

# Eugene Chapter

*American Rhododendron Society*

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## Committees

- **Show:** Helen Baxter, Sherlyn Hilton
- **Nominating:**
- **Welfare:** Nancy & Harold Greer
- **Hospitality:**
- **Programs:** Board of Directors

## Newsletter

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## *Rhododendrons and Culture of Bhutan*

Program by Wally & Kathy Reed

*6:30 p.m. - Thursday - January 8  
Campbell Community Center  
155 High Street in Eugene*

Situated at the eastern end of the Himalayas in Asia, the small kingdom of Bhutan is bordered by Tibet/China on the north and India on the east, south, and west. With a land area that is about 1/5 that of Oregon, Bhutan has climate zones that range from tropical lowland forests up through a temperate zone with conifer and broad-leafed forests to an alpine zone above 12,000 feet with no forest cover. Home to 48 known species of rhododendrons, this small region also sports magnolias, fir, pine, oaks, orchids, gentian, daphne, and a variety of medicinal plants as well as snow leopards in the higher elevations and red panda, langurs, wild pigs, and Bengal tigers in the lower elevations.

Bhutanese tradition is deeply steeped in its Buddhist heritage and the government is making strong efforts to preserve the culture as well as the outstanding biodiversity. To this end, tourism is tightly controlled. The Reeds joined a private tour focused on the religion and art of Bhutan the first 2 weeks of April 2014. Being the only plant people on the tour, stopping to see rhodys was difficult except on Kathy's Birthday. The program will be in 2 parts - a review of the Wild Rhododendrons of Bhutan developed by the real expert, Dr. Rebecca Pradhan, followed by the rhodys that the Reeds saw and what else they got into. We can certainly look forward to an excellent program on this faraway land.

(cont. on p. 2)



R. 'Christmas Cheer'

(Bhutan - cont. from p. 1)

Kathy and Wally are active members in the ARS Willamette Chapter with Wally serving as president (for life) and Kathy serving as the highly respected chapter chef. Prior to retired life in rhododendron land, their careers took them to the University of Virginia with Wally being a professor of Environmental Science and Kathy being the Associate Provost for Management.

Join us for cookies, coffee, and conversation at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 8, at the Campbell Community Center at 155 High Street in Eugene with the program at 7:00.

### Pre-Meeting Dinner

Prior to the meeting you are invited to join us for a no-host dinner at 5:00 at Tasty Thai Kitchen located at 80 E. 29th Ave in Eugene (This is just off Willamette St). There is plenty of parking and it has easy access to the Campbell Center. For a look at their extensive menu go to [www.tastythaikitchen.com](http://www.tastythaikitchen.com). This is a good time to visit with Kathy and Wally as well as to visit with friends. Please RSVP to Helen Baxter at 541-461-6082 or by e-mail at [galen.baxter@comcast.net](mailto:galen.baxter@comcast.net) by Tuesday, January 6.

### Kudos for the Holiday Potluck Dinner

- Special thanks to Nancy Burns for organizing the Holiday Potluck Dinner and to Doug Furr for preparing the scrumptious turkey and ham.
- Kudos to Nancy & Tim, Linda & Gordon, Gloria & Ali, Helen, Sandie and Jack, Paula & Ted for the work on transforming the Campbell Center into a splendid dining hall and those who helped with the takedown.
- Thank you Harold for making sure that the members' slide show ran smoothly.

### Willamette Valley

#### Hardy Plant Group Meeting

- Tuesday, January 13; 7:00 p.m.
- *The Chihuly Glass Garden*
- Richard Hartlage, speaker
- The gardens with this glass museum in Seattle were designed to complement and integrate Chihuly's glass sculptures with dynamic plant combinations.
- \$5 for non-members, free for members
- Campbell Community Center
- 155 High Street in Eugene
- [www.thehardyplantgroup.org/](http://www.thehardyplantgroup.org/)

### Cookie Team Reminder

- Paula Hewitt  
&  
• Linda Wylie
- have volunteered to bring delectable goodies for the January 8 meeting. Many thanks go to the two of you.

### Are you interested in becoming more active with planning chapter events?

- This year there will be two Board of Director seats that will be available.
- Also, the offices of Treasurer and Secretary will be on the ballot in March.

