



The Victoria Rhododendron Society Newsletter

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September 2020
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Fortieth Year of Publication
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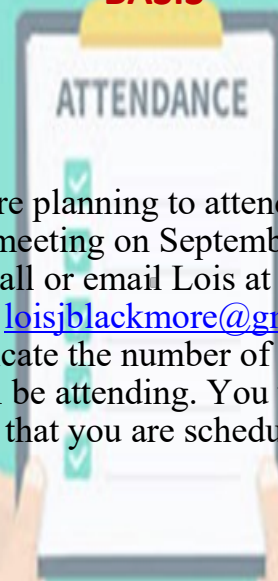
General Meeting

MONDAY, September 7, 2020 starts at **5:00 pm**
Couvelier Pavilion at the HCP Gardens
505 Quayle Road, VICTORIA, B. C.
“Do It Yourself Picnic” and
Tour of the Norm Todd Propagating Center

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MEETING ATTENDANCE IS ON A FIRST COME FIRST SERVED BASIS



If you are planning to attend the first VicRS meeting on September 7, please call or email Lois at 250 478 6615 or loisjblackmore@gmail.com and indicate the number of people that will be attending. You will be notified that you are scheduled to attend.

Upcoming Events

2020	Event	Details
Sept 7	General Meeting 'Do It Yourself Picnic' at the Gathering Place and a visit to the Norm Todd Propagating Center , with Ian and Calvin presenting information and answering questions	Gardens at HCP 505 Quayle Road
Sept 21	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	TBA
Sept 25-27	<i>ARS Regional Fall Conference Gettysburg, Pennsylvania</i>	<i>Stay Tuned</i>
Oct 5	General Meeting 'Spring Bulbs for Your Garden' by Bernie Dinter. As well, Bernie will bring bulbs for sale, but asks for assistance.	Gardens at HCP 505 Quayle Road
Oct 19	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	TBA
Nov 2	General Meeting Jeff DeJong will talk about perennials 'Beauty and the Beasts'	Gardens at HCP 505 Quayle Road
Nov 16	Propagation Group Meeting Call Ken Webb 250-744-1745	TBA

President's Remarks, September 2020

by Brenda Macdonald

Club Business

Well, who'd have thunk it?

Here we are in late August still trying to cope with the restrictions imposed by COVID19. All hope of an early resolution to all this is long past. Quite frankly I do believe it will only be towards the end of 2021 that we will approach anything like what we called normal.

However, onward and upward and cleave to the line, as my Scottish forebearers were wont to say.

During the summer there was significant progress in Norm Todd Propagation Centre. The Construction Crew: Ian Duncan, Calvin Parsons, Dave Mackas, Bill Gordon, Robert Burke, Don Eastman, Mike Minkler, Sean Rafferty, Ian Back, Dan Syroid, Frank Buffam, Lloyd Gilmore and the HCP Volunteer Lonnie Paton and his appreciated backhoe have worked like navvies and the results are amazing. And not to forget the Pot Washers: Anne Allen, Karen Burns, Dave Mackas, Brenda Macdonald, Betty Gordon, Bill Gordon, Johanna Massa, Don Eastman and Ian Duncan – well done, all! So now we have fencing, we have a gate, we have pots, we have rhodos in the pots, we have a shed, we have drip watering, we have a cement sink, and we even have a solar-powered control system to obviate the need for a person having to be there to turn the water on and off. And, in recognition that we are on the right track, we received a grant from the American Rhododendron Society that covers almost the entire cost!

In fact, it is a chance to view/tour this achievement that will be part of our first meeting of the year, on Monday, September 7.

The plans are for a casual DIY picnic get-together outside on the grounds of the HCP, followed by a look at the completed project. (Well, almost completed. Something like this is never really entirely finished.)

There is more information about the logistics and protocol for this first meeting elsewhere in the newsletter, and I would encourage all who can to come and start off the 2020-2021 Victoria Rhododendron Society year together.

