

University Finnerty Garden Friends

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NEWSLETTER • APRIL 2005



President's letter.

Dear Friends,

What an unbelievable spring! Spring is always an exciting time as we watch the world waken after its winter sleep. But this year seems to be specially glorious. The plants are covered with blooms—the combination of the August rain and the beautiful spring has produced more flowers than I remember before.

Perhaps the effect of the rain has not been so noticeable in town where most people water quite thoroughly, but on Galiano where all garden water is stored rain must be used sparingly, and the extra August rain has had an amazing effect. And the shrubs are not the only things affected by the early spring. This year the rufous hummingbirds arrived back at least 10 days ahead of their return for the past few years, and the violet green swallows are back early too. The large orange bumblebees are in the heathers and early flowering shrubs in abundance and fill the air with their busy sounds.

The Finnerty Gardens are a featured garden on the tours arranged for the American Rhododendron Society when it holds its annual meeting here at the end of April. Carmen and the other members of the Advisory Committee have been working with the University gardeners to make sure the Gardens look at their best—and the results of their efforts are showing. Visit the Gardens—they are beautiful with many of the rhododendrons in full bloom. The camellias have excelled themselves and the good weather has ensured that their blooms are continuing to look wonderful. The spring bulb display is worth seeing.— This year the Plant Sale will be held on May 8th., the second Sunday of May, since the usual weekend is part of the American Rhododendron Society Annual Meeting. Be sure to come and plan to replace all your plants that were damaged by the heavy snow. We will be needing volunteers so if you are interested in working at the sale or in the setup, please contact Judith Terry at 477-0747.

May I also remind you that it is time for many of you to renew your membership in the Garden Friends. The fees are the same—\$10 per family. And it is a wonderful way to share in a place of beauty, which is rapidly becoming very well known indeed. And don't forget that charitable receipts are given to all who donate more than \$25 to the Gardens.

It is with regret that I must tell you that Alec McCarter passed away during the past month. He has been a regular contributor to our Newsletter and we shall miss his most enjoyable articles. There have been some changes to the Advisory Committee also—Elizabeth Wilson has been forced by ill health to terminate her active participation in the work of the Gardens. She, her husband Dick, Lloyd Mackenzie and George Pearkes were largely responsible for the creation of the Gardens. They raised money for the initial planting and Howard Petch, an enthusiastic and knowledgeable gardener himself, set land aside for the Gardens. We have all benefitted from their enthusiasm and foresight. Health has also forced the resignation of John Trelawny. He has been a generous donor to the Gardens. We have profited from his extensive knowledge of plants, especially acers.

May I wish you all a happy season gardening, and we can unite in hoping for another August rain!

Betty Kennedy



**University of Victoria Finnerty
Garden Friends**

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Letty's Label Lost

Alec McCarter

Have you ever lost the label on a rhododendron and forgotten the name? You might be able to find the plant at Finnerty Gardens where the plants are faithfully tagged and the names recorded.

Years ago, at a sale, we bought a rhododendron that had been brought to the Victoria Rhododendron Society. We planted it, along with another rhodo, both of which grew vigorously and were soon intruding on one another's space.

We moved the more vigorous of the two, to the front of the house where it still flowers prodigiously every year. But, in the move, we lost the label, and memories being what they are as age advances, we also lost the name.

I asked several knowledgeable rhodo people to make a guess—one said that it had fortunei in it—but that is all he would venture. The others demurred.

Then the thought struck, why not wait until it was in bloom, take a truss and go up to Finnerty Gardens on the assumption that if one existed there, it should bloom at about the same time.

Among the many creamy white, or pale yellow blooms in the gardens, there were none that I could find that matched our plant. At that time, it was only about three feet high and a bit more broad. If Finnerty had one, it might have been of different age and size. Almost certainly it would be in more shade. These different conditions could make comparison more difficult.

Our plant's leaves are elongated ovals (4-5 inches long), somewhat twisted, smooth and shiny, turned under at the edges. Kept only one year, in autumn they turn orange then red, and fall.

The flowers open from large buds, sometimes several (4, 5) to the truss. Somewhat more yellow at first, the colour soon fades to cream. The upper lobes are spotted

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slightly darker and a faint scent accompanies the blooms. The color of the leaves is not

The first year passed and the plant remained unnamed. The following year brought success. In a group of rhododendrons just to the east of the main entrance off Ring Road was a rhodo which in growth habit, leaf and flower appeared to be identical. R. Letty Edwards is the name of that plant. Sure enough, it has fortunei in it crossed with campylocarpum var elatum. (Clarke A.M. 1946, F.C.C. 1948).

