



# The Victoria Rhododendron Society *Newsletter*

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May 2020  
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Fortieth Year of Publication  
<http://victoriarhodo.ca>

## May General Meeting **CANCELLED**

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While staying healthy, also stay in the know now by checking out VicRS2020 Isolation Inspiration for some wonderful club pictures.

# Upcoming Events

2020	Event	Details
Apr 29- May 3	<a href="#"><u>ARS Annual Convention - 75th Anniversary</u></a>	<b>CANCELLED</b>
May 4	General Meeting Truss Show	<b>CANCELLED</b>
May 9	PLANT SALE at the Marquardts'	<b>CANCELLED</b>
May 18	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	<b>CANCELLED</b>
June 22	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	<i>Stay Tuned</i>
June 28 ? Noon	<i>Sunday VRS Summer BBQ Picnic Please note this date may be postponed</i>	<i>Stay Tuned</i>
<b>Summer Break</b>		
Sept 7	General Meeting	<i>Stay Tuned</i>
Sept 21	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	<i>Stay Tuned</i>
Sept 25-27	<i>ARS Regional Fall Conference Gettysburg, Pennsylvania</i>	<i>Stay Tuned</i>

## FOR THE CAT WHO HAS EVERYTHING

by Norman Todd

*The following article was first published in the VicRS newsletter of December 1993. It is a lesson in history, rhodo-botany, Latin, and feline psychology. And whimsy above all.*

Did you notice the word 'who' in the title? If you do not think of cats as persons, this article will not interest you.

It will interest you if you are in that most frustrating of situations when you just can't think of the ultimate present for that most significant cat in your life – to be given on that very, very special cat day. I have the answer and it may surprise you. It was *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes*.

Don't turn off right now because you think *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes* will be too difficult a name for your cat to appreciate – just hang in and read a bit more.

You see, cats don't know many things by their names. And it is pretty well useless trying to get a cat to understand abstract things, e.g., things like 'the Natural Law Party' or 'relativity'.

Cats recognize most things by smell.

That is how they recognize pretty well all tangible things; smart cats can even sense a few abstract things using this sense.

Anyway, *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes* sends cats into paroxysms of ecstasy. We all know that paroxysms do not always occur as pleasant events but when you see that closed-eyed Cheshire look on your cat's face and feel the vibes from its tremulous twitching little nose, you will know this paroxysm is a good one.

You could also object to using a fairly abstract word like 'paroxysm' for your cat's intemperately orgasmic raptures, but even if your cat does not know that precise word, you can be sure it has a complete fix on the idea.

*Rhododendron roxieanum* var. *oreonastes* is a classic rhododendron fit for the garden of the most fastidious connoisseur.

It kind of looks like a land-based green sea urchin. (That is *Strongylocentrotus droebachiensis*, just in case your cat is of the more than normally curious type, still alive and might like to know that).

*Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes* belongs to the Taliense affiliations and, at least from a nurseryperson's point of view, possesses all of the bad qualities of that tribe, i.e., it is almost impossible to propagate from cuttings, is not easy to graft and, as it takes eons to bloom, it is hard to get seed and when you do, it might not be viable. When it does bloom, however, it is a real joy to behold and if you find yourself in the position of



R. roxieanum var. oreonastes TJ, GS237-9653-he

Photo: H. Eiberg

Rhododendronforeninger—Danish chapter of ARS  
[www.rhododendron.dk](http://www.rhododendron.dk)

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beholder, you could be excused for having one of these paroxysms all to yourself.

Being such a coveted plant, it makes sense for those who do own this rare and expensive rhododendron to be discreet and selective in letting the fact of your ownership be widely known because most of the specimens of *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes* in captivity are of a very portable size and visitors could have a paroxysm of envy and greed which could even end up in thievery.

You might think, then, that it would be logical, if you value your status as a collector of rare plants more than the love of your cat, not to tell your cat you have one in your garden.



*R. roxieanum* var. *oreonastes*

Photo: H. Eiberg

Rhododendronforeninger—Danish chapter of ARS  
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However, I would advise against not telling your cat because it is a sure bet that your cat will sense the precise minute *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes* crosses your lot line. And anyway, you, having read this far, must be darn nearly desperate to let your cat experience one of those incontinent paroxysms.

If you know your Latin (I don't, so I'm just waiting for someone to tell me this paragraph is all nonsense) you will quickly intuit that the name itself – *oreonastes* – gives away about this interesting reactionary feline phenomenon.