Stay healthy, stay safe, and happy gardening to all.

Brenda Macdonald



Irrigation drip line



Shed



Solar panels and watering control system

LABOR DAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2020

Our first meeting after the Summer break will be held within the grounds of the HCP starting at 5 pm.

The **GATHERING PLACE** is an area that will hold up to 50 people. **See attached map.** Bring your own picnic and refreshments.

Afterwards, we will visit the newly completed **Norm Todd Propagating Center**, where Ian and Calvin will provide information and answer questions. Please remember

attendance is on a first-come first-served basis. Contact Lois at 250-478-6615 or loisjblackmore@gmail.com if you plan on attending.





CONDITIONS FOR INDOOR MEETINGS AT THE HCP

With the impact of the corona virus continuing, the HCP has established rules and regulations for clubs using the HCP indoor Couvelier Center for their meetings.

Social distancing is a must. 6' or 2 meters distance between members is mandated.

Couples from the same household must sit together.

This means that if only single folks attend, the number of seats is limited to 22.

If couples come, and they are coupled, then 40 is the maximum number that can attend a meeting.

If the board decides to continue with the set agenda of meetings for the 20-21 year, it will be on a first come first served basis. This means that when the newsletter is sent out, members will be required to send the number from their family who will be attending.



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SEPTEMBER 7 — “DO IT YOURSELF PICNIC OUTSIDE THE COUVELIER BUILDING”

With Covid 19 restrictions in place, we are holding our first meeting of the year as a picnic. It will be held at the Gathering Place on Labor Day. The plan is to start the picnic at 5 o'clock and then visit the new Norm Todd Propagation site. There are chairs available in that area, and social distancing will be honored in keeping with the new guidelines as outlined by Dr. Henry. Masks are optional. After eating, we will visit the newly completed Norm Todd Propagation Center. For those who request assistance in walking to the Norm Todd Center, Ian will provide a golf cart.



VicRhodo's Norman Todd Construction Crew

Donates to HCP

By - Ian Duncan

In early May when Robert Burke and I were installing a large concrete wash sink onto cinder block pedestals in the Norman Todd Propagation Centre compound, Linda Petite, the HCP Head Gardener, admired it and asked if I could come up with a free sink for the volunteers.

Because of Covid-19 and no open washrooms, some of the volunteers, particularly the HCP propagation group, had been asking for a sink to clean both their hands and hand tools. Linda said free because she has zero budget with the complete shut down of the gardens.

I had a source for free used sinks and faucets. But just a sink would not work. The sink would also need a countertop and legs suitable for outdoors, definitely not free.

Just then the Lee Valley Spring Gardening catalogue arrived in the mail. Featuring a stainless steel outdoor wash sink.

I called Lee Valley and asked for a donation or at best a discount. Judy, the Victoria store manager, was all in favour and immediately called her head office regional manager, who came back with a 30% discount.

This took the price from \$212.00 taxes in to \$150.00 taxes in.

I sent a proposal to the VicRhodo crew that was working on building the Norman Todd Centre, asking for individual donations of \$15.00 each to fund the expense. Everyone, without exception, came on board. There were funds enough to purchase the sink and hose and pressure reducer. Garside Signs donated a sign to be attached to the sink.

Because the sink is portable, runs from a garden hose and drains thru a flex tube onto the ground, it can be used for many events and functions at HCP, for instance, as a watering source during the plant sales, at the kids' summer gardening camps in the lower field, at outdoor wedding events, or when various garden groups run how-to courses, such as the bonsai group, and of course on volunteer days for the volunteers to wash hands and hand tools.

It would give our society and the Norm Todd Propagation Centre some public notice all year round.

On July 30th, several of the crew were on hand to present the sink to Linda Petite.

A big thank you to the Norman Todd Construction Crew for their support!

The following article appeared in the HCP July Newsletter, which is sent to over 5,000 HCP followers, donors, volunteers, and members.



