

MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

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

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May, 1998

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MAC MEETINGS

May 15-17, 1998

Nov 20-22, 1998

May 14-16, 1999

November 5,6&7, 1999

(Eastern Regional Meeting: host MAC)

Four Points Hotel (Sheraton),Harrisonburg, VA

Chamberlain Hotel, Hampton, VA

Tanglewood Holiday Inn, Roanoke, VA

Fort Magruder Inn, Williamsburg, VA

MAC SPECIES STUDY GROUP by Sandra McDonald

Our Species Study Group met at Ken and Sandra McDonald's home on January 24, 1998. We are still working on developing slide programs on the native azaleas. We reviewed some slides. We did not really get into our discussion topic at this meeting and will save it for next time. We had a couple of new participants, Frank Pelurie from WV and Malcolm Clark from NC. Also Don Hyatt came down from McLean, VA and Bill Miller from Bethesda, MD. Other regulars included, Dave and Debby Sauer, Sybil and Walter Przypek, George McLellan and Ken and me. George has more recently been on several native azalea hunting expeditions and we are sure to hear more from him in the newsletter.

FROM THE MIDDLE OF MAC by Jane McKay



David Sauer, George McLellan, Malcolm Clark, Frank Pelurie, Debby Sauer and Sybil Przypek.

As I sit here writing this our local TV weather announcer has just predicted today's temperature will reach the low 90°F; it's hard to believe this is March 30! The warm weather makes me want to move all the house plants out to their summer residence on the

porch and the rooted cuttings and seedlings out of the basement and into the garden, but of course it is too early. The *Amelanchiers* in the woods are putting on quite a show this spring. I'm sure the mild winter and much needed rain will get our gardens off to a good start. We only wish we could have saved some of the rain for this summer. One daffodil I must tell you about it Rijnvelt's Early Sensation. (Some catalogs list it as Early Sensation.) The flowers opened in late January and stayed in bloom until mid March. We plan to add more of these sensational daffodils next fall. The winter jasmine was in bloom at the same time and they made a delightful combination.



Jane McKay

New York Chapter ARS member and monthly Newsletter Editor, Jim Fry, wrote in the March letter his method for handling container grown plants successfully. When he purchases a container grown plant, instead of putting it directly in the ground he plants it in a larger pot. The potting mix he uses is a combination of the soil from his garden (he does have soil with a high organic content) plus peat moss about a 4 to 1 ratio. He teases the roots out of the original root ball, adding the potting mix that falls off to the potting mix for the larger pot. Jim adds drainage material to the bottom of the large pot, adds a few inches of the new soil mix to the bottom, then puts in the plant working the soil around the roots, adds mulch to the top and waters well. He then sinks the pot in the ground either in its eventual location or nursery area. He says he can keep it this way for several years or plant it out the following season without a problem since the plant has already adapted to his soil. Be sure to keep the plant watered and

mulched.

As I look out the window I see the peonies are a foot high – in March. It's time for my morning walk around the garden, coffee cup in hand. I can't wait to see if there is anything new – how can anyone not be a gardener!

GARDENING TYPES by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture. *Reprinted with permission from The Virginia Gardener, March 1998. [This article says very well what I have been thinking for years. As you read this, think of where your friends and neighbors fit. Ed.]*

According to a National Garden Bureau survey, over 70 percent of American households participate in some form of gardening. That is a tremendous number of people, and my experience tells me that not all of them are enthusiastic gardeners who await Saturday morning so they can get their hands in the dirt. In fact, I sometimes wonder if they are in the minority...the lucky few who get the multiple benefits of time spent with nature.

After years of watching gardeners, I have come to recognize six categories: the obligatory gardener, the employer, the designer, the nurturer, the beginner, and the avid gardener.