The *roxieanum* part of the moniker is something of a letdown because it's one of these commemorative names, eternally memorializing a **Mrs. Roxie Hanna** of Tali-fu, China, who was a friend of the plant's discoverer, or at least describer, **George Forrest**.

Too bad we don't know more about Mrs. Roxie Hanna; perhaps - who knows – she may have had a weakness for aromatically induced paroxysms.

It's the *oreonastes* bit that is the mother lode. The 'oreo' portion really means 'mountain' in Latin, but cats are not too well versed in dead languages and, get this, they recognize the modern meaning of 'oreo' i.e., 'cookie'!

Ah ha! So then we move on to the '*nastes*' bit. You may not believe this, but this is the exception that proves the rule; cats have almost instant recognition of what '*nastes*' means in Latin. They do not make the correspondence to the modern English meaning of '*nastes*' i.e., 'unpleasant', but go right to the Latin word '*nasitortium*' which means 'distortion of the nose'. You look at your cat in its oreonastical paroxysm and you will see what '*nasitortium*' means. The Romans knew what it meant and so does your cat. Nasturtiums evidently gave Romans nasal paroxysms and that's why they called them nasturtiums.

Romans almost certainly never said or smelled *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes*. It's almost impossible to be absolutely sure what kind of paroxysms they would have had they done so. Most likely, they would have given it a very wide berth after Pompey's 67 B.C., army's unfortunate run-in, which quickly developed into a run-out, with the poisonous honey from the Pontic azalea (*Rhododendron luteum*). In that instance, Pompey's army surely had a debilitating and paralyzing collective paroxysm that cost most of the soldiers in the army their lives at the hand of Mithridates, King of Pontus.

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Perhaps this does bring up a cautionary point. Watch out that there are no predators around when your cat is having its paroxysm because they are sitting ducks (??) in that state and to compound it, you yourself might end up having a paroxysm of grief when looking at the moribund remains of your pet.

At this point, I'm sure you want to know how I came by all this dope on God's ultimate gift to mousers. Well, the first *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes* I had I kept in a pot.

At that time, I did not know how addictive it was to cats, but anyway it must not have been cat-accessible.

Probably I kept it in the greenhouse, and it got to be about fourteen or fifteen inches tall and in age produced a flower bud. I must say my mind ran to thinking about installing special security devices to protect from human predation but I was guilelessly unaware that there were four – count them – “Tristan”, ‘Smudge’, ‘Timmy’ and ‘Kate’ – incipient paroxysmatic pussies right in my very own home.

I wondered why all of those exquisite narrow, lanceolate, indumented botanical marvels of advanced photosynthetic evolution were lying around the base of the plant. Then the flower bud disappeared and I had to look more closely.

We all know what rhododendron hairs are but the hairs I found were 2.1 to 4.6 cm. long, glandular, glabrous, white, sometimes black and white, orange flushed brown or black. These weren't rhododendron hairs. They were cats' hairs.

Next piece of evidence. At last year's club picnic I won the door prize – a *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes*. It was a beautiful plant in a four-gallon pot. It had been expertly grown by **Clint Smith**. I went home thinking that the '93 picnic was the best we had ever had.

It sat on the deck where it could be admired from the kitchen window – by people.

But it was admired much more closely by the purring pussy cats that lodge (dare I admit to thinking 'temporarily') at 5631 Batu Road. They had an orgy of paroxysms and one of the main branches was amputated – covered with cat hairs.

Some of you may see this as presenting a dilemma. Which or who comes first cats or rhododendrons? I suspect most of you will plunk for the former and you will want to ingratiate yourself to your fat feline friend – by getting him, her or it that transcendently perfect gift, *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes*.

Don't be tempted by the claims of shysters touting catnip. This is like comparing slug's eggs to sturgeon on caviar.

Go for the best, but be prepared for difficulties because *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes* is not easy to find. You will have to be committed and resolute in being your cats' benefactor responsible for providing the greatest hallucinogenic rapturous paroxysms by acquiring – preferably by theft – *Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonastes*.

Cats truly pass this way but once. Dismiss that view that a cat's life is a vale of tears; make it a Garden of Eden. You have the answer.

For more information on paroxysms caused by ingesting rhododendrons or rhododendron products, see **David Leach's** article “The Two Thousand Year Curse of the Rhododendron” in *Rhododendron Information*, A.R.S. 1967.