This beautiful outdoor hand-washing station was presented to the HCP COVID-19 volunteers – those that maintained the Gardens and those that stayed safe at home. It is located outside the lower portable and we give a giant thank-you to:

Lee Valley Tools, the Victoria Rhododendron Society and the Norman Todd Propagation Centre Construction Crew.

With special thanks to the efforts of Ian Duncan for his “I will make it happen” attitude!

Great Sinks!

Joe Harvey – an introduction

I was born in a quiet little market town in the north of England in the middle of the Depression and when World War 2 came along, since I knew nothing else, I assumed everything was normal and had a happy childhood.

In maybe 1940, my widowed grandfather came to live with us and, looking to be helpful, he found a small wooden wheel and built me a child's wheelbarrow – a photograph still exists of me standing holding the handles – and helped me to plant my very own victory garden. I still remember the names of some of the seeds I sowed: 'Tom Thumb' lettuce, 'French Breakfast' radishes and Virginia stock for the scent.

So, from age about 4, I was growing plants from seeds. I still think of the process as a minor miracle – how those bits of gritty material (seeds) hold in them a whole complex plant, but I am surprised that other people regard such a simple process as sowing seeds as difficult and beyond their abilities, even gardeners!

A big interest in my early years was in science. I read avidly all the science books in our municipal library and at age 8 or 9 I begged my father to get me a chemistry set for Christmas.

These two interests, science and plants, have followed me since and I am puzzled by the current widespread ignorance of basic scientific precepts, the feeling that 'science has nothing to do with me' and even the existence even of anti-scientific attitudes.

I enrolled at college to take a chemistry degree but switched to botany. Now many people avoid botany because plants are so simple compared with animals. On the contrary, I took botany precisely because plants are so intricate and have genetic systems and chemistry of extreme complexity.

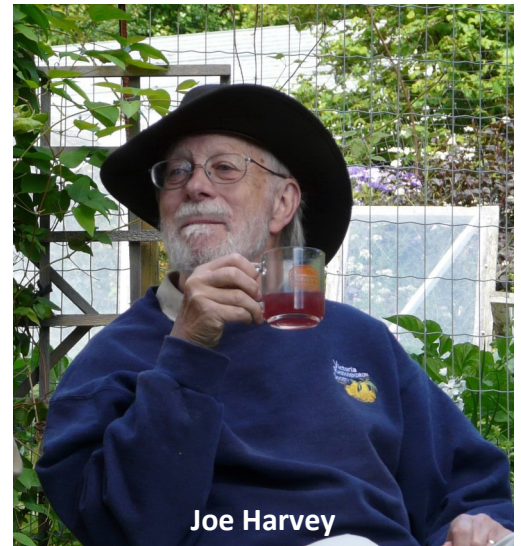
The offer of a job at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, had me emigrate to Canada, something I have been grateful for ever since. Sabbaticals at the Smithsonian Institution, DC and Kew and the Natural History Museum in London saw me working on grasses.

But it was Captain Dick Steele and others forming the Halifax Rhododendron Society that got me back into cross-pollinating flowers and raising the subsequent hybrids. The friends I found in Halifax are still close.

Taking early retirement I initially moved to an acreage in Sooke near Victoria for the climate and planned to produce hybrids of Rhododendrons and Magnolias among other things but a hungry 'face-powder' sandy soil frustrated that. Never at a loss, I turned to other plants, but realizing that I could not compete with the big commercial breeders, I made the decision to work on neglected plants using a lifetime of genetics to solve problems. Over the years I must have worked on 40 or 50 genera. I give a few examples of the more complex:

Peonies. I crossed *Paeonia potaninii* (orange delavayi) with *P. rockii*, the aim being to produce an orange-flowered tree peony. From hundreds of cross-pollinated flowers, a single seedling resulted; it grew extremely vigorously to produce deep purple flowers (!) in 1 to 3-flowered cymes.

