

MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

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

Vol. XXIII No. 3

September 1997

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)	

FALL MEETING 1997 by Doug Jolley

The fall meeting of the Middle Atlantic Chapter, ARS will take place at the Sheraton Inn, Fredericksburg, VA on Friday evening through Sunday morning, October 3, 4, and 5, 1997.



Doug Jolley

Friday night's speaker will be the Potomac Valley Chapter President, Don Hyatt. Don is a familiar face to MAC members and his presentation is sure to be

a treat.

After Saturday morning's general meeting, we will conduct a workshop relating to several propagation methods, overwintering devices, and culture techniques. Cuttings will be available to take home. An alternative to this morning session will be recommendations of historic sites, small gardens and a perennial nursery, all of which are minutes from our accommodations. Members are urged to bring entries for the fall foliage show.

One topic Saturday afternoon will be native azalea hunting in central West Virginia with Doug Jolley. Another will feature the owners of one of the nation's largest blueberry farms. Bill Harwood and Jane Warner will delve into the world of small berry culture in and out of the landscape. We will have selections of many common and unusual berry plants for sale along with our own seedlings, books, and gloves. As usual, the auction and happy hour

will precede the banquet.

Our Saturday evening speaker will be Bryce Lane. He has assumed the reigns as director of the North Carolina State University Arboretum. He will share with us his cross country trekking to gardens large and small as well as give an update on the workings of the Arboretum since J.C. Raulston's untimely death. David Lay has an excellent P4M (Plants for Members) selection to round out the evening.

Sunday morning George McLellan and the Gregory Bald Gang will recap this past summer's excursion.

Mark your calendars for the first weekend of October and plan to spend it in historic Fredericksburg.

HARRY WISE WINS AWARD

The *Charleston Daily Mail* had a lengthy article in its Wednesday, June 18, 1997 issue about our own Harry Wise.

Harry has done much volunteer work at Coonskin Park doing planting, care and maintenance of rhododendrons, lilies, and irises. His efforts for this and other beautification projects were recognized with a



Harry Wise

national award. The Garden Club of America Certificate of Merit in the area of horticulture was

awarded to Harry by the Kanawha Garden Club. This was the first time the Kanawha Garden Club had awarded this certificate. The community award is for nonmembers who have made significant contributions to horticulture. The article mentioned that Harry had been propagating and distributing native rhododendrons and azaleas throughout the Kanawha Valley for several years. He helped many organizations interested in horticulture throughout the county and taught master gardening classes.

Harry said, "Plant propagating is one thing I truly enjoy. It's the science behind it.

"I grew up on a farm in Southern Alabama. I learned I did not want to be a farmer. That is work. This is fun."

FROM THE MIDDLE OF MAC by Jane McKay

Mid August finds us watering, watering, watering. Fortunately this past spring we put a new pump down by the stream so we are able to water a good part of the garden with "free" water. Most of the garden looks pretty good (if you can ignore the weeds) though we lost a few plants from heat and drought when we went north at the end of June.



Jane McKay

Our young rhododendrons are finally starting to bud and our young deciduous azaleas started from seed in January 1994 are well budded. One deciduous azalea, acquired at the ARS convention in Asheville, North Carolina, in the spring of 1994 labeled 'Late Yellow Arborescens Clone 2 —Kehr' is in bloom as I write this on August 15. The flower is pale salmon with a yellow blotch on the upper petal. Both the style and stamens are very long and bright red, and best of all, the flowers are fragrant. How nice to have late blooming azaleas to extend the flowering season of our favorite plants.

I'm pleased to see more and more dwarf *Pieris japonica* in the nurseries and garden centers. These little *Pieris* are great companions for our rhododendrons and azaleas. Some favorites are *Pieris japonica* 'Little Heath' (variegated), *P.j.* 'Cavatine', *P.j.* 'Prelude', *P.j.* 'Nocturne' and *P.j.* 'Pygmaea' (very narrow foliage). Try some; you'll like them.

I'm off to pick a few tomatoes, cut them into chunks, add some chopped garlic and basil, drizzle

them with olive oil and enjoy.

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, July 1943, page 59. "JUST WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?" by Robert S. Lemmon.*

Gardeners, like all hobbyists, have their special lingo which sometimes sounds pretty unintelligible to newcomers in the cult. For instance:

Humus, so often mentioned as a soil ingredient invaluable to the welfare of practically every kind of plant, is simply decomposed "organic" matter (usually some kind of vegetation such as dead leaves, grass, stalks, whole plants, etc.) that has rotted away until it is practically earth-like in texture. Among the reasons why it helps growth are that it retains moisture for the roots, contains a considerable supply of useful plant food, and provides an ideal home for countless millions of beneficial bacteria which perform the essential job of converting the chemical elements or raw "nutrients" into forms which the roots can absorb and the plant utilize in its growth.

