

## **Rhododendron Indumentum in Darts Hill Garden Park- a Treasure Hunt for Hidden Beauty- a Five Part Series by Susan M. Murray**

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In Francisca Darts own words, “... and there I fell in love with Rhododendrons. Not because of their ‘show’, but because the UBC Botanical Gardens had put in a display of species Rhododendrons, and there I saw the leaves- these gorgeous indumentum at the back, narrow leaves, curly leaves- you name it. I loved every one of them. You’d think I was nuts when I’m talking about leaves with such enthusiasm. You know, you have a flower for how long? You’ve got the rest of the bush for the rest of the time. Why not have something that interests both?”

Francisca Darts clearly loved Rhododendrons with colourful indumentum. Darts Hill Garden Park has dozens of these special Rhododendrons, some grown from seed and most planted by Francisca herself. These plants are now mature specimens, many of them are very rare and not readily available today. These plants are more than 50 years old now! In recent years, the DHGP Collection Committee has added to the Rhododendron collection. These new additions are small plants but some have been included in this article series. A few very special Rhododendrons are considered, in their native habitats, vulnerable (VU) or near threatened (NT) according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

What is indumentum, anyway? It is simply a covering, especially of hairs. It’s not surprising that the degree of hairiness has its own botanical vocabulary. Pubescent is the general term often used to describe a hairy surface—but there are many kinds of hairiness! A pilose surface, for example, has sparse, soft and straight hairs while a tomentose leaf surface is covered with densely matted, short woolly hairs. There are many examples of tomentose leaf indumentum in DHGP.

Indumentum is most often found on the underside of the leaves of plants. It can also be seen on the upper leaf surface, on the leaf veins, petioles and buds. Its purpose is to insulate these tissues. Hairy surfaces may prevent water loss, which is due to transpiration, when dry winds pass under and over leaves. This hairy insulation also protects the plants from strong solar radiation and extreme cold temperatures. Dry and cold conditions are found in high alpine regions around the world (above 3,660 metres or 12,000 ft.). Very strong sunlight with ultra violet radiation is especially severe in these alpine zones too, due to the reflective abilities of rock and snow. Most of the species Rhododendrons with leaf indumentum are native to moderately high and high attitude landscapes.

This is the first article in a Five Part series with a new group of Rhododendron species described in subsequent editions of *The Oracle*. Take your time to explore the garden and admire these truly wonderful Rhododendrons. Imagine Mrs. Darts delight when she sourced these plants as seeds or small transplants and put them in her garden! It has taken decades for them to reach maturity.

Leaf indumentum is visible and attractive all year round. It is a good excuse to wander the garden on a fall or winter Member’s Day! Gently turn over a leaf and admire the lovely colours and textures. Indumentum may be white, greyish white, pale yellow, and various shades of tan, cinnamon brown or rusty-orange red! Compare the softness of each by stroking the leaf underside carefully. Some indumentums are as soft as velvet, others feel more like felt.

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Keep in mind that indumentum is most vibrant and plush on new or younger leaves at the beginning of the growing season. On some plants, as the year progresses, the indumentum may wear or slough off.

The Rhododendrons in this Five Part series have been numbered as you would find them while walking around the beds. These walks have been designed to help you discover the beauty of indumentum! To see a wide variety of plants stroll along both sides of the Tractor Road, from Six Corners to 16<sup>th</sup> avenue. Turn over a leaf or two as you go and admire the diversity of leaf colour and shape! This is easiest walk to sample the colour range of indumentum in the garden.

This series, which locates and describes over 30 Rhododendron species, hybrids and two cultivated varieties, is not meant to be a complete listing of all the Rhododendrons in DHGP with colourful indumentum. There are many more to discover. Have fun finding them!

### **Part 1- BEDS 52, 53w and 54w- 4 plants**

Begin Part 1 by making your way from the Welcome Table to Shady Lane which bisects Beds 1 and 2e. Walk to the west end of Bed 54w, where it meets the Tractor Road. Your first plant is a Rhododendron hybrid. It is on the right (east) side of the Tractor Road.

