

MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

A Publication of the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society

Vol. XLIV No. 1

February 2017

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

April 27-30, 2017

May 12-14, 2017

October 20-22, 2017

ARS Annual Convention, Eureka, CA

Wintergreen Resort, Wintergreen, VA

Richmond Airport Hilton Garden Inn

Rhododendron website addresses:

American Rhododendron Society

<http://www.rhododendron.org/>

ARS Store Order from Amazon thru this site

<http://arsstore.org/>

MAC Website (UPDATED REGULARLY)

<http://www.macars.org/>

UVA Special Collections

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/>

Old Quarterly Bulletins & JARS

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/>

Rhododendron Blog

www.rhododendron.org/blog/

Friends of the National Arboretum

<http://savetheazaleas.org/>

FONA's Save the Azaleas and Boxwood site

SAVE THE DATES FOR 2017 MAC MEETINGS by Jeanne Hammer

This is a reminder that the spring MAC meeting will be at the Wintergreen resort in Nelson County, Virginia the weekend of May 12-14. Program details will follow in the registration mailing. Be sure and bring sprays and trusses for our flower show.

Also, the fall MAC meeting will be held October 20-22. Location will be the Richmond Airport's Hilton Garden Inn. This location was selected for the convenience of ARS [national] board. Many of the board members will be flying to Richmond to hold their fall meeting the morning of October 20 and to join MAC for its fall meeting.

DEATH

Kenneth McDonald Jr., of Hampton passed away January 31, 2017, after a long illness. He was born in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, to Kenneth McDonald and Helen Morris McDonald on February 5, 1935, in Dixie Hospital. He attended Virginia Military Institute, where he participated in cross country and swimming, and



graduated in 1956 with a bachelor of science in civil engineering. After graduation from VMI, he entered the Army as a 2nd lieutenant and was stationed at Fort Bliss in Texas, Fort Sill in Oklahoma, and Hanau, Germany.

He retired from the Army as a Captain in 1963 and went to work with his father at Le-Mac Nurseries, Inc., in Hampton. Le-Mac Nurseries was founded in 1927 by Ken's father and a Frenchman, Jacques Legendre. The nursery at first grew general nursery stock and later specialized in growing evergreen azaleas to be



Ken McDonald

shipped throughout the eastern U.S. to nurseries, garden centers, and florists. Ken took over management of Le-Mac in 1965 when his father died and continued there until his own retirement in 2004. The nursery name was changed to Le-Mac Azaleas in its later years, as its specialty was azaleas and rhododendrons.

Ken enjoyed travel and hiking in the Great Smoky Mountains and other mountainous areas in the Southeast observing the native azaleas. He was active in many local and national associations including the Virginia Nurserymen's Association (past president), VMI Alumni Peninsula Chapter, American Rhododendron Society (district director), and was very active in the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS as president and longtime board member. Ken was chair of MAC's Honors Committee and its Budget and Finance Committee for many years. He was involved in many chapter activities such as meeting planning and the Species Study Group and other projects over the years. He and Sandra received the Bronze Medal from MAC in May 1981, and he received another one in his name alone in May 1984. He was a member of the Colonial Virginia Chapter of the Holly Society of America (past chapter president and board member), Hampton Roads Horticultural Society (past president and board member), and served on the Hampton Roads Sanitation District Commission. Gardens of special interest are the Sandra and Kenneth McDonald Azalea and Rhododendron Garden at James Madison University's Edith J. Carrier Arboretum in Harrisonburg, VA, and the McDonald Hybrid Azaleas area at the Norfolk Botanical Garden in Norfolk.

Ken is survived by his wife of 42 years, Sandra Kibbee McDonald, Ph.D., children Kenneth Allen McDonald (Cheryl) of Smithfield; Amy McDonald Blow (Wes) of Newport News; Leslie Margot Gerber (John) of Berthoud, Colorado; Brian Neil McDonald (Margaret) of Memphis, Tennessee; Scott Douglas Gerber, Ph.D. of Ada, Ohio; granddaughter Isabel Alessandra McDonald, Tennessee; sister Marjorie McDonald Gordon (Bruce), Hawaii.

PROBLEMS WITH DEER by Don Hyatt

Deer damage in my garden gets worse every year. My problems may be more severe than others because my community has been experiencing rapid redevelopment. Older homes on wooded lots like mine are being torn down and replaced by huge houses we call "McMansions." Builders remove most of the trees and plants on the lot so that means any animals that lived there must forage elsewhere. That is usually my garden, their Wholefoods Organic Salad Bar.



Don Hyatt's backyard before deer. Photo by D. Hyatt.

