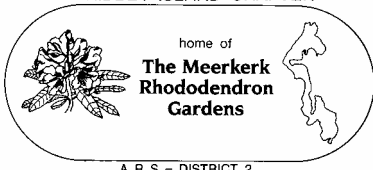


WHIDBEY ISLAND CHAPTER



ARS Whidbey Island Chapter NEWSLETTER

Website: www2.whidbey.net/dapont/ARS

Meets the 4th Wednesday of each Month
Fire District 5 Headquarters Station
215 East Race Road, Coupeville, WA

April 2006

Note: This month's meeting starts at **6pm**
At the **Greenbank Progressive Hall**
on **April 26th**

Program: Potluck, Truss Show Plant Auction, Garden Inspiration

Potluck: Plates, cups, utensils, coffee and tea will be provided. Bring your favorite entrée, salad or dessert to share.

Trusses: Bring blooming trusses (in soda bottles or the like) for display and judging. There will be a prize for the best in each color categories: Red, pink, yellow/white, purple/blue and one for lepidotes. There must be at least 3 entries in each category to become eligible for a prize. Judging will be done by ballot. You can vote for one truss in each color category.

Auction: The auction table will be filled with rhododendron and companion plants just waiting for your winning bid. *Bring money, lots and lots of money!*

Program: Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens director, **Kristi O'Donnell**, will lead us on an inspirational walk through the Gardens and on a journey in our imaginations. This fun filled adventure promises to spring clean the cobwebs out of our dream attics. Please bring some crayons, colored pencils or markers.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

| | |
|------------------|---|
| May 24 | Chapter Meeting Lucile Whitman, Companion Trees |
| June 10 | Meerkerk Picnic |
| Sept 22-24 | ARS Regional Conference Harrison Hot Springs, BC |
| Oct 25 | Chapter Meeting Bill Heller |
| Nov 15 | Annual Chapter Meeting Pie Social/Steve Hootman |
| Dec 9 | Holiday Dinner/Gift Exchange @ Christopher's in Coupeville |

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

We have 15 guests from Vancouver Island who will be joining us at our potluck meeting this month! They will enjoy the day touring Bill Stipe's, Frank Fujioka's and Meerkerk's gardens then join us for the fun and fellowship planned for our meeting. *Please make a little extra* of that entrée, salad or dessert that you're planning on whipping up to share with our new rhodoholic friends. Let's roll out the welcome mat and show them the Whidbey Island hospitality we're known for.

Dunn Garden Tour - reminder

If you signed up for the Dunn Garden Tour, please don't forget to pay your admission fee. Make checks out to *John Marshall* and see him at the meeting. Thanks!

In the Garden

April Rhododendron tips: (Bill Stipe)

Deadhead; prune; pull weeds; it's still time to fertilize; treat for root weevil (beneficial nematodes or Talstar); irrigate if there's no rain for 10 days; enter flowers in shows; enjoy flowers and new growth!



General gardening tips:

(Mary Robson, author of "Month by Month Gardening in Oregon and Washington" (Cool Springs Press, 2006), and Sandy Dunham, Seattle Times desk editor)

- Manage ravenous slugs with beer traps, handpicking and least-toxic baits.
- Early this month, start warm weather crops of tomatoes, squash and basil indoors.
- Trim and prune spring-blooming shrubs such as forsythia and camellia after their flowers fade.

In all things of nature there is something marvelous.

Arsitotle



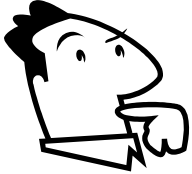
Potluck – 6pm – Greenbank Progressive Hall

ARS Name the Hybrid Project

Don Smart

The ARS is taking on a new project to bring in some much needed revenue. It is similar to the fundraiser in place at Meerkerk Rhododendron Garden which allows anyone to name one of Frank Fujioka's tested hybrids for a fee donated to Meerkerk.

The ARS is inviting hybridizers from both the East and West coast regions to place one of their tested but, as of yet, unnamed hybrids into the arena. From these submittals, one from each coast will be selected for naming by anyone for a donation in excess of \$5000. These donations will in turn benefit many of the ARS programs.



As part of the project we are looking for volunteers to help with the evaluation of the submitted hybrids.

Once the plants are selected we will publicize the availability of the plants to ARS members and the general public. Our goal is to have the process in place by the fall of 2006 and the announcement of the winners at the 2007 convention.

If you have a new rhododendron or azalea hybrid that you would like to submit for consideration, or would like to be part of the selection process, please contact Don Smart at donolyn@comcast.net, or 1618 290th Ave NE, Carnation, WA 98014.

Meerkerk Magic

Kristi O'Donnell

Spring's soft sunrise
illuminates
opalescent lanterns of
Rhododendron falconeri
now beaming



the
fragrance of dawn.

