

# 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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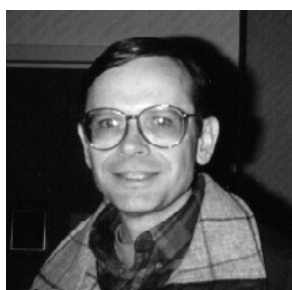
## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MAC MEETINGS

October 3-5, 1997	Sheraton, Fredericksburg, VA
Spring 1998	Harrisonburg, VA
Fall 1998	Virginia Beach, VA
Spring 1999	Roanoke, VA
November 5,6&7, 1999	Williamsburg, VA
(Eastern Regional Meeting -host MAC)	

### SPRING MEETING by Doug Jolley

The ARS District 9 meeting was held May 2, 3, and 4 in Towson, Maryland. Friday evening, Jeff Beasley spoke on the topic of native azaleas. In addition to reviewing the species indigenous to the Southeastern United States, Jeff showed slides of some new selections which are being propagated for introduction. As usual, Jeff presented a terrific and enjoyable program. Afterwards, the first of three Plants for Members sessions convened.

Saturday's tour itinerary included Marshy Point Nursery, Valley Gardens, Ladew Topiary Gardens, and Azalea Hortico Nursery. Harry Weiskittel's Marshy Point Nursery was a kaleidoscope of blooming azaleas and



Doug Jolley

rhododendrons of all types and sizes. The display garden was in full bloom and the seemingly endless ranks of blooming nursery stock backed by the Chesapeake Bay was a sight to behold.

Valley Gardens is the home of Boots and Lou Reichart. Grass pathways meander through 3 acres of rhododendrons and azaleas. A welcome event was the cessation of the rain which had greeted us at the first stop.

Ladew Topiary Gardens is world renown for its topiary masterpieces. A personal favorite was the equestrian hunt depicted just inside the entrance. The topiary gardens were not the only feature. A

rolling expanse of lawn ending in a folly was flanked by several smaller gardens, many harboring mature rhododendrons, azaleas and conifers. Twenty-two acres of immaculately groomed lawns and gardens truly displayed gardening on a grand scale.

Finally, Azalea Hortico Nursery and Gardens saw the first rays of full sunshine. A four acre wooded hillside nursery and garden is home to Emil and Jane Deckert. Over 600 varieties of azaleas, most of which were in bloom were the main feature. Numerous wildflowers and late blooming daffodils in full anthesis lined the pathways. An orchard of espaliered fruit trees was also a highlight of this garden.

At the MAC Chapter meeting the following officers were elected:

President:	Doug Jolley
Vice-President:	Alton Hall
Directors:	William Bedwell, Frank Pelurie, and Diane Wolff.

Harry Wise approached the membership in search of a person willing to assume the office of secretary. Any member who would like to serve in that capacity, please contact me or any officer.

The calendar of meetings was announced.

Saturday evening, the Middle Atlantic Chapter ARS presented its Certificate of Appreciation to Rosa Carter for her meritorious service as chapter treasurer.

Jonathan Leonard was our evening speaker. His presentation traced the horticultural career of his uncle Jonathan Shaw. Jonathan Shaw

hybridized rhododendrons with many of the progeny being named cultivars which grow in our gardens today.

A Sunday morning trip to Ed Reiley's nursery concluded the weekend's activities. The Mason-Dixon Chapter is to be commended for hosting an outstanding District Meeting.

### **ROSA CARTER RECEIVES CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION AT SPRING MEETING**

"In recognition of your services to the chapter as Treasurer from 1991 to 1996. These duties were handled capably and with a keen sense of dedication to the Chapter's interests.



Rosa Carter

"In addition you have participated actively in board, Chapter, and Society meetings. Your refreshments at board meetings were most appreciated. You have been a willing volunteer and have provided plants for the 1996 fall meeting.

"We all enjoy your winning trusses at our flower shows. For this and your many other continuing contributions, we recognize you with this Certificate of Appreciation at this District 9 Meeting."

