

Rhododendrons South Australia

Australian Rhododendron Society Inc. South Australian Branch

Issue 81 - July 2014

Coming Events

Next Meeting, 16th July 7:45pm

The next meeting will feature Scott Frobister, who has been Curator of the Rhododendron Collection at MLBG for almost 2 years.

He has been a member of staff at Mount Lofty since completion of his traineeship. He has had a passion for Rhododendrons since being given a sponsored trip to China back in 1998. His talk will be a mix of what he currently does as Curator of Lothian section which is wider than just the Rhododendrons. It will include some of his Chinese experience and areas of interest to the Society, particularly in regards to the rhododendron collection.

Scott was a high school Science and Maths teacher prior to changing to a horticultural career.

Please 'bring a friend', a plate, and an item for the Trading Table.

Garden Visit, 13th September

Our garden visit to Lianne Healey's beautiful garden has been organised for Saturday 13 September 2014 at 2.00 pm. (members only) Address available from Lianne or Secretary.

Grant Memorial Lecture

Stephen Ryan of Dicksonia Rare Plants will be delivering our lecture this year on the evening of

Friday 15th August

at the

Coventry Library, Stirling

The lecture will be preceded by our AGM.



Stephen should prove to be a very entertaining and informative speaker. Please advertise this opportunity amongst your family and gardening friends.

<http://stephenryan.com.au/>

Tickets are still available, and can be purchased at the next meeting for \$20. The format will be AGM 6.30, drinks etc. at 7.00 pm, the lecture at 8.00pm

A BBQ lunch will be held at Forest Lodge for members only on the Saturday to chat with Stephen.

June Meeting

On a cold June evening 30 members attended the monthly meeting. The guest speaker was Matt Coulter, Curator of Plant Propagation for the BGA. He was a very enthusiastic speaker. Plant propagation has now been centralised to MLBG and he propagates between 20 and 50,000 plants per year. He discussed the methods they use and how it could be adapted to the home propagator, very informative.

He became extremely animated when he was discussing the success he had propagating the *Amorphophallus titanum* (Titan arum), an iconic plant for all botanic gardens. He has even devoted a blog to this plant which shows its astounding growth: click [here](#).

The night's raffle was won by Ann Matison.



Matt Coulter

From the Propagating Bench

Matt's Propagation Recommended sources of supply

Bunnings at Mile End have a good range of the Jiffy pots and holders that Matt Coulter recommended. These can also be purchased from Garden City Plastics at Wingfield. If anyone is interested please speak to Richard as it would be possible to deal through his account.



By Richard Illman

Ingredients for the cutting media; namely perlite and vermiculite are available in small quantities from Bunnings and larger orders can be purchased through Philip Smoult of Smoult Horticultural Supplies. Philip will deliver free of charge for orders over \$50. Richard is also prepared to make up quantities of cutting mix (Matt's recipe) and supply to members at cost. These would be available at the July meeting.

Rooting hormone gel is also available at Bunnings and comes in the different concentrations referred to in Matt's presentation.



Some of Matt's materials

Members are encouraged to have a go at propagating- it is most rewarding and could be another source of plants in the future for the trading table as well as our major plant sale not to mention to increase numbers of your favourite or rare plant. At this time of the year hardwood cuttings can be taken. Easy examples are roses, glory vine, wisteria, flowering currants, fuschias, daisies, and succulents. Now is also the time to graft dwarf ornamental conifers (pines, spruce, fir etc.)

If you have any questions have a chat to some of our resident propagators - Milton, Robert, Jeff, Richard, and Bill Voigt.



Milton Bowman

Librarian's Report

It is no surprise to tell you that the month of June has been both cold and wet. In fact, I have become a little “cabin feverish” during the month because every time that I try to get out and do a bit of cleaning up of debris blown out of the trees it starts to rain and drives the dogs and me back inside.

Forest Lodge has had 206mm this month and the year to date rainfall is 529mm, which is now close to average. The nights have been cold and quite a few days have struggled to get much over 7 degrees, which

makes for numb fingers when weeding.

All in all, the rhododendrons are loving it.

Whilst the rhododendrons still have several months before their main flowering, the Camellias have started and will be spectacular until the end of winter. If you are as careless as me the labels on your plants will have been misplaced and you will have forgotten what is where. Time to get out a book like Stirling Macoboy's “What Camellia is That” and try to identify what you have in your garden. Unfortunately Camellias are like Rhododendrons in that there are many named cultivars where the differences are so slight that one wonders whether a different name is warranted. Regardless of this it is a good feeling when you can actually put a name on a plant. Borrow a book and do some detective work.



