



# Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

## Fall Newsletter—Vol. 43, No. 2

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# Executive Director's Report by Steve Hootman

Here in the Puget Sound region we have had another record-breaking summer in terms of heat and drought. To make matters worse, our summer started quite early this year with the month of May unusually dry and very warm - not a great start heading into the dry season! We typically have cool temperatures and cloudy or misty if not rainy days well into late June before our sunny and dry Maritime Mediterranean summer kicks in at the beginning of July. This weather pattern is ideal for the new growth of our rhododendrons and for establishing any new plantings. The weather pattern this year, like the majority of the past few years, was quite different, something I think many of you, in many parts of the world, have also noted.

Fortunately, but also very unusually, we have had quite a bit of very cool and rainy weather since early September and things are looking great out in the garden. The plants have all perked up and the rain has allowed those of us on the collections staff to concentrate on something (anything) besides watering all day, every day.

Unfortunately, we will soon be saying somewhat of a goodbye to staff member Dennis Bottemiller. Dennis, our long-time propagator and Nursery Manager, has decided it is time to (partially) retire and will be leaving his position as Nursery Manager in January. Dennis has been with the RSBG in one capacity or another for the majority of the last thirty years and actually started his tenure at the RSBG as a summer intern. He is well-known in *Rhododendron* and horticultural communities around the world as an expert propagator with excellent technical skills and with the amazing ability to convey his knowledge and passion for propagation and plants in general to any audience. Dennis has always been in high demand as an accomplished speaker with an easy style and a great sense of humor and has provided lectures and classes to various groups all over North America as well as in Europe.

Dennis will be staying on as staff member for the RSBG in a more limited capacity as part-time Rutherford Conservatory curator. The maintenance of the conservatory and care of the many hundreds of rare and difficult plants within is really a full-time job so having a staff member dedicated to this task for even a couple of days per week will really help to keep the plants healthy and the building looking presentable. Taking over in propagation and as Nursery Manager will be Atsuko Gibson who is currently Assistant Curator and who has worked closely with Dennis in the nursery for the past eight years.



*Rhododendron shanii* in Anhui Province, China

With the early onset of cool and rainy weather we have already started our fall planting season in the garden. Some of the highlights thus far are the *Rhododendron* species *shanii*, *dachengense*, *baihuaense*, *crenulatum*, *mitriforme* and *polytrichum* - all making their appearance in the garden for the very first time.

## A Special Note from Dennis

From the Nursery

In late winter of 1987 Scott Vergara and I made a visit to the RSBG then known only as RSF. We were traveling back to the Puget Sound region from Washington State University where we were both in study of horticulture, he in the masters program and I as an undergrad. We met with Executive Director Richard Piacentini who gave us a tour and I remember being fascinated by the garden being dedicated to only one genus. While standing in the gazebo talking, Richard brought up the subject of an internship and encouraged me to apply. I did and thus began my career at this garden. It was a fantastic first summer, opening a new world of gardening to me.

Within days of completing my studies at WSU in May 1989, Richard called me and offered the position at the garden I have today.

I can't begin to list the great experiences and opportunities I have had here since those early days, not to mention the people I have met and associated with in *Rhododendron* circles over the years. The staff, RSBG members and volunteers are like family to me and I appreciate them all deeply. The garden and nursery have provided me with endless challenge, entertainment and personal growth opportunities and after all this time I still often feel that I have only scratched the surface of how much there is to know and learning ways to do what we do better.

I suppose I should get around to what I'm trying to say.....I'm retiring.



I look back and reflect on the events of the last 30 years and I can think of very few things I would change.

I love my nursery and all the crazy plants we've grown and the ghosts of all those that didn't grow for one reason or another and think that I would do it all over again. I thank all of you who were willing to put up with my "sense of humor" all these years and who helped me take care of the plants and everything surrounding them and especially all the friends who taught me what they knew of the science of plants and horticulture. I will miss it, but I am excited with the idea

of having a little more free time and the opportunity change brings. Au revoir, bon voyage and farewell.

# Cuttings with John Parker by Britt Board

I'm greeted with jazz music as I visit our longtime volunteer, John Parker, who's busy sticking cuttings in our distribution house. He's hunched over a planting flat with tidy rows of green swatches in a variety of sizes and shapes. "I'm making Dolly the sheep," John mentions without looking up. This is an accurate analogy for the process of cutting. Effectively, cuttings are a means of propagation that clone the genetic makeup of a plant by taking a part of an existing plant and attempting to grow another with the part that you've extracted.



While it sounds simple in concept, the amount of work and details associated with the process are a bit more complex. John is prepping plants that we will sell in our nursery years from now. Without his ongoing efforts, we would fall out of step in this domino-effect sequence of tasks.

How do cuttings work? Our Nursery Manager Dennis Bottemiller takes the cuttings at the right moment and brings them to John for processing. The "right" time changes depending on the plant and the season. "You have to take the cutting when it's not too tender and not too woody," he explains. A small snippet of the stem is cut from the plant, then the leaves are reduced by half to ensure that new, fledgling roots can support the weight of the cutting. A fringe benefit of cutting the leaves is that this allows more space in the flat.