The “obligatory gardener” does this because he or she must. It is her duty. He has a lawn, so he must mow it; some leaves, so she must rake; a hedge, so he must prune; or bugs, so she must spray. The problem with the “obligatory gardener” is, since the effort is made out of duty not joy, the gardener rarely takes the time to learn about gardening and bases any action on preconceived, but erroneous, assumptions about what needs to be done in the yard. This in turn creates more work, more expense, less pleasure, less interest in learning; and the cycle continues. A little study might uncover that the bugs weren't doing any damage, the hedge would be healthier and more attractive if allowed to naturalize, the leaves could be left around the shrubs to compost and enrich the soil, and most of the lawn could be replaced with a ground cover. My greatest concern is the “obligatory gardener” can be a source of avoidable pollution problems, using pesticides when they are not needed, spreading fertilizers at the wrong time of the year, adding leaves to the landfill, and relying on noise- and air-polluting power equipment to do jobs that may not need to be done. They have my sympathy. I wish I had more chances to help them. Researchers have shown that being around plants helps people recover from stress, and it works especially well if we don't make it unnecessarily hard on ourselves.

The “employer” wants the landscape maintained

and is willing to put money, but not time, into it. These gardeners fall into many different classes. Some hire the cheapest bidder just to keep the neighbors from calling the “grass police.” Some wait until it is time to sell, then bring in the professionals to spruce up things. Some have the lawn service out on a regular basis, whether or not any pesticide or fertilizer treatment is needed. Actually, becoming an “employer” is a reasonable alternative for an “obligatory gardener” with money. The key to being a successful “employer” is hiring well. Check the reputation and credentials of the company you plan to hire. For health of your landscape, your family, and the environment, hire someone who is using insect and pest management practices and uses pesticide application only as a last resort.

The “designer” loves plants, wants a beautiful garden, and wants to participate in its creation and maintenance, but primarily in a vicarious sense. This gardener hires a talented landscape architect to translate her vision into plans and the best landscape contractors to build the garden, installing walls, ponds, and patios. She selects rare and unusual plants from specialty nurseries and has them maintained by a dedicated gardener with at least 107 years of experience. The “designer,” who is perhaps the most knowledgeable of all the gardener types, takes immense satisfaction in her garden and is happy to share a relaxed evening in this garden with others, many of whom writhe with the pain of recognizing, at last, what complete failures they are in the art of gardening.

The “nurturer” loves plants and the act of caring for plants. This gardener is more concerned with the pure joy of seeing the plant grow and flower than with the peripheral benefits of increased property value or enhanced aesthetics. Their gardens often are neither gorgeous nor large, but contain an element of gardening satisfaction that is evident. Things may look cluttered to the novice, but that is because the plants are being located in the site where they will grow the best, not necessarily look the best. As with other gardener types, “nurturers” come in many different styles. Some have a mission to save the sick and neglected plants from the retail world, others have set about converting their gardens into havens of happy healthy species from throughout the world, while others simply want their decks covered with containers of plants they can care for. The “nurturers” tend to get great satisfaction from propagating their plants and sharing these “grandchildren” with everyone.

The “avid gardener” combines the best of all the other types of gardeners, having a true love of plants

combined with a desire for an attractive landscape that does not simply meet an obligation to the neighbors, but also sets it apart as a thing of beauty and interest. The "avid gardener" is insatiable in his desire for plants, knowledge, and experience; the gardener, the "avid gardener" assures the best interests of both personal landscape and the environment.

The "beginner" has just discovered plants and is exploring the relationship that might develop. With help and support from a "nurturer," the "beginner" can develop a life-long love of plants and develop the skills to care for the environment, helping others while they grow. From a "designer," they can learn about both the needs and the beauty of plants and their environment. They can learn to work with others to create a setting that is healthy for all. On their path to becoming an "avid gardener," the "beginner" develops a relationship with nature based on knowledge and love that will bring a lifetime of joy and satisfaction. But if the love of plants doesn't develop in their relationship with nature, we can hope that they will become a responsible "employer" or fulfill their "obligatory" gardening in a fashion that protects the environment and give them the opportunity to at least appreciate their surroundings.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Welcome to new members:

David L. Parmer, Hinton, WV 25952

David L. Peebles, , Ordinary, VA 23131

Other additions to membership list:

Herbert & Mary Barb, ,

Edinburg, VA 22824

Gloria Saunders, , Afton, VA22920

ALDERMAN LIBRARY

Jeanne Hammer reports from Alderman Library that the Rhododendron & Azalea Fund is growing. Harry Wise recently made a contribution in memory of Col. Raymond H. Goodrich.

