

WHIDBEY ISLAND CHAPTER



A R S - DISTRICT 2

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

January 2009

Next Meeting: January 28

Program: *Eric Studebaker* Dwarf & Compact Conifers as Companion Plants

Eric Studebaker of Bayview Farm and Garden has been in the nursery business for 25 years. His program will share a particular passion for conifers. Their beautiful textures, foliage, the color they provide, and the ease of care once established make them a real winner in the garden. Eric will bring sample plants and explain the culture that makes them thrive and the rate of growth you can expect. You will leave with a list of the plants discussed as well as others worth growing... a jump start on your plant shopping list for spring!

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

Annual Convention, Everett, WA

The Chapters of District 2 welcome visitors to the 2009 Annual Convention at Everett, WA, April 29 -May 3, 2009. The Convention offers educational seminars for beginner and experienced rhododendron enthusiasts, and garden excursions which include *Meerkerk Gardens*, *Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden*, Bill Stipe's *Glynneden Gardens*, Jeanine & Rex Smith's *Rhody Ridge* and *Frank Fujioka's Garden*. Put this exciting event on your calendar today! On the web: www.ars-2009-convention.org

Bronze for Ann Lee

Ann Lee has served our Chapter in a very unique way. For the past 8 years she has faithfully arrived 45 minutes early to each meeting to start the coffee and hot water perking and made sure trays of cookies arrive for our pre-meeting socializing. Then she stays after the meeting to tidy the meeting room and lockup so that we continue to be welcomed at the meeting hall. Ann also arrives early for our April Potluck and November Pie Social to organize the table preparations for a bounty of food and fellowship.



Ann has also spent many hours sorting through and organizing the library at Meerkerk Gardens so that we can browse and borrow books on Rhododendrons and several other plant and gardening subjects with ease.

In grateful appreciation we were pleased to award a Bronze Medal to Ann at our December Holiday Party.

On the Web

Gail DaPont

If you haven't visited our website lately, whidbeyrhodies.org, stop in and click over to the 'Gardens' page where members are sharing a look at their backyards (Mouseover the thumbnails to view the larger version on the right). Everyone is invited to participate. You can send me pictures by email, US mail or invite me to come out and take pictures. Contact me: gail@whidbey.com or 331-4746.

Our Condolences

We extend our condolences to Carolyn and Don Smart for the loss of Carolyn's mother who passed away on Friday, January 16th, at the age of 93. Please keep Carolyn and Don in your thoughts through this difficult time.



Cookie Reminder:
Mary Stipe & Marilyn Wright

From the Prez

Pat Sasson



Happy New Year! Now I must look through my closet for a new hat. I vowed never to be president of anything but here I am... Prez of WIARS, a lady from NJ who had two rhodies in her back yard but never knew they were supposed to bloom.

I trust you all weathered the cold and the snow and are looking forward to Spring. The days are already getting longer. Have you noticed that it is no longer dark at 4:30 p.m.? I hope you did not suffer much damage during the snow and cold. My camellias and 'Christmas Cheer' were blooming but after the cold were left looking like dirty Kleenexes on the bushes. But upon closer inspection, there are new buds about to open. I did lose some branches of a few rhodies but I will just call that nature's pruning.

This year brings the national conference, Rhododendron Rendezvous in the Pacific Northwest, to Everett from April 30 – May 3rd. Please put it on your calendars and plan to attend at least some of the activities. We have great speakers this year! Go to www.ars-2009-convention.org for a sneak preview. Don Smart did an amazing job putting together the web site and chairing the committee. Our chapter is responsible for tours on Friday, May 1st, showcasing Meerkerk Gardens, Bill Stipe's Glynneden, and Frank Fujjoka's garden. You will hear more about volunteer opportunities.

We need to increase our membership! I would like to challenge each one of you to bring a guest to our meetings each time. So how about it? I hope I will see you all, plus guests, at the next Rhodie meeting.

What Your Dues Pay For... Marilyn Wright

Have you ever wondered where your dues to the ARS go? Whatever dues level you choose, individual, family, sustaining, sponsoring, etc., our chapter retains *only \$8.00*. Everything else goes to the ARS. Of that \$8.00, \$1.50 per membership is then sent to District 2 leaving \$6.50 for our chapter. ARS insurance [see below] is mandatory now and costs the Chapter \$2.74 per membership. That makes the total income from your dues \$3.76. The rest of our budget income relies on plant sales, plant auctions, \$ table at meetings and donations.

