

MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

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

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September 2003

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MAC MEETINGS

Oct. 17–18, 2003

Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites, Bristol, VA

Apr. 30–May 2, 2004

Holiday Inn Express, Kilmarnock, VA

Rhododendron Web Site Addresses:

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

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

GET READY FOR FALL MEETING 2003 IN BRISTOL, VIRGINIA, OCTOBER 17–19

President Jeanne Hammer wrote up the activities for our Fall Meeting in the June issue of this newsletter. You will be receiving a meeting notice in the mail shortly. Headquarters for the meeting will be the Holiday Inn Hotel and Suites Convention Center in Bristol, Virginia.

We will have a short business meeting for a by-laws vote at the beginning of our Friday evening program. Then we will have Jim Brant and Don Hyatt describing a MAC-sponsored project to document the diversity of native azaleas on Gregory Bald. Parker Little will give a slide talk about the unusual forms of the native azaleas he studied on White Rock Mountain.

Be sure you bring good walking shoes or hiking boots and possibly a walking stick because on Saturday we will explore Grayson Highlands State

Park. We will have a box lunch picnic there.

Due to health problems Joe Schild will not be able to speak as planned. Another speaker is being scheduled.

In addition to these interesting programs we will have a Fall Foliage Show, a great Plants for Members (P4M) sale, plant auction and book sale. We are planning for a great get-away for colorful fall foliage and beautiful mountain scenery. See you there.

DUES INFORMATION by Jane McKay, Membership Chairman

Please send you dues in as quickly as possible. You will save the Chapter money, and you will save me a lot of time if I don't have to send a second notice. Note the raise in dues to \$35. See the back of the newsletter for my address if you misplaced your dues notice. Thank you.



View at Grayson Highlands State Park. Photo by S. McDonald

NOTIFICATION OF BY-LAWS AMENDMENT VOTE

There will be a general meeting of the membership at the Fall Meeting to vote on proposed by-laws changes. The meeting will take place on Friday evening, 17th, 2003, just before the start of the evening program. The proposed changes are:

Article II - Purpose

The purpose of the Chapter is to promote the study and culture of rhododendrons, including azaleas, and the increase of the understanding of and interest in all aspects of these plants. In addition the Chapter will

support The American Rhododendron Society by allocation of a portion of the dues as provided in the By-Laws of the Society. ~~The Middle Atlantic Chapter will support the District 9 Director office by providing a percentage of its Chapter dues to be used at the discretion of the Board and Officers.~~

Note: Vote will be to remove the portion above that is lined out and to add the following Article XIII paragraph:

Article XIII - District Director Support

The Middle Atlantic Chapter will support the District 9 Director by providing funds from the Chapter's General Fund to be used by the District Director to defray expenses related to the American Rhododendron Society. The amount provided will be at the discretion of the Middle Atlantic Chapter Board of Directors.



Feral ponies at Grayson Highlands State Park. Photo by S. McDonald.



Rhododendron catawbiense in the spring at Grayson Highlands State Park. Photo by S. McDonald.

REPORT FROM THE DISTRICT DIRECTOR

By Don Voss

One of the most notable recollections from my trip to Olympia is the time lost (repeatedly) driving back and forth on SW Evergreen Parkway looking for the hotel. It was poorly marked, and the hotel is not

on the parkway, but about a block back through a huge parking lot. Most pleasant to remember was the privilege of seeing the magnificent private garden of a Japanese lady whose artistry in combining form, color, and texture is truly amazing.

Then there was the Board of Directors meeting, which I attended as an observer. Perhaps the most vital bit of information will not be news to you: beginning in 2004, individual dues will be \$35, up \$7 (of which \$2 will go to the chapter). The family rate (and the 18-month membership) go to \$40; associate membership in a chapter goes to \$8.

A long presentation detailed the rising costs that affect many aspects of the Society's activities, in particular printing and postage costs for the *Journal*. The dues increase was accepted with equanimity by most of the district directors--with the notable exception of those representing the Canadian and overseas chapters.

President Ed Reiley, who had discussed the matter with ASA president Joe Schild, reported that ASA would be favorably disposed to making the 2006 convention a joint meeting between ASA and ARS. The ARS Board reaction was positive. Of course, a final decision rests with the relevant chapters in the two societies. Incidentally, the Spring 2004 will be close at hand, in King of Prussia, PA. Not so the Fall 2004 Western Regional--Hilo, HI!

