



Macrophyllum

December 2003

Newsletter of the
Siuslaw Chapter
American Rhododendron Society
Post Office Box 1701
Florence, OR 97439-0111

From the VP

As the days of December grow shorter and stormier it is sometimes difficult to find time to spend in our gardens. However frequently, here along the Oregon coast, we will have a nice day between the storms. It is on these 'bonus' days that we can still do our regular garden maintenance i.e., weed, mulch, rake leaves and clean up the litter from the last big storm. It is nice just to be able to work outside! Unless we get an unusual cold spell, we can still plant and transplant rhododendrons.

On those stormy days when we are confined to the house it's fun to make our plans for the coming year. Settling down with a good rhododendron catalog is a great way to dream away a lousy day. There are several wonderful catalogs you can obtain that are advertised in the ARS Journal.

Several varieties of rhododendrons are already beginning to brighten our winter gardens. Some of them, like Red Foliage Elizabeth, have been giving us welcome color for several weeks. During one of our nice days drop by one of our rhododendron nurseries and see what you can find in bloom. Try to collect plants that will extend your blooming season with both early and late blooming varieties.

As usual we will celebrate the holiday season with a potluck dinner and gift exchange instead of a regular meeting. For the potluck, bring a main dish and a salad, dessert or appetizer, your table service and beverage. The chapter will furnish coffee. Gifts for the exchange need not be expensive, but we usually try to make them garden-related if possible. If the gift is sex-specific, i.e. a pair of ladies gloves, then mark that on the package. I can't use another pair of ladies gloves! Remember, we will meet at the I.O.O.F campground meeting hall on South Jetty road at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday December 14th. See you there.

Everett Hall, Vice President

2004 ARS Dues

Annual ARS dues for 2004 (Individual, \$35; Family, \$40) are now payable. If you have not received your dues statement, please call Dianne Gilmour at (541) 902-1970.

New Members

The Siuslaw Chapter ARS welcomes new members:

Bob & Carol Alferes, Eugene, OR
Jerry & Joy Burkey, Florence, OR
Chuck & Margaret Getchell, Florence, OR
Greg & Sue Hall, Eugene, OR
Mike Seven, Westlake, OR

Rhododendron Events

January 20, 2004: Chapter Meeting with Jim (Dr. Rhody) Smith as speaker.

May 12-16, 2004: ARS Annual Convention, King of Prussia, PA

September 22-26: ARS Western Regional Conference. Hilo. HA

Ted Van Veen: Word has been received from the Portland Chapter ARS that Ted Van Veen, long active in rhododendrons and the ARS, passed away on Saturday, December 6. Funeral arrangements are not yet available.

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DECEMBER CALENDAR

Christmas Party

When

Sunday, December 14
Gather at noon - eat at 1 p.m.

Where

Odd Fellows Campground
(On South Jetty Road, west of
NACO West Campground, take
the first exit to the left. **See
page 4 for a view of the area**)

What

Annual Christmas Potluck
Bring two dishes - a main dish
and a salad, dessert or
appetizer - your table service,
beverage and serving spoons.
Gift Exchange
Bring an inexpensive garden-
related gift.

Food Items Still Needed

A turkey and ham (for
coordination, let Mike know at
997-3082 if you intend to bring
either), stove top dressing,
gravy, hot veggies, sweet
potatoes and yams.

Plant of the Month: *R. thomsonii*

This month's rhododendron is considered to be one of the finest of the species. Plant hunter Joseph Hooker found *R. thomsonii* in 1849 when he was exploring in Sikkim, China. Other plant collectors subsequently found it in Tibet, Burma, and Nepal as well as Sikkim.

R. thomsonii grows to be a small tree up to about twenty feet tall in its native habitat, but it is unlikely to get more than about half that tall in cultivation. In fact, most of the catalogs list its eventual height in ten years at about four to five feet. The foliage on *R. thomsonii* is very attractive. The leaves are about two to four inches long, rounded or orbicula. The new growth has a quite noticeable blue cast that becomes greener as it matures, eventually becoming dark green on the top of the leaf and lighter colored on the underside.

R. thomsonii is one of those plants that becomes more attractive as it grows larger. On older plants the reddish smooth bark begins to flake or peel and makes a beautiful contrast with the mixed brown, fawn, and pink new bark being exposed by the old peeling bark. This bark-flaking characteristic occurs not only on the trunk of the plant but extends to the larger branches as well.

It takes a few years for *R. thomsonii* to come into its glory, not only for its beautiful bark to start peeling, but also because it seems to be reluctant to bloom well as a small plant. But as the plant grows older it will start blooming freely with two to three inch bell shaped flowers in a large loose truss of about six to ten beautiful deep red flowers that have a contrasting large waxy cup-shaped calyx. This calyx can vary from whitish-green to yellowish-buff to greenish scarlet. The plant blooms in April and will remain in bloom for several weeks if you have it planted in a location protected from the afternoon sun and late frosts.

R. thomsonii should be cold hardy here along the central Oregon coast. However, the terrible cold spell we had here in western Oregon in 1972 killed most of the plants that were being grown at that time. The temperature dropped to minus twelve degrees in the Willamette valley and *R. thomsonii* and many other varieties of rhododendrons are not hardy at that temperature.

Most rhododendrons do not object to being pruned, but *R. thomsonii* does not respond well to the clippers, so be a little cautious when you are doing your pruning and prune it lightly, if at all.

R. thomsonii is not one of those species that can be expected to do well no matter where you plant it, but if you give it a protected place in your garden that has good drainage and if you are patient and give it time to become established, it will reward you by being a beautiful plant to enjoy.