#### **1. *Rhododendron* hybrid [(*degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* x 'Noyo Chief') x *degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* x *strigillosum*] - Bed 54w**

This Rhododendron hybrid has the longest name of any plant in the garden! It is a good size now, reaching 2.5 metres in height. The indumentum is a **pale tan**. The outstanding bright pink bell-shaped blooms have a dark crimson blotch in their throat. Bloom time for this Rhododendron hybrid in Darts Hill Garden Park (DHGP) is late April. You can find this plant at the south-west corner of Bed 54w, next to the Tractor Road. Please turn the leaf over gently!

Continue north up the Tractor Road to locate the next plant in Bed 52. This Rhododendron is on the right, just an arm's length from the chain-flowered red bud tree (*Cercis racemosa*).

#### **2. *Rhododendron campanulatum* var. *aerginosum*- Bed 52- Kashmir to Bhutan, India 2,740 – 4,270 m. (9,000- 14,000 ft.)**

(*campanulatum* or bell-shaped- refers to the flowers) (*aerginosum*- refers to the blue-green colour of the leaves!)

The leaves of this small *Rhododendron campanulatum* var. *aerginosum* are quite attractive. The leaves first open a silver green, which deepens during summer to a soft blue green. The indumentum on the reverse is **cinnamon colored**. Flowers are variable and range from a very light lilac to rosy purple to white. The upper lobes of the bell-shaped flower are purple spotted. This Rhododendron blooms in April. It is an easy Rhododendron to find as it is growing in Bed 52 right on the edge of the Tractor Road.

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Carry on a few more metres north or up the Tractor Road, turn right at the bark mulch path to Bed 53w. There are two lovely Rhododendrons with exquisite indumentum for you to discover in this garden bed. The first one is directly ahead.

### **3. Rhododendron un-named hybrid *Rhododendron degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* x *R.* 'Sir Charles Lemon'- Bed 53w**

This large plant rises 4 metres over Bed 53w. It is a striking Rhododendron hybrid with very dark green oblong leaves. Its **dark orange almost reddish felt indumentum** on the underside of the leaves is very showy. The petioles of the plant are also covered in thick orangey-brown felt. The funnel-shaped flowers are a soft pink in bud, maturing to white. This unnamed hybrid blooms beautifully in DHGP in late April.

Continue to your left around Bed 53w to find the rare *Rhododendron clementinae*.

### **4. *Rhododendron clementinae*, Bed 53w- China (Yunnan, Sichuan, se Xizang (Tibet) 3,350- 4,270 m. (11,000- 14,000 ft.)**

(After Clementine, wife of George Forrest)

*Rhododendron clementinae* is mature, measuring 4 metres high by 4 metres wide. The leaves of this wonderful plant are large and oblong-oval shaped. The thick indumentum on the reverse is **white to pale fawn** color. It easily sloughs away when gently touched and becomes thinner by the end of the season. The flowers are rose with a carmine speckled throat, fading to white. The flower truss holds 10-15 blooms. This beauty flowers prolifically in DHGP in mid-April.

Mrs. Darts purchased *Rhododendron clementinae* from Rainier Gardens in 1972.

## **Part 2- BEDS 6, 7s, 8w, 74, 98- 7 plants**

Begin Part 2 at the Welcome Table. The first three Rhododendrons are planted in a row from the front of Bed 7s to the back of bed, just a few metres from the table. Ask the Welcome staff to point them out for you!

### **1. *Rhododendron* hybrid (*R. smirownii* x *R. rex* subsp. *rex*) - Bed 7s and Bed 35e**

This gem of a hybrid Rhododendron can be found right next to the path as you beginning your stroll toward Augustinii Walk. Look to the right about 10 metres from the Welcome Table. You will have to bend down to see this hybrid closely. Planted in 2020, it is small! The 15 cm (7.5 in.) leaves have a beautiful **light tan indumentum** on the reverse. The indumentum is very soft to the touch. This Rhododendron has a colourful deep yellow midrib on the top of the leaves as well. It will be lovely to see the blooms when this plant grows larger.

