

The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group



BULLETIN No. 52 - April 1993

Forthcoming Events

April 8-11 (0930-1930)	International Spring Gardening Fair,	May 8 (0930-1800)	
April 12 (0930-1700)	Wembley	May 9 (0930-1700)	
April 19 (1630)	Group AGM - Vincent Square	May 12-17	Group Spring Tour - now fully booked.
April 20 (1100-1900)	Main Rhododendron Competition. Daffodil	May 25-28	CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW
April 21 (1100-1700)	show. Tulip Competition. Vincent Square	June 16-20	RHS Show at BBC Gardeners' World live event at the
April 22/23 (1000-1900)	Harrogate Spring Show		NEC Birmingham
April 24 (0930-1700)		June 30	Summer Flower Festival - RHS Garden, Wisley
April 25 (1000-1600)		July 1	
May 7 (1000-1800)	Malvern Spring Gardening Show	Jul 7-11	Hampton Court Flower Show

Chairman's Notes

Once again we come to the beginning of another growing season but, certainly in the South West it has, so far, been a most extraordinary start. A very mild winter has meant that everything in the garden is about six weeks early. The normally early rhododendrons are all well over by the beginning of March whilst those following on have been caught by the end of February/beginning of March frost. Frustrating in the case of *R. macabeaenum* as this is a first-time flowering but as the weather has now turned a little warmer perhaps there will be something to show. Most of the Camellias that were in flower have been caught but luckily there are many unopened buds to carry on. The Magnolias do not seem over anxious to break so, unless we get more frost, will probably flower well. The Tours Organiser is getting worried in case, by May, there will be nothing left to see!!

Recently I was asked to name my six favourite Rhododendrons and this caused me some deep thought. It would be interesting if members would write to the Bulletin Editor imagining a position where they had just enough room in their otherwise suitable gardens to grow six Rhododendrons, species or hybrids. Which would be the choice and why?

Finally, with the prospect of a fine flowering year ahead (frosts permitting) may I take this opportunity to wish all members a very happy gardening year.

B.A.

Editor's Note

Copy date for the next issue of the Bulletin - 1st July 1993.

Photographic Competition

In 1992 members of the Group submitted a record number of entries for the competition and the quality was higher than ever. Entries for 1993 are invited and, to widen the interest, competitors are asked to write a few words about the subject of their photograph and the conditions in which they were taken. These will be printed. Not more than 250-300 words, please. Rhododendrons, azaleas, camellias and magnolias are all eligible, as are both slides and prints. These visual representations of our three genera greatly enhance the appearance of our Year Book. Remember: there is a small prize of £10 - no more than a token, but we like to think it carries a certain cachet. Please send entries (with a stamped, addressed envelope) to Lady Cynthia Postan, 84 Barton Road, Cambridge, CB3 9LH.

C.P.

Pocket Microscopes

With reference to the item in the December Bulletin I am now informed that these are only available to personal callers. For ease of reference the address of the supplier is Wheatley Antiques, Stand

106, Gray's Antique Market, 58 Davies Street, London W1Y 1LB. (But see also the last paragraph of Robin Whiting's article on Raising Rhododendrons from Seed later in the Bulletin)

New Publication

THE COLOUR DICTIONARY OF CAMELLIAS (By Stirling Macoby). 517 Colour Photos; 30 Colour Paintings; 10 b & w photos; 208 pp. Published by Millbank Books Ltd, Victoria Wing, Rawdon House, High Street, Hoddesdon. EN11 8TE. Price £27.95.

This is a brand new edition of the Australian author's book first published in 1981 which has proved to be the 'bible' for Camellia lovers and growers. The publishers have very kindly offered to waive the charge for post and packing (normally £3.15) to paid-up members of the Group and to allow a discount of 10% in addition. The price to members, therefore, is £25.15 (incl. p&p). A review of the book appears later in the Bulletin.

Greetings Cards

Dr. Jack still has a few of these left. As mentioned in previous bulletins they provide an easy and pleasing way of saying "Thank you" or "Get well soon" without the 'corny' messages usually found in the cards offered for sale in card shops. At the offer price of 60p they are surely a good buy. Incidentally Robbie Jack has a new phone number: 0555 663021.

