

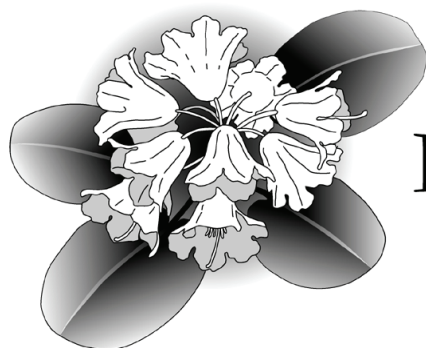
AtlanticRhodo

www.AtlanticRhodo.org

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Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society

Positions of Responsibility 2008 - 2009

President	Ruth Jackson	454-4681	Director - Horticulture	Audrey Fralic	683-2711
Vice-President	Vacant				
Secretary	Susan Boyd	835-8916	Director	Cora Swinamer	826-7705
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Director - Social	Shirley McIntyre	835-3673	May - Pre-Ordered Plant Sale	Ken Shannik	422-2413
			May- Public Plant Sale	Duff & Donna Evers	835-2586

Membership (Please Note Changes)

Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society.

Fees are \$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

American Rhododendron Society

Combined ARHS and ARS membership cost is \$50.00. This may be changed in the future.

For benefits see www.rhododendron.org

Cheques should be sent to ARHS Membership Secretary, **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.

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Cover Photo: Steele Hybrid '96-QPY' [Photo Fazal Rahman]



Calendar of Events

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

- Tuesday September 1** **Lloyd Mapplebeck: Designing Perennial Borders**
Lloyd is the owner of Hill'n'dale Nurseries and has extensive experience in designing borders with zap.
- Tuesday October 6** **Steele Lecture. Ron Rabideau; Searching for the Best.** Ron will talk about the best new and old hybrid rhodos, as well as his plant expeditions in China and his breeding work at his Rare Find Nursery in New Jersey.
- Tuesday November 3** **Philip MacDougall**, a former member now living on the west coast, will return to speak. Always a blast!
- Tuesday December 1** Christmas Party. This is our annual wine and cheese party. There will be a short talk on the rhododendron mapping project.. Come and enjoy an evening of food, wine and conversation. Please bring finger foods or sweets. Wine will be provided by the Society.

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



A very warm welcome to our new and returning ARHS members who have joined since the May Newsletter.

Knight, Myra
MacDonald, Kenneth
McDonald, Barbara
Savage, Darlene
Wilson, Julie
Wood, J. Gordon

Chester Basin
Charlottetown, P.E.I.
Annapolis Royal
Barton, Digby County
Hammonds Plains
Tusket

Special Notices

Cutting Exchange

There will be a rhododendron and azalea cutting exchange at the **Tuesday, October 6** meeting. Many of the members have now acquired rare and unusual plants from ARHS tissue culture sales, May sales and other sources and have them growing successfully in their gardens. Some of these plants are no longer readily available so this would be a good chance to share them by taking a few cuttings and bringing them to the meeting for others to try. Even if you don't have any rare plants please share whatever cuttings you can provide.

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

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

This year Audrey Fralic has requested cuttings of some of the old rhodos that are no longer available: 'Catalga', 'DoubleDip', 'Goldfort', 'Roslyn', , and also some lepidotes (because they are easier to root) such as *carolinianum*, 'Olga' and 'PJMs' as well as rhododendron species

Members' May Sale

We have a new plan for the members' sale in May. In the past many members had a few interesting plants, maybe seedlings, but not enough to set up a sales table. This year we will have an ARHS members' table in May where small numbers of plants can be sold.

Jenny Sandison suggests potting up potential sales items in the fall, preferably in garden soil rather than potting mix, sinking the pots in the vegetable garden or other free area, and covering them with fir boughs, so that they will be ready to go in May. More information in the spring about labelling, pricing etc.

Progress with the Plant Hardiness Project, from Ruth Jackson

In the last issue of our newsletter an article was printed on the possibility of the ARHS contributing to the plant hardiness map of Canada and determining the success of the plants that have been sold through our Society. The project on plant hardiness is fortunate because two staff members of the Centre for Geographic Sciences (COGS) have agreed to support it: Dr. David Woolnough and Dr. Robert Maher. Not only does this institution have an international reputation for its expertise in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) but also our contacts have experience in working with the others in the province that have a horticultural bent. In particular, they have been collecting temperature data and mapping its spatial variation for the wine growers of Nova Scotia.

During the ARHS plant hardiness committee initial meeting with David and Bob it was agreed that the committee would put together a paper questionnaire based on the May plant and tissue culture sales over a number of years. This document was to be developed in September and the committee members will test it. A student will be recruited from COGS who will convert the paper records to digital form and plot the data on maps (i.e., topography, soil type). Prior to the survey being distributed to members a presentation will be given by Drs. Woolnough and Maher.

The project can only be successful with your participation. It will require individuals to take the time to search their records to determine which plants they bought and if they survived. Because a student is involved and they are available in a limited window from January to the end of term, filling out the questionnaire in a timely fashion is also needed.

