

RHODODENDRON & CAMELLIA GROUP

Bulletin No.1 September, 1976.
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Since 1946, the Royal Horticultural Society's Rhododendron Yearbook has been produced under the auspices of the Rhododendron Group. In 1954, this became the Rhododendron & Camellia Group, and the yearbook began to be similarly named.

Since 1972, a member of the Group has acted as Assistant Editor, and a paperback annual entitled 'Rhododendrons, 197', with Magnolias & Camellias' has replaced the hardbook Rhododendron & Camellia Yearbook. Early this year, the Council of the R.H.S. invited some members of the Group to form a small committee to take over its running from the R.H.S. staff, and this has now had several meetings.

Some preliminary ideas for extending the activities of the Group were considered at an open meeting at the New Hall on the 4th May, and suggestions were called for, and a number were made then, and others have been received since.

A point made by a number of those who attended the meeting was that many of the members of the Group lived at a distance from London, and could not very often attend the R.H.S. shows, but that they would like to be in touch with others in the same neighbourhood who shared their interest in rhododendrons and Camellias. This entailed circulating the list of members, which did not appear to have been done for many years, and it was found that this necessitated first revising it, and the revised list is attached.

Revision of the List of Members. 196 members replied to the circular sent out from Wisley in January, 11 of them overseas members, and this was taken to be the membership of the Group at the beginning of this year. A further 223 former members living in Great Britain and Ireland were asked in July whether they wished to continue their membership. Of these 77 have replied that they do, 10 are still interested but have been forced by rising costs to resign from the R.H.S.; 37 have either died or replied that they did not wish to continue; 99 did not reply. 20 former members living overseas were not addressed, and their names have been included in the list. 16 new members have joined the Group since the beginning of the year, two of them resident abroad. There are thus 276 members of the Group living in Great Britain and Ireland, and 33 abroad.

If any recipient of this bulletin has been omitted or wrongly included, or if his particulars are wrongly entered, the Hon.Sec. will be grateful to be told. A further circular is being sent to a number of people known to be interested in rhododendrons and camellias, who are not members of the Group, asking them to join it; in addition, some members may have friends or acquaintances who might be interested in joining the Group, and they are asked to show them this bulletin and to invite them to apply for membership on the proforma attached to this bulletin, or alternatively to send their names and addresses to the Hon.Sec.

Finance. Hitherto of course, the cost of running the Group has come partly out of Fellows' subscriptions (the annual circular) and partly from a capitation fee from those attending garden tours. Postage and stationery however now have to be met by the Group, and the committee proposes to take over the distribution of the annual (yearbook) to its members. A number of members of the Group have indicated already that they would be prepared to pay a subscription to cover the cost of the bulletin and circulars, including the arranging of tours, to include a copy of the annual, postfree to members resident in Great Britain and Ireland; £3 p.a. has been suggested. In addition, it is hoped to supplement the Group's income by the sale of plants at any functions which it holds. £80 was raised in this way on the 8th May, and this is being used for current expenditure on stationery, duplicating and postage. Members are asked to say, on the second proforma at the end of this bulletin, whether they are willing to pay such a subscription; those who do not want a copy of the annual, but wish to remain members of the Group and receive copies of the bulletin and news of garden tours and other activities, are invited to pay £1.50 p.a.

Regional Groups. There have been several requests that the list of members should be arranged by regions but this has not been done and they are in alphabetical order. This was not just laziness, but the difficulty of definition. It would be easy to have separate lists for e.g. Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Kent, Sussex or Cornwall, but the Irish and Scottish members are perhaps too scattered to require regional groups, while for instance Denbighshire may be nearer to

Cheshire than it is to Monmouthshire, which itself may be nearer to Gloucestershire, thus not making much sense of a Welsh group. As another instance, Cornwall has its own Garden Society, but not all its members are interested in rhododendrons and camellias, so perhaps a South-West region is indicated, but should this include Somerset and Dorset as well as Devon, or will gardeners in Somerset and Dorset have more affinity with Gloucestershire and Hampshire? The Group has a good many members in the South-Eastern counties, but is there scope for different regional groups for Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, and if so which group would a member living on the outskirts of Haslemere wish to join?