We have budgeted \$1294.00 of income for 2009. Hopefully we will take in more than budgeted [\$450] at plant auctions at the picnic, pot luck and pie social. Plant raffle and \$ table is budgeted at \$250 for the year. Interest income is expected to be minimal at \$12.00.

The budget for the Newsletter, Website, and Yearbook is \$325.00. Part of the Newsletter cost is postage and ink for printing. You can help lower this cost by getting your Newsletter online. To sign up for email contact Gail DaPont, gail@whidbey.com

The price for rental of Greenbank Progressive Club is \$170.00 for 2 rentals [\$85.00 per night, Apr/Nov]. We have budgeted \$60.00 for awards this year; these include Bronze Medals and engraving.

Since the Chapter subsidizes \$5.00 per member [\$10.00 per couple] for the Holiday Party, \$250.00 has been budgeted for 2009. The Chapter is a member of the Rhododendron Species Foundation at \$100.00 per year. With that membership, each of our members is allowed free admission to the RSF gardens. All you need to do is tell them you are a member of the Whidbey Island Chapter. The Chapter will be donating \$100.00 to Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens this year.

Some other fixed costs, but could go up at any time, are the rental of the P.O. Box in Greenbank [\$40.00], and ARS Liability Insurance [this year, \$147.50 mandatory]. Hospitality [coffee, tea, etc.] is budgeted at \$50.00.

Bill Stipe offers plants for the raffle at the meetings and for new members and will be reimbursed at \$10.00 per plant. We've budgeted \$80.00 for the meeting plants and \$100.00 for new member plants.

There are budgeted items [i.e. postage for membership renewals, etc.] which are not reimbursed at this time and become 'donations in kind'. Sometimes there are unforeseen expenses that don't get listed on the budget; i.e. expenses for hosting our guests from Vancouver Island in 2008.

You are always welcome to come to a board meeting. The next one will be held Feb 12, 2009 at 10 A.M. at Pat Sasson's home in Greenbank.

Meerkerk Happenings Kristi O'Donnell

Hello, Whidbey ARS members! We invite you to attend **Dreams of Spring**, March 7 2009, a horticultural gala to raise funds vital for the care and improvement of Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens. Here's is a challenge we are extending to all plat organizations: reserve an entire table, 8 seats, for WIARS members! Each table will have a regional horticulture person joining you to keep the conversations thriving on plant topics! Tables just 8 x \$75 = \$600. VIP seating and passes 8 x \$100 = \$800; VIP parking, seating and garden passes 8 x \$125 = \$1000.

Dreams of Spring donations: Donate unique plants for our plant frenzy, e.g. plants with sculptural forms for the Living Sculpture Section, with fragrance for the Fragrance section, or rare and exotic plants like species rhodies or new introductions. They can be a single specimen or a grouping, small to tree size. We are also looking for unique experiences, timeshares, services and garden art for the live and silent auction. If you have garden equipment in good working order, donate it to Meerkerk for a tax write off.

To make a donation or purchase tickets, contact Penny: 360-320-2265 or penny@meerkerkgardens.org

Valentine's Day Garden Party February 14, 8:45- noon



Put your heart into Meerkerk. This is a work party with a twist! Come to prune your heart out, chain saw with affection and rake with results! We'll have a lumberjack lunch at noon. We'll be serving flap jacks with real maple syrup, homemade apple sauce, home fries, scrambled eggs, sausage and hot coffee! If you can help with the lunch- please give me a call Kristi 360-678-1912.

Volunteer Opportunities

- **Wednesday Construction Team:** Join our morning construction team working on the pump house roof. Call Bob: 360-320-2214 to get on his list.
- **Horticulture Helpers:** Thursday mornings, 8:45-noon, to groom the gardens in anticipation of spring.
- **Engraving plant labels:** Work in the cozy volunteer cottage on the new computerized engraving machine. As a bonus make name tags for your plant collection at home!
- **Crafting:** Join a monthly craft group at Meerkerk to make things for sale in the Gatehouse this spring: photo cards, woodland fairy kits, seed starting packets, handmade paper cards with seeds in them...the possibilities are as creative as the team wishes to be!

Don't forget the dollar table!

Dwarf Rhododendrons

Ron Knight, Vancouver Chapter

Everyone has seen examples of homeowners (and landscape professionals) who have planted a new perennial garden, filling all of the available space with cute little trees and shrubs. For the first couple of years the garden looks great, but after that, the plants begin to grow into each other and their beautiful individual shapes are lost.

