



"Niagara Rhodo" Newsletter of the The Niagara Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada October 2010

Our Purpose: We are a non-profit organization whose aim is to promote, encourage and support interest in the genus *rhododendron*.. **Our goal is to encourage gardeners to grow and appreciate these plants, by providing educational meetings with knowledgeable speakers, access to topical publications and hosting joint meetings with other chapters.**

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Word of Caution

By becoming a successful grower, the reader will be exposed to a contagion for which there is no cure. Once infected with an appreciation of rhododendrons and azaleas most gardeners spend a lifetime collecting these most beautiful of all plants.

H. Edward Reiley

President's Note

Fall is a glorious season. We can reflect on what we have accomplished in our gardens over the past year, and augment our gardens with new acquisitions for the coming year. Generally, this is a good time to plant, as plants have time to get established before winter sets in.

The Niagara Region Chapter has continued to flourish since the Spring. Following a successful plant sale in April, we had back to back tours of members' gardens with a large turnout. We thank Tom Laviolette and Suzie Jensen for their excellent reception. What better way to get inspiration and ideas for our own gardens! Our Plants for Members Sale, held at Marian and Mike Little's Nettlecreek Nursery, was widely supported.

After our summer hiatus, our group is now gearing up for the fall and winter program. We continue to fill the pipeline of Plants for Members (P4Ms). The cycle -- cuttings, to rooting. to potting, to growing -- lasts at least two years.

This fall, several Board Members worked with Niagara College on the Rhododendron Demonstration Bed to improve the growing conditions for ensuring sustainability of the plants.

Rhodos keep you humble. If there is a lesson to be learned, it's that knowing what works in your own garden cannot be readily extrapolated to another site. Meanwhile, Nick Yarmoshuk and Christine Woodward, have been developing ideas for starting a Brueckner hybrid test program for Niagara & Southern Ontario. This will be the topic of our Speaker's event on November 7th.

We look forward to seeing old friends and newcomers at the meeting on November 7th. This is open to the public so bring your friends. As always, your Board of Directors is committed to enhancing what is offered by the Niagara Chapter. Now is membership renewal time. Whether you choose to be an ARS member or a local member, we value your fellowship and support.

Sondra Meis

Reflections on Spring and Summer 2010

Spring 2010 came early. We found that varieties bloomed early and out of sequences that we had experienced for years. There appeared to be enough rain in the spring, new growth appeared abundant and, unlike the previous summer, buds started to form earlier than usual and abundantly. Although we all enjoyed the heat and dryness of this past summer, the hot dry weather was brutal for rhododendrons and azaleas. Not only did they demand water, but those growing in open sunlight had very warm soil, quite a good deal warmer than the cool root-runs that rhododendron and azalea prefer. Some of us, returning from trips found newly planted cultivars withering, some gone into dormancy and others expired. The importance of excellent drainage and a frugal, yet dependable watering system, was highlighted during this past summer's experiences. Now, in the fall, we find that the leaves of deciduous and evergreen azaleas and some lepidotes are beautifully coloured. And, to our surprise, many cultivars are showing unusual fall bloom. Your editor observes that Rh. Mist Maiden a.k.a. Cordy's Pride is almost in 40% bloom. This occurring in a fall with plants experiencing enormous bud set where in 2009 there was ZERO bud set. This summer's experience was not limited to Niagara and southern Ontario. A contributor to the Yahoo rhododendron chat line has the following to say about his experience:

Hot Summer of 2010 by Dick Murcott

This summer has been murder on Long Island (just outside of New York City). We started off with a very wet spring and the rhododendrons looked great, even though we didn't have a heavy bud set caused by a cloudy, dark summer in 2009. It started to get dry in June and in July the heat hit 103 degrees F. one day and in the high 90s for weeks on end with no rain and bright sunlight. My garden is mostly shaded by very mature oak trees. With that heat and sunshine, no matter how much you watered, it didn't seem to have any effect. You could water all day and the ground was just as dry as before after a few hours. I did notice some interesting things. First,

The Brueckner Story

the yellows did very poorly with the lack of water. They collapsed rapidly and would reach the no-return-with-water point very quickly, a lot quicker than most of the pink rhododendrons. I lost a 6' Golden Star and very large Donna Hardgrove. They collapsed seemingly overnight. The very hardy plants would droop and curl their leaves but almost never got to the abort-the-leaves stage. If it got too dry they would abort the least important branches, mostly those low on the shady side of the plant. The whole plant wouldn't abort like the yellows did. Deciduous azaleas eventually dropped their leaves, but the vegetative buds look OK for next year. I guess they just went dormant early. Those plants that set buds late in the summer or early fall have a very sparse bud set while those that set their buds in early July are covered with buds. The indumented plants did quite well. There was a little die-back, but in general they came through well. Well here it is the third week in September and we are still dry and it is getting hot again.