The software for this application is expensive and requires experience to use it well. We have experts to help us implement our project at no cost. This is an opportunity we should embrace. The data we collect will enhance the chance of individual gardeners' success with plants and help the club bring you plants that will improve your gardens. Of course, we will also have provided invaluable information on the plant hardiness zones for the Atlantic region that will benefit a much larger group. I hope you will consider participating. ☐

ARHS Outreach:

By Christopher Hopgood

The Meagher Garden at Regatta Point



Regatta Pt. Work Party. [Photo Chris Hopgood]

The Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society spent a second work session at Regatta Point this past April 25th. A number of members volunteered their time, skill and muscles at the garden started by the late John Meagher at number of years ago. Some of the members included Rachel Martin, Jenny Sandison, Ron Lawlor, Sheila Stevenson, Stephen Archibald, Sydney and Sandy Dumaesq, our guest member who helped out last year, Terry, Chris Hopgood and Mary and Chris Helleiner for pictures and supervision.

The objective this year was three fold: clean up, continued attempts at ridding the garden of the dreaded Japanese knotwood, and the planting of some new rhodos provided by our own super rhodo grower, Audrey Fralic. The new plants were, *R. maximum*, *R. 'Ginny Gee'*, *R. 'Bpt 80-5'*, *R. 'Patty Bee'* and *R. 'Purple Gem'*. All of them looked great and the last time I was by it appears as if they are loving all the

moisture we are having this spring/summer. Isn't it heart warming to know that something is enjoying the weather we have had for the first half of the summer.

We started about 9:30 am, and it was a very pleasant morning, the sun was out, a bit chilly but a great temperature to do some physical labour, and as the day went on a number of the residents of the area came by and offered encouragement and comments. One asked, are you a volunteer group, and I think Jenny answered, yes we are the Atlantic Rhododendron and Horticultural Society, the person said "It's people like you who make a difference". Well said. In fact that is what Outreach and the ARHS is all about, making a difference, making the effort to improve the beauty of our area through the use of rhododendrons, azaleas and other attractive plants.

When we finished there was a long row of garden refuse bags by the side of the road, all waiting for the city to pick them up. Audrey Fralic's plants were all strategically planted (all in their appropriate areas for size, colouring, and exposure) – what else would you expect from the member of ARHS? However, that dreaded knotweed is still there, and there is a bit more that can be done at this site, perhaps we will have another workday this fall, but let's wait and see. If the place needs more work in 2009, we will have an email out to all members.

Bayport Plant Farm, Lunenburg County



Part of the Bayport work party. [Photo Mary Helleiner]

The second outreach work party took place on June 13th, 2009 at the nursery of Dick and Diana Steele's, Bayport Plant Farm. The original date was to be the 6th of June, but that was a conflict with the annual Pot Luck and Garden Tour of the ARHS, that the undersigned had unwittingly put in place. Upon recognition of the conflict the date for the trip to Bayport was changed to a week later. It would have been interesting to leave the two events on the same day, just to see who in the membership was interested in work and who was interested in wine, food and fine garden viewing. Well, I guess we will never find out.

Of the membership who did make their way to Lunenburg County, Jeff Chown, (with friends Jody Sawchyn and Aaron Sinclair), Mary Helleiner, Jenny Sandison, Walter Ostrom, Wendy and Sandy Burnett, Christopher Hopgood, and our hosts Diana Steele and Dick Steele. The tone of the day was

set with Diana serving morning tea to all who arrived around the hour of 10 o'clock, and after chat and more chat it was off to their plantation. We were driven up to the higher part of the property and from there it was a walking tour with the added touch of a bit of work from time to time, as long as it didn't interfere with the viewing of the rhodos. The sights were magnificent; to see 20 foot tall rhododendrons in full bloom among the spruce, pine, birch and maples was stunning. Words cannot express the beauty, you had to be there and see it with your own eyes.

We were fortunate to have a few members take pictures to record the day, it is hoped that those pictures will be shared with the membership. And yes, some work was done, most consisted of clearing paths and cutting back some of the forest growth from the plants.

That's it for Outreach for now, but stay tuned for more projects. ☐

American Rhododendron Society

By Anitra Laycock

Our Society (ARHS) offers, as we know well, a wonderful opportunity to meet with and learn from others who share our love of rhododendrons and their relatives in the landscape while developing our own collections. But perhaps not everyone is aware that we are also part of a large network of similarly minded groups all sharing a common interest in rhododendrons and their relatives and friends. As a Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, we in ARHS join with 68 other Chapters ranging from Hawaii across North America to Europe and on to Sikkim in the Indian Himalaya. The individual Chapters of ARS are joined on a regional basis into 12 Districts. Together with the Niagara and Toronto Chapters we form District 12 (also known as the Rhododendron Society of Canada). Over on the west coast of Canada the 9 British Columbia Chapters form ARS District 1. Each District is represented on the ARS Board by a District Director. For the next two years the District 12 Director will be Anitra Laycock from the Atlantic Chapter. Alternates are Jenny Sandison and Chris Hopgood.

