



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

March 2006



Next Meeting: Wed, March 22

Program: *Don Kohlenberger Rhododendrons from Seed (Hands-on)*

This month's program will demonstrate how simple it is to grow rhododendrons from seed. So simple in fact, that each of us will be taught to prepare a small planting container and sow the seed. Everything you need will be furnished at the meeting. Then take home your project, follow Don's simple instructions and soon you'll have a container full of rhododendron seedlings to call your own. Don will also bring some seedling examples at various stages of growth.

The seed for this hands-on program has been generously provided by John Nicoletta who manages the ARS Seed Exchange.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

- March 18-19 Meerkerk Opening Sale
- April 26 Meeting/Potluck/Show/Auction
Kristi O'Donnell, Garden Inspiration
- May 12-15 ARS Annual Convention
Rockville, MD
- May 24 Chapter Meeting
Lucile Whitman, Companion Trees
- June 10 Meerkerk Picnic
- Sept 22-24 ARS Regional Conference
Harrison Hot Springs, BC
- Oct 25 Chapter Meeting
Bill Heller
- Nov 15 Annual Chapter Meeting
Pie Social/Steve Hootman

Chapter Sale Revisited

John Marshall

Many thanks for the good help at the Chapter rhodie sale on March 11th; Dennis Giberson and Bill Stipe for the plants; Donna Lee Von Falkenberg for the sale advertising; Don and Bette Kohlenberger, Paul Loudon, John Marshall, Mary Wyman, Don and Jan Allen, Frank Fujioka, Dennis Giberson for setup, sales, for serving as helpers and cashier.

It was a good sale, slow at the start mainly due to a chilly morning. When the mid-morning sun started to shine sales picked up and stayed busy until mid-afternoon. There were a few plants left over, some of which will be on sale at our March meeting and others which will be available at our April auction.



Again, much thanks for all your help!

Dunn Garden Tour

John Marshall

Arrangements have been made to tour the Dunn Garden in Northwest Seattle on **April 27th, 2006 at 1:00pm**. The garden can only accommodate 24 people or 2 tours of 12 each. If you are interested and would like to go, please contact Don or Jan Allen at 360-678-4329 for details.

Cost: \$10.00 Adults - \$7.00 for Seniors

Please advise the Allens before April 9th, as we need to know the number of people attending and send in a confirmation check.

We will collect monies from all those who are going at the April 26th Chapter meeting.

More Rhody Sales !

- March 18-19, 9am-4pm Meerkerk Spring Opening Sale
- April 1, 9am-3pm RSF Spring Plant Sale
- April 1-2, 9am-3pm ARS Seattle Chapter Show and Sale



March cookie reminder:
Jan Allen & Suzanne Ramsey

Happy St Patty's Day 



From the Prez *Bette Kohlenberger*

Happy March! I hope you all survived the last windstorm; I hope your rhodies survived as well. We had some huge branches blow down, especially after the wind shifted to the west. We were very happy to see that the big yard, little rhodie rule once again proved out. No major damage. After all the wind storms over the years I can't believe there are still branches up there to blow down.

March is always a fun month for gardeners. There are lots of spring bulbs coming up. The [Anemone nemorosa](#) ([here is another link](#)) are poking new leaves up, as is the [Maianthemum dilatatum](#). [Clematis](#) is pushing new growth and yes the [rhododendrons](#) are showing color with several already in full bloom. Even though the weather leaves a bit to be desired, March is a fun month.

By time you receive this Newsletter we will have had our annual Chapter Plant Sale. I want to thank everyone who helped make this sale another successful one. Special thanks go to Dennis Giberson for procuring the gallon size plants and Bill Stipe for digging and bringing the larger plants. Thanks also to John Marshall for coordinating the effort. Well done everyone!

The opening sale at [Meerkerk Gardens](#) is March 18th and 19th. It's always fun to see all of the new selections of rhododendrons and companion plants Kristi finds. Maybe this year you will find that elusive hybrid or species that you need for your garden. I hope to see you there.

The [Seattle Rhododendron Society](#) will be having their flower show and plant sale April 1st and 2nd at Swanson's Nursery in Seattle. If you are in the area stop by and support their Chapter.

Please remember that you are all on the Membership Committee. We need more new members!

The program this month will be fun. My husband, Don, will be presenting "Growing Rhododendrons From Seed". The seed we will use was collected by Alan J. Clark during his 2004 Expedition to N.E. India and was generously provided by John Nicolella, [ARS Seed Exchange](#) Chairman.

