



Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden *Newsletter*

Spring 2011, Vol. 36, No. 1

Executive Director's Report

Steve Hootman

It has been a busy and very productive year of growth for the RSBG since you last received our last newsletter in the spring of 2010. Over the Mother's Day Weekend, as a part of the Federal Way sponsored "Buds & Blooms Festival," we experienced our busiest weekend ever and single best day of attendance as well as our single best day of income through the Gift Shop and Plant Sales Pavilion. We are working to make this year's event even better.

The hectic pace of spring did not let up as we had a very busy summer and autumn preparing for the Grand Opening of the Rutherford Conservatory which took place on September 25th. Close to 170 people attended the event, enjoying short speeches by the Mayor of Federal Way, a representative of the Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Ben Hall and E. White Smith who spoke of the history of vireya rhododendrons in the Pacific Northwest and his long years of friendship with Fran Rutherford. Following the introductions and some refreshments, the ribbon was cut and the guests were allowed in for the first viewing of the newly planted building. Thank you once again to volunteer Paul Thompson and the Thursday Crew for all of their work to help complete this project. Paul has calculated that he and his volunteer crew put in 2000 hours of labor which is equal to a savings of around \$100,000.

In April, Lisa Nelson, the Horticultural Assistant, resigned her position for employment with the State of Washington to pursue a career in ecological restoration, the field in which her interests and experience were strongest. In June, we hired Atsuko Gibson

as our new Horticultural Assistant to replace Lisa. Atsuko is a recent graduate with a degree in Public Horticulture from the University of Arkansas and is now spending half of her time in the nursery and half in the garden. She has already proven to be a fantastic worker with a great attitude and we are expecting great things from her in the future.

In late October, our first Fall Foliage Festival and Plant Sale was a relative success considering the horrible weather we endured through virtually the entire week of scheduled events. This new event was organized to replace the old Fall Plant Sale that has been held in the Weyerhaeuser parking lot. We had been netting between only \$2,000 and \$2,500 for the last few years after a great deal of work and time on the part of both staff and volunteers. This new event, with tours, classes and the plant sale taking place within the garden itself, required a substantially smaller amount of time for both the staff and volunteers and, even with the horrible weather, we netted \$5,364. In addition, the shoppers were more easily able to visit the gift shop and garden. We thank the staff at the Pacific Rim Bonsai Collection and the Hardy Fern Foundation for their participation.

In August we had another fine "Evening in the Garden" for members and guests. The event was well attended and we enjoyed great food, weather and company. Thanks to all of the volunteers who helped to organize, decorate and clean up.

We are continuing the renovation of the newly opened areas around the Conservatory as well as the new Japanese Azalea Garden. In addition, thanks to contributions from Fred and Anne Whitney, the Miller Foundation and the Carl Jacobson Memorial, we have had dozens of trees in the garden either removed or had their branches thinned/lifted. Many people have commented on the improved views and increased light throughout the garden. In the mild climate of the Pacific Northwest, trees, both native

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and planted, grow at an incredible rate. If this growth were to remain unchecked, our garden would soon become a true woodland, with correspondingly poor growth and flowering of our primary and secondary collections.

In mid-November I returned from a very successful three-week expedition to China. We found several taxa that have never been introduced including *wumingense*, *levinei*, *faithae*, *nymphaeoides*, *cardiobasis* and *platypodium*, as well as possibly two or three completely new species. A full report will be published in the 2012 Yearbook.

In late December, my Assistant Director, Shara Smith, resigned her position to re-focus her career. On February 15th, our new employee in the office, Katie Swickard, began her employment with us here at the RSBG. Katie has tremendous experience and enthusiasm in managing programs and in outreach having worked for many years as the Conservation Program Manager for the Covington Water District and was the garden director of their Waterwise Demonstration Garden for more than seven years. She has also served on the board of the Lake Wilderness Arboretum Foundation. Welcome aboard Katie!

I know it may seem that it has been a somewhat tumultuous time full of changes for the past couple of years with the departure and restructuring of staff amidst the numerous large-scale projects taking place. As the RSBG continues to develop and grow we are going to suffer through some inevitable “growing pains”. Keep in mind, however, what we have accomplished over the last several years during an era of tremendous development and expansion:

- We have greatly increased our endowment.
- We have added a tremendous amount of production space in the nursery with four large new hoops and four smaller (we originally had only three small hoops) plus the Pergola and a new Propagation Greenhouse.
- We have refitted the old propagation house for tender stock plants and built a distribution building for shipping

and for use as a workshop.

