

WHIDBEY ISLAND CHAPTER



# ARS Whidbey Island Chapter NEWSLETTER

Website: [www2.whidbey.net/dapont/ARS](http://www2.whidbey.net/dapont/ARS)

Meets the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of each Month  
Fire District 5 Headquarters Station  
215 East Race Road, Coupeville, WA  
**Refreshments: 7:00 Meeting: 7:20**

September 2006

## Next Meeting: Wed, Sept 27

### Program: Bill Stipe: A Tribute to Warren Berg

Warren Berg was a well known Northwest rhododendron enthusiast, plant collector, and hybridizer who traveled to many countries to collect rare and some unidentified species rhododendrons. Many of the choice Lepidote rhododendron hybrids, identified with a "Bee" in their name, are Warren's creation. His garden, located on Hood Canal, is planted with many rare rhododendrons, both species and hybrids. Warren passed away this spring but had made this DVD in remembrance of his wife Pat. Warren was mentor to many of us rhodoholics and will be greatly missed.

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

Sept 22-24 .....	ARS Regional Conference Harrison Hot Springs, BC
Oct 11 .....	Board Meeting 6:30 @ Marshall's
Oct 25 .....	Chapter Meeting Frank Fujioka
Nov 15 .....	Annual Chapter Meeting Pie Social/Steve Hootman
Dec 9 .....	Holiday Dinner/Gift Exchange @ Christopher's in Coupeville

## Dues are DUE !



By now you will all have received your renewal notices for your 2007 membership in our Whidbey Island Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. Get this out of the way by mailing your renewal envelope *today* or bring it to the next chapter meeting. If your membership is not renewed by December 1st, you may miss the January issue of the ARS Journal. If you have NOT received a renewal envelope it means your membership has been paid up for 2007 or beyond.

Please consider enclosing a few extra dollars for the chapter.

## In the Garden

### September/October Rhododendron tips: (Bill Stipe)

Now that the days are getting short, the rhodies will start going dormant. Do not prune or fertilize now. Check the flower buds which should now be formed and remove any more than one bud per terminal, this will assure a better flower truss next spring. Check the leaves for symptoms of root weevil; if they are present they leave notches along the edge of the leaves. Several insecticides are approved for control, I use Talstar™ (generic name is bifenthrin). Apply it at the base of the rhodie, which is where the weevil hangs out during the day. You can also hand pick the adults by going out with a flashlight at night and squashing them. Fall is a good time to add or renew the mulch in your rhodie beds. Add 2 to 3 inches of bark or compost. Fall is also a good time to plant or transplant rhododendrons. Watch the nursery adds for fall clearance sales!



### 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)

- Add new groundcover, such as native sword fern and bleeding heart, to those tough dry-shade areas under evergreens.
- Bring houseplants indoors by month's end. Check for hitchhiking insects and wash the plants first.
- Continue watering vegetables, container plants and the lawn.



### Cookie reminder!

Kristy Knickrehm and  
Norma Lounsberry

## From the (acting) Prez

John Marshall



We have experienced such hot and dry conditions this summer, missing all that rain the Pacific Northwest is so famous for. I don't know about you, but I have spent more time watering this summer than any other summer since we have been on the Island. I believe the weatherman stated the other night that we just went into second place for the driest summer and are fast approaching it becoming the first. Don't give up hope though, rain will come. In the mean time let's keep up the rain dances, prayers and wishful rain thinking. Don't put away those hoses just yet and keep watering until "you know what" arrives. We have received a bit of help the last few weeks with shorter days and cooler nights resulting in less moisture being lost.

A great big *THANK YOU* to Jack, Norma, Mary and Geoff for hosting the Annual Picnic and auction at Lounsbury Park. In place of the familiar picnic shelter, which was lost in a storm last winter, there stands a huge gazebo and new landscaping. What a transformation. *Great job Jack!*

Thanks to our auctioneer, Bill Stipe, we sold many great rhodies, fuchsias, and companion plants. Thanks also to all of you who brought items for the auction and all of you bought them. Jack and Norma, again, a big *THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU.*

## Dark Matter

(Harper's Magazine)

From a collection of errors and malapropisms by junior high, high school and college students, submitted by their teachers to Richard Lederer, a syndicated columnist. Many of the following appeared in his book, *The Revenge of Anguished English*, 2005, St. Martin's Press.