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**2. *Rhododendron phaeochrysum*- Bed 7s, China 3,350-4,200 m. (11,000- 13,800 ft.)**

(Dark golden)

The new shoots of *Rhododendron phaeochrysum* are tomentose. The woolly hairs covering the stems slough away in clumps as the leaves age. The leaves are large, to 15 cm (6 in.) long, oblong in shape and dark green with a yellow midrib and yellow petiole. They are hairless above with a lovely, suede-like **dark orange brown indumentum** on the reverse. The blooms are funnel-bell-shaped, white-creamy white, or white blushed rose, and sometimes spotted crimson. The flowers are held in trusses of up to 15. Please don't step into Bed 7s! *Rhododendron phaeochrysum* was planted in 2020 approximately 3 metres from the edge of the path. We will have to wait for the plant to grow a little more to see its attractive indumentum clearly!

Directly behind *Rhododendron phaeochrysum*, you will see Rhododendron 3.

**3. *Rhododendron fulvum*- Bed 7s- Yunnan, Sichuan, Myanmar, Assam, Se Tibet 3,000–4,000 m. (9,800-13,100 ft.)**

(Tawny)

When the small *Rhododendron fulvum* in Bed 7s matures it will form an open, upright, tree-like Rhododendron with very lush foliage. The leaves will measure to 20 cm (10 in.) long. They are smooth, shiny dark green on the top. There is a **fawn to bright cinnamon felt** on the reverse, a fabulous brilliant cinnamon indumentum! The flowers are funnel-shaped, white blushed rose to deep rose, occasionally blotched and spotted crimson. The blooms are held in loose rounded trusses of up to 20. *Rhododendron fulvum* blooms March to April. It is a bit hard to see it. When it was planted in the spring of 2020, a spot was selected about 4 metres from the edge of Bed 7s. Just imagine how wonderful these three small Rhododendrons will appear in 30 or 40 years. Mrs. Darts's vision for her garden must have been one that included a great deal of patience. The tiny specimens she planted in the 1970's are now mature!

Now, stroll along Augustinii Walk to the Tractor Road. Turn right and look for the magnificent *Rhododendron lanigerum* in Bed 6.

**4. *Rhododendron lanigerum*- Bed 6- Assam, Se. Tibet 3,050- 3,350 m. (10,000- 11,000 ft.)**

(Woolly)

*Rhododendron lanigerum* matures to a small tree 6 metres (20 ft.) tall, with very long drooping oblong, lance-shaped leaves. The leaf underside has a fuzzy **tan brown indumentum**. The flowers are campanulate and held in large trusses of up to 25 or more blossoms. Appearing in March-April, the blooms are a rosy purple or reddish purple or dark magenta. This stunning plant is one of the finest foliage plants in the garden. Find *Rhododendron lanigerum* about 15 metres south of Six Corners, next to the Tractor Road in Bed 6. If you only have time to find a few of these special Rhododendrons, don't miss this one!

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Mrs. Darts purchased this *Rhododendron lanigerum* from Caperci Nursery in October of 1974 for \$2.00. Good luck finding one for that price today!

Carry on to Six Corners and look to your left behind one of the benches for the next Rhododendron.

### **5. *Rhododendron 'Cherries and Merlot'*-Bed 8w**

*Rhododendron 'Cherries and Merlot'* is a compact rhododendron, reaching one metre in height in 10 years. The elliptic shaped leaves are very attractive with a glossy dark green upper surface and a bright yellow midrib. The **deep purplish red underside** contrasts strongly with top of the leaf. *Rhododendron 'Cherries and Merlot'* has one of the most highly coloured leaf undersides of all the Rhododendrons in the garden. While this is not an indumented plant, the superlative leaf colouring is too good to miss in a treasure hunt for hidden beauty! The bell-shaped flowers are a brilliant red. *Rhododendron 'Cherries and Merlot'* blooms in late April in DHGP. Find this Rhododendron immediately behind the bench labelled, "From a Grateful Union", at the south end of Bed 8w.

