a significant recreational activity for many people. With this level of interest, and with rhododendrons in particular, the rhododendron species have naturally garnered more attention amongst the more serious enthusiasts. However, while there are many rhododendron species at the University of Victoria's Finnerty Gardens - a significant example of this trend - that garden is not focused around rhododendrons *per se*, and is primarily a show garden rather than an educational garden. There are other noteworthy rhododendron gardens on the mainland, but these involve more extensive travel by ferry and automobile to the mainland of British Columbia and Washington state. They are great resources, but the distances and time involved mean that relatively few Vancouver Islanders visit them.

To address this issue, two keen island ARS members, Harry Wright and Jim Greig, first discussed the idea of establishing a rhododendron species garden on Vancouver Island in 1998. Milner Gardens & Woodland (MGW) in Qualicum Beach was centrally located among Vancouver Island's ARS chapters and had just been donated to Vancouver Island University (VIU). It was a potential location, but because VIU's relationship with MGW was still in its infancy, establishment of such a species garden, at that time, was both premature and not practical.

The idea was revived in 2008, and Geoff Ball, the new executive director of the MGW, was supportive, but before the idea could get off the ground, the 2008 decline in the world's economy occurred. The concept was again shelved, as a significant amount of money would be needed to make the species garden a reality. Timing is often everything!

In 2012, the Nanaimo chapter hosted the ARS Fall Convention. There were tours to the Milner Garden Woodlands (MGW), and this again revived the idea among island ARS members, of creating a species garden at this location. The initial challenge was for ARS members first to raise \$20,000 in seed funds, which Vancouver Island University (VIU) would then match. ARS District 1 (British Columbia) was suggested to champion this effort, but it soon evolved into a fund-raising initiative of the five Vancouver Island chapters within District 1. This amount was raised by the summer of 2014, with each of the five Vancouver Island chapters contributing, as their budgets and commitments permitted.

The next step was the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding that was legally sound and that laid out the roles and responsibilities for all parties. While time consuming, it aligned the various goals and objectives of each group, and laid the foundation for a partnership between VIU, MGW and the five Vancouver Island ARS chapters, for all future activities. Out of this, the different organisational committees and subcommittees were created. A Species Garden Advisory Group, with representation from all Vancouver Island ARS chapters, MGW and VIU, was created to provide guidance, oversight and technical advice on an ongoing basis.

The Significance of a Rhododendron Species Garden

With many thousands of rhododendron hybrid cultivars available, there is little public awareness of the diversity, geographic distribution and beauty of the species within the genus *Rhododendron*. Existing gardens showcase many beautiful cultivars, which help promote rhododendrons as desirable landscape plants, so it's fair to ask, why is it important and relevant to have a garden dedicated exclusively to rhododendron species?

Members of the island ARS chapters believe it is desirable to:

- 1) showcase the diversity of rhododendron species, educate the public on their geographic origins, and inspire gardeners to propagate both species and new cultivars;
- 2) provide a source of species for propagation, as many serious gardeners desire rhododendron species that are not sold in commercial nurseries and are difficult to find;
- 3) assist in species conservation by growing some species that are either endangered or threatened in the wild, and providing a location for conserving and displaying them; and
- 4) encourage greater collaboration among island ARS gardeners by providing a common activity in which they all play a part.

Significance of Milner Woodland Gardens to the Vancouver Island Rhododendron Community

Rhododendron nurseries began on Vancouver Island in the late 1800s, but it wasn't until Ted and Mary Greig started their nursery at Royston in 1934 that rhododendron propagation on Vancouver Island really took off. Ray and Rina Milner acquired their 28 ha (70 acre) seaside property in Qualicum Beach, 60 km (38 miles) south of Royston, in 1937, and they began the earliest development of the garden. Unfortunately Rina passed away in 1952, but more extensive work in the garden portion of the estate was started in 1954 after Ray's marriage to his second wife, Veronica.