Shearing means cutting off the ends of all the branches of a plant, usually some kind of shrub, in order to keep it down to a certain size or shape and make it more dense by encouraging the formation of many new branches and twigs between the point of cutting and the base of the plant.

A *compost pile* is simply a heap of assorted kinds of vegetation stacked up in order that its decomposition may be hastened and the whole mass more quickly converted into a humous "compost" which, when ready, can be mixed into the garden soil to improve it. The addition of a sprinkling of lime, some soil, and plenty of moisture speeds up this conversion process.

Pruning, on the other hand, is the cutting off of individual branches (often quite large) here and there because they are too long, have suffered an injury, are too numerous, or for some other specific reason need to be disposed of. It is less uniform than "shearing," and frequently is more of a major operation.

REPORT OF DISTRICT NINE DIRECTOR

by Jean Beaudry, June 7, 1997

I want to thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to serve as Director of District Nine for the last three years. It was a wonderful experience

and has allowed me to get to know many wonderful people in our District as well as in the rest of the Rhododendron community. I would urge any of you who are interested to serve in this role. Sandra McDonald from the Middle Atlantic Chapter is the new District Director.

I was not able to attend the recent meeting in Vancouver B.C., but I have spoken with a number of the other Directors who were in attendance, as well as our new ARS President and Eastern Vice President, to get the news from the Board of Director's meeting.

The most important development was the appointment of a new Executive Director. Her name is Dee Daneri and she is from California. From all reports she has the necessary qualifications and she has already started to assume her duties. I had a letter from her early this week listing important information for anyone who wishes to get in touch. Her office hours are Mon-Fri from 8-5, California time.

- Dee Daneri, Executive Director, 11 Pinecrest Drive, Fortuna, CA 95540.
- Telephone 707-725-3043 --Note about phoning--
- When calling the new number there is a message giving an opportunity to ask for ARS or Rhododendron information in Mailbox #1. Mailbox #2 lets you leave a message or request information. Mailbox #3 will be answered by Dee.
- Fax 707-725-1217
- Email: DeeDaneri@aol.com. She encourages this means of communication.

There was a motion and vote in favor of changing the name of the ARS to The American Rhododendron and Azalea Society. There will have to be another vote on this motion at the Fall Board of Directors meeting because it involves a change in the By-Laws. Ed Reiley, the Eastern Vice President said there was not a lot of discussion. There will probably be more at the Fall meeting after the Directors have a chance to discuss it with their members. If there are any feelings about this from you, please contact Sandra McDonald, the new District Nine Director so your opinions can be heard at that meeting.

There were several medals awarded at the Annual Meeting. A Gold Medal was given to Hank Shannon from New Jersey. A Silver Medal was

given to Lynn Watts from Washington, the new Western Vice President. A Silver Medal was given to Ken and Dot Gibson from Vancouver B.C.

The new ARS officers are Herb Spady, Past President; Bud Gehrich, President; Ed Reiley, Eastern Vice President; Lynn Watts, Western Vice President; Gerry Nutter, Treasurer; Jean Beaudry, Secretary.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF CHANGING THE NAME OF THE ARS?

As you may have read in the latest *Journal* and in Jean Beaudry's report above, the ARS is considering changing its name. The directors had a vote at the annual meeting to change it to the Rhododendron and Azalea Society, but they must have a second vote this fall. I have had several letters and phone calls objecting to changing the name to Rhododendron and Azalea Society. Also it has been mentioned that it might be changed to the International Rhododendron Society. I have heard objections to that proposal also. If you have any strong feelings on either of these proposals, please write, phone or e-mail me at the return address and phone number on the back of this newsletter. Sandra McDonald, Dist. Dir.

TIDBITS

☼ The American Horticultural Society has released the AHS Plant Heat-Zone Map, designed as a companion to the USDA Hardiness Zone Map. The new map shows the average number of days an area's high temperatures are above 86 degrees. Full-color posters of the Heat-Zone Map are available from the AHS for \$14.95. The map was underwritten by Goldsmith Seed Co., ANLA, Mon-rovia and Time Life Inc. (800) 777-7931 Ext 45.