Now head north up the Tractor Road toward Redwood Walk. Turn right at Redwood Walk.

*Rhododendron strigillosum* is close at hand on the left. This spectacular Rhododendron is easy to locate, first find the Sierra redwood- *Sequoiadendron giganteum* in Bed 98, the Rhododendron is growing 4 metres west of it. This interesting plant is easy to examine closely!

### **6. *Rhododendron strigillosum*- Bed 98- Sichwan- 2,130- 3,048 m. (7,000-10,000 ft.)**

(With short bristles)

The growth habit of *Rhododendron strigillosum* is upright and open, with very bristly new growth. The bristles on the new growth are red! The foliage is long and quite narrow measuring 18 cm by 5 cm (7.5 by 2 in.). The leaves are bright green. The midrib on the underside is densely covered with **cinnamon colored** pilose hairs. Take a closer look at the leaf petioles. They are covered with very short (less than 1 cm) brown bristles too. This is an easy way to identify this plant! The deep-blood-red flowers are tubular bell-shaped and held in trusses of 8-12. *Rhododendron strigillosum* is stunning when it blooms in late March- early April in DHGP.

Complete your circular walk around Bed 8w and head east down Cedar Lane to the exit and parking lot. The next plant is on the north side of Bed 7s, along Cedar Lane, about 25 metres from the Welcome Table.

### **7. *Rhododendron bureavii*- Bed 7s- Yunnan, 3,350- 3,960 m. (11,000-13,000 ft.)**

(After E. Bureau)

The leaves of *Rhododendron bureavii* are dark green above with a bright **cinnamon coloured** tomentose indumentum on the reverse. You'll have to look up to see the underside of the leaves as this plant is 3

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metres high! *Rhododendron bureavii* blooms in May. The white or pink flowers are marked with crimson. Unfortunately, the specimen in DHGP is a bit scraggly, with an open, irregular habit but the soft leaf indumentum is worth seeking the plant out, it is spectacular! Because of its indumentum, *Rhododendron bureavii* is considered one of the finest plants within the genus *Rhododendron* to use to hybridize new cultivars.

Mrs. Darts purchased this *Rhododendron bureavii* from Drings in March 1970 for \$1.50. What a bargain!

### **Part 3- BEDS 14, 15n, 20, 23- 6 plants**

Make your way from the Welcome Table to the Augustinii Walk. Turn right or north at the Tractor Road. Stroll to the north end of Bed 14. The first plant, a *Rhododendron floribundum*, is there.

#### **1. *Rhododendron floribundum*- Bed 14-** China W. Sichuan, Guizhou 1,300–2,600 m. (4,000- 8,000 ft.)

(Free-flowering)

You can find *Rhododendron floribundum* at the very north end of Bed 14 at Six Corners. The leaves are heavily textured and measure 15 cm (6 in.) long. They are dark green. The slender specimen in DHGP is 5 metres tall but just a scant metre wide. The indumentum on the leaf reverse is a **very pale tan or buff** color. The bell-shaped flowers are rose, pink or purplish. This *Rhododendron* blooms March-April.

Mrs. Darts purchased this *Rhododendron floribundum* from the *Rhododendron* Species Foundation in 1981 for \$9.75.

Carry on to Bed 23 via the path between Bed 14 and Bed 19. Turn right at the first intersection. Turn left at the T junction and right again just before the bench. Bed 23 is directly ahead. On the north side of Bed 23 you will find *Rhododendron elegantulum*. It will take a bit of hunting!

#### **2. *Rhododendron elegantulum*- Bed 23,** China (Sichuan) 3,660 -3,960 m. (12,000-13,000 ft.)

(Elegant)

The medium sized leaves of *Rhododendron elegantulum* are a smooth green while the reverse has a woolly and dense **cinnamon coloured indumentum**. Check out the soft feel of the underside of the leaf. Soft as a bunny? *R. elegantulum* has one of the most attractive brownish-red indumentum of the entire genus. The flowers, appearing in May, are pale purple pink, spotted darker, and held in trusses of 10-20. The species has a very limited distribution in its native habitat. This *Rhododendron* is considered vulnerable (VU) according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

Stroll around Bed 23. In April the Trilliums are in bloom! Now return to the Tractor Road and Bed 14.