By 1954, they had completed their design of a 4 ha (10 acre) garden and had begun acquiring plants from the Grieg's at Royston. By this time, Mary Greig had developed into a continental expert on the genus and had become one of the early North American hybridizers (she and her husband received an ARS Gold medal later in 1966). She was particularly interested in adding species to her collection, and obtained these from seed exchanges and plants sent to her from many locations. The Milners became close friends of Mary Greig, and obtained many of their rhododendrons from the Griegs, until the Greigs closed their nursery in 1965. The Milner Garden thus contained an extensive mix both of rhododendron species and hybrids. By the late 1990s, many of these were upwards of 40 years old and up to 6 m (20 feet) high (Fig. 1). These, along with an interesting mix of exotic tree species, were surrounded by native coastal forest, mostly Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and Red cedar (*Thuja plicata*).

When the Milner property was given to Vancouver Island University (VIU) in 1996, the property had matured into an extensive rhododendron woodland, surrounding an English-style rambling "cottage" designed to include some features of a Ceylonese tea plantation house (Fig. 2). The property had many unique features that made it particularly desirable to rhododendron gardeners: a central location on the island, an interesting history, a large existing rhododendron collection surrounded by a natural forest, great ocean views and a mild microclimate. Most importantly, with the property's donation to VIU, it had an owner that was maintaining the site through its horticultural and volunteer programs, that wanted to expand its educational potential, and that was keen to work with local community organizations to achieve these objectives.

Milner Gardens & Woodland (MGW) is also supported by the Milner Gardens and Woodland Society, which raises funds and provides VIU with advice. MGW is also supported by hundreds of local community volunteers who assist in the maintenance and other garden activities: education, interpretation and fund raising, garden and facilities construction, and plant propagation for sales.



Fig.1. Milner Garden Woodland (MGW) rhododendrons in the spring. [Photo by Gus Thompson]



Fig. 2. The MGW English-style "cottage" with some features of a Ceylonese tea plantation house.

Establishment of the Rhododendron Species Garden

The Milner Gardens & Woodland was an ideal location for a Vancouver Island rhododendron species garden. So what were the steps that have made this a reality?

1) Fund Raising and Gifts in Kind

Obtaining financial support followed multiple pathways involving the Vancouver Island ARS chapters, VIU, MGW, individual and corporate donors. To date, donations from the five island ARS chapters total over \$40,000.00. Funds have also been contributed directly by Vancouver Island University (VIU). A grant for plant purchase was awarded to the island chapters collectively by the ARS. Private donations, including naming rights, have brought in more than \$50,000. The estimated final cost of the garden, excluding volunteer labour contributed by ARS members, community volunteers, VIU staff and students, is projected to be \$120,000 - \$150,000.

Gifts in-kind have also been made by the island ARS chapters, particularly by the Nanaimo and Mount Arrowsmith chapters, given their closer proximity to the garden. Thousands of volunteer hours, as well as administrative coordination and financial coordination, have been contributed to date.

2) Garden site selection and layout design

A central, level 0.25 ha (0.63 acre) forested area within MGW was selected for the species garden, and the previous executive director of Milner Gardens, Jim Cadwaladr, a retired Landscape Architect, volunteered to develop the landscape design *pro bono*. The land was cleared of most of its forest to create room for the rhododendrons, to let in sunlight for their growth and survival, and to limit competition from trees such as western red cedar. Tree removal required approval from the town, which regulates heritage tree conservation, and open communication and transparency also minimized negative public feedback. The challenge was to identify which trees needed to be left for shade, and to allow the site to blend in with the rest of the garden. All trees were inventoried, and the decision was made to remove cedars, unhealthy trees, and alders. A case was made for each tree that was to be saved, which included older growth specimens, trees on a nurse log, and some dead wildlife trees for birds such as woodpeckers. The end result was that about 90% of the trees were removed. Although there was concern that some of those left might later fall because of their exposure to strong winter winds, none did. However, because of this possibility, no rhododendron planting occurred until after the first winter following tree removal, which also allowed for further site preparation.

