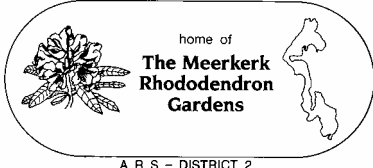


WHIDBEY ISLAND CHAPTER



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

November 2007

November 14th, 6:30pm, Don't be late!

**Note: This month's meeting is at the Greenbank Progressive Hall
(Behind the Greenbank Store, enter on Bakken Road)**

Next Meeting: Wed, Nov 14

**Program: Oriana Simmons-Otness
Hybridizing Adventures**

Oriana Simmon-Otness from Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens will share what she's up to in the world of hybridizing.

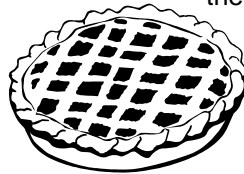
Calendar of Upcoming Events

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Nov 14 | Annual Pie Social/Meeting Oriana Simmons-Otness |
| Dec 8 | Holiday Dinner/Gift Exchange @ Christopher's in Coupeville |
| Jan 23 | Chapter Meeting |
| Feb 27 | Chapter Meeting |
| Mar 26 | Chapter Meeting |
| Apr 23 | Chapter Meeting |

PIE PIE PIE SOCIAL!

You don't want to be late... our annual pie social held at the **Progressive Hall in Greenbank** starts at **6:30**. This meeting is always well attended and you won't want to be caught at the end of the pie line. Bring you favorite pie (precut please) to share, a serving utensil and your pie appetites!

Anyone carrying a calorie counter or heard uttering the word *calories* will be invited to step outside to feast on twigs and berries.



ELECTION of OFFICERS 2007

It is time for the changing of a few of the chapter's guards. Our November meeting is also our annual chapter meeting which includes the election of officers. We will be looking to fill the VP slot and a Director or two. This is your opportunity to shape the direction the chapter will take in the next year. The floor will be open for volunteers or nominations but most importantly, your vote!

2007 Holiday PARTY

Mark your calendar for Saturday December 8th for this year's holiday party. It will again be held at *Christopher's* in Coupeville on the corner of Coveland and New Alexander St. I haven't seen the menu yet but Chef Andreas never disappoints us with the fantastic meal he and his staff prepare. AND the restaurant is exclusively ours for the entire evening.

Bring a gift to put under the tree for the Chinese auction then sit back and enjoy the entertainment this gift exchange always provides.

Watch for a flyer in the mail later this month with all the details.



Happy Thanksgiving

FROM THE PREZ

Bill Stipe

I just recently attended a presentation by WSU Extension Service Horticulturist Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott. The subject was "Compost Tea". The subject was of interest to me because I have been experimenting with its use for about 7 years. Dr Chalker-Scott explained the different kinds of compost tea and she exposed some of the myths about compost tea.



There is compost leachate which is nothing more than the liquid that leaches from ordinary compost. Then there is Non-aerated Compost Tea (NCT) sometimes referred to as compost extract. This is brewed from compost without aeration and includes anaerobes (microbes) and nutrients. Then, Aerated Compost Tea (ACT), which is brewed from compost with constant aeration. ACT contains aerobes and nutrients. This is the compost tea that is most readily available on Whidbey Island.

The producers of ACT may claim that when a leaf or root is colonized by the beneficial microbes in compost tea the harmful microbes cannot take hold. They also claim compost tea is "safe," "Non-toxic," "Easier to apply than compost," "Reduces dependence on chemicals". These claims may be true, but is it affective against harmful fungi and pathogens as claimed? Scientific test have not proven any benefit against plant diseases.

However, ACT applied as a drench to the root zone does improve the soil and reduces the need for fertilizer.

My experience with ACT has proven similar results. I thought perhaps it would be the answer to the Rhododendron powdery mildew. After applying ACT to the foliage of rhododendrons I found no benefit. However my tests as a soil drench have proven stronger roots, better leaf color and overall plant health.

Conclusion: compost has proven beneficial but compost tea is probably not worth the price.

To see other garden myths exposed by Dr. Chalker-Scott, go to www.theinformedgardener.com

BUSTED MYTHS

Myth: Mixing in sand is the best way to improve heavy soil.

Fact: Forget it, unless you are mixing up a little soil for a container. Concentrate instead on improving the soil structure by adding organic matter.

Myth: Lots of wood ashes helps soil.

