



RHODODENDRON SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

WINTER 2007 NEWSLETTER

Volume 32 Issue 1

Director's Report

Rick Peterson & Steve Hootman

Although the nightly television news often tends to be overly melodramatic about even the slightest blip in the weather these days, the Pacific Northwest was subjected to several actually significant weather events the past couple of months. The first one was just after Thanksgiving with a snowstorm and then below freezing temperatures that wreaked havoc for driver's not used to the snow and ice. Then, the most noteworthy storm of the season occurred during the evening of December 14th and early morning of the 15th. Fierce winds, in some areas up to 70 miles an hour, swept through Western Washington and knocked out power to more than 1.5 million people. Some didn't regain power for more than a week. Fortunately, the electricity was only cut off for about a day and a half at the RSBG so the cuttings and seedlings in the propagation greenhouse fared well. In the Garden, however, eight large conifers were blown down and two were leaning drastically enough that they had to be cut down. This was less than half the number that were felled by the Inauguration Day storm of 1993 which was more powerful (although, the December 2006 storm caused more widespread damage). Fortunately, less than a handful of rhododendrons were crushed beyond saving.

Then, only two weeks into the new year a third major weather event brought more snow and ice to the region. Federal Way seemingly received the most snowfall in the lowland central Puget Sound area with at least six inches and it remained for several days. On January 11th the thermometer plunged to 15° F, the lowest it has been in many years. A number of species that are classified as tender have been planted out in the Garden and we will be noting which fared well and which did not.

Along with evaluating rhododendron species for hardiness another very important part of the RSBG mission is to educate members and the public about the great diversity of this genus and how individual species are related to one

another. Recently, a group of board members have assumed the task of updating the education program. Technology has advanced considerably in the last 15 years since the original study course was developed to the point where the new version will most certainly be in electronic format rather than

printed text and slides. The new Species Education Committee is hoping to produce at least a first part of the course by late this year or early 2008. We thank these volunteers for assuming this important project and look forward to their first efforts.

The 2007 *Rhododendron Species* yearbook is progressing and our goal is to have it arrive by April. There will be space for a member's directory this time.

PLEASE NOTE: There were a number of members who did not want their name, address, and email printed (no phone numbers will be included) and we have retained that list; however, for those of you who are new members since that time or anyone who does not want that information printed please contact the office by March 15th.

We are dedicating this edition of the yearbook to rhododendron enthusiast Warren Berg who past away last May. His good friends Hank Schannen and Garratt Richardson have graciously written articles about Warren and we are pleased to have permission from the American Rhododendron Society to reprint an article that Warren wrote for the quarterly bulletin in 1977 about his trip to Cheju Island, Korea. Other articles include Steve's adventures to the extreme northwestern corner of Yunnan Province, China in 2001 as well as rhododendrons of the Philippines, growing rhododendrons in Denmark, and how Vietnamese rhododendrons are fairing in the climate of southwestern England.

The board and staff are very grateful to the Cascade Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society for a gift of \$5,000 in memory of Robert N. Smith, of Bellevue Washington, who passed away in July 2006. Bob was a long-time member of the Seattle Rhododendron Society and a founding member of the Cascade Chapter. He loved rhododendrons and enjoyed growing and tending his garden. Bob also loved touring gardens in such places as New Zealand, Tasmania, Australia, and Scotland. He then shared his experiences with his fellow rhododendron friends. Bob bequeathed a gift of funds to the Cascade Chapter and we extend a sincere thank you to the Chapter for donating part of that gift to the RSBG.

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The *faucium*, *hookeri*, *hylaeum* and *subansiriense* Alliance of Subsection *Thomsonia*

Steve Hootman

In this edition of the Species Profile I shall be deviating a bit from the usual review of a single species. In *Rhododendron* taxonomy an Alliance can be loosely defined as a distinct and closely related but informal grouping within a subsection. The four species in this Alliance - *faucium*, *hookeri*, *hylaeum* and *subansiriense*, are quite similar both botanically and horticulturally, and I shall be reviewing them as a group. All the members of this Alliance make splendid additions to the mild or semi-protected garden (such as in the Pacific Northwest or United Kingdom) with their combined beauty of foliage, habit and bark. In addition, their red to pink or rose flowers provide an outstanding display of color in the earliest of spring.

According to Peter Cox, this Alliance is separated botanically from the rest of subsection *Thomsonia* by the presence on the undersides of the leaves of red punctulate glands which sometimes form hairs. He also states that the inflorescence will tend to be a little tighter in this group. In cultivation, these species are relatively unknown, with only one, *Rhododendron hookeri*, typically grown outside of large specialized collections. I am sure this owes more to both unfamiliarity and lack of source material than to paucity of beauty as their smooth trunks and colorful exfoliating bark are justification enough for a choice position in any garden.