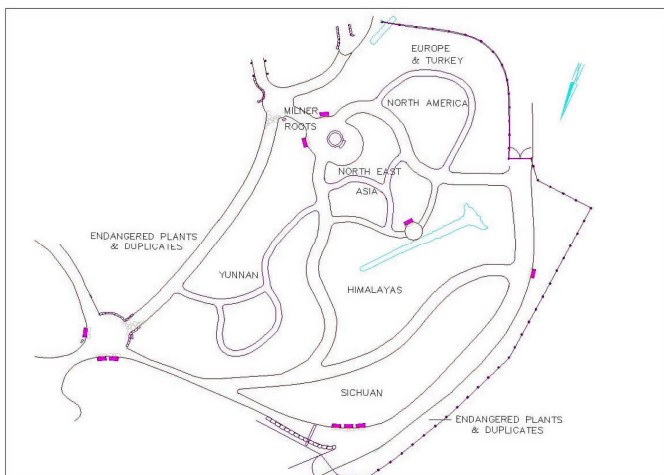


Fig. 3. A map of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden showing its "geographical" zones.

Using the initial garden design, a planting layout evolved featuring six geographic regions (Fig.3): North America; Northeast Asia, Yunnan, Himalayas, Sichuan, and Europe (Southern Europe and the Middle East). Two additional categories were developed: species at risk in the wild (vulnerable species) and "Milner Roots", i.e. species used to create the already existing hybrids in the MGW. The plants in these two categories were to be located in the six garden sections identified by geographic region.

3) Site Preparation

After removal by hand of much of the debris from tree falling and stump removal, the site was levelled, which opened up another issue. Coastal sites in western North America have been inhabited by native First Nation people since the last ice age, with settlement sites typically indicated by extensive clam shell deposits, termed "middens". Stump removal turned up clam shells. Provincial law then required that an archaeological survey be conducted to establish the

site's significance to the local First Nations. This delayed on-site physical activity for about six months. VIU covered all of the costs and expanded the survey to the entire MGW property, so that the issue could be dealt with comprehensively. To our relief, no significant artifacts were unearthed. The survey had the added benefit of engaging the local First Nation and involving them in the overall garden. However, it did mean that in some areas of the new garden, no holes deeper than about 35 cm (14 inches) could be dug in the species garden unless a trained monitor was present. Partly to accommodate this prohibition, while also improving soil structure and ensuring adequate drainage, the ground level was raised substantially. Fortunately, rhododendrons have shallow root systems so no deeper holes were required.

Raising the ground level required the addition of about 460 m³ (600 cubic yds. /40 dump truck loads) of a special soil mix. Working with advice from the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden (RSBG), we used a mixture of 75% coarse sand and 25% fish compost (a local product, consisting of decomposed cultured salmon parts mixed with wood chips and then aged) that was similar to what the RSBG uses, both in terms of soil structure and nutrient analysis. The mixture was spread over the entire site to a depth of about 25 cm (twelve inches).

4) Irrigation

An automatic watering system was installed next, and quotes were obtained from local companies. They were all deemed too costly, so the work was done over one month in the spring by VIU's horticulture staff and students, and Milner volunteers (Fig. 4).

5) Mulching

To provide more organic material for plant growth, to help retain soil moisture, prevent weeds and to keep the roots cool, a 15-20 cm (6-8 inch) layer of mulch was spread over all the planting beds, with care taken to keep the mulch back from the rhododendron trunks (Fig. 5). The mulch was provided free by a local tree service company from shredded trimmings that accrued during community tree removals. The mix of barks in the mulch was unknown, but being in coastal BC, it largely consisted of Douglas-fir, red alder (*Alnus rubra*), red cedar and Bigleaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*). About 150 m³ (200 yds.) was delivered, which was then spread by hand by volunteer ARS chapter members over a period of three months in the fall, 2017, and the spring, 2018.