One of the deciding characters is that the florets often enlarge to a globe-shape but stop there and do not open. Our plant and that in Finnerty Gardens do the same thing! Of course, one cannot be certain that ours is Letty Edwards, but we think it likely. Harold Greer rates R. Letty Edwards at 3/3/3.

I would say he is right, and maybe even a bit generous., but we like its shape and open architecture that shows to advantage where it is placed. The flowers are a bonus. It has proved to be a good parent, producing, for example, R. 'Frontier' which is rated 4/4/4.

We have another unnamed rhododendron, nicely budded up. It has not bloomed for us before. Maybe we'll find a name for it this spring!



Challenges

Tony James
Curator, Finnerty Gardens

This year at the end of April, sees the Rhododendron Conference coming to Victoria with a tour of Finnerty Gardens on the agenda. In addition, official tours are put on by the Advisory Board and there are also many private tours conducted throughout the year. This presents some challenges for us to get the Gardens in good shape both aesthetically and also for the rhododendron and gardening aficionados.

A major problem is control of invasive

particularly helpful because it is affected by the amount of sunlight that the plant receives. perennial weeds. Since pesticide use was restricted about 3 years ago, these weeds—such as violet, Bishops' weed, ground elder, oxalis, etc.—have proliferated. They are difficult to control by hand or mechanical methods, since their root systems intertwine with desirable material and make it impossible to remove all of the plant. In addition, musculo-skeletal injuries can occur from the constant and repetitious attempts to pull all of these from the ground.

A herbicide such as Roundup used regularly in the past was the most effective way to deal with these weeds. A request for specific use of this chemical has been submitted to the University Administration and hopefully will be favourably received even though it seems it will be mainly for cosmetic use. Action will have to be very soon for it to be effective prior to the tours.

Another concern specifically this year involves the earliness of the plants' flowering. Most material is about 3 weeks ahead of normal. This means that a lot of choice material, which the visitors would want to see, will be over. It is certainly nice to be ahead thanks to a wonderful late winter, but it does cause a concern for organizers of the event as I'm sure that most gardens will be in the same position.

A further conundrum is what to do with desirable plant material that may be diseased, dying, suffering from too much sun or shade or not at its best for any number of reasons. No one likes to see these plants especially rhododendrons in such a state so the solution may be to move those that have a chance to an out of sight place where they can hopefully be nurtured back to health. Some of these plants may be quite large, requiring equipment to move them and this tends to cause disruption at a time when we do not need it. A number of the rhododendrons may just need pruning to present a more desirable appearance and others a more vigorous cut back to encourage new adventitious growth. Here they will tend to look unsightly for some time and other plants could temporarily be

planted to hide this.

There is another issue concerning labeling. The newer thermal printer labels on specialized backing for protection against severe conditions have not lasted as well as expected. They are also black on a white background and white stake which detracts from the garden's appearance. Most of these will have to be removed and replaced with new labels of white lettering on a black background and black stake. We are still struggling to come up with the best format to do these as it presently provides a negative image. The very early labels using Dynatape on a black strip have worked well and lasted, although the method of using heavy gauge wire to insert them into the ground was ugly and not effective. In addition, mischievous personnel love to move labels around so all the existing ones will need to be checked for accuracy coupled with the concern as to whether they have been correctly identified in the first place. If the tour from the last Conference is anything to go by, there will be plenty of questions on this accuracy.

One concern at the moment is a lack of edging material in some areas. This is needed to define an edge to paths, give some continuity of plants throughout the garden and provide a more finished appearance. Over a number of years, we have found many that are successful but are always willing to try others. If we could just get a handle on the palate of rabbits and deer, which tends to change annually, we would soon have the work accomplished. An added problem involves a concern that there will be too much of an immature look about the garden should the plants be small or not establish well. Any material, especially ground cover, needs to be of sufficient size to survive but it is often difficult to find in the larger sizes required. At

Now approaching March with so many days of sunshine behind us in a glorious February, my garden is once again exciting me, for out of this misfortune has come a new garden opportunity. The flimsy fencing had come down too in the snow and now seventy-two inch high fencing is replacing it. This has provided a much larger space, for the present

least we have some existing groundcovers that may be divided and transplanted.

Another item we have delayed on for some time is a directory sign at an entrance coupled with corresponding bed naming or numbering. We are going to go with a relatively simple cedar board with suitable graphics under the arch at the Chapel entrance using existing bed numbering. At a later date when appropriate bed names and layout have been decided, this will be changed. But whether the directory board will be designed, made and fitted in time is debatable.