Instead, it is suggested that members may care to scan the list, when they have checked whether their own particulars are correct, and then perhaps to list those within reasonably easy motoring distance, especially those with whom they are not acquainted, and to consider whether they have the time and the inclination to organise a regional group, without paying too much regard to county boundaries. There have been one or two tentative inquiries already, and after consulting some of the others in a possible regional group, would those interested be good enough to let the secretary/editor know, and particulars will be published in a future issue of this bulletin.

Committee. The committee consists at present of Mr. P. Bamford (Treasurer), Mr. J. D. Bond, Mr. J. T. Gallagher, Mr. A. F. George, Mr. G. A. Hardy, Major E. W. M. Magor, (Chairman and acting Secretary) and Mr. A. D. Schilling. The Secretary unfortunately found that he could not spare the time and resigned a few months ago; any volunteer to take his place would be very welcome. Another member of the committee has offered to edit future issues of this bulletin.

The 1976 Season. After a dry summer in 1975, with welcome rain in the South-West in August, there were splendid prospects for the 1976 season, camellias and rhododendrons being covered with flower-bud. After a very mild winter, which brought things on early, there was a succession of frosts in March and April, which ruined the early magnolias, and rather spoilt the rhododendrons. At the spring shows therefore the magnolias were very disappointing, and the rhododendrons less good than had seemed probable; the camellias however were superb. At the Truro Show, which has more classes for hybrid camellias than the London shows, the camellia classes were the best in living memory, so good that the judges had difficulty in agreeing on their awards.

Later, it was another very dry summer, without this year the benefit of the rain which usually falls in August in Cornwall and by the end of the month there was very little green grass visible in the South of England and, apart from plants that have simply died from lack of water, the effect on bud formation is bound to have been adverse. The West of Scotland on the other hand had a superb season, I understand, and quite adequate rain. A Sussex friend tells me that he had a record barley crop, in spite of the drought, because his land in a normal year is too wet.

1977 Prospects. A neighbour with superb magnolias and camellias as well as rhododendrons, tells me that the Asiatic magnolias are fantastically well budded up, so let us hope that we do not have hard frosts next March. His camellias too are promising, but the rhododendrons are going to have a rest again. That is my own impression; what is so distressing is that many of the older rhododendrons overflowered, and then lacked the energy and the water to produce any new growth, so one will be lucky not to lose them next year. One can dead-head young plants, but in an old garden it is not physically possible to get round all the old ones, even though the famous big *R. macabeae* at Trewithen is scrupulously dead-headed every year, which undoubtedly accounts for its superb shape and condition.

The Drought. How our Arab land-owners must be laughing at our improvidence. An old countryman who is a friend of mine snorted at a recent Ministerial appointment, and said "In another few months, I suppose they will be appointing a Minister for snow". Here, we are fortunate perhaps in that our water supply has not been nationalised, and what we do not use runs into the sea, so we do not waste it. Nevertheless, one cannot water everything, and we have lost a lot of plants, a fair number of older rhododendrons, and a depressing number of younger plants of all sorts, some precious young magnolias and rhododendrons, all fortunately replaceable in time. There have been less casualties among the camellias, with their deeper root system. Among 7-10 year-old rhododendrons, there have been a fair number of losses, and a curious observation has been that those with supposedly xeromorphic characters, such as leaves which are small (*Lapponicum* series), or bullate (*R. edgeworthii*), or densely tomentose (*R. haematodes*)

appear to be less drought resistant, and recover more slowly, if at all, after watering, than those with a broader unprotected transpiration surface (*R.griffithianum*), which recover overnight. One may say that other factors are at work, but a *R.Elizabeth* and a *R.williamsianum* hybrid, both about 12 years old, growing side by side on a well drained bank, both showed signs of distress. The *R.williamsianum* hybrid recovered each time it was watered, and now after some good rain is looking quite itself again. Poor Elizabeth never really picked up, and is as good as dead. In last year's lesser drought, we lost several young plants of *R.Elizabeth*, and are doing so again this year; an excellent hybrid, floriferous and cold resistant, it does seem very susceptible to drought.

Associated Plants. 'Magnolias' slipped into the title of the Annual two years ago, and this year (partly to meet the wishes of the International Camellia Society), the Group's committee would have liked to change its title to 'Rhododendrons & Associated Plants', to bring in not only other trees and shrubs that do well in a rhododendron garden, but also the ground cover plants that do so well in other people's gardens. This unfortunately has been vetoed, though we hope nevertheless in future Annuals to deal more than in the past with associated plants.