Another factor which has undoubtedly contributed to this lack of horticultural attention is that two of the species (*faucium* and *subansiriense*) were described only as recently as 1978. *Rhododendron faucium* ("of the gorges") being described by David Chamberlain from Ludlow, Sherriff & Elliot #12289 collected (as *hylaeum*?) in southeast Tibet,



Rhododendron faucium

China and *R. subansiriense* ("from the Subansiri Division") being described by Chamberlain from Cox and Hutchison #418 collected in the Subansiri Division of Arunachal Pradesh, northeast India. In contrast, *R. hylaeum* ("belonging to forests") has been known since 1920 when it was found by Reginald Farrer on the Chawchi Pass of northeastern Upper Myanmar (Burma). It was then introduced into cultivation by George Forrest in 1921 (#20961). It is now generally accepted that most plants of this species in cultivation are actually the more recently recognized *R.*

faucium. The remaining species, *R. hookeri* (named for Sir J. D. Hooker), was first introduced as early as 1849 when it was found by T. J. Booth in the Lablung Pass area of Bhutan. The members of this Alliance are quite closely related. In fact, H. H. Davidian of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, who was generally thought of as a taxonomic "splitter," did not accept either *Rhododendron faucium* or *R. subansiriense* as distinct species. Instead, he "lumped" them both into *R. hylaeum*, reducing the remaining two names into synonymy. Following the leads of both Chamberlain and Cox, however, we are retaining all four names as distinct species. Although quite similar in general appearance, these



Rhododendron subansiriense

four species can quite readily be distinguished from each other by an examination of their ovaries. *R. hylaeum* and *R. hookeri* both have a glabrous (smooth) ovary but can easily be separated by foliage characteristics. *R. faucium* is very closely related to *R. hylaeum* but can be distinguished by its densely stipitate-glandular ovary. *R. subansiriense* is also very similar to *R. hylaeum* but can be distinguished by its tomentose ovary which lacks glands. As a whole, the members of this Alliance show certain affinities with subsection *Irrorata*, especially *R. anthosphaerum*. They also show some relationship with fellow subsection *Thomsonia* member *R. eclecticum* (esp. *hylaeum*).

In the wild, *Rhododendron faucium* forms an erect shrub or small tree up to 21 or so feet in height. It occurs from 8,500 to 10,850 ft. (2600 to 3350m) in forest margins and on rock faces in southeast Tibet, China. *R. hylaeum* grows to 40 feet and occurs from 9,000 to 12,000 ft. (2700 to 3700m) in forests and on cliffs in the provinces of southeast Tibet and northwest Yunnan, China and in northeast Upper Myanmar. *R. hookeri* occurs as a large shrub or small tree up to 20 feet in height. It is found in forests from 10,000 to 12,000 ft. (3000 to 3700m) in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, India. *R. subansiriense* grows as an erect shrub or tree to 45 feet. It is native to Arunachal Pradesh at elevations of 8,400 to 9,200 ft. (2550 to 2750m) where it is common in a small area of mossy forest in association with *R. grande* and *R. falconeri* ssp. *eximium*. In cultivation, these species are typically fairly vigorous growers, generally with a broadly upright habit but remaining much more compact and densely branched than when growing in the wild where



Rhododendron hookeri

they tend to be “drawn up” in their quest for light within the forests they usually inhabit.

As stated earlier, the colorful smooth and more or less exfoliating bark of these species is an outstanding ornamental feature. The color is typically silvery or gray to reddish brown, often somewhat purplish. The sizes and shapes of the leaves on all but *Rhododendron hookeri* tend to be fairly similar. They are usually oblanceolate to oblong-lanceolate in shape, and range from 2.5 to 7 inches long by 1.5 to 2.5 inches wide and are totally glabrous except for the previously mentioned glands and hairs on the undersurface. *R. hookeri* can readily be distinguished from the other three species by the typically larger leaves which are much more rounded in appearance, oblong to oblong-oval in shape. It also has the very characteristic tufts of hair (“hooks”) on the lateral veins beneath which are unique among all rhododendrons. In China this species is known as *chuan zhu dujuan* or “string of pearls rhododendron” in reference to these regularly spaced clusters which are white at first before maturing brown. An added ornamental feature of *R. hookeri* is the bright splash of color produced by the brilliant scarlet bracts which adorn the emerging new growth.

The flowers of species in this Alliance resemble *Rhododendron thomsonii* in general shape and size (bell-shaped to tubular bell-shaped) and typically have the large and showy cupular calyx common to members of subsection *Thomsonia*. *R. hookeri* is generally considered to have the finest flowers among these four species, ranging in color from deep rose

to crimson or cherry-red, all with darker nectaries and sometimes a few faint flecks. As stated by Peter Cox this species is, “One of the most gorgeous scarlet rhododendrons.” A clone from Bodnant with a very dark red corolla and calyx received a FCC in 1933. Unfortunately, the attractive red forms in cultivation are generally not as hardy as the pink forms often seen. The flowers of *R. subansiriense* are a shining crimson-scarlet with a few spots. They are generally smaller than those of *R. hookeri* but arranged tightly within the inflorescence and therefore quite attractive. In *R. faucium* the flowers are pale rose to a white flushed rose, rarely sulfur yellow and typically with purple flecks. The similar *R. hylaeum* is rose-purple to rose-pink or almost white, with numerous or few darker spots. The flowers on all four species appear early to mid-spring and are often among the earliest of all elepidote species to bloom in the RSBG.