1. When a planet first forms, it is like a big ball of mucus.
2. Gravity is a pulling type thing that makes sure the planets don't fall or hurt anything.
3. The law of gravity says no fair jumping up without coming back down.
4. Copernicus's theory claimed that the sun was on the center of the earth.
5. Galileo showed that the earth was round and not vice versa.
6. Most books say the sun is a star. But it still knows how to change back into the sun in the daytime.
7. Before Galileo, no one could see the moon.
8. A vibration is a motion that cannot make up its mind which way it wants to go.
9. Some oxygen molecules help fires burn while others help make water, so sometimes its brother against brother.
10. Water is composed of two gins, oxygin and hydrogin. Oxygin is pure gin. Hydrogin is gin and water.

## Meerkerk Notes

Gail DaPont

### *Calling all Volunteers!*

We hope all of you have had a wonderful summer and look forward to welcoming you for another volunteer season at Meerkerk Gardens. You'll be surprised to see how much has occurred at the Gardens during the summer months. The "Living Wall" in the patio of the Volunteer Cottage has become a blanket of color and the new hoop house behind is in its final stages of construction. The hundreds of lilies planted this year have been blooming in brilliant colors and heady fragrances around the Test Garden to welcome all our summer visitors. The Library's shelves in the Cottage are now filled with books. Last, but not least, the new Gate House plans are finished and construction is to start this month.

Now as the leaves turn color let's roll up our sleeves and gather for our enthusiastic work parties on the second Saturday of each month to prepare for another glorious season of great gardening fellowship to bring Ann Meerkerk's woodland garden vision to fruition.

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**Don't forget something  
for the \$1 table**

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## Ten Ways To Kill a Rhododendron

Marjorie Hancock, Woodland Nurseries

Rhodos are very strange creatures. On occasion I have suspected that each plant has its own individuality; perhaps you could call it a soul. As with humans, their environment greatly affects their health and serenity. As with humans who are suffering, there are symptoms which tell us that they are miserable. But, as with humans, they seem to have a totally incredible will to survive. How often have you heard someone say, "I have a rhododendron in my garden. It looks terrible. The leaves are all blotchy and yellow and scabby, and the plant is scraggly, but I cannot bear to dig it up because every June it blooms like mad with the most gorgeous flowers!?" Just like humans - some of them survive and blossom, even under the most adverse conditions.

But back to my topic - how to kill them. (This is not my favourite hobby, by the way')

### **Method No. 1 - Brutal Murder (Planticide)**

One would think this would be the most expedient method. I've tried it. With almost any other type of plant, this is an easy way. Just dig it up and leave it on top of the ground. With rhodos, however, this does not always work. As a breeder, during the blooming period, I have roughly pulled unattractive hybrids out of the bed and viciously pitched them on top of the ground. The flowers faded and the plant wilted, but many were still alive in August because their roots were still touching the ground.

In the nursery we must discard ailing or scrawny plants at transplanting time. Often they are still alive when cremated many weeks later. Or some are lifted for winter storage and set

on the ground and perhaps forgotten in the fall, and those plants are still alive the next spring when the snows melt. I have several rhodos in the woods that were positioned for planting after use in a flower show but were never put in the ground. They are still alive and quite healthy looking, with only leaf drop around the root. Clearly, digging them up is not a foolproof method and must be considered a last resort, combined with chopping it into little pieces!

If you have analysed why Method No. 1 is unsatisfactory, you have a lead. Exposing the roots to the air does not kill them... Ergo - depriving them of air might do the trick. So we have:

#### **Method No. 2 - Suffocation**

Insert the roots deeply in the ground and tamp them in firmly. As a safeguard, raise the soil level well up the stem. This usually works, although the rhodo will struggle to resist by growing a collar of new roots, just centimetres below the surface, and inches above the crown of the root. Again, not foolproof, but if combined with Method No. 3, following, might be successful.

#### **Method No. 3 - Drowning**

This is best accomplished by first planting your rhododendron in very dense soil, in a hollow with poor drainage and holding it down with plenty of dirt. This is virtually guaranteed to work. Drowning can be accomplished even in a raised bed however, if someone advised you to plant it that way. Just water it a lot, say twice a day, even if it rains. This is slower and may not work too well, unless combined with Method No. 2. Be sure to use heavily chlorinated water, which leads us to:

#### **Method No. 4 - Poisoning**

Just as there are many subtle ways of disposing of people with poison and not getting caught, there are ways to poison a rhododendron. For instance: plant it within the root system of a black walnut tree. This lovely tree exudes a toxin in the soil which will do in your rhodo. Or you could feed it generously with Aluminum Sulphate. This is often recommended by ill-informed garden centres as a beneficial means of fertilizing, but the aluminum ions which build up in the soil will insidiously poison your plant in time, and no one will ever know what you have done!

