

NORTHWEST  
ORNAMENTAL  
HORTICULTURAL  
SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

March-April 1974

SPECIES RHODODENDRONS

This issue of the Newsletter is devoted to species rhododendrons as an introduction to our next general membership meeting, lecture and related horticultural display. Don't forget the date.

Wednesday, March 27th

10 AM - Noon

Eames Theatre

Members: FREE

Non members \$1.00

Lecture: "Species Rhododendrons in an Amateur's Garden"

Speakers: Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence J. Pierce

What makes a garden grow? A rhododendron garden? Isabel and Lawrence Pierce have worked at theirs together for a long time. They will tell us how they got started making their collection of both species and hybrid rhododendrons for ornamental planting and propagating, describe their green-house methods which they say everyone can do, and how to keep on learning the characteristics and the habits of rhododendrons which are so at home in the Northwest. Plant material from their beautiful garden will illustrate their talk.

Ellen Pennell, Program Chairman

What is a SPECIES rhododendron? In order to understand what a species is, it is necessary to define other botanic terms used relative to any discussion of species rhododendron.

*Rhododendron* -- a genus of the family *Ericaceae*

Genus ----- a group of allied species bound together by certain recognizable botanical characteristics. *Rhododendron*, *Primula*, *Rosa*.

Species ----- a group of similar plants which have characteristics distinguishing them from all other species within their genus, which may interbreed and still produce the same characteristics in their offspring, usually perpetuated by seed. This is the most important group in the wild. *Rh. Augustinii*, *Rh. discolor*, *Rh. arboreum*.

Series ----- a group of closely related species. *Rh. Augustinii*, *Rh. Davidsonianum*, *Rh. yunnanense* all belong to the *Triflorum* Series.

Variety ----- a natural variety in the wild denotes a variation within the species which is usually perpetuated by seed. *Rh. sutchuenense* var. *Giraldii*. Other varieties are produced by interbreeding or selection. A horticultural variety is a cultivar and is vegetatively\* propagated.

Cultivar ----- is derived from an individual plant by selection or breeding and should be officially named and described, and is vegetatively propagated. *Rh. Augustinii* 'Tower Court', *Rh. Augustinii* 'Exbury'.

Clone ----- a plant which has been propagated vegetatively from a chosen plant. Members of a clone are actually all pieces of the same original plant and are genetically identical. *Rh. 'Marine'* is a clone of *Rh. Augustinii*.

Margaret Mulligan, Seattle, WA.

### A QUESTION AND A CHALLENGE

First of all, have we exhausted the possibilities of selection of superior plants from seedlings of *Rhododendron macrophyllum*, our lovely pink flowered native? There must be infinite chance of darker, frillier flowers, of more compact growth, or of more persistent\* leaves. The rejected plants would still be suitable for naturalizing in both public and private woodland sites or along roadways where they could reach upward or outward to the strength-giving sun. In the hue and cry for more large-flowered hybrid rhododendrons of great brilliance we may have neglected our stalwart hardy native with its unassuming but charming flowers.

And then a challenge concerning the second of our two native northwestern rhododendrons *R. albiflorum*. Interviews with plantspeople fail to find one instance of real success with this shrub in cultivation. One to five years seems to be the life span when collected plants are brought from their 4,000 foot or higher elevation. Seldom has a blossom occurred. Admittedly it is difficult to find a suitable small plant so most attempts have been made with portions hacked from a large thicket. It seems to me that repeated attempts might be made to grow *R. albiflorum* from seed treated in a variety of ways to determine if someone can find the secret of success; or that a series of trials with cuttings might yield valuable information. Presumably one might have a better chance with cuttings if they could be taken in mid-winter but at that time snow has usually buried plants completely. So the propagator is limited but he still might begin early in the season and continue as long as possible, using various lengths of cuttings and different methods of handling. Certainly this five to six foot shrub would be just as attractive to humming birds, just as fragrant, and hang its creamy bells in as great abundance in a garden as in the wild if we could only learn the proper strategy.

Frances Kinne Roberson, Seattle, WA.