Also “Puzzles in Rhododendron Poison” by the author in ‘*Rhododendrons on a western Shore*’ Ed., **A. McCarter**, VRS 1989.



## THE STRANGE HISTORY OF MAD HONEY ...A RHODODENDRON STORY

Lois Blackmore

At this time of great stress, why are we not using this in our bowl of granola every morning?

“Mad honey” is known as deli bal in Turkey and contains an ingredient from rhododendron nectar called grayanotoxin. It is a natural neurotoxin, that even in small quantities, brings on light-headedness and sometimes, hallucinations. In the 1700s, the Black Sea region traded this potent product with Europe.

However, when used in excess, it can cause low blood pressure, nausea, numbness, blurred vision, fainting and even death. Nowadays, mad honey poisoning happens rarely and is usually experienced by travellers in the areas around the Black Sea, the largest honey-producing region in Turkey.

Although there are over 700 species of rhododendron, there are just two or three that include [grayanotoxin](#) in their nectars. The humid, mountainous slopes around the Black Sea provide the perfect habitat for these particular plants. When bees make honey in these fields, no other nectars get mixed in and thus deli bal is potent and pure.

Deli bal has a strong Turkish following. People believe this honey is a kind of medicine and they use it to treat hypertension, diabetes mellitus and some different stomach diseases. As well, some people use deli bal to improve their sexual performance. It is usually used before breakfast, with a small amount added to milk, which is boiled and consumed before breakfast.

*Adapted from the “Modern Farmer”, September 2014*

## JOE'S JOTTINGS,

# Miscellaneous thoughts from a life with plants

Joe Harvey

### #7: Tomaytoes – Tomahtoos, not important ... but which variety to grow?

#### Microclimates.

I love to eat heirloom beefsteak tomatoes; their thin skins and rich flavour are my ideals. One teensy problem: they don't grow in my garden. Beefsteaks do best in a hot sunny climate – think Okanagan Valley, whereas I have a partly shaded yard less than a kilometer from the sea which means that on a sunny day I get cool sea breezes in the afternoon. However there is a cultivar for every microclimate and I grow plants that produce a big crop each year, just not beefsteaks.

Greater Victoria has a range of microclimates from cool coastal, like Beach Drive, to warmer inland of which an example is Playfair Park which remarkably has a tall example of the normally tropical camphor tree. I speculate that this is the only outdoor one in Canada. So I write the following to help you select the best cultivars which fits your particular yard. (Omit the following section if you have a short attention span).

#### Determinate versus Indeterminate Cultivars

'Determine', to come to a conclusion, to finalize something. From de, concerning, and terminus, the end.

Determinate tomatoes (D) have shoots that are eventually terminated by a flower shoot and that stem then grows no further. Hence most determinates are compact and short season. You do not remove side shoots. Most amateur plants are determinate and are used commercially by farmers as field crops.

Indeterminate (I) cultivars have the initial shoot growing continuously, producing a few leaves then a flower truss, more leaves then flowers ... so on all season. These are a damn nuisance to grow since you have to stake them and remove the side shoots which appear in the axils of the leaves. The reward is some of the best flavours and huge crops. Commercial greenhouse crops are all indeterminate.

#### Cultivars for Cool Sites

Most of these are parthenocarpic which removes the need for insect pollination thus assuring a crop; they are also mostly low acid. The Sub Arctic Series (D) was bred at the Beaverlodge Research Station in Alberta. Now, by definition anything you grow is delicious and, picked on a sunny day, they taste fine. Personally, I prefer eating sawdust. Somewhat larger fruited are 'Oregon Spring', 'Siletz' and 'Stupice'; all are reliable, low acid, unexciting.

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## **Cultivars for Warmer Sites**

'Gardener's Delight' (I). Probably close to the original Mexican 'tomatl', this produces tiny, 1cm diameter fruit with thin skins that split at the least sign of water on horribly sprawling plants that defy staking. The only good thing about it is the heavenly taste – you end up eating them straight off the plant.

Cherry and grape cultivars: there is a vast range of these small-fruited selections in any colour you want - even blue is claimed. They come indeterminate (patio) forms and indeterminate (staking) forms. My favourite is 'Sweet Hearts' (I) F1 bred in Japan and now a supermarket standard. It produces huge trusses with over 50 fruit each on tall plants which can reach 5 feet or more. The fruit has a rich acid flavour with thicker skins (boo) that defeat my slugs (hurrah).

