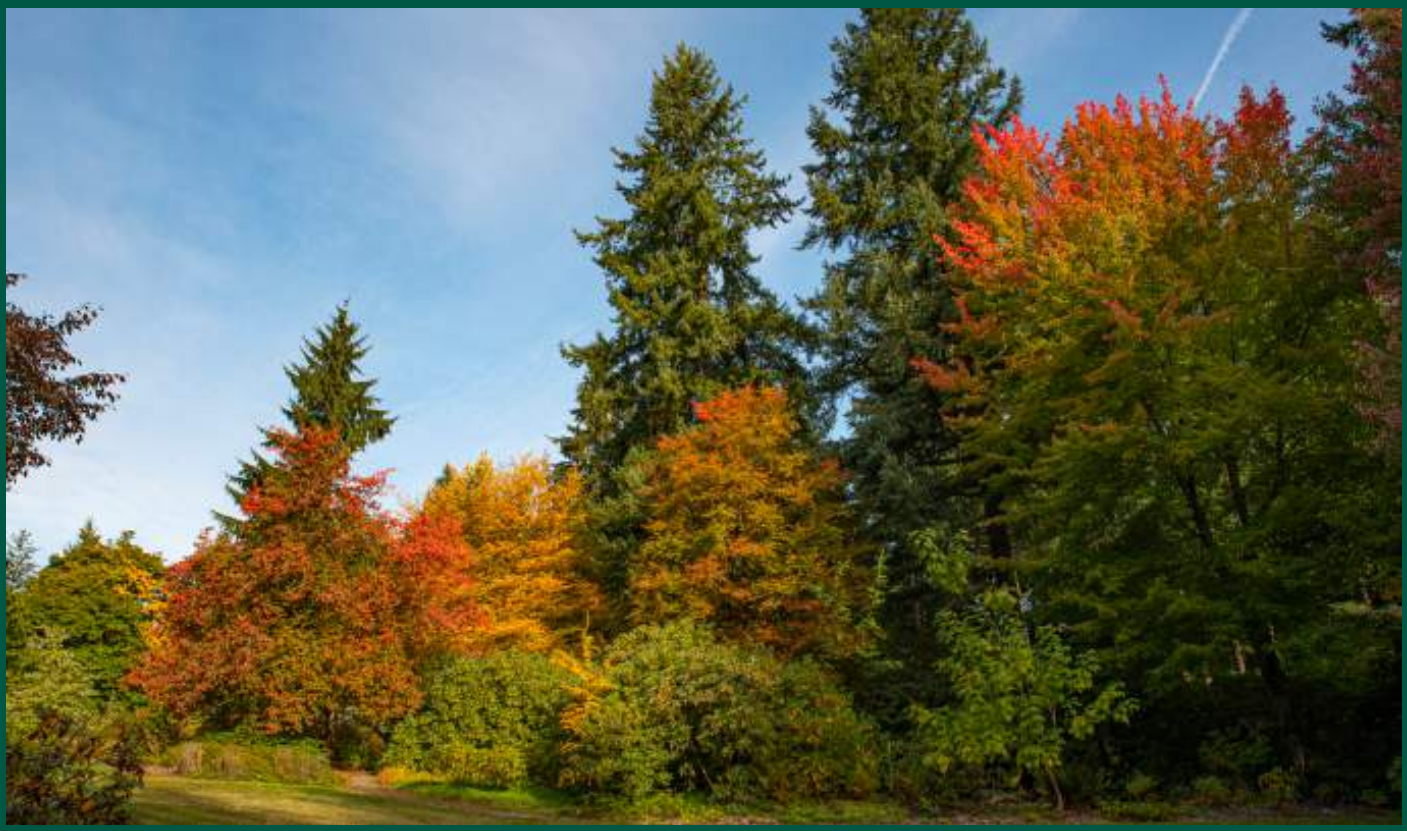
# RHODODENDRON
## SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

# FALL NEWSLETTER
## VOLUME 46, NUMBER 3



# President's Corner by Ian Walker

We recently lost Harold Greer, who passed away on August 10, 2021. One of our long-term Members, Harold was involved with the Rhododendron Species Foundation from the very early days when the garden started at Pleasant Hill, Oregon. Harold was a major contributor, author and presenter. Our best wishes go out to his spouse, Nancy, during this time of grief. Harold will be greatly missed.