Visit the ARS website (www.rhododendron.org) for a wealth of information on all aspects of selection and care of rhododendrons. Here, among other things, you can search the database for plants that fit your garden needs, check on upcoming meetings you might be interested in attending, browse the very extensive seed exchange and find a host of tips on plant care. Next year the ARS will be holding its annual meeting in Long Island, New York from May 14-17, well within driving distance. The major attractions of going to the meetings, besides the many new friends you will make, are the wonderful garden and nursery visits that are planned and the big plant sale with lots of enticing new varieties that are hardy for us. You can join ARS along with your ARHS membership and get a savings on the combined membership of \$50. Members, in addition to other benefits, receive the ARS Journal (a 60-page glossy magazine) four times a year. ☐

ARS Gold Medal presented to Jens Christian Birck



The American Rhododendron Society Citation reads as follows -

Your ruthless selection of hybrids and species has raised standards to lofty levels. Your rhododendron photography is unparalleled and available to one and all. Your keen, critical, hands-on observations of the Genus Rhododendron question conventional wisdom and books - these insights you present clearly and irrefutably. You quietly and selflessly continue this pursuit of knowledge expecting nothing in return. You helped amass a world-class collection of collected wild, hardy species and have promoted their use in public and private gardens for the world to enjoy. The Danish and South Swedish Rhododendron Chapters owe their formation to you. For your many accomplishments and innovations we present Jens Christian Birck with the ARS Gold Medal.

ARHS extends our congratulations to Jens. ☐

Plant Portrait

Pinellia cordata 'Yamakasi'

The genus *Pinellia* consists of six Aroids with simple, basal leaves and is native to China and Japan according to Kristl Walek of Gardens North, where I purchased my first bulbils in 2005. Her description of this particular species was intriguing and included phrases like 'darling little aroid', 'deep green leaves with striking silver veins and a maroon reverse', and flowers that 'smell like Bazooka bubblegum'. How could I resist!

The 'seed' provided is actually little bulbils that are planted like any easy warm germinating seeds and out of 5 bulbils I got 4 good plants. They take some time to mature and every year the original bulbs have enlarged as well as producing many new bulbils, one at the base of each stem and one at the base of each leaf.



Pinellia cordata 'Yamakasi' [Photo Roslyn Duffus]

The clone that I received was named after Mr. Yamazaki who discovered it and is described as superior to the species in that the leaves are larger and have better silver patterning. The leaves are roughly heart shaped or cordate and generally twice as long as they are wide and range in size up to 6 inches. The reverse truly is a lovely maroon colour with the veins in green. As a member of the aroid family, the flowers resemble a Jack-in-the-Pulpit but are small, not more than one or two inches long with a long spadix extending well beyond the flower. As for the scent, Bazooka bubblegum? I'm not sure, but certainly extremely sweet and fruity. Well worth having near a path where you will frequently stop for a sniff. Another great advantage to this little treasure is the fact that it flowers all season long, and new leaves appear as the old ones die back, leaving little bulbils behind to build your collection with. Even relatively young plants will flower, so you don't have to wait too long.

So far, I have not planted any outside but keep them in pots and overwinter in the fridge, but they are listed as hardy to zone 6 in the Gardens North catalogue and even as low as zone 4b in other references. Faye Brunet has had one I gave her out in her woodland garden for two winters now with no problems. Some references say that they may disappear if not happy with conditions but, because of the extra bulbils, you can keep back up plants in the fridge. They want a rich humusy soil, moist but not soggy, and should not be allowed to dry out too much in summer. The bulbs tend to be rather shallow and may be prone to heaving out.

The species is reluctant to set seed and never sets more than one seed per fruit. These seeds are still green when ripe, but why would you worry when the bulbils are so easy.

Other species of this genus are not as much recommended for the garden. Some are too tender and others are reputed to be thugs though that may only be a problem in milder areas. I have tried *P. pedatisecta*, which disappeared and had a rather uninteresting flower anyway, and *P. tripartita atropurpurea*, which has survived the garden for one winter and has a small jack that opens side to side with a purple interior.

– Roslyn Duffus

2010 ARHS Seed Exchange - A Seed Collecting Primer

By Sharon Bryson

We are anticipating the upcoming 2010 Seed Exchange with great interest. Last year's contributions were very well received, and we thank all who participated as donors or as purchasers. It would be very nice to see a few more donors from the general ARHS membership. All members are welcome to donate seeds from an interesting plant(s) in their garden, be it rhododendron, azalea or a companion plant.

To that end we are submitting a few tips regarding seed handling.

