

# MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

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

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## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MAC MEETINGS

April 20-22, 2001	District Meeting, Comfort Inn, Gloucester, VA
Aug 18, 2001	MAC Board Meeting, Charlottesville, VA
Nov 2-4, 2001	Mountain Lake
Spring 2002	Culpeper area
Oct 18-20, 2002	Pipestem State Park, WV

## Rhododendron Web Site Addresses:

**R & A News** <http://members.aol.com/RandANews/news.html>

**American Rhododendron Society** <http://www.rhododendron.org/>

**U VA Science & Engineering Libraries** <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/science/guides/s-rhodo.htm>

## A.R.S. DISTRICT 9 MEETING IN GLOUCESTER, APRIL 20, 21, 22, 2001

by Barbara Hall

Come one, come all and experience glorious springtime in the "Land of the Life Worth Living", Gloucester County, Virginia! For the first time, the Middle Atlantic Chapter will host an A.R.S. District 9 conference in this historic area. Lodging will be at the new Comfort Inn, conveniently located on Route 17 near the quaint village of Gloucester.

We have an exciting weekend of special events planned, including tours of beautiful gardens, informative and entertaining programs, and lots of good food and hospitality. On Friday afternoon, George McLellan will once again welcome us to his fabulous garden on the Ware River. It always gets rave reviews from everyone who visits because George has used his considerable talent in landscape design to organize a unique collection of plants in delightful beds, borders and vistas.

From there, we will "mosey" next door to the Ware River Yacht Club for a good "ole-fashioned" barbecue picnic, followed by a super program. The always-entertaining duo of Don Hyatt and Bill Bedwell will present the second part of the story of their trip to England and Ireland. George McLellan related the first part of the saga at our fall meeting and promised that Don and Bill will show us wonderful slides of more of the beautiful gardens they visited and will relate some of their hilarious experiences.

On Saturday we will board buses to tour private gardens in Gloucester. Because of their close proximity, we will have more time to tour the gardens

and not too much time en route. The spectacular gardens of "Dunham Massie", owned by Dean and Cam Williams will provide a lovely setting for us to enjoy our box lunches on the banks of the North River. Cam has artistically arranged areas of the property into various types of gardens, such as the woodland wildflower area, formal gardens and daffodil and perennial beds.

Art & Betty White's garden, filled with mature specimens of azaleas under a canopy of pines and dogwoods, should be especially beautiful at this time. Art obtained many of these plants directly from George Harding and was the first to grow them in this area.

Al and I are opening our garden to the group for the first time. Azaleas and rhodies are our main focus, but the koi pond, wildflower garden, rock garden and natural areas, framed by dogwoods at peak bloom, will also await your exploration. There will likely be one or two more surprise gardens on tour.

The program at the Saturday night banquet will be presented by Barbara Bullock, Curator of the Azalea and Rhododendron Collection at the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. Her talk is "Azaleas: Creating a Woodland Wonderland". She is a knowledgeable and delightful speaker who will bring us up to date on the collection and other items of interest at the Arboretum.

Please bring lots of entries for the flower show! Because of the earlier than normal date of the meeting, we should get to see some varieties that usually are past their peak by the time of the show.

There will be a plant auction, seedling sale and book sale, so don't forget your checkbook! Actually, these will be the only "non-included" costs for the weekend since

the Comfort Inn will provide a continental breakfast each morning, which is included in their very reasonable room rate of \$59 (plus tax) per night. The Friday evening barbecue, Saturday box lunch and Saturday night banquet are prepaid items that you will sign up for in advance when you register for the meeting, so there will be no "hidden" costs for meals "on your own" (unless you prefer to dine elsewhere).

For "dragees" (spouses who are not particularly interested in going on garden tours), there will be plenty to do, especially if you are interested in American history or you like to go "antiquing". For lots of information about Gloucester and its history, visit Gloucester County's Website at:

<http://www.co.gloucester.va.us/pr/homepage.htm>. On Sunday morning, we will provide directions to gardens of other local Middle Atlantic Chapter members so you can get one more "flower fix" before leaving the area.

We look forward to having you join us for what promises to be a fun-filled weekend, whether you are a seriously addicted or a recently infected "rhodoholic"!

(The meeting schedule and registration forms will be mailed to all current District 9 A.R.S. members shortly. Please be ready to respond promptly as the hotel will be releasing rooms to other guests at an early date.)

### **SPECIAL BOOK AUCTION**

An auction of rhododendron and other plant books donated by MAC and ARS former president Austin C. Kennell is being planned for the Spring Meeting. Be prepared for an opportunity to bid on some interesting books.

