

Along Azalea Row

(Guest Columnist this week is Harry Lockland, Seattle, Washington, who has the Rhododendron as but one of his special horticultural interests. Of latest he has been doing a great deal with their propagation from seeds and our grateful appreciation is here expressed for his taking time from a very busy life to write one of his hobbies. The Lockland's permanent home is here and their friends look forward to the time when they will return to stay. As a former president of the Azalea Garden Club, Dorothy continues to keep track of its progress, and was here to view this year's show.

Under the influence of a kindly climate the West Coast of Oregon and Washington can rightfully be regarded as the natural home of the genus Rhododendron.

The native species are limited to Rho. Macrophyllum, common over large areas of the Pacific coast, and the deciduous azalea (Rho. Accidentale) which is a familiar sight to residents of Curry county and Northern California. However, varieties of cultivated species and hybrids suitable for our coast climate are available by the hundreds with colors ranging from the purest white through shades of light blue, cream, clear yellow, pinks, salmon, dark red and blue to the deepest purple. Some of these commence blooming in February with the majority blooming during the month of May and continuing through July. At the University of Washington Arboretum in Seattle thousands of these plants flourish in a natural woodland setting. During the blooming season it is here amply demonstrated that the Pacific coast does indeed provide a climate congenial to the Rhododendron provided that proper consideration be given to the peculiarities of the plant and the climate.

Among these peculiarities

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should be noted, foremost, the necessity for proper soil acidity and good drainage. Exposure to wind must be carefully considered. Rhododendrons, outside of a few alpine species, will not prosper in a windy location since winds, especially dry ones, absorb moisture from the evergreen leaves. It is therefore essential that a suitable location be selected either where natural protection is available or where it is possible to provide artificial shelter.

Consideration to sun exposure must also be given. While a few species of Rhododendrons do well in full sunshine the great majority much prefer a location where shade is provided from the hot midday sun. It is well to observe the conditions under which the native Rhododendrons thrive and, insofar as possible, simulate them.

The practice of transplanting the native plants into the garden should be discouraged. In the first place, the identical conditions under which a specific native was raised cannot be successfully duplicated in the garden. The compact root system so desirable for transplanting is almost always missing due to the intermingling with roots of other native shrubs and trees growing in the immediate vicinity of the Rhododendron plant. For this reason it is generally necessary to resort to severe root pruning which is highly detrimental to successful transplanting. Finally, if a judicious selection is made the cultivated species and hybrids are, in general, far superior to the native plant in form, and color of flower. Let us therefore leave our native Rhododendrons and Azaleas in their natural setting where they so beautifully enhance the landscape.

In selecting the variety of Rhododendron to plant one must carefully consider all pertinent factors such as whether an extensive planting is contemplated or it is desired to plant only a few specimen plants. In the former case it may be desirable to select some of the tall growing varieties for background planting with plants of medium and low stature in the foreground. On the other hand, should only a few plants be desired it would be better to select only medium sized plants which will blend more readily with the balance of the garden. Also, one should not overlook the dwarf varieties which look equally well as shapely small specimens or as dense clumps of several yards in extent. One point to remember, however, is that the dwarf varieties have a tendency to become "leggy" unless looked after and heavily pruned.

Planting and maintaining Rhododendrons should present no dif-

iculties for the good gardener. The same procedure applies, in general, to these plants as to most other broad leaf evergreen shrubs, however, since they belong to the so called acid-loving family it is necessary to provide an ample supply of a peaty soil mixture immediately around the root ball. Also, the plant welcomes a generous surface mulch to protect its surface roots against the hot rays of the summer sun. The best mulch consists of oak leaves but inasmuch as these are frequently not available a good mulch can be made of peat moss mixed with a little soil to prevent it from getting too dry or caked and to permit the rain to soak in rather than run off.

Due to the fact that Rhododendrons have a shallow root system with the fine roots extending almost to the surface of the soil, weeding in the immediate vicinity of the plant should be done by hand and never by hoeing or digging. However, a good surface mulch will greatly assist in keeping down the weeds and should reduce the necessity for weeding to a minimum.

Good companion plants for Rhododendrons are the Mountain Laurel (Kalmia Latifolia), Andromeda (Pieris japonica), the blueberry and heather. All of these plants seem to fit in well with respect to habit and appearance.

Should you become interested in the cultivation of Rhododendrons to the extent of wishing to propagate plants from seeds there is a wide and extremely interesting field open. Due to the fact that it rarely takes less than six years, and frequently longer, to bring a seedling plant to maturity and flowering size considerable patience and attention to detail is, of course, required. Other methods of propagation such as by cuttings and grafting require a green house or some sort of a heated frame but will produce flowering size plants in somewhat shorter time.

Considering the length of time and amount of care required it is easy to understand why the price of purchased plants is somewhat high as compared to roses and other more rapidly growing and

readily reproducible plants and shrubs. However costs and efforts are repaid many times over by the beautiful sight of a well grown Rhododendron planting in full bloom.

GO TO COOS BAY

Mr. and Mrs. Olaf Lundeen spent Friday and Saturday in Coos Bay on business.

RETURNS TO BALTIMORE

Miss Ruth Ann Bolz of Baltimore, Maryland, who has been at the home of her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Erskine Miller since the first of the year, will leave Thursday to return home.

The Millers plan to drive her to Portland where she will take a plane for the remainder of the trip.

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