On the good news side, we recently received a wonderful gift of property from a couple of rhododendron enthusiasts who wished to provide support for the mission and goals of the Rhododendron Species Foundation in this way.

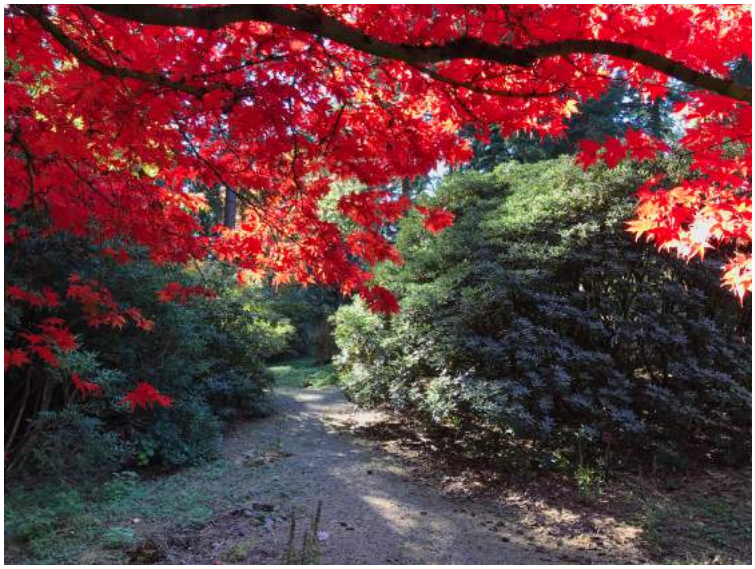
The Executive Committee of the Board of Directors has established two committees to help us update some of our programs. Mike Stewart is heading up the Membership Committee with the goal of developing recommendations as to how we can better recognize Members for their various contributions and how we can grow our Membership. Chip Muller is heading up a By-Laws Committee with the goal of reviewing our by-laws and recommending any modifications.

The By-Laws effort is a project which should be done periodically, as the purpose and responsibility of the Board is governance and audit. This includes establishing and confirming the mission of the organization and assuring that the organization is accomplishing its mission as described in the Articles of Incorporation by developing and auditing policies which guide the operation of the organization and are compliant with all applicable laws. Let me know if you have any thoughts or suggestions!

In November we will be beginning our Fall Fundraising Campaign. Fortunately, we had a good year for plant sales and this has helped with ongoing expenses. However, we need to increase our Endowment Fund to smooth out the 'bumps' between a good year and a not so good year, so your support is very welcome.

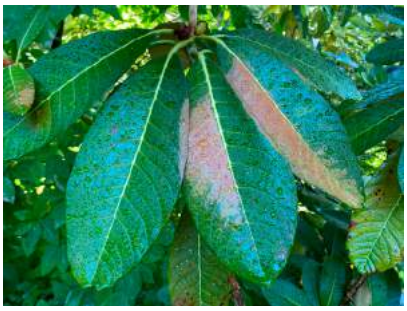
Our primary concerns now are about COVID and forest fires, so stay safe and spend time in the garden!

Ian Walker, Board President
ianwalker-rhodyfdn@att.net



Right: *Acer palmatum* var. *heptalobum*

# Executive Director's Report by Steve Hootman



Above: Sunburn on big leaf rhododendron

Here at the RSBG we are welcoming the first signs of autumn as we come to the end of what has turned out to be one of the hottest and driest summers on record for our region. In late June we suffered through several days of record-breaking high temperatures - up to 108$^{0}$ F! Even if this freakish event had happened in late July or August, the time of year when we normally have our hottest temperatures, it would have been disastrous. But this event happened in late June, just as many of the rhododendrons and other plants were flushing this year's new growth. The late-emerging big-leaf species were hit the hardest, with species such as *sinogrande*, *falconeri* and *rex*, all just pushing out their magnificent huge leaves, suffering damage. The timing and intensity of this weather event was so damaging, especially further inland and away from the coast, that the new growth even on the native trees such as our dominant Douglas firs was burned and severely damaged. The trees to our east look as if somebody had taken a giant blow torch to them. I have never seen anything like it.

All-in-all however, with all hands-on deck, we ran the overhead irrigation and the mist systems just enough to try and keep the plants hydrated and as cooled down as possible without over-saturating the soil or drowning the plants in their containers. Due to the efforts of our diligent staff, the garden came through this event in surprisingly good shape considering the dire circumstances. While there is a bit of leaf curl and some burn here and there, we were all pleased at how well the plants survived such a freakish and unprecedented event.

