

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
Refreshments: 7:00 Meeting: 7:20

February 2007

Annual Chapter IT'S TIME TO PLANT! Sale

Saturday March 10th, 2007
8:00am to 4:00pm
Coupeville Middle School

This is our **major fundraiser for the year**. We have a nice selection including some of Jim Barlup's newer hybrids as well as other notables (Fujioka, Berg). Prices range from \$10-35 for these large, well budded field grown plants. Take a look at the plant list on page 3.

Help needed for the Sale: Folding tables and chairs for our booth; Setup at 6:30-7am in the gymnasium; Teardown at the end of the day (4pm-ish).

Help needed during the Sale: Cashiers; experts to answer customer questions (bring your Greer's); sales people; helpers.

* Contact **Stephen Schwarzmann**, 678-1948 or sschwarzmann@msn.com if you'd like to assist.*

Next Meeting: Wed, February 28

Program: **Richie Steffen**

Righteous Rhodies and
The Plants That Love Them

Richie Steffen of the Miller Botanical Garden will make a slide presentation focusing on one of his favorite groups of plants: species Rhododendrons. This show is filled with colorful shots of the wonderful flowers and foliage of these genus as well as his favorite woodland plants and planting combinations.

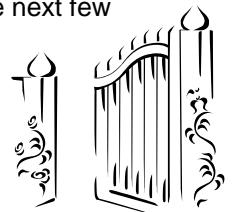
Richie is also working with the nonprofit Pacific Northwest Horticultural Conservancy whose current goal is to purchase the old Heronswood Nursery property in order to preserve the plant collections. He will give us an update on the progress and his latest meeting with the nursery owner in Pennsylvania.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Feb 28	Chapter Meeting
March 11	Annual Chapter Plant Sale
March 17-18	Meerkerk Opening Sale
March 28	Chapter Meeting
April 12-15	ARS Annual Convention San Francisco, CA
April 21	Chapter Garden Tour
April 25	Meeting/Potluck/Show/Auction
May 23	Chapter Meeting
Oct 12-14	ARS Regional Conference Cleveland, OH

Chapter Garden Tour

The date of the Garden Tour has been changed to **April 21st** so it doesn't conflict with the ARS Annual Convention being held in San Francisco. Please consider opening your garden for this fun day. We've refined the hours a bit, 9:30-12 and 1-3:30. Your garden will be open for either the morning or afternoon session which gives you a chance to visit some of the other gardens. Don't be shy about this opportunity to show off your garden. Another member may find a rhododendron in your garden that they've wanted to see in bloom or a plant combination you've put together may solve a problem spot for them. Signup sheets will be passed around at the next few meetings for gardens to share and for those interested in helping a garden host. Contact **Stephen Schwarzmann**, 678-1948 or sschwarzmann@msn.com if you'd like to participate.



Cookie reminder:
Mary Wyman & Nancy Lyon

Meerkerk Magic

JOY! Spring ~

Green grows the grass ~
Is winter long passed?

Spring is fragrant on the breeze.

Plums bloom, alas
Buds swelling fast

March waltzes with grace and ease.

K risti O'D onnell 2/18/07

With hopeful heart and ease-filled thoughts, I pen these lines to you- and invite you to visualize a smooth entering spring time adorned with sweet perfume and blossoms galore. Thousands of daffodil buds are now showing color ~ and early rhodies: Pink Prelude, Chief Sealthe, Weston's Pink Diamond and Tabitha are now in flower.

Meerkerk Gardens enters into her glorious time of year now and blossoms through the next several months. We are gearing up for the biggest days of our year: the **Spring Opening Sale, March 17 ad 18**. We're hoping for the luck o' the Irish for a sunny and successful spring season. Gorgeous rhodies are budding up and we have a selection of superb NW hybrids available this year, including fantastic Fujioka rhododendrons, stellar plants from Jim Barlup's palette and great bloomers from Elsie's résumé.

Thanks to our dedicated staff of gardeners and volunteers, the toll of winter's storms has been transformed into raked paths, split logs and blooming primulas.

Everyone here is very excited about a few new projects recently completed or approaching the finish line:

The new propagation greenhouse is functional and has been a cool house all winter holding pots of bulbs for spring landscapes. The hybrid rhododendron seedlings, crosses by Oriana, are doing well and will soon be accompanied by last year's crosses, now germinating.

The cuttings our volunteers stuck in autumn, however, did not fair well through the electrical outages and we will begin anew this spring. Next winter the propane heating system will be on-line to prevent the freezing that occurred this past year.

The Wednesday Construction Team, who assembled the greenhouse, is now constructing the new Hybridizer's Garden Gazebo adjacent to the nursery. Our thanks go to the Wednesday Team: Bob Boehm, Don Lee, Jim Tully and Master Gardeners: Glenn, George and John. This team is also helping renew the old gatehouse and relocated it to the woods edge as a permanent Botany Adventure Station for self guided tours throughout the woods, maps of the nature trails and interpretive information about the native and exotic plants we have here.

The crescendo of projects is the new Gatehouse, made possible by our Friend of Meerkerk and major gift donor, Nancy Nordhoff. Modeled after an old world style pepper-pot garden house at Highgrove, the new Gatehouse is being created by some of the finest craftsmen in our region.

In addition to inviting visitors to the peaceful woodland garden and serving as a portal into this garden sanctuary and

woodland retreat, the new Gatehouse is a warm and beautiful building for our volunteer greeters.