Conifers of course do well in most rhododendron gardens, and not only the dwarf ones. Some years ago, I was lucky enough to obtain a very nice little plant of *Abies koreana*, which I put in a shady nursery to grow, and after 3 or 4 years it produced half a dozen beautiful little cones, when only two feet high. I mentioned this to the friend from whom I had got it, and he asked the colour of the cones, which were a beautiful shiny purple. He then told me that there were two clones, one with green cones, and one with purple of which the latter is the more desirable. Last year, I read that this fir never grows to a great height, and is very ornamental, so I planted it out in an open place within sight of the house. This summer I had some anxious moments, as it started to look rather limp, and it had to have a good many buckets of water, but it has coned very well, at least a dozen beautiful little cones, but they are green.

'Rhododendrons, 1976, with Magnolias and Camellias'. The new Annual (Yearbook) will be published by the R.H.S. in time for Christmas. It contains the usual features, accounts of the Rhododendron and Camellia Competitions and Shows, awards at the London Shows and after trial at Wisley, and additions to the International Rhododendron Register. There are accounts of three famous gardens, some observations on the age to which rhododendrons grow, and notes on growing Malesian rhododendrons. An article written by Mr. Frank Knight nearly fifty years ago on the propagation of rhododendrons by cuttings is reproduced, as are descriptions of two new species by Mr. Davidian. On camellias, there are articles by Professor E.G. Waterhouse, by Mr. Les Jury, by Miss Gillian Carlyor and by Mr. J.T. Gallgher. Mr. Hillier's article on the Magnolias at Jernays is concluded.

Symposium. Two Sussex members have suggested the following subject for a symposium:

"You are moving to a garden with ideal growing conditions for rhododendrons, but you only have room for six plants - species or hybrids. Which six would you choose, and why?"

Members are invited to send their replies to the acting Secretary by the 31st January 1977. Depending on the number and content of the replies, a feature will be prepared for 'Rhododendrons 1977', and further details will be included in a future bulletin.

Activities in 1977

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| 22nd February | R.H.S. Opening Flower Show. Ornamental Plant Competition. Annual General Meeting. |
| 15th March | R.H.S. Flower Show. Camellia and Rhododendron Competitions. |
| 29th March | R.H.S. Flower Show. Magnolia Competition. |
| 19th April | R.H.S. Flower Show, Camellia & Rhododendron Shows. |
| 22nd-25th April | International Camellia Society Sussex Tour. |
| 29th-30th April | Rhododendron & Camellia Group Sussex Tour. |
| 5th May | Cornwall Garden Society Spring Flower Show at Truro. |

17th-20th May

Chelsea Show.

14th June

R.H.S. Early Summer Show. Flowering Tree and Shrub Competition.

International Camellia Society. British members are organising a long weekend in Sussex, April 22nd to 25th 1977. This will comprise visits to outstanding Camellia gardens in the district, including Leonardslee which holds what is possibly the finest collection of Camellias in the Country. Further particulars will be sent to members with the I.C.S. Journal in December.

French members are organising a Congress to coincide with the Nante Florales May 16th to 18th 1977. Papers will be read by experts from many Countries with simultaneous translation. Afternoon visits will follow. It is hoped to run a coach for British members. Further particulars from I.C.S. Membership representative John Tooby, New House Farm, Bransford, Worcester, WR6 5JB.

Two places at these events are open to each I.C.S. member.

Response to request for suggestions. A considerable number of members have written in with helpful suggestions for Group activities, on the whole supporting the lines which the committee is following, and it is hoped to work through them in future bulletins. Two of particular interest will be mentioned now, and it is hoped that what follows will stimulate discussion.

