The Victoria Rhododendron Society
Newsletter

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Fortieth Year of Publication
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June
BBQ Picnic
To Be Determined

In This Issue

Have you checked out VicRS2020 Isolation Inspiration yet? You can add and view pictures.

Upcoming Events

2020	Event	Details
June 22	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	*Stay Tuned*
June 28 ? *Noon*	*Sunday VRS Summer BBQ Picnic* *Please note this date may be postponed*	*Stay Tuned*
Summer Break		
Sept 7	General Meeting	*Stay Tuned*
Sept 21	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	*Stay Tuned*
Sept 25-27	*ARS Regional Fall Conference* *Gettysburg, Pennsylvania*	*Stay Tuned*
Oct 5	General Meeting	*Stay Tuned*
Oct 19	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	*Stay Tuned*
Nov 2	General Meeting	*Stay Tuned*
Nov 16	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	*Stay Tuned*

Notes from the President

by Brenda Macdonald

Since we are all staying at home looking for things to amuse us I thought a little light reading on the derivation of some of the botanical descriptors which are embedded in official names (often called the Latin names, although Greek turns up with alarming regularity) of the plants we grow would be in order. Ignoring those plants names after people (*R. fortunei*, *R. genesterianum*, *R. williamsianum*) one can often get an idea of the shape, colour, habit, or usual location of a plant from its second (or species) name. Mr. Linnaeus developed a simple yet brilliant classification system wherein every living thing was to be given its own unique binomial (Genus and species) name. The system has been refined, expanded and further codified over the years, but the basic structure remains the same: the Genus is the group to which an organism belongs, and the species is the name of that particular one. It is often the species name (the "specific epithet") which gives us the most information about a plant.

Here are some of the most common descriptors, with an explanation, as well as a commonly used English analog:

1. The look of the thing:

arboreum, arborescens `	tree like	arboretum, arborist
compactum	compact	compact
complexum	interwoven	complicated, complex
decorum	ornamental	decorative, decorated
impeditum	tangled	impediment, impede
intricatum	largest	maximum
pendulum	hanging	pendulous, pendulum
prostratum	low growing	prostrate
rigidum	stiff	rigid

2. How/where it grows:

alpicola	dwells in high mountains	alpine
dendricola	dwells in trees	dendrology
ripense	on river banks	riparian :
drumonium	of woods	
dumicola	dwells in thickets	
faucium	of gorges	
hylaeum	of forests	
oresbium	living on mountains	
rupicola	dwells among rocks	
scopulorum	of crags	

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3. What the leaves look like (often in conjunction with ending "phyllum" or "folium", both meaning "leaves" (hence phyllo pastry – having many layers or leaves):

barbatum/semibarbatum	bearded/half-bearded	barber
cardiobasis	with heart-shaped base	cardiac, cardiology
detonsum	shorn	tonsure
erosum	eaten away	erosion, eroded
giganteum	huge	gigantic
hirsutum	hairy	hirsute
lanatum, *lanigerum*	wooly	lanolin
myrtifolium	like Myrtus - the myrtle plant	
oleifolium	like Olea - the olive plant	
pentaphyllum	having five leaves	pentagon
scabrum, *scabrifolium*	rough	scabrous, scabies
scintillans	sparkling	scintillating
serrulatum	with small teeth	serrated
thymifolium	like Thymus - the thyme plant	
viscidifolium	sticky	viscosity

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But here is an example of the kind of trouble one gets into when delving into the derivations of the botanical name of a favourite rhododendron.

'Annapurna' is a named variety from a group of smaller-leaved seedlings which were promising because of their compact cushion shape and tendency to blossom at a relatively early age. The

"limp tissue paper" texture of the small narrowly flaring blossoms with their short pedicels give the inflorescence an oddly congested look. The leaves are so aromatic they are used as incense in their native Tibet habitat.

R. anthopogon ssp. *hypenanthum* appears to be a victim of a taxonomic sinking, since at one time there was an *R. hypenanthum* as well as an *R. anthopogon*. The official difference between the two was apparently the presence or absence of persistent leaf bud scales (yes for *hypenanthum* and no for *anthopogon*), although originally they appear to have been divided more along colour lines: *anthopogon* tending toward the pink, red, and rose scheme, and *hypenanthum* tending to be of yellow and cream hues.

Both these species share the trait of having a ring of hairs in the throat of the flower tube, and one can only assume that this was such a salient feature that the botanists deemed it necessary to immortalize that fact in the naming of the species.

antho, anthum (Gk) flower
pogon (Gk) beard
hypen (Gk) moustache

So now, as a result of this sunk taxon, we have a fairly small and delicate flower with the overwhelming name of Rhododendron Flower-beard Moustache-flower 'Annapurna'. While Annapurna may denote an ethereal white goddess, such an addendum can do little to overcome the almost overwhelmingly shaggy male aura already in place.