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

The mild temperatures of February and March lulled us into thinking we would have the greatest spring ever, that is until the devastating freeze on April 10 (24°F here). Every azalea and rhododendron that had swollen buds or buds in color froze with the exception of one rhododendron, 'Faisa' (Delp lepidote) was in full bloom and did not lose a single flower. Two plants of *Rhododendron* 'Skyglow and one *R. fortunei* had old leaves burned, but the new growth buds are undamaged and the only one that had flower buds, 'Skyglow', is now in full bloom (mid-May). Most growth buds on rhododendrons that had started to push froze, but



Jane McKay

side buds are now pushing out so we will have more compact plants.

Astilbe, daylilies and hosta were all damaged, but now recovered. An interesting note on the hosta is that all the plants I covered with plastic pots froze, but the ones I kicked leaves over were undamaged. Our only complete loss was one Japanese maple. The other six are recovering. Enough doom and gloom!

The most outstanding rhododendron in the garden right now is one we call 'Emil - Keep'. I immediately called Betty, but she told me the plant now belonged to me. We have since propagated it and the Hagers have 'Emil Keep' at their new home in North Carolina. We plan to propagate it this year and if we are successful, you will find 'Emil Keep' at the Plants for Members.

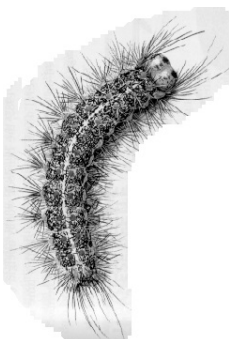
A delightful surprise in the garden is a Sandra McDonald plant of *R. 'Scintillation' x metternichii* with long lasting light pink flowers covering the well shaped plant. Rhododendrons 'Monterey', 'Scintillation', 'Janet Blair', 'Jean Marie de Montague' and lots of late azaleas are blooming nicely.

Those of you who did not attend the District meeting in Towson, Maryland, missed good speakers, a great plant sale (Wally claims I think all plant sales are great), beautiful gardens, each different and interesting and considering the weather a surprisingly good flower show, and last but not least the chance to get together with fellow enthusiasts.

Saturday, May 10, though cold and windy did not stop a group of us from visiting three members' gardens. The first stop was the Brents' in Stuarts Draft, whose well grown beautiful rhododendrons were most impressive. Next we went to the Lapsley's beautifully landscaped and maintained garden and loved it. We finished up the day at the Brown's in Harrisonburg. Their garden was unbelievable. Never before had I seen a hillside solid with *Trillium*, or so many gorgeous tree peonies. A stop was also made at the arboretum at James Madison University where the McDonald azaleas and rhododendrons are alive and well. I have always felt the most enjoyable part of belonging to the ARS was the garden tours. Let's have more of them.

**GYPSY MOTH UPDATE** The May 1, 1997, issue of *American Nurseryman* magazine in an

article titled "Gypsy Moth Populations Crash While Predatory Fungus Spreads" notes that the fungus *Entomophaga maimaiga*, a natural predator of gypsy moth, is now established in many areas of the



Gypsy Moth Caterpillar with pairs of blue dots going down back on front half and pairs of red dots going down back on rear half.

country previously infested with gypsy moth and seems to be contributing to the pest's decline. The US Department of Agriculture Forest Service said last year, defoliation caused by gypsy moth was the lowest on record since 1968. The number of reported acres defoliated by gypsy moth decreased from more than 1.4 million in 1995 to less than 200,000 in 1996 across fourteen states in the Northeast, Southeast and Midwest. Virginia showed one of the most dramatic decreases, reporting 850,000 defoliated acres in 1995 and none in 1996.

In some other places where the gypsy moth is entering for the first time, the number of defoliated acres increased, which suggested that "the fungus may not have caught up to the advancing front of gypsy moth populations in newly infested areas."

Experts are optimistic about the impact of *E. maimaiga* on the decline of gypsy moth, but they do expect the pest to continue to spread.

**BACK TO THE FORTIES** *The following is another article in our series which was discovered by Dr. Doug Jolley and is from The Home Garden, April 1943, "Plants Foods and How They Work" by Alex Laurie, pp. 85-87.*

It cannot be assumed that once a soil has been brought into good fertile condition it will remain in that state. Not only must fertility be built up, in the first place: it has to be maintained. To have the land feed us generously, we must feed it.

