

Rutherford Conservatory Updates Ahead

By Rutherford Conservatory Horticulturist Kim Farmer

For those of you who have been visiting the RSBG for some time, it may be hard to believe that the conservatory first opened 16 years ago in September of 2010. Since that time, many plants have grown and flourished in their new home, while others have lived shorter lives. Among the rhododendrons that have done well, there are those that have done so well, in fact, that they have become tall enough to reach the height limits of the glass roof and/or the protective shade equipment. This can be considered a great success for their growth and their survival! However, we can only hope and assume that their growth will continue, and rather than severely prune them, we will be relocating some of these rhododendrons to a new home at the Humboldt Botanical Garden in California. There they can continue their life and growth in the open air and freeze safe Cali climate.

While it will be hard to see these beautiful specimens go, the sharing of our collection of species rhododendrons aligns with our mission at RSBG to grow, preserve and protect endangered species and share and them across the world in suitable public gardens and environments.

These changes are tentatively planned for early spring this year and so you may see some of that process and resulting vacant spots – which we will happily replant with younger plants that we have grown either from seed or cuttings here in our RSBG Nursery.

The Rutherford Conservatory is one the many highlights of this garden and features *Vireya* and *Maddenia* rhododendrons and companion plants that are native to subtropical and tropical locations around the world and are therefore in need of climate protection in the winter and cooling protection in the drier hot parts of our summers. You may notice while visiting in winter that it is not hot and steamy as is typical of most conservatories. Our vireyas prefer the cooler temperatures that their native high altitude cloud forest environments would naturally provide for them – so it will be warmer than outside but not too hot!

We encourage you to check out the conservatory on your next visit as you will always find something in bloom. This month a spectacular standout is *Rhododendron chrysodoron* with it's vibrant chartreuse-yellow blooms and keep your eye out for new buds forming on other plants that will open later in the spring or early summer.