Everett Hall, Vice President



From Dr. Rhody

This month I would like to present some information to our group. I have included excerpts from an article written by Henry Homeyer of the New York Times on March 9, 2003. I think you will find this article interesting and provocative.

For the past four years, Dr. Mark Brand has been inserting genes derived from an African frog into rhododendrons, trying to create a plant with extra resistance to the root rot caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. A common soil fungus, *Phytophthora* does hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage to rhododendrons every year.

Dr. Brand is a horticulturist and a director of the plant biotechnology facility at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. And he is able to do what seems impossible to an old-fashioned gardener like myself: implant something he cannot see - a modified frog gene - into something else he cannot see, the DNA of a flowering bush.

Dr. Brand chose to introduce a frog protein because other scientists had already noticed that it worked against other fungi. The challenge was to take the gene that creates the protein and fit it into the genetic sequences of a rhododendron.

Though university labs are able to create DNA sequences, these days a researcher can pick up the phone and have a biotech company send one over for about \$50. Once Dr. Brand had the frog protein DNA sequence in hand, he inserted it into *E. coli* bacteria, which let him easily create the larger quantities of DNA that he needed.

The next step was shooting the DNA into rhododendron cells with the potential to develop into complete plants. Dr. Brand's gene gun is a small plastic and metal box that fits easily on the counter, and is powered by high-pressure helium. His ammo is gold dust covered with frog DNA. It goes into a thin piece of red Mylar that sits on a screen above the tissue sample. A burst of helium knocks the gold off the Mylar, sending it flying at the speed of sound. The target is a petri dish with callus cells from a rhododendron leaf. Callus cells are the equivalent of stem cells in animal research. Each can multiply quickly, developing into an entire plant if given the right signals by plant hormones.

Eventually, after considerable testing to see if the gene is indeed in the plants, these test-tube babies grow into ordinary looking rhododendron plants. The ultimate test is to inoculate these plants by contaminating their soil with kernels of ordinary Uncle Ben's rice that have been inoculated with *Phytophthora*.

Testing will take eight years, and more time will be needed for government approval of commercial products. But success seems likely in the end. Dr. Brand is determined to build a better rhodie, and the technology is there to do so. He pointed to a row of quart-size pots in a temperature- and climate-controlled chamber at his lab with the proud look of a new father. The shiny-leaved young rhodie leaves looked pest-free to this gardener.

Gallagher Park Beautification

Gallagher's Park at Spruce and Hwy 126 was given to the City of Florence by the Gallagher family for use as a community rhododendron garden. It is refurbished and maintained jointly by the Siuslaw ARS Chapter, the Florence Garden Club and the City of Florence. Gene Cockeram is a Parks Commissioner for the City.

The Garden Club has done an excellent job of caring for the perimeter and the City tries to keep up with watering and new paths. The Siuslaw Chapter is behind, however, in taking care of the rhodies and interior of the park.

In a call for volunteers to spend a few hours to remove dead rhodies, trim back brush, mow, prune, deadhead, weed, rake up and spread mulch and fertilizer, the following members volunteered at the October Chapter meeting.

We need you; call Jenny Velinty at 997-7573 or Gene Cockeram at 997-2377 if you can help. Times and dates can be altered to accommodate your schedules.

Jan. 8: K. Timmons, P. & F. Ziegelmaier

Feb. 5: G. Cockeram, P. & D. Peterson, J. Velinty

Mar. 4: All members & friends work party & lunch

Apr. 1: G. Cockeram, P. & L. Lanning

May 6: B. & M. Horney, J. Velinty

Jun. 3: G. Cockeram, J. Velinty & anyone else

Sept. 2: All members & friends work party & lunch

Christmas Suggestions

As beautifully displayed at the November meeting, Marianne Horney, our Book Chair, has interesting books on rhododendrons and other garden subjects. They are available to members at a 25% discount. Give her a call at (541) 997-6626 for details.

Jam Bars: Several asked for the apricot bar recipe Jan Woodford used for the November Chapter meeting. Jan obtained the recipe from a church cookbook from Southern California.

Cream together: 1/2 lb. butter or margarine
1 cup of sugar
2 egg yolks (or 1 egg)

Then add: 2 cups of flour
1 cup chopped nuts
(Jan prefers Almonds)

Spread 1/2 of the batter in a 9 in. x 13 in. pan, top with 3/4 cup of jam. Any jam will do, but apricot is Jan's favorite. Then top with the other half of the batter and bake 1 hour at 325 degrees.

Secretary's report for November 2003

Your board met and are busy with all sorts of interesting plans for you. Be watching for information about a Sister Chapter, discussions about your favorite rhodies, plant tags pros & cons and a photo op for the Rhododendron Pageant Program.

The new meeting place at the Middle School is great but we need a little more togetherness. We will be trying different arrangements of the chairs and tables. Any suggestions will be greatly appreciated!

We have renewed our Chapter membership to the Rhododendron Species Foundation. Membership in the Federal Way, WA institution gives our Chapter members free admission to their garden. All you need to do is show your ARS membership card. You don't have one? They will be available shortly for those who have paid their ARS dues for 2004.

A list will be created that identifies "tough rhodies for hard to plant areas" as was requested by a landscaper, Lisa Sedlacek of Laurel Bay Gardens. Lisa is one of the newer members of our chapter.

See you all at the Christmas Party in December.

Kathy Bones, Secretary

Where is your garden? If you would like to get a better understanding of just how your garden relates to geography, visit the site from which the aerial photo shown below was obtained. It can be directed to show you your own garden at a resolution of 1 meter. Have a look by logging on to this web site:

<http://terraserver-usa.com/image.aspx?t=1&s=12&x=513&y=6084&z=10&w=1>