Japanese Maples. Maples are difficult only because the flowers are extremely small. My breeding aim was to produce upright trees with deeply cut leaves (most dissected leaf cultivars are weeping). Of many crosses, all were weeping except possibly 'Omurayama' x 'Sei Ryu'.



Joe Harvey

(Continued on page 10)

Magnolia 'Bella Bella'. The lily-flowered magnolia, *M. liliiflora*, crosses with the star magnolia, *M. stellata* to produce the popular 'Little Girl' series, which are sterile triploids. I reasoned that repeating the cross but treating the seedlings with colchicine to double the chromosome number should result in a fertile hexaploid. Using 'Leonard Messel' as the pollen source (I had no pink stellata) resulted in the fertile 'Bella Bella', thus proving the hypothesis.

Rusty the Rhododendron. Some Rhododendrons have a thick indumentum under the leaves; a few have an upper indumentum. Crossing *R. pachysanthum* with *R. bureavii* gave Rusty with rich rusty orange persistent upper indumentum. Proud of it, I showed it to my neighbour who said, "I thought it had died".

Lapageria x Philesia. The climber Chilean bellflower crosses with the tiny shrub Philesia to produce a hybrid very difficult hybrid to get to flower. I am attempting to repeat the cross and test it in the West Coast rain forest.

Helleborus niger x vesicarius. The seedlings are extremely slow-growing and I seem to be losing yet another batch.

And so it goes on. My living room window ledge currently has the tiny Chilean climber Sarmienta pollinated with another climber, Mitraria. Who knows what will result?

JOE'S JOTTINGS,

Joe's Jottings #9:

The Tibetan Tree Peony - *Paeonia ludlowii*

Hate is not an emotion that I normally, or ever, express but my dislike of the yellow Tibetan tree peony comes pretty close to it. Yes, I know that there are many YTP lovers out there. Indeed, if it were the only tree peony in existence it would be wonderful, but there are so many better ones that I despair when I see it.

I should make it clear that I am discussing the vigorous, tall-growing yellow tree peony. There are other yellow tree peonies that I shall discuss in subsequent articles but the Tibetan one is confined in nature to a relatively small area from where it was introduced to the West in 1937. But first, who was Ludlow?



Paeonia ludlowii

Courtesy of

<https://www.botanicaplantnursery.co.uk/paeonia-ludlowii-7393->

Frank Ludlow (1885 – 1972) born in Chelsea, took botany from Marshal Ward, father of Frank Kingdon-Ward, then taught English and Biology at Sind College, Karachi and in World War 1 was a Lieutenant in the Deccan Infantry. He retired from education in 1927, settled in Srinagar, and proceeded to travel extensively in the Himalayas. In 1929 he met Major George Sherriff, originally from Scotland.

George Sherriff (1892 – 1967) from Scotland, was of a like mind with Ludlow in terms of exploring the Himalayas. The two became great pals and made a series of expeditions between 1933 and 1938 collecting specimens for museums and seeds for sponsoring gardens.

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Tibet held a fascination for Europeans at the time, it was largely closed to Europeans. With an administration extremely suspicious of foreigners it was largely closed to Europeans. In addition, the terrain was difficult to traverse because of roaring rivers and steep valleys. There is little doubt that they were interested in Tibet because of the publication in 1926 of the account of the Frank Kingdon-Ward and the Earl of Cawdor 1924 expedition, under the title *The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges*. This is still one of the best travel books ever written and was re-issued, updated, by Kenneth Cox, 2001.