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**3. *Rhododendron thayeranum*-Bed 14, 15s- China (w. Sichuan) 2,745 m. (9,000 ft.)**

(After a well-known New England family, patrons of botany and horticulture)

***Rhododendron thayeranum*** has very a tidy upright growth habit, truly a great foliage plant! The leaves are clustered closely around the flower trusses. The large leaves, reaching up to 20 cm (8 in.), are lance-shaped or narrowly oblong and dark green on top. The leaf reverse has a very thin **buff-coloured indumentum**. The flowers are funnel-bell shaped, white tinged pink or pink. They are held in compact trusses of 10-20 blooms, blooming time is June-July. Find *Rhododendron thayeranum* 15 metres south of Six Corners directly opposite the *R. lanigerum* in Bed 6. *R. thayeranum*'s branches reach to the Tractor Road. This Rhododendron is huge. It was crown reduced to encourage lower branching but it is so wide it reaches from one side of Bed 14 to the other. It is now ground layering!

A second stunning specimen of *R. thayeranum* is growing on the east side of Bed 15s. This one measures 1.5 high by 3 metres wide. Both are hard to miss! If you only have time to find a few of these special Rhododendrons, don't miss these two beauties!

**4. *Rhododendron argyrophyllum* subsp. *nankingense* 'Chinese Silver'- Bed 14**

Wow! The leaves of ***Rhododendron argyrophyllum* subsp. *nankingense* 'Chinese Silver'** are beautifully held on the plant in umbrella-like clusters. The leaves are lustrous and deep green on the top surface. The **bright whitish indumentum** on the reverse side of the leaf sets this plant apart. The leaves measure 15 cm by 5 cm wide. The mid-pink flowers appear in May. This delightful plant is easy to find. Just look for the red branches of the *Stewartia monodelpha*, (Tall Stewartia), which overhang this Rhododendron.

There are several other mature *Rhododendron argyrophyllum* in DHGP that are well worth searching for. Look for the huge one in Bed 30 in the shade of the Empress tree, *Paulownia tomentosa*. A smaller but very beautiful specimen is growing in Bed 51 at the southern end. It's also well worth a look, too!

The next Rhododendron is an arm's length from Number 4 to the south.

**5. *Rhododendron degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* (dwarf form) Bed 15n**

***Rhododendron degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* (dwarf form)** is a very attractive, sprawling low growing plant with dark green leaves. The leaves are up to 18 cm long. The indumentum is a thick and **bright orangey** colour. This plant, at the south end of Bed 15n, has delightful soft pink blossoms held in a loose truss. Bloom time is late May in DHGP.

If you wish to see another ***Rhododendron degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum***, but not the dwarf form, there is a very large mature plant on the west side of Bed 4w at the northern end of the bed. An exceptional ***Rhododendron degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* 'Silver Creek'** can be found in Bed 34!

Walk a few metres around the end of Bed 15n to find the next plant.

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**6. *Rhododendron hypoglaucum*- Bed 15n.** Hupeh, E China- 1,500- 2,100 m. (5,000-7,000 ft.)

(Blue-grey beneath)

Explore the southwest end of Bed 15n to find *Rhododendron hypoglaucum*. This is mature plant measures 4 metres by 4 metres. It is round! The oblanceolate leaves are 15 cm (6 in.) long with a thin, dust-like **whitish-pale yellow indumentum**. The white to pale orchid bell shaped flowers appear in May.

Mrs. Darts purchased *Rhododendron hypoglaucum* from Caperci Nursery in 1974 for \$2.50.

**Part 4- BED 15s and 16w- 6 plants**

Begin this walk at the north end of Bed 15s. The first Rhododendron is mid-bed about 1.5 metres from the edge of the bed.