With such challenges as the Conference and all the improvements and plant additions we want to do in the Gardens, this is certainly going to be a busy year



Garden Opportunity

Margaret deWeese

The Chinese word for *crisis* has two characters: one is misfortune and the other opportunity. After the heavy snowfall of January 2005 at my property, several large trees fell over under the weight of the snow and shallow rooted trees in wet boggy soil lay everywhere, even in the pond. This was my crisis and looking at the mess was daunting. The realization of a lot of heavy work ahead, plus the sadness of losing a friend in Alec McCarter, gave added weight to my mood. How would the garden look with so much cover cut up for firewood?

fence extends into the mossy floored forest, where I have been putting treasures atop the moss and in hollowed rotting tree trunks. In the past few years I have become inspired by *vacciniums*. Of course this includes the local evergreen huckleberry bush, *Vaccinium ovatum* which, growing out of rotting stumps in the dappled sunshine, is a treat, even without

its delicious fruit. The blueberry bushes—*Vaccinium mortalities* and *Vaccinium ovalifolium* with its reddish twigs laden with plump blueberries and the added splendour of brilliant fall colouring—makes them glorious plants in any garden, but much more so in a wooded setting.

For the past few years I have been buying vacciniums from the Rhododendron Species Foundation catalogues whose writeups are irresistible! These include:

Vaccinium floribundum: "A beautiful dwarf evergreen blueberry with tiny leaves along the spray-like branches. The new growth is bright red and the flowers are rose-pink in dense racemes in early summer. A hardy shrub native from Costa Rica south to Peru."

Vaccinium glaucoalbum: "An absolutely magnificent plant. This blueberry has incredibly chalky blue new foliage with a glaucous waxy white coating on the leaf undersides and blueberries. It produces small but showy pink flowers in spring. This rhody relative is native to the eastern Himalaya where it occurs in subalpine forests. It thrives best in light shade, with good drainage." One of my all-time favorites, the striking foliage of this plant always attracts attention.

Vaccinium (unknown species): "This is probably one of the southeast Asian tropical blueberries. A stunning foliage plant with very smooth and shiny obovate leaves up to 1.5 inches long. The new growth is bright reddish-purple. Only a few are available—for the collector. Excellent drainage is required and should probably be treated like a vireya rhododendron. Collected in Borneo by RSF member Fran Rutherford."

Vaccinium retusum: "an epiphytic evergreen blueberry with small blue-green leaves from Sikkim where they climb the tree rhododendrons and they are drought tolerant once established."

By the rotting stumps I have put two small *R. edgeworthii*, those beautiful rough-

textured leafed rhododendrons which thrive in stumps, as well as the tender vireya rhododendrons from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea in their wire moss baskets. Not tolerant of freezing temperatures these plants are taken inside a glass structure in the winter months and brought out to enjoy the sun and rain in the nine months of temperate temperatures we enjoy on Vancouver Island.

The moss is thick and soft, and the tree ferns in pots are being placed upon it. These include: *Cyathea dealbata*, the silver-backed tree fern from New Zealand known there as "Ponga," *Cyathea smithii*, *Cyathea cooperi*—the Lacy Tree Fern, *Dicksonia fibrosa* and *Dicksonia squarrosa* with their unfurling croziers, their new fronds so neatly folded within a circle. Seedling Japanese Maples will be planted in the moss. I like the lacy branches of the acers in their undernourished state for they are thin and ethereal which suits the serenity of the place and provides a particularly suitable setting in which to remember a good friend.



Tree Fern Crozier



Edging Shrub Beds

Hector Bussiere

Edging or re-edging an established shrub bed or edging a new shrub bed is like adding icing on a cake—it just provides the bed with a neat and finished appearance.

When you consider a shrub bed in a sunny location, part shade, dappled shade, dense shade, dry, damp or wet, that will determine from which plants you can select. If you have any favorite plants, incorporate them where they'll be happy. Should you have a raised bed there are so many graceful plants that will cascade over it. There's also a wide variety of variegated foliage plants in either gold or silver. They're nice and cheery in a dark shady area especially during the dull winter days. But don't overdo it; interplant them amongst green foliage plants.

Too many variegated plants in a setting will look unduly busy. Depending on the size of the bed, one to three variegated plants amongst green ones will look neat. You can also select plants that have bronze foliage but then if they're in front of rhododendrons or other shrubs the color can clash with the flowers on the background plants. There are also deciduous plants (those in which the foliage and stems die down in the fall and grow back in the spring). Some people employ these because they like to plant spring flowering bulbs in pockets (3 to 7) always an uneven number. When bunched together they look much better than when planted singly.