THE GARDEN by Sandra McDonald

Last issue I had to by-pass my column for lack of space. This is turning out to be a remarkable season, I suspect due to El Niño, though some weather people may disagree. Here on the coast we had rare back-to-back nor'easters that caused a good bit of flooding and beach erosion and damage. We had no flooding, but we did have some beach damage.

Winter was very warm and very wet. It hardly got below freezing until March 12, when the temperature dropped to 25° and killed a good percentage of my plum blossoms and left *Magnolia*

soulangiana waving brown hankies in the wind. I do have a few plums that escaped the freeze.

The dogwoods are doing funny things this year with the leaves coming out before the bracts are fully expanded on many trees for a less than glorious show. But otherwise spring is now coming in with a bang.

U.C.'s STRAWBERRY CANYON OFFERS ITS FRUITS by Jeanne M. Hammer

While on a trip to the San Francisco Bay area in mid-March, I stumbled upon a marvelous botanical garden, thanks to a map of the University of California - Berkeley campus. Situated in the Strawberry Canyon of the Berkeley Hills, the garden features eco-niches found in subtropical climates and is full of the tender Asian rhodie species we admire but cannot grow in the MAC region. With a collection of more than 13,000 species and varieties, mostly of documented wild origin, it is the largest university botanical collection in the U.S.

Although I spent time in the South African, Desert, Mediterranean, Californian, etc. sections of the garden, the highlight for me was exploring the Asian Garden. Thanks to "El Niño," which brought them milder winter temperatures and a deluge of rain, spring was about two weeks earlier there this year, and judging from what was in bloom, I would say their spring is always earlier than ours. Of the mature rhodies in the garden (there is an active program of planting new seedling species), at least half were in bloom.

Dominant among the blooming, mature plants were *R. grande* and *R. arboreum*, which date to the early 1930s and were grown from seed from plants in the Edinburgh botanical garden. There were a multitude of species represented, and I enjoyed in particular the blue blossoms of *R. hippophaeoides* and *R. telmateum*, both of Yunnan, and the large leaves of *R. protistum* (China) and *R. sinogrande* (Yunnan). Of the many "companion" plants, the fragrant *Michelia yunnanensis* stands out.

The Asian Garden is tended by horticulturist Elaine Sedlack, whom I met while she was digging up a plant to move to a spot she thought it would prefer (sound familiar, folks). Elaine knows her plants well and shares her knowledge with friendly enthusiasm. In fact, she was speaking to the local chapter of the ARS that evening. Of all the Asian plants, she seemed most fond of *R. moulmainense* (Yunnan), which she nearly lost in their bitter cold 1989 winter (temperatures dropped to the teens for four nights). I have to agree that it's the crown jewel of the garden. With shiny, dark reddish-green new foliage and

fragrant white blossoms, it is stunning. Regrettably, I'll have to remember it and the rest in my mind's eye, as I left my camera at home on this trip.

MY WANDERINGS ON COPPER BALD AKA The Diary of a Mad Man by Edward W. Collins, Hendersonville, NC. (Reprinted with permission from the author.)

This article is intended to chronicle the events leading up to and including native azalea hunting trips on Copper Bald, North Carolina.

I'm quite puzzled that in the six years I have been in North Carolina, I've heard very little about Copper Bald. Comments were "there are some nice things there, but it's so overgrown" or "it's nothing like Gregory Bald." Both comments are true.

