

# Whidbey Rhodies News

whidbeyrhodies.org

October 2011

Meets the 4th Wednesday of each month ❖ Race Road Firehouse, 1164 Race Rd, Coupeville WA  
7pm Refreshments, 7:20 Meeting & Program

### Next Meeting: Wed, October 26th Frank Fujioka: Hybridizing for Better Foliage

Like most hybridists **Frank Fujioka** worked for many years to produce rhododendrons with better flower color, size and fragrance. For the past 12-15 years, however, he has focused on creating interesting foliage with less concern for flowers. Frank has observed that we often enjoy using other plants in landscapes because of their leaf shape, color and texture. Flowers can be short lived or insignificant, leaving us a large portion of the year looking at the plant and leaves. Why not hybridize to enhance these features in rhododendrons? This month's program will tell you how he's done just that...



### Calendar of Upcoming Events

- November 16 ..... Pie Social/Annual Meeting  
Election of Officers
- November 19..... BLV Work Party
- December 4 (Sunday) ..... Holiday Party  
@ Christopher's in Coupeville
- January 25 ..... Chapter Meeting  
DVD, TBD
- February 8-12..... NW Flower & Garden Show
- February 22..... Meeting  
Tim Lawrence, Sweet Nectar & Mad Sex
- March 28 ..... Chapter Meeting  
Bus Tour, TBD
- April 25..... Chapter Meeting
- May 23 ..... Chapter Meeting
- September 26 ..... Chapter Meeting



Cookie Reminder:  
Jan Allen & Joan Bell

### Big Leaf Valley Work Party

The October 16th work party was a fun time for everyone. Those attending, Don K, Don L, Frank, Paul, Joan and Susie got the lower part of the Valley cleaned up and it's looking great! The **next work party** will be on **Saturday, November 19th**.

Please remember that the Chapter voted to take on the maintenance of the Big Leaf Valley as a group, the more hands the merrier. Let's mark our calendars for the next work party on the 19th and set about making the BLV the sparkling gem Jake envisioned.



### Election of Officers Coming Soon

Our Annual meeting and election of officers is just around the corner. If you can serve the club in this capacity please speak to one of the current Board: Felicia Marshall, Stephen Schwarzmann, Marilyn Wright, Don Allen, Frank Fujioka, Stephanie Rodden, Pat Sasson or Gail DaPont.



### Don't Forget, Renew

Renew you dues today and you won't miss the January ARS journal and this Chapter's *to die for* newsletter and events!

### la Nina's Silver Lining

Weather forecasters are warning of another cool, wet, la Niña winter. Perhaps we can take solace in these words from **Richie Steffen**, curator at the Miller Botanical Garden in Shoreline: *"If nothing else, it forces us to remember our gardens are dynamic spaces that are constantly changing with or without our input. And every dead plant is an opportunity for a new plant."*



Don't forget the \$ table!



Editor: I was able to persuade Stephanie to share the recipe for the wonderful Almond Torta she brought to last month's 'Taste of Sicily' program.

Enjoy!

### Almond Torta with Chocolate Chips

Torta di Mandorle ~ Makes a 10-inch cake, serving 10 or more

- 10 ounces (2 ½ sticks) soft butter plus more for the pan
- 1 ¾ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for the pan
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup sugar
- 5 large eggs
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (about 2 teaspoons)
- 1 teaspoon pure almond extract
- 2 cups almond flour or almond meal
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- ½ cup sliced blanched almonds, lightly toasted

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 10-inch springform pan; an electric mixer with paddle attachment

☞ Butter and flour the bottom and sides of the springform pan. Arrange a rack in the center of the oven, and heat to 350°. Sift together the all-purpose flour, baking powder, and salt.

☞ In the mixer, cream the butter and sugar on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. On medium speed, add the eggs, one at a time, mixing each in thoroughly before adding the next; scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed. Beat in the lemon zest and almond extract, then raise the speed to high and beat the batter until very light, a minute or more.