“Camden Pink”, an old 19th C Australian cultivar recently identified in Forest Lodge, which is now a propagation project

Tissue Culture

Update : As the multiplication phase is progressing quite slowly we have decided to bring forward the rooting phase by producing a medium with a different chemical composition which is designed to promote the development of roots. We hope to be able to share our progress with members at future meetings and through the newsletter.

Bronwyn & Richard

Bloom of the month

This month's bloom of the month is an Encore Azalea Ruby, one of the two available in Australia as featured in Bron's article. Also features in this Newsletter header.



Encore Azalea Ruby

Trading Table

After some truly stellar trading table results of the previous two months, June's Trading Table was a little less abundant.

The takings for June were \$40.00, somewhat down our previous months.

Thank you to all those who contributed in June and we hope members continue with their generous contributions.

Bird of the Month

Pink-eared Duck



Malacorhynchus membranaceus

Also known as the Zebra Duck.

38-45 cm; span 58-72 cm. poorly named small duck with huge, square-tipped grey bill and strongly brown-barred flanks. Pale brown with darker upperparts, white forehead and face with clown-like dark brown patch over eye;

The pink 'ear spot' is almost invisible.

Perches on branches, logs; associates with other ducks.

Found on lakes, ponds and wetlands such as Laratinga at Mount Barker. Mainly at the top sewage ponds at Laratinga.

Nesting is stimulated by the drying and filling of pools that promote increased levels of organic material. In good years, large numbers of pink-eared ducks concentrate in shallow flood plains. However, when conditions do not meet specifications, reproduction may be completely curtailed.

Chris Thomas



By Bill Voigt

Culture Notes

"What you should be doing with your rhodies and garden this July"

Peach and nectarine trees should be sprayed, after pruning, with copper oxychloride to prevent "Leaf Curl", which can greatly affect the health of the tree and reduce the fruit crop. Flowering peaches also suffer from this fungus so they should be sprayed too.



Curl leaf on a Peach tree

Don't be too early in pruning roses, as late frosts can damage new growth which emerges after pruning. A well pruned rosebush should resemble the shape of an upturned umbrella, with an open centre.

Snails and slugs often attack the new shoots of chrysanthemums as they arise from the base of the plant, so be aware of this threat.

Flower spikes of helebore (orientalis) will be evident soon, so removing the old foliage will make the flowers more visible.

As well as the usual weeds, there will be seedling olives, ivies and cherry plums to remove before they can establish themselves.

Most nurseries have stocks of the dwarf cyclamen in now. These are good value as they can last many years in a partly shaded border, or in containers. Don't leave cyclamen indoors in heated rooms because they need a cool atmosphere.



Heuchera amythest

Furry caterpillars love cinerarias and can quickly destroy the foliage. They will also attack acanthus. Any insecticide will control them.

Heuchera in various colours is a popular plant now. The older clumps can easily be divided at this time.

Wet weather has arrived with a vengeance, so it is essential to check for any flooded areas which may have occurred because of blocked drains or build-up of fallen leaves.

Ericas thrive in the acid soil of the Hills. An excellent one to try is "Erica Ventricosa".



Erica Ventricosa

Yellowing of leaves on azaleas could be caused by poor drainage or soil becoming a less acidic. If poor drainage is not a problem apply some sulphate of iron to the soil.

When growing rhododendrons or azaleas in containers, always choose those containers which are outward sloping because that provides for easy removal when repotting, or planting out in the garden.

"Margaret Dunn" is a lovely rhododendron with apricot blooms, shaded pink, produced in November.

"Mauve Schryderii" is a mucronatum hybrid azalea that has a long flowering period. The mauve single blooms are fragrant. The foliage is quite sticky.

A beautiful small tree for a semi-shady position is "Crinodendron Hookerianum". Also known as the lantern tree, it bears red drop shaped flowers suspended on long stalks from horizontal branches.

The foliage of vireyas may have a reddish tint now, but this is not a disease, it is the effect of cooler weather. As long as they are protected from frosts they should survive the winter successfully.

Even though this is winter, flowering quince (Japonicas), flowering apricots (Prunus Mume) and almond blossom are already showing colour. Look forward to warmer days to come.