Meerkerk Happenings

- **Gardens in Bloom Guided Tour**
Saturday mornings, April & May 10-11am
Join horticulturist Oriana Simmons-Otness on an inspirational and fun stroll of the ten-acre Gardens. Dress for the weather. Meet at the front parking lot. *Regular admission fees apply.*
- **Native Plant Walk**
Saturday afternoons, April & May 1-2:30pm
Join Master Gardener and Meerkerk Volunteer, Don Lee for a tour of the Gardens focusing on native plants. Dress for the weather. Meet at the front parking lot. *Regular admission fees apply.*

- **"Tai Chi from the Arthritis Foundation"**
Saturday, April 29th, 10-noon
Is your chi flowing? The ancient discipline of Tai Chi Chuan combines joint safe exercise, breathing and mental focus to improve balance, mobility, and relaxation in ways that help you feel in greater control over your daily life. Join fitness instructor Sarah Birger in the gardens of Meerkerk to explore some simple moves and connect with the chi (energy) that is within you and within the garden. Sarah is certified to teach Tai Chi for the Arthritis Foundation (www.taichiforarthritis.com). Meet at the front parking lot. Dress comfortably with good shoes. *This program is funded by a generous grant of the Stanley Smith Horticultural Foundation. Donations are gratefully accepted.*
- **Volunteer Opportunities:**
Become a Grateful Deadheader!
Help us keep the Gardens looking fresh all spring long. You will receive a tie dyed t-shirt and the satisfaction of working in the beautiful gardens with friends.



* Ramsey Remembered *

Meerkerk Gardens invites the members of the Whidbey Island Chapter of the ARS to an afternoon tea in the Ramsey Rock Garden, Sunday April 30, 1-3pm. Tea, coffee and Whidbey Island Pie will be served.

A new plaque, contributed by WIARS, has been installed, commemorating our friendship with Ramsey. In addition, we will have a sneak preview of the new Fujioka hybrid rhododendron named in Jim's honor: R. 'Jim's Blueberry Jam'.

The Garden will be in bloom featuring some of Ramsey's favorite dwarf rhodies accented by the living tapestry of miniature spring bulbs contributed by the Whidbey Island Weaver's guild.

Park in the main parking lot.
Tents will be set up for rain or shine.

Please RSVP the Gardens
360-678-1912 or meerkerk@whidbey.net

Meeting Reminders

Bring...

- ❖ A Potluck dish
- ❖ Blooming trusses!
- ❖ Lots of money
- ❖ Friends, neighbors, family
- ❖ Your enthusiasm

...and especially your warmth and friendship to share!

Potluck – 6pm – Greenbank Progressive Hall

Rhododendron vaseyi

A. Gray 1880

Steve Hootman

A Species Profile reprinted from the
Rhododendron Species Foundation Newsletter.

In the upper elevations of the southern Appalachian Mountains, in only seven counties of western North Carolina and one in adjacent northern Georgia, grows an azalea loved by all who experience it - *Rhododendron vaseyi* - the pinkshell azalea.

First "discovered" in 1878 by George S. Vasey, the botanist in charge of the U.S. National Herbarium from 1872 -1893, it was introduced into cultivation by the Arnold Arboretum of Jamaica Plain, MA soon after 1880. Since that time, this species has become widely cultivated due to its tremendous ornamental appeal, including distinct foliage and unusual beautiful flowers. Planted as a specimen or in a group, the narrow, delicate-appearing, deciduous foliage provides a graceful accent to the landscape. As winter approaches, and the trees and shrubs are beginning their physiological changes in preparation for the dormant season, *R. vaseyi* blazes forth in shades of brilliant red and scarlet. With this striking display of color, the pinkshell azalea easily earns its place in any landscape. Fortunately for us however, autumn is not the only time of year when this plant deserves our admiration. Blooming in April with unusually-shaped, orchid-like flowers in shades of pink to white, the pinkshell azalea has the unique beauty and charm to enthrall even the most hardened rhodophile.

Rhododendron vaseyi is a member of Subgenus Pentanthera, Section Rhodora (formerly Sub-series Canadense). The only other member of this section is *Rhododendron canadense*, another unusual and distinct deciduous species native to eastern North America. The taxonomy of the entire group (Subgenus Pentanthera) has been the subject of much debate over the years. Most of the argument has been concerned with the alliances between the species, where and if divisions should be made, and into which groups certain species should be placed. Peter Cox and many others familiar with the genus feel that *R. vaseyi* has little or no connection even with *R. canadense*, the only other species in the same taxonomic section as *vaseyi*. This is based upon their different chromosome numbers and their strong differences both morphologically and chemically. Alfred Rehder, formerly of the Arnold Arboretum, considered *R. albrechtii*, a Japanese species, to be the nearest relative of *vaseyi*. The uniqueness of *R. vaseyi* is borne out by the fact that it is one of the few species of *Rhododendron* that has so far proven impossible to cross with any other species (albiflorum, schlippenbachii, and semibarbatum also share this characteristic). Of course, this means that it always comes true from seed, even when open-pollinated in a garden situation. At one time, it was even considered to be in a distinct genus and was known as *Biltiavaseyi*. Further testing on a genetic level should improve our understanding of the relationship between this species and the rest of the genus.

