

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

March 2009

Next Meeting: March 25

Program: *Expert Panel* *Rhododendrons, How & Why*

Frank Fujioka, Bill Stipe and Don Allen will make up our panel of experts to discuss how to grow rhododendrons on Whidbey Island. They will cover the basics: planting, pruning, pests, diseases, and watering smart. The panel will also cover using the right plant in the right place, overcoming landscaping challenges, things to consider in small vs. large gardens, hybrid vs. species plantings. Questions will be begun by moderator **Stephen Schwarzmann** then opened to the floor for everyone to participate.

This sounds like an interesting format for an informative evening for all!

Calendar of Upcoming Events

- March 21-22 Meerkerk Opening Sale
- March 25 Chapter Meeting
Expert Panel: Rhododendrons 101
- April 22 Chapter Meeting/Potluck
@ Greenbank Progressive Hall
- Apr 29-May 3 ARS Convention
Everett, WA
- May 27 Chapter Meeting
Fujioka: A Visit to Scotland
- August 9 Chapter Picnic
- Sept 23 Chapter Meeting
Program: TBA
- Oct 28 Chapter Meeting
Program: TBA
- Nov 18 Annual Mtg/Election of Officers
Program: TBA

Share Those Early Bloomers

Please remember to take a quick walk through your garden before the meetings and cut a few of your early blooming trusses to share with the membership. Reading those descriptions in the Greer Guidebook is nothing compared to seeing those blooms up close and personal. I'm observing that, due to this darn cold weather, rhodies (and many other things) are blooming about two weeks later than last year. It sure will be nice when warmer temperatures stop teasing us and decide to stay for more than just a few days!

And don't forget to bring something for the dollar table!

Convention Reminder, again...

In case you skipped over this in the last newsletter... a reminder that the 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.



Rhododendron of the Year

Add these (NW) 2009 rhododendrons of the year to your wish list:

- Elepidote Rhododendron: 'Fantastica'**
- Lepidote Rhododendron *augustinii***
- Evergreen Azalea: 'Balsaminiflorum'**
- Deciduous Azalea: *R. occidentale***

So Now You Know

Some cultivar names are in the language of the country where they originated. Look for some of these translations when shopping for Japanese maples:

aki=autumn *asagi*=pale yellow *beni*=deep red
fuyu=winter *gashira*=lion's mane *gawa*=river
goshiki=multicolored *haku*=white *kamagi*=mirror
nishiki=brocade *sango*=coral *shidare*=cascading



Cookie Reminder:
Suzanne Ramsey
& Gail DaPont



From the Prez *Pat Sasson*

What a week weather wise...sleet, snow, rain and warm sunshine and then more sleet and snow. I love the weather in the Pacific Northwest. It is so dramatic! I saw cars yesterday covered

with snow only to find out they had come to Freeland from Clinton, not the North Pole.

The Meerkerk dinner/auction was a fun night with lots of nice people. Yes, I was able to get a table of Rhododendron people so we were represented.

I have an ongoing plea for you to attend Rhododendron Rendezvous, the national convention to be held in Everett this April 30-May 3rd. Early registration ends March 31st. After April 1st it goes up \$20. There will be lots of good speakers, plants, tours and seminars. Our chapter hopes to benefit financially from the convention as we did when it was held in Bellingham. Each of the District 2 chapters contributed \$300 seed money. After all expenses are paid and the seed money is refunded, the profits will be divided up between the chapters. This is an important factor for our budget as we no longer do a plant sale. Look at the information about the conference in your latest journal and consider joining us for all or part of the time. As one who has been to many of these conferences since I got involved with WIARS, I highly recommend going. It is a blast! Nice people!

I am off to Israel by the time you get this. I have fertilized all my rhodies with Bill's special mix, did some trimming, cleared some gardens and will jump in with both feet when I get home.

See you all in April!

The Good Guy Bugs *Pat Muntz*

Reprinted in part from Master Gardener Magazine, Winter 2009

Just what are beneficial predator insects? They are insects and their larvae who find that bugs like aphids, thrips, mealy bugs, spider mites, scale, and soil organisms, including slugs, make tasty snacks or are a good place to lay eggs. Often their activity is on such a small scale that you don't know they are out there working. The lack of aphids or thrips in the garden doesn't mean they haven't been there. It may mean that the predator insects got to them before they did major damage to your plants.

Lady beetles will fly short distances between plants and both the adult and larvae stage will eat aphids, scale insects, spider mites, and mealy bugs.

Lacewings and their larvae, known as aphid lions, prey on scale insects, mealy bugs, whiteflies, caterpillars, leafhoppers, and thrips. Beetles, such as soldier, tiger, ground and rove beetles, inhabit leaves, flowers and seeds or spend their time on the ground foraging for soil organisms. Some fly, while others run quickly over the plants and ground. They generally eat slugs, snails, cutworms, root maggots, and Colorado Potato beetles.

True bugs from the *Hemiptera*—including assassin, ambush, big-eyed, minute pirate, damsel and predacious stink bug—are often found at various levels of vegetation and feed on a general list of other insects they encounter. Pirate bugs, in particular, go after thrips, mites, scale, aphids, and whiteflies.

Predacious hoverflies and parasitoid tachinid flies are both *Diptera*. Hoverfly adults mimic bees and wasps in appearance and manner but are smaller, fly more quickly and will hover around flowers. The larvae look like small maggots that prey on aphids and scale insects. The adults feed on insects they find feeding on flowers. Hoverflies are active early in the season before many other predators are out. Tachinid flies can resemble house and blow flies and are found near flowers looking for hosts for their eggs. They lay eggs on worms, beetles, sawflies, and other bugs. The larvae enter the host to feed before pupating outside the host, killing it in the process.