Margaret Dunn



Crinodendron Hookerianum

Overseas News Update

Biomesh- anti-insect screening

This is a follow-up to the article in the previous newsletter concerning vegetable netting suitable to screen out insects. This product, is supplied by [Redpath Australia](#) in 2 standard widths of 3 or 5.5 metres in standard rolls of 100 metres or it can be cut to length at approximately \$3.00 per square metre. The mesh size of 0.24 x 0.75 mm will screen out aphids, white fly and other small pests.

Bunnings also have an insect mesh available (isle 27) at a cost of \$20 for 4X4 metres. I am currently trialling this over some Brassicas.

Bronwyn



What's in the Nurseries?

I was recently passing Newman's Nursery (1361 North East Rd, Tea Tree Gully) and popped in to examine their stock of rhododendrons. Newman's Nursery is of course synonymous with camellias.

I have not been to Newman's for some time and had forgotten what a beautiful setting it is.

They had a few rhododendrons and I was pleased to see a scattering of 'hardy hybrids'.

They had a large, very healthy 'Pink Pearl', an ideal plant for the casual rhododendron grower. I spoke to an assistant and was informed that they get the majority of their rhododendrons stock in August.

With the combination of the beautiful setting, plant variety and the Topiary Café, one could easily while away a very enjoyable afternoon. I suggest High Tea in the café, which is served daily between 9:30 am and 3:00 pm, bookings are essential.

It is well worth the drive.

Their website is very comprehensive and contains a number of plant catalogues, particularly of note is the camellia catalogue www.newmansnursery.com.au.

Michelle

Pen-Lan Plants Winter Catalogue

Chris Thomas recommends this as an excellent little catalogue for members perusal. www.auricula.net.au



Newman's Entrance



Pink Pearl



Another view

Encore Azaleas

At the June meeting members were shown a recently purchased azalea from the “Bunnings Collection” that had claims of repeat flowering, drought tolerance and lace bug resistance. This was a sample of a group of azaleas known as the Encore Series and some of their developmental history is outlined below.

The Encore group of azaleas were introduced into Australia just before the quarantine ban on rhododendron imports came into effect. They are the result of an enthusiastic amateur azalea breeders' attempt to produce plants that would reliably flower twice a year. Robert Lee of Louisiana had obtained a wild collected plant of *Rhododendron oldhamii* from Taiwan that differed from other members of the species in that it flowered in autumn as well as spring. This plant has been used as the pollen parent in a number of crossings with other azaleas from the southern US that had a tendency toward autumn flowering.

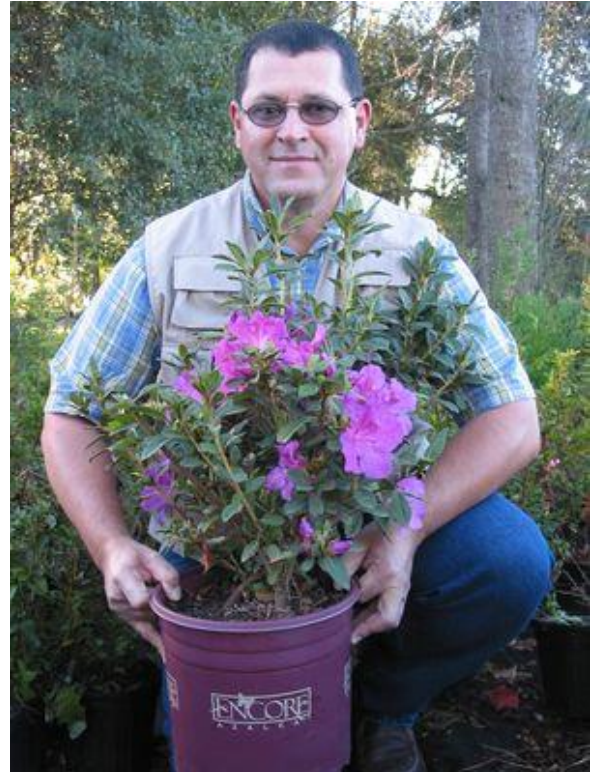
The selection of parents that came from a warmer climate has produced over 20 varieties of azalea that also tolerate a little more heat.

The *R. oldhamii* selection was named 'Fourth of July' and has also been found to be very resistant to lace bug probably due to the thick covering of hairs on the leaves. The cross with 'Georgia Giant' and 2 of its sports have also inherited this characteristic. The flowers are large and in a range of solid and bicolours and the plants are suggested to grow to over 1M x 1M in 10 years.