- We have greatly expanded the garden and renovated most of the old soggy dead and dying portions, adding popular features such as the Magnolia Grove, the Blue Poppy Meadow and the Hardy Fern Foundation’s Victorian Stumpery.
- We have built the Rutherford Conservatory and can now properly claim to be fulfilling our Mission Statement by growing and displaying all *Rhododendron* species, not just the hardy ones.
- We now produce and publish our annual yearbook *Rhododendron Species* which has been met with great acclaim throughout the world’s botanical and horticultural communities.
- We have increased our outreach and marketing through increased participation in regional plant sales and events.
- We have greatly increased the *Rhododendron* collection both in the number of taxa represented and in the genetic variation within each taxa. We have also greatly increased the companion plant collection and now have one of the finest collections of documented wild material on the west coast. This has had a tremendous impact on the aesthetic impact for the casual and professional visitor alike and has greatly extended our season of interest.
- We have become a major participant and facilitator on the world stage in the introduction of new species and documented wild source material.
- We are now evaluating, selecting, naming and introducing into the trade horticultural forms and cultivars and have more than a half dozen successful introductions of *Rhododendron* species including such popular and best-selling plants as *luteum* ‘Golden Comet’ *chamaethomsonii* ‘Little Vixen’ and *augustinii* ‘Cerulean Mist’.

With our new staff now settling in and stable and with the assistance of our fantastic volunteers, we have high hopes and expectations for even more success in the coming years.

RSF ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Board and Member’s Meeting will be held on Saturday, May 28th at Weyerhaeuser’s Corporate Headquarters adjacent to the garden. Following the Board Meeting, Announcements and Reports, we will enjoy a box lunch followed by a presentation by Steve Hootman on his successful expedition to South-Central China in the autumn of 2010. In addition, there will be a Silent Auction of new

and rare plants to support the RSBG Internship Program. All members and guests are welcome to attend—be a part of our energetic and active group—participate! Invitations will be sent to all members once the details have been confirmed.

Remember to mark May 28th in your calendar. We hope to see you there.

Evelyn Weesjes Honored with Life Membership

The RSF Executive Committee has, without even the need for debate, decided to award Evelyn Weesjes, of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, an honorary life membership in the Rhododendron Species Foundation.



Evelyn Weesjes

As many RSF members know, at the outset of establishing our organization a small group of gardeners in Oregon, led by Dr Milton Walker, were unsatisfied with the usual rhododendron hybrids to be found in local nurseries and garden centres, and consequently, in gardens. As a result, they came up with the idea of taking cuttings from the best species *Rhododendron* clones in the great British gardens, plants which themselves had been propagated from among those introduced directly into Britain by the renowned British plant explorers in Asia, and create a collection of *Rhododendron* species in the United States. Eventually, the resulting plants would be propagated for dissemination among private interested parties. But, while they had the full cooperation of the relevant British horticulturists, the people directing American customs regulations had other ideas, and required that all plant material imported from outside North America be fumigated when coming into the United States. In other words, the plants could be legally imported into the US, the only requirement being that they be dead. Fortunately, however, the plants could be brought, legally and live, from Britain into Canada, and the resulting propagated plants could then, after a period of time, be imported from Canada into the United States.

Evelyn Weesjes, then Evelyn Jack, became the propagator at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, of the original collections of plants brought over from the United Kingdom to start the RSF collection in the 1960s. She was recommended for this task in a letter to Milton Walker from Mary Greig, owner of the Royston Nursery on Vancouver Island. In 1969 Mrs. Weesjes was awarded the ARS Gold Medal for this work.

In mid-December, 2010, RSF Executive Director Steve Hootman wrote Mrs. Weesjes the following letter:

Dear Mrs. Weesjes,

It is our sincere pleasure to tell you that the Executive Committee has decided unanimously this fall, and immediately upon its suggestion, to offer you an honorary life membership in the Rhododendron Species Foundation.

Actually, we feel remiss in that this should have been done a good many years earlier. Your contribution, propagating hundreds, if not thousands, of rhododendron cuttings taken from plants in the great British gardens, plants which themselves were propagated from original collections in Asia, was enormous and crucial. This was at the time when this organization was little more than a concept in the minds of a few creative people, in the 1960s. In fact, your work enabled the RSF to come into existence with a mission it continues to maintain. The RSF began with an exemplary international collaboration among people in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. Your part in the Canadian function was central. The RSF has grown considerably since that time, of course, with the usual advances and setbacks along the way, but we are pleased to say that there is currently a close relationship between the RSF and the UBC Botanic Garden, with ongoing exchange of plant material and a good, mutually respectful relationship that is both personal and professional between the RSF Executive Director and Douglas Justice, the Associate Director and Curator at UBCBG. In fact, it is most interesting, and intriguing, that your work took place, and was central, in the advent of both rhododendron collections, and, in fact, at the very founding of both institutions. Belated as it may be, then, we want you to know that we do very much appreciate the role you played in the Rhododendron Species Foundation's coming into existence.