Last spring a local nursery had an enormous quantity of 3 gal rhododendrons for sale for \$19.95. They had 3 foot diameter heads on them loaded with buds. Customers were buying them like crazy. I wonder, after this summer, how many are still alive. I run every morning and pass a home where someone had planted three Anna Rose Whitney plants this spring, about 3 feet high. They sure were a knockout when they bloomed. Right now, one is basically dead, another poor looking and the third not so bad but with no flower buds for next spring. And these had been watered all summer. I wonder if any will survive the winter.

Program 2010 & 2011

Shown below are meeting dates and program listings for the next 12 months. As Sondra has stated in her note, our meetings program, for this period, plan to provide more information about Plants for Members, invites member involvement in a proposed Test Garden project, and descriptions & tours of local unique and innovative gardens.

Please note that all meetings, unless otherwise stated, will be held at Rittenhouse Hall, Vineland Research & Innovation Centre (VRIC), Vineland Station, Ontario, starting at 2 PM.

Sunday, Nov. 7, 2010. 2 P.M. *The Story of Joe Brueckner's Hybrids*: Christina Woodward & Nick Yarmoshuk.

Sunday Feb. 6, 2011. 2 P.M. *The MacDougall Garden*: James McDougall.

Sunday Mar. 6, 2011. TBA

Sunday, Apr. 16, 2011. 2P.M. Description of cultivars in Annual Plant Sale and discussion of cultivars in P4M program.

Saturday Apr. 22, 2011, Annual Plant Sale. VRIC, 9 A.M.

Sunday, May 8, 2011. Mother's Day

Saturday, May 14, 2011 Garden Tour, TBA

Saturday May, 28, 2011 Plants for Members Sale. TBA.

The late Dr. Joseph Brueckner started his hybridizing in New Brunswick but continued his work in Mississauga after he moved his entire plantation to this new location. Several of his named cultivars are now available in commerce, and many others are being grown successfully in Canada's maritime provinces. Despite a very large plantation of his hybrids at his family's home in Mississauga and others at the Brueckner (public) Garden in Mississauga, no systematic testing of these hybrids has been carried out in Central Ontario. Christina Woodward, Dr. Brueckner's daughter, and Nick Yarmoshuk will talk about how the Brueckner hybrids were developed; the goals that were set, the species that were used, and the results that were obtained. Details of the Niagara Region Chapter's innovative Brueckner Test Program will be presented. Opportunities for members' involvement will be presented and enhanced ideas for this involvement will be sought. **The photo presentation and discussion will start at 2 P.M. on Sunday , November 7, 2010 at Rittenhouse Hall on the campus of the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre. Vineland Station at Victoria Avenue.**

Leaves in the Fall

For many of us, fall is the most wonderful of seasons. Temperatures have moderated, and clear, cool, calm, blue skies provide a wonderful backdrop to bright foliage. But soon, this wonderful scene gives way to blowing winds, falling leaves and results in leaves littering the yard. **Tadeusz Dauksza**, who gardens in the Chicago Area, recently made similar observations (on the Yahoo azalea chat line) and then asked With the colors changing on our deciduous trees and leaves falling, what are you doing with them ??? Do you just use them directly onto your garden beds? Do you whack them with a "weedwacker" in a barrel to shreds? Do you use a lawnmower and run over them? Do you spread this mulch onto your azaleas and other flowers? Within a few hours Tadeusz received two responses to his questions:

From Barry Sperling: I leave them on my beds (they are all oak leaves and we get a thick carpet of them), but rake the rest onto piles. After about 5 years they become an ingredient (about 2/3) of the soil I mix for planting and top dressing the azaleas. Much of the leaves left on the beds have blown off by late winter and I rake those and add them to the piles. I've made these piles for 34 years but I've used the compost so fast over the last 10 years that I could run out within the next year and have to wait for more to be produced. (*Barry gardens in Northern Virginia*)

From Niagara Rhodo editor: Oak leaves, Pine needles, Liriodendron leaves and Maple leaves are the dominant leaves in my yard. Fortunately Oak leaves are the dominant leaves that fall into the rhodo beds. Maple leaves are not left in the garden as they form a heavy, wet mat, impervious to air. Maple leaf would choke out plant growth underneath them. The Oak leaves are left in the bed and they form a carpet much as Barry describes. All the remaining leaves, including those from a neighbour, get raked up and passed through an 8 hp

Troy-Bilt chipper-shredder. This shredded material, which, each year, includes about 25%, by volume, of chipped pine and spruce boughs and branches, is composted, with household vegetative refuse, for one year.