### My Favorite Rhododendron Species:

Among enthusiastic rhododendron growers, it is extremely difficult to single out one favorite species, however when asked the response was as follows:

When considering a "favorite" species of the varied *Rhododendron* genus, my thoughts almost immediately come to rest on the *Taliense* Series, a group of mostly small to medium sized shrubs particularly characterized by their beautifully indumented\* foliage. Of this series which includes fifty or so species, probably *R. recurvoides* offers as great a reward as any. It will qualify as a dwarf rhododendron barely reaching a globe shape of two feet high and two feet across in ten years. The plant retains its foliage for at least two years giving it a dense appearance. The leaves are a dark and shiny green, the undersides generously clothed with a thick and spongy honey-colored indumentum. While it is true that most *Taliense* do not bloom until quite mature (15 to 25 years, or more in some cases) and *R. recurvoides* is no exception, the new growth more than makes up for flower absence. The new leaves are held erect displaying the bright golden-lemon indumentum which continues for a month until the petioles\* relax and the plant again shows the dark green surface of its foliage.

*R. recurvoides* is a relatively good-doer so long as excellent drainage is provided and granular fertilizer withheld. The plant appreciates shelter from the wind, but surprisingly will take direct sunlight.

A large specimen of this not too widely distributed species, can be found in the U. of W. Arboretum. More information on *R. recurvoides* can be found in the new book by Peter Cox, "Dwarf Rhododendrons", Mac Millan, and "The Species of Rhododendron", The Rhododendron Society, 1930.

Reuben Hatch, Vancouver, WA.

*Rhododendron yakusimanum* is a semi-dwarf species of the *Ponticum* Series, *Caucasicum* Subseries, a native of the island of Yakushima, Japan. Growing to a height of two to three feet, *R. yakusimanum* has a dense growing habit, with a spread of three or four feet. More than the mere fact that a rhododendron has large, beautiful flowers should be taken into account in choosing the favorite species of this genus of delightful flowering shrubs. Plants have to be lived with throughout the year and this species is one which demonstrates constant beauty. The leaves are rather small and narrow, averaging about three-and-a-half inches by one inch and are conspicuously recurved at the margins. The backs of the leaves are thickly coated with a hairy, felt-like indumentum of a lovely gray or fawn color, depending upon the form selected. The swelling and development of the leaf buds provide a season of beauty comparable to the flowering season. The buds and unfolding leaves are covered with a grayish-white farina\* strikingly handsome, and when the leaves are completely open traces of the farina remain on the upper surfaces of the shiny, dark green leaf. The farina remains on the leaf petiole, giving a handsome appearance to the plant for the rest of the year. And when the plant is in flower, with its campanulate blossoms turning from pink while in bud to pure white when fully open, it is judged by many to be the loveliest of all rhododendrons. To further enhance its value it is used as a parent in hybridizing, producing very fine crosses, although I haven't seen any which exceed the beauty of selected forms of the true species. The Exbury and the F. C. C. forms are considered among the best.

Owen Pearce, Orinda, California

*Rhododendron moupinense*. Favorite Rhododendron? I could not choose one above all others - each month of the first half of the year brings its own particular star. Writing as I do, in February, *R. moupinense*, gloriously welcoming the weak winter sunshine, is the current object of my affections. The two inch wide, glistening white, open corollas, faintly dotted with pink in one form, or splashed with crimson in another, jostle with each other in a profusion of bloom over the deep green, shining, elliptic leaves. This small species from Western China is easily grown and perfectly hardy in all but its exquisite flowers which need a little protection on frosty nights.

Barry N. Starling, Essex England

Trying to choose a favorite rhododendron species is a most difficult task indeed. There are so many species which I like and which have a great attachment for me. The "big leaf" species which have such large leaves and such enormous trusses, or the very beautiful plants which bloom early in the year such as the reds of *R. strigillosum* and *R. fulgens*, or perhaps it might be *R. ungermii*, or *R. serrotinum* because of their late bloom when all else is finished.

However, I think probably I enjoy the plants which are in the *Campylogynum* Series and specifically the various forms of *R. campylogynum* itself. *R. cremastum*,<sup>†</sup> the only plant in the series with a green leaf on the underside, and *R. celsum*<sup>†</sup> being the two taller growing forms naturally have larger flowers in keeping with their height.