**Let Ali know if you are interested in being nominated for these positions.**

### January Programs at other ARS chapters:

- Wednesday, January 14, Willamette Chapter - Mike Stewart, Program TBA
  - Thursday, January 15, Portland Chapter - Steve Hootman, Program TBA
- Two fine speakers a little farther north. Maybe you would like to spend a night at the Oregon Garden Resort and then continue on to Portland on Thursday.

## ***From the President***

### **Why Join the Rhododendron Society?**

Before I get to my topic, I would like to express my appreciation for the folks who helped out at our December potluck dinner! We had a group of 22 people who brought plenty of smiles as well as delicious food to share and a few showed us lovely pictures of their gardens and their travels. Our dedicated members Nancy and Harold brought us a Christmas wreath to auction and raise a little money. Thank you Nancy and Harold. The wreath went home with Paula and Ted Hewitt..., we thank them for their support and know they will enjoy the wreath. Do not forget the turkey and ham which Doug and Mary Furr provided that were so tender and tasty. Also, their choice for decorations for the table tops was appreciated.

Now, I will get to my topic of "why should I join the society?" I will share a couple of my personal experiences of going to rhododendron conferences. Once or twice, I travelled with Ted Van Veen, who is not living any more, to Victoria, British Columbia. He was certainly a person who was willing to share his knowledge of rhododendrons in kind and gentle ways no

matter what your language or your place of origin.

The other gentleman who I had a chance to meet is Dr. Forest Bump who some of you might know or have heard of. I understand he and his wife are now living in a nursing home. When he lived in Forest Grove, Oregon, he personally loved his rhodies and loved to share his passion with you to help you become interested. They were a very pleasant couple with whom to travel. These are a couple of my mentors that I think of and I am sure there are more as well.

A society should always: have their minds set to be welcoming, tolerant, be willing to be helpful, be caring, sharing, enjoyable. I have no doubt that these characteristics leave a memorable impression on a person and make it a fun learning experience for all those around. We have all heard the saying "you can't take it with you" and there really is truth in that. Why not share it with your fellow gardeners?

Finally, welcome to the rhody society and enjoy each other's personal experiences, and knowledge. Peace in 2015.

*Ali Sarlak*



Sharing conversation



The Wreath with Variegated Ponticum



Sharing delicious food

## Some Thoughts from Across the Atlantic on How to Kill Rhododendrons

by John Hammond

Maybe Rich Aaring was not around at the time, but back in the late-1940's and 1950's Eugene did not enjoy a monopoly with its long, hot and arid Summers, as I clearly recall being sent out of the house every day to play with my mates in glorious Summer weather during the six-week school holidays, with the exception of when the family went down to the South Coast for an even hotter two-week vacation. Back then, in England, we enjoyed clearly defined seasons, with heavy snow and frosts that made life difficult in the Winter and, following a showery April, Spring would arrive in early-May. Similar in many ways to Eugene.

I woke up early this morning and a gale-force southwest wind is driving the sheets of rain and sleet past the office window. It is mid-December and I cannot recall when we last had 24 hours without either rain, hail or sleet, to say nothing of the intense storms that, since mid-October, have reached far inland from the West Coast to cause damage on the west-facing slopes of the Pennines. Our home is on a hill that runs for a couple of miles down to a river valley, so drainage is not normally a problem; however, the garden has been saturated for the past couple of months and, with a heavy clay sub-soil, there is nowhere for the rainwater to go other than to run directly off the surface of the sodden soil to wherever it can find a lower elevation. There is little that can be achieved in the garden at present as my feet will only compact the soil, so, not surprisingly, some of the tasks planned for the Fall have been disrupted by the sequence of storms coming in off the Atlantic and there will be little chance of completing any garden chores for the foreseeable future. For the fifth Fall and Winter in succession the West Pennines are receiving somebody else's rain; indeed, for the first three years our rainfall was around 80 inches, but this year we are well over 90 inches, whereas the 'norm' is 55 inches. Some weeks we get 5 inches of torrential rain, or the equivalent amount of snow in colder periods, but perhaps far more pertinent, we no longer enjoy the clearly defined seasons, which have slowly disappeared over the past 50 years.