Sonja Nelson informed the Board of interesting developments relating to the *Journal*. The copyright issue affecting the proposal to make past issues of the *Journal* available on CDs or on the Internet appears to have been resolved. Permission must be obtained from authors and photographers back to 1963 or 1964. Those of you who have contributed to the *Journal* will be receiving permission requests from Sonja (date indefinite). As to *Journal* costs, the possibility of changing printers to lower cost and the possibility of preparing the digital files of images to be sent to the printer in-house rather than having them done professionally (a pricey business) were described. Jack Root has been working on the latter problem and showed color reproduction at least as good as that from images processed commercially. The new grant program, designed to apply a portion of income from the Endowment Fund to furthering the educational aims of the ARS, resulted in approval of four grants:

To the Hawaii Chapter, \$3500 for a vireya display garden; To the Tacoma Chapter, \$1800 for

improving its display garden; To the Milner Garden, \$3500 for printing an information booklet for visitors; and To the Meerkerk Rhododendron Garden, \$4000 for continuing the test-garden. Remember that the ARS Endowment Fund, Research Fund, and General Fund will gratefully receive donations large or small as memorials or simply as tokens of your support of the goal of the Society.

A day or so after the BOD meeting, Ed Reiley, Sandra McDonald, and I were faced with selection of Rhododendron of the Year Awards for 2006 for the Mid-Atlantic Regions (=District 9). Four plants (Iepidote, elepidote, deciduous azalea, evergreen azalea) are chosen each year for each region. The catch was that we were expected to select only plants on the Proven Performer lists of all three chapters in the District. The purpose is to notify nurseries and growers that the selections will be published in the *Journal* in 2006, thus giving nurseries time to provide a supply of the "award" plants by then. I believe that Ed Reiley will be developing guidance for better coordination of the selection process in the future. The day following the Board meeting, a workshop was held on obtaining grants from foundations and industrial donors, etc. I went on tour instead--but have a copy of a how-to-do-it report that I can make available to anyone interested.

E-MAIL FROM THE AZALEA LIST RE TRANSPLANTING AZALEAS: *Printed with permission of Barbara Bullock, Curator of Azaleas & Rhododendrons,*

*U. S. National Arboretum, Washington, D. C.
Zone 7*

National Arboretum website: www.usna.usda.gov
<<http://www.usna.usda.gov>>

New Glenn Dale azalea photo gallery:
<<http://www.usna.usda.gov/PhotoGallery/AzaleaGallery/index.html>>

direct email: barbarabullock@usna.ars.usda.gov

[Message from Maartin van der Giessen]
bestliners@zebra.net 06/17/03 wrote:

"The problem of rooting out into soils is an important question. How we transplant azaleas is central to your question regarding water. If azaleas are planted into a heavy clay soil with insufficient preparation, then it will certainly be a matter of time before they expire regardless of mix. Again, I'm sure there are as many successful planting methods as

there are mixes."

[Barbara's response]

Thank-you, Maartin, I couldn't agree with you more. There is one practice I use with regards to repotting or transplanting into the landscape that hasn't been mentioned here.

At the National Arboretum, I obtain plants grown from a variety of sources, all kinds of potting mediums, and degrees of pot-bound-ness. We have a good layer of organic soils in our hardwood forests, over pockets of clay, but, on the whole, we have pretty good sandy loamy soils that are well drained. We have a really good degree of success with the following method:

My practice is to allow the plant to get slightly dry before taking it out of the pot, and then thoroughly shake out the soil that the plant is growing in. I use a blunt object (shovel, trowel, rock, clippers) and hit the root ball fairly hard, all the way around, (sometimes I have to sever the roots a little with a sharp knife or clippers) but concentrating toward the bottom of the root ball. You can even use a shovel and slice off the whole bottom one inch of roots.

When grown in a container, the azalea's roots are forced unnaturally to grow down to the bottom of the pot. (They would like to be horizontal. If we could only get a container that is 10 inches wide, and only 3 inches deep...) You want to "reopen" that root ball by tearing apart the roots down at the bottom. I then hit the root ball repeatedly until all of the soil it was growing in falls out. Whatever it is, I use the medium that is removed when planting into the landscape, by incorporating it into the soil I dug out of the hole where the plant is going to be planted.

If I'm repotting it, I don't reuse it. But I still get the root ball as free of the old soil as possible. Bark mixes drain more, and need more frequent watering. If you use some other mix, you'll have to modify your watering accordingly. The bark mixes make for great root systems, but not for instant transition into the landscape.

Get those roots exposed and hairy, to the point where they are almost bare root. When you hold your hand up under them, you will notice that you can rest the plant on your hand with the roots, and it is only about 2-3 inches thick after the soil is removed. This is also the depth that I dig my hole in

the landscape. I dig a wide hole, but not a deep hole. Yes, you are slightly stressing the plant. But if you are repotting, you should have water accessible, so to hydrate the repotted plant as soon as possible.

