

# AtlanticRhodo

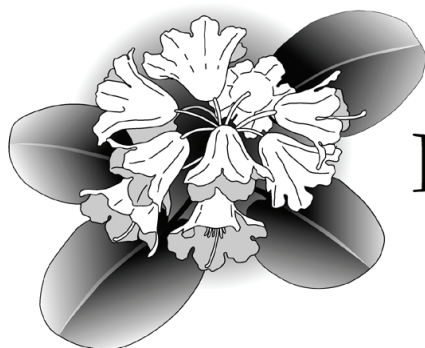
[www.AtlanticRhodo.org](http://www.AtlanticRhodo.org)

Volume 34: Number 2

May 2010



**Captain Richard M. Steele**  
**1915 - 2010**



# Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society

## Positions of Responsibility 2009 - 2010

<b>President</b>	Ruth Jackson	454-4681	<b>Director - Horticulture</b>	Audrey Fralic	683-2711
<b>Vice-President</b>	Vacant				
<b>Secretary</b>	Susan Boyd	835-8916	<b>Director</b>	Cora Swinamer	826-7705
<b>Treasurer</b>	Chris Hopgood	479-0811	<b>ARS Rep.</b>	Anitra Laycock	852-2502
<b>Membership</b>	Jim Drysdale	431-0223	<b>Newsletter</b>	Mary Helleiner	429-0213
<b>Past President</b>	Sheila Stevenson	479-3740	<b>Website</b>	Bob Pettipas	462-5654
<b>Director - Education</b>	Jenny Sandison	624-9013	<b>Library</b>	Jean White	477-2933
<b>Director - Communications</b>	Mary Helleiner	429-0213	<b>Seed Exchange</b>	Sharon Bryson	863-6307
<b>Director - Social</b>	Shirley McIntyre	835-3673	<b>May - Pre-Ordered Plant Sale</b>	Ken Shannik	422-2413
			<b>May- Public Plant Sale</b>	Duff & Donna Evers	835-2586

## Membership (Please Note Changes)

### Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society.

Fees are \$20.00 from September 1, 2009 to August 31, 2010, due September 2009. 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](http://www.atlanticrhodo.org)

### American Rhododendron Society

Combined ARHS and ARS membership cost is \$50.00 Canadian. For benefits see [www.rhododendron.org](http://www.rhododendron.org)

Cheques, made payable to Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society should be sent to **Jim Drysdale, 5 Little Point Road, Herring Cove, NS B3V1J7.**

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.

#### Editor:

Mary Helleiner  
834 Marlborough Ave.  
Halifax, NS, B3H3G6  
(902) 429-0213  
[cmhelleiner@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:cmhelleiner@ns.sympatico.ca)

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

Cover Photo by John Weagle



## Calendar of Events

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

**Saturday April 24**

**Work Party in Meagher Garden**  
**See special Notices**

**Saturday May 1**

**Pre-ordered plant pickup**  
**See Special Notices**

**Tuesday May 4**

**Members only plant sale**  
**See Special Notices**

**Saturday May 8**

**Public sale**  
**See Special Notices**

**Saturday June 5**

**Garden Tours**  
**See Special Notices**

**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 Newsletter.

**Karin Allen**  
**Diane Beanlands**  
**Hope Beanlands**  
**Judy Bhandari**  
**Jane Flemming**  
**Niki Jabour**  
**Kate Jarrett**  
**Sheila Legere**  
**Derek & Barbara Squirrel**

**Liverpool**  
**Halifax**  
**Grand Lake**  
**Dartmouth**  
**Halifax**  
**Stillwater Lake (returning)**  
**Dartmouth (returning)**  
**Hammonds Plains**  
**Edmonton, Alberta**



# Captain Richard Miles Steele

## 22 September 1915 - 14 March 2010

Captain Steele, as many simply knew him, was an internationally renowned and respected rhododendron breeder, teacher and plantsman. The proprietor of Bayport Plant Farm since 1973, he planted his beloved thirty-acre woodland with rhododendrons, magnolias and many rare plants. In the 1960's he was co-owner, along with Dr. David Fluharty, of the former York River Nursery, Belroi, Virginia until the early 1970's.

He regularly appeared on the CBC Radio's "Morningside" talking about and promoting rhododendrons. He was the subject of several CBC TV Specials featuring his life and work with rhododendrons - "Land and Sea," "On the Road Again" as well as Vision TV's "Recreating Eden" in a programme on his horticultural life entitled "Planting Peace". The Japanese media produced a television special on his plantings on Hall's Road in Boulderwood, Halifax.

He generously donated specimen plants to the Nova Scotia Lieutenant-Governor's Garden (Halifax, NS), Boulderwood (Halifax, NS), Kentville Research Station (Kentville, NS), Pine Grove Park (Liverpool, NS), the Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens (Annapolis Royal, NS), Oxen Pond Botanical Gardens (St. John's, NL) and the Norfolk Botanical Gardens (Norfolk, Virginia); his plants became the backbone of many of these gardens.

He was a founding member of the Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society, the Rhododendron Society of Canada, the Rhododendron and Native Plant Society and the Tidewater Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. He was past President of the Rhododendron Society of Canada and Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society. He was the recipient of the Rhododendron Society of Canada's highest awards, the Hybridizer's Award and the Leslie Hancock Memorial Award (1983). In 1998 he received the American Rhododendron Society's Gold Medal - its highest award - for his international contributions to the genus *Rhododendron*. He was a longtime member of The International Plant Propagator's Society, The Royal Horticultural Society, The Magnolia Society, The Alpine Garden Society and The Primula Society.

The annual Steele Lecture was established to recognize his many contributions to the Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society. In 2007 the Hall's Road Garden Society and the ARS Endowment Fund created the Dick Steele Garden in Boulderwood in his honour. In the coming year Van Dusen Gardens in Vancouver, BC will feature a section of the garden devoted to the Steele hybrids.