**1. *Rhododendron phaeochrysum var. agglutinatum* Bed 15s,** China 3,350- 4,200 m. (11,000- 13,800 ft.)

(Dark golden)

The new shoots of *Rhododendron phaeochrysum var. agglutinatum* are tomentose. The woolly hairs covering the stems sloughs away in clumps as the leaves age. The leaves are large to 15 cm (6 in.) oblong, dark green with a bright yellow midrib and yellow petiole. With age, the leaf reverse develops a suede-like **dark orange-red indumentum** which is very attractive. The blooms are funnel-bell-shaped, white-creamy white, white blushed rose, sometimes spotted crimson, in trusses up to 15. Blooms mid-April to May.

Now, return to the Tractor Road and stroll south.

**2. *Rhododendron pingianum*-Bed 15s-** Tibet, China (w. Sichuan) 3,350- 3,800 m. (11,000- 12,500 ft.)

(After Professor C. Ping)

The foliage of *Rhododendron pingianum* measures 12-15 cm (6 in.). The leaves are lance shaped, medium green on the top and covered with a thick **whitish-yellow or grey indumentum** on the reverse. The funnel-bell-shaped flowers are purple. They are held in trusses of 12- 18. It is hard to see the indumentum of *Rhododendron pingianum* as it is planted about 3 metres from the Tractor Road edge in Bed 15s. A small plant, it was added to the collection in April of 2020. Please don't step into the bed. We will have to wait for the plant to grow to see the indumentum! This Rhododendron is considered near threatened (NT) according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

**3. *Rhododendron smirnowii*- Bed 15s, 35w-** Caucasus, Turkey



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(After M. Smirnov)

***R. smirownii*** is an upright open growing Rhododendron. The specimen in DHGP is rangy with its sparse branches flopping onto the Tractor Road. Its new shoots are covered with soft white felt. The leaves, which are to 15 cm (6 in.) long, are oblong or lance shaped and dark green on top. The reverse side is clothed with a thick **tan colored indumentum**. Flowers are frilled, funnel-bell-shaped from pale mauve to deep rosy-purple, and carried in loose trusses of 10-12.

*R. smirownii* blooms in mid-May in DHGP. The species has a very limited distribution in its native habitat. It is considered Vulnerable (VU) according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. It is easy to find as it is right next to the Tractor Road in Bed 15s.

Mrs. Darts purchased *R. smirownii* in Bed 15s from the Rhododendron Society at a Plant Sale in 1969 for \$3.25.

### **4. *Rhododendron galactinum*-Bed 15s, Sichuan 2,740- 3,050 m. (9,000-10,000 ft.)**

(Milky)

The growth habit of ***Rhododendron galactinum*** is open, with dark green, smooth leaves. The leaf reverse has a dense, velvety indumentum, ranging in colour from a **greyish-white to the cinnamon** colour of the plant in Bed 15s. The bell-shaped flowers, held in tight trusses of many flowers are white to pale rose, and blotched crimson. This small plant (2 metres south of the *Magnolia tripetala*) was planted in 2020. It will grow! The species has a very limited distribution in its native habitat. It is considered Vulnerable (VU) according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.

### **5. *Rhododendron campanulatum* - Bed 15s- Bell- flowered Rhododendron- Kashmir to Bhutan, India 2,740 – 4,270 m. (9,000- 14,000 ft.)**

(Bell-shaped)

The foliage of this mature ***Rhododendron campanulatum*** is quite lovely. A robust plant, it measures 4 metres high by 5 metres wide (and it has been crown reduced so it was much taller). The elliptic leaves are a dull dark green on the top surface and measure 15 cm long. The petioles and bud scales are a pretty red. The leaf reverse has a **pale tan indumentum**. Flowers are variable and range from a very light lilac to rosy purple to white. The upper lobes of the bell-shaped flower are purple spotted. This Rhododendron blooms in April. It is easy to find as it is growing at the south end of Bed 15s right on the edge of the Tractor Road. Gently turn a leaf over to observe the underside.