A number of MAC members visited my garden when the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA hosted the National Convention here in May of 2009. I had a slight deer problem then but to illustrate the change I have seen over time, compare the two images below of the same vista in my back yard. One shows my garden in May of 2008 when I was taking photos for convention publicity. The other photo was taken in May of 2016 showing its current status.



Don Hyatt's backyard after deer damage. Photo by D. Hyatt.

Not only did the deer devour my evergreen azaleas, they defoliated the lower 6 ft. of every mature rhododendron, and their hoof traffic destroyed the lawn. My garden is a disaster!

Trying to minimize deer damage will take constant effort and now that the convention is over and I have more time, I intend to be more vigilant. Perhaps some of the suggestions in this article will help if you also have problems with deer.

Fences

To stop deer browsing, nothing is as good as a tall fence. It should be at least 7 feet high and made of heavy-weight material. I intend to fence at least a portion of my garden, but I have a lot of preparation



Bubba. Photo by D. Hyatt.

to do. My preference is a Benner fence, the leading supplier for over 20 years: **Benner's Gardens LLC**, 1 Hudson City Centre, Hudson, NY 12534 1-800-244-3337

www.bennersgardens.com

In the meantime I am using some temporary barriers such as covering vulnerable plants with chicken wire or small sections of metal fence. The diameter of the mesh should not be too large since deer will push that fence down and eat the plants underneath through the openings.

It is important to protect small trees in the garden from bucks during rutting season. By September, I construct a cylinder of wire around the bottom 4 ft of any valuable tree that has a trunk diameter between 1 to 6 inches. It keeps the bucks from

rubbing the bark off those trees as they try to rid their antlers of the felt that covered that rack as it grew all summer.

Electric fences are very effective but in my suburban community with children and lawyers nearby, that is not an option. I have considered purchasing some of those electronic stakes like the Havahart 5250 Deer Repeller which cost about \$50 each. An attractant lures the deer to the stake but as soon as it licks the surface, the deer gets a strong jolt of electricity. Those work briefly, but the deer soon learn to avoid them and eat everything around the stake.

Chemical Repellants

I have used foliage sprays to deter the deer and that works fairly well, provided I keep up with a regular spraying program. Liquid Fence is a common deer repellent which comes ready to use or in a concentrate that needs to be mixed with water. It is expensive but it has worked. The active ingredient is apparently an egg protein. It smells terrible at first but after the stench fades, the protein makes the plants less palatable to the deer for many weeks. The spray must be reapplied several times during the season to keep deer away.

www.liquidfence.com

I have made my own spray using the following formula. It contains egg and is much less expensive. I whip 6 eggs with a cup of milk and a few drops of Dawn detergent in a blender. Then I add enough water to make 3 gallons of spray. I do add a small amount of Liquid Fence concentrate since it stinks and makes me feel better about making my plants unsavory to Bambi.

Several people have recommended Plantskydd which they claim lasts 6 months during the winter but only 3 to 4 months during the growing season. I may try it this winter.

www.plantskydd.com

With all of the sprays, be sure to clean your sprayer thoroughly after each use since the repellants can solidify and clog the apparatus. Buying a new sprayer after each use will add significantly to the cost of fighting deer.

There are some other products that emit objectionable odors which seem to repel deer. An Amish fruit tree propagator, Schlabach's Nursery, sells small bars of soap that Jim Brant used last year. These bars are inexpensive and come with a wire to attach the soap to plants. The company does not

have a website, nor do they do take credit cards or phone orders. However, you can call them to get a current price and then mail a check. Here is their contact information: Schlabach's Nursery, 2784 Murdock Rd, Medina, NY 14103. (585) 798-6198 My friends in the Hosta Society are excited about Natura Plant Saver, a systemic repellent made of Bitrex (Denatonium Benzoate), the most bitter chemical compound yet known. Two or three pills pushed into the soil around the plant while it is actively growing will be absorbed into the tissues which makes it taste terrible to man and beast for up to 18 months. It is obviously not appropriate for a vegetable garden but it is wonderful for ornamentals.

www.naturaproducts.ca

The tablets are costly since a bottle of 50 will run about \$18. However, when one buys an expensive perennial, it might be worth the money. I intend to try it when setting out young deciduous azaleas. The protection doesn't start right away since it takes time for the plant to absorb the chemical. New plants must be protected by other means until that happens. Another important warning is to wear gloves and avoid exposing your skin to this product. It is easily absorbed through skin and will make everything taste terrible to you for many days.