Seed collection for many companion plants must commence quite early. There are some plants that set seed very early and some unfortunately fall into the category of ephemeral seeds. They are those that will not stand any amount of dry seed storage and need to be sown as soon after maturation as possible. Because of that they don't make the best candidates for our exchange unless they can be stored moist and usually cool. If anyone has really interesting seeds that require this special treatment, it might be best to send an email to the membership via Susan Boyd and see if there are a few people that might want seed.

Some other special needs seeds include the magnolias, which we have been cold/moist storing each year with reasonable success. They need to have a special cleaning procedure to extract and wash the ripe seeds. Try not to let the berries dry out at all before this procedure. Maples also need to have seed stored so they never dry out. A bit of fresh sphagnum makes a very effective storage aid for such seeds.

There are many that just need to be collected as the seed pods ripen. Most can be popped into a labeled paper bag to finish drying. The seeds will normally fall to the bottom of the bag where they can be retrieved and cleaned for storage in leak-proof envelopes. Plastic is not the best for seed storage, but can be used for very short term. Moisture can be a problem, and also static electricity makes the seeds very difficult to transfer.

Azalea and rhododendron seed pods can usually be ripened on the plant. There seems to be little danger of most splitting and dispersing their seed prematurely. Some forms will have the pods split when they have been thoroughly dried inside. Others are very tough and have to be literally broken apart to release the seed. Pliers can be used for a gentle break. Separating seed from chaff requires some practice, but like anything becomes simpler after a few times. Bill is quite happy to clean seed for anyone who isn't feeling "proficient". You can also contact us if you have other questions.

Ideally seed should be fresh, clean and labelled. A concise description would be helpful. Crosses should, of course, include the names of the parent plants. Early collected seed should be kept cool and dry. Please ensure that the envelopes used to transport seed are sealed along the seams to prevent leakage.

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

Members are encouraged to try growing rhododendrons and azaleas from seed. Germination requirements are included for the majority of seeds each year. Cultural information is readily available, and the rewards are heartening. Results, from a bloom standpoint, often appear in as little as 2-3 years. Azaleas are especially easy. They also seem to yield many very nice plants from either HP or OP seed lots. We could say there is no such thing as an ugly azalea!

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

Send seed or a list by December 1, 2009, to: Sharon Bryson, #407 Old Maryvale Rd. RR#3 Antigonish NS B2G 2L1

ARHS 2010 TISSUE CULTURE ADVANCE SALE

RHODODENDRONS (all rhododendrons are elepidotes unless otherwise stated)

VARIETY	HYBRIDIZER	DESCRIPTION
R. Anke Heinje	Heinje	Beige indumentum coats the underside of this compact plant. The red buds open to rosy pink flowers with golden markings. Midseason bloom. 3 ft X 3ft. Hardy to -25F.
R. Axel Tigerstedt		This is a new Finnish hybrid with pale pink buds opening to white flowers with pale yellow spotting. Thin brown indumentum on undersides of dark green leaves. About 5 ft. in 10 years. Hardy to -26F (-32C).
R. Blue Baron		Lepidote. Near-blue flowers on a very hardy, compact plant. The small foliage is glossy and turns bronze color in fall. Early mid-season bloom. 3 ft X 2 ft. Hardy to -15F. (-22C)
R. <i>camtschaticum</i>		This is a deciduous species rhododendron that can look dead in the winter. However, come early spring the leaves burst forth. This little plant is a tiny treasure with its rosy-plum flowers. It only grows to about 6 inches and is hardy to -25F (-30C).
R. Crete	Leach	A very popular yak hybrid. Buds are purplish pink, as are the flowers at first, then they turn white. Silvery tomentum covers the new growth ; beige indumentum on underside of leaves. Mounding habit. 4 ft. X 5 ft. Hardy to -25 F.
R. Gunborg	Heinje	Dark rose buds open to light rose flowers with scant yellowish spotting. This rounded, compact plant has dark green foliage. 3 ft x 3 ft. Hardy to -15 F.
R. Kathe Heinje	Heinje	This plant has all the traits of a <i>yakushmanum</i> hybrid. It has dark green leaves with indumentum on the undersides. Its blooms are a beautiful rosy- pink with frilly edges and darker rose speckling . Compact and slow growing to 3.5 ft. Hardy to -15F.
R. Kodiak		A compact growing plant which has wonderful foliage of deep green with light tan indumentum. Silvery white ball shaped trusses open in midseason. Hardy to -10F (-22 C). 4 ft x 4 ft.
R. <i>keiskei</i> 'Yaku Fairy'	Starling	This little gem was cancelled on last year's order so we'll try again. Low growing and compact, it produces pale yellow flowers that bloom profusely, even when the plant is young .2 ft. x 2 ft. Hardy to -10 F(-20 C).
R. Mardi Gras	Bovee	This is a beautiful rhodie that seems very hard to come by. An outstanding plant with strong purplish-pink, ruffled flowers that fade to paler pink then to white. The deep, green leaves are covered beneath with reddish-brown indumentum (it has <i>yakushmanum</i> parentage) . It is believed to be somewhat harder than its rating by the ARS of -15F. Compact, slow grower to 3 ft x 3 ft.
PJM Elite	Weston Nurseries	Lepidote. Cold hardy as well as heat tolerant, its small rounded leaves are green in summer turning mahogany colored in winter. One of the earliest rhodos to bloom with its bright lavender pink flowers, it is a definite bright spot after our long winters. 5 ft x 5 ft. Hardy to -25F. An outstanding plant.