☞ On low speed, mix in half of the sifted flour mixture, beating just until it is incorporated; beat in half the almond flour. Scrape the bowl, and mix in the remaining all-purpose flour and remaining almond flour. Beat briefly on medium to a smooth batter, then, again on low speed, mix in the chocolate chips just until evenly distributed.

☞ Scrape the batter into the prepared pan, and spread it in an even layer. Scatter the sliced almonds all over the top. Bake the torta for 45 minutes—rotating the pan halfway through the baking time—or until the cake is golden brown on top and a knife inserted in the center comes out clean.

☞ Cool the cake in the pan for about 10 minutes on a wire rack. Run the blade of a paring knife around the edge of the cake, then open the spring and remove the side ring. Cool the cake completely before serving. Cut it in wedges, and dust with confectioners' sugar or accompany with whipped cream, ice cream, or zabaglione.

From: "Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy"

Lidia Mattichio Bastianich

Alfred A Knopf, NY, 2010

### Notes from Meerkerk Joan Bell, MRG Operations Mgr

If you had a chance to join us for the Garden Fest, then you know it can be summed up in one word: FUN! The weather was grand and visitors lingered as the music played.

Both the nurseries and artisans were pleased with their sales, and each and every one complemented us on our wonderful group of volunteers. The volunteers, in turn, enjoyed working with the vendors and commented that it was a lovely "garden party".

To all the volunteers, including Jack Lounsberry and his garden gadgets, we succeed because of you! Thank YOU!

### MRG Volunteer Opportunities

Meerkerk Garden/Nursery Manager , **Susie Reynolds**, invites everyone to join in the monthly work parties that keep Meerkerk looking its best. No special skills are required, but do bring your enthusiasm for the Gardens.



Meet in the Volunteer Cottage at 8:45 then break at noon for a pot luck lunch. Bring your favorite dish to share.

- 2nd Saturday Work Party: Join us for special projects to beautify the Gardens on the 2nd Saturday of each month. Next general work party meets on November 12th.

### The Concealed Proverb

In each of the sentences below a word is concealed, such as the word "no" that is marked in the fifth sentence. If you can find the other buried words and read them in order, they will form a well-known proverb.

1. The word buried here only has one letter.
2. Did you find a jelly roll in Gaskin's Bakery?
3. It's the best one I've ever seen.
4. The rug at her stairway was made in India.
5. He's an old friend.
6. Amos sold his bicycle to a friend.

Answer on page 3.

Trick or treat,  
Smell my feet,  
Give me something  
good to eat.



## Happy Halloween

Editor: An article by Victoria Rhododendron Society member **Norm Todd** never fails to delight. Here he shares some deadheading wisdom.

The Victoria Rhododendron society is putting together a compendium of 73 of Norm's article – *The Wit and Wisdom of Norm Todd* – it should be available later this fall.

## Deadheading

by Norm Todd

You need a dead head to deadhead. There is no doubt I can be totally dead in the head quite often on any given day on a wide variety of topics but after about five minutes of deadheading, I start to estimate how many more five minutes will be needed to remove all of the pesky capsules. Even with our contemporary appreciation of astronomical numbers – those with strings of zeros on their tails – the task becomes incomprehensible. Paradoxically, I have an appreciation of the meaning of infinity.

Why do rhododendrons not have good fruit? If they had nice brightly coloured berries we would gladly leave them on the branch. If they were edible... oh, what a pleasant thought. I even try to convince myself that all this spent biomass that is being strewn at the base of the plants must be the best mulch in the world for rhododendrons. But that only makes the plants more luxuriant, which compounds the problem next year.

There is a school of thought that says, "Why deadhead? It only makes the critters bloom better next year". I recommend you weigh this advice carefully. It has merit.