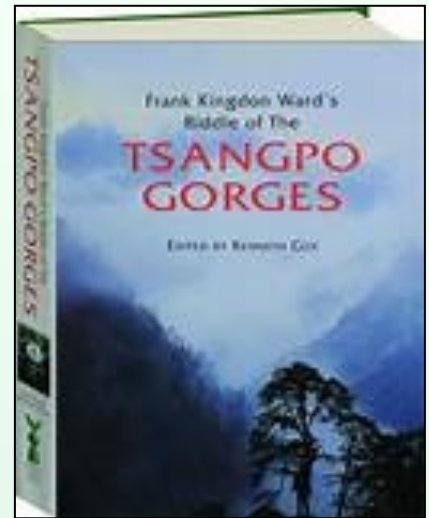
The Tibetan Peony was found growing in and around villages, especially in the hedgerows surrounding fields. Its association with people implies some degree of cultivation and peony roots of various species are used medicinally.

In cultivation, the Tibetan peony is a vigorous plant that in the mild climate of Victoria, British Columbia, can grow 10 feet tall with yellow flowers up to 4 inches diameter. When grown in the open under stress conditions the flowers can be well displayed. My quarrel is with plants grown under soft conditions of shade, with ample nutrition and moisture. Under these conditions, the luxurious spring foliage develops a yellowish-green colour which envelops and hides the not so dissimilar yellow flowers in the interior of the plant. The display lacks oomph.

The technical distinguishing features of the Tibetan peony include the yellow flowers bearing only one or two carpels and containing the largest seeds of any peony. The flowers are self-fertile, seeds are abundantly produced and readily germinate. I complain that this leads to an excess of specimens in gardens, taking up space that could better be used for other peonies.

One good thing about *P. ludlowii* is that it has contributed yellow genes to some of the hybrid tree peonies. The Lemoines and Saunders used its pollen-producing such famous old cultivars such as 'Alice Harding', and 'Chromatella'; later hybrids such as the semi-double 'Age of Gold' have less over-weighted flowers.

Frank Ludlow donated his collections to the Natural History Museum, London. He was especially fond of birds and contributed over 7000 specimens. Two birds, a hedgehog and *Paeonia ludlowii* are named for him.



The Riddle of the Tsangpo Gorges

Courtesy of

https://www.hamiltonbook.com/media/image_full/3865398A.JPG



Tibetan tree Peony seeds

Courtesy of <https://img.photobucket.com/albums/v66/kudzu9/Plants%20and%20shrubs/Tibetan-tree-peony3Large.jpg>



Newsletter Editor's Plea for Help

By Theresa McMillan

I am researching our "help" plea info, by going through the copies of Newsletters I have, going back to 1994 when the Fullers were the editors, Margaret deWeese (October 2006-Nov 2007), Joyce Whittle (~1994-present) and then me from 2007-present.

In 1994, James and Pat Fuller were the long-time editors of the Newsletter. When they retired in Sept 2006, Norm Todd praised them in the Sept 2006 Newsletter: James Fuller could write "an astringence of "Sir Charles Lemon", which suggests in six words wit, a pucker, horticultural savvy and poetic rhythm. How could anyone top that?" But when he read Margaret deWeese's work, Norm was satisfied.

Margaret added colour to the Newsletter, getting pictures of special occasions like the awarding of trophies and in the articles, many rhododendron and member pictures. When her health began to fail, in December 2007, I took over for Margaret. Before becoming the editor, I had taught English 12 at night school, worked as a volunteer to the Royal B.C. Museum and edited three museum volunteer Newsletters.

In March 2010, recently retired from government service in publishing, Linda Gilmore joined the Newsletter committee and soon became co-editor. Linda has worked tirelessly on better formatting and design, using her government expertise to brighten my three years' work before her.

It is now August 2020, and I have been the editor for 13 years and Linda co-editor for 10. This is a great opportunity for someone to help with the newsletter.

So, we are asking the general membership (you--perhaps?) to help us out. Even with the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions, things are still happening, rhododendrons are still blooming, people are still falling in love with them and wanting to buy them, and, and....

Contact either Theresa McMillan or Linda Gilmore @ victoriarhododendron@gmail.com



Milner Gardens & Woodland Opens Thursday August 4, 2020

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