

Niagara Rhodo



Newsletter of the Niagara Region Chapter

*Rhododendron Society of Eastern Canada
American Rhododendron Society | District 12*



February 2022 Edition

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.

President's Message

We are now into February and the days are noticeably getting longer... psychologically, this is beneficial, notwithstanding successive snowstorms. Our thoughts turn to planning ahead for the coming seasons for our gardens. Leisure activities include perusing our plant catalogues and refining our "wish" list.

During this period of uncertainty in our collective lives, our interests/hobbies are healthy distractions. Our Chapter has benefited from a series of Zoom Sessions, made available through both our speaker sessions and those that are shared with us by other Chapters.

The Zoom capability has proven to be a versatile tool that keeps our local members connected, as well as plugged in to the ARS organization. As a result, our relationship with the ARS is strengthening as exhibited by a modest increase in our membership. Over 40 Niagara Chapter members have ARS memberships, while 60 remain interested as local members. In the event you're unable to participate in one of our Zoom events, most are available from our website to enjoy at your convenience <http://www.rhodoniagara.org/events/>

Not all of our members have participated in Zoom Sessions. To broaden participation and to make sure they're not missing out on a lot of good stuff we are initiating an informal outreach by our Active Zoomers to "Encourage a Friend to Become a Zoom Buddy", and assist them in getting set up.

If you're interested in scouting for speakers or pre-recorded Zoom sessions, please don't hesitate to contact our Interim Editor, she sure could use a hand and would introduce you to some easy sources for the purpose.

A couple of ARS updates:

- Do consider Registering for the delayed 75th Anniversary ARS 2022 Spring International Convention "Return to the Northwest." Portland-Vancouver, Oregon, USA May 4-8, 2022
- Atlantic and Niagara Chapters agreed to automatically share their Zoom presentations, except where circumstances may prevent; this is a growing trend across the ARS

Meanwhile, we continue to look forward to a time when we can hold live membership meetings, with the opportunity to socialize with coffee/tea and home-wrought goodies...

Sondra Meis

Next Chapter Meeting

March 1, 2021 6:30 pm EST

The Hardier, Smaller Rhododendrons

Dr. Glen Jamieson

Editor, Journal of the American Rhododendron Society

Courtesy of the Atlantic Region

Update on Web Hosting Service for the Niagara Chapter

A few weeks ago the back end of the Chapter-owned website was compromised due to a mysterious glitch at Bell Hosting, which provides the service. The Chapter was charged over \$600, in error, for an "overage on bandwidth capacity" (we hardly use any). Bell could offer no explanation, and agreed to drop the charges. The glitch wiped out the usage metrics so nothing could be traced.

Four weeks later, an identical notice on overage was sent to us. By this time, we had made enquiries to transfer hosting of the website to another company. You may recall VCOMP Inc. and the company's Principal, Vio Ivanescu, who was contracted to build the RA-METRICS database. We have enjoyed a valued relationship with this company. In the spirit of this good relationship, we were offered a very reasonable contract for hosting services, which has been accepted by Niagara Region Chapter. Bell has offered no explanation but accepted our termination of their hosting service.

Our contract with VCOMP Inc., Mississauga, ON, specifies a price structure for hosting the site that is considerably less than the Bell fee. In addition, it includes site maintenance services at an hourly rate on an as-you-need basis. Timely addition of new content, corrections, updates, modest new features are critical elements for a functional website, as are reliable continuation of accurate digital service.

Addy Majewski, Chapter Member and volunteer Webmaster, undertook the overhaul and management of the original site in 2015 when volunteer programming and other site management activities were possible under the Bell Hosting contract. Under the new hosting arrangement, there is no provision for volunteer activity in website management. Addy understands the situation and expressed his best wishes for the future of the website.

In turn, the Chapter thanks Addy for his contribution to modernizing the website, and furthering the interests of the Chapter. We have made many demands on his time and talent and sent frequent urgent requests. He always responded with unquestioned assistance, in many instances when his advice was invaluable. Thank you, Addy, for keeping our website functional and connected to the rest of the rhododendron world.

We wish you the very best,

Sondra Meis, President



Watch the Convention [You Tube Video](#)

Locate information on the Convention [HERE](#)

Receive Convention [Updates](#)

This Convention has a very full agenda with great variety befitting a 75th Anniversary: the overnight tours, the day tours, international speakers, plant clinics, photo contest, poster exhibits...Hoping some of our Chapter members can attend.

