



RHODODENDRON
SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN



SUMMER NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 48, NUMBER 2

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Rodgersia pinnata 'Superba'

Executive Director's Report by Steve Hootman

We had an unusually cold spring this year which led to quite a drop in attendance and plant sales early in what is normally our peak season for visitation. However, when May arrived the weather really turned around and we experienced a very early start to our typical warm and dry summer weather. In fact, it turned out to be the warmest May on record for our region. While this is not necessarily good for the plants (cool and rainy conditions are much better for the newly emerging growth of *Rhododendron* species) it was very good for attendance, and we managed to catch up to our expected numbers in both attendance and plant sales.

Botanically, this past spring was quite strange in that we experienced the least amount of *Rhododendron* flowering that I have seen in the past 31 springs. Keeping in mind that most of the plants are obviously much more mature and with better light due to tree canopy thinning, this is completely the opposite of what we would expect. Another strange aspect of this is that this phenomenon was common up and down the west coast and even with hybrids which are typically more reliable in their flowering. Speaking with friends in Europe I learned that they experienced the same “flowerless” spring! Another factor to consider is that we had a very stressful summer (even hotter and drier than normal) in 2022 when flower bud formation would have taken place. Normally, plants set more flower buds when stressed, not less. Very strange indeed.

A note on hardiness – many thanks to Board President Peter Norris who has reported that after a brutal mid-February – to quote Peter “Low temp was -6°F overnight after a warm, mild Feb. it was tough, even fatal for many plants.” Peter noted that the species *huanum*, *polytrichum*, *yuefengense*, *platypodum* and *maoerense* all survived with no damage so I would guess that a reasonable estimate of their cold hardiness would be -10°F at the least. Great news indeed.

Thanks to all for your continuing support of this fine and unique institution.

Fall Catalog Opens September 6!

Sustaining, Patron & Benefactor Members - Ordering Begins: Sept. 6

All Members - Ordering Begins: Sept. 13

Non-Members - Ordering Begins: Sept. 20

The Fall Catalog will be available September 6! While we sell a diverse selection of plants in our onsite nursery, our biannual catalogs provide an opportunity to purchase some of our rarest species rhododendrons and companion plants. All plant purchases directly support our mission.



Agapetes pyrolifolia



Rhododendron edgeworthii

Fall Catalog Highlights by Steve Hootman

“Hardy” Gesneriads

I have long had a strong interest in the Gesneriaceae (the African Violet/*Streptocarpus*, etc. family), especially those few genera and species that are cold tolerant enough for cultivation outside in a rocky or woodland garden in our maritime Pacific NW climate. This interest was strongly boosted while botanizing in Guizhou, China in 2010. We were at about 7,000 ft. near the top of an extremely floristically rich mountain called Leigong Shan. Growing there were many hardy plants such as *Rhododendron fortunei* ssp. *fortunei*, maples, oaks, magnolias, conifers, etc. etc. Growing with these reliably hardy genera we noted specimens of what were obviously members of the Gesneriaceae growing on vertical, moss-covered cliffs. It seemed likely that these plants (which turned out to be *Oreocharis auricula*) would probably be hardy, at least in the Pacific Northwest and so they have proven to be. Following this observation, we have been collecting, propagating and evaluating temperate members of this incredibly variable family and using them in the garden amongst the other temperate plants in our collection just as they are observed in the wild.



Briggsia speciosa with three inch flowers on the Jinfo Shan



Briggsia mihieri on the Jinfo Shan, Chongqing, China

This year is the first in which we are featuring and offering plants of our ever-expanding collection of hardy gesneriads. Most of these require moist but well-drained soil in filtered light or at least in a location out of the hottest sun. Most of my hardiness ratings are estimates based on the native range/elevation and/or our experience here in the garden. NOTE: We have many additional selections in production. These should be available in the near future.

The genus *Primulina* is by far the most diverse in our collection and is herein highlighted.

The Genus *Primulina* – This is a large temperate genus with over 100 species native primarily to limestone regions of southern China and adjacent northern Vietnam. All species are perennial herbs and most are evergreen with rather leathery, often patterned leaves in a basal rosette and with attractive flowers making them ideal for cultivation. Most of these were formerly included in the genus *Chirita*. New species are being discovered and described every year and there are also hundreds of hybrids to choose from. *The Gesneriad Reference Web* on the internet is a useful guide to the species and hybrids of *Primulina* and the other genera in cultivation in the Gesneriaceae.