Sincerely and with many thanks,

Steve Hootman,
RSF Executive Director

Congratulations, Evelyn, and welcome to the organization for which you had so large a part in its foundation.

Joe Ronsley
RSF Past President

Spring Plant Sale, April 15 & 16

As we head into another great spring, don't forget to put our Spring Plant Sale on your calendar. This annual event will be taking place in the Weyerhaeuser parking lot on April 15 & 16. At this year's sale, we have the bonus of hosting the annual judged early truss show for the Tacoma and Seattle Chapters of the American Rhododendron Society which will be displayed in the garden. Also be sure to make a note of this year's Mother's Day Plant Sale. In addition to a tremendous assortment of choice and rare plants that will be available, the Seattle and Tacoma Chapters will be staging their annual judged late truss show on the grounds of the RSBG. And, as always at this time of year, there will be masses of flowers and beautiful plants to enjoy in the garden and Rutherford Conservatory.

New Bird Houses at the Garden

Rodney Deacon

In thinking of what I wanted to take on as an Eagle Project, many things came to mind. I wanted to make sure what I did impacted my community in a positive manner. I knew I wanted it to be nature minded, something that animals would benefit from.

I remembered going to the Rhododendron Garden by Weyerhaeuser's Corporate Offices with my mom and dad. I



Left to right: Tom Deacon, Rodney Deacon, Paul Bowder, Sr., Bryan Gellner, Clint Burrows, Paul Bowder, Jr., Spencer Gellner, Tyler Burrows, Clarice Clark and Brenda Deacon.

thought I would see if there was anything there that I could improve to benefit the habitat. I met with Dennis Bottemiller, Nursery Manager.

We walked through the garden discussing the wildlife that was present and he mentioned not seeing

as many birds as he did years ago. Then it hit me, how about increasing the bird population by offering the birds a place to nest. We talked about bird houses as we walked the 24 acres. We agreed that this project could really impact the area for the birds and visitors.

I met with Clarice Clark, an active member of Tahoma Audubon, and a former garden employee at the Rhododendron Garden. She had a lot of information about birds, bird houses and the gardens. She showed me around the garden again, talking about what the birds like around their houses (some require a bush by the house to sit on) and that we would need to avoid putting houses in the path of sprinklers. We walked into the woods and looked at several existing houses and told me that having additional bird houses would be a huge help with the return of nesting birds to the garden.

After meeting with her, I looked into making bird houses and ended up introducing 13 new bird houses to the gardens; most for smaller birds. One larger bird house I made for an area of the garden that had been cleared to add more light to the plants. One tree had been limbed and cut leaving about twenty feet of the trunk where I was able to install a bird house for woodpeckers.

I am excited about the work we accomplished for the garden, for the visitors and for the birds that will enjoy more nesting opportunities at the Rhododendron Garden.

From the Nursery

Dennis Bottemiller, Nursery Manager/Propagator

Sitting by the fire I can see the thermometer that tells me it is 46 degrees F outside. On top of that it is raining furiously and all the trees and shrubs are doing a crazy dance in the wind. All the better to be sitting by the fire looking forward to warmer weather and all the new things coming along in the Nursery.

After an early and severe freeze, (11degrees F the third week of November) we had quite a lot of damage especially on potted plants but also in the garden. Seventeen offerings from the catalog had to be taken off the list of shippable plants either because they were not saleable or they were outright dead. Of course the bright side of this is that we will have lots of room for all of the new plants coming along. We have a great batch of new seed from Steve's latest expedition to China and germination has been excellent. In fact we have already transplanted several thousand of them and they are growing fine in the greenhouse. Of the many great things to look forward to from this year's wild seed crop, the long sought after *R. platypodium* is already transplanted and growing very well in the propagation house. It has also been a very good year for *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm'. We will have plenty of them for sales as well as to augment the Meconopsis Meadow with more plants this year. This spring will be the third season for the Meconopsis meadow so it should have the best showing yet with hundreds of unbelievably blue flowers and while they are blooming it will be a challenge to keep enough of them in the sales pavillion. Not a bad problem to have!