Armillaria mellea (Honey Fungus)

Sir Peter Smithers has provided an interesting piece of news from his garden at Vico Morcote in Switzerland where he lost innumerable Rhododendrons to this scourge in the early years of the garden. Sadly, it is now endemic there because, in an effort to control erosion the law forbids the grubbing out of affected tree stumps on the hillsides when a tree is felled and of course the rotting stumps create a luxury housing estate for the Honey Fungus. It has now invaded the vineyards.

In 1985 they had an exceptionally cold night when the temperature fell to -17 degrees killing three *Eucalyptus* spp. (*EE. viminalis*, *nitens* and *nichollii*.) *E. viminalis* had a trunk about 2 feet in diameter and Sir Peter fancied that the wood was too aromatic to be a host to Honey Fungus. "How wrong I was", he writes. By 1987 a fine crop of mushrooms had appeared in the neighbourhood of the dead *E. viminalis* and a good drench with *Armillatox* proved useless. In 1990 a *magnolia grandiflora* 'Goliath', already a tall tree and the furthest in a line of different varieties nearby began to defoliate but again *Armillatox* proved ineffective and the 'Goliath' was duly felled.

In the spring of 1991 the next Magnolia shewed the same symptoms and was treated similarly when Sir Peter had a visit from a local and eminent arboriculturist, Dr. Zanzi of Varese, who looked at the dying tree and its sickly neighbours. "I am trying a new product, non-

toxic", he said, "which carries a parasitic fungus hostile to certain other fungi. It is worth a try". There was a wait of 6 months whilst the presence of the Armillatox was dissipated, since this would destroy the parasitic fungus. The soil was then mounded up round the gravely wounded trunk and the mounded up soil drenched with this somewhat expensive new non-toxic product. "Frankly" writes Sir Peter, "I thought it was a waste of money! However, last August I happened to be walking by the dying tree and instead of averting my gaze from the unhappy spectacle I looked towards it and what should I see but, not only very vigorous new growth arising from the base (which by the end of the season had reached about 2 feet in length) but at many places on the seemingly dead trunk, some new growth appearing even quite high up. In the middle of the dying leaves which still persist at the ends of a few branches there was also new activity. Dr. Zanzi was called and we were both astonished".

The product is called ACTIVATOR TCH, manufactured by BIONOVA. It appears from the label that it is supplied in 50kg bags but I have written to the suppliers to ascertain whether they are exporting it and if so at what price and where it can be obtained and I am still awaiting a reply. Should it be of any interest I will gladly inform any member of the result of my enquiry on request.

Ed.

Plant Sale at High Beeches, Handcross, Sussex

A wide selection of LARGE SPECIMEN TREES AND SHRUBS will be sold at High Beeches Gardens on Monday May 3rd from 10 am to 5pm.

Included will be many varieties of hardy magnolias and maples, 8-10 feet tall, large specimen rhododendron species and hybrids and many other important trees and shrubs. Purchases can be collected at any time during the week following the sale. It is regretted plants cannot be reserved beforehand.

Enquiries on prices to Starborough Nursery, Marsh Green, Edenbridge, TN8 5RB. SAE please.

There will also be a very enjoyable WINE TASTING of International Award Winning Sussex wines from Barkham Manor Vineyard.

At BLUEBELL TIME the gardens are perhaps at their best with early rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias and sheets of bluebells in the woodland glades. Homemade lunches and teas will be served throughout the day in the Barn Tea Room.

Entrance £2.50 includes the gardens. Free Car Park. No dogs in the gardens, please. Coaches by appointment. Contact Anne Boscowen or Sarah Bray on 0444 400589.

Book Review - The Colour Dictionary of Camellias

Stirling Macoboy is to be congratulated on the 4th Edition of his Colour Dictionary of Camellias, which is a mine of information and a most useful tool in the hands of Camellia lovers generally. The illustrations are superb, although I would like to see some, like that of Mrs D. W. Davis, replaced as the written description and the picture do not relate.