Copper Bald is not a Gregory Bald and Gregory Bald is not a Copper Bald. If you want to stand in one place and see hundreds of azaleas in each direction, that thousands of people have seen, go to Gregory. But, if you like the thrill of discovering that fragrant pink with yellow blotch, or that dwarf, deep late red with the dark green, crinkled leaf, and the fragrant yellow with red stamens and blue-green foliage that almost no one has seen, then go to Copper Bald! Every color combination found on Gregory Bald is on Copper Bald and more. The difference is a 6.5 mile hike to Gregory and a 3000 ft rise in elevation versus a 1.7 mile hike and a 1000 ft rise in elevation to Copper Bald. On Copper Bald you must get off the trail and hunt for these breathtaking plants. I should say that Copper Bald is approximately 3 miles north as the crow flies from Wayah Bald. However, it is 13 to 18 miles depending on which route you take by car. The trail runs north and south and cuts across an east/west slope. The slope runs moderate to very steep with some interesting seeps. It is in and around one of these seeps that you first see *Rhododendron. arborescens*. When in bloom, you will get a whiff of their wonderful fragrance before you actually see the plants.

THE BEGINNING

June 17, 1996 - I received a phone call from Rich Owings (horticulturist at the North Carolina Arboretum) telling me about a weekend camping trip he and his daughter Kendra made to Copper Bald the previous weekend (June 14-16).

On the way down the trail, his daughter spotted a couple of medium to deep pink blossoms on an azalea. So, we planned a trip for Wednesday, June 19, 1996 to explore the area near that plant.

June 19, 1996 - Rich, Ron Lance (botanist at TNCA), Peter Stanz (TNCA intern) and I met Gary Kaufman