The Nursery has been humming along in the normal fashion with potting both of seedlings and rooted cuttings in the propagation house and band size plants into gallons out on the potting bench when the weather permits. Plant movement in the Nursery is always a challenge making space where we need it and filling the spaces with plants that will grow in



Plants in Hoop C.

RSBG NEWS & NOTES

the vacant locations and making sure we don't run out of any supplies and stop the whole show! We are also well into plant distribution season with assembling orders Wednesday through Friday and shipping plants to you the following Mondays. Atsuko Gibson is our great new helper in the Nursery and Garden and she has taken



R. mucronulatum, white flowered, in Hoop B.

over most of the order packing and UPS shipping duties with confidence and great attention to detail. I would like to take a sentence to thank not only Atsuko but all of the volunteers who make it possible to run the Nursery and distribute the plants we grow: on Mondays Deena Henkens, Ramona Soule and Diane Thompson keep the distribution and transplanting going plus some data entry. Tuesdays, John Parker is in doing *Pleione* orchid production for me the last couple weeks but often cuttings or potting or gleaning tiny lily bulbs out of flats. Wednesdays we see Gary Becker and Margo Steinman doing transplanting or cuttings in season and a variety of other nursery tasks. Thursday is a really busy day with the "Thursday Crew" led by Paul Thompson and his Merry Band of Pranksters including Rollo Adams, Garratt Richardson, George Lewis and Bill O'Neil who lately have been doing some office renovation. They are always building something! Thursdays also includes Loretta Goetsch transplanting in the greenhouse and Pat Cummins on the potting bench and Diane Thompson back for her second or sometimes third day of the work week. We always have the most rousing lunchtime conversations on Thursdays! Finally Friday, Deena Henkens is in for her second day of the week to handle any nursery task imaginable. I can't imagine working with a finer group!

Remember, it's not too late to order plants from our spring catalog either for shipping or pickup at the nursery.

Look for us at all the big plant sales around the Puget Sound as well as our spring plant sale on April 15-16 and Mother's Day. We will also have a great selection of rhodos and companion plants at the ARS convention in May. Hope to see you there!

RSBG GIFT SHOP

Gift Ideas

Cathi DuBose, Gift Shop Manager

When have you ever thought to buy a wedding gift at a plant nursery? Or when you need a unique home furnishing item, do you expect to find it in a greenhouse? When is the last time you stopped to buy a rhododendron and came home with a new bracelet or a scented candle?

For many, botanical gardens and nurseries are an excellent resource to buy plants and flowers to accent and beautify a space. Each season offers a unique variety of blooms and foliage, options to achieve a gorgeous garden. But the special treasures and one of a kind pieces found in a botanical garden's gift shop go beyond the garden.

The RSBG Gift Shop is just such a place. A jewel on the botanical garden property, our shop specializes in all things rhododendron as well as an impressive, hand-picked book selection. We carry discerning garden gifts from vendors such as Roost as well as locally made crafts, such as concrete leaves and ponderosa pine needle baskets.

As we look forward to our busy season and springtime in the garden, you can expect to find a bevy of highly scented Trapp candles, botanical and bird inspired perpetual calendars, glass vases, hand-blown glass species ornaments and rhododendron inspired mugs and mouse pads.

Last years most popular gift items were the light branches made by The Light Garden. Offered in a variety of flowers such as Chinese lanterns, orchid, pussy willow, roses and forsythia, each branch has tiny LED lights in the head of each flower and casts a beautiful ambient light for any interior setting.

The store's merchandise changes seasonally and there are always some new treasures to be had. Want to make it personal? Purchase a paving stone engraving in the Rutherford Conservatory for yourself or your family or group. Want to give a gift that keeps giving all year? Purchase a yearly membership for yourself or for a family member or business.

Come in and visit the gift center and see what treasure awaits you.



Light branches.

CONTRIBUTORS - THANK YOU!

Extraordinary Gifts

Joshua Green Foundation
Hall, Benjamin

Garden Campaign

Contributions

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Hasche-Kluender, Hans
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Cummins, Patrick J.
& Jean L.
Clark, Clarice
Sinclair, June

In Memoriam

Ritchey, Inez
In memory of Anna
Becker.
ARS Peninsula Chapter
In memory of Anna Becker
and Fred Minch
Hilt, Valerie
In memory of Mary Ann
Stephens

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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RSBG CALENDAR Spring 2011

April 15th & 16th: Spring Plant Sale

May 7th & 8th: Mother's Day Plant Sale

May 28th: RSF Annual Membership Meeting

Nov. 19th: RSF Fall Board Meeting