It is the only publication which sets out to enable the average grower of Camellias to identify their cultivars and also to enhance their knowledge of the history and cultivation of Camellias. The contributions by acknowledged experts are of real interest and written in an easy and acceptable style. I am impressed by the new dust cover. The choice of Toma-no-ura is particularly felicitous as the same cultivar has been chosen by the International Camellia Society for the frontpiece of their new Comprehensive Camellia Register. Undoubtedly there is a great future for this new cultivar, but was it discovered in Japan in 1973 or 1975?

Of course, the Dictionary does not pretend to be a complete record of all the cultivars in cultivation, but it is certainly more than comprehensive of those usually found in our gardens, and the illustrations, divisions and explanations are designed to give the maximum assistance to the expert and non-expert lover of this beautiful shrub alike.

Identification is never easy, but here is a book designed to help and if properly used will iron out many of the pitfalls, and having absorbed the contents of the articles the reader will be well placed to fend off any argument.

While the book is almost 'coffee table' size and beautiful enough to

qualify, its real place is on the shelf among those treasured volumes that enrich our knowledge, understanding and education concerning the cultivation of the amazing genus, 'the Camellia'.

C. E. Perring

Sunday Telegraph Gardeners' Diary

As from the beginning of February the new diary section will contain a notice of events, talks, walks, demonstrations, courses etc - everything which may be of interest to gardeners. This will be found on the Gardening page of the Review Section of the Sunday Telegraph and anyone seeking publicity for events which they may be organising is asked to send details to:-

Margot Bishop
Gardening Editor, The Sunday Telegraph
The Gables
Burnham Road
Woodham Mortimer, Maldon,
Essex CM9 6SS

What's in a name?

In 1992 Rhododendron hybrid 'Florida Ogada' appeared in the International Rhododendron Register.

This lovely hybrid has been named, at the suggestion of Anita Roddick, of The Body Shop, after a brilliant young 'entrepreneur' Ms Ogada, who lives in a rural village in Kenya. Ms Ogada has designed a clay cooking stove, not unlike a strawberry pot to look at. This stove is a great improvement on the open fires in common use for cooking in that part of the world. It is also much safer, as children fall in to the open fires quite often, and it requires much less firewood, so conserving the trees.

All the surrounding villages soon bought the stove, and the Kenyan Government are now buying thousands of them. Anita Roddick visited Ms Ogada, and her marketing manager, and they appeared on television. They were smartly dressed in bright cotton robes, and turbans, and obviously delighted at the success of their business. They explained that the women of the village make the moulds, dig the clay, and fire the stoves. They also keep the money they make, and use it for the good of the village. A few men appeared in the background, leaning against doorstops, and wearing very doubtful expressions!

Rhododendron 'Florida Ogada' was the centrepiece of our Gold Medal stand at the R.H.S. February show. The cross was made at Windsor, in 1965, from *R. macabeianum* x *sinogrande*, hoping to produce a hardy, large leaved plant. This would appear to have been achieved. The leaves are 460mmx230mm, with a silvery indumentum, and so far, show no sign of frost damage. The first flowers appeared in April 1992, in large, firm, primrose yellow trusses.

High Beeches Gardens Conservation Trust is very grateful to Anita Roddick and the Body Shop for practical help with the conservation of the gardens, and we all very much hope that Ms Ogada will be able to continue her work, in peace and prosperity.

Shallowford Lodge, Great Torrington, Devon

A group member, Mr Philip Cull, has written to me with some notes on the above property the gardens of which contain an important collection of rhododendron species and hybrids, magnolias, camellias and other rare and interesting plants, including 6 cultivars &/or varieties of Lapageria. Sadly, he and his wife due to increasing infirmity and advancing years now find themselves unable to maintain the garden properly and so have decided to put the property on the market. Mr Cull has asked me to let this be known through the medium of the Bulletin in the hope that an enthusiast may be found who is contemplating a move to that part of the country. (We have not, so far, negotiated the introductory commission! - Ed.)

The garden is in a secluded and sheltered woodland valley, mostly oak, occupying some 12 acres. Three streams run through the valley bottom. A naturalist's paradise in an area of outstanding natural beauty, close to Rosemoor Gardens. For further details write to Mr P J Cull at the above address or phone 0805 22182.