A friend and mentor to both amateur and expert alike, his passion and boundless enthusiasm to the very end inspired thousands in Canada and the U.S.A. Wandering in his famous woodland and in the wilds of Labrador brought him immense joy. His belief was that the beauty and serenity of plants and gardens have the power to transform lives and bring peace and harmony to the world.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dick was known to and admired by everyone. The great collections in England, the Tidewater area of Virginia and Nova Scotia were his haunts until he moved to Nova Scotia permanently in the early 1970's. His life was split between his distinguished naval career and his passion for rhododendrons, yet he managed to meld the two. He was always somewhere planting rhododendrons, from Norfolk to Halifax, Cornwallis to New Brunswick.

He always made sure his NATO meetings in Europe ended on a Friday so he could duck over to England for the weekend to view the rhododendrons and to collect cuttings and pollen. Windsor Great Park was unquestionably his favourite garden and it was there he met T. Hope Findlay, keeper of the rhododendron collection, who was to become both friend and mentor and for whom Dick had the deepest respect.

In the US he was a personal friend and expert on the work of his hero Joe Gable. His dynamic talk to the Potomac Valley Chapter on Gable's work led to the formation of the Gable Study Group and the publication of *Hybrids and hybridizers*, chronicling the work of east coast hybridizers. His good friends were fellow Gable admirers, Jane & Ray Goodrich, Velma & Russ Haag, George Ring and George Miller. One summer when Gable's rhododendrons were close to death from an extreme drought Dick mustered water pumps and hose-lines from the Norfolk naval yards and trucked them to Gable's in Pennsylvania, arriving just as the rains started to fall. Lanny Pride was another close friend whose work on extra hardy



rhododendrons he followed closely. I remember the day Lanny phoned to say he was terminally ill and was sending cuttings and the seeds of his last crosses to Dick. Dick was deeply touched.

In 1961 he was Base Commander of the Royal Canadian Naval Base Cornwallis, NS. Knowing he was in one of the milder areas of Nova Scotia it was not long before sea cadets were being trained to plant rhododendrons; soon the base was awash in them. Busloads of cadets were to travel even further afield to test their abilities. There were the rescue helicopter training exercises that Dick organized from his ship off the coast; there were a goodly number of days of low-level flights scouring Halifax County woods to spot the long lost native *Rhododendron maximum*.

Despite the illustrious circles in which he traveled he was welcoming to one and all; he was as at ease staying at Buckingham Palace as at Cecil & Rita's modest B&B in L'Anse Amour in Labrador. At 93 he was still leading groups to the barrens of Western Newfoundland and Labrador in late summer. He was fascinated by the plants in the area and keen to test them.

Dignified yet modest, he had no superlatives for his own hybrids, instead he would take you to his woodland and let you be the judge. He was a listener. His humour and self-effacement were perfectly illustrated in a story told by his good friend David Veinotte at the Celebration of his life. Not so long ago they were at an International Plant Propagator's meeting and were the last on a packed elevator. The elevator stopped at the next floor where a crowd was waiting, someone yelled "We love you Captain Steele". Everyone in the elevator looked at Dick as did those waiting to board, Dick turned to Dave and said "I love you too Captain Steele".

This remarkable man inspired countless people to plant plants and gardens, to look at plants critically and most importantly to enjoy their beauty. I last visited him in the hospital a few days before he died. I had taken him a colour photo of *Rhododendron huianum*. "What a colour! Can you get me some pollen before spring?" he beamed. He kept moving forward even to the end. Let's keep his dream and optimism alive.

Members who wish to share a tribute or anecdote are asked to submit them to our website at:

[http://www.atlanticrhodo.org/hybrids/Steele/Cpt\\_Richard\\_Steele\\_Tribute.html](http://www.atlanticrhodo.org/hybrids/Steele/Cpt_Richard_Steele_Tribute.html)

- John Weagle



(L) At "The Farm", (R) With Alleyne Cook at Boulderwood. [Photos John Weagle]

# Special Notices

---

## ARHS Outreach

Work, work, work, it's never done for the members of the Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society. This year we will again attack the Japanese knotweed, we will plant more rhododendrons and azaleas and we will prune and mulch, and clean up.

You might ask where and when, and here's the answer to your questions.

Where           **Meagher Garden**, at Regatta Point  
When           **Saturday, April 24, 2010** at **9:30** until about 11:30 or 12 noon

So bring your muscles, your gloves, shovels, rakes, pruners, and most of all bring your ever sunny dispositions.  
If you plan to take part please let **Chris Hopgood** know. email [cpheer@eastlink.ca](mailto:cpheer@eastlink.ca)

## **Plant Pickup for Advance Sale for Members Saturday May 1**

Plants are to be picked up at 5 Sime Court, Halifax, on Saturday, May 1, between **10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.** Sime Court is in the Kingswood subdivision off the Hammonds Plains Rd. Take Kingswood Drive (between Kearney Lake Rd and Farmer Clem's) to Brenda drive (the first street on the right) and follow it to the first left which is Sime Court. Plants are to be paid for when they are picked up. Any plants not picked up on this date will be offered for sale at the Public Sale.

## **May Meeting, Members' Plant Sale Tuesday May 4 7:30 p.m. LeMarchant-St. Thomas School, 6141 Watt Street, Halifax.**

### **Something New!**

This year we will have a table for a mixture of members' plants – bring one or many for us to sell for you.

**Each plant must have 2 labels – one with the name of the plant and the price and one with your name and the price.**  
This is so we can give you your money after the sale. Please bring your plants in by 7:00 p.m. so we can get the tables organized.

Remember if you are selling or buying you must be a paid up member and plants should be unusual or difficult to obtain. Please donate any of the more common varieties to the Public Sale.

## **Public May Plant Sale Saturday, May 8, 2010 - 1:00 to 3:30 PM**

As one of the largest events that the ARHS holds yearly to raise money to carry on the work of the society, we also rely heavily on donations from our members. We hope our members will donate a good selection of tree and shrub seedlings, as well as rooted cuttings, perennials, annuals, etc. So members, please keep the sale in mind this spring when you are seed sowing, transplanting and dividing. Your donations are always greatly appreciated. Members are requested to drop off any donations between 11:00 AM and 12 noon.