I think that there should be an extra number used in rating rhododendrons – one for ease of deadheading. One of my most favourite rhododendrons is *R. auriculatum*. The plant is at least twenty years old and I enjoy it every day, twelve months of the year. It has never flowered. *Auriculatum* would get a 5 in my rating scheme – so would most of the *R. talienses* – they never flower either. For plants that do flower, I would rate things like "Loder's White" quite highly. I'd give it a 4.5 (5 is reserved for plants that never flower and for plants where the darn things fall off by themselves). The spent rachis on "Loder's White" has the attribute of breaking off at the right point on the plant, assuming one is reasonably careful. Frequently on other varieties I end up with a whole whorl of leaves in my hand and more often than I like to admit, whole branches.

*R. augustinii* I would give a 1. By the time the flowers are faded, the new growth buds are elongated to just the right length to make them easier to knock off than the immature seed container. Actually, on some *augustiniis* the old flower pedicels are not attached all that well and a lateral blow will detach them quite easily. Try placing a curved index finger on the pad of the thumb and flicking quickly while taking careful aim at the object to be beheaded. With practice, you will soon knock them flying. My neighbour returning from his daily ten mile jog saw me executing this method. Reflexively, running on the spot, he half-raised his arm in greeting – paused – then hurried up the road shaking his head. I am now careful to use this method only when I am sure no one is watching.

Incidentally, I don't know why *augustinii* is classed as Triflora. I swear all of our plants have at least four flowers in the inflorescence. All of the *lapponicum*s get a Zero, a big fat goose

egg. The fungus-like excrescences on *impeditum* just have to be ignored. There is no way they can be removed.

But the worst rating goes to *racemosum*. I would rate it right out there in negative numbers. I furtively pick a few of the cursed blobs and give up quickly. I always have a ready supply of seed of *racemosum*. When some ingénue asks, "Are all rhododendrons hard to grow from seed?" I put on a benign smirk and reply with feigned generosity, "Here, let me see if I can find you some seed of *racemosum*; it's a good one to start with". The seed capsules on *racemosum* are more persistent than the leaves. The deer occasionally browse on the leaves – never on the seed. Come to think of it, have you ever seen a weevil notch on a seed capsule?

In this deadheading business we also have to take account of the stickiness factor. I wonder if the manufacturers of "Crazy Glue" know about "Ruby Bowman"? Maybe I'm onto something and can make a million. I know now why Lem (or was it Elliot?) called "Jingle Bells" "Jingle Bells". You deadhead the plant and you'll be hearing Jingle Bells on the radio every day before you get the gunk off your fingers.

It's no use using gloves. They do more damage than enough and the cloth fingers are soon irreparably forever fused. Scissors are needed to get the intended protection off.

Talking of scissors, they are quite an effective tool for deadheading the long sturdy pedicels of the *R. campylogynums* and *R. glaucophyllum*s. I used to think that using scissors was an affectation, like using sugar tongs to pick up slugs, as the ladies in Oak Bay do. But it really is a good method for these particular species of rhododendrons and for this reason I would give them a 2.5. If you try to pull off three or four of the old flowers at one time on a *campylogynum* you risk pulling the plant out by the root. The stalks have remarkable tensile strength.

The deciduous azaleas have very high stickability indices. It's strange how the leaves fall off regularly as clockwork every year but the seeds seem to know another Ice Age is on the way. They are going to hang on until it's over.

I occasionally find a dead bee inside a wilted flower – stuck to its supposed feeding source. It is a good thing that we are quite a bit bigger than bees or every rhododendron grower would be trapped in early efforts to deadhead and all of this would be academic, which, on reflection, is what it is supposed to be.

There has been a huge increase in the number of hybridizers of late. I know why this is so. It is much easier to pull off the petals and the anthers before, or just as the flower opens, than it is to pull off the entire flower when it has wilted. The excuse they use is that the seed capsules may contain the next wonder of the world.

These are, however, superficial thoughts. Sooner or later, even if you are only a five minute spurter like I am, you have to ask yourself the fundamental questions, "What am I doing? What are the consequences of this act? When does the life of a rhododendron begin?" I hesitate to say it but perhaps we need a free vote on the subject.

October 1989



The buried words form the proverb: "A rolling stone gathers no moss."