Let's consider the steps which will give us the proper start in making a "good" soil. First, the incorporation of manure to induce the many needed soil organisms to develop quickly, to provide the aeration needed, to help hold the quickly evaporating water in the summer, to supply the needed hormones for plant growth, to add a certain amount of nutrition to the soil. The manure may be

from any natural source, or may be man-made, out of straw, litter, leaves or other plant debris, together with a complete fertilizer if available added for quick decomposition. About a ton to 1000 sq. ft. of ground is a sufficient amount.

To give us the proper structure, to produce air-conditioning in the soil, it is necessary at times to mix with our soil some foreign material. Thus, to a clay soil, sand or coal cinders may be added, while for sandy soil an admixture of clay or peatmoss or manure would be really beneficial.

Were you able to peep underneath the surface of an air-conditioned soil, and one which is "stuffy," the spaces between particles filled with water and toxic gases, you really would marvel at the difference in the activity of the roots. In the well-aerated soil you would note little white roots spreading out like a network of roads, pushing here, pushing there, and in the process absorbing the needed nutrients for the plant. On the other hand, the roots in a "poor" soil would be skimpy, stubby, and frequently brown. The growth under such conditions would be slow and upon the slightest provocation the tops wilt. What is more, the plants are in a larger measure subject to diseases and pests.

#### DRAINAGE

And we must be sure that surplus water has a chance to drain off. Most plants don't like "wet feet." Only those with specially adapted organs can survive in constantly wet soil. So if natural drainage is not available, tiling is essential. Proper drainage not only gives the plants a greater chance for existence, but it allows soils to "warm up" sooner in the spring. This warmth causes the various compounds to become more readily available to plants through their roots.

All these preliminary preparations lead us to the point of the needed materials in the soil which, when taken into the plant, are manufactured and stored inside as foods which are essential in the formation of cells, their development and growth. Growth is nothing more than the laying down of new cells. Have you ever stopped to consider what a wonderful mechanism the plant is? The leaves take in the carbon dioxide from the air, obtain through the roots water from the soil, and (in the presence of light) manufacture foods which are distributed throughout the entire system.

There are many elements in the soil which are needed for the growth of plants once they are

changed into proper forms, first by the minute organisms in the soil so they may be absorbed by the roots, and later compounded within the plant in such a manner as to be usable in growth. When you buy a complete fertilizer you will find an analysis on it which may be 4-12-4 or 3-8-7 or some other combination. This merely indicates the percentages of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium in the mixture. There are others present in forms of impurities but by law they do not have to appear in the analysis shown. Yet many of these are extremely important.

#### ELEMENTS FOR PLANT GROWTH

Let us consider them briefly. Nitrogen is associated with stem and leaf growth, and coloration of flowers. Phosphorus energizes the plants, produces greater root development, strengthens stems and gives earlier flowering. Potassium is like a tonic in that it acts as a conditioner. It plays its part in root development, stem strength, deeper color in flowers, and in general vitality.

These three elements are always mentioned as the most essential, but actually they are no more so than several others except for the fact that these so-called "lesser" or "trace" elements are required in smaller quantities, and are frequently present in soil in sufficient amounts so that there is no need for adding them.

Take iron, for example. Without it the green coloring (chlorophyll) would not be adequate in food manufacture. Or calcium (lime)—without it roots would not develop and stems would be weak. In some manner the others, as magnesium, manganese, sulphur, zinc, boron, play a role which spells health for the plant. The addition of these elements in some soils seems to work magic upon plants. That has been the case, for instance, in the use of zinc with roses; or iron with oaks; or boron with beets. Fortunately, many of our complete fertilizers contain these materials—either added to the mixture, or present as impurities—to take care of soil conditions where they may be lacking naturally, or become depleted through years of use.

Specific recommendations for the application of these mixed fertilizers cannot be made for all localities and all soils; but at present the soil testing methods have been developed to a degree where sufficient accuracy may be obtained to be relied on. Hence, a test of the soil will indicate about what to apply.