The pinkshell azalea grows as a large upright shrub to 15 feet in height. The branchlets are hairy at first, becoming glabrous by the second year, with flaky or shredding brown to gray-brown bark. The leaves are scattered along the branches and elliptic (widest at the middle) to elliptic-oblong (longer than broad, with almost parallel sides) in shape. They range from two to five inches long and 3/4 to 2 inches wide, with an acuminate apex (tapering to a protracted point), and a cuneate base (wedge-shaped), often with undulate leaf margins. They are typically dark green above, lighter green and usually glabrous beneath, with entire to serrulate (minutely saw-toothed) margins. The flowers are up to two inches across, widely funnel-shaped to rotate-campanulate (a flat bell), two-lipped with deeply divided lobes (lacks the long tube characteristic of most other eastern azaleas). The flowers are variable in color, usually in shades of rose or pink but varying to almost red in the wild and occasionally even pure white. The largest lobe (and often the two lateral) can have red, pink, or green spots (sometimes mixed on same flower). This species has anywhere from three to fifteen flowers per inflorescence, with five to seven stamens and a glandular-pubescent ovary (hairy with glands). Pinkshell azalea blooms before the new foliage emerges in early spring.

In the very limited geographical area where *R. vaseyi* is native, it can be a common or even dominant species in the appropriate habitat. The literature states that this species occurs in bogs, spruce forests, ravines, and even swamps, usually between 4,000 and 6,000 ft. but sometimes lower. I have most often observed it growing as an under-

story shrub in deciduous or semi-deciduous mountain forests, often forming a pink haze under the leafless canopy of the awakening trees. It is also very common on road cuts and on large moss-covered boulders and cliffs where a constant supply of water from upslope was available through seepage in the moss. The area in which this species occurs benefits from a tremendous amount of rainfall each year, as well as a very humid and foggy atmosphere. Cooler temperatures prevail during the growing season (compared to the hot and muggy conditions in the surrounding lowlands) due to the high altitude at which this species occurs. This environment is very similar to the mountainous regions of the Sino-Himalaya where the majority of temperate rhododendrons are native: a cool, humid atmosphere, and an extremely well-drained "soil" (moss-covered rocks) with a constant supply of highly oxygenated water at the roots.

Seeing it blooming in the wild for the first time (in the spring of 1994), I was impressed, and somewhat surprised, at the tremendous range in flower size and color observable in each population. I found several pure white forms and a few which were such a dark pink that they appeared almost red. Obviously, there is quite a bit of distinct and superior clonal material available for selection. It is interesting to note the large and obviously dynamic genetic pool functioning to preserve diversity even in a species with a small, limited range population (i.e. endemic) like the pinkshell azalea. As is often the case with plants of a very limited range in nature, *R. vaseyi* has proven very adaptable in cultivation. A vigorous and hardy species, pinkshell azalea has been reported as naturalized in Massachusetts and is somewhat tolerant of, but less well adapted, to the hot and humid conditions in the south-eastern U.S. It performs admirably in the Pacific Northwest and is reported to grow well in many parts of Europe including Scandinavia.

At the RSBG, this species puts on grand display every year, with masses of flowers and strong growth that usually hardens-off and colors-up before a hard frost. Many of the other azaleas native to the southeast tend to continue their active growth well into the autumn and so never really develop any decent fall color before a frost kills all of the foliage. In our mild climate, *R. vaseyi* does not usually color as well in the autumn as I have seen in many eastern gardens. However, many plants known for their colorful fall foliage fail to excite under our northwest growing conditions. This arises mainly from our (usually) lacking the ideal combination of warm sunny days, cool clear nights, and several light frosts prior to a severe "killing" frost. These environmental influences help to "tell" a plant that the dormant season is coming. Our northern latitude (longer days), and the fact that we may get no frosts until late November or even December, can "fool" plants such as many of the other southeastern azaleas into continual growth up until a real cold snap hits and all of that non-hardened-off soft tissue at the branch tips is damaged or even killed (the plants normally recover the following growing season).

R. vaseyi likes a plentiful supply of water during the growing season and is probably best near water, but doesn't seem to require any special conditions to perform well in the landscape, adapting to almost any reasonable soil and situation. Here at the RSBG, most of our specimens are growing directly beneath several large douglas firs (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), a rather dry and shady place as many of you know from first-hand experience. Full exposure to the sun (with adequate soil moisture) will probably give the best results in all but the hottest climates. The species as a whole received the Award of Garden Merit (AGM) in 1927. In 1969, the clone 'Suva' was exhibited by Edmund de Rothschild, Exbury, and received the Award of Merit (AM). A pure white-flowered clone 'White Find' is another beautiful selection.

Happy Easter



Please submit articles of interest for May Newsletter by **5/12/06**

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Potluck – 6pm – Greenbank Progressive Hall