This year at our annual sale the Society will have a wonderful variety of nursery grown rhododendrons and azaleas as well as many other nursery grown shrubs and perennials. Many of the varieties brought in for this sale are not available in the advance sale. We depend upon the dedication of society members to help spread the word to the many enthusiastic gardeners who are looking for unusual varieties of plant material. This year's event will take place at **Le Marchant – St. Thomas School** gymnasium on **6141 Watt Street**, Halifax, N. S. on Saturday, **May 8, 2009** from **1:00 – 3:30 PM**. As in other years, this sale takes place the day before Mother's Day and what better gift is there for your mother, wife, daughter, sister or favorite aunt!

A point to be noted is that donors and sale volunteers will be able to select two plants prior to the sale opening. This will *not* include nursery grown stock. Plants must be selected, paid for and taken to your vehicle a minimum of one hour prior to the sale opening. This rule will be strictly enforced! No exceptions!

So plan to attend and bring your friends and family. This is always a very popular event and the line-up to get in is usually long. For the best selection we recommend that you plan to arrive earlier than the 1:00 PM opening time. While you are waiting, a handout with descriptions of the nursery stock will be available.

For more information contact Duff and Donna Evers at (902) 835-2506 or [devers@eastlink.ca](mailto:devers@eastlink.ca).

## **Garden Tours    Saturday June 5**

This year the garden tours will be on the South shore. Information will be sent out to members by e-mail in May. If you do not have e-mail and want information about the tours, please contact Mary Helleiner 429-0213. ☐

## **Plant Portraits**

### ***Pieris* ‘Brouwer’s Beauty’ (*floribunda* x *japonica*)**

Winter is not the usual time to admire a plant, yes there are some deciduous types with interesting bark, and some evergreens that look attractive, but to my eye, nothing beats *Pieris* ‘Brouwer’s Beauty’. The foliage is attractive with the medium green leaves that show themselves fully during the short days, and don’t curl up during the deep cold like rhododendron leaves do. However, the most attractive point of this plant is the buds.

During the winter they have a yellow/mid red colouring that really stands out. With a dusting of white snow, the buds in combination with the green leaves make an attractive picture that cannot be equaled in the garden during the deep mid winter. It’s a perfect plant for Atlantic Canada as winter does stay with us for quite some time.

There is an added advantage to this plant, it blooms! The lily of the valley type blossoms appear in early to mid spring. The plant is very popular with the bees at this time of year, and we do have to be good to the bees as they do a lot of work for us humans.

This plant grows to about 10 ft tall and about 6 ft in diameter. It is a carefree thing, not needing pruning, or staking, or anything other than what nature gives it. Mine has done very nicely in full sun and average soil moisture.

There now, are you convinced? Plant a ‘Brouwer’s Beauty’ in full view from a comfortable chair in your house, and in the deep mid winter you can pour yourself a nice cup of hot tea, combine that with a few cookies or squares, take your February issue of the AtlanticRhodo newsletter and admire your pieris. Enjoy your tea and cookies, read an article or two, and order your plants for the May plant sale. Nice eh? Winter’s not so bad after all.

**-- Chris Hopgood**

### **Two Miffy Finns**

*Rhododendron* ‘Elviira’ is one of the superhardy (?) Finnish rhodos that many of us have in our gardens. The flowers are an amazing scarlet, a truly spectacular colour, not the rather drab red of so many rhodos. (Just my opinion). The colour comes from *R. forrestii* var. *repens*, a glorious blood red plant that is much too tender for us. The hardiness comes from *R. brachycarpum tigersstedii*. The leaves are good too, shiny and holly-like. But, as Ken Shannik says, it is miffy. It just doesn’t grow well and the buds tend to shrivel up. When it is good it is very, very good. And pretty horrid otherwise. The best plant I know, not ours, grows half under a roof overhang, facing east and gets no TLC whatsoever. Who knows what the secret is.

The other Finn is ‘Pojohla’s Daughter’. It does seem to be super hardy, but its behaviour is odd. We have it in an unpromising spot, very shady, covering the bare legs of an old *Pieris japonica*. It looks normal most of the time, with pale mauve-pink flowers, but after the winter the leaves seem to collapse, looking as if the plant is dying. And then miraculously they recover and look perfectly normal again. Ken says that sometimes they don’t recover; that hasn’t happened to us yet.

**– Mary Helleiner**



## Snowdrops

We have had the common snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, in our garden for probably forty years. It has spread by seed and division and now makes a real show in March if it can get out from under the snow. This year (2010) it was spectacular. When we arrived home after several weeks away, in late March, the snowdrops were sprawled flat on the ground; there had been a very hard freeze the night before. The next day they sprang up as if nothing had happened.

Our snowdrops are grown in deciduous shade, which means that they get quite a bit of sun (when there is any) in the spring before the oaks leaf out, and then fairly dense shade after that. They are covered every year with the fallen oak leaves, which we don't remove, but this does not seem to bother the plants, and although oak leaves rot slowly, eventually they make good leaf mould. That is all the care the snowdrops get.

Snowdrops are best transplanted "in the green", that is, before they die down, which happens quite early. Bulbs bought in the fall grow well, but not as vigorously as the green plants.

A tip I read somewhere: a cut bouquet of snowdrops is seen best when placed on a mirror; that way the interior is visible.

Ordinary snowdrops are not the only option: several other varieties of *Galanthus nivalis* are available. *Viridapicis* has green tips on the outer petals, very pretty. 'Magnet' has extra long pedicels, very graceful. 'S. Arnott' never came up, so I can't comment. Then we get into other species of *Galanthus*, *elwesii* and *ikariae*. *Elwesii* is somewhat bigger than the ordinary *nivalis*. It has the same glaucous green leaves, but they are broader than those of *nivalis*. It is said to want drier conditions with better drainage, but ours have done best in damper places. *G. ikariae*, also found as *woronowii* and *latifolius*, is also somewhat larger, but it has distinctive broad bright green leaves. It doesn't seem fussy about where it grows.