6) Rhododendron Species Selection and Planting

A subcommittee was established to assess what species would be most appropriate for the garden, and after much discussion, the selection criteria determined were, in order of importance:

- 1) Species hardy enough to survive on coastal Vancouver Island,
- 2) Species from the six geographical areas to be represented in the garden,
- 3) Species endangered or threatened), and
- 4) Species that were in the genealogy of the hybrid rhododendrons already well-established in Milner Gardens.

Given that we didn't have the space to include every potential species, the list was then pared down to include only the top rated species that would thrive in our area. A list of about 160 desirable species was created, and plants with documented provenance confirming their species status, were then sourced. Virtually all plants were obtained from the Rhododendron Species Foundation (RSF), either being purchased outright or donated by ARS members, with the latter plants, still with their RSF labelling, having been obtained over the previous decade from the RSF and then grown on in private BC gardens.

The species garden, as presently designed, has space for about 250 plants of differing sizes, with an allocation of just one plant of each species, in most cases. However, for the endangered or threatened species, to improve their chances of survival within the collection, there was an allocation of least three plants of each species. Eighteen of the twenty eight vulnerable species selected as acceptable candidates, have been planted in the garden as of June 2018 (see section above, Rhododendron Species Selection and Planting).

By way of example, the table on page 24 of this article lists all the endangered or threatened species selected for inclusion. Listings of the all rhododendron species planned for, or already planted, are included in the ARS Journal online at: <https://www.arsoffice.org/protect1/users/online.asp>.



Fig. 4. Installing the irrigation system. [Photo by Geoff Ball]



Fig. 5. ARS volunteers spreading mulch from tree trimming. [Photo by John Deniseger]



Fig. 6. The planting of some of the larger species rhododendrons.



Fig. 7. Shading the newly planted, smaller rhododendrons from the hot summer sun. [Photo by John Deniseger]

The first planting, of 100 rhododendrons including 60 relatively small ones obtained from the RSF, occurred in the spring of 2017, with another 20 of the much larger specimens obtained from private gardens, planted in the fall of 2017 (Fig. 6). How the latter were dug up, moved and planted is described by Jamieson and Lightburn in a previous article for the ARS Journal (see Vol. 72, No. 2).

The problem with planting in the spring is two-fold. First, young plants may not have been exposed to much direct sunlight in the nursery, and so their leaves may burn if suddenly planted in an open habitat. To counter this, awnings of weed cloth were built around each plant to give them partial shade (Fig. 7). Second, southern coastal BC typically has an extensive summer drought, and in 2017 this extended from about mid-June to mid-September, with only a few millimeters (1/4 inch) of rain falling during that period. Since the performance of the just-installed sprinkler system was unknown, ARS chapter members visited the garden three times per week to ensure that all plants were being sufficiently watered and protected from excessive sun exposure. Only two of the 100 plants died, both were very small. Considering the extremity of the 2017 summer drought, we were happy with this result.

In spring 2018, an additional ten large rhododendron species were planted, with another ten small plants heeled in for later planting in the fall. In addition, various companion plants and exotic tree species (see below) were added to the native trees to provide more shade, and a more realistic natural habitat for each geographical zone.

7) Companion Plants

The companion planting to date has been focused on the acquisition and installation of specimen trees. Eighteen large trees were planted in the spring of 2018, including Chinese mahogany (*Toona sinensis*), Persian ironwood (*Parrotia persica*), Orangebark stewartia (*Stewartia monodelpha*), Empress tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*), *Magnolia spp.*, Paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*), Himalayan birch (*Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*) and the Chinese Parasol (*Meliiodendron xylocarpum*). These were selected for their complimentary beauty and sized as large as possible to provide immediate shade relief, and to enhance the entire space. The garden is also gradually being planted with a large array of perennials, ferns and small shrubs to add visual appeal, and to assist with weed control. This will begin in earnest in the fall of 2018, when the rains commence again.