This compost is then mixed with pine bark mulch as top dressing and spread out in the garden every two years. When I want a potting mix I used equal parts compost, pine bark mulch and coarse chunky peat moss. I use the raw compost in a small herb garden and also as a potting mix when I grow tomatoes, hot peppers and herbs in containers. It seems that I never have enough compost. Each fall I fill two 3ft x 3ft x 4ft compost bins with new shredded material. And so the cycle continues.

What do you do with your leaves?

Planting in a Spruce Forest

Bruce Clyburn who gardens in New Waterford, NS, Zone 6a, is a rhododendron enthusiast, grower, hybridizer, friend and helper, who contributes frequently to the Yahoo rhododendron and azalea chat lines. Recently he wrote an interesting story and provided photographs about how he plants small rhododendron plants in areas where he felled spruce trees. These are printed here with Bruce's permission.

Last fall I cut down a number of overcrowded red spruce (*Picea rubens*) to expand my garden. Its habitat ranges from Maritime Canada south and down the Appalachians to western North Carolina. Red Spruce is the provincial tree of Nova Scotia. I left a few of the larger trees to provide overhead dappled shade. Normally I would have had the stumps grubbed but the section of woods is inaccessible by heavy equipment. Spruce of any species are not the recommended shade tree to accompany rhododendrons with their shallow root system but here our summers are cool and wet and there's lots of moisture for all so the two are quite compatible.

With 40-50 sizable stumps left behind I decided to plant a few dwarf rhododendrons in close proximity to the stumps and integrated the two like one would do in planting a rock garden. I discovered the pockets between the main large roots of which there were 4-5 held a thick layer of spruce cone scale. This was the result of feeding by red squirrels in the tree above for several decades. They strip a cone down removing the outer scale to get at the succulent winged seeds inside. The scale falls to the base of the tree and there it

accumulates:
I've never heard of this material recommended for gardening purposes but I think it is one of the nicest organic mulches you can work with. I scraped back the top 4-6 inches dug out the soil below, mixed a



bit of amendment with it in a wheelbarrow and back filled the hole then planted.

The spruce cone scale mulch was replaced around the plants and this is the result:



I realize the stumps will not be around forever, maybe 5-6 years; the rhododendrons will be a larger size then. They can remain there or be moved to other locations, so the groupings around stumps might end up being a 'nursery'. Time will tell. Long story short, we have an over abundance of red spruce here and I plan to do some serious harvesting of spruce cone scale mulch this fall and next spring. I'm sure where other coniferous species grow and squirrels eat there fruits, similar opportunities exist. To quote Martha Stewart, 'It's a good thing'.

New Rhododendron Bed Near Kingston Ontario

By Paul Chafe

I'd like to think that I'm not often wrong. But, when it comes to my native soil, I couldn't have been more wrong. I used to tell people that the soil where I grow my Rhodo's was 'alkaline'. Well, it isn't; but it's not far off. The area near Sydenham, Ontario, where I garden is a thin layer of poor soil on top of limestone. When excavating you can, generally, get between 2 and 3 feet down before hitting a solid Limestone rock shelf. I recently did an analysis of the soil and the pH is approximately 6.8 which is slightly acidic, but not quite acidic enough for Rhodo's. The Limestone in the soil also present a problem with buffering the soil such that, I felt I couldn't confidently use the native soil (even with amendment and sulphur), so I set about designing garden beds specifically for growing Rhodo's.

Given the constraints above, I decided that beds raised slightly above the native soil level would be best. I decided to order several yards of a mixture of pine mulch and soil/compost (1:1). Here is how I constructed the beds:

1. Remove the grass and other plants from the entire area to become a bed.
2. Dig out another ~6 inches soil the native soil.
3. Spread a layer of sulphur (powder) along the bottom of the dug out Rhodo bed.