For the past five years there have been occasional hot sunny weeks in the Summer, interspersed with periods of rain, then we have gradually drifted from Summer into Fall, with an occasional early air-frost in September. Somehow the birds know what is going on, as this year during a three-day warm and dry period, the swifts gathered a month early in the tall

trees behind the house, then departed south for the Winter shortly before the colder weather preceded the arrival of the rain in mid-October. One side effect of the rains is that the temperature has remained several degrees above freezing, then without any prior warning, a sudden sharp heavy frost in mid-November has caused havoc with many plants that are a long way off achieving dormancy, particularly those that are still slowly generating new growth. Meanwhile, the rains have been with us into the New Year and continued on until April, only stopping for periods of open skies and heavy frost. When April arrives the weather gradually drifts into Spring bringing with it the likelihood of occasional late-frosts and hail that can devastate the trusses and sprays I had planned to take along to the Show. What went wrong to change the climate so drastically?

Part of the answer is that El-nino tends to have an impact on Europe during the Winter. The higher than normal sea temperatures in the Central Pacific, probably with an input from seismic activity deep in the ocean, generate a conveyor-belt of storm systems, and this is coupled with a shift in the Jet-stream toward the Gulf of Mexico. So, having picked-up heavy moisture whilst crossing the Pacific, part of the storm systems pass over the isthmus (Panama) and, having not crossed any significant mountain ranges on which to drop their 'sky-borne river' during their passage overland to the Gulf of Mexico, continue to follow the Jet stream north-east across the Atlantic towards Britain and the European mainland, picking-up additional moisture en-route from the North Atlantic Drift. Last Winter there were times when a storm system blew in off the Atlantic every three days, with +80mph winds on the Coast and +60mph inland.

There are some aspects that are well worth considering in connection with the impact of these storms on the rhododendrons in British gardens. Whilst the bud-set has been very good for the coming season it is interesting to conjecture why this should be. In Northwest England we did not receive any significant sun in the late-summer or early-autumn to ripen the wood prior to the arrival of the 'monsoon' in mid-October. Most, if not all, rhododendrons have still not achieved dormancy and have continued to grow, as is the case with a massive and tender species fuchsia in our back garden, which still has not shed its leaves. More importantly, some of the rhododendrons and azaleas are not looking happy as a result of having their feet wet for many consecutive months.

Of particular concern are the yellow flowering species and their hybrids, many of which are more difficult to grow in our climate, as are some of the yellow/salmon/orange multi-coloured varieties. The heavy-bud-set

on these may well indicate I am going to lose a few of these, whilst others have a lot of dead-wood that needs to be cut out. As an example, a large mature plant of R. 'Nancy Evans' was killed outright a couple of years ago, whilst R. 'Ring of Fire' and 'September Song' need attention and may have to be replaced if they are further damaged this Winter. Pruning, or removal of the plant, may deal with the visible damage, but it will not address the basic problem with the soil, as the persistent rains over many months during successive winters have tended to leech away all the nutrition from the garden.

Classic old-fashioned hardy-hybrids in a woodland setting, or placed along the drive up to the house, performed beautifully with little attention from the gardeners of yesteryear. They required no fertiliser to sustain them. In other words, the traditional approach, since Victorian times on this side of the Atlantic, is, with the right soil and climatic conditions, to grow rhododendrons without giving them a second thought. The old-time head gardeners left the autumn leaves to decay around the base of the plants to provide a natural source of nutrients, and let the condition of the leaves of the rhododendrons themselves tell them if any remedial action was required.

In direct contrast, many of the 'showy' hybrids created over the past fifty to sixty years are hungry for nutrition and minor minerals and if these plants are short of any key nutrients they will look unattractive and not only perform badly, but are less able to cope with adverse weather and can become disease prone. So, in common with the header of these notes, it should come as no surprise that a few mature rhododendrons and azaleas are being killed in my garden each year and need to be replaced. Many crosses made in the Pacific Northwest are 'hungry hybrids' and their performance is directly related to the availability of high levels of both nitrogen and minor elements in the soil. These cultivars need to be looked after by a gardener who understands their requirements, as they tend not to survive for long in Britain when planted by a member of the public in an untended garden and are left to their own devices.