I'll see you at the Chapter meeting. *Don't forget to bring a plant for the dollar table.*

In the Garden

March Rhododendron tips: (*Bill Stipe*)

For those of you who are still working on fertilizing your rhodies... An assessment of last year's growth and color of leaves will give an indication of fertilizer needs. If it is healthy and dark green, don't fertilize. Pruning for shape can be done in March. I also like to remove double flower buds so there is only one flower per terminal. The truss will be larger and better shape. To keep a rhododendron from getting "leggy", pinch off any single vegetative buds to encourage multiple growth.



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*)

- In sunny spots, add handsome perennials for edible landscaping – blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and rhubarb.
- cut back spent foliage of your other perennials – daisies, hostas and daylilies all will appreciate the tidying



The Hybridizer's Garden at Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens

Kristi O'Donnell

"When you wish upon a star..."

The introduction of Frank Fujioka's 'Starbright Champagne' a few years ago inspired the concept of a Hybridizer's Garden at Meerkerk to showcase the top works from Pacific Northwest hybridizers. After the plants from the Hybrid Test Garden finished their six year cycle, we needed a special garden for the top specimens to remain in the Meerkerk collection.

The concept of a Hybridizer's Garden to honor Elsie Watson, Frank Fujioka and Jim Barlup, was drafted. The design incorporates woodland garden elements to make it feel apart of the original Meerkerk 'Secret Garden'. Companion plants are being chosen to fulfill Ann's desire to have fruit bearing shrubs for birds and to provide seasonal interest via exfoliating bark, unique leaf shapes and colors.

Please join us for the celebration of

*The Hybridizers' Garden
a new part of*

Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens

Sunday, April 9, 2006

1:00pm to 3:00pm

Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens

The Hybridizer's Garden is being launched with the dedication of an area devoted to the hybrids of

Elsie Watson

Elsie, a long time supporter of Meerkerk Gardens, has been hybridizing in the Pacific Northwest for 60 years. Her sixteen registered hybrids will surround the gazebo used for our traditional Mother's Day Concert.

Make a day of it, and enjoy the Gardens' premier spring season!

RSVP by April 1st

360-678-1912, meerkerk@whidbey.net



The Birds and the Bees Norman Todd

At the American Rhododendron Society convention held in Victoria this last spring two of the world's great rhododendron gurus participated in a short but significant ritual. **Peter Cox**, plant explorer, author, and hybridizer had traveled from the UK to present the Royal Horticultural Society's Loder Rhododendron Cup to **Warren Berg** of Washington State, plant explorer and hybridizer.

Both men have made outstanding contributions to the knowledge of the Asian flora and to the cultivation of Asian plants in Western gardens. For many gardeners it is the creation of new hybrid rhododendrons that ensures their lasting renown. For a hybrid to be a success it must be significantly better or markedly different from its parents. There are now in excess of 30,000 registered rhododendron hybrids. It is probably safe to say that a mere 10% of that number meets these two criteria.

Both Cox and Berg have demonstrated a ruthless scrutiny in the protracted assessment of the new progeny of their hybridizing efforts. A hybrid from Cox or Berg is almost always worth growing. Cox is the creator of a series of hybrids of small stature to which he gave the names of birds. Berg's most well known hybrids contain a 'Bee' in their bonnet. There are more Birds than there are Bees. Several of these plants have been around for about 25 years but it is not easy to find commercial sources for some of them. They are more easily available in British nurseries than they are in British Columbia and consequently are seen in more gardens over there. I recall admiring several of the Birds in a plot that was probably not more than 100 square feet behind the iron railing of a Georgian terrace house on a busy street in the center of Glasgow. It was a tasteful tribute to Peter Cox's efforts.

Here are the names of the Birds known to me, 'Chiffchaff, 'Chikor, 'Curllew, 'Egret, 'Eider, 'Grouse, 'Merganser, 'Phalarope, 'Pipit [a natural hybrid], 'Razorbill, 'Snipe, 'Wigeon and 'Wren. These are all Lepidote rhododendrons, i.e. the undersides of the leaves and often other parts of the plants have scales. Whether a rhododendron has scales or not is an important factor in determining its botanical classification. Berg's Bees are comprised of both Lepidote and Elepidote rhododendrons. Here are the names of the Bees that I know, 'Ginny Gee, 'Golden Bee, 'Honey Bee, 'Jan Bee, 'King Bee, 'Patty Bee, 'Too Bee, 'Wanna Bee and 'Wee Bee. I grow a plant called 'Queen Bee, however, I suspect someone preferred the title Queen to King [maybe an ardent feminist] because the 'Queen and the 'King are to my eye identical. Furthermore, the name 'Queen Bee is officially given to a plant that was registered by another hybridizer in 1962 and I am sure that Warren Berg would not endorse a name, even in a casual way, which was already taken.