Spring/Summer Garden Campaign

Dear friend,

If you have had a chance to visit the garden recently or have been following us through our website or on social media, you know about the tremendous progress being made in the garden and in the continuing development of our vitally important conservation collection. However, now is not the time to rest on our collective laurels and we must continue to push forward in our ongoing mission to continually improve the garden and to strengthen our commitment to local and global conservation goals. With our greatest sincerity, we thank you for being a part of those efforts and urge you to help us keep our strong forward momentum alive and growing!

A tremendous thank you to all who contributed to our campaign last year. With that critical funding we were able to complete a couple of long-term projects in the garden, including the addition of two new trails into newly planted areas!

Essential to our momentum is your gift to our 2023 Spring-Summer Garden Campaign. It takes both hard work and financial resources to ensure the garden is a thriving and welcoming natural space for everyone to enjoy. In addition to helping us to maintain the garden and the Rhododendron collection, your gift is crucial to the funding of engagement programs that help educate, enrich and delight our diverse community. Through our remarkable collection of rhododendrons and companion plants, we can continue to teach visitors about conservation, biodiversity, and environmental stewardship year-round. Help us grow the next generation of gardeners and nature enthusiasts with your support today!

Your gift helps the garden:

- Provide horticultural expertise through educational outreach efforts like guided tours, webinars, and symposiums
- Engage with the larger community through celebrations like Mother's Day Weekend, Blue Poppy Day and Fall Foliage Festival
- Keep admission fees low and accessible for everyone to enjoy the garden

We depend on your support to do the work that keeps this unique, world-class public garden a living resource and urge you to invest in the future of our garden.

The RSBG Board and staff are very appreciative of your generosity. Thank you for helping us fulfill our mission.

Sincerely,

Steve Hootman
Executive Director & Curator
Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

Peter Norris
President
Rhododendron Species Foundation

Show your love for the RSBG:

[Donate
Today](#)

Rhododendron Species Symposium Recap

Thank you to everyone who attended the Annual Rhododendron Species Symposium June 9-10 this year. Around 50 'rhodieholics' shared gardening and horticultural stories, learned from fellow plant experts, laughed and made great connections with like-minded *Rhododendron* species enthusiasts. A special thank you to our friends who traveled from all over the globe to join us and share their expertise during our panel discussion. Guests enjoyed a day full of featured garden tours with RSBG Executive Director Steve Hootman, Conservatory Curator Dennis Bottemiller, Horticulturist & Assistant Curator Will Clausen and lab classes with Nursery Manager & Assistant Curator Atsuko Gibson.



Attendees learned how to grow rhododendrons from seed, cuttings and grafting, discovered how RSBG mitigates the effects of climate change and took a virtual tour of the most horticulturally promising new plant species. Keynote Speaker Daniel Hinkley shared his expertise from 35 years in the field while attendees enjoyed a delicious banquet dinner and silent plant auction for rare and unique plants.



RSBG staff are already planning next year's Symposium and it's shaping up to be one of the best gatherings yet, with new garden tours and a world-famous Keynote Speaker. Stay tuned for more information later this year. We look forward to seeing everyone again for another round of great plant talks and rhodie-camaraderie!



Species profile: *R. hippophaeoides* by Will Clausen

For some lowland gardeners who wish to grow high altitude plants, *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* presents a useful exception to an unfortunate rule. Many desirable alpine plants are not grown with ease outside of their preferred natural climate. They often demand sharp drainage, precise sunlight exposure, and will wilt in prolonged heatwaves over long summer months. In the mountains these plants tend to experience short summers with lots of sun, moisture, and relatively cool temperatures. Winters are very long and dry with the ground frozen and most precipitation locked up in snow anyway. Even in temperate lowland regions like western Washington, the long rainy winter means root and crown rot while by September after a couple of months of scrambling to offset the effects of drought and heat, even the most dedicated gardener might start to wonder why they even try. All that is not to say alpine plants are not worth working for, but it is just nice that sometimes you find one that is a little easier. Enter *Rhododendron hippophaeoides*, a high elevation rhododendron from the mountains of Yunnan and Sichuan that can be grown in your backyard.