There are many more species and varieties available in Britain, some amazingly expensive, and there is a whole world of snowdrops out there if you are interested. Or, like my husband, you can say "They all look the same to me".

I can't help mentioning spring snowflakes, *Leucojum*s. For the first time we have actually had one bloom. This is *L. vernum* var. *carpathicum*, which has yellowish-green markings near the tips of the perianth segments, instead of clear green. It was the only one I could find in a bulb catalogue. The summer snowflake, *L. aestivum*, is much easier to come by. ☐

- Mary Helleiner



(L) *Galanthus ikariae*, (R) *Leucojum vernum* var. *carpathicum*. [Photos Chris Helleiner]

# Our East Dover Garden Or Vic and Anita's Excellent Adventure

by Anita Jackson



## The Beginning

Victor bought the East Dover property in 1997 after retiring from the Canadian military. His first major site improvement was to dig and jack hammer out the granite bedrock under the house to create a full basement. After that he began cracking the 2 -3 ton glacial erratic rocks that were strewn around the front and back of the house with the idea of having a lawn instead of the existing upland bog. He then moved the split rocks to the side to make a border along the property line. The rock moving was done with chain falls and anchors. The rocks were placed flat so that topsoil could be brought in and was graded off to create the rough grade. At this time the alders, aspens and upland bog vegetation were growing right up to the back of the house. In the front the original lawn ended at the apple trees. He now had moved the rocks aside, and we brought in soil to cover them and laid nursery sod to make a lawn.

I had studied Ornamental Horticulture and Environmental Planning in college and had worked for several years as a landscape designer with a local landscaping firm. After acquiring a master's degree in England in Landscape Conservation, I acquired a job in 1994 to teach a new one year program for landscape workers called the Landscape Technician Course at NSCC's Institute of Technology campus. For six years I worked with turf specialist, Martin Walsh, to train 80 or so gardeners and golf course workers. When the NSCC was restructuring in 2000, the LT program was relocated to Kingstec in Kentville. I opted to stay in Halifax and took a job teaching in the NSCC's School of Access in Halifax.

Victor and I met in the fall 1999. We discovered that working together on his East Dover property was something we both enjoyed. Vic, an engineer, is extremely handy and with my design background and desire to create a new garden we eagerly launched into the new project. It was around this time that I became a member of the ARHS.

## The Structure: Shaping the Garden's Bones

In May 2002, we put in the flower bed along the north side of the property. We seeded the bed with a wildflower mix (created for north-eastern areas) to cover the ground quickly. This mix brought us daisy, Californian poppy, yarrow, oenothera, bachelor button, gaillardia etc. Next we put a load of manufactured soil into four areas to create wind breaks and planted the white spruce clumps. We had observed the most successful evergreens in the woods were multi-headed and grew in clumps, so to mimic nature we planted in groups of five to seven field-grown spruces. (Note: We trim them yearly in June and remove half the new growth.)

We started to rejuvenate the old apple trees. We attempted grafting, but our grafts only lasted one year. We fertilized the trees with boron and general purpose fertilizer and did dormant sprays with lime sulphur and oil. The trees started to grow, but not the way we wanted. There were too many new vertical shoots. After a few years, we started a lower key approach and now just rake the old apples under the trees for fertilizing. This is working great. I naturalize daffodils in the turf below the trees.







*Fargesia murielae*; *Semiarundinaria* 'Okuboi' (broad leaved, doing well); *Pseudosasa japonica* (broad leaved, doing well); *Phyllostachys aureosulata spectabilis* (yellow and doing wonderfully). His plan was to create a dense but friendly foliage cover between us and the neighbour on the north side. Six years on the desired effect is now being realized.

The property's well provides for domestic washing and flushing, but the garden has to fend for itself except for the hand carried water I use at plant installation. I mulch with straw and seaweed because it's cheap and plentiful. We gather leaves in the fall from town and shred them using a lawn mower and add that to the beds. We gather horse manure from a stable in Tantallon, and we haul seaweed up from the shore. This requires

putting the seaweed in baskets and carrying it up hill for 700 to 800 feet from the water's edge to the main garden! Last year I laid a load of triple grind bark on the beds. The manufactured soil available in Halifax is usually a sandy/silty loam (subsoil) that has been with augmented organics. Sometimes the composting is incomplete. It takes several years to get the microbial activity and C: N ratio balanced in the soil.

### Adjustments and Augmentation

Over the years I acquired more infill plants to augment the basic planting. I acquired a few choice specimen evergreens from David Veinotte (2005) in Mahone Bay. The *Abies koreana* 'Aurea' cultivar went into the driveway planting along with a seedling from a mature *Magnolia sieboldii*, *Clethra virginiana* and *Picea ormika* 'Nana'. Another year more soil, more evergreens and the elepidote evergreens start to arrive in greater number due to Audrey's tissue culture offerings. I soon discovered that the elepidote rhododendrons found the open areas of this site too windy. The lepidotes I planted along a south facing rock ledge have been doing terrifically well.. Recently we've been moving the elepidotes to the more sheltered areas and that has been working well. I added more evergreens to the front garden with, clumps of Colorado blue spruce and a hedge of *Chamaecyparis pisifera filifera nana*. I acquired a collection of *Echinacea* from Vesey's. (We make our own tincture from the flowers to take as an immunity builder against colds).

Phase one of the front wall happened in July 2005. These large Ready Rock concrete blocks were laid in one day! The blocks have an open trove design, which has given me a place to collect an alpine plant or two including a lewisia, dianthus, *Picea abies* 'Jean's Dilly', *Alyssum saxatile*, etc. The new wall provides shelter from the wind for a cut leaf weeping Japanese maple. The spruce clumps are now 7 feet high and nearly meshed together. They provided the 'bookends' for the torii gate installed by Vic in 2006. For his birthday I got him the gargoyles, which were made by a sculptor in Pennsylvania and shipped to us in cardboard boxes. Also in 2005, we purchased an Israeli made greenhouse from Canadian Tire. We bolted the structure to the back deck, and it has survived the winds of five seasons. The unheated structure has extended my season and allowed me to start my own perennials, annuals and biennials. I particularly have fun with foxglove, Canterbury bells and hollyhock.