Evergreen shrubs and plants like grasses and ferns. Epimedium need foliage cut just before the flowers come up towards the middle of March, earlier if you are by the ocean. For our native sword ferns I like to cut off all foliage towards the end of February and into March before the new fronds (leaves) unravel. The new fronds are extremely brittle and easy to break off. If the previous year's foliage is removed, the new foliage will look great and tidy all summer long.

In late fall or very early in the spring, once your plants and bulbs are planted and you feel good about it, cover the whole area with about 2-3" of well rotted leaf mulch or compost.

I include a partial list of plants that are

suitable for the following locations:

Sun and dry—*Pulsatilla*, *Mahonia aquifolium* 'Compacta', *M. repens*, *Gaultheria mucronata* (*Pernettya*), *Potentilla fruticosa* 'Red Robin', *P.f.* 'Yellow Gem',

P. f. 'Princess', *Nandina domestica*
Cascading—*Rubus pentalobus* 'Formosan Carpet', *Vinca minor*, *Bergenia*, *Aubrietia*

Sun and wet—*Petasities* (invasive), *Pachysandra* (invasive), *Mahonia repens*, *M. nervosa*, *Luzula sylvatica* 'Aurea'

Part shade and dry—*Ophiopogon* sp., *Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant', *Picea abies* 'Little Gem', *Saxifraga* x *aqueum*, *S. fortunei*
Cascading—*Aubrietia*

Part shade and average to moist—*Hosta* sp., *Dryopteris affinis* 'Crispa Gracilis', *Adiantum venustum*, *Cyrtomium falcatum*, *Houttuynia cordata* 'Chameleon'
Cascading—*Soleirolia soleirolia*

Dappled shade and dry—*Geranium renardii*, *Helleborus* x *hybridus*, *H. niger*, *H. argutifolius*

Cascading—*Vinca minor*, *Bergenia*

Dappled shade and wet—*Lobelia siphilitica*, *L. fulgens*, *L. 'Queen Victoria'*, *Mahonia nervosa*, *M. repens*, *Persicaria* 'Red Dragon', *Astilbe* sp.
Cascading—*Vinca minor*

Dense shade and dry—*Convallaria*

Dense shade and wet—*Polystichum munitum*
Variegated foliage (evergreen)—*Lonicera nitida* 'Baggesen's Gold', *Daphne odora* 'Aureomarginata', *D. x burkwoodii* 'Carol Mackie', *Pachysandra* 'Variegata'

Variegated foliage (deciduous)—*Spirea japonica* 'Candlelight', *Phygelius* x *rectus* 'Sunshine', *Hosta* 'Sun Power', *H. 'August Moon'*, *Geranium* 'Ann Folkard', *Fuchsia magellanica* var. *gracilis* 'Aurea'



The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

The Sanctuary presents their 10th annual Gardening for Wildlife—A Native Plant Gardening Sale and Demonstration on Saturday and Sunday, April 23 and 24 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Admission: \$3/day, \$5/weekend pass (price includes admission to all workshops and presentations).



Notes from the Editor

1. The Newsletter has lost a particularly good friend in Alec McCarter, who for several years has regularly provided us with his highly interesting and scholarly articles. James Fuller of the Victoria Rhododendron Society has informed me that a book scheduled for publication to mark the upcoming celebration of the VRS's 25 years will be dedicated to Alec's memory. Both Alec and his articles will be sadly missed by readers of this Newsletter.

2. You will notice that our list of Advisory Committee Members includes the names of Carol Dancer and Anne Mace who are replacing Elizabeth Wilson and John Trelawny, both of whom have been obliged to terminate their active participation in the work of the Gardens for reasons of health. We thank the departing members for their important contribution and welcome the new members for taking on this additional responsibility.



GARDEN SALE AND MEMBERSHIP DUES

**Our Annual Garden Plant Sale will be
Sunday May 8, from 10 am to 2 pm.**

**This will be an ideal time to renew your
Annual Membership in the Garden Friends.
Should you be unable to attend, please
send your cheque (\$10 per family, made
out to University of Victoria) to Mrs. Shirley
Lyon, University of Victoria, PO Box 1700,
STN CSC, Victoria BC V8W 2Y2.**

**(Please remember that charitable receipts
are given to all who donate more than \$25
to the Gardens.)**



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