

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

January 2006

Next Meeting: Wed, January 25

Program: Bill Stipe, 'More to Rhododendrons than Just Flowers'

There's no disputing that we most often purchase a rhododendron for its blooms which last for two or three weeks each year, but what about the rest of the year? **Bill Stipe** is going to talk to us about foliage you can enjoy for the other 49-50 weeks. When you tune into rhodie foliage, you'll find a variety of large and small leaved plants in many colors and textures. Bill's presentation consists of rhododendrons grown entirely here on Whidbey Island.

Join us for a look at rhododendrons beyond the blooms.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Feb 8-12 ..	Seattle Flower and Garden Show
Feb 22	Chapter Meeting Marie Lincoln, Chocolate Flower Farm
Feb 25-26	Mt Baker Orchid Show/Sale Mt Vernon, WA
March 11	Annual Chapter Plant Sale
March 22	Chapter Meeting Don Kohlenberger, Hands-on, Rhodies from seed
April 26	Meeting/Potluck/Show/Auction
May 12-15	ARS Annual Convention Rockville, MD
May 24	Chapter Meeting
June 10	Meerkerk Picnic
Sept 21-24	ARS Regional Conference Harrison Hot Springs, BC

Christmas Party Recap

Another good time was had by all at the annual Christmas Party held at Christopher's in Coupeville. Our hats are off to **Pat Sasson** for pulling the party together with a wonderful menu. Pat also found a pianist to play carols, providing a special holiday ambiance during the pre-dinner fellowship.

Speaking of hats, **Bill Stipe** distracted and amused us all with his dancing hat, making it difficult to focus on the gift exchange. But focus we did as the rustle of wrapping paper revealed a treasure there was no guarantee you would keep. Chocolates, wine, ornaments, garden art, Christmas décor and wildlife accessories made the rounds until they were retired on the third pass.

Thanks also to **Donna Lee Von Falkenberg** for the clever buttons she put together for our party favors. Learn more about these in the following article.



Rhodies? Ask me!

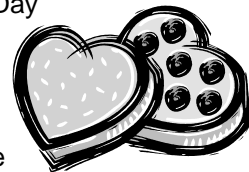
We're campaigning for new members!

Those of you who attended the Christmas party have already received a 'Rhodie, Ask Me' campaign button. Wear it on your shirt, hat or jacket when you are out and about to promote our chapter. If you missed the party, pickup a button at the next meeting. When someone asks you about your button, tell them what a great group of folks we are and how we love to talk about rhododendrons. Then invite them to a meeting to learn all there is to know about gardening with rhododendrons.

The Chocolate Report

We want to thank all the chocoholics out there who valiantly stepped forward to purchase boxes of Seattle Chocolates in an effort to reduce our budget deficit. With your help we made \$57.00!

Let me remind you, however, that Valentine's Day (February 14th) is just around the corner. **Bill Stipe** will be bringing a trunk-load of chocolates to the next meeting so you can shop early and not be caught chocolateless on this special appreciation day. Don't limit yourself to a loved one either, there's the neighbor, your barber, clerks in the Post Office, the milk man and, for heaven's sakes, you have to get a box or two for yourself...



January cookie reminder:
Mary Stipe & Bette Kohlenberger

From The Prez

Bette Kohlenberger

Happy New Year everyone. I hope your holidays were healthy and happy.



Our chapter Christmas party at Christopher's was wonderful. It was nice to see a larger turn out than in years past. As always it was nice to welcome several guests. The food was great, and so was the company. I want to thank **Pat**

Sasson and all those who helped her to put this fun dinner together. *Great Job Pat, Thank you!*

As we begin a new year, I am looking forward to our Chapter meetings for 2006. I promise that our upcoming speakers will entertain you. An interactive program is scheduled for March (I happen to know the presenter personally). Please invite everyone you know to our meetings. We need to increase our membership.