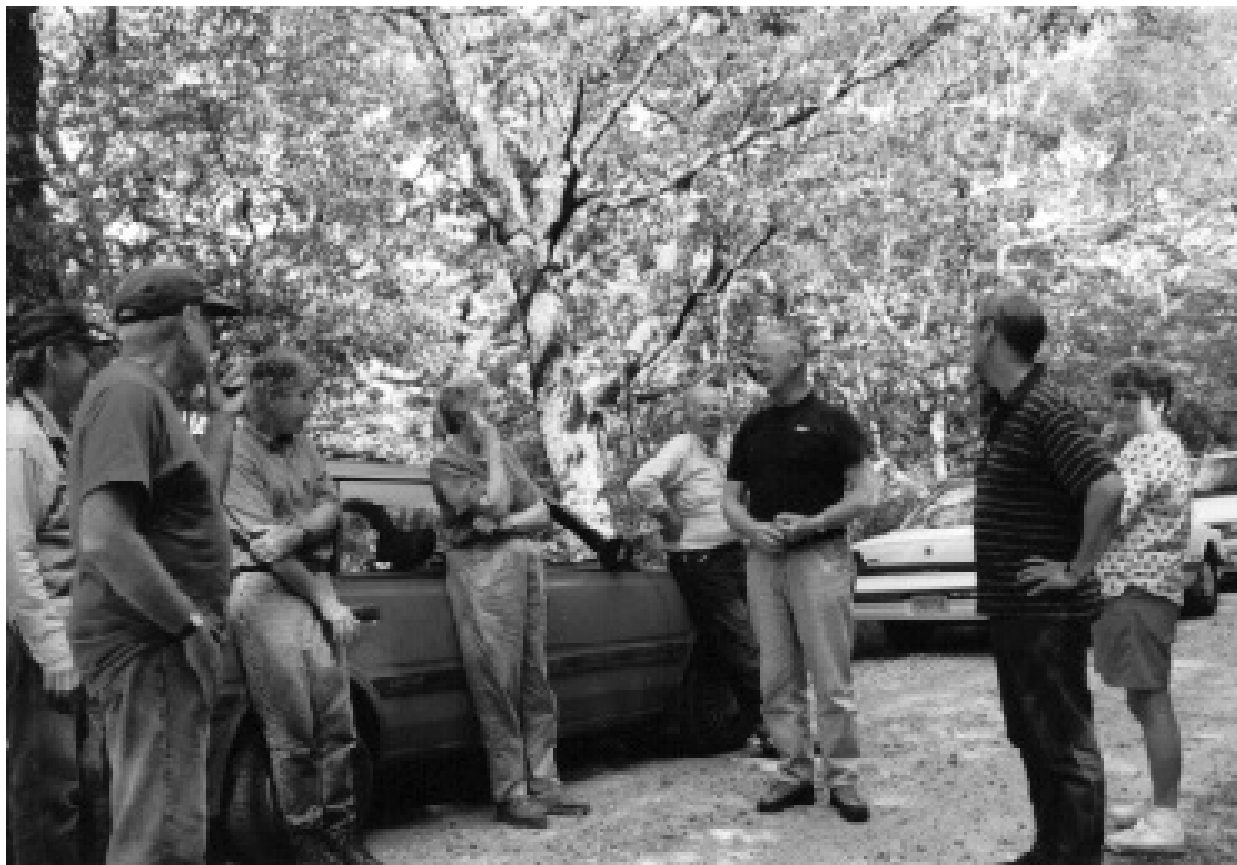
and George Hernandez (both of the US Forest Service) at Burningtown Gap where Ben Creek Rd., meets the Appalachian Trail. Gary is a botanist and George is an ecologist. Gary had a special interest in the native grasses and we made many stops along the trail to botanize these plants. Since the first half mile is the steepest, I quickly learned that when I was out of breath all I had to do was point to a grass and ask, "Which one is that?" There were no azaleas to be seen in the first half mile. Then we came into large stands of yellow, orange and red flowers (*R. calendulaceum*). They were above and below the trail. Some of the best red flames I have seen in the wild are along the trail and, in particular, a group of maybe five plants just four feet off the left side are most noteworthy. As you may know, many deep orange flowers will get darker as the blooms age, but not so with this group. They open bright red and stay bright red until they drop. They can be found approximately 3/4 mile up the trail. At 1.2 miles you come to Cold Spring Shelter. Just in front of the shelter is a spring that Gary said is pure and he had no reservations about filling his canteen. A sign post approximately 0.3 mile past the shelter says you have come 1.5 miles. Another 0.2 mile brings you to "our lunch room." This is a shaded spot with a couple of rocks on the right of the path and a large diameter tree trunk laying along the left side. (We usually leave Hendersonville at 7:30 a.m. and arrive at this site between 11:30 and noon, just in time for lunch.)

After lunch, we only had to go another 100 yards to the pink azalea Rich and Kendra had found. About 15ft off to the right side was a 7 ft high plant with only 3 flowers left. It was solid medium to dark pink with no blotch or other shadings. As Ron and Gary took out their lenses and several different azalea 'keys', the rest of us spread out and immediately saw other similar pinks. Some had yellow blotches and some were fragrant. We found pastel pinks with darker blotches and some with yellow-salmon blotches. We also found some near whites with salmon and yellow blotches and many multi-color flowers. Ron and Gary agreed that pink "keyed out" to be *R. arborescens*. This kind of threw me! I had never seen or heard of a deep pink *arborescens*. We found a colony of low plants not in bloom with small dark blue-green crinkled leaves later identified as *R. cumberlandense (bakeri)*. In an area about 150 yards × 150 yards, we found *R. calendulaceum*, *arborescens*, *viscosum*, *viscosum var montanum*, and *cumberlandense*. My notes say, "At least a dozen of the nicest pinks I have ever seen and many more to bloom."

June 26, 1996 -This trip was made with Dr. August Kehr, Charley Larus and myself. About one mile up the trail, I decided to photograph a plant and to my dismay, I didn't have my camera. I remembered putting it on top of my car when I took my pack out and that's where it stayed. I panicked and literally ran down the trail to the car to find a pick-up truck 10 ft from my car with a man looking at the camera. He said he was just about ready to take it to the Ranger Station. I honestly was more concerned about the exposed film I had taken the week before. Now the trek back to Augie and Charley! We found many

October 1996 - Bill Klippel and I made one last trip in October to collect seed. This was most disappointing as most plants had not set seed.