Plant cuttings that are perhaps a bit too firm or fibrous are wounded, which means that a shaving or an incision is made along the stem to encourage it to take root. The stems are dipped into a mix of indole butyric acid in powder form mixed with talcum powder – a hormone mixture that will help kickstart growth.

After being dipped, each cutting is planted equidistant from each other in a mix of ground up coconut shell husk and perlite. John notes that "ordinary soil is not sterile and could threaten the growth of the cutting," which is why the RSBG goes for a cleaner option to prevent rotting or bacterial complications. Another benefit is that perlite drains beautifully – also preventing rot.

After planting, the flats are moved to a controlled incubation environment, of sorts. They are placed on rubber heating tubes to keep the planting mix at 70 degrees and the cuttings are kept moist with a misting system. It can take months for cuttings to root and the fail rate can be daunting – "between 5 and 60% - more, if the misting or heating systems break for any reason."



After rooting, they are carefully replanted into 3" containers and over several years, they're rehomed as growth demands a wider berth. It's a tremendous amount of work. As someone who does not come from a horticulture background, I'm impressed that this multi-year process functions so beautifully – of course, this is due in large part to volunteers like John.

Want to learn more about cuttings? The American Rhododendron Society website provides a thorough overview: <https://www.rhododendron.org/propagation.htm>



## **Fall is upon us, and we are excited to bring back our annual Fall Foliage Festival!**

Join us in celebrating autumn with this FREE week-long festival that features:

- Huge range of special plants on sale at half price
- Plant and pumpkin sales all week and with special vendors Bryan's Rare Japanese Maples and Windcliff Plants on October 20 only!
- Activities for kids and families
- Bonsai talks & demos with bonsai sales from Asia-Pacific Gardening
- Pop-up artist sales and demos on October 20
- Gardening workshops and tours
- Fall photo station
- Hardy Fern Foundation presentation and fern sun prints on October 27

## **1st Annual Carved Pumpkin Contest at Fall Foliage Festival!**

Bring in your scary, detailed, funny, clever, cute, and creative carved pumpkins! Enter your pumpkin masterpiece in a competition to win a cash prize of \$100 and a Family Membership to the RSBG.

To participate: Bring your carved pumpkin to the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden on Saturday, October 20<sup>th</sup> between 10am and noon. Winners will be announced at 1pm and are determined by visitor votes.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner will receive an Individual Membership and \$50 cash prize, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Place winner will receive an Individual Membership.



## Evening in the Garden 2018



Another celebratory Evening in the Garden has passed, and we would like to take a minute to share a chorus of thank-yous:

Thank you to all who came out to Rhody Gras! We celebrated Mardi Gras in July featuring flavors from the Big Easy from Seattle caterers Where Ya At Matt, plenty of beads, and Mardi Gras trivia.

A heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to our internship fund by bidding on our selection of plants and silent auction items. Interns are critical to the success of the organization, particularly in spring and summer, and help with everything from liaising with guests in the sales area, clearing blackberries, maintaining paths, and more. A special thank you to Trader Joe's and Caroline and James (above) for bringing a selection of beverages to keep us cool on what was a very warm evening outside.

Beverages in tow, members and volunteers were toured around the conservatory and garden with Dennis Bottemiller and Steve Hootman. For staff, Evening in the Garden is like inviting all of our closest friends over for dinner. We enjoyed seeing everyone's faces and we recognize that we could not function without our supportive membership base. Thank you again for participating! We'll see you again next year.

## Farewell to Dennis from the Staff

"Dennis is the best teacher and a mentor that I have had the pleasure to work with. If I face a problem, I know I can talk to Dennis and he will always walk me through it. Even repairing the irrigation and working on plastic covers on hoop houses are good memories! I will miss him greatly, more than words can describe, but I will carry on with everything Dennis has taught me. Best wishes to you in the next chapter of your life."  
-Atsuko

"I feel very fortunate and pleasant to work with you for 10 years and it's so hard to imagine working here without you. You are not only a great worker, you are also a very good friend. For the dedication and hard work, you deserve the best retirement ever. Enjoy this new journey of your life. We are seriously going to miss you. Good luck and best wishes!" - Grace

"Dennis! It was great working with you. It is hard to imagine our workplace without you. I always appreciated how you were readily available to help any one of us with your knowledge and expertise. We will miss you very much and I hope retirement brings you the chance to do whatever it is that you always wanted to do but didn't get to. All the best!" -Chanelle

"Dennis is a singularly good guy...appreciative, kind, flexible, and easy to laugh. I'll miss the banter and learning from Dennis—certainly about plants, but also every other topic under the sun. Even though I'm new, I can see how essential he has been to the RSBG and everyone connected to this place. Dennis, I hope you have an amazing 'retirement' filled with seafaring, music, and lots o' DIY. We'll miss you." -Britt

