

WHIDBEY ISLAND CHAPTER



ARS Whidbey Island Chapter NEWSLETTER

Website: whidbeyrhodies.org

Meets the 4th Wednesday of each Month
Fire District 5 Headquarters Station
1164 Race Road, Coupeville, WA
Refreshments: 7:00 Meeting: 7:20

February 2009

Program Notes: Bonsai Hands-On



The Greenhouse Florist & Nursery is a family owned business established in 1954 and passed down from generation to generation. Tennis Vanden Haak was a vegetable grower when he and wife Sylvia emigrated from Holland and together they nurtured their family and business. Henry Vanden Haak and Audrey Vanden Haak-Butler, children of Tennis and Sylvia, now own the Greenhouse F&N and are working to continue it to the next generation.

Henry's has a great hands-on program planned for us. He will guide us through the potting of a Lonicera 'nitida' which he feels is a very good starter plant for developing ones Bonsai skills. Henry will provide kits for our workshop that include: starter container, soil, plant, saucer and some pea gravel for \$10. There will be 4 varieties of Lonicera available to choose from.

Please bring a garbage bag to cover your workspace for easy clean-up. Henry will also pot a large rhododendron and answer questions as he moves through the demonstration. You are also invited to bring any Bonsai plant from your collection that you might have particular questions about.

This sounds like a great workshop for those who have wanted to dabble in Bonsai or are just curious about how those trees survive in those little pots. Who knows, you may just catch the bug!

It's Time!

Yes, it's time for you to get out in the garden and feed those rhododendrons. **Bill Stipe** is making his special slow release fertilizer, formulated for Whidbey gardens, available to you at \$30 for a 25 pound. Bags of fertilizer will be available at the meeting or contact Bill, wstipe@whidbey.com or 678-8740 for more details. Bill is donating a portion of these sale dollars to the Chapter. *Thanks Bill!*



Don't forget the dollar table!

Next Meeting: February 25

**Program: Henry Vanden Haak
Hands-on Bonsai and more...**

Henry Vanden Haak, one of the owners of Greenhouse Florist & Nursery in Oak Harbor, will dazzle us with his Bonsai skill in a hands-on workshop on the planting of a Lonicera 'nitida' in a starter container. If you have a Bonsai plant and have questions you are encouraged to bring them as well. *Read more program details this page.*

Calendar of Upcoming Events

- Feb 18-22 NW Garden & Flower Show
- Feb 25 Chapter Meeting
Henry Vanden Haak: Bonsai
- Feb 28- Mar 1 Mt Baker Orchid Show
- March 21-22 Meerkerk Opening Sale
- March 25 Chapter Meeting
Rhododendrons 101
- April 22 Chapter Meeting/Potluck
@ Greenbank Progressive Hall
- Apr 29-May 3 ARS Convention
Everett, WA
- May 27 Chapter Meeting
Fujioka: Visit Scotland
- August Picnic
- Sept 23 Chapter Meeting
Program: TBA

Convention Reminder

Just a reminder that this year's Annual ARS Convention will be in Everett, WA, April 29-May3 at the Holiday Inn. Come for the day, part of the day or just for the plant sale.

Volunteers are still needed for bus guides, the hospitality booth or, please, donate a door prize. Contact **Pat Sasson**, 331-5816 or patken@whidbey.com, if you'd like to pitch in.



Cookie Reminder:
Jan Allen & Kathy Rix

From the Prez

Pat Sasson



I am sitting here writing this on Valentine's Day and hoping you are all having a special day. My crocuses were blooming – until the rabbits feasted on them. But rabbits and deer don't eat primroses or hellebores! And my two Christmas Cheer Rhododendrons that I thought had only frozen buds are now blooming. Days are getting longer. Spring is coming!

And with Spring comes two important events. The first is the International Rhododendron Conference to be held in Everett from April 30 – May 3rd. Our Chapter, as you know, is one of the sponsors of this event and is committed to making it a success. If it is successful, we will not only get our seed money of \$300 returned, but have a chance to glean a share of the profits. People will come from Canada and from all across the United States. Please help make this event one of the most successful conferences ever! You can do so by attending the conference either all or in part. You must be registered to attend but you do not have to stay at the hotel or attend everything offered. You can also help by offering to volunteer. We still need 4 bus captains to go on the Rhodie Ridge tour (or 2 volunteers if they can do both morning and afternoon.) We also need volunteers to help man the hospitality booth at the hotel. And, lastly, we are also still looking for donated door prize items.