Distribution of Plant Material. There is considerable support for the committee's desire to see a wider distribution of the best cultivars, the F.C.C. and A.M. forms of rhododendron species and hybrids and good clones of those that have not received awards. This probably means plants which are not in commerce, and there are of course some good camellias too in cultivation in this country which are not obtainable yet from nurserymen. Something on the lines of the schemes operated in the U.S.A. by the American Rhododendron Society for seed and the Rhododendron Species Foundation is suggested, but until a member volunteers to act as co-ordinator, it is difficult to know where to start. Camellias on the whole are perhaps easier to propagate than rhododendrons, and camellia growers seem to be generous with cuttings, Dick Shaw has explained the role of the Botanical Gardens in the distribution of the best clones in his note at page 53 of 'Rhododendrons 1973', in reply to the plea for a Rhododendron Species Foundation in this country. The nurseries that he mentions have many of these, and are usually very glad to receive material of a good clone for distribution. For example, the owners of many of the fine rhododendrons in Scotland, mentioned in the article at page 26 of 'Rhododendrons 1974' generously provided propagating material, and plants of these cultivars will soon be available for distribution.

The older gardens receive a number of requests every year from abroad, mostly from America, for seed, pollen, and sometimes cuttings, and I think most of us probably try to meet these requests. Of these, cuttings are probably the most satisfactory means of propagation and certainly would be in this country. In these days of crippling taxation, many gardens that open to the public are doing some propagation, and have plants to sell on open days, and one can often obtain very good plants at small cost in this way.

It is thought that these gardens and probably many others, would be willing to provide other members of the Group with propagating material of their better plants. For a start, it is suggested that members wanting material should write to the owners of plants listed in the annual as receiving awards each year, and the owners presumably will say whether the cultivar is in commerce, or whether they are willing to supply material.

Showing. The other suggestion of particular interest was that the Group should try to stimulate more entries at the R.H.S. Rhododendron and Camellia Shows and Competitions, by circulating advice on how to select, prepare, transport and effectively stage exhibits, the feeling being that there may be good plants skilfully grown whose owners are inexperienced in and therefore diffident about showing.

Perhaps some of the more successful exhibitors would care to contribute a note on the subject for a future bulletin, or even the Annual. To stimulate discussion, may the writer contribute his own, very amateur views? Have a hang, and learn the hard way, there is still an encouraging trickle of new exhibitors at the R.H.S. shows and once started one tends to go on.

There are a number of special classes at the R.H.S. shows for rhododendrons and a few for camellias, restricted to exhibitors who have not won a prize in the last three years, and this year similar classes were introduced at the Truro Show also. This is an excellent way for a new exhibitor to cut his teeth, and many of us have begun in this way. Exhibiting rhododendrons, I have always found other exhibitors, and the stewards, very helpful and ready to advise. I have only recently started exhibiting camellias, and I find that my blooms always seem smaller than anyone else's, but I only get a superior smile when I ask other exhibitors how they do it.

Much depends of course on one's circumstances; the exhibitor who can go out after breakfast, cut a choice bloom and go straight to the show and put it into its vase immediately before the judging begins, clearly has an advantage. Similarly, it is a help to have an estate lorry to bring up one's exhibits, and I have heard of special trains, and of course some of the lovely exhibits on the International Camellia Society's stands come by air across the world. For the ordinary mortal, it is probably car or rail, and when the weather is hot I have found cut blooms travel better in the comparative cool of the guard's van or a sleeper, than in the back of a car. A friend of mine has a gardener who gets up at 2.00 a.m. to pack the flowers, to enable his employer to leave at 5 in his car and reach London before it gets hot. I tried this myself once or twice this year (without the assistance of a gardener), and I can recommend it as a means of getting one's blooms to the show in good condition.

But to start at the beginning, the would-be exhibitor must make sure that he is sent a copy of the schedule; the R.H.S. usually send these out several months in advance. Entries usually close a week before the show and so, with no weekend post, this means posting them towards the end of the week before that. It is as well to have a rough idea of which classes one will show in about a fortnight before that, and as one goes round the garden in the next two weeks, to notice what is coming on and likely to be out in time. When the time comes to complete the entries, go round again, and make sure that you have more than enough stuff coming on for each class in which you enter. Rhododendrons that are fully out then may well be going over by the time you come to pick. At this stage, or even earlier, it may be as well to pick a few blooms to open indoors, as a protection against possible bad weather, keeping them in the dark if they are already nearly open, and in the greenhouse if they are only just starting to open.