The cultivation of this Alliance is limited to those areas which offer some protection from extremely cold temperatures. Portions of the United Kingdom and New Zealand as well as mild areas along the western coast of the United States and Canada afford the most hope for success. The selection of forms collected from colder regions and higher elevations should provide hardier stock suitable for cultivation in harsher climates. These four species are generally rated at +10° to 0°F. (H3 to H4), illustrating the tremendous variance of hardiness within each. Because the members of this alliance are prone to push their new growth early in the season, cultivation outside of mild climate regions can result in a damaged or stunted plant. According to Rick Peterson, Garden Manager at the RSBG, the members



Rhododendron hylaeum

of this Alliance have not suffered any winter damage since we reached +7° F in 1985. This freeze hit in the early autumn before most of the rhododendrons had sufficiently hardened off and many species suffered severe damage or even death. Of the four species under discussion, only *Rhododendron hookeri* and *R. subansiriense* suffered any visible tissue damage with some minor dieback. These specimens quickly recovered the following spring and all four species are now flourishing here in the garden where they are grown under a high canopy of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) exposed to the open sky in the north.

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The aforementioned FCC award for a clone of *R. hookeri* is the only award that I am aware of given to member of this Alliance. These species have rarely (if ever?) been used in hybridizing.

ACCESSIONS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE RSF:

faucium

1980/089 LS&E.12045:RBG Edinburgh

*We also have numerous accessions grown from seed collected wild by Warren Berg on the Doshong La, SE Tibet. These and many newer accessions have yet to be fully evaluated.

hookeri

1967/711 Benmore. Pink flowers

1976/214 RBG Edinburgh. Deep scarlet flowers.

1990/078 Glenarn

*We also have many newer accessions grown from seed collected in the wild.

hylaeum

1977/743 KW.9322:Windsor

*We also have many newer accessions grown from seed collected in the wild.

subansiriense

1977/636 C&H.418:Cox:Berg Flowers crimson-scarlet

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Rhododendron Species Foundation: Records - 1964 to present.



Rhododendron moupinense

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We are very grateful to the following members for their generous contributions to the 2006-2007 Garden Campaign:

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 Claudia & Robert Tidball
 Robert Van Citters
 A. Jennifer Velinty

Letha Hoagland, a wonderful volunteer for many years, passed away in December at the age of 93. She helped in the nursery with transplanting during the 1990's and, along with her husband, Bill, assisted at the plant sale fundraisers. Letha faithfully arrived every Tuesday bearing a plate of homemade chocolate chip cookies for the staff and other volunteers. Her kindness and support will long be appreciated.



Rhododendron sutchuenense

L. W. Abel
Arboretum of LA County Plant Science Library
ARS RhododendronForeningen
Lisl Linthicum
Helen Smelko
Jon Villaume

Contributions (as of 12/31/2006) **THANK YOU!**

Life Member Gifts

Mary Brookhyser
William Hatheway
Martha Robbins

Member Gifts

ARS Cascade Chapter
ARS Seattle Chapter
Linda Dougherty
Caroline Enns & Stephen Hall
Lucille Fleischmann
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Stan Southerland
H. Dean Stout
Hazel Tarpley
Margaret Taylor
Elizabeth Ward

Intern Program

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ARS Middle Atlantic Chapter
ARS Peninsula Chapter
ARS Valley Forge Chapter
Paul & Diane Thompson

Tropical House

Darryl Stewart

Old Greenhouse Retrofit

E. White Smith

Non-Member Gifts

Stephen M. Henning - Rh. & Azalea Bookstore

**Rhododendron Species
Botanical Garden**

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In Memory

In memory of Gladys Ayres

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In memory of Warren Berg

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John Weagle

In memory of Vera Elliott Berglund

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In memory of Deloris Gray

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In memory of Letha Hoagland

Barrett & Drew Henry
Rick Peterson & Richie Steffen



Rhododendron dauricum

Many thanks to the above contributors for their thoughtfulness in choosing the RSF for their donations.

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2007 Calendar

February

14 -18 NW Flower & Garden Show

March

17 - Spring Work Party & Potluck
30/31 - **Spring Plant Sale**

April

28 - Annual General Meeting

June

2 - Volunteer Picnic & Work Party

August

4 - Evening in the Garden

September

22 - **Fall Plant Sale**

December

8 - Volunteer Christmas Party

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

Spring Plant Sale Fundraiser

Friday, March 30, 2007

RSBG Members only - 2pm to 3pm
Everyone welcome - 3pm to 6pm

Saturday, March 31, 2007

Everyone welcome - 9am to 3pm

Location:

Weyerhaeuser Corporate Headquarters
West Middle Parking Lot
Federal Way, Washington

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