

# MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

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

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## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MAC MEETINGS

May 15-17, 1998	Four Points Hotel (Sheraton), Harrisonburg, VA
Nov 20-22, 1998	Chamberlain Hotel, Hampton, VA
May 14-16, 1999	Tanglewood Holiday Inn, Roanoke, VA
November 5,6&7, 1999	Fort Magruder Inn, Williamsburg, VA
(Eastern Regional Meeting: host MAC)	

### SPRING MEETING '98 by

Doug Jolley

Rhododendrons and azaleas will be blooming by the score and Virginia bluebells by the tens of thousands as we meet in Harrisonburg, Virginia at the Middle Atlantic Chapter's Spring Meeting. Friday evening through Sunday morning, May 15 - 17, will be spent at the Four Points Sheraton Inn, Harrisonburg. Garden tours, speakers, plant sales and a visit to one of Virginia's premier arboreta are planned.

The registration desk will open early Friday afternoon. The Four Points Sheraton is located at the



Four Points Sheraton



Doug Jolley

Junction of I-81  
and U.S. Route  
33 in  
Harrisonburg.  
Friday evening,  
Dr. Norlyn  
Bodkin will  
introduce us to  
the James  
Madison

University Arboretum. Dr. Bodkin, a botanist, earned his doctorate from West Virginia University. He recently received a highly esteemed award from the Linnean Society in London for his taxonomic endeavors. In addition to his classroom obligations, Dr. Bodkin has been tireless in his role as director of the Arboretum. The growth of the Arboretum and the public and corporate support of the Arboretum over the past five years has been truly phenomenal.

One of the salient features of the Arboretum is its

emphasis on native plants. Doug Jolley will lead us on a photographic tour "On Hands and Knees" through his own garden, highlighting the use of native species large and small (yes, rhodos and azaleas included).

A chapter meeting early Saturday morning will be followed by two garden tours. Glenn and Mary Kauffmann are establishing a garden which features plants of ARS Seed Exchange origin and plants from our own P4M (Plants for Members) program. This will be a showcase of those plants for which we have all at one time or another stood anxiously in line waiting our turn to procure. Native azaleas are also featured here.

The next garden, that of Ron and Norma Brown, is one which few are apt to forget. The following unexaggerated testimony is possible only through personal experience. Over 21,000 Virginia bluebells carpet this hillside garden in waves of blue. Many of the nearly 20,000 daffodils of over 100 varieties will be finishing their own spectacular show. Over 500 tree peonies will be blooming throughout the garden. Hundred of primulas abound and here and there both the pink and yellow lady's slipper orchids may be found. In addition to an already spectacular display, add thousands of trilliums, other wild flowers, hellebores, hostas, minor bulbs, native dogwood and redbuds. Pathways meander through these magnificent grounds. By the way, five hundred azaleas and rhododendrons also call this garden home!

Saturday morning's final destination is the JMU Arboretum. Here we will dedicate the MAC native azalea garden. This portion of the Arboretum has received over 125 native azaleas for the MAC Nursery Project. At the entrance to this garden will also be

dedicated a bench in memory of Past MAC President Terry Scheuchenko. Lunch will be catered and then Norlyn Bodkin, Ron Brown (Ron tells me that he has just planted 15 gallons of trillium seed in the Arboretum) and Dennis Whetzel will lead groups on guided tours of the Arboretum or one may stroll the over 100 acres on one's own. Features of the Arboretum include the recently dedicated Sandra and Kenneth McDonald Azalea and Rhododendron Garden, a shale barrens garden, acres of wild flowers, a terraced herb garden, an antique rose garden, as well as perennial borders furnished by André Viette.

A large selection of Glenn Dale azaleas reside near the entrance of the Arboretum. MAC member Frank Pelurie has donated to the Arboretum azaleas procured from the Glenn Dale Project. Our chapter has developed close ties to the Arboretum in many ways.



JMU Arboretum Entrance  
Photo by JMU photographer.

All the usual book, glove, seedling sales and auction await everyone late in the afternoon. A judged flower show will run concomitant to Saturday's events from noon through the evening. Sharon Collins will be in charge of the flower show and will accept entries

Friday afternoon and evening as well as very early Saturday morning.

Our banquet will cap off the day's activities and Ed Collins will entertain us with his "Wanderings of a Rhodoholic." Formerly of Pennsylvania and now a resident of Hendersonville, NC, Ed will share his expertise of the Dexter's, Cole hybrids, Southern Appalachian native azaleas and more.