Mrs. Darts received the seed for this *Rhododendron campanulatum* from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1971.

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Carry on around the tip of Bed 15s to Bed 16w to find the magnificent 'R. Etta Burrows' on the north side of the bed next to the path.

### **6. *Rhododendron* 'Etta Burrows'-Bed 5, 16w**

Bright blood red flowers and sensational foliage make this plant a show stopper! *R. 'Etta Burrows'* received the best characteristics from both its parents (*R. 'Fusilier'* x *R. strigillosum*). The very furry veins are also interesting features of this plant along with a **tan coloured fuzzy indumentum** on the leaf underside. The leaves are a dark green colour. This mature *Rhododendron* is now 3.5 metres tall by 4 metres wide.

Mrs. Darts received the *Rhododendron* 'Etta Burrows' in Bed 5 as a gift from Mr. Milton Wildfong in 1975.

## **Part 5- BEDS 1, 4w- 6 plants**

Begin the tour of Part 5 by making your way from the Welcome Table to Shady Lane and the east end of Bed 4w. Your first plant is *Rhododendron* 'Wine and Roses', which is on the right side of the path.

### **1. *Rhododendron* 'Wine and Roses' - Bed 4w**

Wow! This delightfully compact *rhododendron* is graced with a brilliant **maroon-red** leaf underside. While this is not an indumented plant, the superlative leaf colouring is too good to miss in a treasure hunt for hidden beauty! The upper leaf surface, which is shiny and dark green is very attractive, too. The plant is an arm's length from the path edge so it's easy to reach out, gently turn a leaf and take a closer look! The cerise pink campanulate flowers are produced prolifically in late April in DHGP. ***Rhododendron* 'Wine and Roses'** is a knock-out!

**2. *Rhododendron uvariifolium*, Bed 4w.** China (Sichuan, Xizang, NW Yunnan), 2,100- 4,200 m. (7,000- 14,000 ft.)

(With leaves like an *Uvaria*)

Make a right hand turn along the small path after viewing the *R. 'Wine and Roses'*, stroll 8 metres along this path to find ***Rhododendron uvariifolium*** in Bed 4w. This mature plant is 4 metres high by 3 metres wide. The large oblanceolate leaves measure 15 cm by 7 cm wide. The top side is a lustrous dark green and deeply patterned with veins. The indumentum on the reverse of the leaf ranges from grey to the **dark cinnamon-brown**, as shown by the plant in Bed 4w. The bell-shaped flowers are pink-blue to purple. Blooms mid-April.

Return to Shady Lane and cross to the mulch path.

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**3. *Rhododendron rex*- Bed 1, Bed 60w** Sichuan, 3,050 -3,350 m. (10,000-11,000 ft.)

(King)

This 'King' Rhododendron is growing beautifully in Bed 1. The leaves of *Rhododendron rex*, which can reach 17-27 cm in length, are oblong-oval or oblong-elliptic and shiny dark-green above. The **indumentum** varies from **greyish, buff or brown**. You may easily view the *Rhododendron rex* in Bed 1 via the small side path at the east end of the bed. The huge leaves of this plant are within an arm's reach there. Let's compare the two *R. rex* in DHGP. This one in Bed 1 has an outstanding **dark cinnamon brown indumentum** while the specimen in Bed 60w has a **greyish-white** indumentum. The King Rhododendron in Bed 60w is equally accessible on your right as you exit the garden via the wrought iron gate. It was donated to DHGP in 2021 by Mr. and Mrs. Bezdeck.

The blooms of the 'King' Rhododendron are tubular bell-shaped, creamy white, or pale yellow to pink, held in large trusses of up to 30 flowers. The throat is spotted with dark purple and has a crimson basal blotch. *Rhododendron rex* blooms in May in DHGP.

Return to Shady Lane to continue your stroll.