The weather we are having is so unseasonably warm that our spring bulbs are starting to come up. This tells me that it is time to get Don out of the house to start cleaning up the garden so that we will be able to enjoy the flowers when they come. (I'm not much for getting dirt under my nails). Even the geranium on our deck is blooming!

We have been enjoying the intoxicatingly sweet scent of [Sarcococca ruscifolia](#) (commonly called Fragrant Sweetbox) just outside our front door. It is a good companion for rhododendrons or camellias, enjoying the same organically rich topsoils & light exposure. Our yellow and orange [Witch Hazels](#) are in full bloom providing a nice spicy fragrance to the garden and the [Beautyberry](#) is loaded with shiny purple berries. Our normally reliable early January bloomers *R. dauricum* and *R. 'Christmas Cheer'* have yet to show color. Could it be that they need a bit of cold to realize that it is time to bloom? A couple of days ago I noticed [Cyclamen coum](#) starting to bloom. This really is an exciting time of year in the garden. While the winds have been hard on the trees and shrubs, the rains have been welcome. Lets hope the rains keep up well into Spring. After so many years of drought our rhodies can certainly use the moisture. If you have any rhodies sitting around in pots, now is an excellent time to get them in the ground.

See you soon.

PS. If when you click on the links above in blue your browser doesn't open, press the return or enter button on your keyboard.

Help, I'm lost

Did you end up with an extra pie server from the Pie Social in November? Pat Sasson is looking for her Cutco pie server with a wooden handle. Please bring it to the next meeting or contact her: 331-5816 or patken@whidbey.com.



Thanks.

Meerkerk Notes

Kristi O'Donnell

Tilth's Native Plant Salvage Project: A coordinated salvage of large species rhododendrons at Rhododendron Park, Coupeville.

Island County Parks will be improving the parking lot near the ball fields. There are close to 100 large (5' or taller) rhododendron's to be salvage as well as some large evergreen huckleberries. These large plants will need to be planted in their adopted homes soon after salvaging on Saturday or the next day to insure their survival. We are trying to find home for these plants that would benefit the public "viewscape" and community organizations' projects as much as possible.

When: **Saturday, January 21**

Where: **Rhododendron Park.** Directions: Hwy 20 just south of Coupeville. Turn west onto Patmore and follow this around until you come to the Park sign, turn right (north) into the park, follows the drive around. The parking lot is to the right of the ball fields.

Agenda:

9:30-10:00: NPSP & Meerkerk set up, flag, unload tools
NPSP will provide coffee, hot cider & muffins

10:00-12:30: Salvage crews will dig up plants, protect root balls & move to edge of parking lot

Overlap with planting crews (adopted sites parents)

12:30-1:00: Lunch break

1:00-2:00: Load trucks (approximately 6 to 10 plants can fit in one truck) and proceed to planting sites for planting.

It is important that we collect information on how many plants, where they are going and who have helped with the salvage & planting.

We are networking with the SW Rotarians, IC Master Gardeners, Greenbank Garden Club, native plant people and rhodie folks to make this happen, we would love you to help us out too! Please RSVP (meerkerk@whidbey.net) so we can be sure we have things well organized.

More questions about rhododendron availability can be addressed to:

Mark Fessler/Barbara Kolar, grendl@GTE.net



Meerkerk Magic

Kristi O'Donnell

*Sweet soil, moist and cool,
fell gently from the roots of Magnolia stellata
as we moved her to a new place in the Gardens today.*

In making improvements to the Volunteer Cottage, we've transplanted the star magnolia, planted by Ann and Max Meerkerk over sixty years ago, from the corner of the Volunteer Cottage to the corner of Lem's patch, just next to the "crooked pine tree".

Layers of moss hug the trunks. Fuzzy bud sheaths wrap 'round the folds of tissue-soon-to-be blossoms. Branches reach skyward, awaiting the glory of spring.