8) Hard Structures

To link the species garden with the rest of the garden, an entrance portal was created through an existing hedge. This included an impressive cedar gate which was designed, built and installed by volunteers (Fig. 8), and was accompanied by a stone wall and a fieldstone path that led into the garden. On Vancouver Island, we have a large population of the native black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), which can do significant damage to the plantings in the garden. To keep them out, a 2.5 m (eight foot) cedar lattice fence (Fig. 9) was constructed along the back of the species garden. VIU staff and ARS chapter volunteers did this over the 2017/2018 winter.

A small speaker's platform was constructed near the garden entrance to be used by guides to address tour groups and classes. Over the coming year, benches will be added throughout the garden to provide rest places for visitors. These benches will also be available for "person dedications," and their funding, which will be greater than their cost, will assist with the construction and maintenance of the garden.



Fig. 8. The entrance gate to the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden.



Fig. 9. The garden fence constructed by ARS members to provide privacy and to keep deer out.

9) Interpretation

A Milner staff member, Pam Murray, also a member of the National Association of Park Interpreters, met with ARS chapter representatives to develop appropriate interpretation signage for the garden. We have an opportunity to inspire and educate visitors to the garden about the tremendous diversity of the genus *Rhododendron*. The challenge was to first identify our audience (not ARS members), and then to achieve effective education, while making the content both interesting and informative. An example of some signage used at the dedication ceremony described below, is shown in Fig. 10.

10) Dedication ceremony

On April 22, 2018, about 55 ARS members from all five island chapters (Fig. 11), their families, Friends of Milner Gardens, and First Nation, university and community leaders, gathered together on a beautiful sunny day for the official dedication and opening of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden in Milner Gardens and Woodland. Many members of the Greig family were also present, and it was a fine culmination to all the planning and hard work that went into this beautiful new garden (Fig. 12). It was a true community effort!

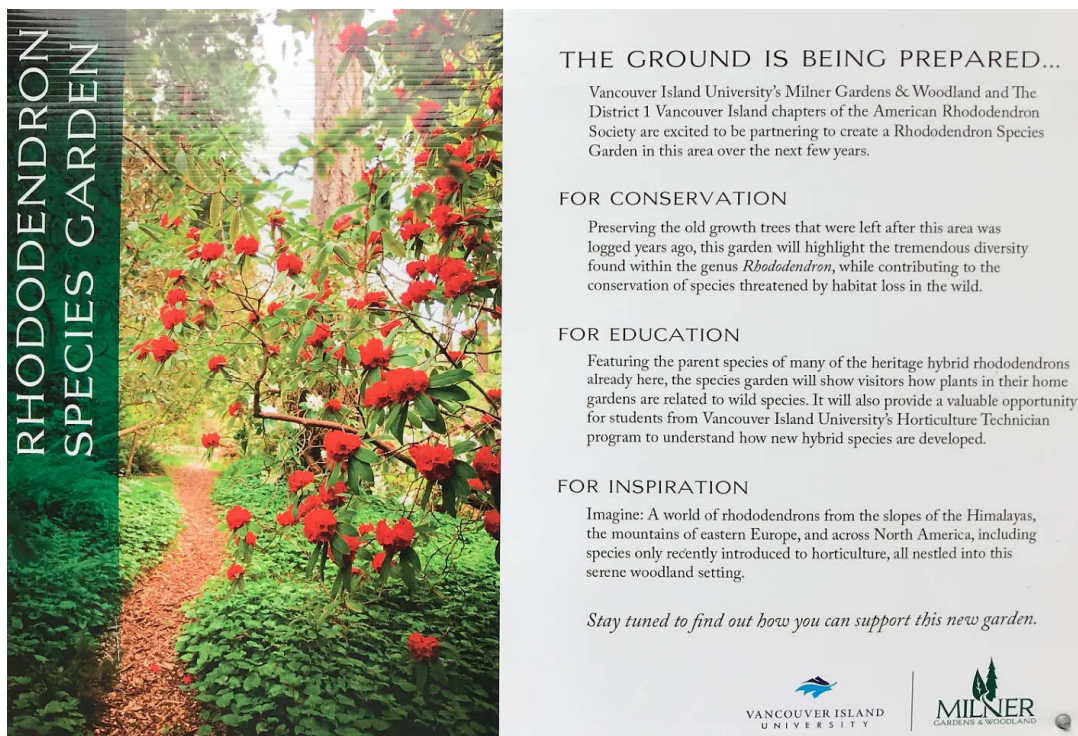


Fig. 10. Interpretative material created to explain the garden's importance.