Fact: Ashes add potassium and will sweeten acidic soils, but they are usually over-applied, causing nutrient imbalance or even toxicity.

(Written by Mary Robson and Holly Kennel, Washington State University Cooperative Extension/King, Snohomish and Pierce counties. Seattle Times)

MEERKERK NOTES

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 in the Gardens, 9-noon.

- ♦ **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. Please contact Kristi: meerkerk@whidbey.net.



PROPAGATING HARDWOOD CUTTINGS



Adam Wheeler, propagation manager for Broken Arrow Nursery in Hamden, Connecticut, says autumn is prime time for propagating false cypress, hollies, arborvitaes, willows, rhododendrons, red-twigged dogwoods, and boxwood by hardwood cuttings.

Adam recommends rooting cuttings in flats filled with half perlite, half peat-based potting mix. An expert tip for choosing which stem to cut: He imagines a triangle drawn over the shrub, its wide end at the base and its apex two-thirds of the way up the trunk. Think of this as the plant's "cone of juvenility." Cuttings taken from within it have the best chance of rooting. Avoid taking stems with berries or blooms. And if variegation is what you're after, aim for a branch with vivid color.

1. **Cut** Clip a branch from within the "cone of juvenility" (see above). Remove and discard the new growth at the tip. Reduce your cutting to six- to eight-inch-long segments for deciduous shrubs, or three- to five-inch-long segments for evergreens. Be sure each has at least one leaf node.

2. **Prepare the cutting** Strip any leaves off the lower end of the cutting. Reduce the upper leaves by cutting them in half. Wound the lowest inch of stem on one side by whittling away the bark. This will foster root formation. Hold the cutting in hardwood rooting hormone for 10 seconds.

3. **Stick** Fill a pot with a mixture of moist perlite and peat-based potting mix. Stick the lower tip of each cutting into the medium and firm it in. Insert a 10-inch bamboo stake and slip a plastic bag over the pot, propping it up on the stake. When the cuttings resist a tug, roots have formed. By spring, they should be ready to brave the outdoors.

(Tovah Martin - Horticulture Magazine Oct/Nov 2007)

RHODODENDRON TRIFLORUM

Hook.f 1849

Steve Hootman

A Species Profile reprinted from the
Rhododendron Species Foundation newsletter.

The majority of the 30 or so rhododendrons introduced by Joseph Hooker from his 1848-1850 expedition to Sikkim have become well known and, at least in species collections, widely-grown. Showy and impressive species such as *RR. thomsonii*, *arboreum*, *niveum*, *maddenii*, *edgeworthii*, *falconeri*, *hodgsonii*, *griffithianum*, *campanulatum*, *barbatum* and *cinnabarinum* gained the widespread attention and admiration of western gardeners and botanists following this historic expedition into the eastern Himalayas. To this day, these plants make up the "backbone" of a species collection in most gardens and many are commonly used in hybridizing programs.

Not all of Hooker's introductions have gained this lasting popularity, however. For various reasons - whether the lack of a sufficient floral display, hardiness issues, or difficulty in cultivation, several of his introductions, including *Rhododendron triflorum*, remain relatively uncommon in gardens. The lack of interest in *R. triflorum* is probably related to the fact that it is quite variable over its extensive range and many of the more desirable forms, including those considered to have superior flowers such as var. *bauhiniiflorum*, are typically less hardy. Overall, the species is quite ornamental with its beautiful, glossy, smooth and exfoliating, pale to deep chocolate brown bark, aromatic shiny foliage, and late season, more or less yellow, though small, flowers.

Following its introduction by Hooker in 1850, this variable and often common species was widely collected by later plant hunters from throughout its extensive range. *R. triflorum* occurs at elevations ranging from 7,000 to 13,000 feet (2,100 to 4,000m) in the eastern Himalaya from eastern Nepal through Sikkim and Bhutan, including adjacent areas of northern India (West Bengal) and eastward into the mountains of southeastern Tibet and the northern Myanmar/Tibet/Indian frontier. It was also collected by Frank Kingdon Ward in 1928 from an isolated population in northeastern India (Manipur & Nagaland) where it occurs from 8,000 to 9,500 feet (2,400 to 2,900m). Although quite similar to *R. triflorum*, this new collection was named *R. bauhiniiflorum* due to its distinct range and larger, flatter flowers. This species was reduced to varietal status within *R. triflorum* in 1980 by Dr. Cullen. Forms from the eastern end of the range (southeastern Tibet and adjacent Arunachal Pradesh) were originally described as var. *mahogani* (now lumped into var. *triflorum* and best referred to as *R. triflorum* var. *triflorum* Mahogani Group). These have non-peeling bark and often have a reddish coloring in the flowers, whether a suffusion, blotch an/or spots. These are now understood to be nothing more than color variations within populations. The flower color in Mahogani Group is quite variable and the plants tend to be hardier. Chinese botanists have recently located an amazingly disjunct population of this species which they have named *R. triflorum* ssp. *multiflorum*, distinguishing it on the basis of its very isolated range and in having four to five flowers per inflorescence (versus the typical two or three). They collected this subspecies in the Wuliang Shan of southwestern Yunnan Province, China.

