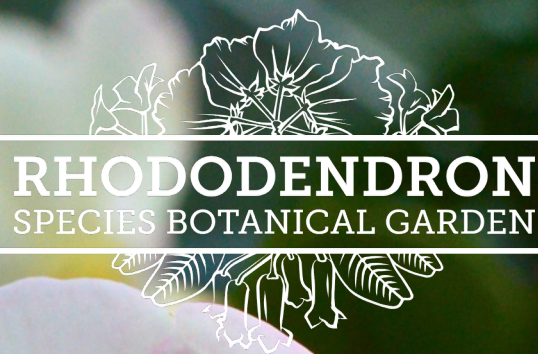




FALL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 51, NUMBER 2

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Rhododendron superbum



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Thanking the donors who help our mission thrive.

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Rhododendron hippophaeoides



What an unusual summer it has been here in the Puget Sound region. By unusual, I mean normal. Let me explain. Just within the context of my time in this region, dating back to 1992, the typical summer would start off rather damp and cool, generally not really drying out and warming up until July 5. I am not joking. It would often be that specific. It is a “thing” here in the region. After that, the mornings were usually overcast or foggy, clearing off right around noon with sun and mild, pleasant temperatures for the rest of the day. It rarely hit 90°F and even then, just for a day or two in late July or early August.

Over at least the last decade or so, that has all changed. We now rarely have the overcast mornings that used to keep the temperatures from climbing all day, and we regularly hit 90°F or worse many times each summer, often even in June. This was the first summer in many years that felt like the summers of old, and it was glorious. Of course, this is all anecdotal from my personal point of view, although many friends and coworkers mirror these thoughts.

This August was the first large-scale blooming of the magnificent new species *Rhododendron magniflorum*. This is a Jens Nielsen & Remi Nielsen introduction (NN#0959) from western Guizhou Province in China. They found only a single specimen of this rare taxon growing isolated on a grassy hill, so this species should be considered extremely endangered in the wild.

It is a close ally of the more widespread and familiar *R. glanduliferum* and, in my opinion, should probably be considered as just an outlying form of that species, albeit with supposedly larger leaves and flowers and with only five lobes on the flowers (vs. seven or eight on *glanduliferum*).

Based upon my own observations, however, the flowers and leaves of *magniflorum* are a virtual match in size with those of *R. glanduliferum*, at least those plants grown from the type location in NE Yunnan (SEH#174). Note that both the Yunnan form of *glanduliferum* and *magniflorum* have much larger leaves and flowers than the Guizhou form of *glanduliferum* (PW#s), which flowers much earlier in the season, typically in early June.



Rhododendron magniflorum (NM#0959)



Rhododendron glanduliferum (SEH#174)

Executive Director's Report (cont.)

by Steve Hootman

It appears that the species description was based upon a rather poor “type” specimen - the herbarium specimen from which the species is first described, and so probably should never have been named as a distinct taxon. Whatever we want to call it, this is a stunning *Rhododendron* with large and bold foliage, a strong and upright growth habit, and beautiful, large, and very fragrant white flowers in late summer.

Indeed, this species is still flowering as I write in early September and is now overlapping in bloom with the closely related and even more spectacular *R. faithiae*, which is typically at peak bloom in mid-September in our climate and which wraps up our outdoor *Rhododendron* blooming season here in the garden.

Evening in the Garden

by Harriet Newhouse

On August 8, members gathered for an intimate and memorable Evening in the Garden featuring more than a dozen rare auction plants. Each guest also went home with a rhododendron of their own, *Rhododendron petrocharis*, as a special gift.

Mike Stewart and Steve Hootman partnered as auctioneers, sharing stories, insights, and horticultural history as they introduced each plant. Auction highlights included *Schefflera shweliensis*, offered for the first time in North America; the beloved *Rhododendron cardiobasis*; a special Warren Berg *Rhododendron* hybrid with beautiful cinnamon-colored indumentum; and the legendary *Wollemia nobilis*. Proceeds from the auction support the RSBG's Student Intern Program.