At the present time, due to restrictions in the use of nitrogenous fertilizers, it is practically impossible to make specific recommendations. [Ed. note: Remember this was during WW II when nitrogen was needed for

the war effort.] The Victory Garden fertilizer (3-8-7) is now available for *vegetables* and makes a satisfactory material used at the rate of 2 to 4 lbs. to 100 s. ft. Outside of this material several formulas of farm fertilizers may also be obtained for use on your *vegetables*, and since these vary in different areas of the country, information should be secured from your County Agricultural Agent. Tankage (4 lbs. to 100 sq. ft.), a source of nitrogen and phosphorus; tobacco stems (5 lbs. to 100 sq. ft.), source of nitrogen and potash; dried blood (2 lbs. to 100 sq. ft.), source of nitrogen and potash; dried blood (2 lbs. to 100 sq. ft.), source of nitrogen; bone meal (5 lbs. to 100 sq. ft.), source of nitrogen and phosphorus; and shredded dried manures may be secured, provided local supplies are available. Soybean meal and cottonseed meal, excellent organic fertilizers, are no longer permitted to be used for such purposes—instead they are used as animal feeds. [Ed. note: Again this pertained to WW II restrictions.]

Phosphorus may be bought in the cheaper grades, 16-18% superphosphate and potash in the form of muriate of potash (1 lb. to 100 sq. ft.) and hardwood ashes (5-6 lbs. to 100 sq. ft.). Lime as a fertilizer should only be used when calcium is lacking and if the soil is acid to correct that acidity. If the soil is close to the neutral point and yet calcium is needed, it is better to apply agricultural gypsum (calcium sulphate).

It should be noted that neither the Victory Garden fertilizer nor any other mixed fertilizer containing chemical nitrogen is to be sold for flower gardens. However, the organic fertilizers may be applied to any crop. If a blanket recommendation were to be made for vegetables, I might suggest the use of 2-4 lbs. of 3-8-7 (Victory Garden fertilizer) per 100 sq. ft. before planting and make 2 or 3 more such applications during the season. For flowers, tankage or bone meal would have to be resorted to with a supplement of muriate of potash or hardwood ashes or ground tobacco stems.

Most garden crops will be benefited by having 2 applications of plant food. In fact it is very essential that this be done, provided that the materials are applied according to direction and watered in.

Applications of fertilizers to diseased plants or those growing under the handicap of poor soil preparations are usually wasted. Be sure to start with a good physical condition of the soil, and then add the plant foods needed to give you greater perfection.

**WHERE HAVE ALL MY TREE FLOWERS GONE?** (*Excerpted from "Reasons Why Plants Fail to Flower," by Terri McAuliffe, Consumer*

*Horticulturist, Albany County, New York, in Gro News, May 1996 and published in The Virginia Gardener Newsletter, May 1997.)*

Last May, I received a telephone call from a gentleman who was quite distressed that his prized crabapple did not flower that spring. He proceeded to explain that the tree was planted two years ago in May, and it flowered very well last year. What went wrong? Why did the tree fail to flower? There are seven major reasons why a woody plant fails to flower. Let's look at each one.

- **Insufficient Light**

Most fruiting and flowering trees require at least one-half day of full sun in order to flower properly. As shading increases, the amount of flowering decreases. There are certain plants that will flower with less light, but generally speaking, insufficient light is a major reason why plants do not flower.

- **Pruning**

Pruning at the wrong time of year and excessive pruning are both common causes of failure to bloom. Heavy pruning promotes vegetative growth and may prevent flower bud set. If you prune a plant after the flower buds have formed, you will remove next year's flowers. Consult a reference to determine when your species sets flower buds and to find out the corresponding appropriate time to prune.

- **Plant Immaturity**

Many plants undergo what is called a juvenile stage of growth. During the juvenile stage, the plant does not flower. This stage can vary from a few weeks, as in the case of most annuals, to ten or more years, in the case of some trees. There is nothing one can do to rush this normal phenomenon.

- **Winter Injury**

The flower buds are the least cold-tolerant part of a plant. Planting trees and shrubs that are completely cold hardy for your location is the best means of controlling winter injury. Desiccation is the major form of winter damage in Virginia. It's caused by water being lost through the leaves on mild or windy winter days—water that cannot be replenished from the frozen water in the soil. Watering your trees and shrubs may be necessary on days like these to prevent desiccation.