I hoped to create the quintessential English flower border along the north side of the back lawn. To start my border I acquired perennials including garden phlox, alliums, *Delphinium elatum* hybrids and lamb's ears from my sister Ruth's garden when she was dividing her plants in the spring. I acquired a few David Austin Roses as well as peony, dianthus and boxwood. What I soon discovered is that my soil was too acidic for many of my plant choices. Water runoff over the acidic granite combined with unstable imported soil was the start of my cultural problems. Slugs appeared and systematically wiped out my oriental lilies, liatris, phlox and delphinium. I've discovered battling slugs requires daily vigilance and the fact that I'm in Halifax during the week meant many of my choice tender things were killed off. Also the lack of water in the hot microclimate and the poor nitrogen recycling in the soil meant I had flimsy weak plants. I'm now liming heavily, using general purpose granular fertilizer and planning a change in thematic focus to retain what's working, but trying new selections from the native American prairie palette of Piet Oldolf.



### Tissue Cultures

In 2006 I needed a new bed for my tissue culture acquisitions. I had acquired *RR*. ‘Eleanor Moody’, ‘Eruption’, ‘Fastastica’, ‘Skookum’, ‘Tiana’ and *Enkianthus* ‘Showy Lantern’. Because the oblong shaped bed needed structure, I introduced several other plants to create the spine. The structure plants include *Acer griseum*, *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis glauca*, false cypress *kosterii* ‘Twisty’ and a corkscrew hazel ‘Royal Red’. In 2008 we added more tissue culture: ‘Weston’s Parade’ azalea, *RR*. ‘Sugar Plum’, ‘April Rose’, ‘Kalinka’. None of these plants have bloomed yet, but they are healing in successfully. Last year several small accent plants found their way into this bed; a dwarf weeping pussy willow, a dwarf yellow barberry, and Siberian iris which are massed in drifts along the center. The edges are planted with *Veronica spicata*.

In 2007 Vic put up his windmill to generate power, which is stored in 12 volt batteries. We created a circular gravel path through our little wooded raven with a spur that runs to the waterfront. I started to plant “extra” tissue culture plants (*RR*. ‘New Century’, ‘Ingrid Mehlquist’ and ‘Francesca’) along the front edge of established shrub beds.

A new bed to feature the specimen *Picea pungens* ‘Montgomery’ was placed in the front yard. This bed also has a topiary boxwood teddybear and a changing seasonal display. Another choice plant is our Camperdown elm. The first one we purchased died in 2006. Vic was disappointed, so I said, “Let’s try one more time”. This time our plant thrived and is providing the focal point we had desired at the point between the patio garden and the long border to the back.

Two years ago we started to plant the odd plant in the wood. We planted a ginkgo near the woodland edge and a *Magnolia soulangeana* in the woods.

With the excitement of the pending rhododendron garden tour (June 2009), I splurged and got some new pines. I saw a Japanese cloud pine (topiary of a *Pinus sylvestris*) and had to have it, a *Pinus aristata* (Bristlecone), a *Pinus densiflora* ‘Umbraculifera Compacta’ (compact Tanyosho umbrella pine) and several small mughos. Last fall we acquired three *Betula jacquemontii* to place in the foreground of the back woodland bed. We began moving elepidotes to the woodland.

Currently we are working in our little wood. We have purchased a chipper and are chipping up branches of wind damaged trees. Vic burns the wood in his wood stove. Our experiment with rhodos in the woods is going pretty well, but our witch hazel was grazed off by the deer.

We are planning a new bed in front of the solar panel with plants from Ken’s list in the members plant sale. To conclude, it’s a garden in progress. We love it, but we hope to complete the major bed work this year or next and then keep maintenance at three to five hours a week. □



# Ploidy<sup>1</sup> Investigations Suggest Interesting Azaleas for Cape Breton Garden

By Bruce Clyburn

Recent DNA analyses<sup>2</sup> of *Pentanthera* azaleas has allowed us to infer, respectively, the ploidy number of each species and an evolutionary tree that relates the different species to one another. This has resulted in an azalea paradigm shift. Work by Hall, Ranney, Miller, and Towe indicates that native azaleas break into two major clades<sup>3</sup> that correspond to their ploidy levels. The tetraploid clade includes *Rhododendron atlanticum*, *austrinum*, *calendulaceum*, *colemanii*, *luteum* (from Europe), and a possible pink flowered species similar to *austrinum*. The diploid clade includes *Rhododendron alabamense*, *arborescens*, *canescens*, *cumberlandense*, *eastmanii*, *flammeum*, *occidentale*, *periclymenoides*, *prinophyllum*, *prunifolium*, *viscosum*. Although diploids, *Rhododendron canadense*, *molle* (from Japan and China), and *vaseyi* are separate from the diploid clade proper.

John and Sally Perkins<sup>4</sup> are known rhododendron hybridizers. They have closely followed the above investigations and designed their past two years of breeding azaleas to validate and add to the findings from the perspective of fertility/vigor patterns. Knowledge gained in their crosses thus far is summarized on the ARS Mass Chapter Rosebay weblog:

<http://rosebayblog.blogspot.com/2009/12/rules-of-engagement.html>



Azaleas grown indoors under lights 1st winter, moved out into cold frames under shade cloth for two summers

An ARHS member living near New Waterford, I have grown rhododendrons and azaleas from seed for 20 years and seed from the Perkins crosses for 5 of those. In 2008 John asked me to assist in a study being carried out to confirm the ploidy level of our native *R. canadense*. A prior report suggested *R. canadense* was a tetraploid. A sample of buds taken from an indigenous plant in our woods and six other collection areas throughout its native range were analyzed by Professor Thomas G. Ranney of North Carolina State University and confirmed to be diploids in all cases. Perkins/Clyburn further collaborated when I was mailed twenty of Perkins' crosses to grow on and evaluate later in 2008. In 2009 an additional 60 seed lots were shipped. Germination rates both years were good. The parents in Perkins' crosses are the highest quality species and hybrids grown in their own garden in Salem, NH supplemented by plants at the Arnold Arboretum or pollen collected in their travels to other gardens. Of special note is the inclusion of 10 *R. colemanii* crosses, the newest North American species from the Coastal Plain of Alabama and Georgia, a.k.a. the Red Hills azalea. More to follow when the flowers appear!