Guests also enjoyed intimate garden tours, with Steve highlighting the Magnolia Grove and Atsuko Gibson offering one-on-one tours of the Rutherford Conservatory.

It was a wonderful evening and a successful celebration of our members and the extraordinary plants that make the Garden so special. We hope to see you at the next Evening in the Garden!



Auctioneers Steve Hootman and Mike Stewart



View of the auction plants

The Hands Behind the Plants

by Atsuko Gibson

My day at the Garden often begins with getting our volunteers set up for the day. We are fortunate to have so many dedicated and hardworking people who come in every week to help keep the nursery running.

Potting is a big part of their work. From tiny seedlings and rooted cuttings in the greenhouse to plants at the outdoor potting bench, there is always something to be potted, rain or shine.

We are particular about how we pot our rhododendrons, making sure each plant is at the right depth and that the growing media has just the right amount of aeration. Our volunteers quickly become experts at all the little details. Some pot along while listening to the radio, while others work to their favorite podcasts.

Volunteers also play an important role in propagation.



Propagation with Tristan Levigne, Craig Cummings, Marissa Swindler & Will Selke

Every Tuesday morning at 9 a.m., our propagation crew arrives to prepare and stick the cuttings I have harvested in the days before. They gather around the large propagation bench, and the work begins.

I enjoy listening to the conversations happening around the bench. While hands are busy preparing hundreds of cuttings, the topics range from birding and woodworking to personal greenhouses, vacation stories, and favorite restaurants. People from completely different backgrounds come together around a table, share stories, and work toward the same goal: getting those cuttings stuck and growing.

There is something special about the combination of horticulture and community. Nursery work can be repetitive and physically demanding, but it is much more enjoyable when you are working alongside other people who are curious, enthusiastic, and willing to get their hands dirty.

We take a morning break together with coffee and tea, and the conversation can go anywhere. Over time, our volunteers become part of our rhododendron family. And potting and propagation are only a small part of what they do. Throughout the year, volunteers help with weeding, labeling, sorting bulbs, sweeping the hoop houses, and countless other tasks that keep the nursery growing.

When you visit the nursery or purchase a plant from us, you may see the finished product: a healthy young rhododendron ready to go home with you. What you don't see are all the hands that helped get it there.

It truly takes a village to grow plants, and we are incredibly grateful to have such a wonderful village.

Shop Our Fall Plant Catalog

The 2026 Fall Plant Catalog Is Here!

Fall is one of the best times to add new plants to your garden, and the RSBG Fall Plant Catalog is here for it. Our fall selection features a range of exceptional rhododendrons and companion plants for gardeners looking to add something special to the landscape.

Fall Plant Catalog early access began September 2 for Life, Benefactor, and Sustaining Members, followed by access for all RSBG members on September 9, and will open to the public on September 16.

Whether you're looking for a hard-to-find species, adding to an established collection, or simply want to bring a little more of the RSBG home with you, the Fall Plant Catalog is a chance to discover something new.

And if you're shopping in person, don't miss the Fall Clearance & Plant Sale, September 30–October 4, for additional opportunities to find plants for your garden.

Explore the Fall Plant Catalog and start planning your fall garden.

Fall Catalog Ordering Ends October 28

[Click here to shop now!](#)

LAUNCH DATES

- **Sept. 2** Highest-level members (Life, Benefactor, Sustaining)
- **Sept 9** All members
- **Sept 16** Public

SHIPPING

- **Sept. 14** First shipping (members only)
- Weekly shipping after that through **Nov. 9**
- **Nov. 9** International shipping with inspection
Nov. 7 *RSVP required for Canadian drop-in inspection service during FFF*

PICK-UP DATES

- **Weekends only: Sept. 19–20** through **Nov. 7–8**
- **Exclusion:** No shipping the weekend of **Oct. 17–18**
- **Nov. 7–8:** Pick-up (during FFF, including Canadian pick-up)



Upcoming Events

STORYTIME IN THE GARDEN

Wednesdays | Sept. 16 - Oct. 14 | 10:30 - 11 am

A nature-focused storytime for preschool-aged children and their caregivers, featuring stories, songs, movement, and simple nature exploration in the Garden.



