



NEWSLETTER OF THE SEATTLE RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Seattle Rhododendronland

Volume 32 Number 4

May 2009

May Meeting

May 23, 2009

Tour the Pt. Defiance Rhododendron Garden with an add-on visit to the Museum of Glass

Note special date and time!

President's message

The time that gardeners live for is upon us! Spring is underway despite some maddening cold spells which have delayed its arrival by a couple of weeks or more. Its going to be a spring like last year with early bloom still hanging on when mid-season flowers open. Our garden is on tour for the ARS Convention in Everett, April 29–May 3, so Rex and I have been working for the last year to get it “tour-worthy.” And of course, the tough winter and subsequent plant damage weighed heavier than it might normally since we wanted everything to look great. We have been very grateful to have several SRS friends helping with the garden cleanup and grooming these last weeks. Its made a real difference. Our daughter, Erin, and I inventoried the plants in the garden which she put it on a database. Everything will have new readable labels. Without the pressure of a tour, I may never have gotten around to it.

I hope to see many of you at the ARS Conference. We will need your help bringing in cut rhododendron trusses for the floral display. These can be brought to the Everett Holiday Inn anytime from Wednesday afternoon to Friday. They won't be formally judged, but there will be a People's Choice Award. We want to show our guests from around the world what we grow here.

This spring has given me a new fondness for *R. calophytum* and its hybrids. What a trooper this hardy big-leaf rhododendron is! It was unscathed by the cold (except for a late-season frost which browned some open flowers). The branching structure of the plant is arboreal and sturdy and the branches hold the flower trusses upward without flopping down. Some of the hybrids that I have in my garden that perform reliably are 'Sarita Loder x *R. calophytum*' (Lem unregistered?) that blooms a week later than *R. calophytum* in a darker pink but has a similar plant habit. It was this plant that Elsie Watson crossed with *R. macabe anum* to come up with her splendid hybrids, 'Pink Prelude,' 'Karen Swenson,' and 'Chief Sealth.' I grow 'Pink Prelude' and 'Karen Swenson' and they were unscathed by the winter cold, whereas my rhododendrons *macabe anum* were severely damaged and have defoliated. Yet the flowers and foliage of this cross have maintained much of the *R. macabe anum* character, with the hardiness and sturdy structure of *R. calophytum*. Another great hybrid is 'Avalanche' ('Loderi grex x calophy-

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tum), an early bloomer and like calophytum becomes a large, tree-like plant. It opens pink, fades to white and is fragrant. Another Rothschild hybrid is 'Exbury Calstocker' (*R. calophytum* x 'Dr. Stocker') which has huge trusses of light pink with a rich red flare. rhododendron 'Babylon' (*R. calophytum* x *R. praevenum*) has huge white flowers with a chocolate blotch and forms a dense, rounded mound. When siting these stars of the early garden, whether the species or the hybrids, allow room for them to attain their eventual tree-like stature. They may take a few years to start blooming, but once they begin they are reliable! I have limbed up my original 35-year old *R. calophytum* and an 'Avalanche' and underplanted them to good effect.

On a sad note, two of our long-time members passed away in March, Bob McKhinney and Margaret Pflug. Bob was a regular attendee at srs meetings and was a participant in a "how to" program last fall demonstrating how to propagate rhododendrons on a small scale. Margaret and her husband, Gene, were also members of the srs, although they attended the Cascade Chapter these last years. We're grateful to have known these wonderful people and extend our condolences to their families.

We have planned a field trip to Pt. Defiance Park in Tacoma on May 23. We'll meet there at 10:30AM for a guided tour. There should still be plenty of rhododendrons in bloom. For those interested in making it a day, we'll go to lunch and then tour the outstanding Museum of Glass. See Jeff's article for details. Also, mark your calendars to save July 25 for the srs Summer Picnic at Dennis and Marie Hendrickson's garden in Pt. Orchard!

Happy gardening,
Jeanine Smith

From the Book Lady

The Book Lady is thrilled to report that she is on a cruise. Since we have two months of garden visits, the books won't be back until the June meeting.

Happy sailing,
Laura



What's with the weather? Don King took this image of *R. wasonii* var. *wenchuanense* today (April 14th, 2009).