A small area would accommodate all of the above for a period of say 20 years. If my memory is correct there is a bank in the Cox garden/nursery at Glendoick, Scotland with some, or maybe all, of the original Birds and some of these plants are now taller than a human. I have a plant of 'Egret that is over 30 years old and it is almost shoulder height. **Albert de Mezey**, of local horticultural fame, and recently deceased at the age of 102, once advised me, "to grow rhododendrons one needs a physical age of 30 and a longevity of 300." This is true but one also needs a garden that is ever expanding as the darn things can become quite big during that period of time.

It is always satisfying to give one's prejudiced opinions an airing, so I offer some comments on the worthiness of some of these plants. In this age of governance by opinion poll one cannot ignore the preference of the buying public. The winner

is without doubt 'Patty Bee. 'Patty Bee is a cross between *keiskei* 'Yaku Fairy and *fletcherianum*. It passes the test of being better than either parent in several characteristics — although I would not like to be without either. 'Patty Bee is more floriferous and reliably so from an early age; it is easier to please; the yellow flowers are of deeper intensity and of greater substance. Given a well drained but never dry, fairly open location, it will flourish and not outgrow a 75cm space for many years. The runner-up in the sales department is 'Ginny Gee. I can hear the protests already; "This is not a Bee". Warren Berg introduced both hybrids about the same time [1970s]. I suspect he had not settled on a line of Bees at that time and perhaps now he wishes he had perfect continuity. But perhaps not: 'Ginny Gee is clearly a commemorative name and for that reason is cherished both by Warren and the chosen honouree. It grows in the same fashion as 'Patty Bee. Its leaves are not so glossy and the flowers are pale pink and white. They both bloom in April. Having dwarf narcissus or other bulbs as companions solaces the sensibilities, even of those with acutely refined tastes.



My personal favourite is 'Razorbill. Peter Cox writes that this is a chance seedling of *spinuliferum*. Imagine being so fortunate as unexpectedly discovering such a treasure! The flowers on 'Razorbill are most unusual being up-facing tubes of rosy pink grouped in sizeable clusters. They are produced in profusion in March.

Cox's most famous dwarf is probably 'Curllew. This won the Cory Cup at the Royal Horticultural Society for the best hybrid of any genus [1980?]. It has proportionately very large flowers for the size of the leaf. It is surprisingly robust given the miffiness of both parents, *ludlowii* and *fletcherianum*. I have seen the first parent only at the Cox nursery and brought back two plants to Victoria. One I gave to a much better grower than I but neither of us was able to satisfy its temperamental needs. 'Curllew's flowers are a bright yellow with deeper shading and greenish brown spotting. Its bark is attractive and it has a somewhat open but interesting architecture. It does not like a hot site and resents too much fertilizer.

'Chikor is a tiny bushy plant with soft yellow flowers in profusion — if well grown. This is one plant that certainly does better in the cooler Scottish summers. Gardeners who like the challenge of growing the higher elevation Asiatic primulas will enjoy 'Chikor. Chikor is a partridge-like Asian bird.

I really like Berg's 'Wee Bee. It is very similar to 'Too Bee being a sister seedling. Warren tried to register it as 'Not Too Bee but evidently this was not allowed. The flower buds of 'Wee Bee are of quite a dark hue; some call the colour turkey red. They open to a rose pink on the outside and pale yellow on the inside. If I had space for only one plant I would choose 'Wee Bee over 'Ginny Gee. Thank goodness they are dwarfs so this seldom becomes a gut wrenching decision.

Most of these plants are described in *Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons*, third edition. This book is recommended as an inexpensive reference. However, the best reference is to see thrifty plants in a local garden. The easy ones pay their rent every month; the more difficult ones boost the ego and give a muted reward when a whimsical name like 'Too Bee or 'Wanna Bee rolls subtly off the tongue of a showing off gardener.

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Please submit articles of interest for Feb Newsletter by **4/14/06**

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