FALL CLEARANCE & PLANT SALE

Wednesday - Sunday | Sep. 30 - Oct. 4

10 am - 4 pm

Find great deals on plants during our Fall Clearance and Plant Sale, and shop a selection of rare and unusual plants for your garden.

FALL FOLIAGE FESTIVAL & PLANT SALE

Saturday & Sunday | Nov. 7 - 8 | 10 am - 4 pm

Experience the Garden at its most colorful season. Shop specialty plants and other unique goods from pop-up vendors. Enjoy food trucks, guided fall color tours, and a kids' scavenger hunt. Free admission all weekend.



Upcoming Webinar

THE 2025 EXPEDITION TO JAPAN

Thursday | Sept. 24 | 5 - 6 pm

Join us for a look back at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden's first expedition to Japan. In 2025, Steve Hootman and RSBG Nursery Manager Atsuko Gibson spent nearly two weeks exploring the island of Honshu in search of new knowledge and plants for the Garden's collection.



Volunteer & Staff News

In August, we had the opportunity to celebrate our volunteers at our annual summer BBQ. A chance to gather, enjoy good food, and recognize the people who give so much of their time and energy to the Garden. Our volunteers have truly become part of the Garden family, and we couldn't do what we do without them.

We are deeply grateful for every volunteer who helps keep the Garden growing.



Summer BBQ, Garden Walk with staff and volunteers.

Pictured left to right: Atsuko Gibson, Lucy Kozeluh, Paul Thompson, Tristan Levigne, Winnie Adams, Deena Henkins, Steve Hootman, Dennis Bottemiller, Mike Stewart, Will Clausen, and Kim Farmer (kneeling in front)

WELCOME HARRIET NEWHOUSE TO THE TEAM



I grew up in the foothills of the Appalachians (West Virginia and Ohio). My parents were avid gardeners, and we had multiple gardens, including one filled with native species we collected and transplanted from areas scheduled to be logged.

I graduated from Hiram College with a degree in Psychobiology, and my love of nature, photography, and writing led me to marketing, where I combine creativity, storytelling, and strategy. After moving around the country, my husband and I settled in Des Moines where we live with our 5-year-old son, two cats, and a plethora of plants that we endeavor to keep alive.

I'm excited to step into the role of Marketing & Outreach Manager and bring my marketing and creative experience to RSBG. I'm looking forward to meeting you in the Garden!

Membership Matters

Welcome New Members March 1, 2026 - August 30, 2026

The garden is grateful to all its members, whether you have been with us since the beginning, a loyal member who renews each year, or a brand new addition to the RSBG family. Thank you! Your support helps ensure that we can continue fulfilling our mission of conservation, research, acquisition, evaluation, cultivation, public display, and distribution of *Rhododendron* species.

SUPPORTING MEMBERS

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Connie Heermann
John & Jean Everard
Millie Livingston
Tricia Avey

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Ashleigh Berry
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Alison Dewey
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Anders Bitney
Anju Thomas
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Annette Heffron
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Barbara Crick
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Teresa Svart
Tracy Miller
Tricia Guiget
Tristan Levine
Van Phan
Victor Lor
William S Lingley Jr
Zhuoxi Liang



Donor Acknowledgement 2/01/26-8/01/26

Thank you for your generosity and for being part of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden community. We are grateful for your support and for the many ways you help make the Garden a special place for all who visit and enjoy it.

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A planned gift is a meaningful way to create a lasting legacy and support the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden (RSBG) for generations to come.

Your gift can help ensure that the Garden continues to preserve its extraordinary plant collections, advance conservation, and inspire future generations of plant lovers and gardeners.

Visit the [**Donation page**](#) on our website to learn more about planned giving.

RSF Board & RSBG Staff

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Executive Director of Business Operations
Nursery Manager and Assistant Curator
Marketing and Outreach Manager
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Assistant Nursery Manager & Retail Sales Manager
Administrative Assistant
Visitor Services Representative
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