**At this time there is no mention of a virtual alternative.
Travel restrictions are easing both sides of the border.
Stay tuned.**

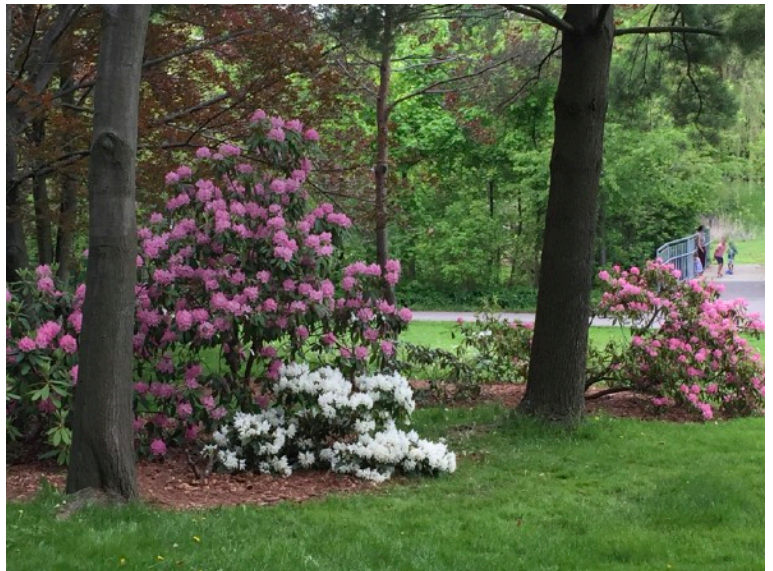
Municipal Parks & Gardens

Youth Engagement



Summer of 2021 saw an unprecedented number of visitors to public parks and gardens, nature preserves and any outdoor space that would bring a reprieve from the interminable monotony of stay-at-home days. So it was at the Brueckner Rhododendron Gardens (BRG) in Mississauga. It was one of the most popular venues for families, picnics, dog walks, runners and walkers, children exploring the marvels of nature - any time of day or even well into the early night hours, the parking lot was full, paths often crowded. The exceptional flowering of the rhododendrons last year was well timed - it was a magnet. What a magnificent introduction for the first time visitor; or, for that matter, young horticulturalists completing a planting project at the BRG!

The City of Mississauga Parks Department offers a variety of job opportunities in a number of locations in the City-maintained parks and gardens. In 2021 two part-time horticulture students, both *Parks Operations 1* with the Parks horticultural team, were selected, based on their interest, to participate in planting dozens of young rhododendrons in the Heritage area of the BRG. For Tara McAdam and Surbhi Thakur it was a first experience with handling



Rhododendron, a valuable one that is rarely available in Horticultural programs. Patrick Charland joined Brenda-Lee Albrethsen, responsible for the organization of the horticultural maintenance program in the BRG. For Brenda this was an opportunity to create a hands-on learning module on proper care and cultivation of Rhododendron. Planting rhododendrons, especially mass planting, is not a frequent event, so this was a rare occasion.

As with any garden, maintenance issues are a regular concern, but after more than 40 years many of the stately rhododendrons have deteriorated, some areas of the park have thinned out and the general condition of the garden indicated the need for a significant overhaul.

The park traces its origins to the mid 1980's when, at the inception of Dr. Joseph Brueckner, several years' preparation of the former Cranberry Cove Park saw the planting of hundreds of trees, construction of a network of pathways and the introduction of hundreds of rhododendrons and azaleas. Over 1300 rhododendrons were at the time donated by Dr. Brueckner and included many of his own hybrids from his breeding programme for cold-hardy hybrids. Today the 25 acre park has the distinction of being one of few Municipally owned public rhododendron gardens in Canada, possibly still the only one. It has been a source of great pride for the City and in its heyday attracted busloads of rhododendron enthusiasts from the USA and as far away as Japan.



Stacey Silvestri, Head Gardener (now retired) and Brenda-Lee Albrethsen, *Parks Person 1 Horticultural*, have in recent years been responsible for the care of the Rhododendrons at the Garden. Their efforts have been rewarded by the visibly renewed health of the rhododendrons and well groomed gardens, assisted by other Parks departments which they have encouraged to follow recommended best practice for rhododendrons. Raising the tree canopy to allow more light and air is now an ongoing procedure, invasive lawns have been controlled around the rhododendron plantings, deadwood has been removed from the rhododendrons; extensive mulching with shredded pine bark has been applied in proper proportions, an annual fertilizer program, with additional sulfur as needed, to help

lower pH, is in place; ongoing pruning of rhododendrons is done to improve form and health, the pathways have been carefully controlled to limit close access to the plants, invasive flowers and shrubs have been removed or curtailed, the irrigation system is to be replaced.



These enhancements to the rhododendron gardens deserve a more detailed description because they are part of ongoing restoration plans. For the moment they are mentioned here because they prepared the way for the introduction of a host of new rhododendrons. Purchased by the City Parks Department, the collection consisted of fifty 7 year old rooted cuttings from Brueckner hybrid mother plants. The motivation rested in replenishing the BRG Heritage collection which over the years had suffered the loss of many of the original plantings.