The real charmer though is *R. campylogynum* var. *myrtilloides* which I probably would have to choose as one of my favorites. It has small obovate leaves about one half inch long. The pink to plum colored flowers seem to nod on long flower stalks. Each flower is quite small, about one half inch long and usually appears in pairs all over the plant. The plant has a very neat compact but spreading habit, seldom growing over eight to ten inches high. To see the plant to its best advantage it should be planted up in a rock-garden above a pathway on a slope or anywhere that it can be looked up into when passing by. This is one species which I will always consider as a treasure in our garden.

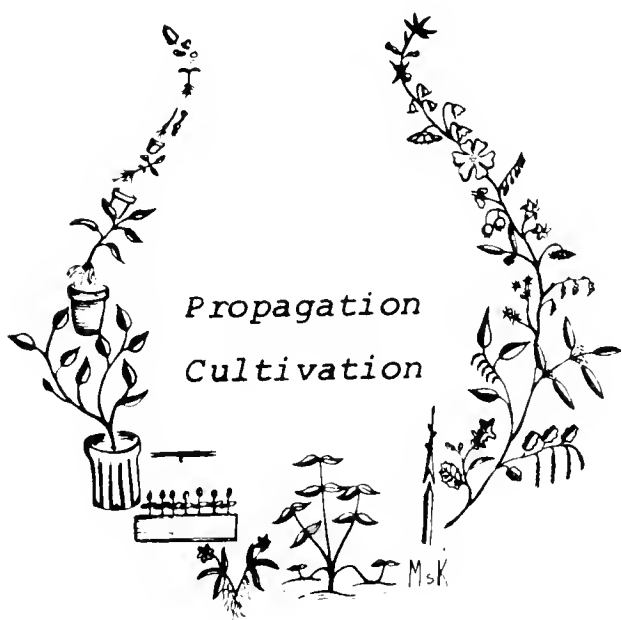
Marge Badger, Bothell, WA.

<sup>†</sup> considered as varieties of *R. campylogynum* by many authors.

Rhododendron *leucaspis*, if I must choose from the hundreds of species of a beautiful genus, would be my favorite. In early spring the lovely pearl-like open faces look bravely toward the sky, usually atop a rosette of five small dark green, slightly hairy leaves. Sometimes there are twins--or a third blossom. Ten dark brown stamens add much charm and distinction. It asks for a little shade and shelter, but loses something of its character in the complete shade of a woodland.

A spreading dwarf 1 - 1½ feet high. February - March. *Boothii* series. From Tibet.

Eileen Sutton, Seattle WA.



#### PROPAGATION:

One of the greatest joys of our gardening hobby is learning how to propagate our treasured plant material thus enabling us to not only expand our own landscaping plans but to share our pleasure with our gardening friends. The two methods of propagation described as follows are especially good for the amateur because they do not require a greenhouse, cold frame or expensive special equipment.

Seed: SOW THEM ON SPHAGNUM

One of the easiest and most successful methods of sowing rhododendron seed makes use of ground sphagnum moss\* for the growth medium. We at the Arboretum did some experimental work several years ago and found the following a simple and nearly foolproof way to germinate these tiny seeds.

We use clear plastic boxes about 2 inches in cross section and 6 or 8 inches long with a tight-fitting lid. Glass casseroles or any other containers with transparent sides and clear close-fitting tops will do as well. The container should be washed thoroughly then a layer of moist sphagnum at least an inch thick is pressed lightly in the bottom. The dry sphagnum (not peat moss\*) should be put through a ¼ inch sieve to break it into small pieces. It is then soaked in water and the excess water squeezed out by hand. The sphagnum will be damp but not really wet if it is squeezed as hard as possible.

The seeds are sprinkled lightly over the surface ... don't sow them too thickly. A very light watering with the finest mist will help snug the seeds into the sphagnum. Cover the container and set away from direct sunlight. A mantle above a fireplace is good or somewhere near a furnace. Depending on how fresh the seed is, germination can be expected from within a few days to several weeks. The container can then be moved to a bright light, by a north window is ideal, but keep out of direct sun. When the seedlings are large enough to handle they can be placed in flats or pots to grow in. It is good practice to gradually remove the cover from the container a week or so before transplanting in order to harden off the seedlings.

