

A Virtual Visit to Rhododendron Heaven

At the September meeting, our guest speaker was Ron Knight, a past-president of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society, and a past-director for the American Rhododendron Society's BC Division.

Over the last two decades, Ron and his wife Carla have created Caron Gardens, located in the Garden Bay area of Pender Harbour. Their one-acre lakeside garden displays over 400 different rhododendrons, with thousands of companion perennials. Caron Gardens (www3.telus.net/rcknight) has been featured in Gardens West magazine and on television.

Ron's presentation was entitled, **4 Seasons in a Rhododendron Garden**. It began with a photographic essay (to music) showing the diversity of plant life in Caron Gardens over the course of a year, and some spectacular rhododendrons that bloom in each month from February to July. Then Ron showed us how the garden evolved from a densely forested hillside to the magical place it is today. He described how the 6 "rooms" in the garden were designed and what steps he and Carla had taken this year to decrease their gardening work by fifty percent. Here are Ron's top 10 strategies (arranged from most to least potential impact):

- ◆ Learn to love a mossy lawn.
- ◆ Close steep and heavily shaded garden areas.
- ◆ Replace many drip irrigation emitters in a bed with one mini-sprayer.
- ◆ Minimize pruning for size by ensuring all shrubs are placed with their 10 year height in mind.
- ◆ Use a leaf blower for paths, driveway, deck, roof and gutters. (Stihl BG 55 recommended).
- ◆ Plant low-maintenance perennials, not annuals.
- ◆ Don't bother with deadheading (except for new plantings).
- ◆ Simplify weeding with newspaper and mulch.
- ◆ Sharpen tools at least once per year with a bench grinder.
- ◆ Don't use chemical sprays and fertilizers (except for potted plants).

Ron will be returning to speak at LVGC on April 21st. On that evening, his topic will be **Make Your Rhodos Think They're Growing in the Himalayas**. This will be your chance to find out everything you've always wanted to know about rhododendron culture and care.