I would characterize 1996 as a 'normal' bloom year. By that, I mean bloom dates were neither early nor late. That's not the case with 1997. As most of you know, the early spring bloom time of 1997 was over two weeks early and I heard many complaints from our ARS members that they wouldn't have anything for our Truss Show. Well, after over three weeks of cloudy, dark, cool weather, the bloom dates shifted to three weeks late.



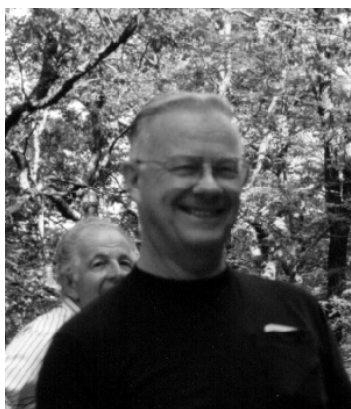
Ken McDonald, Neil Jorgensen, George McLellan, Mary and Frank Pelurie, Ed Collins, Don Hyatt and Sybil Przypek talking about Copper Bald. Photo by S. McDonald

pinks: light, medium and dark solids, some with blotches, stripes and other shading. We also saw some orange-red to red plants (most likely *cumberlandense*) and one very nice pastel pink with a gold blotch and white shading.

July 2, 1996 - Bill Klippel and I made the trek this day. We found several good pinks, good reds and a yellow *arborescens*. Bill was taken by a watermelon red plant about 15 ft away from the yellow *arborescens*. We left Copper and drove up Wayah to see many late flames and *cumberlandense*.

June 20, 1997 - Larry Mellichamp, Charlie Larus, Bill Klippel, Bob Stelloh, Dick Kehn and I went to Wayah

and the Parkway. Very few flames were open. Normal peak time at Wayah is June 15.



Ed Collins

June 25, 1997 - I received a phone call from Don Hyatt who was in Franklin with nine other A R S members from Virginia [primarily the MAC Species Study Group]. He wanted to know how to get to Copper Bald. They had spent that day at Wayah and had seen very little in bloom. I told them I would meet them on Wayah and take them to Copper Bald, but not to expect to see much. Boy, was I wrong! After the first ½ mile, we started seeing a large number of flame azaleas with color ranging

saw over its peak on my first trip to Copper on June 19, 1996 was not open yet. In fact, the spectacular display we were seeing now had been totally gone on that date. We left after about 30 minutes, as clouds rolled in complete with thunder, lightning and rain.

July 3, 1997 - Six of us left for Copper Bald: Rob Eisenbert, David Dethero, Ray Head, Bill Klippel, Bob Stelloh and myself. We were to meet April Sanborn just past Wayah on Forest Service Rd. 711. Charley Larus was to come by himself later. (He doesn't like getting up early.) His plans were to stay the night in Franklin because of an appointment in Murphy the next day. Again, we saw many new things in bloom for the first time. This day was the first time we went down the slope on the left of the trail. Unbelievable! As far as you could see were azaleas in every color imaginable. This was to be a rather eventful day for three reasons: 1. Rob Eisenberg found a full double yellow azalea only to lose it later. He couldn't locate it again. (Didn't mark it?) 2. David Dethero went bananas. He couldn't wait to get home to get his greenhouse ready for seed propagation. 3. When we were ready to leave, we



Pink, yellow and white *R. arborescens* hybrid on Copper Bald. Photo by S. McDonald.

called Charley for quite a while with no response. Not to worry. A clear, sunny day, good for bearings, a man who has trekked the Himalayas, a man who is master of "short cuts" get lost? Never! Charley left Copper Bald around 6:30 a.m. the next morning. He told Ethel he was lost, but I know better. He was so taken by the spectacular azaleas that he didn't want to leave. He only had about 10 oz of water, some blueberries, and an apple. The blueberries were crushed when he fell in the dark. When he placed the apple on the ground next to him, it rolled down the hill and was lost. Seriously, it could have been a tragedy and future trips should require better communications, a compass and square apples. (Have you guys ever seen little toddlers on a field trip all connected to a rope, so they have to stay together?)