It is a misconception that the scattering of nitrogen-rich fertiliser around an ailing plant will enable it to recover; more likely the sudden application of nitrogen will shock a weakened root system and kill the plant outright. The term 'feeding' has crept into many suggested care routines, which implies that rhododendrons require regular applications of fertiliser; whereas, the plants take most of what they need from the air and combine this with water and minute quantities of naturally occurring minerals in the

soil. What matters is keeping the soil in good condition with regular applications of rotted compost that generate a healthy population of earthworms and good drainage. And, given our persistent wet conditions over the past four Falls and Winters, this can be quite difficult to sustain in practice when the problem extends to the whole of the gardens around the house. The use of liquid fertilisers are often a waste of time and resources as they rapidly run right through the mulch and barren soil, as there is little humus available to absorb and retain the liquid. In my experience a scattering of sterilised bonemeal around the roots is a more practical 'starter for ten' as it provides natural slow release nutrients with a high proportion of phosphate, but what is really required is a good covering of rotted compost spread over the roots, or well rotted horse manure, to put some life back in the soil. In some instances the plants will need to be lifted, the level of humus significantly increased to provide aeration, and the drainage improved where practicable, then the plant placed back in its original position. Quite a task with a large mature plant!

However, it is well worth noting that many enthusiasts are not aware that one of the main problems resulting in stunted leaf growth, interveinal chlorosis, bud death and dieback is that the soil has become too acid for healthy growth, and the effect on the leaves is that they look similar to magnesium deficiency. This condition is often accompanied by an increasing infestation of lichen, which is caused by a deficiency of calcium. So apply calcium sulphate (Gypsum) carefully. Remember, lichen does not harm the plant; it is an indicator that the plant itself is suffering from stress and is in poor health, often caused by a combination of factors.

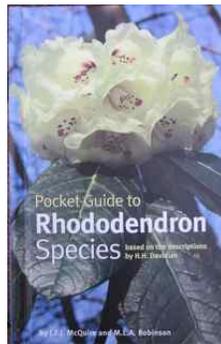
This commentary began by reflecting on the changing climatic conditions that have taken place over the last half century or so in Britain, and in some ways it underlines the importance of never being complacent in regard to the reality that over a relatively short span of years the annual cycle of weather can change dramatically. Indeed, the ongoing extremes of weather that are presently impacting many parts of the World remain a cause for concern, as none of us want to be in the business of killing rhododendrons. As to my garden 'receiving somebody else's rain' for the past five Winters, well, there's no landmass between Britain and the isthmus connecting North & South America, so perhaps it should have fallen somewhere on the West Coast, probably on the Sierra, Coast and Cascade Ranges!

(John Hammond is an ARS Eugene Chapter Associate Member who lives in Lancashire, England, but often visits Eugene.)

## Ted's Notes

For my birthday last summer I received the book *Pocket Guide to Rhododendron Species* written by John McQuire and Mike Robinson that is based on the descriptions by H. H. Davidian. Published by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in 2009, it is one of the newer publications on rhododendrons and is a first-rate addition to any gardener's library.

Measuring 8-3/4" x 5-1/4" x 1-1/4", it would take a sizable pocket to hold this guide as one treks in the Himalayas looking for rhododendrons, but it is certainly easier than lugging along Davidian's 4-volume set.



When I first saw this book a few years ago, I was struck by the exceptional quality of the photos, mostly taken by John McQuire, often at his garden, Deer Dell, in England. Each designated species is accompanied by a concise description and an adjoining, sizable photo. Most descriptions include where the species is found in the wild, how it is different from similar varieties, the origin of the name, the hardiness (using the British system), and the time of bloom. One helpful hint that I find missing is a comment on how best to grow it in your garden, such as Peter Cox often gives in his books. Often a photo shows one leaf turned over which I find to be a helpful hint in identification as well as just learning more about these many kinds of species rhododendron.

At the beginning of the book, there is a nice listing of the 9 subgenera of the genus *Rhododendron* with the vireyas being listed as a distinct subgenus. The list includes each of the sections into which a subgenus is divided and how many species are included in each section. This is followed by a commentary on what distinguishes the subgenera - a helpful learning device

for the study of this genus. Following this same style is a listing and a description of each of the subsections into which the sections are divided. The main part of the book with its descriptions of the species is grouped by subgenus, section, subsection, and then the species in alphabetical order.