Rhododendron hippophaeoides belongs in subsection Lapponica, a large group with about 40 recognized species in the Flora of China. Most of these species are native to China and across the Himalaya, though *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* is a circumboreal species mostly restricted to the far north but dipping south in North America into the White Mountains of New England. Most Lapponica species have a definite alpine appearance. They are generally small and compact shrubs with small leathery leaves. Flowers are small but can cover the plants in late spring most often in shades of purple and pink, though some species are yellow or white. Among these small relatives, *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* can be called a comparatively large plant, slowly gaining a maximum height around 1.25 m (about 4 ft). Their leaves are also relatively large, usually about 1-2.5 cm (0.4-1 in) long and 0.5-1 cm (0.2-0.4) wide. The upper surface of the leaves is notably glaucous, a slightly paler shade of green than all but one other species in subsection Lapponica. Spring brings lavender flowers, though individuals can exhibit rose pink and occasionally white flowers. These are held in inflorescences of 4-7 flowers, each of which are about 1-1.5 cm (0.4-0.6 in) wide. In the wild, these plants are found between 2,400 and 4,800 m (7,900-15,700 ft) and often grow in alpine marshes, though they are not restricted to wet areas. This natural inclination for wet feet might help to explain in part why they are so adaptable to lowland gardens in areas where winters are often too wet for many high elevation plants. The Flora of China recognizes two varieties: *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* var. *hippophaeoides* and *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* var. *occidentale*. The two are distinguished by the length of their style, length and width of leaves, and number of flowers per inflorescence.



R. hippophaeoides
Photo: Atsuko Gibson

Wild seed was first collected in 1913 by George Forrest and sent back to England where it was sown without delay. The first plants to flower in cultivation did so in 1917, and in short order *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* received an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society, signifying that it is both an interesting and growable plant for the garden. Numerous subsequent seed collections were made by both Forrest and his contemporaries, and more have been made in recent years.

In gardens, *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* is one of the most frequently encountered species from subsection Lapponica. Though that might not make it the most desirable of plants for the collector (though any good collector should have one or two!), it should be taken as a good sign for someone looking for a relatively easy to grow plant. These plants like plenty of sun, and like other rhododendron will still require good drainage and supplemental summer water in order to thrive in the garden, but nothing too special beyond that. They work wonderfully as an evergreen component in a

Species profile: *R. hippophaeoides* by Will Clausen

larger rock garden, or as a compact shrub along a sidewalk or in front of a house. Some selections tend to rebloom in the late summer or early fall, though not as strongly as the spring bloom. Given where it grows naturally, *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* should be a fairly cold hardy plant and a possible addition for gardeners who experience low winter temperatures but not too oppressive heat and humidity in the summer. In colder gardens they can look a little unhappy in the winter as their leaves turn somewhat brown and curl up, which is a natural adaptation of some alpine and high latitude plants including other rhododendrons. But not to fear, they will still perk up again in the spring.

The Rhododendron Species Foundation frequently offers for sale *Rhododendron hippophaeoides* 'Haba Shan', a very fine selection of this species with deep lavender flowers which tends to bloom again in the autumn.

This plant will be available for purchase in the Fall 2023 Catalog.



R. hippophaeoides
Photo: Will Clausen

ACCESSIONS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE RSF:

1966/592	Glendoick
1973/135	Fred Robbins
1977/611	King & Patton
1978/115	Sunningdale Gardens; Carl Phettleplace
1980/067	R#11363; USDA#59615
1993/056	June Sinclair
2002/026	SSNY#; 'Glendoick Iceberg'; Glendoick
2004/163	93 KGB#262; RSF
2013/281	'Haba Shan'; Glendoick
JN#	Jens Nielsen; 2009 ARS#540; 6 accessions
JN#618	Jens Nielsen; Warren Berg; 3 accessions

REFERENCES CONSULTED:

Cox, Peter A. & Cox, Kenneth N.E. 1997. The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species. Glendoick Publishing, Perth, Scotland. pg. 265-266.

Flora of China @ eFloras. 2008. http://www.efloras.org/flora_page.aspx?flora_id=2. Missouri Botanical Garden, St. Louis, MO & Harvard University Herbaria, Cambridge, MA. Accessed 07-06-2023.

'Rhododendron hippophaeoides'. Trees and Shrubs Online. treesandshrubsonline.org/articles/rhododendron/rhododendron-hippophaeoides/. Accessed 2023-07-06.

Upcoming Events



Preparing rare plants for the summer sale.