<sup>1</sup> Number of complete sets of chromosomes

<sup>2</sup> *Rhododendron colemanii*: A New Species of Deciduous Azalea – JARS Spring 2008

<sup>3</sup> Group of biological taxa (as species) that includes all descendants of one common ancestor

<sup>4</sup> ARHS 21st Steele Lecture – Tuesday Oct. 2, 2007

[Editor's note: Most wild plants are diploid. That is, they have two of each chromosome. When these are doubled the plants are said to be tetraploid. Tetraploid plants are often more vigorous than the diploid version, and are frequently easier to hybridize.]

# Garden Basics

By Jenny Sandison

## Some Principles of Staking

Staking is one of those irritating jobs that you know you have to do ahead of time and then, inevitably, there is a summer storm and all those peonies and delphiniums end up broken, with their faces in the mud. For those of you who are not familiar with the technique, staking is an artificial way of propping up tall, beautiful perennials that would otherwise end up with their blossoms toppled.

We have to remember that the techniques were developed in the glory days of horticulture when large country estates and municipal gardens employed a substantial cheap pool of labour. Today it is all up to us. If staking isn't anything you want to bother with, you will have to limit your purchases to shorter, stouter varieties and even give up on some individuals. Living in a windy area I have abandoned delphiniums. They are among the most enchanting of flowers with their tall tightly packed spires of blue; given rain and a gusty wind they are doomed.

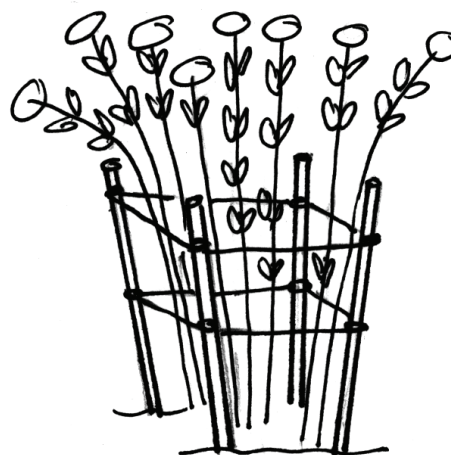
The most common form of plant support is the peony hoop. This comprises a ring, sometimes expandable, on three legs. It works extremely well if you go at it in the right way. I usually get these in place when the plants are well grown but the buds are still tight. The secret is to take a 36 inch piece of string, and circle the plant and gently but firmly use it to pull all the stems together and tie in a bow. Then you can get the circle of the peony hoop over the plant with the three legs dangling down and evenly spaced around the plant. Keep the legs vertical and gently push the first into the ground about two inches. Continue with the other legs. Come back to the first and push it a bit further into the ground. Continue until all the legs are well into the ground. Occasionally one of the legs will encounter a rock. You will have to gently pull that leg up again and reposition it a bit over to the side. Finally untie and remove the string and fluff the leaves of the plant so that most of the support is hidden. Usually once the flowers are finished I cut them off and removed the peony hoop at the same time.



Peony hoops can be used for other perennials too. They work well for supporting *Geranium psilostemon*, a tall growing and floppy plant, but long flowering with brilliant dark pink flowers that really ignite the border. I have also used the hoops on herbaceous clematis.

## Using bamboo stakes

The other general way to support perennials is the use bamboo stakes and string. I find it easiest if I have cut the stake at an angle at the bottom and I use a hammer to drive them in. You just position three or four around the plant and get them into the ground about four inches. Then using a longish piece of string you secure to the top of one of the stakes and go around the plant looping at each stake and securing when you come around the plant. Depending on the height and mass of the plant you have to choose a suitable thickness of stake. Halifax Seed carries a good selection of green bamboo stakes which can be cut to the correct length, and Lee Valley has a good green coloured jute twine. Sometimes all that a floppy plant requires is some short twiggy branches stuck into the ground around the stems. Foliage will quickly hide the sticks until the flowers open.



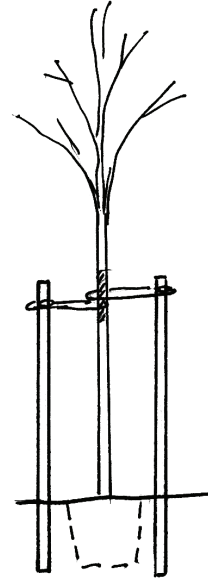
A more specialized way to stake very tall plants such as delphiniums is to provide a tall stake for each spire of flowers and to tie the stem three or four times to the stake. But for me this has now become an exercise in frustration. If the plant requires that degree of care and attention it will have to grow in



someone else's garden. Interestingly I have found that a quicker, easier way of dealing with tall perennials that fall over is the Chelsea chop. I have a very tall (six feet) late summer yellow daisy, *Rudbeckia* 'Herbstsommer', that I really like. Around the beginning of July, when the green plant has grown to about three feet, I take the shears and chop off the top twelve inches. This gives the plant a check, it regrows and flowers well, but it will now be only 48 inches tall and much more able to withstand the wind and the rain. You can try this technique on all kinds of late tall blooming perennials.