The other event is Dreams of Spring, the auction/dinner to support Meerkerk Gardens on March 7th. I would like the Rhododendron Society to sponsor a table of eight. I now have five from WIARS but would welcome three more. This is the major fund raiser for the Gardens and as rhodie lovers I would like to see us support it. Do call me if you would like to join Frank, Suzanne, Jack, Norma and me!

Phew! I know I am asking a lot but then I guess that is the job of the Prez to do so, is it not?

See you at the February 25th meeting – and don't forget to bring a guest!

Whidbey Gardening Workshop



The Whidbey Gardening Workshop is presented annually for the benefit of the gardening public. This year's workshop, held Saturday March 14th at the Coupeville Middle/High School, is presented by the Island County WSU

Master Gardeners and WSU Livestock Advisors. This workshop features a wide variety of gardening topics: Bonsai; Rain Gardens; Edible Landscaping; Pruning; Native Plants; Weather; Digital Photography; Fruit Tree care and much, much more.

Award-winning nurseryman John Christianson will be keynote speaker, discussing *A Nurseryman's Garden: The Constancy of Change*. He and his wife, Toni, are well known to area gardeners for their Skagit Valley business, Christianson's Nursery and Greenhouse, as well as for their acclaimed exhibits at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show.

Fee is \$35, registration begins February 13th. For more information visit: www.island.wsu.edu or call 360-240-5527.

Meerkerk News

Kristi O'Donnell

Hello, WIARS members: A bouquet of thanks to WIARS for your recent contribution of \$100 for the Big Leaf Valley. We are hoping to top dress the gravel that Jake and crew installed nearly 10 years ago. If you love big leaf rhodies and appreciate the project Jake dreamt up, I invite you to match our chapter's gift of \$100 or any portion thereof. It will cost about \$850 to upgrade the path.

We had a fun-tastic lumberjack work party for Valentine's day. Thank you Whidbey members for taking time to help us in the gardens.

Don Kohlenberger brought a gorgeous 4 year old R. *sinogranda* for our Dreams of Spring auction. *Thank you Don!*

Mark came with his supply of chain saw equipment to help take the last of the diseased cedars out while **Keith** and new volunteer, **Jack Green**, tended the burn pile and picked up the towering stacks of winter clean up **Paul Loudon** and **Arlee Anderson** have been building over the last 2 months.

Jack Loundsberry, king of tool repair, arrived to kick start a DR Power Mover and chippers that were donated for Dreams of Spring.

Ann Lee, our librarian, worked on removing some duplicate books in the Meerkerk library. They will be on sale during our Spring Season when the specialty rhododendron nursery opens, March 21- June.

Don Lee worked on the paths and gardens surrounding the Volunteer Cottage which is also now the new Meerkerk office! Come by for a visit.

Susie and **Arlee** spruced up the entry beds while **Frank** cleaned and sorted rhodie hybrid seeds to sow. **Kristi** prepared the containers and sowed 8 new hybrids- we are excited about all the new possibilities. These crosses feature plants with fragrance and good foliage. We'll see what develops!

Mark your calendars for our Saturday March 13th work party. We'll be getting plants ready for our largest rhodie sale of the year, opening day March 21, 22. I'll have a special treat for every Whidbey ARS member who comes to help us out! If Saturday won't work for you, keep in mind our Thursday work parties, 9-noon. We have hot soup on for the team! In addition to help in the Gardens, we are looking for volunteers to make the engraved labels in the warm cozy cottage, stamp ARS info booklets, package fertilizer and pot up seedlings and cuttings.

Pat Sasson is busy signing up WIARS members for her table for Dreams of Spring. Tickets are available and super items have been donated for the auction! Visit our website, meerkerkgardens.org, for the listing of auction items and to receive more info about the gala. Thanks to ARS members **Fran Spicer** and **Cee Shacker** for helping with the auction and to those of you who can't attend, thank you for your donation!

So Now You Know

*Many plant names commemorate legendary kings and heroes... A milkweed genus, *Asclepias*, is named for Aesculapius, the god of healing, the loosestrife genus (*Lysimachia*) recalls Lysimachus, ancient king of Sicily, and germander (*Teucrium*) commemorates Teucer, the legendary founder of Troy...*

(Willard Clute)

The Garden in January

Ted Hewitt, Eugene Chapter

It is now the end of the first week of January and just a few weeks ago we had snow with 15° temperatures, but now it is near 50°. Having recently read an article in the Fall 1987 ARS Journal on the beauty of rhododendrons in the winter, I took my camera with me on a walk around our garden as I find this to be a good way to observe some of the details of what is looking good. Without the many perennials, there are not the summer groupings of color, texture, and shape so I tended to look at the details of individual plants and was surprised at how much there is to see in the way of color, texture, and shape in a microcosm.