How to Select a Rhodie at Your Local Nursery

Source: JARS V45:No.3:p136:y1991

Jan D. Kelley

Over 30 years ago I purchased my first rhododendron for a Mother's Day present. I still have a vivid picture of proudly presenting it to her on Sunday morning after selecting it the day before from a local nursery. Like most beginners I was looking for a big plant with lots of blooms that didn't cost any more than a 16-year old boy could afford. However, with the passing of time I now realize that I was fortunate to have purchased a quality plant without really knowing what I was doing. Today when I purchase a new variety several criteria come to mind before I make my purchase. As there are some readers of the journal who are new to rhododendrons, I will try to identify some of the things I look for when selecting a new plant for my yard. The following general topics are not necessarily in any specific order but seem to be worth consideration prior to selecting a plant:

Learn about climate. Get knowledge of local climatic conditions with special attention to the most extreme winter temperature in the last five years. This information is typically available from the local airport, radio or TV weather station, or local newspaper. This extreme cold temperature is critical as most all rhododendrons sold are rated for hardiness. The hardiness rating is a *generally* accepted temperature that the plant will endure and survive. Notice I said the plant and not the flower buds. The rationale behind plant hardiness is that you can afford to lose the buds on a given year, but not the plant. Rhododendrons are generally rated from H-1 (will survive to minus 25F) through H-6 (will survive at plus 30F).

Talk to local gardeners. Talk with neighbors and rhododendron club members about varieties that they have had for several years. Discuss with them how frequently the plant flowers, when it blooms, and where in their yard they have it located, i.e., in the shade, in full sun.

Read about rhodies. Background reading about rhododendrons in one of the several books that are available is helpful. Several of the books have many excellent color pictures. I would recommend any of the following authors as good resources: Van Veen, Greer, and Cox. Each of the authors provides good description of flowers, plant habit, bloom period, and hardiness in a very understandable form.

Visit nurseries. Visit several local nurseries, if available, to view their selection of rhododendrons. Find a rhododendron knowledgeable sales person and seek his/her opinions about varieties that do well locally. Generally, retail nurseries tend to sell "tried and true" varieties that have stood the test of local time. Frequently, your choice will be quite limited in the number of different varieties that are available.

When you have all of the general information identified and are ready to make your choice - that one plant that is going in that special place in your yard - I suggest that you have the following in mind:

ULTIMATE SIZE. How large will the plant be at 10 years of age. Standard varieties are about 6 feet at 10 years. Semi-dwarfs are about 2 to 4 feet at 10 years of age and dwarfs are about 1 1/2 feet at 10 years of age.

PLANT AGE. Know the plant size that you want to purchase: are you after instant landscape or are you willing to grow with the plant.

LOCATION. Know that the variety you want meets the conditions of your location, i.e., full sun, semi-shade, etc.

PLANT HEALTH. When you make the final choice the foliage of the plant you select should be dark green and vigorous looking. It should not have burned or spotted leaves. Burned leaves generally result from inadequate water in the summer or excessive cold in the winter. Leaf spotting typically results from some disease condition in the plant. The plant should be uniform and well branched. Stay away from lopsided or crooked plants. The leaves should be free of insect damage. Uniform notching around the border of the leaves generally indicates weevil activity. Other insect damage is evidenced by irregular holes in the leaves. If you want the plant to bloom in the coming season, look for large flower buds on some of the branch ends.

I realize that initially all of the above takes a great deal of time, but your labors dramatically increase the chance of purchasing an excellent rhododendron. All too often we buy the plant with the big open flowers only to later realize that it was a mistake. Good Hunting!

In the Garden

January Rhododendron tips (*Bill Stipe*):



- Prune dead, dying, and rubbing branches
- Get some lifting exercise, transplant rhodies now!
- Shop for fertilizer for *February* spreading.

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*)

- Transplant dormant trees and shrubs on mild days through February.
- Keep after those pesky winter weeds, evicting them from mulched areas and garden paths before they go to seed.
- Prune deciduous trees and conifers, and clip out storm-damaged branches.

Please submit articles of interest for Feb Newsletter by **2/10/06**

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