VARIETY	HYBRIDIZER	DESCRIPTION
R. Patty Bee		Lepidote. Another outstanding plant with its clear yellow flowers, that bloom early midseason. One of the very best dwarf hybrids for its appearance and tolerance to heat and sun. Grows to about 18"; hardy to -15F (-20 C).
R. Raisa		A new Finnish hybrid with bright pink flowers and dense, dark green foliage. Low spreading habit to about 3 ft. Reported to be hardy to -22 F (-30 C).
R. Teddy Bear		This <i>bureuvii</i> , <i>yakushimanum</i> cross is a beautiful plant. It has a compact, rounded habit; shiny dark green foliage with cinnamon colored indumentum beneath. Delicate pink flowers. Hardy to -15F. (-22C).
R. <i>vaseyi</i>		A deciduous species with open and upright habit, displaying flowers that appear before the foliage. The wavy edged foliage is dark green and the flowers can vary from white to deep pink with red spotting. Grows to about 5 ft. Hardy to -15F, (-22 C).
R. <i>wiltonii</i>		Leaves are dark and glossy with thick cinnamon colored indumentum. New growth is covered with white tomentum. The trusses of bell-shaped flowers are white or white flushed with pink, have a crimson blotch and spotting. Low and mounding to 3 ft. in 10 yea

DECIDUOUS AZALEAS

Candy Lights	This hardy, disease resistant azalea is an outstanding plant with its pink flowers that have yellow streaks and dark green foliage. Needs full sun to partial shade; grows 3-5 ft tall and wide. Hardy to -40 F. Extremely fragrant.
Tri-Lights	Another hardy and disease resistant azalea. The attractive blooms have wavy edges and are white with pink marbling and vivid yellow spots. Likes full sun to partial shade . Hardy to -25 F.

COMPANION PLANTS

Beesia deltophylla	This new introduction from China is an excellent ground cover that has exceptional shiny heart-shaped leaves that grow to about 5" long. The flowers are delicate and appear in late summer on slender spikes up to 1' tall. It is a great background for spring blooming plants such as orchids or corydalis, etc. Grow in shade; will burn in direct sun. Zone 6.
Enkianthus camp. 'Red Bells'	Cherry red flowers appear in late spring on an upright shrub with delicate bell shaped red flowers shaped like oriental lanterns. Outstanding blue- green summer foliage turns brilliant yellow-orange-red in the fall. Likes partial sun and shade. Grows to 5 ft. high. Hardy to Zone 5.
Hosta 'Trifecta'	The heart- shaped leaves of this hosta have a snow white center with a fairly wide, green margin and flashes of chartreuse dividing the margin and center color, giving it a tri-colored effect. Compact grower to 6" tall and 12" wide. Lavender flowers.
Pieris japonica 'Compacta'	This compact pieris likes full sun and has waxy white flowers in pendulous clusters in early spring. Hardy to Zone 5. Grows to about 4 ft. ☐

“They May Not Grow There, But It’s Worth a Try”

By J. Alexander (Sandy) Burnett

In the late 1970s, Sackville New Brunswick was not renowned as a hotbed of rhododendron culture. Indeed, plants of that genus in local gardens could almost be numbered on the fingers of two hands. There was one at a home on Queens Road, one on York Street, and another on Wellington Street behind the harness shop. Professor Bill Noble had some at his home on Gordon Street and there were a few on the campus of Mount Allison University. All were “Ironclads” — super-hardy hybrid offspring of *R. catawbiense* — and conventional wisdom had it that no other rhododendrons would survive the extreme climatic variability of the Sackville winter.

Enter the heretics.

At that time, Paul Bogaard, Harold Popma and I were all relatively recent arrivals in Sackville, Paul from Atlanta GA, Harold from Baddeck NS, and I from Montreal QC. With our wives (Mary, Kathy and Wendy) we shared a passion for gardening and a burning curiosity about what would and would not grow in our new environment.

By coincidence, we all contracted Rhododendron fever independently but at about the same time. Paul and Mary received their first plant, a layered ironclad, as a gift from Bill Noble. Harold and Kathy acquired theirs on a visit to a nursery outside Truro. Wendy and I encountered ours on a visit to the late George Swain at his nursery on the outskirts of Wolfville. I had a long conversation with Mr. Swain that day about the genus and its particular requirements. In the end, we left with a couple of his *catawbiense* hybrids and a sturdy, potted ‘PJM.’

“They may not grow in Sackville,” he cautioned me, “but it’s worth a try.”

Prophetic words. Our initial plants thrived and we’ve been trying new ones ever since.