☼ A lethal brain disease in humans may be linked to the use of common bone meal in the garden, a network news program in March suggested. On March 14 it was reported that a human outbreak of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) may be connected to bone meal, which is commonly used on roses, bulbs and other garden plants. CJD, thought to be similar to mad cow disease in cattle, induces progressive dementia in humans.

☼ New counties in West Virginia quarantined for gypsy moth include Doddridge, Harrison, Lewis, Tyler, and Upshur. This mainly affects Christmas tree shipment.

☼ While on vacation this summer, Ken and I drove across the state of Nebraska and planned to spend the night in the small town of Burwell in the Sand Hills

area. While we were having dinner at a small cafe in town, four retired men in bicycling outfits came into the cafe and were having a good time. I asked where they were from and what they were doing. Two of them were bicycling cross-country from Oregon's Pacific Coast to New Jersey's Atlantic Coast and the other two were driving along to take care of their accommodations, routes, etc. The friendly fellow said they were from Butler, Pennsylvania. Immediately I asked if they had known the late Lanny Pride of Butler, the well-known rhododendron hybridizer. They said yes they did and they also knew his son. What a small world it is! S.McD.

THE GARDEN by Sandra McDonald

Our poor garden has been neglected this summer because we have had to go on so many trips. As everyone knows this year we have had quite a drought, I believe on almost the whole East Coast. We have had a rain deficit since January. In Norfolk, the deficit from January 1 through June 30 was 10.61 inches. Here in Hampton, we have had about the same deficit and the drought has continued through July and August except for the 4.7 inches of rain that we received from the remnants of Hurricane Danny. We are still way behind and have had exactly one inch of rain in the first 15 days of August.



Sandra McDonald

We did not plant much this year because we knew we were going to be away a lot. A couple of the automatic timers for sprinklers were a very good investment this year. They did a good job of keeping containers and a few newly planted things watered while we were away.

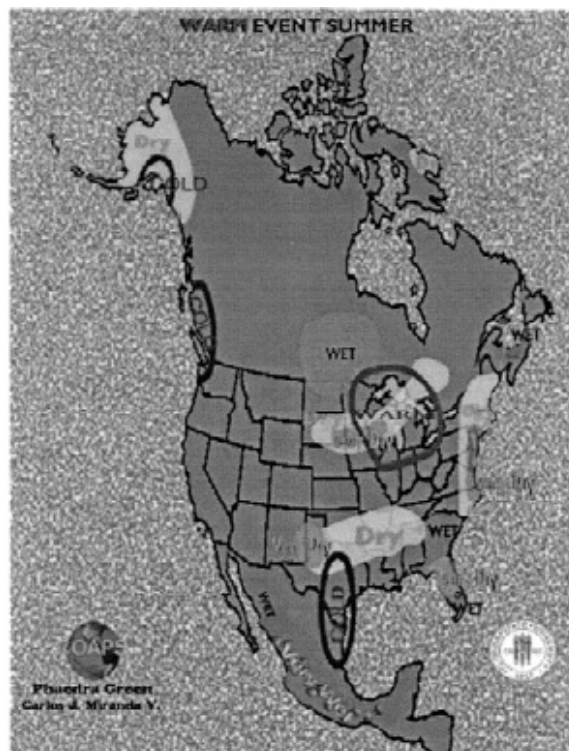
After the very cool spring, we are finally getting paid back with some real old-fashioned extremely hot and humid summer weather. It has been really hard to predict what would be blooming when this year. *R. prunifolium* is putting on a gorgeous red display now. This plant was one of my earliest selections from a very large seedlot of *R. prunifolium*. The plant is about twenty years old, broader than tall, and has quite large very good red flowers. James Madison University has a lot of plants from this seedlot and I hope they are doing as well in Harrisonburg as my selection does here.

A good number of *R. prunifolium* × *R.*

serrulatum and some late-blooming *R. arborescens* hybrids have just about finished blooming. These late hybrids have been performing well for several years and I am going to have to make more room in the yard for them. The fragrant pinks, peaches, salmons and oranges are especially appreciated at this time of year – the dog days of summer. And they seem to be so sturdy. They really deserve a special place.

ANOTHER EL NIÑO YEAR

If you pay close attention to the weather as many gardeners do, you may have already heard talk about the El Niño that has developed in the Pacific Ocean. During this event, the rain area that is usually centered over Indonesia and the far western Pacific moves eastward into the central Pacific. Interaction between the ocean and the atmosphere has far-reaching effects



North American summer during an El Niño event. From COAPS at Florida State University.

on world climate. In checking the NOAA World Wide Web pages and the COAPS Web site at Florida State University, it appears likely that probable precipitation for Southeast Virginia and a good part of our surrounding area will be near normal for fall; greater than average for winter; greater than average for spring followed by a VERY DRY SUMMER in 1998 as a result of this El Niño event. I don't know

how it could be much drier than it has been this summer, but we probably should do all we can to prepare our plants for a really dry time next summer. S.McD.