### **BRONZE MEDAL PRESENTED IN RICHMOND**

Dr. William Stepka received the Bronze Medal Award at St. Mary's Hospital in Richmond on January 28, 2001, from Honors Chairman Ken McDonald, with David and Debby Sauer, Sandra McDonald, and Bill's son Don Stepka looking on. Bill received the medal for his long-time participation and service to the chapter and the genus *Rhododendron*.

Bill served as vice president then as president in 1977 to 1979 during a period of transition for the Chapter after the death of Dr. Thomas Wheeldon.

He and his wife, Bonnie, handled registration and worked at several chapter meetings in Richmond. He was interested in deciduous

azaleas and raised many seedling crosses.

He had recently become active again in the chapter after Bonnie's death and has graced many meetings including our trip to Scotland for the 1996 Annual Meeting in Oban, Scotland.

With much appreciation for his many contributions to our meetings and fellowship we present this Bronze Medal, our chapter's highest honor.

### **DECEASED MEMBER**

Dr. William Stepka, 84, died on February 5, 2001. Plants were his vocation and avocation. He was a



Dr. William Stepka. Photo taken at the 2000 Fall Meeting by Walter Przypek.

retired professor at Virginia Commonwealth University's Medical College of Virginia, where he taught and specialized in pharmacognosy, the study of drugs and compounds derived from plants or other natural materials.

He grew up in rural Minnesota, then went to a Cornell University-run agricultural experimentation program in Geneva, NY. From there he went to the University of Rochester in New York. Six weeks shy of graduation, his education was interrupted. Drafted into the Army during World War II, Bill served in the Army Air Forces flying reconnaissance missions in nearly every theater of battle (Flying Tigers, China, Philippines, Okinawa, Japan), specializing in radar

and radar countermeasures.

He returned to complete his degree and to go on to the University of California at Berkeley where he received his Ph.D. in Plant Physiology-Plant Biochemistry. There, he worked closely with Nobel laureate Melvin Calvin. Bill did much of the research on that project and his name was on the research paper "The path of carbon in photosynthesis. X. Carbon dioxide assimilation in plants." He had many other research papers to his credit.

He taught at the University of Pennsylvania before coming to Richmond and to the Medical College of Virginia as a professor in the late 1950s. He retired in 1982.

Bill was in many scientific, honorary, and professional societies, two of his most notable being the Virginia Conference, AAUP, where he served as president, and faculty senate at VCU where he also served as president. He was also retained by Virginia Commonwealth University as a professional lobbyist, for issues of higher education at the Virginia General Assembly. He was a member of Sigma Xi, honorary scientific society. He was a consultant on poisonous plant ingestions for MCV Emergency for many years.

Bill loved plants and enjoyed hybridizing deciduous azaleas. He had entered some of his seedlings in MAC Flower Shows. He became president of MAC at a time when the chapter was smaller and was suffering in the early years after the death of Dr. Thomas Wheeldon. He helped keep the chapter going and pointed it in a more scientific direction.

#### **CORRECTION TO FLOWER SHOW 2000**

The May 2000 issue of the newsletter had the 2000 MAC Flower Show headings incorrectly listed as 1999.

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

The garden in late January is in a deep sleep. Unlike the last few winters this one has been cold. Our low was 9°F with most nights in the upper teens or in the twenties. Of course we have a long way to go.

Last spring we put a small pre-formed pond in the garden. Though only 18 inches deep we were assured the fish would survive the winter. So far

so good. It's been iced over since mid-December, but we can see the fish swimming under the ice.

Conifers steal the show at this time of the year. Some are blue, some gold and all shades of green. Conifers come in all shapes and sizes, tall, medium, and short, upright or spreading. As to texture some are soft and feathery, others sharp and prickly, and everything imaginable in between.

Dwarf *Nandinas* are bright red as are the berries on many plants at least until the birds strip them. A flock of robins took every red berry from our hollies, evergreen and deciduous, the second week in January. Oddly, they have not touched the yellow and orange berries.



Jane McKay

I recently received the New York Chapter Newsletter regarding the Northeast Regional meeting to be held on Long Island November 2-4, 2001. It sounds like it will be interesting, also a great plant sale. The hotel will be very close to Islip's MacArthur Airport. If you plan to drive and since we go up there four to five times a year, give us a call for directions and best times to hit "the bridge".

On a different note and since there is not much to write about in the garden this time of year, I have a request. Do you enjoy reading the *News and Notes*? I know I do. How about helping Sandra by writing a small article, even a few paragraphs. If you've read something of interest let her know. Do you have questions? Submit them and someone will have the answer. We don't want Sandra to become discouraged so come on and help her out. Believe me, if I can do it anyone can!