With rain in the forecast this weekend, we can all breathe a sigh of relief as we slowly head into our rainy season. Thank you for your continued interest and support of our mission.

**FALL FOLIAGE FESTIVAL & PLANT SALE**

FREE

On Saturday, October 17 and Sunday, October 18, we look forward to seeing you for this beloved annual event! We are delighted to welcome four featured nursery vendors: Courting Frogs, Botanica, Lee Farm and Nursery, and DeGro Flower & Garden Co. The festival includes planting demos, fall color tours, mini Rhody Care 101 workshops, free cider and cookies, and activities for kids. Of course, be sure to stop by to shop our sale section, where we'll have a wide selection of rhododendrons and perennials available at 50% off. See the lineup on our website.

# Species Profile: *Rhododendron pachytrichum* by Emily Joseph

As described by Ernest Wilson in 1903 as one of "the most common and widely dispersed species in western Sichuan" (Davidian, 1989, p.138) *Rhododendron pachytrichum* remains relatively uncultivated if not elusive in North America, despite its ease and beauty. Though often compared to its close relative *R. strigillosum*, the species is surely worthy of its own garden merits.

In form, a mature *R. pachytrichum* grows into a well-branched, rounded shrub or small tree, up to 20 feet (recorded at up to 40 feet in its native habitat), but probably closer to 5 feet in 10 years in the garden. With oblong to oblanceolate leaves and brown shaggy hairs on its branches, petioles, and lower leaf midribs, the species often resembles a shorter leaved, softer haired version of *R. strigillosum*. Hence, the specific epithet *pachytrichum*, meaning thick (*pachy*) hairs (*trichum*; trichomes) and the native moniker *rong mao du juan* meaning "tomentose rhododendron." The early appearance of spring blooms and trusses of 7-17 campanulate flowers, mimic the inflorescences of *R. strigillosum* as well. Differing in color, the blooms open in early March or April from magenta buds to a pale rose-pink or white blushed pink, revealing a deep maroon blotch within the corolla. The early flowers can be susceptible to frost damage which marks the species as somewhat fleeting in flower. Yet a fine-flowering form of *R. pachytrichum*, with its succession of soft rosy watercolor-washed blooms, is a welcome and charming sight in the garden during a dreary March.

Above: ***Detail of hairs on R. pachytrichum***

In the wild, it grows throughout the mountains of southwestern Sichuan and northeastern Yunnan, at approximately 7,000-11,000 feet (2,100-3,400m). This distinct altitudinal zone is comprised of mixed deciduous trees and *Abies* forests, continuing upwards to the subalpine cliffs. Here the cool-temperate climate is influenced heavily by monsoon rainfall with near constant dense humidity and mist. Wilson recalls such a scene on Omei Shan (Mount Emei),

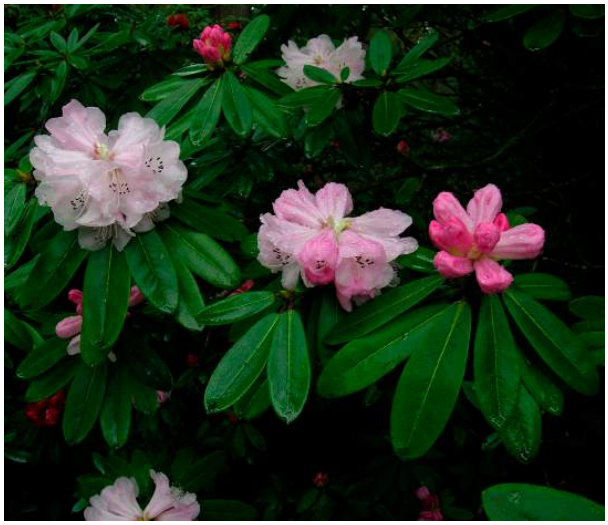
> *On clearing a dense thicket and emerging on to a narrow ridge, 6100 feet above sea-level, an extraordinary view presented itself. Above towered limestone cliffs nearly a mile high; below spread valleys and plains filled with a dense fleecy cumulus, through which the peaks of mountains peered like rocky islands from the ocean's bed; to the westward the mighty snowclad ranges of the Tibetan border…The contrast between the floral zones was equally startling and impressive. Below, until lost in the clouds, was a mass of rich, somber green vegetation; above were autumnal tints of every hue, from pale yellow to the richest shades of crimson, relieved by clumps of dark green.* (p. 247)

Though introduced to cultivation by Wilson, *R. pachytrichum* was later reintroduced in 1980 by Keith Rushforth (KR198) from the very mountain Wilson depicted. Prior to cultivation, the species was first documented in 1886 by French botanist, Adrien Franchet. Never having visited China himself, Franchet studied herbarium specimens from missionary and naturalist, Jean Pierre Armand David, sent to the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturell in Paris. Franchet and David were captivated by the flora of the Tibetan frontier and endeavored to scientifically catalogue the botanical treasures.