Initially, our choices were cautious, reflecting the advice of experienced local gardeners and the limited range of stock available from local suppliers. ‘Roseum’, ‘Boursault’, ‘Boule de Neige’ and ‘Nova Zembla’ provided a dependable range of pink, mauve, white and red blossom. It wasn’t until a few years later, in the mid-1980s, that our horizons were broadened.

Bayport discovered

Harold and Kathy were the first in our group to encounter Captain Dick Steele and his plantation at Bayport, the summer that they rented a cottage at nearby Kingsburg. They shared news of their discovery with the rest of us and before long a spring pilgrimage to the Plant Farm had become one of our annual rituals. Once he realized that our interest was more than casual, Capt. Steele enlisted us to further his own life’s mission — testing the limits of rhododendron hardiness. It was he who first suggested that we try *R. yakushmanum* and a wide range of Yak hybrids. Not least among these was his Boulderwood 72-2 cross, now registered as ‘R. A. S.’ It has become a particular favourite in all three gardens.

Little by little, we became more adventurous, Captain Steele suggesting and we accepting varieties that were not generally rated to be winter hardy under our marginally Zone 5 conditions. Specimens of ‘Blue Peter’, ‘Janet Blair’, ‘Francesca’, ‘Scintillation’, ‘Smiryak’, ‘Wyandanch’ and ‘Walter Ostrum’ (formerly Pinehurst 83-M) found their way northward from Bayport, each accompanied by the same warning: “They may not grow there, but it’s worth a try.”

Worth a try indeed! Not one on that list of supposedly borderline plants has failed to please. Admittedly, they suffer some damage in a severe winter. A few days of temperatures below –25°C will kill the uppermost flower buds of ‘Blue Peter’ but the lower branches, especially those sheltered beneath a bit of snow cover, will bloom unscathed. As for the remaining varieties from that group, we’ve found that harsh cold may blacken a few pips; yet, to date, even our worst winters have been followed by a pleasing show of bloom and in mild years the rewards are spectacular.

Other plants have taken to our conditions without even that degree of hesitation, among them ‘Bellefontaine’, ‘Minas Maid’, ‘Grand Pré’, and other hybrids developed by Donald Craig and George Swain at Agriculture Canada’s Kentville Experimental Station.

Rhodos from seed

Before long Captain Steele was encouraging us to grow more plants from seed, whether gathered from our own gardens, ordered from the ARS Seed Exchange, supplied by him, or collected on expeditions to Newfoundland and southern Labrador. We have had good success with seed from the captain’s cross of *dauricum* x *mucronulatum* and with straight Pink

Mucronulatum, two semi-deciduous varieties that bloom in early spring and withstand late frost very well. Seeds of *R. carolinianum* have produced a handsome, if somewhat leggy, range of hardy plants that adapt well to a variety of horticultural treatments from hedgerow to bonsai. As for wild-collected seed, both Harold's and Paul's gardens boast healthy specimens of *R. lapponicum* whose parents grew in Labrador.

Today, we feel confident enough to share seed from our own plants for trial by others. A prime example has been *R. schlippenbachii*, a deciduous species widely known as "The Royal Azalea of Japan." When I told the captain of having bought a specimen at an area nursery, he was interested but somewhat skeptical of its prospects. "Let me know how it performs," he said.

In the years that followed, it grew ever larger and bloomed ever more profusely, the blossoms appearing like a cloud of pink butterflies in mid-May. "That plant must be an especially hardy individual," said the captain. "You should collect seed from it and spread it as widely as you can." I have done so. Its descendants are now prospering around Sackville, in Moncton, and as far afield as Toronto.

Success invites risk-taking. Soon, we were taking chances by purchasing nursery stock imported from gentler climes in Connecticut and Oregon. Predictably, the results were not always what we hoped for. A plant rated as tender below 0°F. (-18°C.) is unlikely to thrive in a setting where, according to Environment Canada, we can expect a dozen or more days below that temperature in an average winter.

Some plants failed the test. Many, to our surprise, passed. We suspect that many growers, not wishing to raise false hopes among their customers, prefer to err on the side of caution when it comes to estimating hardiness, especially if they have had no opportunity to test the limits.

Clues to survival

Without making any claim to scientifically verified expertise, we can now offer a few observations that may be helpful to other gardeners who want to discover how far they can push the hardiness envelope.

First, it is useful to know not only what the extreme minimum temperature may be in your area, but also how many days at that extreme minimum range can be expected in an average winter. You can obtain this information on the Environment Canada web site at http://www.climate.weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca/advanceSearch/searchHistoricData_e.html Many plants can withstand a day or two at temperatures well below their rated minimum, but not an extended period of several consecutive days.

Second, it is important to be sufficiently familiar with microclimates within your garden that you can take advantage of them, locating tender plants in areas where they will have protection from windburn, sunburn, and pockets of extreme cold. Minimizing exposure improves the likelihood of survival.

