

Whidbey Rhodies News

whidbeyrhodies.org

February 2010

Meets the 4th Wednesday of each month ❖ Race Road Firehouse, 1164 Race Rd, Coupeville WA
7pm Refreshments, 7:20 Meeting & Program

Next Meeting: February 24

Program: *Janet Hall*

Composting for Acid Loving Plants

Janet Hall is the WSU/Island County Waste Wise Volunteer Coordinator. Her education is in forestry and fire science earning degrees in Forest Management and Forest Fire Science. Her passion is to educate the public on ways to reduce waste by concentrating on composting, recycling, sustainable living, and septic systems. This evening she will teach us that not all compost is the same. We'll learn to make compost for acid-loving plants for mulching and reduced water usage.



Calendar of Upcoming Events

Feb 27-28.....	Mt Baker Orchid Show
March 20-21.....	Meerkerk Opening Sale
March 24.....	Chapter Meeting Rhododendrons 101
Apr 9-11.....	Ultimate Rhodie Conference Vancouver, BC
April 28.....	Chapter Meeting/Potluck @ Greenbank Progressive Hall
May 14-17.....	ARS Annual Convention Long Island, NY
May 26.....	Chapter Meeting Shirley Rock: All About Hardy Fuchsias
August.....	Picnic
Sept 22.....	Chapter Meeting Judith Jones: Ferns as Companion Plants
Oct 27.....	Chapter Meeting Dennis Bottemiller: Big Leaf Propagation
Nov 17.....	Pie Social/Annual Meeting

Big Leaf Valley Work Party

Don Kohlenberger/Gail DaPont

The Feb 6th work party was another success with the helping hands of **Don Kohlenberger, Stephanie Rodden, Marilynn Wright, Stephen Schwarzmann, Don & Ann Lee, Don & Jan Allen, Frank Fujioka, Mark Walljasper & Suzie Reynolds.** Not only did we make significant headway, but we also got four more species rhodies into the ground!

It's really exciting to see Jake's project looking so good. Once the areas around the plants are cleared and barked we'll start pushing the clearing process a bit up the sides of the Valley getting rid of the salmonberries, red elderberries and some of the encroaching sword ferns. We have already done a bit of sword fern clearing in a few areas immediately surrounding some of the rhodies and it has made a striking difference.

The next work party will be **Saturday, March 13th**. Don Kohlenberger may be out of town. Would one of you who has been to a work party please lead the effort... contact Don (donk@whidbey.net/679-2352) if you have any questions. Bring a potluck dish to share at noon.

Ultimate Rhododendron Conference

If you're in need of a rhodoholic fix don't forget the Rhododendron Conference, April 9 – 11, at the University of British Columbia, Botanical Garden and Centre for Plant Research in Vancouver, BC.

Learn all there is to know about rhododendrons and rhododendron gardening through six 90-minute educational sessions offered at a Novice or Veteran level. You'll be busy throughout the day attending lecture/slide presentations and listening to practical advice, laboratory experiences and field work with evenings free to enjoy Vancouver and the UBC campus. You'll have the opportunity to visit 3 notable gardens: UBC Botanical Garden; Nitobe Memorial Japanese Garden; VanDusen Botanical Garden. This conference is geared towards a high octane rhododendron education.

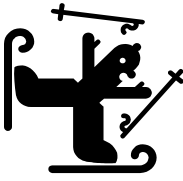
Visit www.rhodos.ca for costs, daily schedule, teaching topics, registration, accommodation and meal information.



Cookie Reminder:
Kathy Rothschild & Gail DaPont

From The Prez

Pat Sasson



This month has brought so many more blooms to my garden and, I am sure, to yours also. Unlike last winter, I didn't lose any plants this year. I am anxious to get out in the garden and have been out for brief periods of time but it does get chilly when the sun goes down. As March approaches I am less uneasy that we will get zapped by a cold front which will destroy the blooms.