The other interesting thing about this flower is the official description of its shape: hypocrateriform. (Initially I was led slightly astray by references in both the Coxs' *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species* and a handy little reference book by Melva Phillipson entitled *Botanical Features Used in the Identification of Rhododendron Species* to a "hypercratiform" flower shape, but I am now fairly confident that these two references were simple errors.)

hypo (Gk) beneath, under
crater (L) bowl
form (L) shape

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This long word (and its even longer synonym hypocraterimorphous) is simply the way scientists have - not unlike the Germans - of jamming all the meaning of a longer phrase, such as my "narrowly flaring", into a single word.

I have seen expanded explanations describing "goblet-shaped" or "trumpet-shaped", but they all describe the same basic shape: a blunderbuss, or a grain of rice you have cooked too long, with a long narrow tube topped by abruptly flaring lobes, more often flattened than not.

A term used more frequently – but apparently not in conjunction with rhododendrons – is salverform. The Phlox flower is a typical salverform flower with its wide, flat, flare atop a narrow corolla tube.

I knew that a salver was the term for the small round silver tray on which household staff would present visitors' calling cards to the lady of the house, but what I did not know was that the original derivation of salver is from the Latin "salvare", to save, or "salvus", safe.

This verb/adjective root was gradually transformed from describing food that had already been tasted (made safe) for incumbent royals (somewhat nervous about the easy access other would-be royals had to various poisons), to the name for the tray which carried the food, and thence to any tray used in the service of the upper class, including those for calling cards.

Phlox
Courtesy of Kitty Stanley

From poisoned-food testing to a flat-topped flower form, surely metonymy at its finest.

And thus endeth the lesson on botanical names, or, how to amuse oneself during enforced social distancing.

Brenda Macdonald

JOE'S JOTTINGS,

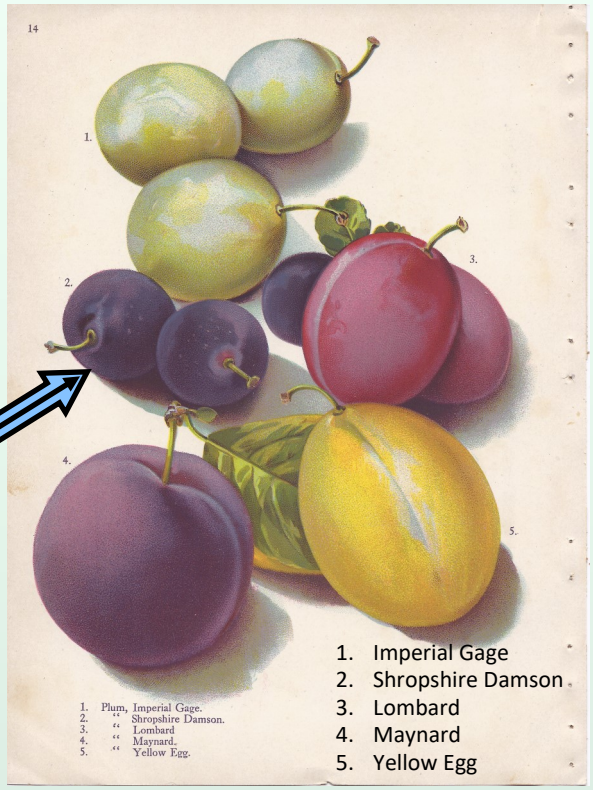
Miscellaneous thoughts from a life with plants

by Joe Harvey

#8: Who Killed the Damson?

Joe Harvey

Food tastes change and formerly common foods, e.g. kippers, kidneys, black pudding, rabbit, venison, are no longer readily available. I call these orphan foods; they still exist but only on the fringes of society, unwanted, unloved. For this series, I shall confine myself to tree fruits.



What is a Damson?

Damson – the plum of Damascus – is a small black plum with a name that seems to be a case of name transfer, somewhat like 'robin', a large thrush in North America and a tiny member of the flycatcher group in Europe.

It seems likely that damsons originated in the hedgerows of Medieval England by chance crosses between the sloe, the myrobalan and other introduced plums. Their heyday was during the Victorian era when many of the current cultivars originated, some by deliberate crosses, including 'Merryweather', a slightly larger and sweeter fruit.

The fruit of damsons is about an inch long with a deep purple skin a yellow flesh and a small, hard, annoying clingstone. The skin is covered in a white wax bloom, sometimes mistaken by the paranoid for pesticide residue. In fact, it is a waterproofing to keep fungal spores from germinating.

Are Damsons Edible?

Certainly not, this a cooking fruit par excellence. The skin is highly astringent, the flesh strongly acidic. In this, it has a more successful parallel in the Seville or bitter orange which also has astringent skin and acid pulp. It is used to produce 'English Marmalade' which still has a following, and the fresh fruit still appears in supermarkets in January and February for home cooks. Most marmalade sold is what I call 'American Marmalade', a sucraceous simulacrum manufactured from sweet oranges and chemicals.

Damson fruit
Courtesy of Wikipedia

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Is there anything good about Damsons?

Yes, this is a fruit that makes 'Food that Really Schmecks', which is the title of Edna Staebler's 1968 cookbook (she died not long ago at 101). 'Schmeck' is a Yiddish word that she got from her time in an Ontario Mennonite community and means really, really, really good. There is no English equivalent.