#### **FROM THE NORTHERN NECK** by David Lay

Here on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay we enjoyed an unusually wet summer after several dry years. As ours is a woodland garden under tall oaks, perennials, ferns and ground covers flourished as did shade-loving weeds. Azaleas put on excessive new growth after flowering. Some trimming back has already begun and much more will be needed as the weather warms.

Many of our 25-year-old Glenn Dales and Kurumes are over eight feet tall and spindly, long, budless, new

tip shoots should be removed. I hope to take the opportunity to drastically prune back many of the azaleas that crowd our driveway. Care must be taken to retain the shape and proportion of these shrubs as we hate both the butchered look of radical surgery and the manicured-mounded look of azaleas in Japanese gardens. I try to prune back to a twig or branch and avoid lopping off an azalea halfway down the stem. We strive for a natural effect and the areas we don't get around to pruning are less noticeable and blend in better. Also there is only so much time and energy to maintain five acres.

A cool, very dry fall has been followed by a winter that as of early February has not been excessively cold or snowy. Our lowest temperature to date was 12 degrees F with less than three inches of snow. However, our brackish-tidal creek has frozen all the way across twice, a testimony to constantly low daytime temperatures. Strong winter winds and the lack of moisture during the fall have had no major effect on evergreens thus far. *Daphne odora* and *Ilex vomitoria* have some burned leaves but both are only marginally hardy here. Deer damage has been far less than last year, but it is unclear whether this is due to hunter's success or my deer repellent and hot sauce spray. We are keeping our fingers crossed!



David Lay

#### **WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER:**

Thomas Baks, Potomac, MD

#### **SPECIAL CUTTINGS FROM AUSTIN KENNEL**

Austin Kennell is offering cuttings from his rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias, conifers, dogwoods, and other plants to MAC members. Some labels are illegible, but many are known. Visit during the blooming season and make cuttings or mark plants to get cuttings later. Austin also will give divisions of daylilies, iris and peonies. You will need to call ahead or write to let Austin know when you will visit. Telephone 540-456-6076.

#### **TREASURER**

Ray Brush is resigning from the treasurer's office and Debby Sauer has agreed to take it on. The Board is temporarily appointing her to the treasurer's office

upon Ray's resignation, and then she will stand for regular election at the Spring Meeting.

#### **PLANTS NOT FAVORED BY DEER**

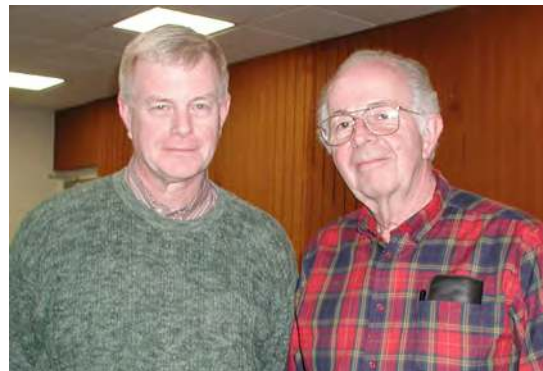
Don Hyatt has observed that on his land in the country that the deer population has decimated most of his azaleas, rhododendrons and some other plants, nibbling most of them down to nubs. However, his deer don't seem to care for the taste of 'Koromo Shikibu' or 'Delos' and have not done much damage to *R. minus*. The foliage on these plants does have a strong odor and possibly is somewhat of a deterrent to deer.

#### **PROPOSED EVERGREEN AZALEA PROJECT**

Tim Lloyd would like to do an evaluation project on the differences in flowering habits of evergreen azaleas for several hardiness zones and would like some MAC members to do some plant evaluations with their plants to help him with this project. Some of the things he plans to evaluate are growth habit, flower coverage, number of days in bloom, and time of flowering. Please write Tim Lloyd at 4020 Timberland Dr., Portsmouth, VA 23703, or call him at 757-484-1816 and he can tell you about the project and send you a form.

#### **MAC BOARD MEETING**

Your board met in Richmond on February 17. District Director Bill Mangels came from Pennsylvania to the meeting and explained some ARS issues. The board reviewed plans for up-coming meetings, reviewed a proposed policies of the board document, and took care of some other chapter business.



Bill Mangels and Frank Pelurie

GARDENS OPEN TO NEW MEMBERS - New members are encouraged to visit members' gardens in their area. The officers and board members have agreed to show new members through their gardens if the member will call ahead and arrange a convenient time. Telephone numbers and towns are listed below.

MIDDLE ATLANTIC CHAPTER OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

**Memberships and renewals should be sent to Jane McKay, Membership Chairman, 3 Cobb's Ct., Palmyra, VA 22963.**

Annual membership dues are \$28 per year.

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

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