In June, the Parks Department scheduled one and a half days at the BRG for the planting. Pandemic procedures for health and safety measures were carefully followed despite the outdoor setting. The weather complied.

It was a fast paced timetable beginning with the delivery of 50 one and two gallon plants. Now you will notice the watering cans - perhaps an unusual sight in a public park equipped with an automated irrigation system. The rather dated system does not easily adapt to manual!



This section of the Park has naturally acidic, friable soil from the towering White Pines, Oaks and the occasional Magnolia though it has received massive quantities of peat moss and composted shredded pine bark over the years. The terrain is gently sloping with steep grades here and there.



Over the course of this day and a half Brenda managed the activity on her own, with some assistance from a long-time volunteer at the BRG, recognized here as the author. Brenda provided basic description/information on Rhododendron as well as basic principles in best practice planting and maintenance. The plants were sorted by their ID and type (Lepidote, Elepidote) and placed temporarily in the spots staked out for each. Consideration was given to each plant for its preferred orientation, size

at maturity, exposure to the elements, sun tolerance or shade loving, and other relevant details to assure suitability of the location. They were repositioned as necessary, then planted.

These young gardeners were genuinely intrigued with the experience. They took great care to get it right, striving to accurately follow Brenda's instructions for specific and unique needs of rhododendrons; handling surface rooters; treating a pot bound specimen; preparing a hole wider than deep; gently watering in the roots instead of tamping down the soil; and all the other procedures and precautions that seasoned rhododendron enthusiasts take for granted.



The plantings were largely completed by the first day. Few breaks, lots of good-natured banter, young voices, questions, laughter, defined much of the day that focused on getting the job done well. What great work ethic!

The planting completed, the work was not yet done. It is the recent practice at BRG to provide extra protection for young plants by securing each with one or more bamboo stakes and, as a finishing touch,

surrounding each with 1" chicken wire secured with stakes. This added protection from rabbits and other wildlife, heavy snow, falling branches, etc. has proven to be a good preventive in recent years. Not an easy task cutting and shaping chicken wire and only done with great care and proper equipment to avoid injury. To their credit, as Brenda explained, both Tara and Surbhi continued to help out days and weeks afterwards, securing the plant protections and taking charge of manually



watering the young rhododendrons. “They really enjoyed being part of the planting of the Rhododendrons,” Brenda says, “and appreciated the rare opportunity to do so.”

With their careers in horticulture advancing, these youthful gardeners are sure to have a soft spot for Rhododendron well into their future. We wish them well!



***Christina Woodward, Interim Editor
Niagara Rhodo***



***Brenda-Lee Albrethsen, Parks Person 1 Horticulture
City of Mississauga Parks Department***



***Stacey Silvestri, formerly Head Gardener
City of Mississauga Parks Department***

Early Successes With Deer-detererring Devices

(Reprinted from *AtlanticRhodo* May 2021, Newsletter of the RSEC Atlantic Region Chapter, by permission of the author)



Buds? Deer food. Photo: Paul Chafe

On Shamber's Bluff where I live in New Brunswick, Canada, there is a roaming deer herd that varies in number between seven and 16 individuals. There are huge open fields nearby, plus the woodland of the nature reserve. The deer are not as habituated to people as in more settled areas. However, they can be a problem for me in the winter months, when the fields are usually covered with snow. They love to eat the flower buds of rhododendrons and azaleas. Because I have no close neighbours, I have generally been successful at deterring them in winter by playing three different radios, in widely-separated locations, from late afternoon to dawn, when my two dogs are indoors. However, not always can I do this, and power failures are also possible.

For me, the effective solution has been "PREDATOR EYE," made by the Canadian company Aspectek, night time animal control for rodents, cats, dogs, birds, raccoon, wolves, foxes, etc. The device is tiny, inexpensive, solar-powered on and off, and has an effective range of 453 metres or 500 yards. I cover my entire

1.4 ha (3.5 acres) of rhodos with six (total cost about \$120 or two for \$36, via Amazon) There are two models at the same price. One has one eye and a very long battery life - the sun always powers it up. The other has two eyes and a shorter battery life (30 days on a single charge, automatic light sensitive turning on at dusk and turning off at full daylight so a potential problem after weeks of cloud), but both are fully effective for me. Mine have been in use for three months. No deer damage! There is no bright strobe light or ultrasonic sounds, just a flashing red light that looks like a predator's eye, so it needs to be mounted at the eye height of a predator.