If you are planting into the landscape, you should try to do it in the spring or fall, which are cool times of the year, and also water in as soon as possible. The whole process should only take 5 minutes unless the plant is very large. Hope this helps. Barbara

MOSQUITO MISERY

People usually think that lots of rain means lots of mosquitoes. This is not necessarily true as new research shows. The August 15, 2003, issue of *Science*, Vol 301, page 904, reports on research by Jonathan Chase of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and his wife Tiffany Knight. A pond they were studying in Pennsylvania dried up during a drought. When the pond filled up the next year, the number of mosquito larvae skyrocketed. They set up an experiment to study this using three different types of ponds: permanent, semipermanent, and temporary. Permanent ponds had few mosquito larvae, but plenty of fish, water beetles, and other creatures that feed on mosquito larvae. Mosquitoes were scarce in ponds that dried up every year because there was lots of competition from zooplankton, snails, and tadpoles that compete with mosquito larvae for algae and other food.

But in ponds that were usually full, but dried up after a drought in 1999, mosquito larvae burgeoned the next year. They found the same pattern in artificial wetlands they created.

Drought the previous year correlates much better with mosquito abundance than the current year's rainfall.

FROM THE MIDDLE OF MAC by Jane McKay

This gardening season has certainly been a change from previous years. The abundant rain has been welcome, not welcome are the local deer jumping our fence and invading the garden. The money spent not watering was spent on material to raise the height of the fence.

Our rhododendron bloom was the best in the 10 years we have lived in Virginia. Several rhododendrons bloomed for the first time. Among these were *R.* 'Accomplishment', *R.* 'Elizabeth Poore', *R.* 'Peppermint Twist', *R.* 'Phipps 32', *R.*

'Tripoli', and two Delps: *R.* 'Big O' and *R.* 'Winning Edge'. *Rhododendron* 'Dexter's Giant Red', which we previously grew in New York, bloomed here in Virginia for the first time. This is a truly gorgeous flower, a 'must have'.

A few years ago we started growing lilies and choice hosta in large containers to protect them from voles, so this year the deer ate them. We



Jane McKay

have expanded our container growing to include tender perennials, annuals and bulbs. These we over-winter in the garage. The lily and hosta containers stay out year round.. This year we tried datura. The two varieties we tried are 'Ballerina Purple' and 'Ballerina Yellow'. The flowers are beautiful and rodent and deer proof. Next year they will go into the ground as they are a bit too large for the containers. Another plant new to us that we over winter in the house is heliotrope. We have *Heliotropium arborescens* with vanilla scented violet flowers and *H. arborescens*, white with almond scented flowers. We also have several varieties of *Abutilon* doing well in containers.

Early in the season *Cornus kousa* 'Wolf Eye' (variegated foliage) was magnificent. This tree stayed in bloom for six weeks. During the cloudy and rainy weather this tree really stood out.

Does it seem I'm always quoting *The Avont Gardener*? Well here I go again. The August issue contains two tidbits. Cornell University researchers found that pachysandra repelled voles and that daffodils and boxwood were almost as effective. When the components in these plants are isolated they could be useful to repel rabbits, deer, and voles. The second item of interest is that milk (whole or skim) diluted with anywhere from 1 to 9 parts water and sprayed twice weekly on plants is as effective or more effective than synthetic fungicides. Scientists believe that milk not only kills the fungus, but also stimulates the plants' protective systems.

MAC AT MAYMONT by Jeanne Hammer

MAC has accepted an invitation to participate

in the 15th annual Maymont Flower & Garden Show on February 19 – 22, 2004 in Richmond. Chapter board members and committee chairs are planning an exhibit to include: a display of foliage showing the range of shapes, sizes, textures, and colors rhododendrons offer for year-round interest in the garden; plants forced into bloom to attract attention; handouts about “good-doers” in our region, cultural notes, membership information, and upcoming meetings; backdrops of enlarged photos of rhododendrons; a laptop with continual selections of pictures of rhododendrons and past meetings; and perhaps most importantly, MAC members on hand to greet visitors and answer questions.

The Maymont show draws large crowds of “plant people” and has grown larger each year. In 2003, it moved to the Greater Richmond Convention Center at the corner of 5th and Marshall Streets, where it will be held in 2004. Maymont show director, Cricket O’Conner, is making a special effort to get all the plant societies represented in 2004. For MAC, this represents a wonderful opportunity to provide information to the public about successfully growing rhododendrons and to recruit new members. A number of years ago, MAC participated in the Maymont Show, and benefited from new membership as a result. Bill Bedwell, who worked with past president Ray Doggett on those displays, recalls the notable example of Barbara and Alton Hall, who first learned of MAC at the Maymont show.

Please be sure to mark the Maymont show dates on your calendar and let me know if you could help set up or “man” the display for a couple hours. We want to put MAC’s best foot forward, and there’s no better way to demonstrate the benefits of MAC membership than through personal contact.

OBSERVATIONS FROM WEST VIRGINIA

Notes from Harry Wise

Harry noticed many strange things happening with plants this year in his Charleston area. *Rhododendron calendulaceum* and *R. periclymenoides* were blooming at the same time this year for the first time in his memory. So perhaps the hybrids of these plants that are growing in Audra State Park are natural hybrids and not something manmade.