Assuming good weather, and no frosts, I usually pick on the Saturday for a Tuesday show, making sure that the blooms are unblemished, trusses are the biggest on the bush upright if possible, and preferably with one or two bells still to open, and the foliage must be good also. I pick two or three possible trusses for every one that I want for showing, and preferably one or two of another rhododendron eligible for the same class as well. With sprays, one cannot usually do this, so one must take one's time choosing the best one on the plant, within the scheduled size, and one which will stand upright. Once picked I put the exhibits as quickly as possible into water in a cool, fairly dark place (the potting shed).

One very skilful exhibitor brings his blooms down from Scotland standing in milk bottles in crates in his van. Some people use big wooden boxes to pack their flowers, while most of us who come any distance I think use the ordinary commercial cardboard flower boxes, which are not expensive and are expendable. As short a time as possible before one has to start (2 a.m. on Monday), one starts packing. I find it a help to pack class by class from the schedule, choosing the best flowers from those one has picked several days before, and ruthlessly discarding any that are blemished in any way. I usually allow 25% spares to replace those that drop, mark or wilt on the journey.

I cut the stems down to about 2" longer than required for staging, wrap the ends tightly with wet newspaper or moss, tied on with bast, and place the bloom or spray as flat as possible in the box, and stick it to the bottom with sellotape. It is sometimes a good plan to tie on a label, or scribble the name on the box by the bloom if one has several rather similar rhododendrons in the same box. I place as many blooms as possible in each box, without touching each other. Camellia exhibitors usually pack their blooms flat in wet moss. When each box is full, I cover the blooms with wetwrap paper, and put on the lid; the boxes must then be kept flat.

On arrival at the show hall, one needs a staging table and sufficient vases of the right sizes filled to the top with water. One can then open the boxes, preferably in the same order that they were packed, take out one's exhibits and place them as quickly as possible into vases. As you do so, take off the wet newspaper, and cut off the bottom half inch or so of the stem and make a vertical slit in the new cut surface with secateurs; this enables the bloom to take up water, and if some wilted on the journey they may well revive with a night in water; an aspirin in the water helps.

The judges have the task of choosing the best exhibit in the class, so the nearer perfection one can achieve in staging the better chance one has of winning. They look for quality, good colour, good shape, size, symmetry and general effect; blemishes and poor foliage detract from this. One therefore stages one's exhibit in the vase to show itself off as well as possible; this may entail weighting the bottom of the vase for a topheavy spray, or packing it with paper or moss to make a truss stand up well. In the spray classes, check that your exhibit is within the scheduled limits of width and height.

If you are showing in a number of classes, it is as well to go straight through the card, putting all one's blooms in each class before going on to the next. When they are staged, make sure that each has a name label and that your exhibitor's card is face down. If you are in doubt about a name, the stewards can usually help one. It is a golden rule that one should go round one's exhibits within half an hour of judging beginning, if one has staged overnight. It may be necessary to replace a truss that has flopped, or you may have left 5 blooms to choose from in a class for 4, or another exhibitor may inadvertently have put down a vase with a spare bloom in it in the middle of your exhibit. Once, I staged a 10 foot spread with a large and beautiful Magnolia obovata in the centre, and omitted to look at it in the morning until after the judging, by which time the magnolia had gone black.

Contributions. It is hoped that future issues of this Bulletin will not be monologues, but this depends upon members sending in contributions. These will be very gladly received by the acting secretary and editor at any time, but he reserves the right to publish in the Annual contributions intended for the Bulletin, and vice-versa.

Proforma A

To the Hon. Sec.
Rhododendron & Camellia Group.
Lamellen, St. Tudy,
Bodmin, Cornwall.
PL30 3NR

I should like to join the Rhododendron & Camellia Group; I am
a Fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society; my ticket No. is

Will you kindly include my name in the list of members, and send
me copies of the bulletin as they appear ?

Signed

Name

Address

Date
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Proforma B

To the Hon. Sec.
Rhododendron & Camellia Group.
Lamellen, St. Tudy,
Bodmin, Cornwall.
PL30 3NR

I am willing to pay a subscription of £3 per year to the
Rhododendron & Camellia Group, for which I will receive a copy of all
bulletins and circulars which it issues, and a copy of the Annual 'Rhodo-
dendrons, 197 , with Magnolias & Camellias', post free in Great Britain and
Ireland. I enclose a cheque for £3 for the year beginning 1st November
1976 (i.e. to include the 1976 Annual).

Signed

Name

Address

Date
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