We have found that if the containers are tightly sealed no water need be added and the little plants will survive for at least two years without removing the lid. Sphagnum is a nearly sterile medium and our experience has shown that little or no disease problems develop. Our one experience with mold in the containers occurred when we planted very old seed and even then the seedlings were not severely injured.

Joseph A. Witt, University of Wash. Arboretum

### Cuttings:

As a housewife and mother I find that the convenient time to take cuttings seldom coincides with the "right" time. Cuttings are taken when the neighbors dogs or children have broken out a branch of a favorite plant or when other pressing home and garden chores don't interfere. If you are offered a cutting regardless of the time of year, accept it, try it and you may be pleasantly surprised.

The size of the cutting depends of course upon whether the rhododendron is a large or dwarf species... large, approximately 4", small, 1 - 2". Unflowered branches are the best, however not always possible; pinch out flower cluster or bud, remove leaves along the cutting, leaving a few at the top. They will root without the use of a hormone but it seems to take longer for them to strike and the root systems are less vigorous. I have the greatest success with the liquid "Jiffy Grow No. 2" used full strength. Dip the portion to be below the soil directly in the bottle, count to ten, remove and plant firmly to a depth of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the cutting. Try tip end, soft wood, heel cuttings, hardwood and that which snaps when broken. Experiment ... the delight is in the discovery of what works best for you.

Cuttings are placed in the open ground in a shaded, protected spot that never is allowed to dry out. The natural garden soil is a gritty, woody consistency in most places, providing excellent drainage. Rotted wood in the soil takes the place of peat moss, is less inclined to dry out and rhododendrons and other *ericaceous* plants thrive on it. Peat and/or coarse sand are sometimes worked into the soil if it seems necessary. Label and date new acquisitions. If you only require a limited number of propagations of your own rhododendron, cuttings can be placed in the shade of the parent plant, thus eliminating the necessity of labeling.

My curiosity gets the best of me, so I often pull gently on the cuttings to see if they have rooted, if not they can be replanted. If they do not come away easily the rooting process has begun. With me, transplanting takes place when time permits. Continue to water regularly when you move a well rooted cutting, and shade temporarily if hot weather persists. Thus, a new rhododendron plant begins its life in your garden.

Sallie D. Allen, Seattle, WA.

### CULTIVATION: Do Rhododendrons Like Ground Covers?

Clue: Have you ever seen a rhododendron in its native habitat growing out of otherwise barren soil?

Rhododendrons have a fine network of surface roots. Ground covers prevent compaction of the soil and keep the soil loose and friable thus enabling the rhododendron to readily absorb both air and water. The transpiration of the ground cover's foliage helps keep the roots cool in summer. Ground covers also provide frost insulation as well as heat protection, retain moisture and add a natural processing of the soil.

Ground covers of course should be proportionate in size. A small growing rhododendron could be smothered by salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) but larger growing species and particularly the less hardy ones do very well with salal protection. The tender *Maddenii* series enjoy being surrounded by salal which gives protection from freezing winds and burn, as well as insulation from either heat or cold.

The Old Wives Tale has it that ground covers will steal the soil nutrients from the rhododendrons. And contrarily, it is also said that a degree of competition builds stronger, healthier plant specimens. What else can we do but judge from our own experiences, then share and compare our experiences with others before drawing any conclusions.

Betty Miller, Seattle, WA.

CHARGE!! The weevil Legions of the Northwest are marching towards your rhododendrons again. Woe is you! Soon your favorite 'Cynthia', 'Elizabeth' or 'Purple Splendour' will resemble your aunt's best lace tablecloth. The Strawberry Root Weevil Infantry will serrate the edges of the leaves in small uniform notches. Then the Woods Weevil Shock Troops will move in and voraciously chew out entire sections of the leaves clear to the midrib. The heaviest attacks will occur at night while you are asleep. All the while the adults are busy above chewing your plants to shreds, the Fifth Column, the Weevil Grubs, are devouring the roots and girdling the plant by chewing the bark from around the stem just below the ground level.

This year counter attack! Fight back! There are defenses. Use them. Know your foe and retaliate.