Enthusiastic new rhododendron collectors often make the same mistake in their quest to display as many as possible of the plants they have heard rhododendron experts say are "the really good ones": *R. augustinii*, *R. macabeaeanum*, *Lem's Cameo*, the *Loderis*, *Sir Charles Lemon*, etc. They purchase dozens of young plants in one and two gallon containers, placing them a metre or so apart throughout the beds and borders of their small garden. Inevitably over time, the collection becomes little more than a sea of green for 11 months of the year.

As an alternative, rhododendron lovers with small garden spaces might consider using mostly dwarf and semi-dwarf specimens. As a rough guideline, these are the plants that Harold Greer describes as reaching 3 feet or less in 10 years (Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons, Offshoot Publications, Eugene, Oregon, 1996). Of course, all rhododendrons keep growing after a decade but dwarfs do so at a very slow rate.



Most dwarf rhododendrons are evergreen. They have showy flowers in a wide range of colours, plus dense foliage that is attractive all year long. Varieties are available that will provide garden colour from February through July. Dwarfs look fabulous in containers, require minimal care, and are susceptible to few pests. Most are very tolerant of wind and sun.

In fact, dwarf rhododendrons should be planted where they will receive maximum sunshine. Many will become leggy and less attractive when planted in the shade. Dwarfs need to be located as far away from aggressive tree roots as possible. They coexist well with mosses but are happy not to associate with most ground covers. Instead, they like a covering of mulch over their roots, but not grass clippings, peat, or sawdust.

Dwarfs look spectacular when planted in groups. In alpine regions, they naturally grow that way to provide mutual protection from strong winds. Only some very early bloomers whose flower buds are susceptible to frost damage need any special protection in garden settings.

In rock gardens, dwarfs need to be lifted and replanted when their roots have filled the available soil space. Moreover, some thought needs to be given to both irrigation and drainage. Dwarfs, like all other rhododendrons, require acidic well-drained soil. They should be planted high, on a slight mound, rather than in a rocky hollow that may allow water to pool around their roots. On steep slopes, a dam of mulch or rocks should be placed on the downhill side of the plant so that water is channeled through the roots rather than over the top of the soil. Regular watering is essential

during the summertime in B.C. and a drip irrigation system is ideal both for dwarfs grown in containers and in the field.

In containers, most dwarfs need to be repotted every second year. During the in between years they appreciate a top dressing of compost. Feeding with slow-release fertilizer or liquid plant food is also beneficial.

Minimal pruning is required for dwarf rhododendrons. Each year, however, it is wise to remove dead branches from under the leaf canopy. Deadheading is unnecessary for most dwarfs. However, fussy gardeners may want to remove seed capsules that tend to stick up above the leaves of certain varieties.

Most garden centres carry a very small selection of dwarfs and almost all of these are hybrids. Only specialty rhododendron nurseries are able to provide a wide choice of both dwarf species and hybrids. (Editor's note: Check with the Rhododendron Species Foundations in Federal Way, WA)

Examples are:

- *R. campylogynum* - flowers come in a wide variety of colours and resemble small bells.
- *R. cephalanthum* - aromatic leaves and tubular white or pink flowers.
- *R. hanceanum* (*Namum*) - cream coloured flowers and a compact growth habit.
- *R. litangense* - purple flowers and tiny leaves that turn bronze in winter.
- *R. nakaharae* - a creeper with relatively large flowers in various shades of rose and red, blooming into July.
- *R. saluenense* - bright reddish-purple flowers with foliage that turns a dark burgundy colour in winter.

Among well-respected hybrids are those bred by Warren Berg. Examples are *Ginny Gee* and *Patty Bee*, both Superior Plant Award winners, and *Wee Bee*. Any of the Cox bird-name dwarfs such as *Ptarmigan* are also worth collecting. John Waterer's seven dwarfs, all named after Snow White's friends, are interesting low-growing shrubs but reach 3 feet or more in ten years.



Visit Ron on the web: <http://www3.telus.net/rcknight/>

Feed the Hungry

It will soon be time to fertilize your rhododendrons. **Bill Stipe** will again provide chapter members with his special blend of rhodie fertilizer formulated for Whidbey gardens. This is a slow release fertilizer containing all the elements shown to be deficient in our soils. The cost will be \$30 for a 25 pound bag and available for spring feeding. Contact Bill, wstipe@whidbey.com or 678-8740 for more details

Please submit articles of interest for Feb Newsletter by 2/13/09

Gail DaPont, editor
PO Box 1399, Freeland, WA 98249
gail@whidbey.com
