

WHIDBEY ISLAND CHAPTER



A R S - DISTRICT 2

# 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**

Sept 2007

**Next Meeting: Wed, Sept 26th**  
**Program: Bill Stipe,**  
**Rhododendrons 101**

Choose them, plant them, feed them, water them, prune them, save them from pests and disease, why they belong in your garden (or not)... **Bill Stipe** will cover these basics of rhododendron culture to get you started with a contagious passion for these plants. *Bring a friend!*

### Calendar of Upcoming Events

Sept 21-23 .....	NW Regional Conference Newport, OR
Sept 26 .....	Chapter Meeting
Oct 6-7 .....	Meerkerk Autumn Sale
Oct 12-14 .....	ARS Regional Conference Cleveland, OH
Oct 24 .....	Chapter Meeting
Nov 14 .....	Pie Social/Annual Meeting
Dec 8 .....	Chapter Holiday Dinner @ Christopher's in Coupeville

## *Dues are DUE!*

By now you will all have received your renewal notices for your 2008 membership in our Whidbey Island Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. Please fill out your renewal envelope and get it in the mail *today* or bring it to the next chapter meeting. The cutoff date for dues renewal has been moved up 2 weeks to November 15. If your membership is not renewed by then you may miss the January issue of the ARS Journal.



## *Thank you, Jack & Norma et al*

**Jack and Norma Lounsberry**, you've done it again and we can't thank you enough. Our annual picnic was the best ever. The salmon was delicious (thanks **Mary & Geoff Wyman** for your assistance at the grill), the new dining hall grand and the gardens beautiful. You even arrange perfect picnic weather.

Thanks also to auctioneer **Bill Stipe** and assistant **Don Kohlenberger** for keeping the auction moving right along and **Marilynn Wright** for collecting the bucks. Thanks **Kristi, Keith** and **David** for the toe tapping entertainment before the auction.

And let's not forget a thank you to all of you who attended, providing your favorite salads and desserts to complete the meal, with friendship to share!

## *A Few Good ...Persons*

We have two positions on the Chapter Board that need to be filled for the next election; Vice-President and a Director position. **Pat Sasson** has done a commendable job for 6 years as VP and is ready to 'retire'. **Donna Lee Von Falkenberg** has served her Director's term and is also ready to move on. If you would like to fill either of these positions please contact Donna Lee at 341-3240.

You don't have to be a rhododendron expert to fill either of these positions, just the willingness to guide us through another year (or two) of rhododendron adventures. You will have the entire Board at your disposal to call on to assist you.



**Cookie reminder:**  
Marilynn Wright & Margaret Hamm

*"If you are a gardener, you can always put  
'Plant Manager' on your resume."*



## From the Prez

Bill Stipe



The spring and summer flowering season is over and now some of the rhododendrons are starting to bloom again. Most of the Rhodies do not re-bloom, at least not consistently, but there will be a few. I am often asked "how come?". I really don't have a good answer. Maybe it's the weather or fertilizer, or maybe the plant is under stress. Anyway, just enjoy the bloom. If you are looking for a summer bloomer, how about *R. auriculatum*, *R. memetes*, *R. serotinum* or 'Polar Bear'. Or how about a rhododendron that has fragrant foliage? Leaf fragrance adds another aspect to the allure of rhododendrons. I am growing *R. bathyphylum*, *R. iodes*, and *R. anthapogan*. Several of the Taliense series also have fragrant foliage.

Take a look at your rhodies to see if root weevils are devouring leaves. The adults usually emerge in late June or July and start notching the leaves. These little critters live in our forests but venture out into our gardens and live in the duff under the rhododendrons. They lay their eggs there and the grubs live just under the ground level and eat on the roots. Besides making the leaves look terrible, the grubs can kill a plant by eating through the bark just under the ground level. Applying contact insecticides are not effective because the weevils are nocturnal; they hide in the duff during the day and come out at night. I have found an insecticide that works! It is TALSTAR™, or the generic form *bifenthrin*. It comes in either liquid or crystal form. I have used the liquid bifenthrin for 2 years and have very little leaf damage this year. It is applied on the root zone and washed in with rain or a sprinkler. It kills the grubs but I'm not certain if it kills the adults. But if there are no grubs there won't be any adults. If you can't find TALSTAR or bifenthrin locally, try the internet.

Don't forget The Western Regional ARS Conference in Newport, Oregon on Sept 21-23. It will be a good time to meet with other rhodoholics and maybe get some interesting plants at the plant sale.

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### *Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden Annual Fall Plant Sale*

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**Saturday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 9am to 2pm**

Weyerhaeuser Corporate Headquarters West Parking Lot  
2525 South 336<sup>th</sup> Street, Federal Way, WA

Proceeds from this sale benefit the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden. There will be over 20 vendors from Western Washington & Oregon selling thousands of favorites as well as unique and rare plants including rhododendron species and hybrids, perennials, trees, other shrubs, ferns, and bamboo.

Parking and admission to the garden are *FREE* on the day of the sale.

## Sale: Glynneden Gardens

**Glynneden Gardens**, 2970 Smugglers Cove Rd, Greenbank, is clearing out many hybrid rhododendrons for ½ price during September and October. The Garden is planning on growing only Northwest hybridized rhododendrons, therefore many of the older hybrids are being cleared out.

## Sale: Kirk's Nursery

**Kirk's Nursery**, 3693 Scriven Ln, Langley, is having a 20-50% off sale on an assortment of perennials, grasses, shrubs and trees.