That brings us to you! We are asking you to volunteer and assist us with the activities of spring: greeting visitors, helping sell rhodies each weekend, grooming the gardens and assisting with the nature trail clean up. Cookie bakers, sign makers and data base entry persons are welcome too!

For our Spring opening Sale, March 17-18, **we need your help** with plant pricing and labeling, setting up the nursery and signage. We get together as a group every Thursday morning from 9 to noon. If Thursdays don't work for you, please email (meerkerk@whidbey.net) or phone (678-1912) to give us a heads up that you'd like to come and we will be sure to have a project ready for your helping hands.

For the Sale Weekend, we need your expertise in enchanting people with rhodies and educated them how to grow them here on Whidbey Island.

We will be phoning and emailing to ask for your assistance, so check over your calendars and pencil in Meerkerk Gardens!

If it is not possible for you to volunteer, perhaps you know of someone who would be interested? If you'd like to help out and are able, send a tax deductible contribution to help offset the extra expenses winter storms created.

So mark your calendars, make a special date, to experience the rebirth of spring in the Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens!



Meerkerk Gardens 2007 Events

March 17, 18	Spring Opening Sale	9-4
April-May	PEAK BLOOM!	Open Daily 9-4
April 21	Meerkerk Magic, Celebration of Flowers	Noon-4
May 13	Mother's Day Harp Concert	Noon-4
August 4	Meerkerk Medley	4:30-9
Oct 13	Autumn Rhododendron Sale	9-1



Busted Myths

Myth: Chemicals control weeds best.

Fact: Weed management means using several techniques. Mulch all bare ground, choose plantings that will shade out weeds, and pull out weed seedlings.

Myth: Spring and summer cause the most weed growth.

Fact: The maritime Pacific Northwest abounds in winter weeds infesting landscapes. Keep up weed control through the cold months.

(Written by Mary Robson and Holly Kennel, Washington State University Cooperative Extension/King, Snohomish and Pierce counties. Seattle Times)

Chapter **IT'S TIME TO PLANT!** Sale

Get to our plant sale bright and early to get your hands on some of these treasures!

Amber Touch 18"
Deep Clover 12"
Fantastica 15"
Fire Rim 15"
Hallelujah 18"
Hallelujah 21"
Homebush 24"
Horizon Monarch 18"
Ice Music 12"
*Invitation 2-gallon
*Komo Kulshan 2-gallon
Love Poem 18"
Marley Hedges 18"
Mindy's Love 15"
Orchid Mist 15"
*Radicans 1-gallon
Silk Ribbon 18"
Snow Candle 15"
Starbright Champagne 15"
*Wee Bee 1-gallon
Wind River 15"

Note: * potted plants, all others balled and bagged

Q & A

Irene Mills

Question: *What is mulch and what is the best kind to use?*

Answer: Mulch is any type of loose, weed-free material laid on top of the soil surface to reduce water loss from evaporation, protect plant roots from heat and freezing, and prevent soil compaction and erosion.

The best mulches, from the standpoint of improving soil and cutting down on maintenance and watering, are organic materials (such as fallen leaves, wood chips, or aged manure) that are gradually broken down by the feeding activities of soil organisms. Organic materials are decomposed in the top layer of soil, in the vicinity of feeder root systems, where nutrients released by the decomposition process are more readily available for the plant's use. After the organic materials have been thoroughly decomposed, what remains in the soil is humus—fine material that improves soil's structure and water-holding capacity.

Materials high in nitrogen, such as manure, decompose fairly quickly, especially in warm weather, and have to be renewed regularly. That's why the twenty yards of expensive compost you laboriously spread last year is nowhere to be seen this year. But don't despair: Dr. Lee Reich of Cornell University and Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott of WSU-Puyallup Extension, among others, advocate arborist wood chips (not bark) as the best mulch both for soil improvement and effective weed control. Research has shown that wood chips laid on top of the soil, not dug in, do not rob nitrogen from plants and have not been shown to introduce disease pathogens into the soil. They break down more slowly

than high-nitrogen mulches, yet quickly enough to benefit soil organisms, and if you ask, tree-care companies will usually let you have a load of shredded wood chips at no charge.

An alternative to arborist wood chips is to purchase playground chips (a nursery owner I know calls them "hog fuel"). They might cost more than bark, but they look nice and have the same benefits as arborist chips.



How deep should mulch be?

Depends on which material you use and which expert you consult. For wood chips, three to six inches is about right. Mulches should never be piled against trees and shrubs—keep a few inches of ground clear around their bases to avoid creating an environment for diseases and insect pests.

Inorganic materials, such as gravel, are useful for mulching around plants like lavender and succulents that need lean soil and excellent drainage. In the NPA Borders at

Bellevue Botanical Garden, where composted dairy manure is the favored mulch, dolomite lime chips are spread around the crowns of peonies to enhance drainage, help protect them from botrytis, and sweeten the soil. •

Reprinted from the Northwest Perennial Northwest Alliance newsletter, The Perennial Post. To learn more about the NPA, one of the largest nonprofit gardening organizations in the Pacific NW, visit: <http://www.northwestperennialalliance.org/>

Meeting Reminder

Bring...



- ♥ Early blooming trusses!
- ♥ Plants for the dollar table
- ♥ A friend
- ♥ Your enthusiasm

... and friendship to share!

Yearbook Update

Gail DaPont

I'll be updating the Chapter Yearbook throughout the next month. Please let me know if your info needs correcting, 331-4746 or gail@whidbey.com.

Please submit articles of interest for Mar Newsletter by **3/16/07**

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