Harry noted no seed pods on the early blooming azaleas this year, but *R. maximum*, which is a late rhodo, had huge numbers of seed capsules. So something hindered the early seed set. Perhaps it was rain or cool weather which would discourage bees and other insects from pollinating.

In Harry’s approximately 50 years in West Virginia, he has never seen so many seeds from trees. Huge numbers of tree seedlings have germinated in roof gutters. There are little forests of maples, elms, and other trees growing in them.

If anyone has similar interesting observations or can give other reasons for why these strange happenings this year, he would be glad to hear from you.

SPECIES STUDY GROUP JUNE 15–21, 2003

by Sandra McDonald

The MAC Species Study Group visited mountains in the states of Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee and North Carolina over a week’s time this summer. We visited some new sites as well as some old ones. We found *R. cumberlandense* blooming on Black Mountain in Kentucky.

The following day we hiked out to Grassy Ridge Bald near Roan Mountain. Some *R.*



Rhododendron calendulaceum in the mist at Engine Gap.. Photo by S. McDonald.

calendulaceum and *R. catawbiense* was blooming.

Tuesday we went to Wayah Bald in North Carolina. Before we got to the top we took a short hike and saw a lovely double *R. calendulaceum*. Other *R. calendulaceum* plants were blooming at the lower elevations. But when we got to the top the



Jim Brant talking to some ATVers on Black Mountain where we found *R. cumberlandense*. Photo by S. McDonald.



John Marshall, Don Hyatt and Jim Brant at Grassy Ridge Bald. Photo by S. McDonald.

bloom was very disappointing. We saw only one of the many *R. arborescens* that had good bloom. Most of the plants hardly had any flowers. At the top the *Kalmia* and *R. calendulaceum* did not have good bloom. We were speculating on the poor showing at the top and thought that the last year's drought probably had a lot to do with the poor show. Several of the group did some more exploring along a trail off the highway, but we went on to the motel.

up that way. The hike was not as steep and rocky as the other trail, but we made the hike in a pouring rain. We saw some *R. cumberlandense*, *R. calendulaceum*, and a few *R. arborescens*. At first we had not seen the *R. arborescens*, but caught a whiff of its lovely fragrance from the trail and tracked it down. The rain limited our ability to photograph so we have few shots of this hike.



Don Hyatt, George McLellan, Doug & Anita Burke, Ken McDonald, & John Marshall at Grassy Ridge Bald. Photo by S. McDonald.

Thursday morning before leaving Murphy, North Carolina, where we had stayed several nights, we made a brief stop at the place where Eric Rudolph was found. We will have one less worry on future trips to that area now. We planned to explore Stratton Mountain after that, but didn't get very far out the mountain road until we came to a washout. George and Jim in the truck were able to go ahead, but the rest of us, the Burkes and Don Hyatt, decided to visit Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest and see the large old growth trees again. The trail was very muddy, but it was not raining and the trees are always so impressive. After that we went to Hooper Bald off the Cherohala Skyway. We found

Wednesday was our hike up Slaughter Mountain in Georgia. George McLellan and Jim Brant had been up the back trail before, but this was the first time for Anita and Doug Burke and Ken and me to go

several impressive *R. calendulaceum* azaleas there, but there were not as many in bloom, and the Bald is having scrub growth encroach on the azaleas. We were just a little too early for the best show here.

We stopped at an aerial photography company that Jim had been in contact with on the way to Townsend, Tennessee. They showed us samples of

points of the trip.



Double *R. calendulaceum* at lower elevation on Wayah Bald. Photo by S. McDonald.

photographs and impressive computers and scanners that they use in their work. This was one of the high



Ken McDonald by one of the old growth trees at Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. Photo by S. McDonald.

When we arrived in Townsend, Tennessee, a little later, we checked at the tourist information center to find the status of the bloom on Gregory Bald. We were told by staff that it was only 12% of normal. That, coupled with the fact that the bridge was out on Parsons Branch Road making it impossible to hike Gregory by the shorter trail, but only hike it by the longer trail, helped Ken and me decide we would not make the arduous climb this year. John Marshall, a new associate member, had joined the group for the climb up Gregory. The

group split up into two or three groups to make the climb, while Ken and I headed for home. We later found that the hike was strenuous and muddy and the azaleas were possibly 25% in bloom. The drought had evidently affected bud set on Gregory, too. Jim and George decided to call off the photography for Gregory Bald for 2003 because there were so few flowers and will try again in 2004.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Susan M. Harman, Charleston, WV
25314

Michael Perry, Lynchburg,
VA 24503



This sign speaks for itself.

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 \$35 per year.

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

Sandra McDonald, Ph.D., Editor
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