The imported ones, the three *Brachyrhinus* species (Strawberry and Vine) weevils pass the winter usually as legless grubs in the root ball areas of your plants. Occasionally, during mild winters, adults will over-winter in the soil. A patented apple pomace bait containing sodium fluosilicate (Go-West) spread under your plants will kill adults. Chlor-dane applied as a soil drench under your plants, will kill grubs. Whenever you use any chemical, always be sure to read the label thoroughly and carefully follow the directions for use.

Our native weevil, *Nemocestes incomptus* (Woods Weevil) has been content to eke out a living, munching on salal and other native plants for tens of thousands of years. But when you offer him a delicious salad plate such as your new choice rhododendrons, azaleas and primulas he eats them with glee. Eggs, larvae, and adults are often found over-wintering in the soils and mulches beneath shredded plants. Peculiarly, emergence of the adults is continuous throughout the year during periods of mild weather. Adults can be reasonably controlled with the same "Go-West" bait described above and by leaf and soil drenchings of Diazanone. No control is presently known for the grubs. Previously, because of their long residual life both Aldrin and DDT were used to control the adults. But as you know the use of DDT and Aldrin by homeowners is prohibited in the State of Washington by law.

*Scioptes obscurus* (Obscure Weevil) a native buddy of the Woods Weevil, apparently as little is known, has somewhat the same habits and controls as the Woods Weevil.

One method exists when all other controls fail. Acquire 2 pieces of maple wood about 2" x 4" x 1" thick. Then, well dressed in your long underwear and warmest clothes, take a flashlight, go out into the night, and hand pick off the small adult weevils. Place them, one by one on the first piece of wood and quickly splat them with the other block.

Root weevils are a problem if you have them, but they can be reasonably well controlled if you try.

Bob Badger, Bothell, WA.

\*Glossary of some Botanic Terms used:

farina ----- powdery coating on stems, leaves or sometimes flowers.

indumentum -- a hairy covering, particularly of the undersides of leaves.

peat moss --- is decayed sphagnum and other vegetative material found in deposits in peat bogs. The sphagnum used in raising seed is dried, ground, living sphagnum moss.

persistent -- remaining till the part which bears it is wholly matured, as the leaves of evergreens.

petiole ----- leaf stalk

sphagnum ----- see peat moss above

vegetatively- propagated by cuttings (not seed)

#### USEFUL RHODODENDRON BOOKS

Rhododendron Handbook - Part I - "Rhododendron Species in general cultivation," Part II - "Hybrids," Royal Horticultural Society, Vincent Square, London S. W. 1, England.

Rhododendron Quarterly Bulletin, American Rhododendron Society.

"Dwarf Rhododendrons", by Peter Cox, Mac Millan (just published).

"Rhododendrons of the World", by David Leach.

"Rhododendrons and Azaleas", by Clement Gray Bowers.

#### For Further Information:

American Rhododendron Society  
2232 N.E. 78th  
Portland, OR 97213

NOHS Rhododendron Study Group

Advisor: Marge Baird - 454-3862

Our Newsletter Editor, Anne Williams, was unable to compile the March-April issue because of a serious illness which has confined her to the hospital. We miss you Anne and wish you a speedy recovery. With deadlines looming there was no time or opportunity to delegate responsibility. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my many friends who responded immediately to my letters and telephone calls for "HELP" by contributing the botanical and horticultural information included herein.

Frances Kinne Roberson, Seattle, WA, well-known lecturer and writer on Northwest natives, rock plants and ground covers.

Reuben Hatch, Fruit Valley Nursery, 2212 N.W. 69th Street, Vancouver, WA, specializing in rare species and hybrid rhododendrons.

Owen Pearce, Orinda, CA, Editor of the California Horticultural Society Journal. Rhododendrons are his special gardening interest.

Barry N. Starling, Nurseryman, Epping Upland, Essex, England, very fine rhododendron plantsman, whose garden contains many rare members of the *Ericaceae* Family.

Marge and Bob Badger, WCN, Garden Valley Nursery, 12960 N.E. 181st St., Bothell, WA, full line nursery specializing in rare and unusual species and hybrid rhododendrons.