So...now to fertilize those rhodies! And soon to cut back the roses when the first forsythia is in bloom.

February 27th is Meerkerk's "Dreams of Spring". Will any of you join me? I would welcome you at my table. Last year was a lot of fun with wonderful items for auction. Do let me know if you are going. It would be nice to have a Whidbey Island Chapter of the Rhododendron Society table!

I am off to Bend, Oregon with my family for our annual cross country skiing for a week. I must admit I tried to get out of it this year as I am loving not being cold. My nine year old granddaughter squelched that idea with "But Grandma, you just have to come! You are the snow under my skis!" How can I resist that?

See you all at the February meeting!

Whidbey Gardening Workshop

The Whidbey Gardening Workshop is presented annually for the benefit of the gardening public and is sponsored by the Island County Master Gardeners. This year's Saturday March 20th workshop features more than 50 gardening classes, local vendor booths and WSU publications. Fee is \$35, registration begins February 15th. For more information visit: www.island.wsu.edu or call 360-240-5527 to request a registration packet by mail.



Keynote speaker, Valerie Easton, writes about gardens, houses and the people who make them for Garden Design, Metropolitan Home, and in her weekly column and articles for the Seattle Times.

Valerie's newest book *The New Low Maintenance Garden; How To Make a Beautiful, Productive Garden and Have Time To Enjoy It* was published this past fall. Earlier titles include *A Pattern Garden*, *Artists In Their Gardens*, and *Plant Life: Growing a Garden in the Pacific Northwest* all from Sasquatch Books.

Editor's note: I've read through the list of classes and it is loaded with all sorts of informative sessions. Check it out!

Meerkerk Notes



This year's Garden Gala fundraiser, Dreams of Spring, is being held February 27th at the Fireseed Hall in Langley. Our team is doing a fantastic job of locating unique plants and plant experiences to raise

money vital to keeping the Gardens cared for.

We would love to see two full tables of 8 representing the Whidbey Island ARS!

Would you like to donate an item or experience to support the Gardens? The ideas are endless, the rewards are ever-blooming! For more information, give Kristi a call: 678-1912, send an email to meerkerk@whidbey.net or visit Meerkerk on the web: www.meerkerkgardens.org



Meerkerk Gardens is cared for by a dedicated group of volunteers. Friends from the American Rhododendron Society, local garden clubs, Island County Master Gardeners and our community assist throughout the year. There are many ways you can volunteer to help at the Gardens:

- *Work Parties:* Join us for monthly work parties the 2nd Saturday of each month, 8:45-12:00. We share a potluck lunch at noon.
- *Wednesday Construction Team:* Join our crew in building and repairing structures as needed in the Gardens, 9-noon. Add your name to the call list 678-1912.
- *Thursday Mornings: Hands-on-Horticulture* Enjoy working with gardening volunteers and the Meerkerk staff on horticultural projects in the Gardens.
- *Independent Opportunities:* Work on your own schedule on a solo or team project in the Gardens or your home office. Contact Kristi: meerkerk@whidbey.net.

Meerkerk Gardens 2010 Events

February 27	Dreams of Spring Horticulture Gala
March 20-21	Specialty Nursery Spring Opening
April 10	Early Bloomers Rhododendron Sale
April 17-18	Meerkerk Magic Festival of Flowers
May 9	Mother's Day Concert on the Lawn
May 15	Purple Passion Rhododendron Sale
August 28	Bluegrass Festival
October	Autumn Rhododendron Sale

Visit www.meerkerkgardens.org for event updates.

➤ Big Leaf Valley work party March 13 ◀

Fertilizing, Back to Basics

In fertile soils rhododendrons and azaleas can be grown well without receiving further fertilization. However, if plants are mulched with something like fresh sawdust or wood chips, there will be a nitrogen demand caused by the decomposition of these materials, and unless nitrogen is added, the plants are likely to show yellowish foliage and poor growth. In this case a fertilizer such as ammonium sulfate should be added. It is safer to use mulches other than those containing fresh sawdust or wood chips and then you don't have to be concerned with exactly how much extra fertilizer to add, as excess

fertilizer can harm your plants by "burning" the roots.