Eating a damson pie hits three of the five taste sensations: bitter, acid and sugar. You have to add the sugar and therein lies a tale.

Damson Pie
Courtesy of Kelli W, Cooks.com

Home made Sloe Gin
Courtesy of www.womanandhome.com

Who killed the Damson?

As a kid brought up in England I blame Mr. (later Lord) Woolton. He was an industrialist coopted into the war cabinet and given the post of Ministry of Food. He brought in rations books and the sugar ration was 6oz per person per week. That is not sufficient to sweeten one damson pie let alone all the other needs. My childhood was ruined! - and I am probably healthier for it.

Of course, many other people were responsible, especially Hitler with the Battle of the Atlantic aiming to starve out the British. But there were extensive damson orchards in North America tended by immigrants; there sugar had a slightly different course, the supply from the Philippines was cut by the Japanese War, and the biggest producer of cane sugar in the world, Cuba, has had an on and off relationship with the USA, first with tariffs on imports to appease the beet sugar producers, then the little disagreement with Mr. Castro where imports were completely cut off.

Sugar shortage, to abundance, to superabundance

A teensy bit of obscure research in isolating the enzyme glucose isomerase in 1965 led to the ability to convert corn starch into high fructose corn syrup. Corn growing in the USA is heavily supported by the annual Farm Bill. At last, a sweetener was available that was really cheap. For the first time, the sugar cost less than the fruit in pies. More to the point we have had several generations since 1945 who have been brought up on high sugar foods. The appetite for challenging tastes has vanished

Can you grow your own Damsons?

Of course I bought a tree in the 1990s; it took a few years to take off as the soil was too sandy. They are easy to grow and make a small tree which is quite ornamental. I would deny the truth of the old ditty: He who plants plums, Plants for his sons. He who plants damsons, Plants for his grandsons. The trees will not take over your yard and fit in with many garden schemes; try one with your Rhododendrons or hardy plants. It will fit in nicely and your meals will schmeck.

An Update on the Norman Todd Propagation Centre at HCP

by Ian Duncan

As you all know, when Covic-19 hit us, most public venues shut down. On April 20th, HCP was closed to the public and all volunteer gardeners. Being very concerned about the approximately 300 Barlup cuttings we had potted up to 1-gallon size in the fall, and the warm weather we were experiencing, Calvin Parsons and I asked for and received special dispensation to enter the grounds and water our plants as required. Thankfully the weather turned cooler and we only had to water once before HCP came up with a plan to allow a limited number of volunteers back into the gardens as of March 30th. VicRhodo applied for and was granted three spots. These will be used by myself and one other in the Norm Todd Compound on Monday morning, Calvin Parsons and one other in the rhodo garden on Tuesday morning, Bill McMillan and one other in the rhodo garden on Wednesday mornings.

Here is our progress in the Norman Todd Propagating Centre

On April 06th Mike Minkler joined me and we worked on preparing to hook our water line to the HCP system. This entailed removing a section of old HCP wood and wire gates to gain access to where the HCP water line was buried. On April 13th we erected some new metal and chain link gates that HCP provided. On April 20th we completed the gates and hooked up the water lines. We could now water our plants manually by hose from our own faucet, rather than from a faucet over a hundred feet away. On April 27th, Robert Burke volunteered volunteered his masonry skills and built the cinderblock pedestals for a large concrete wash sink, to be used for cleaning pots.


Mike Minkler at new gates

The sink has a bit of VicRhodo history attached to it. Tom and Nancy Thomson enticed Anne and me into joining VicRhodo in 1990. After Tom passed away Nancy moved from their home in North Saanich to a house in Oak Bay. When I helped her with a renovation project she gave me an old double concrete laundry tub from her basement. I had always meant to hook it up at our house as an outdoor pot washing station, but life got in the way, and it never happened, for about 20 years. So now Nancy's sink is the club's wash sink.


Unloading a 200 pound sink

On May 4th Nancy's sink was placed on the pedestal built by Robert. Ian made all the final connections at the water system control board. On May 11th Robert and I installed the remaining drip irrigation lines for the

1-gallon pots and the pot sprayers for the larger pots. All the lines that were over pots with plants were

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fastened in place so each drip head was directly over a plant. We tested all the lines for flow. Exuberation! We no longer had to drag a hose around to water all 300 plants by hand. We just turn on a valve and all plants arewatered at once. On May 19th Calvin and I spent 4 1/2 hours hooking up the automatic controller

Drip line on 1 gallon pot

Pot sprayers on larger pots

system. There is no electricity to our compound, so we needed to go solar. Lloyd Gilmore donated two solar electric panels and a control panel. Ken Webb and I welded up a steel frame to hold the panels at the correct sun angle for Victoria. The water system controller requires AC and solar makes DC, so we installed two batteries to store power and an inverter to convert the DC to AC. The system is controlled remotely by internet and Wi-Fi so that we do not always have to be onsite. It also sends alerts if there is a problem with the watering, so we don't go for a week before discovering dry or conversely, drowning, plants. And it tracks the amount of water used, as we pay HCP for our water, at the preferred farm rate.

Calvin programming irrigation controller

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We are now ready to start adding more plants to the compound.

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