From section Ponticum and subsection Maculifera, *R. pachytrichum* has close relatives in *R. longesquamatum*, *R. maculiferum*, *R. morii*, and *R. strigillosum*, among several others. In fact, the species is known to hybridize in the wild with *R. calophytum*, *R. wiltonii*, *R. oreodoxa*, and *R. strigillosum*, the latter producing what Chamberlain describes as a possible intermediate *Rhododendron pachytrichum* var. *monosematum* (Cox, 1997). This naturally occurring hybrid was formerly referred to as *R. monosematum*.

Hardy to -5°F, vigorous, and easy to grow in light shade, *R. pachytrichum* would be an excellent addition to any corner of the garden in need of a splash of early spring color. This species is best grown in well-draining soil with consistent moisture. In the misty gray of early March, with weather much like that of its native habitat, *R. pachytrichum* shines. The RSBG is now offering a new collection, **CDHM#14556**, grown in the nursery from wild collected seed gathered by Peter Cox, Kelly Dodson, Steve Hootman, and Sue Milliken on an expedition to China in 2012.

**Accessions in the Collection of the RSF:**
**1965/290** Younger Botanic Garden
**1965/389** Bodnant Gardens
**1970/191** W#1435: Lamellen (E.W.M. Magor)
**1995/228** JS#9001: June Sinclair
**1999/028** JS#9001: June Sinclair
**2002/478** DJHC#806: Dan Hinkley
**2014/156** JN#546: Jens Nielsen
**2014/247** JN#546: Jens Nielsen
**2018/154** JN#546: Jens Nielsen
**2018/186** JN#546: Jens Nielsen
**1976/164** Bodnant Gardens, *R. pachytrichum* var. *monosematum*



Above: ***Rhododendron pachytrichum***

**References Consulted:**


Bretschneider, E. (1898). *History of European Botanical Discoveries in China* (Vol. I). Sampson Low, Marston and Company.

Cox, P.A., & Cox, K.N.E. (1997). *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species.* Glendoick Publishing.

Davidian, H.H. (1989). *The Rhododendron Species: Elepidotes Part 1* (Vol. II). Timber Press.

Wilson, E.H. (1971). *China-Mother of Gardens.* Benjamin Blom, Inc.

Young, J., & Chong, L., Trans. (1980). *Rhododendrons of China: Species Descriptions and Key from Volume III, Iconographia Cormophytorum Sinicorum Beijing Botanical Research Institute of Academia Sinica, 1974.* Binford & Mort.

# Hypertufa Planters by Will Clausen

**Why to make them**

Finding a spot in your garden for small plants can be tricky. If you are limited by space, lack appropriate growing conditions in the ground, or have lots of large and rambunctious plants in your garden, planters can provide a haven. Even if you have suitable in-ground planting areas, planters provide a way to showcase favored plants and give them specialized attention. Of course, there are all sorts of planters but for a rustic look that is well suited to small alpine and woodland gems, hypertufa is a good choice.

Hypertufa is a non-natural rock meant to mimic some of the qualities of tufa, a highly porous limestone rock prized by rock gardeners because it provides an ideal home for finicky alpine plants. Tufa is a naturally occurring and somewhat uncommon rock, expensive and difficult to source. Hypertufa by contrast is made of materials readily available at any garden and hardware store, and is comparatively cheap. Like tufa, hypertufa is porous and alkaline, and is also relatively lightweight. For these reasons, hypertufa is a great substitute even if it does not quite compare to the real thing.