Summer Clearance & Rare Plant Sale Sat & Sun, July 22 & 23 • 10 am - 4 pm

Reimagine your garden this summer with help from the RSBG! A large selection of rhododendrons and companion plants will be marked 50% off the regular price.

In addition, for the collectors and hardcore “plantaholics”, we will be offering a huge selection of rare *Rhododendron* species and companion plants in 3-gallon containers or larger including some large, “retired” stock plants – all ready for that “instant landscape” look.

[Click here for more information.](#)

Member Appreciation Day Sunday, September 17 • 10 am - 4 pm

Membership makes us grow and thrive! As a way of thanking our loyal Members for their continued support, we invite you to join us for our Member Appreciation Day, featuring:

- Double discount – 20% off plants
- Lunch provided between 12-1 pm (while supplies last)
- Garden tours with staff
- Access to buy special and rare plants
- Rare plant silent auction

[Click here for more information.](#)



Evening in the Garden Saturday, July 29 • 5 pm - 8:30 pm

Garden members and volunteers are invited to step into a world of tropical delights and island tunes as we celebrate Ohana (family) and togetherness this summer at the garden. Come dressed in your favorite island attire and treat yourself to a fun evening you won't forget! Savor mouthwatering cuisine and desserts, refreshing beer & wine, a rare plant live auction, garden tours, and more...all benefiting the RSBG!

\$55 Members

\$65 Non-Members

Non-members must be accompanied by a member.

[Click here for schedule, menu & tickets!](#)



Fall Foliage Festival Sat & Sun, Oct. 28 & 29 • 10 am - 4 pm

This fall, the garden will erupt in warm and welcoming colors as we celebrate the season with garden vendors, featured tours, plant talks, and plant sales. Enjoy a savory meal from a food truck and grab a sweet drink from a beverage truck as you soak in the stunning surroundings.

Prism Garden Nursery will return with their colorful maples and variegated hostas, and Bontanica will feature rare and unusual perennials...as well as many old favorites.

Admission is FREE!

[Click here for a schedule of events.](#)

Restricted Contributions 01/01/2023 - 06/30/2023

Hoop House Construction:

ARS NOYO Chapter
Bell, Dianne
Bluhm, Wilbur
Candiotta, Patty
Drobnack, Gary
Hirsch, Eric
Keck, Ian
LaPierre, Amy
Larson, Charles
Mapes, Ron & Ginny
Meyers, William
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Sears, Alan & Beverly
Smith, Rex and Jeanine
Walker Foundation
Whitney, Fred and Ann

Intern Program:

ARS Olympic Peninsula
ARS Peninsula Chapter
ARS Seed Exchange
ARS Tualatin Valley Chapter
Washington State Nursery & Landscaping Association

2023 *Rhododendron Species Journal*:

Walker Foundation

Undesignated Gift:

Walker Foundation

General Operations 01/01/2023 - 06/30/2023

Cash Contributions:

Aaring, Richard
AmazonSmile Foundation
Chapen, Carol F.
Dahlgren, Ruth
Davies, Dr. S.E.
Feagin, Jean
Gelfer, Lindsey
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Harkins, Charlene
Henkins, Deena J.
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Tacoma Garden Club
The Blackbaud Giving Fund
Thurber, Frederick
Trachewsky, Jason
Waltman, Terry & Nancy
Williams, Florence
Fleischmann, Lucille

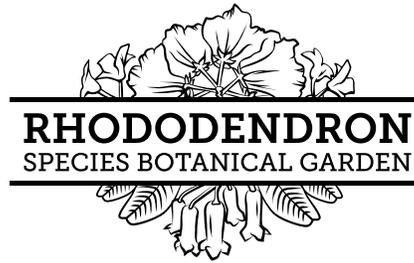


Lilium mackliniae

RSF Foundation & RSBG Staff

Staff

Executive Director and Curator	Steve Hootman
Chief Business Officer	Grace Pham
Nursery Manager & Assistant Curator	Atsuko Gibson
Marketing and Outreach Manager	Natalie Ries
Horticulturist & Assistant Curator	Will Clausen
Assistant Nursery Manager	Emily Joseph
Assistant Horticulturist	Adam Duell
Administrative Assistant	Janey O'Neil
Visitor Services Representative	Alexys George
Rutherford Conservatory Curator	Dennis Bottemiller



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