The varieties 'Twist' and 'Ruby' are available in Adelaide.

Richard

Lace Bug Resistant and Drought Tolerant Azaleas



Robert E. Lee (aka Buddy Lee)



Autumn Twist



Of interest to Gardeners

extract from the RHS The Garden Magazine June 2014

A former physician to HM The Queen has said he would like to prescribe “more gardening” to improve the nation’s health and make “huge potential savings” for the National Health Service. At a conference on urban greening he revealed that studies showed hospital gardens reduced the stress for patients and indoor ornamental plants in recovery rooms led to a drop in the use of painkillers. Sir Richard Thompson, President of the Royal College of Physicians, highlighted the role of gardening



itself in reducing stress levels and in helping treat a range of problems, from lung disease and disabilities associated with stroke to levels of obesity. Digging for half an hour burns 202 calories, the same as lifting weights and turning compost is even more strenuous at 300 calories per 30 minutes- more than running on a treadmill !

Lasting care for Rhododendrons

By David Millais. Millais Nurseries, UK. published with kind permission of David Millais.

So you chose your 'perfect' rhododendron, planted it with love and attention, and enjoyed it every year while it flowered and brightened up the garden every spring. Fast forward ten to fifteen years, and in your annual review of the garden you spot a messy looking plant, with dull pale green leaves, covered in bud blast, looking old and bony with hardly any vigour and a sparse habit, mingling with other plants in the border. Oh dear, what has gone wrong?

But this may not even be your own well tendered garden. Unfortunately there are all too many old parks and gardens open to the public where the plants need massive attention and a good sort out. Rhododendrons planted with care and enthusiasm are now languishing in overgrown collections where the original owners may have moved on, or where knowledgeable Head Gardeners have been replaced by contractors. Even in gardens benefiting from National Lottery funding, it



Overgrown Rhododendron

seems that the structure of the garden is more important than the original plants. I have seen mature rhododendrons, already stressed after years of growing under dense trees which nobody

would thin, butchered on height and consigned to a slow painful death by moving them under a dry, dense canopy of huge chestnuts. The original area was then cleared for a pseudo-authentic Union Jack garden!

With correct planting and maintenance, even some of the fussier dwarf rhododendrons should be good for more than 50 years, while hardy hybrids should perform for more than a century. However, as a little plant, fresh from the nursery, grows into a big plant, so its requirements change over the years, and it will need more and more nutrients and water. Likewise, over the course of time so the growing conditions surrounding the plant will change. Soon a larger plant can find itself exploring shadier places, boxed in by other plants. Alternatively, it can stick its head over the fence and find the full force of a cold or hot wind. And that is before allowing for unsuitable positions, blocked drains, dry summers and climate change!

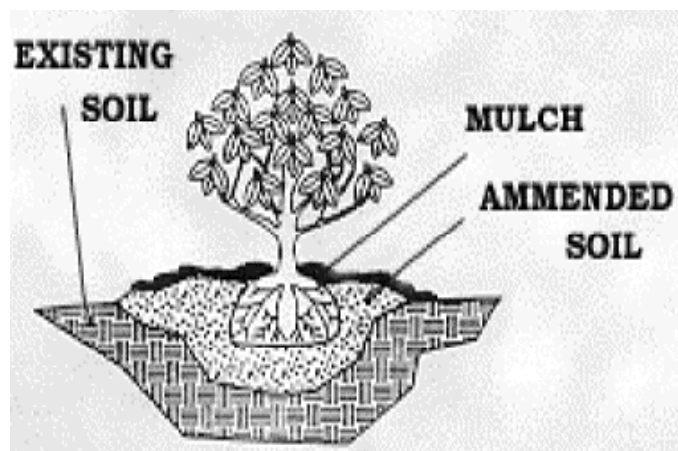
Soil Fertility

Everyone knows the basics for rhododendrons: well drained, moist acid soil (PH 5.0 - 6.0) with good humus content. Beyond that it gets a bit more interesting. John Ravenscroft, who has recently sold Bridgemere Nurseries in Cheshire, only ever grew one crop of rhododendrons on the same piece of land because they never performed so well after replanting in the same spot. Having thought about that, I tend to agree that the best crops we have had over the last 20 years have been when we planted in a fresh field. I do not know if this is a rhododendron allelopathy or a replant disease, but it does suggest that plenty of new compost should be used if replanting rhododendrons in the garden.