Watch for registration material which will soon follow this newsletter and plan to spend a terrific weekend in Harrisonburg, Virginia, May 15, 16, 17!!

#### FROM THE MIDDLE OF MAC by Jane McKay

Mid-February finds us still waiting for winter to arrive here at our home and garden approximately 20 miles east of Charlottesville, Virginia. Not so for our friends west of the Blue Ridge. While we have had rain and lots of it, they have had snow and ice. More heavy rain is predicted for this week. It would be nice if we could save some of this for July and August.



Jane McKay

*Jasmine nudiflorum* has been in bloom since mid January. Witch-hazel (*Hamamelis × intermedia*) 'Arnold's Promise', with yellow flowers that are delightfully fragrant, especially when cut and brought indoors, is starting to open. The buds on *Viburnum × bodnantense* 'Dawn' are showing bright pink; yellow crocuses are blooming along with *Iris danfordiae* and the daffodil 'Early Sensation'.

Early January while I was walking around the garden checking to see how many small plants the squirrels dug up, I noticed small branches snapped on two rhododendrons. When I cut the branches, I saw the stems were hollow. I cut back to solid wood and split the hollowed stems and there was a borer chewing away. Why did I think borers only worked in the summer?

#### REMINISCENCES by Jane McKay

I recently came across this picture taken in January, 1976 on the occasion of Guy Nearing's eighty-sixth birthday (see *ARS Quarterly Bulletin* Vol. 30 No. 4). I was program chairman for the New York Chapter at the time and we did a "This is your Life" kind of birthday party for Mr. Nearing. Speakers came from near and far to honor him. Some of his most noteworthy hybrids are

'Windbeam', 'Wyanokie', the Guyencourt Hybrids, 'Purple Gem', 'Mary Fleming', and my special favorite 'Rochelle' (this was gorgeous in our New York garden and is doing well here in Virginia).



Wally McKay, Dorothy Schlaikjer, Guy Nearing and Jane McKay with Frank Arsen and Emil Bohnel in background.

Dorothy Schlaikjer is also in the picture; she was president of the New York Chapter at the time. Dorothy and her late husband Hugo owned the former Parker estate on Long Island and it was here that the Dexter committee discovered 'Parkers Pink' among other previously unknown Dexters. To learn more about Guy Nearing and other early hybridizers, I suggest you read *Hybrids and Hybridizers: Rhododendrons and Azaleas for Eastern North America*, edited by Livingston and West.

#### FROM THE NORTHERN NECK by David Lay

On the western shore of Chesapeake Bay we have had an extremely mild winter thus far. As of late January, the temperature has never fallen below 20°F and there were five days in a row after New Years with above 60°F. Many *Camellia japonica* buds opened, especially on lower branches.

This was probably due to unmulched earth beneath the plants warming during the day and radiating heat during the cooler night time hours. The earliest witch-hazel 'Pallida' is in full bloom; *Helleborus foetidus* flowers are everywhere and daffodils are up several inches! Fortunately, cooler weather returned by mid-January so that the buds of *Magnolia stellata* and some early asiatic relatives which had begun to swell, did not open.

This is the second winter in a row with

unusually mild weather. Whether it results from El Niño, global warming, or is part of a longterm cycle is something climatologists can chew over until they get heartburn. Recent hot summers combined with periods of prolonged drought are taking their toll. Stress has caused considerable dieback on some of our biggest rhododendrons, especially 'Trude Webster' and Leach hybrids. Dexters, Gables and all the yak hybrids seem to be faring much better. The stress caused by heat combined with drought probably makes even the largest shade trees more susceptible to disease and insect attack. We have lost a forty foot hickory and this year there appears to be more dead branches and windfall on the ground beneath trees.

The up-side to all this, of course, is our greatly reduced winter heating bills, though the possibility of a comparable jump in temperature this summer could mean any utility savings are short lived. Perhaps we should start a cactus and yucca study group!