Deer Resistant Plants

I have been trying to find deer resistant plants but I have discovered that hungry deer will eat almost anything. Last winter, I threw some scraps of ham on the driveway to feed the fox during that very heavy snow. Within 30 minutes I had 5 deer out eating that ham instead. Many of us thought deer were strict vegetarians but Sandra McDonald sent me links verifying that deer will even eat road kill at times.

Deer can also change their tastes from year to year. Plants I thought were deer resistant can become fodder at a later date. Some recent surprises included Christmas ferns and Lily-of-the-Valley. So far, deer have not eaten any of my tree peonies from Ron Brown. They do not like my hellebores, either. However, young deer will often taste anything in the garden. Many times I have found the flower stalks of expensive double hellebore hybrids chewed off and spit out on the ground. They may not have liked that hellebore but they still ruined the bloom.

Deer love native azalea foliage during the growing season but I have found minimal damage once the plants drop their leaves.

If deer are not ravaging your garden, you are very fortunate. If you are like me, fighting the deer will be an essential part of gardening.

IN THE CROZET GARDEN by Lloyd Willis

It is January 10, 2017, as I start to write this article. There are three inches of snow in most places in the yard, the ground is still frozen, and the sledding area in our garden is very slick due to the actions of our four local grandsons and several of their friends.



Lloyd Willis

About four weeks ago, Mrs. Willis (Margaret) asked a very simple question, "Wouldn't it look nice if you used the extra dwarf mondo grass to line the pathways in our back yard?" The answer to that question was a quick and totally expected "Of course." I was so excited. Over the years I had lined pathways in our front yard and in neighborhood yards but not in our back yard.

So where is the humor in this article? In my mind a couple hundred clumps of dwarf mondo grass, a couple of hours of labor, and the task would be finished. Were there any steps I had forgotten in planning to line the two pathways? I had forgotten that I needed to weed the sides of the path. I had forgotten that I needed to loosen the soil and remove any rocks. I had forgotten that I needed nine clumps of mondo grass per square foot. I had forgotten that I needed to mulch each clump of mondo grass. So to complete the project, I actually needed 1,386 clumps of mondo grass (which is 6,930 individual plants) and twenty and one half hours of labor. I did not share with Mrs. Willis that I was off just a little from my plant and time estimates. Did I mention that I'm sure the azaleas and rhododendrons near the paths feel much better with the mondo grass outlining the area?

WINDBEAM WAY WANDERINGS, JANUARY 2017 by Doug Jolley

Our winter here in central West Virginia has been mostly uneventful. We've experienced many rainy, cloudy days, mild temperatures, one measurable snowfall and a couple nights of single digit thermometer readings.



Doug Jolley

Witch-hazels are now coming into full bloom. With moderate weather forecast for the near future, this should be a terrific and lengthy season. Davetta and I most always detect the first blooming witch-hazel with our noses rather than our eyes.



American holly in the snow. Photo Doug Jolley.

Another uneventful situation is that of not having deer in the garden. If our fencing holds up for the winter, this will be the fifth year of not having deer make the garden a winter browsing ground.

Nearly all our winter work has been that of drastic pruning, limbing up and cutting down trees and shrubs to open up canopies to allow sunlight and to create sight lines to view areas past the immediate yard. After several monthly bonfires, I don't think anything removed has been missed.



An oriole eating an orange. Photo Doug Jolley.

The two biggest treats offered by our garden this winter has been the bountiful display of all our hollies; evergreen and deciduous. American holly is always stunning after a snowfall if heavily laden with berries. Our deciduous holly is most attractive to me when the bare stems and berry clusters are coated in ice. A host of winter birds also slowly consume the crop. In addition to marvelous hollies, a second treat has been the continual presence of a hatch year Baltimore Oriole that has visited feeding stations daily since Thanksgiving week. Although orioles have been occasionally recorded on Christmas Bird Counts at times in our state, I cannot find any documentation of an individual staying through or even surviving a West Virginia winter. This bird is very social and eats just about everything offered. Hopefully it will be waiting for its mates to arrive from down south in a couple months.

It won't be long now until *Rhododendron dauricum* announces the end of winter.



Remember all photos plus extra online photos can be seen in color and ENLARGED at MACARS.ORG. Click on Newsletter on left panel.

Memberships and renewals should be sent to our Membership Chairman Jeanne Hammer at 231 N Robinson Dr, Macon, NC 27551.

Annual membership dues are \$40 per year.

Miscellaneous inquiries may be sent to the editor (address below) for forwarding to proper individual.

Sandra McDonald, Ph.D., Editor
Mid-Atlantic Rhododendron News and Notes
4302 Chesapeake Ave
Hampton, VA 23669