Whilst beneficial mycorrhizal fungi can be of great help in establishing conifers and trees, those currently available serve no use with rhododendrons. However, there are increasing numbers of products to help improve soil fertility using beneficial bacterial and fungal products such as humic compost, worm cast compost and tonics such as Revive with which we have had good results. We also use compost tea, but that needs fresh brewing and using within 24 hours.

Planting Depth

This may seem elementary, but rhododendrons are surface rooting. They have a wide but shallow rootball which rarely goes down deeper than the depth of a spade. That fine, fibrous rootball needs all the aeration it can get. It hates being buried, and does not like a weight of compost or soil on top. At an arboretum that ought to know better, I have seen huge "tree-pits" dug for rhododendrons with a mini-excavator, and had to tactfully tell the gardeners that they would be better digging a wide shallow hole than the graveyard they will end up with. A plant in a deep hole will settle even lower, and end up too wet and buried in



Planting Guide

leaf litter. For examples of successful planting, take a look at the Bruns Rhododendron Park in Northern Germany, or the accompanying picture of wet hillside garden in Perthshire to see rhododendrons almost placed on the surface with compost mounded around. At the RHS Wisley Gardens, Colin Crosbie, Curator of RHS garden Wisley, has spent many winters on Battleston Hill gently lifting up sick plants and replanting at a higher level where they had been planted too deeply after the storms of 1987 and 1990. The results have been outstanding and have contributed to the huge improvements in the collection over the last few years.

Following on from this logic, care must be taken not to mulch too deeply on top of the rootball: several years' worth of mulching with 50mm compost or bark chippings can soon bury a plant. Evidence of this can be seen when branches emerge from the soil in places other than a single stem. Occasionally I have seen weed control fabrics underneath a mulch surrounding rhododendrons, and the results have always been very disappointing. I believe they contribute to poor aeration, upset moisture distribution with wet and dry spots, and they prevent new rhododendron roots from developing right where they need to: into the surface mulch and leaf litter.



Rootball

Spacing

Perhaps as a Nurseryman I should not complain, but overplanting is easily done. It is hard to imagine that a 3 year-old hardy hybrid will be occupying a space 2m x 2m in 10 years time. Nobody wants to see great patches of bare soil with space for weeds to develop in a new border, but a lot of planting is too close, and although it really needs thinning and moving after 5 - 6 years, few people do that. A common moan amongst rhododendron enthusiasts is that they don't have room for any more treasures, but go to High Beeches Garden in Sussex to see plants on a good spacing, where they have room to develop and show their true characteristics. Other benefits include much better airflow around the plants, and far less risk of Powdery Mildew and other fungal diseases.

When planting a hardy hybrid near a wall or fence, remember to plant it at least a metre away to allow it to form a well balanced plant, or else it will forwards and collapse in later years. If planting near a hedge, then it should be at least 2 - 3 metres away to allow for the hedge to grow and be trimmed. Unfortunately rhododendrons don't put up a good fight.

Bumblebee Plight

Europe's Bumblebee Plight raises pollination concerns

Habitat loss due to increasing temperatures, long periods of drought and the intensification of agriculture are behind the near extinction of almost a quarter of Europe's bumblebee species according to a study for the IUCN's red list of Threatened Species.

The research found 46 percent of Europe's 68 bumblebee species are in decline, with 24 percent in danger of disappearing altogether. Across Europe, bumblebees and other pollinators contribute more than 22 billion euros to the agricultural market.

Are we in a similar situation in Australia?



Insect Hotels

Our society explored the concept of insect hotels in 2013 and some success has been experienced in attracting some of our solitary bees. Recommendations from the RHS website section entitled "Bug Hotel" and "Wildlife gardening" include the use of short lengths of pipe or plastic bottles with the base cut off and the insertion of straws, hollow plant stems or bamboo sections.

Non-absorbent florist's foam is an alternative to drilling holes in wood. The nesting contents need to be replaced in spring. The insect homes should be sited in sheltered spots out of wind, rain and direct sunlight and at about 1-2 metres from the ground?



Magnolia at Mt Barker in June



This photo sent in by Chris Thomas of a Magnolia flowering unusually early. I have noticed that ours have also started flowering, Dave.

Bill Voigt has seen flowering quince, flowering apricots, and almond blossom.

A sign of climate change?