### Staking young trees

Staking is also usually required for young trees for the first one or two years until the plant has developed strong roots to anchor itself. The number of stakes you will need depends to some extent on the windiness of the site. I generally provide a pair of two by two wooden posts and drive them into the ground on opposite sides of the root ball. I then use a fairly heavy duty string as in the diagram. I always wrap the tree's trunk with a length of burlap to prevent the bark from being damaged. A notch in the post will prevent the string working its way down the trunk. Do keep an eye on the tree as there is always a chance that the string can cut through the bark. I loosen the ties as necessary and remove all the supports after one or two years. However these days many of the young trees I buy have been grown in a fair-sized container, and I don't have to do any staking as the rootball is heavy enough to anchor the tree. As always it is a case of estimating how windy the site really is, and these days we seem to be getting storms with increasing wind speeds.



Staking – moan about the time it takes, or find time to make your life easier. ☐



*Sanguinaria canadensis* (Bloodroot). Spring has arrived. [Photos Sterling Levy]

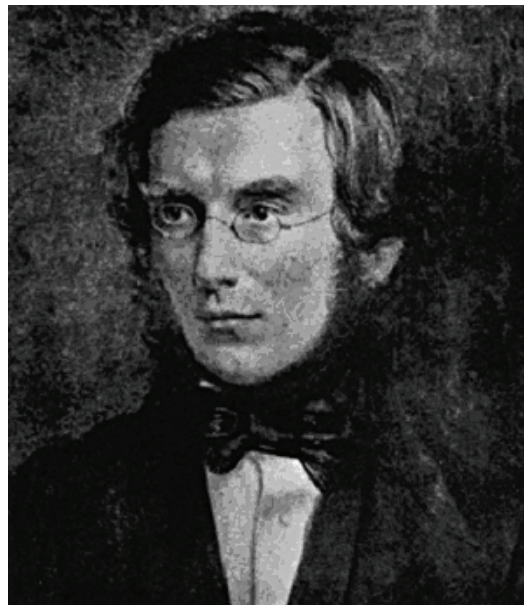
# The Rhododendron Hunters

By Anitra Laycock

Joseph Dalton Hooker 1817-1911

Spring finds us eagerly awaiting the new arrivals, whether from the seed exchange, tissue culture or plant sale, that will one day, we hope, fulfill their promise of added splendour in our gardens. Most of these little plants with their attractive names and alluring descriptions are genetically complex, reflecting the efforts of generations of hybridizers to provide outstanding plants for our local conditions. The origins of these plants, however, lie ultimately in the wild, from which their parent species were brought back by the efforts of the great plant collectors often at the cost of considerable hardship.

One of the earliest and greatest of these collectors was Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911), the foremost botanist of the nineteenth century and a close friend and ally of Charles Darwin. Like many a student of botany, I first became familiar with Hooker through 'Bentham and Hooker' the *Handbook of the British Flora* but his scientific achievements stretch far beyond his contribution to formal taxonomy. The son of a botanist, his father was Chair of Botany at Glasgow and later Director of Kew Gardens, Joseph was a keen naturalist from an early age. His university studies in medicine and in astronomy were all undertaken with a view to pursuing his goal of traveling to the far regions of the world to study plants in their native environment, and to bring home from there representative examples for the establishment of collections in Britain. In 1839 Hooker set sail on James Clark Ross' epic four-year expedition to the Antarctic in HMS *Erebus* and *Terror*, joining the Navy as assistant surgeon on the *Erebus*, at age 22 the youngest member of the crew. His findings on the voyage, he published on his return in *Flora Antarctica*, beautifully illustrated with full colour plates.



With his book completed, and his reputation as a systematic botanist and geographer firmly established, Hooker was anxious to be off on his travels again. In particular now he was eager to expand his knowledge of tropical botany and his sights were set on traveling to India. With the support of Lord Auckland, First Lord of the Admiralty, himself a former Governor-General of India, Hooker was able to set off again in late 1847, intent on exploring the flora of the Himalayas. For rhododendron enthusiasts the next three years would turn out to be the most important and memorable period of Hooker's travels. Basing himself in Darjeeling, Hooker made plans to explore the surrounding Himalaya together with Archibald Campbell, the British Political Agent to Sikkim. Hooker's keen desire to explore the remote, mountainous kingdom of Sikkim, was unfortunately for him not reciprocated by the country's ruling Rajah. Surrounded on all sides by more powerful states, Sikkim was anxious not to arouse the ire its neighbours, which in addition to British ruled India included also Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet.

In October 1848, still lacking permission to enter Sikkim, Hooker set off for Nepal and the mountain passes in the vicinity of Mt. Kanchenjunga, the first European to make this journey. The record of his trip sets down in detail his experiences. He describes the hardships and setbacks faced in inhospitable terrain; the native peoples he encounters, the political obstruction and intrigue; the magnificent scenery, the mountains, and the plants he collects. Climbing high towards a pass he takes particular note of the profusion of rhododendrons clothing the mountainside. At last he is permitted an opportunity to enter Sikkim and to make a brief expedition there before returning to Darjeeling in late January 1849.

Later that same year, after finally obtaining permission from a reluctant Rajah, Hooker was off on his travels again. This time he has planned a much lengthier and more detailed exploration of Sikkim. Setting off from Darjeeling on 3 May 1849, his intent was to follow the River Teesta, the major river of Sikkim, to its headwaters in the high mountains of North Sikkim on the Tibetan frontier. Writing to his father, he promises to send shipments of rhododendrons to him as he progresses. The rainy season, which is now well underway, brings additional hazards for Hooker and his party. The long steep river valleys of North Sikkim are particularly prone to huge landslips that make travel difficult and dangerous. At this time too, leeches are present "in incredible profusion." Hooker reports regularly removing more than 100 from his legs and the sores that result take months to heal. But what he found the greatest torment were the sandflies who bit him remorselessly. "We daily



arrived at our camping-ground, streaming with blood, and mottled with the bites of peepsas, gnats, midges, and mosquitoes, besides being infested with ticks." All the while, the emissaries of the Rajah, in particular his minister, the Dewan, were doing everything in their power to sabotage the expedition and force Hooker to return to Darjeeling.