Jean and Rob Northrup of nearby Hampton (who supply me with all my horse manure compost) have some potentially nice flower gardens near their house that have been decimated in recent years by deer. The deer are so habituated that they eat from under the bird feeders, strip all the shrubs, including roses, and sleep near the house. One can usually see one or more deer around at any time of day. I was positive that "Predator Eye" would not repel deer so totally habituated to humans. So, I suggested the other Aspectek deer repelling-device, "YARD SENTINEL". It is motion activated, both sonic and ultrasonic, can be set to continuous operation or to specifically chosen hours. Volume, range, etc. are adjustable. It operates by being plugged into an electrical outlet or with four C batteries, automatically switching to them when there's a power outage. The Northrups have had 100% success and now their relatives and even their veterinarian are also using Yard Sentinel.

For highly habituated deer this device is "goodbye Charlie!" Being birders, the Northrups set the device for night-time operation only. The first night, Jean watched a line of deer approaching

through the snow and, at about 12.2 m (40 feet), the lead deer triggered the alarm—a sonic burst of fifteen seconds—and they all fled instantly. The following night at 3:00 AM., Rob was up and happened to be looking out the bedroom window when four deer approached very, very tentatively. At the critical point, the alarm again went off. Rob remarked that jet planes don't take off as fast. The Northrup's alarm has thus only gone off twice for 15 seconds each time since installation on Feb. 2, and the device now just sits there waiting for a new generation of deer to test it. So, more than two months have now passed since a deer has appeared - night or day! After a decade of living in a deer yard, the Northrups are looking forward to gardening again, and all their relatives have since installed the "Yard Sentinel" as well.

1. Both devices are tiny: "Predator Eye" is 7.5 by 7.8 cm (3 by 3.1 in). and "Yard Sentinel" slightly larger. They hang easily on a tree, post, etc.
2. Dogs seem not to be affected negatively by the "Yard Sentinel" sound; the Northrups have five dogs, and none regards the sonic or ultrasonic sound as coming from a predator.
3. I suggest you pay no attention to the reviews on Amazon, some of which are critical. I hesitated myself before concluding that in all likelihood the products do what they are designed to do, but some people are careless in how or where they hang these little lightweight devices and then blame the devices, rather than their own lack of care.

[Editor's Note: JARS Spring 2022 issue also published this article and included information on more recent Models. Freeman has suggested that I include the following Addendum:

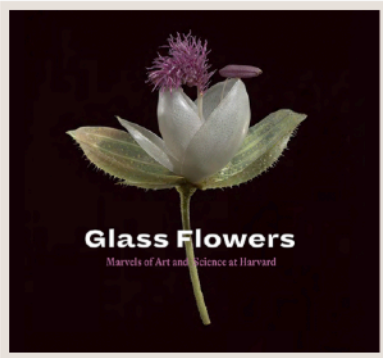
After 13 months of use

- 1) *I've found the inexpensive Predator Eye device 100% effective in preventing night-time incursions of deer in my rhododendron garden (approximately four acres now, total of 1700 plus plants) I've had three brief incursions during daylight, but no damage.*
- 2) *The Yard Sentinel seems more problematic for two reasons. First, it is motion activated and does not have nearly the range of Predator Eye. Second, unless it is positioned with great care, branches and other plants blowing in the wind can trigger the device. If it goes off too often, then the deer become habituated to it. I use a couple only in very specific locations. However, others gardeners in the area seem to be quite happy with it, though none is a rhododendron gardener.]*



Freeman Patterson
Kingston, NB, Canada

Books - here's one to consider



Glass Flowers: Marvels of Art and Science at Harvard

From orchids to bananas, rhododendrons to lilies, Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka created a stunning array of glass models of plants from around the world. Working exclusively for Harvard University in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Blaschkas applied their artistic expertise and botanical knowledge to craft an extraordinary collection for Harvard students, researchers, and the public. The precise shaping and delicate coloring of the models renders life-like details that fool the eye. Such detail is captured in dazzling new photographs of models that inspire wonder and blur the line between the real and the man-made. The unique and astonishing Ware Collection of Blaschka Glass Models of Plants demonstrates the majesty of plants and the artistry and scientific acumen of this father and son team.



One of few rhododendrons in the collection, this is a Maximum, dated 1896.

Read more about this exquisite collection and the extraordinary craftsmanship of the Blaschka's.
Book available from Amazon.

<https://hmn.harvard.edu/glass-flowers>

***Your Board continues to work on behalf of the Chapter
and looks forward to joining our Members in person.***

We're working on it.

We could use some extra hands and welcome your ideas.

Niagara Region Chapter Board of Directors

Sondra Meis..... President

Angela Calixto..... Treasurer

Lil Haworth..... Membership

Christina Woodward..... Secretary, Newsletter, Social Media

Kevin Kavanagh..... Advisor, Cultivar Selection & Plant Sales

Tom Laviolette..... Advisor, Chapter Organization & Strategy

Nick Yarmoshuk..... Special Advisor / Director Emeritus



The promise of things to come!

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