#### MAC VIDEO LIBRARY from MAC Video Chairman Walter Przypek

The video tapes listed below are available to MAC member to borrow, maximum of two at a time, for mailing costs:

1. Wakehurst Place Garden
2. Caerhays Gardens
3. Savill and Valley Gardens
4. Bodnant Gardens
5. The Queen's Garden
6. Glory of the Garden & Kew Garden
7. Sommerville Garden in Georgia 1993
8. Sommerville native azaleas
9. McDonald Garden, Hampton, VA 1989
10. Public Gardens of Georgia
11. Native Azaleas
12. Propagating Rhododendrons, by Harry Wise.
13. How to Root Cuttings - Victory Garden Excerpt
14. Eastern Vistas: a visit to some of the East's National Parks
15. ARS Historical Tape: Old Timers discussing the start of the Rhododendron Society at the home of Herb and Betty Spady near Salem, Oregon, Jan 1993.

Send your request to Walter Przypek, P.O. Box 1087, Yorktown, VA 23692-1087 or phone 757-898-9159.

**AMERICAN CHESTNUTS ANYONE?** by John Buschmann

American Chestnut Cooperator's Foundation has a program that is of interest to everyone. Those of us who would like to participate in a program of seed chestnuts, seedling trees, and planting them should contact:

L. Griffin

2667 Forest Service Rd 708

Newport, Virginia 24128

Phone: 540-552-5943.

Web site: <http://ipm.ppws.vt.edu/griffin/accf.html>.

This is a challenge for us to provide for the future generations. Help us bring back one of the world's great trees, the American chestnut tree.

**ELECTRONIC NEWS**

News of interest from other ARS chapters' newsletter is now on the Internet. Betty Spady is publishing quarterly *The Rhododendron and Azalea News* patterned after the format of the old paper publication that Janet Binford edited. The site address is:

<http://members.aol.com/RandANews/news.html>

**CHALLENGE GRANT FOR RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION**

The October issue of the *Journal* had an article about this \$400,000 challenge grant. If the challenge is met, the garden's existing endowment would increase from its current level of \$500,000. The Middle Atlantic Chapter will be making a contribution in recognition of the work that Austin Kennell has done for the rhododendron world. The amount will be determined at our August MAC Board of Directors meeting. Any individual members who would like to make a contribution should mail their check to our Treasurer Ray Brush, PO Box 266, Madison, VA 22727. Checks should be made to MAC with a notation that it is for the RSF Challenge.

**A MID-FEBRUARY WALK AROUND THE GARDEN** by Bill Bedwell, Dinwiddie, VA

It is raining. Again! No gauge but the total must be close to a foot, depending on when you start counting in January. They've been mostly gentle rains, with no flood problems, no snow, no bad weather, and mostly mild temperatures, but a few plunges in early winter. I've nothing to

complain about from El Niño so far. I feel lucky and glad I'm not on low ground.

It's been so mild that a white Dame's Rocket has been in continuous bloom since last summer until this week, when all the buds finally bloomed out to give the plant a rest. Some of the hellebores started early, but most began opening slowly a few weeks ago and it has been fun discovering new colors in the big group of plants I bought at Barry Glick's Sunshine Nursery following our Spring 1996 meeting in West Virginia. (He gave the Friday night talk on hellebores.) I had to borrow money from Alice Doggett and Don Hyatt to buy 15 randomly selected from Barry's flats. Some have not yet opened, but already I have most of the colors shown on the cover of the Spring 1997 Wayside Gardens catalog and called "Royal Heritage," plus some colors not pictured, such as a gorgeous white with light red blotches near the center. So far there are five good variations of yellow that I am thrilled over because the light colors make the best show in the garden. There are no really good pinks yet, but some are close. One large and beautiful medium purple with a big yellow center reminds me of a tree peony with similar color. It appears the hellebores are easy to grow, but young plants may sit around looking pitiful for a few years before they take off.

The pesky voles won't let bulbs grow in my garden so the hellebores and pulmonaria have become the early show. When we had the fall meeting in West Virginia, Elmer Lapsley brought enough pulmonaria 'Mrs. Moon' plants to give to everyone, and this is one of my favorites. But my new favorite is 'Roy Davidson' that I brought back from the ARS Convention in Portland in 1995. Its light blue flowers are really showy but the foliage is the main feature. I also have divided plants until I have a six foot area under a leggy rhododendron that is covered with pulmonaria 'Bressingham White' that is the showiest at flowering time. I think these plants look best with a mass of the same variety, but that takes either time or money. When temperatures are too warm, the flowers may not make a good show, but the foliage rivals hostas all summer without the problems of voles destroying the plants.