Of course, some climatic vagaries cannot be pre-empted. Speaking of microclimates, Harold's garden consistently breaks dormancy in spring a good week ahead of mine. His early lepidote rhododendrons bloom much sooner than mine but for that reason they are more susceptible to late frosts that can wilt their blooms while those of my plants are still safely shrouded in their buds.

Third, it may help to take a few protective measures before winter's arrival. Faced with the brittleness of certain low, spreading plants, Harold, a doctor, had the inspiration of crafting small crutches to support branches that may become overloaded with snow or ice. Such props and braces can go a long way towards forestalling split stems and broken limbs.

Thirty years ago we began, tentatively, to test rhododendrons in Sackville NB. Today these magnificent plants have become the mainstay of our three gardens. Collectively, we now have representatives of more than 20 species and over 180 hybrid varieties. There was always a chance that they might not grow here, of course, but its been worth the try! ☐

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A Garden on Prospect Bay

By Gwen Romanes

We bought the property in '85 having walked by it for a few years prior to the purchase. It was a dreadful looking place but had quite the view over Prospect Bay and loads of potential. Prior to '85 it had been a junk yard; the owner collected everything that was of no use to anyone and stockpiled it wherever he could. It seemed to us that he had bulldozed parts of the property flat and, by pushing whatever soil there was into the sea, made room for his collections. There were rotten boats, dead trucks and motors, old school buses filled with dead appliances; the ground was littered with switches, cables, meat hooks, hoses and other uninteresting detritus. The ground was almost soil-less with lots of patches of spilled oil and other machine liquids and lubricants. Still, the view was lovely!

At first we started by clearing as much of the junk as we could. Some we just had to bury (logs that had once been a dock in Halifax.) There was much to be burned: rotten sheds and boats, etc. Many loads of stuff were taken to the dump or recycler. Then we planted tree seedlings and brought in some Rawdon "loamy soil" (sand) and planted whatever we bought or were given. We also fell in with some very bad company who knew how to sell a rhododendron or two and we were on our way to acquiring quite a collection of the lovely darlings. Some rhododendrons did well; others have, sadly, "gone over". As Wendy Cornwall once said, "If we had the money back for all the plants we killed..." Over the last twenty years we've had big gardening years and slow ones. Much of the energy has gone into replacing tainted ground with healthy soil and compost and watching the growing plants create their own little microclimates and growing media. We continued to plant trees even though we thought we'd likely never see them as adult specimens. But it's amazing how big and beautiful many of them have grown. There are many native plants that either survived being covered in junk or whose seeds have flown in with the birds and other wildlife. These plants are looking healthy and well and obviously because they are native, do well.

The property originally came with a cabin that, we were told, had been brought to Prospect from Bedford in the 1930s following the closing down of the Bedford house of ill repute – this has never been confirmed but given what we know of the owner it does seem entirely possible that he could have acquired one of the cabins that made up the business. This building was our home for the first few years until we built the new house. The cabin was taken down three years ago and the piece of land it was on is now the vegetable garden. Living by the sea with a rocky shoreline means we have access to as much seaweed as we can collect and this makes a wonderful mulch/compost. I use it on the vegetable beds but not the other beds (for no obvious reason)).

Many years we lost heart and wondered if the place would ever look established and healthy. But here we are almost a quarter of a century later and the great mother has done her thing – from a sickly polluted environment those few years ago, we have a lush, productive and healthy garden that's a joy to be part of. ☐

ARHS May Plant Sale - 2009 [Photo Chris Helleiner]



Garden Basics

The survey our members completed in May 2008 showed that many of you wanted basic gardening information. This is the third article of a series that we hope will fulfil that need.

The Soil Beneath our Feet

By Jenny Sandison

Compost: Horticultural Gold

Several years ago I built a flower bed in a small hollow beside a driveway. I ordered topsoil from the local supplier who delivered it and dumped it beside the driveway. I had a great time pushing the soil into the low whale-shape I had imagined and I planted it.

The plants didn't die but neither did they thrive. They seemed to just stay the size they were when I planted them. This was more than a little annoying as I wanted the perennials to plump up and spread and fill the bed. Certainly the area was exposed to the cold north winter wind but I still felt something was wrong.

The next spring Julie and I lifted all the perennials and spread a thick layer of municipal compost between the shrubs and turned it into the top 8 inches. Then we replanted the perennials. What a difference! The shrubs stood up and looked lively and the perennials grew fat and strong. It was a good lesson. The so-called topsoil was in fact Lunenburg clay from underneath the top 6 inches. It contained no humus, or decayed organic matter, and although the elements necessary for plant life were there they needed the organic material to bring that soil to life.

The municipal compost is a heady mixture of all the kitchen waste from our green bins and all the animal and fish matter that the restaurants supply. My backyard compost isn't as rich but it is pure humus and is just as effective at conditioning the soil. There are all kinds of formulas for making compost heaps, and all kinds of containers and tools to help you, but my basic way of doing things works fine.

