

Rhodo Master

With skill, determination and daring, David Hinton has created a spectacular rhododendron forest where you'd never expect to find one.

And he isn't finished yet

When it comes to gardening, David Hinton has always loved a challenge. Ever since his first experiments as a teenager growing cacti from seed, he's been curious about the possibilities of plants, and audacious about stepping out in new directions. So it's perhaps not surprising that he has unlocked so many secrets about rhododendrons, in the process gaining

an international reputation as a leading grower and propagator of these plants. Nevertheless, a first-time visitor to his property 30 kilometres southwest of Peterborough, Ontario, is in for a very big surprise.

You don't expect to find rhododendrons in abundance in Zone 5, and in fact not many are in evidence when you first turn into the lane. But the name of the country property, Rhododendron Woods, is no mere flight of fancy: keep going, and before long you discover a secret garden—a spectacular rhododendron forest big enough to get lost in, set well back beyond the house in a dark grove of pine trees.

The rhododendron woods, along with the other garden areas on the property, were 22 years in the making. When David and his wife, Sandra, who died last year of cancer, moved here in 1976 with their two young children, there were only a few mature trees—maples, birches and black willows, along with some waist-high pine seedlings. David's skill, determination and daring have turned it into a five-acre (two-hectare) garden. A truly astonishing feat for a gardener who spends only about \$300 a year on his garden and works alone. (Al-



though his wife loved the garden, she was not a gardener.)

The first year, from his chair on the back verandah, David could watch school buses pass by on the concession road to the north. Now, you'd never suspect there's a road nearby. "It's hard to imagine the difference," he says. When he sits on that verandah today, six years into retirement from his job in a data processing de-

partment at General Motors, his view northward takes in perennial beds backed by tall trees, and the only sounds are birdcalls and the wind in the pines. A walk in any direction—around the pond near the back of the house, down the hill to the wetland garden or back to the arbour where the irises and lilacs grow—eventually leads into the woodland. Here, under the pines, are hundreds and hundreds of the twisted trunks of mature rhododendrons—healthy, plentiful and, from early May to August, loaded with blossoms, a magical mix of apricot, rose, orange, pink, red, yellow, purple, white and peach. Some of the flowers have a creamy delicacy; others appear to have a bright light shining from the centre outward; all look as delicate and precious as the finest origami blossom.

But even though he's proud of his rhododendrons, David doesn't indulge them. He gives them a good start in life, but after that they're expected to make it on their own. If they don't, that's fine with him; it means they weren't hardy enough to begin with. "Having such a large acreage, I can't coddle them," he says. "I need to cut down on maintenance." Of