- **Late Frost Injury**

All spring-flowering plants, regardless of how cold hardy the plants might be, are susceptible to late frost injury. Plants that flower early in spring are more subject to this kind of damage. Flower buds are more tender than young leaf buds and may start to open

earlier. A late frost can kill or damage some or all of the flowers without causing damage to the leaves.

- **Improper Fertilization**

Excessive amounts of nitrogen fertilizer can prevent a plant from flowering. Nitrogen tends to cause a plant to produce a lot of vegetative growth, and flowering may be inhibited. Plants growing in lawn areas that are heavily fertilized may be affected by this. Deficiencies of other elements, such as phosphorus, can also result in poor flowering.

- **Alternate Flowering**

Plants, such as flowering crabapples and flowering dogwood, are subject to a phenomenon called alternate flowering. This comes about when heavy fruit set in one year compromises the next year's flowering because the plant's food reserves get taxed. As it turns out, the gentleman who telephoned me last spring was probably dealing with this quite natural phenomenon. I explained to him that his crabapple might flower heavily one year, then fail to flower the next one or two years. This can be prevented by selecting plants that do not exhibit this tendency or by manually or chemically thinning the heavy fruit set.

## NOTES OF MEMBERS

**Dr. Curtis Roane** has delivered two boxes of **Dr. Martha Roane's** miscellaneous rhododendron materials and documents to be added to the rhododendron collection and manuscript collection at Alderman Library of the University of Virginia. He had contacted the Library about the materials and Michael Plunkett of the Library met him at the loading dock to receive the materials.

## GARDENING HINTS

- For colorful weatherproof labels for your garden plants take pictures of the plants when they are at their peak, cut the pictures down a bit, affix scientific and common names to the back, and laminate them. Suspend the labels in the garden using giant wire clips. Make a clip by wrapping galvanized wire around a pole to create a loop (the two straight ends, opposite the loop, will be side by side). Insert your label into the loop, then poke the straight ends into the soil.\*
- To repel squirrels from bird feeders, lightly coat about a pound of bird seed with 1 teaspoon vegetable oil. Toss oil-coated bird seed with 2 tablespoons cayenne pepper in a large sturdy plastic bag (don't touch the mixture with bare hands!). Spread the mixture freely. Mammals can

taste cayenne pepper, birds cannot, which makes cayenne pepper effective against dogs, cats, and surprisingly snails, slugs, and several kinds of insects.\*\*

- Ethylene glycol is reportedly effective against gophers. Slice carrots into sticks. Soak the sticks in anti-freeze over night. Dig open several mounds and place two or three carrot sticks in each side of the tunnel. Cover and keep other animals from the carrots. Gophers are vegetarians and the sweetness of the anti-freeze and the crunchiness of the carrots make an irresistible combination.\*\*
- Flowers that reseed can be a nuisance or a joy, depending on where they do their thing. Plant seeds such as hollyhocks, snapdragons, columbines, cleomes, cosmos, California poppies, sweet alyssum, love-in-a-mist, rose moss and Johnny jump-ups in places where you want self-sowing plants. Then let them do their thing.\*
- When contemplating installing a tree near the road, be sure to check with your local tree commission to find out if regulations apply to the species you have in mind. Also, be aware of local ordinances regarding planting along streets and near intersections, signs, and traffic lights.\*

\* From *The Virginia Gardener Newsletter*, Vol. 16 No. 3 and 5, published by VPI&SU, Blacksburg, VA

\*\* From *Rhododendron News*, April 1997, published by the Portland Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

## THE GARDEN by Sandra McDonald

Parts of the Tidewater area of Southeastern Virginia missed the late frost that much of the Middle Atlantic area had on April 10, though we were very close with icicles forming on a couple of rhododendrons where irrigation had been dripping on them at the nursery. Spring seemed to start for us at the end of February. We started out with a good show of *R. mucronulatum* and the bloom of other rhododendrons and azaleas has continued. We have had a cool spring with just a few hot days. Rainfall has been below normal for the whole spring for our immediate vicinity, but with the cool temperatures, drought has



Sandra McDonald



not been troublesome. New growth is coming out and hiding what remains of the ugly brown left from Hurricane Fran.