SRS Officers and Board Members

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Vice President	Jeff Bell	206.363.1417
Secretary	Karen Swenson	425.775.0863
Treasurer	Deena Henkins	206.284.6978
Past President	Chip Muller	206.368.7868
Board Member (08-10)	Loretta Goetsch	206.525.4714
Board Member (08-10)	Open position	
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Programs	Jeff Bell	206.363.1417
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SRS Webmaster		
District 2 Director	Don Smart	425.333.6178
Newsletter	Prudence Holliger	prudenceholliger@mac.com

May Meeting

Instead of our usual meeting at the Center for Urban Horticulture, on Saturday May 23, the SRS is getting a tour of the Rhododendron Display Garden at Point Defiance in Tacoma. Bill Hicks, chairman of the garden will give us a tour of the Rhododendron Display Garden starting at 10:30AM.

“Designed as a natural display of rhododendrons in the wild, this garden is nestled in a stand of old growth forest. Trails wind through the forest and intersect the garden. The nearly five-acre site was established in 1968 in cooperation with the Tacoma Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, which continues to provide support. The garden contains more than 500 plants, including 198 cultivated varieties and 75 species of rhododendrons.”

Afterwards we'll break for lunch at nearby restaurants and then regroup to tour the Museum of Glass or you can visit the Point Defiance Zoo. Some folks may visit Curran Apple Orchard Park and Nature Preserve in nearby University Place, WA (south of Point Defiance).

If you are interested in attending any of these activities or would like to carpool with someone, call me at 206-363-1417 or e-mail jeffnbell@comcast.net. If you plan on attending this event, please let Jeff Bell (see phone and email above) or Bill Hicks (206.824.3884) know as Bill would like a head count for the tour.

For our June 3 meeting, we return the Center for Urban Horticulture.

Save Saturday, July 25 for the Annual SRS Summer Picnic. This year it will be at the garden of Dennis Hendrickson in Port Orchard. More details to come in the June Newsletter.

—Jeff Bell

Watts with the Species (reprint)

Rhododendron lepidostylum

If you are fond of the bluish-foliage plants then you will be intrigued by this delightful dwarf species rhododendron.

Although this plant is particularly noted for its fine bluish foliage it also rewards us with an attractive array of yellowish flowers. The flat, pale yellow flowers about 1in in diameter appear in May in the Pacific Northwest.

First discovered by George Forrest in 1919 but not introduced by him until 1924, *Rhododendron lepidostylum* is native to a very limited region of Yun-

nan Province where it grows in open locations on rocky ledges and ridges at an elevation of 11,000 to 12,000ft.

This species has to be rated along with *R. campanulatum* var. *aeruginosum* and some members of Subsection *Cinnabarina* as one of the finest of the glaucous-blue foliaged rhododendrons. In cultivation it is rather slow growing and may reach two to three feet in height and spread four or five feet.

Through trial and error we have determined that the most ideal location for this charming little dwarf is a site which provides maximum exposure but allows protection from the sun during the hottest part of the midday summer. Planting in a full-sun location seems to hasten the change to a dark green leaf; personally I want the bluish foliage to predominate as long as possible.

The under surface of the small (to one and a half inches) coriaceous* leaves is a glaucous-white while the upper surface of the newly emerged leaves is covered with a bluish bloom. The under leaf and leaf margins have an obvious covering of loriform setae.* The under-leaf setae are referred to as indumentum.*

Although many of the rhododendrons in Subsection *Trichoclada* are similar in appearance, *R. lepidostylum* can be readily distinguished from its nearest relatives by its scaly ovary and style.

Without question this is the most attractive and desirable rhododendron in Subsection *Trichoclada* and would be a fine addition to the dwarf garden.

*

coriaceous

Thick, leathery.

glaucous

Covered with a thick, waxy bloom which wears off as the season progresses.

indumentum

We generally use the term to refer to the dense, felty covering of hairs found on the underside of many elepidote rhododendron leaves particularly in Subsection *Talensia*,- however, taxonomists also use this term to refer to the hair found on the underside of lepidote or elipidote rhododendron leaves.

loriform

The hair, bristles or setae found on leaves, etc.

setae

Stiff, bristly hairs.

The Seattle Rhododendron Society

Seattle Rhododendron Society
Loretta Goetsch
6209 30th NE
Seattle WA 98115
ADDRESS CORRECTION AND FORWARDING REQUESTED

Coming Up

May 23, 2009

Tour the Pt. Defiance Rhododendron
Garden with an add-on visit to the Mu-
seum of Glass NOTE SPECIAL DATE

April 28–May 3, 2009

ARS Convention in Everett

July 25, 2009

Summer picnic at Dennis Hendrickson's
garden

Meerkerk Work Party

second Saturday of every month