July 9, 1997 - I went off to Copper alone and met April on Rd.711. Many more plants not previously seen

from clear yellow through orange and red. Next was *arborescens* starting to bloom in the seeps. One of the group saw an off-color far down the hill. Several people and I went down to find a pale yellow *arborescens* with salmon-pink shading and fragrance. As we approached our "lunch room", we could see the most spectacular display of azaleas on both sides of the trail ahead of us. Some were over their peak, and some were just perfect. The pink azalea that we

July 9, 1997 - I went off to Copper alone and met April on Rd.711. Many more plants not previously seen

were in bloom. A short while later the sky was so dark, I couldn't get good exposure with the film I was using.



R. calendulaceum on Copper Bald. Photo S. McDonald.

Thunder and lightning were getting closer. We arrived at the car as the rain came pouring down. To my surprise, Charley appeared and told us he was showing Ethel the area he was lost in when he backed his car into a ditch. We drove to a cottage several miles away and phoned for a tow truck. All's well that ends well.

July 15, 1997 - This trip had nothing to do with Copper Bald. Bill Klippel, Charley Larus, Bob Stelloh and I went to Curtis Creek to meet April and check out the famous 'Red Maximum'. Since April looks up to Charley, (come to think of it, April looks up to most people), she decided to follow his example and backed the rear wheels of her pick-up over the edge of a cliff (there wasn't a ditch available.) A tow truck was already on the way.

July 18, 1997 - Bob Stelloh and I arrived on Copper at 10:55 a.m. Many excellent pink, red, orange and off-white pastels were observed.

July 24, 1997 - Charley Larus, Bob Stelloh and I met with Dick Kehn on Rd. 711. Again, many spectacular azaleas were found. Probably, the highlight was a full double white.

There is no doubt in my mind that if we had gone back in another week, we would still have seen azaleas in bloom. Azaleas are not the only plants to be seen and appreciated on these trips. Below is a list of a few I can remember:

Wintergreen, *Clintonia*, squaw root, lousewort,

Bowmans root, saxifrage, spider wort, trailing arbutus, evening primrose, grass of Parnassus, *Hydrangea arborescens*, Dutchman's pipe, false hellebore, *Aruncus*, *Lilium superbum*, *Trillium*, *Monarda*, *Galax*, fire pink, Turk's cap lily.

I'm sure there are others. Now comes the long wait until next spring. See Y'all.

GARDENING IN DINWIDDIE by Bill Bedwell

I've been trying to get the garden cleaned up. Spring is three to four weeks early and I was not ready. The plunge to the teens a few weeks ago wiped out a lot of my early

rhodos: it caught *R. mucronulatum* in full bloom, completely zapped 'PJM' just as it was ready to bloom, killed foliage and flower buds on 'Aglo', froze flower buds on *R. metternichii* var. *hondoense*, *R. hyperythrum*, 'Taurus', about half of azalea 'Festive' and about half of *R. 'Spring Dawn'*, burned leaves on 'Yaku Angel' and some azaleas (spotty on plants with no logical pattern except maybe where patches of early morning sun hit it). *Magnolia* 'Dr. Merrill' had started in bloom and after the freeze it looked like it was full of used Kleenex ... or whatever!!!

The white dames rocket that did not stop flowering from last summer until February is about to start again (I think the seed came from Thompson & Morgan, but don't remember the specific name.) Usually my main garden is just starting now (April 11) and often later than this, but flowering this year is at the late April/early May stage. I don't like springs when the dogwood leaves come out the same time as the flowers, and this is one of those years. At least it has been cooler in the last few days.

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 Ray Brush, Treasurer, PO Box 266, Madison VA 22727.

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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