Over the years, there have been a number of excellent books written about rhododendrons including plant identification and classification but I have been very pleased to find a newer book with excellent use of color photographs in a well-organized format that helps to sort out this large genus.

With 692 pages and more than 700 high quality color photos on good quality paper, the book is not cheap but may be purchased through the ARS Store allowing the ARS to receive part of the cost. For a neophyte rhododendron grower like me, this is a wonderful resource for learning more about the genus and, if I were to go trekking in the Himalayas looking for rhododendrons, I would carry it in my day pack along with my camera while a porter carried the rest of my belongings.

- As I read John Hammond's article, I kept thinking of problem situations that I see in my garden and making connections to his wisdom. One of the first species rhododendrons that I added to our garden when I joined the Eugene Chapter was *R. prunum* and, ever since, I have enjoyed watching it grow and mature until September of 2014 when I noticed some yellowing of outer leaves and dieback of a few outer branches. In the last couple of years, I have been concerned about how flat it seemed and how close to the ground it was growing. In November, I dug it out, filled in the hole with a mixture of composted mint straw, hemlock bark, and 1/4 - 10 quarry crush gravel for drainage, set the plant on top and mounded mulch around it in hopes of improving drainage and aeration of soil. We shall see.
- I encourage you to share your successes and failures in your garden in future newsletters.

***Rhododendron latoucheae* - Subgenus *Azaleastrum*, Section *Choniastrum***

When Paula and I visited the Berkeley Botanic Garden in March, I was interested to see a number of rhododendrons with which I was unfamiliar, including *R. latoucheae*. With clearly labeled signage, it was easy to record (a digital camera makes this simple) so that I could look them up later. The large genus *Rhododendron* is divided up into 8 or 9 subgenera, depending on whether or not one gives the vireyas a separate subgenus or includes them in the Subgenus *Rhododendron*. So, what is special about the Subgenus *Azaleastrum*? Like the larger Subgenus *Hymenanthes* (with its over 200 species) the much smaller Subgenus *Azaleastrum* (with about 10 species) is comprised of elepidotes (no scales) but the flowers are born in a lateral inflorescence, meaning below the terminal bud. If you look at most of the rhododendrons growing in your garden now, you will notice the expanding flower buds will be a terminal inflorescence, i.e. at the end of a stem.

*R. latoucheae* will grow to 3' - 10' and blooms March to May, but is hardy only in Zones 9 and 10. It was named after Madame de la Touche, a French plant collector in 1898, but has also been called *R. wilsonae* by some taxonomists.



*R. latoucheae* at the Berkeley Botanic Garden



With such serious consideration, one would think they were judging a truss.



mmmmmm good



*R. arboreum* ssp. *delavayi* at Berkeley Botanic Garden

Newsletter photos are by the editor unless credited otherwise.

2014

**EVENT CALENDAR**

2015

**CHAPTER EVENTS:**

- January 8, 2015 Chapter Meeting - *Rhododendrons and Culture of Bhutan*  
Speakers: Wally & Kathy Reed from the Willamette Chapter ARS
- February 12 Chapter Meeting - *Looking for Rhododendrons in Tibet*  
Speaker: Bob Zimmerman from Chimacum Woods Rhododendron Nursery
- March 12 Chapter Meeting - *Companion Plantings at the RSBG*  
Speaker: Dennis Bottemiller, Propagator and Nursery Manager at RSBG  
**Annual Meeting with officer elections**
- April 25 Spring Rhododendron Show and Banquet, Hilton Garden Inn, 3:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
Program: *History of the Rhododendron Species Foundation - the First 50 Years*  
Speaker: Harold Greer  
Flower Show - Plant Auction - Raffle - Silent Auction - Dinner
- May 6-10 ARS Convention, Sydney-by-the-Sea, B.C. [www.2015rhodo.ca/](http://www.2015rhodo.ca/)
- May 9 Chapter Plant Sale, Lane County Fairgrounds, 9:00 - 2:00
- June ?? June Picnic, details TBA

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