**How to make them**

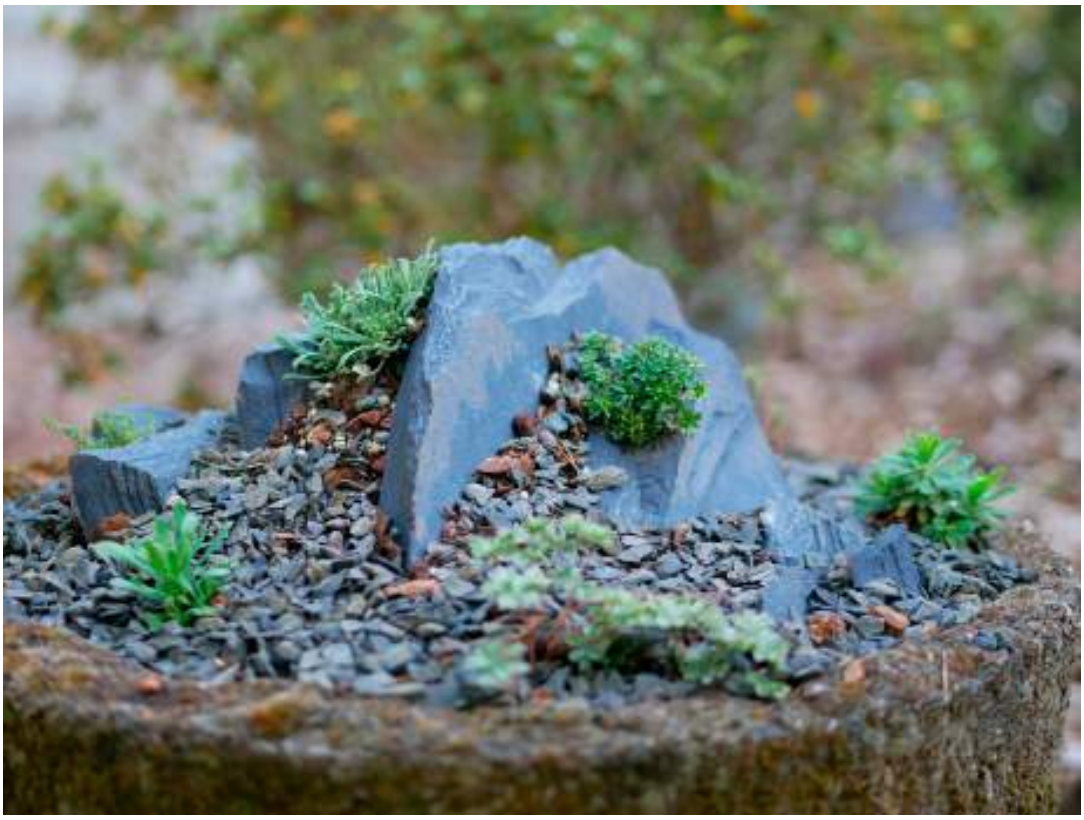
Making hypertufa planters is a straightforward and fun project. There are plenty of resources on the internet with endless formulations for creating the perfect hypertufa planter, so I will just briefly cover the basics. Hypertufa is a type of concrete and requires three ingredients: Portland cement, lightweight aggregate, and water. A common recipe that I have used calls for two parts Portland cement, three parts peat moss, three parts vermiculite, and water. Coconut coir can be substituted for peat moss, and perlite for vermiculite. I have read that some people add sand, but this will create a heavier planter with less pore space for water storage, air exchange, and root anchorage. Adding a handful of concrete fibers into the mix to add strength is optional but probably a good idea, and for very large planters you might even use a wire mesh support frame embedded within the hypertufa itself. Whatever your recipe, you want to combine the dry ingredients in a wheelbarrow or other large container until they are evenly mixed. Do this in a suitable location either outside or in an indoor workspace. Protect your skin and lungs with latex gloves and a mask. Having a cement mixer would be convenient especially for making large planters, but it's a better workout to use your arms. Slowly add water to the dry materials and mix until you get to a cottage cheese-like consistency. You want the mixture to be very moist but not quite wet. Next you will need to pack the mixture tightly into a mold, which can be as simple as a cardboard box. The mold can also be complex so long as you can remove it from the set hypertufa later. Alternatively, you can pack the mixture around the inside or outside of a pot, or kitty litter box. You will want the mixture to be between 1-2" thick all the way around and have at least one drainage hole in the bottom, but more than one for larger planters. Once you are satisfied with the thickness and compactness, cover the planter in plastic and leave it in a dark, cool area to cure for a few weeks. After a couple of days, you can remove the planter from the mold and use a wire brush to give the planter more texture if you wish. Portland cement is alkaline to the point of being caustic, and although some alkalinity in the material will be a benefit to future plants, it's best to wash down the planter several times after it is fully cured but before putting it to use so that some of the lime leaches out.