**4. *Rhododendron kesangiae*- Bed 1, Bed 4w**, Bhutan- 2,700-3,500 m. (8,850- 11,500 ft.)

The *Rhododendron kesangiae* in Bed 1 is a small plant with only two small main stems but its huge leaves pack a punch! Wow! These paddle shaped leaves are 30 cm (12 in.) long, with a startling **white indumentum** and very prominent veins. The midrib is a bright yellow on the top of the leaves. The flowers are bell-shaped, rose or pink, fading to pale pink or light purple with dark purple nectar pouches. Bloom time is April- May. The truss holds 16-30 flowers.

**5. *Rhododendron makinoi*- Bed 1- Makino rhododendron**, Japan, 450 – 560 m. (1,500- 1,800 ft.)

(After T. Makino, a Japanese botanist)

The unusual foliage of *Rhododendron makinoi* makes a very pleasant contrast to the larger Rhododendron leaves along Shady Lane. In fact, you might mistake this Rhododendron for something else! The dark green leaves are extremely narrow, about 7.5 cm long and 1.5 cm wide. They curl slightly under at the edge. The new growth boasts a thick covering of **white to fawn indumentum** while the underside of the leaves are covered with a tomentose **tan coloured indumentum**. The clear pink flowers appear in May. This plant is right by the path but it is small, so you might miss it! Contrast the slender leaves of this plant with the huge leaves of *Rhododendron kesangiae* just a few steps away.

Mrs. Darts received the seed for this *Rhododendron makinoi* from the American Rhododendron Society in 1970.

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**6. *Rhododendron wightii*- Bed 1-** Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet, NE Upper Myanmar, 3,350- 4,265 m. (11,000- 14,000 ft.)

(After R. Wight)

The growth habit of *Rhododendron wightii* is open and tree-like, but with sparse foliage. The elliptic shaped leaves are long up to 18-20 cm (8 in.) and heavily textured. They are elliptic and dark green above. The underside is covered with a **cinnamon or reddish-brown indumentum**. The bell-shaped flowers, which appear in late April in DHGP, are 5 cm (2 in.) long and are a beautiful pale to lemon yellow. They are held on the stem in a lopsided fashion. The loose trusses may have up to 20 blooms. *Rhododendron wightii* is growing right next to the path in Bed 1. The plant leans heavily toward 16<sup>th</sup> avenue in its search for light.

Mrs. Darts received the seed for this *Rhododendron wightii* from the American Rhododendron Society in May 1971.

This is the last Part in the Five Part Series of *Rhododendron Indumentum in Darts Hill Garden Park- a Treasure Hunt for Hidden Beauty*.

**Note 1:**

The first bracketed word provides the origin of the species name, for example, campanulatum means bell-shaped. The species name often describes a unique plant characteristic...see if you can identify the descriptive characteristic the plant is named after!

**Note 2:**

**Rainier Gardens-** this is how this name appears in Mrs. Darts plant cards and was transcribed by Kathy Piccott. There currently is a nursery called Rainier Rhododendrons, located south of Seattle, Washington but it is not clear if this is the same nursery.

**Note 3:**

**Caperci Nursery-** this is how this name appears in Mrs. Darts plant cards and was transcribed by Kathy Piccott. It was actually called the Rainier Mountain Alpine Gardens rhododendron nursery and was owned and operated by Jim and Betty Caperci. The nursery was internationally renowned as a source of outstanding species and hybrid rhododendrons as well as dwarf conifers. Located in Seattle, the nursery was sold in 1980. Perhaps this is now Rainier Rhododendrons, see Note 2?

**Note 4:**

Flowering times noted like this, "... blooms in late April in Darts Hill Garden Park" are actual bloom times observed by the author.

**Online Sources:**

## **Rhododendron Indumentum in Darts Hill Garden Park- a Treasure Hunt for Hidden Beauty- a Five Part Series by Susan M. Murray**

The website Treesandshrubsonline.org provided the most complete and detailed descriptions of pretty much all the species Rhododendrons described in this series of articles. To save space, here is a sample citation:

'Rhododendron kesangiae' from the website Trees and Shrubs Online (treesandshrubsonline.org/articles/rhododendron/rhododendron-kesangiae/). Accessed 2023-01-23.

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