Wasps are an important group of predator insects and the group most likely to run into a conflict with humans. Thread-waist wasps, yellow jackets and hornets are all meat eaters that will eat a variety of insects they find in the garden. Adults will bring masticated insects back to the young in their hives. Parasitic wasps are tiny in comparison with larger wasps. They are found around flowers where they seek out cutworms, corn earworm, horn worms, gypsy moths, leafrollers, cockroach eggs and beetles to lay their eggs in.



Meerkerk Specialty Nursery Spring Opening Sale

March 21 & 22, 9am-4pm

This annual fund-raising event showcases the *best selection of rhodies* including new hybrids from Frank Fujioka, exotic species and tried and true good bloomers! The nursery season begins this weekend and lasts throughout spring.

Proceeds go directly to caring for this 53-acre outdoor classroom, living museum and woodland preserve.

Meerkerk Gardens 2009 Events

Mar 21-22	Specialty Nursery Spring Opening	9-4
April-May	PEAK BLOOM!	Wed-Sun 9-4
April 18	Magic Festival of Flowers	Noon-4
May 10	Mother's Day Harp Concert	Noon-4
Sept 12	Bluegrass Pickers Festival	All day long!
Oct 3-4	Autumn Rhododendron Sale	9-4



Rhododendron ciliatum

Hook.f. 1849

Steve Hootman

A Species Profile reprinted from the
Rhododendron Species Foundation newsletter.

Of the many outstanding introductions of *Rhododendron* species made by Joseph Dalton Hooker during his famous expedition to Sikkim and surrounding regions in 1848-1949, *Rhododendron ciliatum* is perhaps one of the least widely grown "hardy" species in the modern garden. This is unfortunate given that the semi-dwarf habit, attractive foliage and large funnel-shaped flowers provide more than enough reason to cultivate this early spring bloomer in the modern, often smaller garden.

As previously mentioned, *Rhododendron ciliatum* was first introduced into western cultivation and science from the Sikkim Himalaya. It was subsequently collected from the mountains of adjacent eastern Nepal, Bhutan and southern Tibet. It is found from 8,000 to 13,000 feet in elevation growing in various habitats including coniferous forests, rhododendron thickets and on open rocky slopes. One interesting habitat for this species that I was able to observe first hand during a 1997 expedition to Sikkim, was the occurrence of large colonies on open slopes in what amounted to running water. The plants were generally "perched" upon low hummocks of turf in the wet seeping meadows, but were nonetheless growing in seemingly saturated soil conditions. I must say that if I were to try such a thing in the garden, it would undoubtedly result in a complete failure - these wild rhododendrons were quite happy in their soggy situation however. In stark contrast, I observed this species in another region growing on dry exposed grassy slopes under conditions quite at odds with what one would consider to be good *Rhododendron* habitat, yet these plants also appeared to be quite healthy.

Rhododendron ciliatum is one of the few hardy (relatively speaking, of course) members of Subsection *Maddenia*, a large group that is considered to be quite tender in most rhododendron growing regions. In fact, this species and the yellow-flowered *R. fletcherianum* are the only species within the subsection that can be considered reliably hardy in most of the Pacific Northwest. Fairly isolated from related species throughout most of its range, *Rhododendron ciliatum* is one of the few taxonomically "solid" members of the Ciliicalyx/Johnstoneanum Alliance. Under the former Balfourian system of taxonomy, H.H. Davidian included this and several closely related species in the "Ciliatum Series", distinct from, but with ties to the "Maddenii Series."

This species forms a neat, mounding and compact shrub, slowly reaching around three or four feet in height and as wide in cultivation. Like many members of

Subsection *Maddenia*, it is blessed with the bonus ornamentation of attractive peeling, smooth and reddish-brown bark. The deep green evergreen foliage is elliptic in shape and generally around two or three inches in length. The leaves are bordered with a conspicuous fringe of hairs (they are "ciliate"). The flowers (early to mid-spring) appear as bell-shaped funnels in clusters of two to five. They are white to white flushed pink or pink and up to two inches in length. Unfortunately, the flowers are not fragrant but their size and color in comparison with the plant habit and foliage makes for an outstanding display. This species underplanted beneath and around the taller, yellow-flowered *R. lutescens* provides a fine display in the early part of the flowering season.



In cultivation, *R. ciliatum* is relatively trouble-free if provided with good drainage and supplemental irrigation during long dry periods (as with all rhododendrons). It performs best in a bright, fairly sunny position where it will form a dense, compact mound but is tolerant of shade where it will become a bit leggy and open. Of course, you

then have the advantage of enjoying the attractive bark. It is hardy to around +5° F. but you may want to position the plant where it will have some protection from late spring frosts if you garden in an area prone to such events. A location such as a within a light woodland or under high conifers will provide some protection for the relatively early flowers.

This species has been used quite often in hybridizing and is the parent of many widely grown and well known hybrids. A short list of these would include 'Countess of Haddington,' 'Praecox' and 'Cilpinense' a cross with *R. moupinense* which is often mislabeled and sold as *R. moupinense* in the trade.

A form of this species with white tinged pink flowers won an Award of Merit when exhibited by Lord Digby of Minterne in 1953.

Editor's note: Our chapter is a member of the RSF.
R. ciliatum is listed in the current RSF catalog.
Visit them on the web: www.rhodygarden.org

May good luck be with you
Wherever you go,
And your blessing outnumber
The shamrocks that grow.



Please submit articles of interest for Apr Newsletter by 4/10/09

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