"Even though you will be retiring, I know you will never leave this place. Your 30 years of dedication to the RSBG has helped create what it is today. The propagation program you have fine tuned over the years will be followed for decades to come. You will be missed daily, because who is going to fix what we break now? I know I will not be the only one thinking: What would Dennis do?" -Ronnie

# Welcome New 2018 Members

6/1/2018 — 9/30/2018

Disability Determination Services

Richard Freeman

Mary Ann Ramminger

Richard Lyons

John Simmons

Jordan Palmer

Linda Rocheleau

Amy Jones

Laura Van Voorhees

Jeffrey Thompson

Megan Aumiller

Ann Sylvia

Jenifer-Joan Lauren

Nora Larson

Eugene Parnell

Linda Cicero

Margaret Simmons-Cross

Paula Olsen

Suzan Gallup

Susan Brain

Anita Medina

Llie Gaceu

Sandy Rominger

Namju Jang

James Kerr

Lia Ward

Peter Anderson

Gretchen Carlson

Clark Isackson

Holly Hedges

Marilyn Davis

Pamela Rivette

Anne Sallaska

Suzanne Paschall

Laurel Davis

Jessica & Tyrel Beede

Leslie Walt

Christina Koons

Karen Howlett

Patrick Lutali

Peter Hu

April Thompson

Scott Stowell

## 2018 RSF Board

### **Executive Committee (2017 to 2019):**

President: Sean Rafferty

Immediate Past President: Mike Stewart

1st Vice President: Ian Walker

2nd Vice President: Charles Muller

Treasurer: Robert Gust

Secretary: Garth Wedemire

### **Executive Committee Members At Large:**

Anne Gross

Jean Muir

Paul Thompson

### **Board of Directors (2015-2018):**

Rollo Adams

Christopher Brickell

Al Campbell

David Chamberlain

Charles Sale & Margaret Charlton

Ken Cox

Susan Davies

Harold Greer

Anne Gross

Benjamin D. Hall

Henry Helm

Donald Hyatt

Douglas Justice

Donald King

William Lindeman

Robert Mast

Peter Norris

Garratt Richardson

## 2018 RSF Board Continued

Martha Robbins

Joe Ronsley

Hartwig Schepker

Elaine Sedlack

Donald Smart

Jeanine Smith

Diane Thompson

Paul Thompson

Tim Walsh

Keith White

Martin Wilkie

### **Newly Elected (2018 to 2021):**

Jerry Ackerman

Tom Nosella

Valerie Soza

### **Renewing Members (2018 to 2021):**

Ken Cox

Robert Gust

Henry Helm

William Lindeman

Robert Mast

Charles Muller

Peter Norris

Joe Ronsley

Charles Sale & Margaret Charlton

Hartwig Schepker

Don Smart

Mike Stewart

Paul Thompson

Garth Wedemire



## Restricted Contributions

ARS Greater Philadelphia, *Intern Program*  
ARS Monterey Bay Chapter, *Intern Program*  
ARS Tappan Zee Chapter, *Intern Program*  
Walker Foundation, *Yearbook*

## Endowments

Dr. Peter Edward Norris



Illustration by Margaret Trent

## General Operations

AmazonSmile Foundation  
ARS Willamette Chapter  
Megan Aumiller  
Robert J. Barry  
Carolyn Beard  
Michael Bunce  
Don Butler  
Mary Beth Dahl  
Hans Eiberg  
John Fitzpatrick  
Shirley Graves  
Deena J. Henkins  
Clarke Isackson  
Mary Lignana

Katherine Lintault  
Mona Moloney  
William A. Plummer  
Bruce Simonds  
Ramona Soule  
Stan Southerland

### **Garden Campaign:**

Carolyn Beard  
Joan Buhler  
Frances E. Burns  
Martin Carson  
Carol F. Chapen  
Herman Gehrlich

Hans Hasche-Kluender  
Clem Hertz  
David Husch  
Beth Nakatsu  
Charles Sale  
Seattle Foundation  
Seattle Garden Club  
Donald Selcer  
Karen Swenson  
Diane & Paul Thompson  
Claudia Tidball  
Jonathan & Holly Wright

## Legacy Circle

Members of the Legacy Circle:

Deena J. Henkins

Peter Norris

Donald King

Ian Walker

Anne Guelker

Keith White

About the Rhododendron Legacy Circle:

The Rhododendron Legacy Circle is open to all members who have made provisions for the Rhododendron Species Foundation in their financial or estate plans. Established in 2013, the Legacy Circle enables the RSF to recognize and show appreciation for our friends' generosity during their lifetime.

## Last Chance to Order Plants!

Fall is a perfect time to plant rhododendrons! Peruse a selection of hardy and unusual plants, plus staff favorites. Find YOUR new favorite plants [here](#).

The deadline to order plants is Wednesday, October 31.

*Rhododendron brachycarpum* ssp. *brachycarpum*



*Rhododendron macgregoriae*