Let's look first at the rhododendrons. In a raised bed by the driveway, where we see it as we come and go, is *Rhododendron* 'Pink Snowflakes' with wonderful red flower buds contrasting against the green leaves. Nearby, beside a garden path, is one of our favorite multi-season plants, *Rhododendron* 'Cilpenense', with its bright green leaves edged with little hairs and sporting clusters of tight flower buds each having bud scales edged in white creating wonderful patterns. We now have several of these around the woodland garden that contribute their nice color and shape throughout the year, but,



this year, we have added a few dwarfs that have beautiful maroon winter foliage. In a prime spot on the front rock terrace is *R. campylogynum* var. *myrtilloides* which we selected for its dainty little thimble-shaped flowers in April. However, we are now delighted with the small, shiny, greenish-maroon leaves. Also new this year is *R. 'Patty Bee'* whose maroon foliage is a good foil for the curved, silver-backed green needles of a dwarf balsam fir, *Abies balsamea* 'Nana'. The third new little maroon-foliaged dwarf is a *R. hanceanum* 'Nanum' but it is so small that it continues to live in a pot. However, the winter foliage will someday be a good addition to the garden. Also in a raised bed where it is easier to see, we have *R. pronum* whose sturdy, green leaves have yellow stems and ribs radiating out from a yellow growth bud, forming a spoked wheel pattern. This plant also looks good during the rest of the year and, perhaps, will bloom someday. Often at this time, *R. 'Christmas Cheer'* shows some of its pink color to brighten gray January days but the December cold took care of the early buds that were opening. However, I did find one new bud just starting to open showing the bright pink against the green leaves. By February these plants should be in full bloom placing them among our favorites. Throughout the garden, plants with variegated foliage brighten the winter dullness so *R. 'President Roosevelt'* does its share with swelling flower buds amidst the tri-color, green to cream foliage.

Now let's look at some of the other plants that are putting on a winter show. Old fashioned as they are, the female skimmias with clumps of bright red berries nestled in the green foliage are easily seen, even from a distance. On

a smaller level, the shiny green, heart-shaped leaves each decorated with a silver, marbled pattern of *Asarum marmoratum* really stand out amongst the brown oak leaves on the ground. Similarly, the irregular, pentagonally-shaped, highly patterned green and silver leaves of large clumps *Cyclamen hederifolia* present a nice vignette. Many digital cameras are capable of taking close-up pictures of these terrific patterns that are very interesting to look at on the computer monitor. Among the few blossoms in the garden at this time is the sweetly scented *Viburnum grandiflorum* with small clusters of dainty pink and white trumpets blooming directly from the bare stems of the leafless shrub. Close-up pictures make it easier to study these little wonders. Among the interesting texture plants are the stemmed hellebores. Though the more common *Helleborus x hybridus* is barely showing the new blossom stalks, the large stalks of



evergreen, toothed leaves of the *Helleborus argutifolius* are looking fresh and are putting forth the interestingly shaped new light green flower heads that form a wonderful contrast of texture. Similarly the finely cut, dark green leaves of *Helleborus foetidus* contrast with the light green flower heads. In terms of texture, pattern, and shape, a cousin of



our sword fern, *Polystichum neolobatum*, has kept its shiny, dark green fronds looking beautiful through the winter with each part of the frond being incredibly detailed. The effect in a close-up picture is a composition of texture and pattern. The variegated false holly, *Osmanthus*

heterophyllus 'Goshiki', has become a favorite of ours with its spiny, holly-like leaves that are a mottled cream and light green and that serve to lighten the solid green of shrubs around them all year long. Interesting color and texture contrasts continue on several of the dwarf conifers, the small *Saxifraga umbrosa* 'London Pride', the large, burgundy-colored leaves of the oakleaf hydrangea, and the peeling bark of the Himalayan white birch.

There are still more plants of interest to be studied and photographed but I will conclude with the statement of how wonderful it is to be enjoying the garden in the first week of the new year and I hope you will take your digital camera out to explore the plants of your own garden.

Reprinted with permission of the author from the Eugene Chapter's January newsletter. Visit them on line:

<http://www.eugene-chapter-ars.org>

Please submit articles of interest for Feb Newsletter by 3/13/09

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