Raising Rododendrons from seed (By Robin Whiting)

Arising out of Chairman's Notes in the last issue of the Bulletin perhaps other members may be interested in the following notes

based on techniques which I have used successfully as an enthusiastic amateur for about 10 years.

The method is tedious but has the advantage in that the seed is started off in a semi-sterile condition and can be watched closely until germination takes place. The technique is similar to the schoolday method of growing mustard and cress on damp blotting paper. It requires the use of a good magnifier of the sort which leaves both hands free, some fine tweezers, a seed tray about 20mm deep and a fair bit of patience. A coffee filter paper is cut and folded to fit into the base of the tray and moistened with distilled water applied through a small syringe fitted with a hypodermic needle. This is going a bit over the top, I know, and anyone catching me in the middle of my seed-sowing antics could be forgiven for thinking they had stumbled on a mixed up junkie! The method does however allow the moistening to be carried out in a controlled manner and this is particularly important if extra dampening becomes necessary after the seed has been sown. I use filter paper in preference to kitchen roll as it is less hairy and thus it is easier to lift the seedlings off later.

The seed is then sown carefully on the surface, each seed being picked up individually using a sharpened wetted matchstick and placed about 3-4mm apart - tedious, did I say? Cling film is then wrapped around the tray after labelling and put somewhere warm. It does not seem to matter whether it is light or dark, but as our warm places tend to be dark, that is where they go. Regular inspection of the seed is essential to ensure that the surface is still moist, any rotting seed being removed immediately. Germination usually takes place in 2-6 weeks, sometimes longer, after which the seed is transferred to a conventional sowing medium. This is a tricky operation for which I use tweezers, not to grip the seedling but as a sort of hook to carry it to the new seed tray and to guide the radicles into crevices in the compost, spacing them so as to allow space for reasonable growth before further transplanting.

I have germinated many hundreds of seedlings using this technique including vireya and kalmia. Members of S.W. Branch may be interested to know that many of the large-leaved hybrids infesting the sale table at the autumn meetings in recent years were raised in this way.

Incidentally, members may also be interested in a simple pocket microscope operating from ambient light. This is the Waltex Pocket Microscope 30x magnification Model No. 7514, price £4.95 (incl VAT) plus 75p postage, obtainable from Shesto, Unit 2, Sapcote Trading Centre, 374 High Road, Willesden, London NW10 2DH Tel. 081 451 6188. The Company accepts orders by telephone using any recognised Credit Card. I disclaim any interest in the firm other than as a satisfied customer.

Hooker Rhododendrons

The legacy of J. D. Hooker's expedition to the Sikkim Himalayas lives on in many plant collections in these islands. *R. arboreum* is truly arboreal in many gardens. *RR. falconeri*, *griffithianum* and *niveum* have also attained noble proportions.

I am preparing an article about Hooker rhododendrons extant in gardens today for a forthcoming Yearbook. The Hooker rhododendrons were distributed from Kew by Wm. Hooker and J. D. Hooker. They were also available from the nurserymen Standish & Noble. Any information about such species in cultivation in gardens in your district would be much appreciated. I require the names of the species, number of specimens in the garden, height and condition of the plants. Historical information, such as the source and date of planting would also be welcome.

Please send this information to me, Mary Forrest, Department of Crop Science, Horticulture and Forestry, Faculty of Agriculture, University College, Belfield, Dublin 4, Eire. Fax No. 010-353-1-2837328.

Rhododendron Powdery Mildew

David M. Kenyon, Department of Horticulture, SAC / Strathclyde University, Auchincruive, Ayr. KA6 5HW.

Another growing season is approaching and powdery mildew continues as the most serious disease affecting Rhododendron. Despite this very little is known about the disease or the factors which govern its behaviour. Through our work at the SAC and Strathclyde University, Auchincruive / The Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh we

hope to solve some of the mysteries surrounding this disease. Initial work has concentrated in four areas:- environmental factors effecting disease development, initial infection events, pathogen genetics and the control of disease.

Work on environmental factors affecting the pathogen have clearly shown that there is a temperature optimum of 15°C for growth and the fungus develops poorly at higher temperatures. Unfortunately, for those of us living in the north temperatures above 20°C are infrequent and fungal spread continues throughout the spring and summer period. The ability of the pathogen to spread at low temperatures also means that the disease starts appearing early in the spring when the very young and particularly susceptible leaves are expanding. Indeed in some areas fungal growth continues throughout the year.

Events surrounding initial infection of a leaf by this fungus have been studied in Edinburgh using the scanning electron microscope. Using this tool we have shown that the pathogen normally grows on the under side of the leaf and is predominantly found on the surface with feeding structures penetrating down into the leaf cells at irregular intervals. Under laboratory conditions the time required from spores initially landing on a healthy leaf to the development of a new batch of viable spores capable for re-infecting is only 11 days. This coupled with the low temperature requirement for growth illustrates why this pathogen can spread early in the season and has become of such great importance within many Rhododendron collections.

The name of the pathogen is still unknown but it is of great importance that we should identify it correctly. Utilising techniques similar to those for genetic fingerprinting in humans we hope to solve this problem. Whilst using this technique we may also find that several races of this pathogen exist, something that is common with other powdery mildews. If distinct races do occur then this may give rise to the possibility of control through breeding resistant hybrids or the use of chemicals.

The control of the disease is obviously of great importance not only to nurseries but also to those who supervise important Rhododendron collections. With no new chemical products approved for use on Rhododendron this year, reliance will again have to be placed on the products used in 1992. Part of our work aims to look for alternative fungicides which may give both improved and more prolonged control. Unfortunately, it may be several years at least before any such products are recommended for use on Rhododendron.

The pathogen overwinters both on the previous year's leaves and in flower buds. As a result there is a plentiful supply of new spores which infect young Rhododendron tissue early in its growth. A chemical application which protects this young tissue will help prevent the disease becoming well established early in the season.

There is still much work to be attempted in the next 18 months. The start we have made gives a solid foundation for this and future studies. Hopefully, in the near future we will be in a position to answer more of the questions surrounding this most fascinating if annoying disease.

Garden Tours 1993

The group Spring Tour is now fully booked but if there are any disappointed members who have not been able to obtain a place on the tour they might care to consider one of the specialist Garden Tours organised by Brightwater Holidays a full list of which can be obtained from their office at "Tothill" Lathrisk Estate, Falkland, Fife KY7 7HX. Tel. 0337 57650. Here is an example: Gardens of the Far North - Departing July, September. Based in the North of Scotland visiting:- The Queen's secret garden - The Castle of Mey, Cluny House Gardens, Jack Drake's Alpine Nursery, Dunrobin Castle Gardens, and Inverewe Gardens. Price from £129.00.

BBC Gardeners' World Live event at NEC Birmingham

The Rural Crafts Association are organising a special competition in association with the BBC Gardeners' World Live show in June. The aim is actively to encourage the design, manufacture and sale of new British garden products that are capable of being mass-produced by manufacturers within the garden trades. The competition is open to both amateurs and professional designers and makers, and entries

are invited from gardeners, craftsmen, tree surgeons, architects, designers, manufacturers and inventors.

All designs and samples will be treated in strict confidence.

The competition is divided into 3 Classes:

- Class 1 **Garden Containers** which may be of any material any size and any end use.
- Class 2 **Garden Feature**, e.g. weather vanes, obelisks, lighting, sculpture, plant supports etc.
- Class 3 **Innovation** – a good idea to benefit the garden or gardeners.

Prize moneys of £250 per Class will be awarded and should be collected at the Show. 10 selected products from each class will be displayed, including the winners - staging provided.

Schedules and Booking Forms can be obtained by application to Rural Crafts Association, Heights Cottage, Brook Road, Wormley, Godalming. GU8 5UA. Tel. 0428 682292. There are no entry fees.

Main Rhododendron Competition, Vincent Square. April 20/21

The Rhododendron, Camellia & Magnolia Group will be mounting an exhibit which is being staged by Peter Howarth, Ken Hume and Ivor Stokes.