Travelling up the valleys of first the Lachen and then the Lachung rivers in his quest to complete his survey of the sources of the Teesta river, Hooker made his way towards the high passes which lead to the Tibetan Plateau. All the time, besides seeking out and collecting plants and taking measurements that will allow him to construct a detailed map of the area, he records in his journal, with pictures and vivid descriptions, the landscape and people he encounters. Climbing higher and deeper into the mountains following the river, rhododendrons become the most prominent plants "clothing the mountain slopes with a deep green mantle glowing with bells of brilliant colours." Finally, on the 24 July Hooker arrives at the Kongra Lama pass between Sikkim and Tibet. His sense of achievement in finally achieving his goal is obvious: "So here, at last, after three months of obstacles, I stood at the back of the entire Himalaya range." For the next three months he thoroughly explored the region identifying the source of the Teesta at Cholamu lake before finally returning to Choongtam via the Donkia pass and the Lachung valley.



*Tibet and Cholamoo Lake from the summit of the Donkia Pass looking North-West (from JD Hooker: Himalayan Journals vol II)*

One last trip in Sikkim took Hooker, in the company of Campbell, the Political Officer, to the eastern border and the Chola pass. Here on the 7 November 1849 the two Englishmen found themselves taken prisoner by the Rajah's men who were seeking political concessions from the British. Strictly, Hooker was not their object, but he refused to leave Campbell, following beside him as he was taken into captivity and collecting rhododendron seeds along the way. Threatened with invasion and retribution, the Rajah eventually backed down and after six weeks in captivity, both Campbell and Hooker were released and returned to Darjeeling unharmed. The Rajah, for his part, was punished by the British with the loss of his pension and the annexation of the lower lying part of his territory.

All told, Hooker collected more than 3,000 species of plants in Sikkim and Bengal. Subsequently, botanizing in Assam with his old University friend Thomas Thomson he added more than 3,000 more. This collection would form the basis for a projected flora of India that the two planned jointly to undertake on their return to England. Meanwhile, Hooker had been sending back drawings of the rhododendrons he discovered in Sikkim to the illustrator W.H. Fitch who would produce the superb plates that illustrate Hooker's *Rhododendrons of Sikkim Himalaya* [1849-51]. No significant additions have since been made to the list of rhododendron species Hooker collected in Sikkim, a tribute to the preeminence of his abilities. The magnificence of the plants he introduced, which included *R. thomsonii*, *R. falconeri*, *R. hodgsonii*, *R. campylocarpum*, *R. ciliatum*, *R. nivale*, *R. dalhousiae*, and *R. maddenii*, so opulently displayed in Fitch's renditions, had owners of the great estates, botanical gardens, and nurseries lining up to obtain seed for themselves. Many of these plants have since been extensively hybridized to produce a wide range of beautiful garden plants.

In 1865 Joseph Hooker succeeded his father, William, as Director of Kew Gardens. Although he made other journeys to collect plants, including in 1877 to the USA, it is for the rhododendrons he introduced from Sikkim that Hooker is best remembered. □

## Book Review

### Bleeding Hearts, Corydalis, and their Relatives

by Mark Tebbitt, Magnus Lidén, and Henrik Zetterlund,

Timber Press, 2008, ISBN-13: 978-0-88192-882-2, 176 pages, \$34.95

Another important book from Timber Press, this volume is devoted to the family *Fumariaceae*, which includes some of the most widely grown, familiar garden plants, such as the common Bleeding Heart and Yellow Corydalis, as well as a multitude of less well-known, sometimes difficult to cultivate ones. One of the authors (Tebbitt) is an American gardener; the others are Swedish botanists and taxonomists. So the book is divided into a chapter on cultivation and advice for gardeners, and a much longer section devoted to botanical descriptions and accounts of the relationships of the various genera and species. This includes discussions of the reasons for changing scientific names: Why is *Dicentra spectabilis* now *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*? Read this book and find out.

I was intrigued to find that *Corydalis flexuosa*, the blue-flowered corydalis so many of us crave, is regarded as “part of an intricate complex of species that is not fully understood taxonomically”. This may explain why we have seen such a wide variety of colour forms, of varying degrees of success in cultivation in our gardens.

Perhaps the best part of this book is the illustrations – many line drawings in the text, and a section of 112 superb colour photographs, mostly of plants growing in gardens, but also of plants growing in their native habitats. Included are 19 pictures of various kinds of blue corydalis – mouth-watering!

The ARHS library has a copy of this book.

– Chris Helleiner

---

## Remembering “Captain Rododendron”



With Gwen Romanes and (R. *chrysanthum* x Prelude) BPT 82-1. [Photo John Weagle]





Toasting John Meagher



"Lounging on Lapponicum"



## Photo Album -



*Pieris japonica*. [Photo Chris Helleiner]



'Elviira'. [Photo Chris Helleiner]



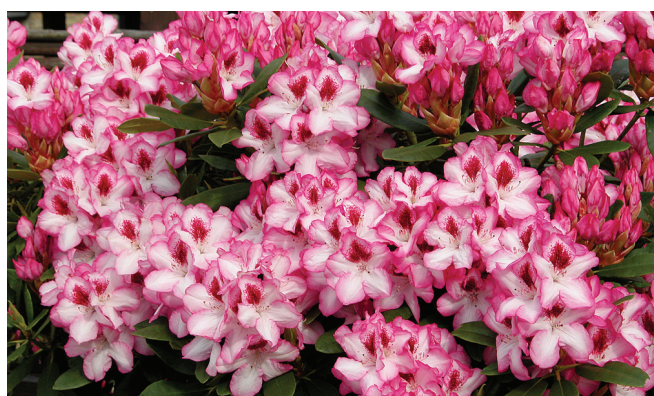
'Sarled'. [Photo Sterling Levy]



*R. vaseyi* 'White Find'. [Photo Sterling Levy]



'Arabella'. [Photo Jens Birck]



'Charmant'. [Photo Jens Birck]



'Barbarella'. [Photo Jens Birck]



'Azzuro'. [Photo Jens Birck]