Beefsteaks: 'Better Boy' (I) has the record for productivity with rival 'Ultra Girl' (I) close. My advice, go for the girl.

Roma: Traditionally grown for cooking and preserving with their higher solids content, locally you cannot beat 'Viva Italia' (D) F1 with its smooth, deep red fruit. On the other hand 'Juliet' (I) F1 is a hybrid between a cherry and a roma form with small fruit which I prefer for salads.

## **Cultivars for Hot Sites**

Seed merchants tend to offer the same seed selection across North America but I think it is a mistake to ship these here; however people try them. I include 'Brandywine', the Italian 'Roma', 'San Marzano' (I) and 'Principe Borghese' (D). You may be lucky but mostly they are a waste of time.

## **Cost of Seed**

F1, first-generation cross: the seed is expensive and difficult to obtain. I pay about \$8 for a packet of 10 seeds of 'Sweet Hearts' F1, so if a couple of seeds do not germinate they are a dollar for each seed (and this is one of the small-seeded cultivars; you can barely see them). There is also a bit of intellectual snobbery in that some people say they prefer heirloom varieties to hybrids.

In my opinion, the F1s are superior in yield but, being a skinflint, I have come to a compromise between the two camps: I save seed from my F1 fruit. But, I can hear the people who took old-fashioned genetics (it has been replaced by DNA) shouting out - the F2 generation will segregate into plants with the different alleles (forms of genes). In practice, the two plants in each F1 hybrid have such a large number of different alleles that you hardly notice in the second generation. The only occasion I noticed this was in a 'Juliet' F2 which had perfectly spherical fruit instead of the plum shape. I now grow it as 'Fat Juliet'; she's good.

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## COVID19

This article is written (April 2020) as a contribution to the necessary isolation brought about by the novel coronavirus pandemic and the resulting disruptions of trade and the closing of stores, including nurseries. While, among others, the Victoria Parks Department is producing vegetable starters instead of the iconic hanging baskets, I am trying to do a little in producing small plants to give away, including some of the ones mentioned above. They will be ready late May and into June, email [joeharv@shaw.ca](mailto:joeharv@shaw.ca) for availability.



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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## American Rhododendron Society Membership Committee report April 2020

June Walsh, Membership Chair

Twenty years ago, at the turn of the century, those of us in the tech industry were concerned about our Computer readiness for January 1, 2000. Would our networks crash making communications, product delivery, our computers inoperable? How would we recover quickly if we had a 'crash'? People's jobs, livelihoods and well being were at stake. We made it because for months we had run our computers forward beyond the 'drop dead' date to test them. We made plans for failure and recovery; some of those plans we put into action and some of them went on the scrap heap of experience.

Covid19, 20 years later, did not give us an opportunity to 'ramp up' for its world-wide effects and damage, so we improvise, we help our shut-in or quarantined neighbor. We walk singly in our neighborhood. We work in our gardens and chat with neighbors, walking singly, across a fence and space gulf of 6+ feet. We volunteer in the community where it is safe for ourselves and others. We make the milk and coffee last just a few days longer.

All of this is being done by our chapter members, our chapter Boards of Directors and most importantly by our Chapters' Newsletter editors and webmasters.

Many of our Chapters' newsletter editors and webmasters are still hard at work keeping their chapters' members **together** with newsletters, beautiful pictures, human interest stories, Rhodo stories and highlights, pest notes and weed stories. There are no meetings or interesting speakers, or garden visits, no potlucks or cookie exchanges, but the telephone trees are still calling members to remind them that though there is no meeting they are still in our thoughts and we are hoping to see them soon.

This is NOT a regular membership report; Katherine Sterner and Dave Banks will have the hard numbers for you. This is more of a pep talk to ask you, as directors, to call your chapter officers and let them know how important they are to the health, wellbeing and persistence of this Society.

Part of our chapter's glue and society's bond has been temporarily broken; no chapter meetings, no celebration of our 75th year Convention. Make the best of what we will have left of 2020 by reaching out to members to remind them of their value and friendship.

### Could you please help me find a R. Yakushima?

A Campbell River resident has requested assistance to find R. yakushima for purchase. If you can help, please contact [victoriarhododendron@gmail.com](mailto:victoriarhododendron@gmail.com).

Thank you.



R. yakushima