**How to plant them**

Once the hypertufa is cured and ready to go, it's important to get an appropriate growing medium in the planter. If you're planting alpines, you will want lean soil with excellent drainage, achieved by incorporating plenty of sand and other grit with a good loamy soil. For a woodland planter, use a richer soil with more organic matter but still provide sufficient drainage. It was once common practice to put a layer of stones or broken terracotta on the bottom of the planter to help with drainage, but current thought says to fill the planter entirely with your soil mixture. This has been found to provide better drainage. Set any desired decorative rocks or bits of wood well into the growing medium. Besides adding to the visual appeal or the planter, large rocks or decaying wood provide important benefits to the plants, giving nutrients and creating microclimates. Now you can plant away in any fashion that you like, but make sure to plant things a little bit high so that you can top dress without smothering your plants. Use crushed rock or coarse organic matter, again depending on the type of planter you want to create. This will help keep down weeds, hold in moisture while reducing soil temperature, and importantly for many alpines, help to keep the crowns of the plants dry. It's a good idea to have your planter raised off the ground to prevent worms and unwanted insects from entering through the drainage hole.

**Hypertufa at RSBG**

Here at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, you will find hypertufa planters on the Terrace in front of the Rutherford Conservatory. Most of these are planted with classic and obscure rock garden species from *Saxifraga*, *Salix*, and *Cassiope* among other genera. Three of our planters are placed out in full sun but are taken under cover during winter for protection from our incessant rain. In these you will find such plants as *Eriogonum ovalifolium*, *Lewisia columbianum*, and *Asplenium ceterach*. The rest of the hypertufa planters are in a spot that receives plenty of shade. This makes a nice home for some plants that are accustomed to slightly less sun-exposed areas in the wild like *Saxifraga oppositifolia* and *Androsace sarmentosa*. One of these shaded planters is filled with gesneriads, which are planted in a richer mix and receive a little more water than the others. One small planter in more sun is home to a few pitcher plants (*Sarracenia*), and these we keep continually wet in their peat rich soil. Our hypertufa planters were planted in the spring of 2020 and for the most part the plants seem to have settled in nicely.



Vancouver Island Master Gardeners

Affiliated with Master Gardeners Association of BC


Nanaimo Rhododendron Society

NRS

# Fall Into Gardening

Our friends at Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society and Nanaimo Rhododendron Society, in partnership with Vancouver Island Master Gardeners, are hosting an exciting programming series this October.

ARS 2021 Fall Conference Fall into Gardening Schedule:
Saturday and Sunday, October 23 and 24, 2021 at NO COST!

Four presentations each day starting at:
9 am Pacific - 12 noon Eastern – 1:00 pm Atlantic – 5 pm UK – 6 pm CET
All presentations will be recorded and available for our members in NZ, Australia & Asia to view at a convenient time.

Saturday Speakers and Topics:

- Hartwig Schepker, Germany - Sichuan: A Plantsman's Paradise
- Shannon Berch, BC Canada - Living Soils
- David Sellars, BC Canada - From Rhododendrons to Rock Gardening
- Don Hyatt, Virginia USA - A Walk in the Woods

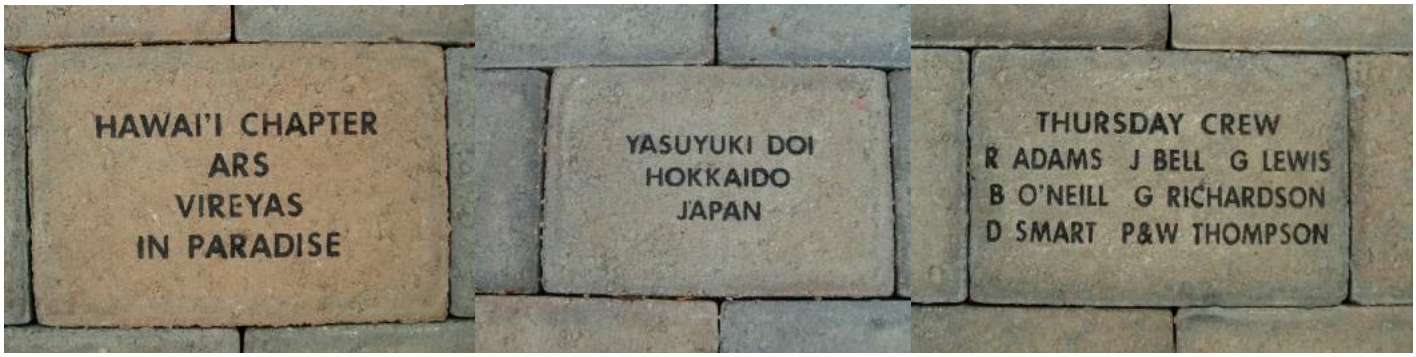
Sunday Speakers and Topics:

- David Millais, UK - Conservation of Heritage Rhododendrons
- Linda Chalker-Scott, WA USA - Landscape Mulches: The Good, the Bad, and the Just Plain Ugly
- Richard Dionne, QC - Growing Rhododendrons in Québec's Harsh Winters
- Don Wallace, CA USA - Fragrant Rhododendrons

**To sign up, please register using Mailchimp at:**
**https://mailchi.mp/9151e79e2a98/fall-conference-2021**

## Engraved Paver Program

Make your mark on garden history with a paver! The RSBG offers engraved paver stones with customized messages. Whether you're commemorating a loved one, celebrating a birthday, or making a special spot for your family to revisit, our engraved pavers are a meaningful and unique gift. Pavers cost as low as $100 and are located in the Rutherford Conservatory or just outside of the conservatory on the Terrace. Space is limited - visit our website today to create one of your own.

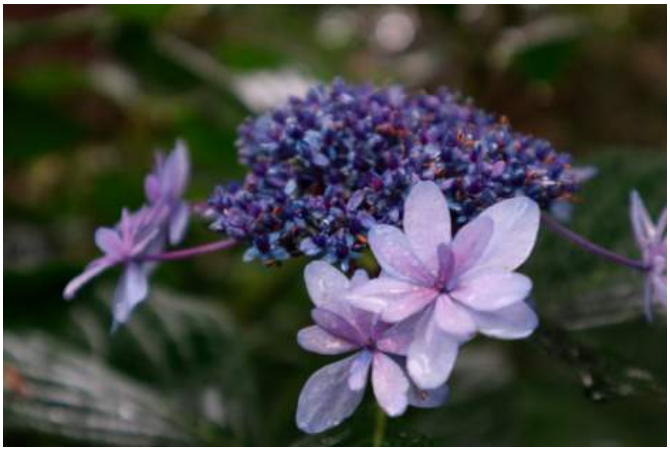


# Internship Review by Ellie Richmond

Hi, my name is Ellie. I have been the intern at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden since March. I have been gardening for a long time, mostly at home with my mom who has had me toting watering cans behind her since I was three. Strangely, when I decided to go to college, I took a risk and followed my passion for film to Montana State University. While taking film classes I also took some horticulture classes with an eye for making that my minor. Horticulture has always been a passion of mine and eventually I came to the realization that I don't particularly like art films and that I would be better off focusing my college career on horticulture and ecology. I came back to Washington at the end of the semester and realized that if I wanted to get a degree in ecology, that it would be easier to get it in Washington (where I know what the plants are called and they're not covered in snow for half the year). After coming home, I had to take a gap semester to work on switching from an art major to a science major. Since I had the time and the curiosity to explore horticulture, when I saw the job posting for the internship, I applied with great enthusiasm.

I knew how to garden before I started at the RSBG, but Latin names and plant identification were still a little new to me. In Montana I took a class on identifying woody ornamentals (trees and shrubs) and was the best student in the class. However, in Montana there are only so many things that grow in a place where -20 degrees Fahrenheit is common in winter. When I came home to Washington, I realized we have such a unique ecosystem here and so many plants that just do not grow elsewhere. One example is the Bigleaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) which I have growing as a street tree by my driveway. I thought they would be everywhere, but they are native only to the Pacific Northwest. We also have native rhododendrons which are almost impossible to grow in much of the interior of the country where the winters get so cold.

When I started at the rhododendron garden, my first task on a wet Monday morning in March was plant distribution. Which is a fancy way of saying wrapping plants in paper and sticking them in shipping boxes. I enjoyed distribution, which is a task I did almost every Monday until the end of spring shipping. My next task that day was potting. I remember by that time the light rain had become a downpour and I was very glad the potting benches were covered. It took me longer than a day to learn how to pot companion plants and then rhododendrons properly. I realized that I had to be more precise in the professional horticulture world than I was in my garden at home.