R. triflorum is a lepidote or scale-bearing rhododendron and is the type species for Subsection *Triflora*. It is found in a wide variety of habitats; although, like most rhododendrons it is generally restricted to mountainous situations with cool, humid air and plenty of precipitation. I have been fortunate in having the opportunity to observe this interesting species on both ends of its wide range, noting firsthand the variation and distinguishing characteristics. I first saw this species in the wild

in the spring of 1997 while on an expedition to Sikkim where I observed the plant as it was originally described by Hooker back in 1849. The populations of *R. triflorum* in this area are very typical of the eastern Himalayan type (var. *triflorum*), with glossy, dark brown peeling bark and shiny leaves which are bright glaucous-white beneath. It was too early in the season to enjoy any flowers but I was more than impressed with the overall character and beauty of the plants. I noted plants of this species in habitats ranging from shaded moss-covered cliffs growing with numerous other Ericaceae to dry, treeless, grassy slopes where it grew with *Rhododendron ciliatum*. Plants grown from seed collected on this trip have been flowering in the nursery for several years now. The flowers are rather small and a bit pale in color but this "lack" of floral display is made up for by the glossy foliage and stunning, smooth and peeling deep chestnut brown bark.

In 2003 I observed the rare, disjunct and rather localized *R. triflorum* var. *bauhiniiflorum* in its native habitat while exploring the mountains of Nagaland in the northeastern corner of India. On these isolated peaks, this species grew on steep rocky forested slopes with a very interesting selection of species including *RR. macabeanum*, *johnstoneanum* and *elliottii*. All three, like var. *bauhiniiflorum*, are endemic to the Naga Hills.

As in almost every other characteristic, this species varies greatly in size, ranging from fairly small and seemingly delicate to a large and vigorous thicket-forming shrub up to 20 feet in height. As I have mentioned previously, the bark is much shinier, smoother and more peeling in the typical western (Himalayan) form than that of the eastern populations. The leaves are typically aromatic, somewhat elliptic in shape and up to three inches (c. seven cm) in length. As with the bark, there are obvious differences in foliage characteristics between the western (very glaucous on the underside) and the eastern populations (green or only slightly glaucous beneath); the lower surface is always dotted with tiny brown scales spaced approximately their own diameter apart. The flowers (late spring to early summer) are borne in a terminal inflorescence of two or three (sometimes four), thus the epithet "*triflorum*" meaning "three-flowered." The individual flowers are widely funnel-shaped and up to one and a half inches (four cm) across except in the northeastern India population (var. *bauhiniiflorum*) where they are much flatter in shape and one and a half to two inches (four to five cm) across. They range in color from pale yellow to bright yellow or greenish, usually with greenish spots and in the case of the southeastern Tibetan/Arunachal Pradesh populations (Mahogani Group) variously marked or blushed with red or reddish-brown. The calyx is quite small, the ovary is covered with scales and the style is typically smooth.

In cultivation, *R. triflorum*, like most members of Subsection *Triflora*, is vigorous and easy under normal rhododendron growing conditions. It prefers strong light but performs more than adequately in partly shaded conditions. As always, good drainage is essential. The hardiness varies somewhat as would be expected from a species with such a wide distribution. Most forms of this species should be hardy from +10°F. to 0°F. with the typical Himalayan as well as the northeastern Indian (var. *bauhiniiflorum*) forms generally less hardy than those from southeastern Tibet.

I am unaware of any awards this species may have received and the only hybrid I could locate was a cross with *R. xanthostephanum* called 'Butterball.'

Please submit articles of interest for Jan Newsletter by 1/11/08

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