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### *Meerkerk Gardens Autumn Sale and Whidbey Island Farm Tour Participant*

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**October 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>, 9am to 4pm**

"Beautify Your World"! Meerkerk Gardens announces its Autumn Rhododendron Sale: the perfect time to plant your garden! Choose from a fantastic selection of mature budded rhodies from our Hybrid Test Garden and the Meerkerk Nursery.

Meerkerk Gardens is part of the **Second Annual Whidbey Island Farm Tour**, a FREE self-guided tour of 19 working farms on beautiful Whidbey Island featuring locally grown food and products.

Farm Tour Info: [www.whidbeyfarmtour.com](http://www.whidbeyfarmtour.com)



## *Busted Myths*

**Myth:** All pruning should be done in winter or a tree can "bleed" to death.

**Fact:** Some gardeners prefer summer pruning, since it tends to suppress vigorous regrowth. Some trees such as birch, dogwood and maple bleed profusely if pruned in late winter after sap starts flowing.

**Myth:** Native plants may be well adapted, but they look boring.

**Fact:** Natives show off with brilliant color from vine maple and amelanchier. Explore nurseries to see the garden qualities of natives.

**Myth:** Plant in spring.

**Fact:** Fall and winter in the maritime Pacific Northwest give gardeners workable soils, moderate temperatures and great rainfall to get roots adapted.

*(Written by Mary Robson and Holly Kennel, Washington State University Cooperative Extension/King, Snohomish and Pierce counties. Seattle Times)*

## *Monster Rhodies*

### *Big-leaves are a delight to see and feel*

Valerie Easton (Seattle Times Pacific NW Magazine 09/16/07)

I have to stop myself asking about flower color when Richie Steffen enthuses about rhodies. With connoisseurs like Steffen, it's all about the leaves.

And not just any leaves, but brawny, platter-sized stretches of leathery green, often backed with bronze or silvery fine hairs called indumentum. Not that these darlings of the plant world don't have lovely flowers, too, but that's only a couple of weeks of the year. The 50 other weeks, they earn garden space with a bold display of textural foliage, often growing so treelike with age that you can walk beneath and look up into a canopy of green.

Maybe that's why I keep mistaking big-leafed rhododendrons for magnolias. They're that grandiose - and they look as if they hail from some Southern plantation where it's nice and warm. In truth, many big-leafed species have been rediscovered in China since it opened up in the early 1990s, and the plants are quite hardy.

"A decade ago, big-leaves were so scarce they were almost mythic," says Steffen. "It used to be it felt as if you were chosen when you had a big-leaf in your garden."

Steffen, coordinator of horticulture for the Miller Botanical Garden, and Rick Peterson, co-executive director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation, grow at least 20 species of big-leaves in their home garden. One of Steffen's favorites is *R. auriculatum*, a late-bloomer that sports fragrant, white, trumpet-shaped flowers July into August. He also admires *R. calophyllum* for its bright green, distinctively narrow foot-long leaves. And *R. rex* is one of the easiest big-leaves, reliably winter hardy, with dramatic leaves backed in thick silvery fuzz.

"I always think of big-leaves as guy plants," says Steffen. "It's all about size and performance." Since it takes these giants at least 10 years to flower, each bud is keenly anticipated. And how large will those leaves get? In the case of *R. sinogrande*, they stretch to 2 feet long if you keep the plant well-watered and fertilized when young. And here's the girly part: This monster has creamy yellow flowers with a pretty red blotch. It grows 18 feet tall, and can be a little tender, so you want to plant it in a protected spot.

"Remember that big-leafed species aren't doused in bloom like a typical hybrid," Steffen points out. "They're more subtle and elegant," he says with a laugh.

The key to growing big-leaves to their full potential is to plant them in well-drained soil enriched with plenty of compost. And water, water, water - when the buds start to grow in early spring, then once a week all summer.

Since these rhodies tend to dominate a garden scene, Steffen suggests hefty companion plants that can hold their own, like ligularias, hostas and the larger ferns. Big-leaves are quite a sight growing in a pot, held

up so you can really appreciate the felt-like undersides of their leaves. They'll grow happily contained for a few years before needing to be transplanted into the ground.

Steffen's final comment convinces me I have to, somehow, find a place in my garden for a big-leaf. "I see lots of savvy gardens," says Steffen. "And what amazes me is that almost every one of them has at least one big-leaf species of rhododendron in it."

Valerie Easton is a Seattle freelance writer and author of "A Pattern Garden."

## *Scholarship Fund*

The Chapter's scholarship fund has grown to \$4,000 and we want to give it away! If you know of a Whidbey Island student interested in pursuing an education in horticulture or related field, please contact **Bill Stipe**: [wstipe@whidbey.com](mailto:wstipe@whidbey.com), 678-8740.

## *Dollar+ Table News*

As you may have noticed the size and quality of the dollar table plants have made such an improvement that they are often worth, well, *more than a dollar...* so we've expanded the pricing on large specimen plants to \$2 and \$5 dollars. **Kathy Rix** has volunteered to mark the plants at \$1, \$2 or \$5 and collect the funds. Remember, all the proceeds go the Chapter to fund fun things like the Holiday Party! See Kathy at the meetings with your dollar+ table contributions. It may be just the plant some bargain hunter is looking for.

## *Northwest Regional Conference*

There is still time for you to take a mini vacation to Newport, OR, to attend the Western Regional Conference on September 21<sup>st</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>. The emphasis of the conference is to provide you with information you can use in your garden. Along with a vast assortment of rhododendron topics, use of companion plants, native plants, maples, ferns, conifers and a look at rock and water features to enhance the garden are presented. District 4 has done an excellent job of putting together a conference that has something for every gardening interest... and they're having a giant *plant sale* too... Don't miss it!

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Please submit articles of interest for Oct Newsletter by 10/12/07

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