The 28 vulnerable and endangered species selected for inclusion in the species garden .

Species	No. of plants wanted	No of plants in garden June 2018	Assigned Region within species garden	Status
<i>R. aberconwayi</i>	3		Yunnan	vulnerable
<i>R. barbatum</i>	3	3	Himalayas	vulnerable
<i>R. callimorphum</i> var. <i>callimorphum</i>	3	3	Himalayas	vulnerable
<i>R. catacosmum</i>	3		Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. chamaethomsonii</i> var. <i>chamaethomsonii</i>	3		Yunnan	vulnerable
<i>R. coelicum</i>	3	3	Yunnan	vulnerable
<i>R. cyanocarpum</i>	3	1	Yunnan	vulnerable
<i>R. elegantulum</i>	3		Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. erosum</i>	3		Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. griersonianum</i>			Yunnan	endangered
<i>R. habrotricum</i>	3	1	Yunnan	vulnerable
<i>R. hanceanum</i> Nanum group	3	3	Yunnan	vulnerable
<i>R. insigne</i>	3	1	Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. kesangiae</i> var. <i>kesangiae</i>	3	5	Himalayas	vulnerable
<i>R. makinoi</i>	3		NE Asia	vulnerable
<i>R. niveum</i>	3	1	Himalayas	vulnerable
<i>R. orbiculare</i> subsp. <i>orbiculare</i>	3	3	Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. pachysanthum</i>	3	3	NE Asia	vulnerable
<i>R. platypodum</i>		1	Sichuan	endangered
<i>R. pseudochrysanthum</i>	3	3	NE Asia	vulnerable
<i>R. qiaojaense</i>	3	2	Yunnan	vulnerable
<i>R. ririei</i>	3	2	Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. sanguineum</i> subsp. <i>didymum</i>	3		Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. smirnowii</i>	3		Europe	vulnerable
<i>R. souliei</i>	3	1	Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. tricanthum</i>	3	1	Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. williamsianum</i>	3	3	Sichuan	vulnerable
<i>R. zaleucum</i>	3		Yunnan	vulnerable



Fig.11. ARS members from the five Vancouver Island chapters at the garden's dedication ceremony on April 22, 2018.



Fig.12. The newly established Greig Rhododendron Species Garden in July, 2018.

Lessons learned - Keys to success

The opportunity for ARS society members to participate hands-on in the development of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden allowed members to take ownership of the initiative, and maintain their interest. This was critical to its success, as the project extends over a number of years.

The initiative needed a project manager, and the fact that Geoff Ball, Milner's Executive Director, took on that role, kept the project on track and brought in essential resources at critical times.

It was important to have many champions in the Vancouver Island ARS chapters so that the workload, planning, communication, and fundraising activities were shared. This ensured that commitments were met, and enthusiasm was maintained.

Chapter feedback occurred regularly: orally at meetings, through presentations, and via society newsletters. Good communication was essential. Progress was celebrated as it happened, creating and sustaining a positive momentum as we moved forward.

The Species Garden design and layout was not created in isolation. It was done in collaboration with the Milner Woodland Garden as a whole, and taking into account other current and future initiatives planned for the site.

The formation of an advisory committee with representation from all the Vancouver Island ARS chapters was key to determining priorities, and the participation of members on the subcommittees, according to their interests, kept the project going.

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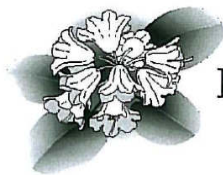
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Photo Album - – Garden tour images from the fabulous ARS Spring Convention 2019, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 14-19. Photos by John Brett

