

Small-Scale Rhodo Rockery

ARS Poster Abstract

This poster describes our process to design, renovate, and install a small-scale rhodo rockery garden as a new feature of The Riverwood Conservancy's (TRC) public gardens. TRC is a volunteer and member-based charity that provides programs and services focused on environmental education, conservation, and gardening, located within a 150-acre urban nature preserve in Mississauga, Ontario. This unique addition to TRC's gardens exhibits dwarf rhodos as well as a variety of companion plants, thereby diversifying and expanding our existing rhodo gardens to create a dynamic learning space about ericaceous gardening.

The site chosen for this new garden posed some serious challenges of erosion and poor soil quality, and contained overgrown, woody shrubs and stumps. These issues were addressed by removing all debris from the site, amending the soil, and constructing a short, natural stone retaining wall to limit erosion. Although the space is small, the work was extensive and this project could not have been completed without the hard work of TRC's student volunteers to renovate the space over the summer months.

Once the bed was prepped, decorative stones and moss were installed to create the rockery aesthetic, and 8 dwarf rhododendrons were selected for the space. Many of these had been subjects from the Brueckner Hybrid Test Project, completed in 2021, and at this time are not commercially available. These unique hybrids were then accompanied by a variety of ericaceous companion plants, including some native plants to our area.

This project illustrates a very practical approach to rhodo gardening, demonstrating how to overcome site challenges, choose companion plants for rhododendrons, and maintain an ericaceous garden. As a new feature in TRC's diverse gardens, it provides an opportunity to teach and share the possibilities of gardening with rhodos.

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