Or you could simply plant your rhodo in sticky alkaline clay without amending the soil. This of course combines poisoning with suffocation and drowning and is an ideal solution to your problem. If you happen to have naturally acidic soil, increase the pH by adding large quantities of lime. Your rhodo will gobble it up and will not be able to eat its recommended balanced diet and will get very ill and will perish. This business of diet leads us to several other approaches.

#### **Method No. 5 - Starvation**

This is not the easiest way to get rid of a rhododendron and can only be accomplished by closely following these rules:

- A. Plant in pure, sterile sand, in a totally exposed area, away from trees or plants of any kind (especially pines and oaks) and never allow leaves to collect under the branches.
- B. Never provide additional mulch.
- C. Never fertilize.
- D. Never water, even in drought periods.

#### **Method No. 6 - Overeating**

This is bad for people and can be very bad for the well-being of a rhododendron. It can eventually lead to death. A moderate diet of proper proportions is necessary for good health. If one provides an over-abundance of food which encourages too much growth at the wrong time of the year, the resistance of the plant is lowered and the rhodo will succumb to such ailments as indigestion, rashes along the edges of the leaves, sunburn and frostbite.

#### **Method No. 7 - Malnutrition**

This is rarely fatal and your plant will linger, unless you are aware of the following fact: you must keep the pH of the soil either extremely low or very high (at least 6.5 pH, preferably much higher). This will suppress appetite; your rhodo will not feel up to eating what good foods are available, thus encouraging a wide assortment of problems, particularly anaemia (chlorosis), indicating a lack of iron (or phosphorus, magnesium, manganese or other nutrients), making it more susceptible to a natural death from attacks of fungi or insects. Of course, you can speed the process by combining this method with other methods already described.

#### **Method No. 8 - Overexposure**

By this I do not mean showing the plant to all your friends! I prefer to designate this method Torture I, or Desiccation This could be a favourite with some gardeners, especially those in brand new subdivisions. Just plant your rhododendron by itself in the middle of the yard, or in an open field where it will receive the full blast of the dry arctic winds which we have in good measure from November to March. Alternatively, you might position it tightly against a white wall, preferably facing due south, and bake it to death in summer. Any temptation to provide windbreak in the winter, or to plant something else in the yard to provide light shade should be assiduously avoided.

#### **Method No. 9 - Torture II / Trauma**

Physical abuse can be inflicted on your plant- This procedure is not very satisfying, unless you are both a sadist and a masochist. Various avenues are open with this method, such as: have a spouse who hates plants (it happens!); have a very large family of primary and pre-school children (expensive!); have a very large male dog which is totally uncontrollable (a nuisance!); or have a resident gardener who insists on hoeing and digging up the beds twice a week instead of weeding (inevitable!). Vandalism by trespassers is occasionally helpful. Maiming falls into this category, i.e., cutting the plant down just above the ground level.. Most of these do not work well and the plant is likely to just sprout again from the old wood.

#### **Method No. 10 - Torture III / Ostracism or Mental Cruelty**

Deprive your rhodo of compatible companions such as azaleas, other Ericaceae and Micorrizhae fungi, with whom it might develop rapport and come to feel a cherished part of the garden community. Refuse to provide resource and support systems such as Guardian Pines and Mentor Oaks.

Plant it in a place where it cannot effectively compete with the giant corporations such as huge maples and willows, nor cope with the muggers of the plant world-the wild grape vines, wild cucumber, Creeping Charlie and brambles. Withhold your love and attention when it is really needed, or conversely, provide smother love instead of the studied neglect which allows it to develop its full potential and character in its own sweet time.

These are ten simple, home gardener ways to dispose of your rhododendron; all time honoured, but variably reliable under individual conditions. There are of course, more bizarre things you could do: import some whitefly or weevils or perhaps inoculate it with a fatal disease such as Phytophthora cinnamomi, a bit like a mad scientist.

I have heard that the best solution to a problem comes, not from the first or second idea but is found somewhere between the third and twenty-seventh suggestion, and is usually a combination of several ideas. So try the methods I have outlined or think up some of your own. If nothing works, I suggest that you just give your uncherished plant to another rhodo buff or a public garden and cancel your membership in the Rhododendron Society!

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