Rosalie Nachman gave my first hellebores during one of our MAC tours of her gorgeous garden in Richmond. It is *Helleborus foetidus* with narrow leaves and big clusters of very light green flowers that remain about the same on into June. They multiply easily from seed, eventually forming

foot-high masses that are easy to pull up where not wanted. This year they started in December and have been really showy. Some have naturalized in the woods.

It has been fun discovering new plants that do well and I recommend both hellebores and pulmonaria to give winter excitement with attractive foliage through the summer and fall.

#### **WINTER WANDERINGS** by Doug Jolley

While snow has been measured in feet recently just a few miles away, we have had no snow accumulations of more than one half inch this entire winter! Snowdrops and winter aconite are in full bloom and the witch-hazel are enjoying a stellar blooming season. Beginning in late October with *Hamamelis virginiana* through several cultivars and now 'Sandra' just beginning to reach anthesis, we have experienced "cut flowers" all winter. Deer browsing (knock on wood) has been minimal. The "four-legged locusts" did feast on an all-you-can-eat 'Girard's Rose' azalea hedge/smorgasbord. A Maginot Line-style electric fence helps keep the deer out, but it can be circumvented. Quince, forsythia and *Cornus mas* will all be showing color soon.

Spring is not far away and the Spring Meeting should be spectacular. Glenn Kauffmann and Ron Brown are hard at work planning and putting the finishing touches on our activities. Watch for registration material to follow this newsletter.

#### **EXPLORING FOR NATIVE AZALEAS THE EASY WAY** by Frank Pelurie

While there are many places MAC's Species Study Group visits to explore for native rhododendrons, not all are readily accessible. You may want to see some of these plants in their native settings, maybe just to make sure that photographers in the Species Study Group are not faking those spectacular azalea pictures they are showing at chapter meetings. However, many of us have young children or are mature enough so that we do not even consider the difficult six hour walk necessary to see what is considered to be one of the finest flower shows of native hybrid deciduous azaleas in the mid-Atlantic area: Gregory Bald in Great Smoky Mountain National Park. There are however, many other places where one can see beautiful displays of rhododendrons and azaleas, some without even getting out of your car, or others

with just short, easy walks.

There is a catch though, and that is to pick the right date for your trip, or visit the site often enough during the bloom period, so that you catch the flowering at its peak. You can narrow the date selection window by calling acquaintances or chapter members living in the area. While there is always an element of chance involved in planned trips to see native azaleas and rhododendrons, usually somewhere, something is in bloom that makes the outing worth while. Here are a few places in the mid-Atlantic area that are worth visiting.

**Dolly Sods** - This is a flat mountain top several miles long with lots and lots of *Rhododendron prinophyllum*, and wonderful scenery. The difficulty is that this is on a relatively well maintained, and on weekends moderately to heavily used, gravel road located in the Monongahela National Forest. Dolly Sods is located between Canaan Valley State Park and the community of Petersburg, WV. Obtain a Monongahela National Forest Visitor map by either writing to the Monongahela National Forest at 200 Sycamore Street, Elkins, WV 26241 (telephone 304-636-1800 weekdays 8-4), enclose a check for \$4.00 payable to USDA Forest Service, or purchase a map at the Forest's Seneca Rocks Visitor Center, south of Petersburg, WV. The Visitor Center is open 7 days a week spring, summer and fall. The magic date for *prinophyllum* flowering on top of the mountain appears to center around June 10. However, in 1997 flowering was just getting started June 17, about two weeks late.

**Seneca State Forest** - *Rhododendron calendulaceum* and maybe some hybrids. *Calendulaceum*, *prinophyllum* and *periclymenoides* have, on occasion, all been in flower at the same time in isolated areas of the State Forest. Seneca State Forest is about 16 miles north of Marlinton, WV on State Route 28. There is a stand of azaleas behind the Forest's office, and a short, easy trail with azaleas across Route 28 from the office. The time to visit is early June. In 1997 these azaleas were in full bloom on June 17, a week to two weeks late. If you feel a little adventurous, ask the State Forest Office for directions to Sitlington and the gravel ridge road to the west that is within the State Forest. This road can take you to Cass Scenic Railroad State Park.