For rhododendrons planted in less fertile soils, a complete fertilizer designed for acid-loving plants may be applied in late winter or early spring. Be careful to use only the amounts recommended for rhododendrons and azaleas, which normally require less

fertilizer than plants such as grasses and vigorous shrubs. In cold climates, nitrogen fertilizer should not be applied after late June as it may promote new lush growth susceptible to winter damage. Recent research indicates that plants reasonably well supplied with nutrients, including nitrogen, are more resistant to low temperatures than those that are starved.

Phosphorus in fertilizer tends to favor early production of flower buds. If your soil is deficient in phosphorus and since phosphorus does not readily move through the soil, phosphorus should be incorporated into the soil at planting time if needed. Magnesium in the form of Epsom salts is sometimes recommended for rhododendrons. Magnesium is an essential element and lack of it will cause yellowish areas between the leaf veins on older leaves. If the leaves are a solid green the addition of Epsom salts would not be useful.

Lack of iron causes much the same symptoms as lack of magnesium, but with the younger leaves showing yellowing between the veins. Iron deficiency is frequently caused by too high a soil pH, often the result of mortar or mortar building debris in the soil near the roots. A soil test should be performed to see whether high pH is a problem and if it is the soil should be acidified. For a quick but temporary solution, ferrous sulfate can be added to the soil or chelated iron can be sprayed on the foliage, but the pH should be corrected for long term good growth.

Calcium is also essential to good rhododendron growth. Calcium can be obtained either from gypsum or from agricultural lime. Gypsum will not raise soil pH, while lime will, therefore, lime is not generally recommended in areas with naturally alkaline soil or water.

Reprinted from ARS website: <http://www.rhododendron.org>

A New Superfruit

Certain fruiting plants have become known as superfruits because of their high content of health-promoting compounds. Best known is the pomegranate, which has been found to contain almost three times as much antioxidants as red wine and green tea. Pomegranates have a drawback for gardeners: they can be grown only in the warmer climates (Zones 8 to 11).

Now a much hardier (Zones 4 to 8) fruit shrub is being called the newest superfruit. Traditionally prized for jelly, pies and wine, elderberry fruits are rich in antioxidants and also contain an antiviral flavonoid effective against flu viruses. "Neutraceutical" products based on elderberries are now appearing in health food stores.



Research on the health values and commercial growing of elderberries is underway at the University of Maine (Orono, ME 04473), the University of Missouri (Mountain Grove, MO 65711) and Oregon State University (Corvallis, OR 97330). A North American Elderberry Alliance has been formed; for information, contact Edie Johnston, Eldertide Pharm (555 Gardiner Road, Dresden, ME 04342; 207-737-8717; www.eldertide@mac.com).

Gardeners know elderberries as fine ornamentals as well as producers of fruit crops. Many cultivars with gold, purple or variegated foliage and great flowers and fruit have become popular.

The Avart Gardener, February 2010

In Bloom

Gail DaPont

A walk through my garden today finds R. 'Noyo Dream' and R. 'Rose Elf' in bloom along with *Pieris japonica* 'Valley Valentine'. Other members are enjoying the blooms of: R. *barbatum*; R. 'Bo Peep'; R. 'Bodega Crystal Pink'; R. 'Praecox'; R. *sperabilis*; R. *pachytricum*; R. *fulvum*; R. *dauricum* (white form); R. *mucronulatum* 'Mahogany Red' and R. *mucronulatum* 'Cornell Pink'.

You might want to consider adding one of these to your garden for early blooming interest.

Please submit articles of interest for Feb Newsletter by 3/13/10

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➤ Big Leaf Valley work party March 13 ◀