Betty Miller, Seattle, WA, immediate past President of the Northwest Ornamental Horticultural Society, nationally recognized for her outstanding contributions in the field of Ornamental Horticulture.

Margaret Mulligan, Our Honorary Lifetime member of the Northwest Ornamental Horticultural Society. My thanks to Margaret for the botanical definitions.

Eileen Sutton, Seattle, WA, the Editor's Editor of the American Rock Garden Society Bulletin.

Joseph A. Witt, Curator of Plant Collections, University of Washington Arboreta. My special thanks to Joe for so patiently answering my many, many questions and proofreading the Newsletter.

Sallie D. Allen, President  
Northwest Ornamental Horticultural Society



*Rhododendron mucronulatum*

Calendar of Events - March-April

March 27th NOHS Lecture and Horticultural display, 10 AM - Noon, Eames Theatre, Pacific Science Center. Lecture, "Species Rhododendron in an Amateur's Garden", speakers Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence J. Pierce.

April 6th & 7th - The 11th Annual Early Season Rhododendron Competition, Flag Plaza Pavilion. April 6th - Time 2-6 PM, April 7th - 10 AM - 5 PM. Open to the public, no admission charge.

April 18th - Annual Work and Fun Day sponsored by the Arboretum Foundation, 9:30 AM - 3:00 PM. Meet at the Arboretum office to sign in. Bring your own gardening tools and carton for weeds. Chairman of the event, Shirley Veblen (454-2213) said, "Bring your friends and your lunch; coffee will be served. There will be a funny hat parade at noon. This is an opportunity to give your gift of time to the Arboretum."

April 23rd & 24th - 50th Annual Orthopedic Plant Sale, University Village. April 23rd - Time 9:30 AM - 5 PM, April 24th - 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM.

For further information, please call Mrs. John Hartman 525-4562.

\* \* \* \* \*

We started at the "beginning" Feb. 27th for the first lecture of our series. Seeds, yes, and Dr. B. J. D. Meeuse of the U. of W. Botany Dept. was most enlightening and entertaining on the subject "Pollination and Seed Dispersal". His charts, photographs, exhibits were very colorful and added much to his remarks. A horticultural display prepared by Dorothy Brauss and Altha Miller with index cards of identification provided a sort of "lab display", and also thrilled us to find so much in bloom from our gardens in late February. Thank you to Dorothy and Altha and Harold Miller for all their help in setting up the table exhibit.

Ellen Pennell, Program Chairman

Do you have a hidden talent? Let us know how you would like to help.

Publicity, Plant Sale, Study Groups, Newsletter. We enjoy working together. Send in your special gardening experiences for future Newsletters; share your knowledge and horticultural enthusiasms. The subject of the May-June issue will be Ferns, July-August - Propagation, September-October - New and interesting plant material, November-December - Winter Flower and Foliage color.

Competition \*\*\*\* Prizes \*\*\*\* Competition \*\*\*\* Prizes \*\*\*\* Competition \*\*\*\* Pri

We need our own identifying emblem for Northwest Ornamental Horticultural Society News letter, stationery, etc. What plant do you think should be selected as typical of the northwest and us? Six prizes in all will be awarded to the three best ideas and the three best drawings.



Send your ideas and/or drawings (as many as you wish) with your name and address on the back of each to Sallie D. Allen, 18540 - 26th Avenue N.E., Seattle, WA 98155. Your Board of Directors will be the judges and the prizes of plants will be awarded at the members only "Bring and Buy" Plant Sale on July 17th.

\* \* \* \* \*

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. Wallace Coburn (Nancy), 3235 Hunts Point Road, Bellevue, WA 98004 454-3538

Bruce Johnson, 10311 - 20th N.E., Seattle, WA 98125 525-7404

Mrs. Stephen Richardson, 3933 N.E. Belvoir Place, Seattle, WA 98105 522-6458

Mr. Ed Hume, 12517 Lakeholme Rd S.W., Tacoma, WA 98498

Please note a phone correction on your membership list for Mrs. Jack Shunk. It should be 222-7384. All membership changes, corrections or additions please send to Mrs. Stephen Herron, 442 Upland Road, Bellevue, WA 98004.

NORTHWEST ORNAMENTAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY  
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