FEBRUARY 2023/ISSUE #2

RICHMOND GARDEN CLUB

Newsletter

Great Galloping Galanthus!
New life is peeking through that chilly soil this month, and it's time to start our garden warm-up routine....

IN THIS ISSUE

Garden Club News
- Club Updates
- Events Calendar
- New Volunteer Opportunities

Grow Your Garden Savvy
- February To-Do List
- Ask the Garden Guru
- Fall in Love with...Hellebores!

Find Inspiration
- Planetary Love: Making a Difference with the Butterfly Rangers
- Spreading Garden Passion: In Conversation with Gary Lewis

Letter from the Editor

Lisa Colby
Vice President, RGC

Happy Valentine's everyone! Welcome to our February newsletter with your usual fix of the latest club news and upcoming events, a timely seasonal garden checklist (yes even for February!), and a swoon-worthy plant feature to fall in love with this month. There are some inspirational reminders to love your community and your planet this year, as modeled by our own local Butterfly Rangers of Richmond, and by the impressive array of community contributions of Gary Lewis, Phoenix Perennials, a local business that helps keep gardening interesting and accessible for us all.

And also, for a bit of fun, we have added a new feature column called Ask the Garden Guru, where we will answer monthly questions from the readership for some seasonal practical gardening tips and trivia. Enjoy!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 11
Family Birdwatching & the Great Backyard Bird Count! VanDusen Botanical Garden from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. Learn how you and your family can support wild birds. Between February 17th- 20th the GBBC brings thousands of bird lovers together around the globe to help scientists count local bird populations before the massive spring migration. Adult $15 Child / Youth $10: Register now!

February 11
Hydrangea Pruning Workshop
Free for RGC members
Paulik Park, Richmond.
No registration required.
Just come by at 10:15a.m.
Bring your secateurs and gardening gloves. Meet by playground off Heather Street entrance.

February 15-19
Northwest Flower and Garden Show
Official Northwest Flower & Garden Festival | February 15-19, 2023 | Seattle, WA (gardenshow.com)

February 18
Darts Hill Garden Park, Family Day1633 170th Street, Surrey, BC @ 10:00 am - 4:00 pm Free activities: build your own birdfeeder, fruit tree pruning workshops, guided birding walks, ask a Master Gardener, live music. Entry by donation, Open from 10am-4pm. Learn more at www.surrey.ca/dartshill.

February 22

Club News Update

Welcome to All New Members

We are so delighted to welcome 17 new folk to our club over this past year. And now that the pandemic seems over-ish (hopefully !!) we want to begin meeting and getting to know you all in person over the coming season and introducing you to our projects. Watch this space as various committees ramp up for the summer and meet, greet, and volunteer opportunities are announced

Annual Plant Sale!

The date is now confirmed for Saturday, May 6th in the north parking lot of South Arm United Church. (**Note, this is the weekend before Mother's Day weekend**) The sale will run 9am-1pm, but set up begins 7:15am and take down is 1-2pm. This is the major fundraiser for our club, raising over 90% of the funds that pay for all the fantastic speakers at our monthly meetings. For those generous folk willing to donate plants, please:

- Plan now to divide your perennials (recalling that for best success in their new homes they'll require 6 weeks to grow a decent root ball before being sold).
- For those who like to grow vegetable seedlings for the sale (always a big hit!), please time growth so they are a decent size for May 6th.

Happy Gardening everybody and here's to another great Annual Plant Sale!

Bird Friendly Garden Presentation (Zoom) by Vancouver Avian Research Centre (VARC) Click here for more information.

February 22
Next RGC Meeting
Feature Guest Speakers:
- Gary Lewis, Phoenix Perennials, speaking about Groundcovers;
- Sharon MacGougan, of Garden City Conservation Society, speaking about the Miyawaki Forest Project

March 16-19
BC Home and Garden Show
Official BC Home + Garden Show March 16-19, 2023 | Vancouver, BC (bchomeandgardenshow.com)

April 14-16
Bradner Flower Show
10am-4pm daily. Bradner Community Hall, 5305 Bradner Rd, Abbotsford. Admission $2.50. More detail: Bradner Flower show

May 6
Annual Plant Sale
Richmond Garden Club
South Arm United Church

Raffle Update

Our sponsorship support from Home Depot has come to an end, diminishing our prize budget by half. We do wish to keep the raffle prizes interesting though given the importance of this popular event as an additional fundraising source for our club programming. So... while we continue to search for another generous donor, and instead of raising the price of raffle tickets, other measures being proposed to keep us going are:

- **Birthday Donations**: A past tradition is being resurrected, namely, asking members at their discretion (and only as their personal circumstances allow each year of course), to consider donating a garden-related prize on their birthday month. That spreads the donations out a bit.
- **Anytime Donations:** Also, anyone with surplus new-looking, prize-worthy gardening goods at home is always welcome to donate them to our good cause at any time.

Just bring your donations to the Raffle Table at any meeting.

New Volunteer Opportunities

Live the Dream – Become a Garden Writer!
Have you always wanted to be a writer? Be one for us! The RGC Newsletter would LOVE to hear about your gardening passions, research, reflections, inspirations, travels and adventures. It's a friendly and eager audience so don't be shy! Letters articles, poems - can be short and sweet. It feels good! Contact the Newsletter Team to discuss further at richmondgardenclub.com

Picture Paradise - Photography Buffs wanted
We are looking for volunteers for our new year-round Photography Committee that will be gathering and organizing a glorious photography collection for our club to use in its newsletter, promotional or outreach activities going forward. We are seeking a treasure trove of photos of all our gardens and events in all seasons of the year. Over time this could be quite a wonderful photo collection. Skills that would be helpful on this committee would include but not be limited to experience with digital photography, videography, graphic layout or visual arts, archive and library sciences (or at least people keen to develop those skills).

Members interested in helping out with this fun project can obtain more details at richmondgardenclub.com.

Grow Your Garden Savvy

Garden Giggles
What would be a gardener's favorite Beatles song?

Answer:
Lettuce Be....

February To-Do List

ASK THE GARDEN GURU

Have a gardening question? Many others probably have the same one – we guarantee. Send those questions in to our Garden Guru at richmondgardenclub.com and we will track down answers to publish in the newsletter each month, so we all learn together. (Watch out Master Gardeners and other local experts, we might be calling for help!)

Q: We had some frost

Checklist for the February Gardener

It's not to early to start planning and gardening! Snow drops and hellebores are emerging, crocus and daffodils are starting to poke out and witch hazel's jazz hands have been shimmering for a while. And oh, that intoxicating scent of fragrant sweetbox or sarcacocca on the breeze again. Beyond the obvious task of cleaning and sharpening your tools for the season ahead, here is a checklist of some of key things to get started on this February.

recently so it made me wonder why do snowdrops not mind it when it gets down to -10 degrees Celsius, yet Hellebores do?

A: Well....it seems that some plants have proteins that switch on other proteins that do a variety of jobs. Some make a chemical that protect the plant from dehydration in winter and other proteins that produce something like anti-freeze that keeps ice crystals from forming in their cells. Most plants do need some time for cold acclimation so large temperature changes can cause damage to plants that can usually withstand a frost.

Back to snowdrops - if you are a fanatic about Galanthus you are known as a galanthophile! The range of flowers and leaves is subtle but if you are an enthusiast, you will eagerly pay to acquire different species. They are native to Europe and western Asia and are in the Amaryllidaceae Family of plants along with onions and garlic. Galanthus (Greek for milk) are another source of both nectar and pollen for bees and native pollinators.

Luckily we have a good number of snowdrops in Richmond's Paulik Park in various spots - to make you smile when you see a new cluster.

Clean Up

- Remove visible weeds (that buttercup is growing again!);
- Cut back deciduous ornamental grasses and remove dead leaves from evergreen grasses;
- Start cleaning up the old dead stems and leaves from the perennial beds;
- Cut old hellebore leaves to the ground to reveal emerging flowers and new growth.

Pruning (on a dry day)

- winter flowering shrubs that have finished flowering;
- summer flowering shrubs like butterfly bush, hydrangea, and other hardy fuchsia and C-type clematis that bloom after June (but careful - don't prune the Spring flowering shrubs!);
- wisteria to within 2-3 buds (avoid cutting off flower buds!);
- dormant grapes, kiwis, raspberry canes and berry bushes;
- deciduous trees;
- hedges, both hardy evergreen and deciduous;
- and you can start pruning the roses when the forsythia blooms this month.

Planting (if soil not frozen or waterlogged)

- It's a good time to transplant those new fruit bushes, climbers. bare root roses, lily bulbs, hedging, shrubs, and trees;
- Divide and transplant your snowdrops (G*alanthus*);
- Sow hardy annuals outdoors (e.g. bachelor buttons, sweet peas and California poppies);
- Bring winter stored dahlia tubers back into a warm, light place to sprout before planting;
- Allow the potato tubers to start sprouting;
- Start tender annuals indoors (e.g. cosmos, snapdragons, nicotiana, petunia, zinnia, salvia).

We thank the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) website for some inspiration and some of the ideas above, and we also mixed in some other common local knowledge. For more details and ideas on things you can do this month, check out this RHS link: *Gardening in February - jobs to do this month / RHS Gardening*.

Have fun out there!

Falling in love… with Hellebores?

Helle yeah! By Thora Gislason

Are you finding it hard to tear your eyes away from your darling hellebores, now blooming in many of our West Coast gardens? Additionally, are you experiencing a particular thrill from inciting jealousy in your friends back east with alluring closeup photos of these early-blooming sweethearts? If so, you are likely in love ... and we don't blame you!! What's not to love about hellebores?

They are often the first plants to bloom in our gardens, sometimes well before Christmas. The blooms are gorgeous, hence the nickname Christmas Rose or Lenten Rose. They also have a long blooming time, due to the fact that what appears to be the petals are actually sepals, or modified leaves (the true petals are clustered in the centre). Also, the leaves are evergreen, meaning we can enjoy their foliage in the garden all year round (the leaves do refresh in the spring). One caveat: if we get a cold snap during their blooming time as we did towards the end of January, it's wise to cover them at night, either with an upturned plant pot, a cardboard box, or some newspaper.

Why was the first hellebore called the Christmas Rose? Legend has it that one of the Bethlehem shepherds was filled with sorrow because he didn't have a gift for the baby Jesus. A beautiful flower grew in the spot where he wept his bitter tears; this became known as the Christmas Rose. Of course hellebores are very different from roses, belonging in fact to the buttercup (Ranunculaceae) family. There are many varieties and colours now available in our local nurseries. Nursery staff tell me that the plants on offer are all very hardy, often to -20 degrees or even -30. The Helleborus niger (Christmas Rose) is the first to bloom and the hardiest. It is usually white with yellow stamens, and dark green, leathery leaves. The Helleborus x hybridus (Lenten Rose) blooms a bit later, and can tolerate more sun. There is an astonishing number of these to choose from in a huge range of colours. Vancouver even has its own hellebore: Vancouver Medallion, developed for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

In terms of growing conditions, hellebores are not particularly demanding. They prefer part shade and are drought tolerant. Although they thrive in well-drained, neutral to alkaline soil, they will tolerate acidic soil as well as some clay. Considered heavy feeders, hellebores will benefit from a generous top-dressing of compost once a year along with optional organic fertilizing at the end of the flowering season and again in the fall. The plants themselves can be very long-lived, which is good news for our love affair as we can look forward to it being renewed through many seasons!

Sources

Black, Carolyn. (March 21, 2021). Hellebores: an amazing winter and early spring display.

Lewis, Gary. (2022). Helleborus. In The complete book of ground covers. Portland, OR: Timber Press.

Phoenix Perennials. (2020). All about hellebores.

Sarah P. Duke Gardens. [n.d.]. Garden talk: Horticultural highlights: hellebores.

Thompson, Paul. (Jan. 17, 2022). The world of hellebores.

Green Inspirations

Planetary Love: Making a Difference with the

Butterfly Rangers

By Anne-Marie Fenn

The Butterflyway Project was initiated by the David Suzuki Foundation in 2017. The purpose of the project is to bring together Canadians in their communities to create habitat for pollinators, especially butterflies. Upon completion of the program, one is considered to be a Butterflyway Ranger. The Butterflyway Rangers are an enthusiastic and supportive group. There are plenty of opportunities to volunteer for a variety of events and learn together.

Rangers are given training on topics such as: types of pollinators, native plant species and how to create a butterfly garden that provides both a food source and host plants (where butterflies can lay their eggs). Training involves a one day, in person session, followed by monthly webinars. Gardens can be created in private homes, local parks, schools and community centres. Creating a corridor of gardens that are closely connected provides an important variety of food and habitat for pollinators which increases their chances of survival.

If you are interested in becoming a Butterflyway Ranger, there is more information about the program and an application online at this link: https://davidsuzuki.org/take-action/act-locally/butterflyway/ - editor-2 If you answer 'No' to the question "Have you been a Butterflyway Ranger before?" the application will automatically appear.

The deadline to apply is: February 13, 2023. You will be notified of your application status by March 6, 2023.

We already have a number of dedicated Butterflyway Rangers in the Richmond Garden Club. We look forward to having more people join this wonderful group.

Spreading Garden Passion: In Conversation with Gary Lewis

We are so fortunate in our corner of the gardening world to have Gary Lewis, owner of Phoenix Perennials, involved in educating and inspiring customers and supplying a vast array of beautiful, interesting plants. A prized local nursery and retail outlet since 2004, Gary also contributes horticultural expertise and energy to our local garden community in many other ways that may surprise you including rich and informative newsletters, webinars, public garden tours, nursery tours, public speaking engagements and more. We are delighted to have Gary confirmed as our feature guest speaker on "Groundcovers" at the upcoming

Feb. 22 members' meeting, where we know he will inspire us to expand our thinking and enjoy new and imaginative ways to use beautiful ground covers.

For broader context beyond ground covers before his talk, we invited Gary for some conversation recently to learn a little more about him and his passions, what inspires him and where his energies may take him next. And we are glad we did! Enjoy his reflections below.

What do you consider one of your proudest personal contributions to the Richmond and Lower Mainland garden community?

Gary: Overall I'm most proud of the selection we bring to the local gardening community as well as to our mail order customers across Canada. We offer more than 5000 different plants a year locally and about 2500 for online ordering and shipping. And 300-400 of them are new additions every year. We are always trying to push the envelope to inspire people with the diversity and beauty of the plant world. We always love to be the first to offer hot new cultivars. And it's pretty cool when we're the only source in Canada and even North America for many rare plants. With our new South African bulbs we'll be one of the few places in the world to offer them. We love it when someone asks us for a dream plant they've been searching for for years and we say "Of course, it's right over here!".

It has also been really gratifying to build our mail order division over the past 10 years. Canadian gardeners across the country, especially outside of major cities, are very limited in the plants available to them locally. But they can get all kinds of cool plants from us via mail order. We even have a lot of customers in the Lower Mainland who use our mail order and courier services. Some are too busy in their lives to have time to shop. We also have a number of local customers with disabilities and mobility issues who can now get our plants shipped right to their door.

Have there been notable changes to your guiding philosophy over the years related to the gardening industry and community?

Gary: I think it has remained pretty constant over the last 19 seasons as we look towards our 20th anniversary season this year. The guiding principle has always been "More cool plants". But combined with that has always been a mission to educate and inspire people about plants. From the very beginning I started doing garden club talks – including to the Richmond Garden Club - and workshops at the nursery. I like plants and I like people. I like to meet people at their current level of gardening knowledge and interests and help them learn and explore and get even more excited. It's just as gratifying to teach a millennial about how to grow tomatoes for the first time – and to talk them out of growing them in one gallon pots in their kitchen - as it is to talk to a seasoned gardener about rare plants.

What current projects are you most excited about these days that you want people to know about?

Gary: My new book, The Complete Book of Ground Covers, is the most exciting thing happening at the moment for me. I spent nine years researching, writing, and photographing for the book in my spare time while running the nursery. It just came out in October and, I must say, it's beautiful and I'm very happy with it. It has received some great reviews and I've received lots of positive feedback from customers which is so nice. It was quite the undertaking as it covers the vast majority of ground covers – 4000 in total – for the whole temperate gardening world including North America, Europe, New Zealand, and temperate parts of Australia and Asia. I've just found out it will be translated and published in Japan! I can't wait to see that.

At the nursery I'm excited about our ongoing fundraising projects for two charities I care a lot about. This will be the second year fundraising for both. We are raising money for Food Banks BC through pre-order sales of our Grafted Veggies. For every plant purchased, we donate $1 to Food Banks BC. These cool edibles also contribute to your own food security as they produce 2-3 times more produce than own root veggies. One local Richmond gardener even got 100 pounds of 'Brandywine' tomatoes off a single grafted plant! Two years in a row! So he was convinved pretty quickly of their benefits. The pre-order is on now so you can help us raise funds by placing a pre-order and spreading the word to your friends.

We are also donating 20% of our sales of BC native plants to the First Nations and Endangered Languages program at the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies at UBC. These funds will be used by their staff and students towards projects to help support and maintain First Nations languages in BC. I love languages and it's a gut punch to me that right here in BC these beautiful and fascinating languages are being lost. Language is fundamental to cultures and their worldview. So I'm happy that we can play a part here in BC. When we fill up our native plant section this spring, please come and shop and bring a friend or two. Our local pollinators and other wildlife will also appreciate you including BC native plants in your garden.

How and why do you try to inspire gardeners?

Gary: I love plants so I want to share that. And let's be honest, it's good for business and I have upwards of 25 employees to support each year! But when you get people interested in plants I think it helps them become better and happier people which in turn improves our communities and also makes people more aware and appreciative of the natural world.

Plants and gardening also have so many benefits from trees mitigating global warming and reducing the urban heat island effect, to growing our own healthy edibles which reduces our carbon footprint and leads to healthier eating by adults and especially children, to including pollinator plants in our gardens to support our valued garden critters. If everyone in the world was a gardener, the world would be a much better place. You just know that Vladimir Putin is NOT a gardener.

I believe that plants and gardening can save the world.

Where do you find inspiration yourself – what keeps you energized?

Gary: I might have a Masters in Botany, have run a diverse nursery for 20 years and been into plants since I was a kid, but there is still so much to learn about in the world of plants. That keeps me motivated and interested. Part of that learning is the ongoing hunt for amazing plants from around the world. I get to be the personal shopper for all of my customers and discover new plants to me and to all of you. When gardeners get excited about a new discovery to them, that's exciting for me.

What would you love to do more of if you had time? What is next?

Gary: Now that Covid is over-ish I'm enjoying travelling again. I lead garden and botanical tours for alumni UBC though anyone from the wider community can also join. The Gardens of Ireland tour I lead this past summer was so inspiring. This summer I'm leading a tour to see the Great Gardens of Northern France – Versailles, the Loire and its castles, Normandy, Giverny, and Champagne! There are still a few spots left if any Richmond Garden Club members want to join! I'm currently planning future tours in 2024 to New Zealand and South Africa. So this is exciting. I love travelling to see both gardens and wild plants. The more I can do, the better.

And on a lighthearted note, which is your favorite unexpected plant to give your Valentine?

Gary: It's hellebore season. So it has to be a hellebore. Though that's not unexpected for all of your members who are familiar with the nursery. By this point, I do hope that all of your members have at least 10 hellebores in their garden! Or maybe a rose bush from our Rose Pre-Order. My favourites are 'Distant Drums', 'Hot Cocoa', 'Peach Glory' and 'Gabriel Oak'. But maybe 'Love at First Sight' might be the best option!

So, that's all we had time for. Thanks, Gary for all that you do. Great perspective and food for thought. Come meet Gary in person Feb 22 everyone – we guarantee you will walk away inspired!