**Audra State Park** - Known species in the park are:

*R. calendulaceum*, *periclymenoides*, and *arborescens*, and as a result there are hybrids. Those of you who attended the fall 1997 MAC meeting saw pictures of these azaleas. Audra State Park is located a few miles to the east of US 119 (Buckhannon, WV to Philippi, WV) on State Route 11. When in the park continue past the bridge over the Middle Fork River to a small creek crossing under the road from your right, just before leaving the park to the south towards Kesling Mill. There is enough space just before the creek to park off the road. As you look up the small creek, explore up the creek's watershed to the right from late May through mid-June. In 1997 the azaleas were in bloom from the end of May thru June 20. Again, flowering was a week to two weeks late in 1997.

**Cheat Bridge** - South of Elkins, WV on US 250, just before crossing the Cheat River there is a gravel road angling off to the left that runs parallel to the Cheat River for a ways. Get one of the Monongahela National Forest Visitor maps, mentioned above. This is *Rhododendron arborescens* country; visit about mid-June. Look along stream banks, the flower's fragrance is very noticeable. While you are in the area visit Gaudineer Knob.

**Lake Sherwood Recreation Area** - From White Sulphur Springs, WV take State Route 92 north to Neola, about 15 miles. Turn right off Route 92 towards Lake Sherwood. Watch to the right of the road as the narrow valley floor to the right drops well below the road. You should see a stand of *Rhododendron maximum* and *catawbiense* with natural hybrids. If you catch them in full bloom you won't miss the location, it is spectacular. Visit about mid-June. It has been in full bloom on June 20, but more recently the stand has been past peak bloom on that date.

**Burkes Garden** - Near Tazwell, VA, take State Route 61 northeast about 9 miles to Secondary Route 623. Go up the mountain, straight across the valley, past the school and trash station until the road turns to gravel. Continuing on the gravel road will eventually lead to State Route 42, but near the top there are large stands of *Rhododendron calendulaceum*. These plants were in flower June 22, 1997. Normal flowering is probably a week or two earlier. The southern rim of the valley reportedly also has azaleas.

**Black Mountain** - On VA State Route 160 west of Appalachia, VA on the VA-KY state line. At the

top of the mountain there is a gravel road off to the right, if traveling west. Here you have to take some bad with the good. The area is trashy, has a natural gas well, and a power line, but there is a large population of *Rhododendron cumberlandense* (*bakeri*) that can be viewed from the gravel road. You just have to filter out the bad. These azaleas were a little past peak bloom on July 9, 1997. In a normal flowering year a mid to late June visit would probably be right.

**Roane Mountain** - On the TN-NC state line between Elizabethton, TN and Bakersville, NC, TN State Route 143 and NC State Route 261. At Carvers Gap the surfaced side road will take you to the Roane Mountain Garden of *Rhododendron catawbiense*. Mid to late June is a good time for *R. catawbiense* here. Another option, but with some work, is to climb the trail, across from the side road, and head out the Appalachian trail about a mile to Engine Gap for a really nice showing of *Rhododendron calendulaceum*, again mid to late June is the normal time, however in 1997 flowering occurred in early July.

**Wayah Bald** - From Franklin, NC take Ball Road (# 1310) to Wayah Gap then turn right onto good gravel road to reach Wayah Bald. Along the way, and at the top you will see *Rhododendron arborescens* and *R. calendulaceum*. Mid to late June is the time to visit Wayah.

**Blue Ridge Parkway** - The following information on species, flowering times, and milepost locations (milepost 0 is near Waynesboro, VA; 120 is at Roanoke, VA; and 469 is near Cherokee, NC) was taken from a National Park Service brochure. You almost can not miss seeing rhododendrons and azaleas in flower as you change elevation and aspect along the parkway.

*Rhododendron periclymenoides*, April - May, Mileposts; 4, 92-97, 138.6, 145.5, 154.5 picnic area, 162.9, 211.6, 217-222, 350-351, and 412-423.

*Rhododendron minus*, Late April - June, Mileposts; 308-310 and 404-411.

*Rhododendron vaseyi*, May- June, Mileposts: 305.2, 342-343, 349-351, and 419-424.

*Rhododendron calendulaceum*, May - June, Mileposts: 138.6, 144-145, 149.5, 160-166, 217-221, 308-310, 368-380, and 412-423.

*Rhododendron catawbiense*, June, Mileposts; 44.9, 77-83, 130.5, 138.6, 239, 247, 266.8, 348-350, and 364.1.

*Rhododendron maximum*, June - July, Mileposts; 162.9, 169 picnic area, 232-233, 339.3 picnic area, 352-353, and 455-456.