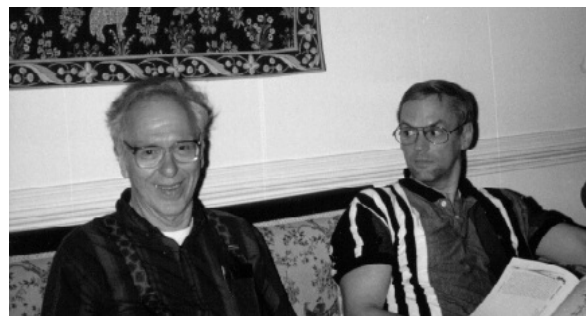
## SPECIES STUDY GROUP MEETINGS

The species study group has been busy this year with a meeting in Midlothian, Virginia at the new home of Gretchen and Bob Johnson on February 22. At the meeting the group reviewed slides of native azaleas they have been taking for use in a slide program. They also worked on plans for future trips to see the native azaleas.



Gretchen and Bob Johnson

On May 11 the species study group met again, this time at David and Debbie Sauer's home. Future meetings and trips were discussed. There is a tentative trip planned



David Sauer and Don Hyatt at the Johnson's.

about June 21 to go to parts of North Carolina and Tennessee to see Roan Mountain, Gregory Bald, Parsons Bald, Copper Ridge Bald, Wayah Bald and Mt. Pisgah and perhaps other locations.

After the meeting at the Sauer's, three of us went on to see *R. atlanticum* in bloom at several locations in Prince George and Surrey Counties. We saw many fine forms of



George McLellan in field of *R. atlanticum*

*R. atlanticum*, including pure whites, pale lavender and white, pale pink with dark pink tubes, white with yellow flush and many shades and combinations of these. We took many photographs and collected pollen for Harry Wise to use to make more of his famous crosses.

We also saw many pretty wildflowers as well as our native *Chionanthus virginicus* in full bloom.



Pale pink *R. atlanticum* with dark pink tubes



Pure white *R. atlanticum*

**BILL BEDWELL'S GARDEN TOUR** by e-mail from Bill Bedwell.

Today, April 23, 1997, this rainy day, was the day my garden was on a house/garden/historical site fund-raising tour organized by the Dinwiddie County Historical Society. Since I could find no evidence of publicity and could not believe any Dinwiddie natives would pay \$20 to get on a bus and ride around Dinwiddie, I did not expect but a few blue haired ladies. I was astonished there were

two bus loads -- 80 people, with each bus arriving at a separate time. Fortunately, it was only misting or lightly raining with each tour. I managed to clear out most of the dead stuff and trash and the garden cooperated way beyond my expectations by reaching nearly the mid-season stage of bloom. The dogwoods held on too. Usually I don't have this much in bloom until the first days of May. Bottom line -- the garden looked OK and they enjoyed it.

I wore the rain hat I bought in Scotland that looks like a WW I army helmet. It is great for misty or light rains.

So many people were astonished the garden was here, including a recently retired deputy sheriff who spent his career almost in eyesight of the garden. (He did not have blue hair, and many of the people were my age or younger and without blue hair!) This was the first tour by a non-garden group but they seemed surprising enthusiastic.

I now feel like a big load has lifted, but it was nice to have an incentive to get the garden back in shape after neglecting it for a year. Now I will have to concentrate on getting rid of the clutter in the house. There is no place to sit!

A group of *R. chapmanii* seedlings, grown from seed off a plant you gave me, have been beautiful. I planted the seedlings about six inches apart in a clump. There is a surprising light to dark pink color range among the few seedlings and they seem OK, having never been further transplanted. They have a pretty location.

**HELP WANTED!**

Many committees still need staffing. Volunteer for a committee and gain more from your Society. Let Doug Jolley know your interests. We have nominations, honors, research, video library, publicity, long range planning, ratings, newsletter, publications/extension, P4M, Alderman Library liaison, flower show, membership, finance, species study group, new members welcoming, equipment, Ginter rhododendron display, budget, and we can form other committees if your interest has not been mentioned in this list.

**Your editor could really use help with pictures and articles.**

Anyone wishing to help, contact an officer or director or our president, Doug Jolley at Box 69, Flatwoods, WV 26621-0069. Telephone 304-765-2608 (home).

**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 \$25 per year.

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

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