First I sink 4 posts into the ground in a rough square, probably 3 feet each side. Then I staple chicken wire to the outside of the posts to make a square, open at the top. If you are feeling creative you can devise a way to make the front into a door, but it isn't necessary. Alternatively the various Ark workshops sell notched wooden slats that make a very effective square. Then you start piling all the plant material from the garden inside, adding to the heap as the year goes by, and adding all the vegetable kitchen waste as well. At the end of the year you stop and leave this heap alone while you construct another and use that for the second year. The third year in the spring you go back to the original pile that by now has sunk way down and you start hauling it all out. I have found that at this point it is a good thing to sieve the material. I have some 1/2 inch galvanised mesh stretched over a rough wooden frame big enough to balance on the top of my wheelbarrow. I fork some of the aged material into the sieve, and using heavy duty gloves I work it through the sieve into the wheelbarrow. When the barrow becomes full I bag the material and start over. Any material that is still unrotted just goes back into the second heap. I tend to stack the bags for use when I am renovating a bed, but I also just add a layer over existing plantings in the spring before growth has begun. A word of caution here. Backyard compost tends to have a lot of weed seeds in it so I try to always cover any surface compost with mulch and then I don't have to deal with a tedious weeding problem.

There are a few no-nos. Don't put fish or animal leftovers in the pile or the raccoons will be all over it. Don't put any fat into the pile because that inhibits the decomposition. Consider the proximity of your neighbours when you are planning the position of your compost piles and bury the more malodorous offerings from the kitchen under the top layer. Then again there are all kinds of other things to hurry up the process. You can add accelerators, you can turn the heap, you can shred everything very finely before it goes in, but many friends of

mine have arrived at the system I have described. Perhaps, if you garden in a small town lot it would make sense to purchase a tumbling kind of composter and use accelerators so you get an end product in 3 months or less. Anyway your compost is ready when it is dark in colour and crumbles in your hand.

One more point I would make is to reiterate the advice I heard from Marjorie Willison many years ago regarding sheet composting. She pointed out that it takes a lot of time to cut all the perennials down at the end of the year, haul them to the compost heap, sieve when it is ready and bring it all back to the flower bed again. Another way you can deal with perennials is, at the end of the season, take your hedge shears and starting at the top of the dead stalks cut 3 inch pieces off until you arrive at the bottom of the stalk. The bed gets covered with these pieces of dead stem and you leave them in place. In the spring the plants grow up and soon cover the decaying pieces. The bed looks a little messy for a few weeks but the end result is just as good and less labour-intensive. Marjorie felt that all the woody stuff on top of the bed also protects the soil and its loose nature assists all those wonderful bacteria, microbes, whatever, that are so important to making nutrients available to our plants.

However you do it, make and use compost! ☐

Book Review

Saxifrages: A Definitive Guide to the 2000 Species, Hybrids & Cultivars.
By Malcolm McGregor. (Timber Press, 2008, US \$49.95).

The genus *Saxifraga* is home to a range of hardy perennial plants, native primarily to the temperate and alpine regions of the northern hemisphere. Although saxifrages are found distributed across a wide range of habitats in the wild, they thrive in particular abundance in rugged mountain ecosystems. With their compact form and tiny, bright, starry flowers, these alpine species have come to be considered indispensable inhabitants of the rock garden.

This beautifully produced book from Timber Press is authored by an acknowledged expert in the field, and fills a major gap in the literature on this popular genus. In a very readable and comprehensive account, Malcolm McGregor covers all aspects of the taxonomy, ecology, and garden uses of the genus *Saxifraga* and the closely related genus, *Micranthes*. The book is extensively illustrated with more than 300 high quality photos of plants both in their native habitat and in cultivation. One very helpful feature is the additional inclusion of a number of pictures that clearly illustrate the textual discussion of comparative features in related plants. Most of the book consists of chapters devoted to each of the many different sections into which botanists presently classify plants in this genus, the best known of which include the silver saxifrages, the dwarf cushion saxifrages, and the mossy saxifrages. Undoubtedly, this work is set to become the standard reference text on the genus. Yet, while there is detail aplenty for the expert in these chapters, there is also a wealth of information throughout the book that is of ready interest to the general reader looking to learn a little more about these interesting plants. Towards the end of the book there is a very helpful discussion on various aspects of saxifrage cultivation in the home garden. This is followed by a list of 100 recommended plants, drawn from across the genus, that are reliably available and relatively easy to grow. A good bibliography and an index to the plants described complete the book. ☐

– Anitra Laycock

Photo Album - Featuring Steele hybrids



Pinellia cordata 'Yamakasi'. [Photo Roslyn Duffus]



'94-7'. [Photo Sandy Brown]



'Bayport 98K'. [Photo R. Steele]



'2000C'. [Photo Fazal Rahman]



'94-F'. [Photo Sandy Brown]



'Pinehurst 87-1'. [Photo Sandy Brown]



'Dave's Delight'. [Photo Fazal Rahman]



'95 TB'. [Photo Sandy Brown]