Above: A *Hydrangea* blooming in August

Another task that requires a lot of precision is pricking out seedlings and moving them up from their little seed pots to flats where they can grow. In the spring this seems like a never-ending task, and I found it very satisfying to prick out countless seedlings and stick them into neat rows. As the season wore on and the plastic was taken off the hoop houses, I started sticking cuttings. I really enjoy working with cuttings, it's something I also do at home. It's one of those tedious and time-consuming but meditative tasks that I enjoy.

On my second day, I was out in the garden, where I was put to a task that is literally endless: weeding. Everyone with a garden has weeds (whether you want to admit it or not) and they just keep growing unless you pull them out (and in some cases that only delays them for a few weeks). Weeding has occupied many of my days, and while it's not my favorite thing, I don't hate it and sometimes it is nice to zone out and weed for a couple of hours. Of course, it's not ALL weeding.

In the spring, we did seed crosses on some of the rhododendrons and worked on mulching and planting Fortune's Way (which is the new area down by the meconopsis meadow). Working in the garden is rewarding, watching plants grow and establish over the months as the seasons change. Eventually the plants start to bloom and then the deadheading starts. In a garden populated by rhododendrons, there are a lot of flowerheads that turn into seed pods as spring turns into summer. Now in late summer, there is mostly weeding to do as the garden is busy growing and the cleanup work has yet to begin. For me, it has been amazing to see the garden change over the two seasons that I have been here, from the damp and cold spring to the hot and dry summer. Even in this wacky time that we live in, plants still grow, and the seasons move on.

These past few months have been a real learning experience, both about horticulture and for me, a real look into what I want to do in the future. With Covid and everything else going on in my own life (which has been quite eventful this year) it has been refreshing to have somewhere that I can do my job and not feel overly stressed by everything going on in the outside world. As I leave my internship, here at the end of August, I find myself both sad that it is over and excited to see what my future holds and what I can do with my new knowledge.

## Restricted Contributions- 6/21/2021 - 8/31/2021

Internship Program:

ARS Kitsap Chapter

## Extraordinary Gifts - 6/21/2021 - 8/31/2021

Rex and Jeanine Smith

## General Operations - 6/21/2021 - 8/31/2021

AmazonSmile Foundation
ARS Juan de Fuca
Eiberg, Hans
Kang, J. H. John
Mathes, Richard
Niihara, Shuichi
Preble, Rosalie
Stowell, Scott
Van Winkle, Michael

## Spring Fund Drive Supporters

Chapen, Carol F.
Dunning, Robert A.
Enns/Hall
Enticknap, Ruth
Kast, Barry
Langham, Suzanne
Mangels, William & Ann
McLean, Robert & Katherine
Parker, John
Petersen, Robb
Rogers, Stewart
Smith, Beverly
Soule, Ramona
The Boeing Company
Thompson, Diane and Paul
Willard, Kenneth & Loretta

## Legacy Circle

Anne Guelker
Deena Henkins
Donald King
Jean Muir
Peter Norris
Ian Walker
Keith White

# RSF Executive Committee and Board

**Executive Committee:**
President: Ian Walker
2nd Vice President: Charles Muller
Treasurer: Robert Gust
Secretary: Garratt Richardson
Immediate Past President: Sean Rafferty

**EC Members-At-Large:**
Anne Gross
Jean Muir
Peter Norris
Chris Southwick
Mike Stewart
Paul Thompson

**RSF Board of Directors:**

Rollo Adams
Chris Brickell
Al Campbell
David Chamberlain
Ken Cox
Susan Davies
Anne Gross
Robert Gust
Don Hyatt
Douglas Justice
William Lindeman
Stephen McCormick
Jean Muir
Charles Muller
Peter Norris
Tom Nosella
Sean Rafferty
Garratt Richardson
Joseph & Joanne Ronsley
Charles Sale & Margaret Charleton
Hartwig Schepker
Don Smart
Valerie Soza
John Stephens
Mike Stewart
Diane Thompson
Paul Thompson
Ian Walker
Tim Walsh
Garth Wedemire
Keith White
Martin Wilkie

**Board of Directors - Honorary:**

Peter Cox
Honore Hacanson
Patricia McDowell
June Sinclair
Herbert Spady
Philippe de Spoelberch
George Weyerhaeuser