4. Mix wheel-barrows of the soil mix above and add in several shovels of peat moss.
5. Fill the bed with this mixture.
6. Mix in additional peat moss with a pitch-fork
7. Top with a layer of sulphur and water the bed in
8. Let the garden sit for 2-4 weeks
9. If necessary after the bed has 'settled' additional wheel-barrows of peat/soil mixture should be added.
10. Test the pH in several places within the bed to ensure it is in the proper range.
11. Plant.



Figure 1: My Rhododendron brachycarpum var. Tigerstedtii this past March 2010. I'd like to think that it looks pretty good after the past winter of 2009.

Once the bed was planted I mulched the newly planted Rhodo's with pine or cedar mulch and watered well. If necessary, additional sulphur is sprinkled on and watered into the beds. These beds were only constructed this past summer, but, so far I'd like to think that the plants are happy!

Cutting Back old Rhododendron

In a recent posting on the Yahoo rhododendron web site, Jens Birck, who grows rhododendron in Denmark, provided photographs of an old Rh. Fantastica that he had cut back in early June, after the plant had flowered. He showed that dormant buds quickly elongated and that within 2 months, and long before danger of first frost, the plant had developed considerable growth. Within 14 months the plant appears to be completely rejuvenated.

These photos reflect similar experiences that your editor has had with mature rhododendron that appear legging. The important issue is to be sure that dormant leaf buds appear along the stem of the plant and that some foliage be left on the plant when it is cut back. Furthermore, it is important that the cut back be done very early in the spring, immediately after flowering and that the candidate for cutting be growing in an area of some sunlight. The same s hold for cutting back deciduous azaleas when one wishes to rejuvenate an azalea. Evergreen azaleas are much more tolerant of pruning, but they too, respond best to pruning when they grow in lots of sunlight.

The accompanying photos were provided by Jens Birck and are used with his permission.

Please note the small pink buds visible in the first photograph. These were barely discernible dormant buds at the time of the first cut, but were activated by the natural plant processes following the cuts.

July 7 one month after cut



July 20 Sleeping buds start to open



August 7 New Foliage appears



14 months after Original cut.



At the May Garden Tour



Membership Matters

Membership in the Rhododendron Society of Canada, Niagara Region Chapter and the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) are valid for the calendar year.

The 2011 membership fees are now due.

The benefits of a \$5.00 local membership (RSC) are

1. Newsletters/notices sent by email .
2. 10% discount at the spring plant sale .
3. Advance notice of plants available and able to pre-order for the Plant Sale .
4. P4M (Plants for Members) available only to members .
5. Garden Tours Open only to members .

Note: A \$10 Local membership fee applies to Newsletters mailed by Canada Post to those so requesting .

Members of the ARS (\$35.00) have all the above benefits as well as receiving the quarterly *Journal*, and other benefits through the ARS office i.e. discount on books, eligible to attend conventions, participation in the seed exchange. Please see the form on the next page.

Plan to renew your ARS or Chapter membership at our November meeting or by sending your fee to: Lillie Haworth, 4 Deer Park Court, Grimsby L3M 2R2



A raffle winner

(L) Sue Gemmel, (R) Christina Woodward & (Center) Joyce Fleming. Marian Little (Right, Rear Background)



**Niagara Region Chapter, Rhododendron Society of Canada
American Rhododendron Society**

Membership 2011

Membership fees for the American Rhododendron Society 2011 are now due.

To continue receiving *The Journal* all fees must be submitted to the membership secretary by November 15th for submission to ARS.

Please make cheques payable to RSC Niagara and send to

**Lillie Haworth
4 Deer Park Court
Grimsby, ON
L3M 2R2**

ARS & Local Fees for 2011:

- 1. **ARS** \$CDN 35.00 Individual or Family membership
- Commercial membership \$CDN 90.00

This fee includes all the privileges of ARS membership i.e. *The Journal*, seed exchange, etc. as well as the Niagara Region Chapter Newsletter via email. Please note there is a \$5.00 surcharge if you wish your Niagara Newsletter by Canada Post.

Additional Chapter Membership: (\$15.00 each) Toronto Atlantic

OR

- 2. **Local Membership Fees** e-mail only (\$5.00 Canada Post Mail (\$10.00)

Please return section below with payment

Name:.....Address:

.....

Telephone: Email:

ARS (includes Niagara Chapter Membership)

Additional chapter membership ~ Toronto &/or Atlantic

OR Local Membership e-mail Canada Post Mail

Amount enclosed: