

University
of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends

March 2013 Newsletter

D Dear Friends, I would like to send best wishes to you all for the new year. It doesn't seem possible that another year has rolled by—I swear that the



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Carmen Varcoe

Finnerty Gardens has continued to flourish and grow this past year. Companion plants are still being added to the newly created bed where some of Norm Todd's favourite rhododendrons have been planted. The board continues to advise and improve existing beds. Plans are being made to look at the Memorial Garden and see how this bed can be improved. There's always room for improvement and a garden never remains frozen in time. Plants grow old just like people and it's important to keep a watchful eye on areas where the plants have become ungainly or simply not

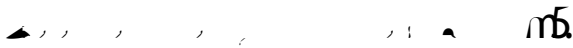
worthy of garden space. In my own garden I find this is a real challenge to remain objective and keep editing as needed. With 10–12 sets of eyes on the Advisory Board very little gets overlooked.

Tours have been given throughout the year for garden clubs, faculty members and visiting groups at conventions.

The self guided brochures have proved very useful when getting the word out there about Finnerty. Up at the Nanaimo Rhododendron Conference, last fall, the brochures were all snapped up.



us the ability to undergo long-distance transport and set up a new population requires this genetic system.



be a low probability of pollen arriving from another plant. Under these circumstances Madison Avenue rules apply—advertise, be persistent. As these plants have been selected for long lasting and large flowers. When cruising a forest a bee is more likely to see a large flower than a small one. In this case size really does matter.

P. ostii

Little is known about the breeding systems of the large tree peonies but *ostii*, the medicinal peony is well known to be self-fertile. It is more or less a requirement for a field crop to self but it is not clear whether this has arisen over the centuries as a result of domestication, or whether this ability was already present in the original wild plants. Since there are reports of wild *ostii* it should be possible to test this, if they are indeed truly wild. Incidentally I can report that Mr Osti is alive and well and has published another book on peonies. I have not seen a copy but hope this one has an index.

P. rockii

It was a lucky accident that I ordered several seeds of rockii from Halda and that most germinated. This happy accident steered me towards writing this series of articles.

I initially used the pollen from my plants to make hybrids with the old cultivars of 'sibirica' I was growing. These set seed very well and at the time I did not see any significance in this. But after a year or two I wanted to multiply the rockii because at the time it was an extremely rare plant, but my main plant did not want to set seed. I suspected

self-incompatibility and this was confirmed the next year when hand cross pollination between two separate seedlings produced a good crop of seed. Earlier *rockii* had been a plant only to dream about and specimens fetched exorbitant prices. Even in 2012 one nursery in the USA was asking \$150 for a plant. Not having a nursery I cannot produce flowering sized specimens but second year seedlings can be either grown on in larger pots or given extra care in the garden. And yes, I admit they are not as easy to establish as *ludlowii*, but much more rewarding.

Other large flowered species

The remaining species are not available to the public. Growers have reported difficulties of obtaining and germinating seeds. Using my experience with the readily available plants I would start from the hypothesis that the seed shortages are most likely due to self-incompatibility with growers possessing single plants. Even when two plants are side by side natural pollen transfer may be poor as I have found with *rockii* and hand cross-pollination will result in an abundance of seed when the very young stigmas are pollinated by hand.

One problem would be cost. For instance if the exquisite *decomposita* were to come on the market individual plants would fetch, I presume, hundreds of dollars. To propagate it by seed would require two or preferably several specimens. I may not be able to afford that but at least we now have an indication of how to proceed.

The next article will deal with hybrids.

NORTHERN ENGLAND & SCOTLAND GARDEN TOUR

Hosted by Eryl Morton

Days: May 18 - June 2, 2013
(16 days)



Visiting: York, Easingwold, Garton, Scarborough, Ouseburn, Airedale, Thirsk, and other areas.

For more information: Jane Dutton, Morton Garden, Scarborough, South Yorkshire. Tel: 01753 833333. Email: j.dutton@scotgard.com



Membership in the Friends of Finnerty Gardens is \$10 per year (single or couple). Membership includes an informative newsletter published four times a year. Funds raised through membership support enhancements within the Gardens which would not be possible otherwise.

is newsletter is also available on the University of Victoria's website at www.external.uvic.ca/gardens/. If you would prefer