A SERPENT IN PARADISE: MAC SPECIES STUDY GROUP 1997 TRIP TO GREGORY BALD by George Keen McLellan

To many who have climbed to Gregory Bald and seen its azaleas in full bloom, this spot in the Great Smokies has become an azalea heaven. We have been used to wandering freely in the lush grass and brush to



Don Hyatt on Gregory Bald with azalea hybrid swarm.

visit our favorite azaleas, which now seem to have become “old friends” and to discover new selections in areas not explored before. But this season our carefree attitude has changed. We discovered a “Serpent in Paradise”.

The MAC Species Study Group's 1997 trip to the mountains ran into some snags this time. The group gathered in Townsend, Tennessee on June 24, only to discover that there were no native azaleas in bloom on the bald and everything was still in tight bud. (Normally this would have been the date for full bloom or even a little late, but with this wacky spring nothing seems to be predictable.) So the group all moved on to explore Wayah Mountain and Copper Bald in North Carolina.

But three members, Don Hyatt, Frank Pelurie, and George McLellan would not be denied the natural high of seeing the bald in bloom; we must be addicted to native azaleas. So on July 10, the strenuous climb was made from the Furnace Creek parking lot in Cades Cove. (Parsons Branch Road, which provides a shorter route is still not open, maybe 1998?). O joy! The bald was in bloom, but maybe two to three days past its peak bloom, which we had seen on June 21, 1995. Luckily this trip we had more time to explore (over 4 hours) and

visit our “old friends”.

Although I have not seen an azalea on the bald I would not want in my garden, we did try to list our favorite dozen to begin to make sense of this beautiful hybrid swarm. Our list gives one an idea of the diversity to be found on the bald.

Our list and our nicknames, not rated in order, as all are excellent:

'Goldielocks', a brilliant golden yellow azalea that just glows. The golden yellow flowers with a deeper gold blotch and red stamens and pistil, covered the bush in sheets of bloom.

'Cover Girl', an azalea growing next to 'Goldielocks'. This azalea has deep dusty rose flowers with rounded petals and is highlighted by a deep golden blotch that covers the upper petal.

'Candy Pink', another azalea we saw for the first time. The buds of this azalea are beautifully candy-striped and open to a soft pastel pink with a prominent soft yellow blotch.

'Fasty Pink', a light pink arborescens hybrid. This was picked because of its extremely fastigate (narrow and upright) habit of growth and light pink star-shaped flowers. The plant even holds its leaves in an upright position.

'Deepest Red', one of the most brilliant azaleas I have seen. The flowers are very deep crimson that glow and shine from a distance.

'Christmas Red', a fine red *R. cumberlandense*. Its scarlet flowers are offset by its deep green foliage and remind one of a Christmas ornament.

'White-by-the-Entrance', a large arborescens- type azalea by the northeast trail entrance. The fragrant, white, star-shaped flowers have a prominent yellow blotch.

'White Flame', this azalea has been cut back to a stub, but seems to be recovering. A large white calendulaceum-like flower with a big brilliant yellow blotch.

'Salmon-by-the-Entrance', an enormous shrub, 8 to 9 feet high by 10 to 12 feet across. This bicolored coral-salmon was so covered with bloom the branches were weeping from the weight of flowers. New to us, this plant was found at the southwest entrance to the bald.

'Pale Salmon', an almost flesh pink found in the middle of the bald. This shrimp pink azalea is covered with star-shaped flowers.

This list is a beginning and many others could have been picked. We did not choose an orange because there were so many beautiful orange *R. cumberlandense* to choose from that they almost seemed common.



Pink *R. arborescens* hybrid with darker pink stripes. Photograph by George McLellan.

Even with the long hike back we decided that it was a successful outing, but back to the title. We did discover a “Serpent in Paradise”. While blissfully exploring on the southwest end of the bald, I heard Frank give out a loud yell and some choice words and phrases as he came crashing out of a tangle of azaleas. I thought he must have happened on a nest of yellow jackets. After he had regained his aplomb, he pointed us to a pile of



Timber Rattlesnake

to say after this we walked in the brush and grass with a lot more trepidation and when I almost

brush he almost stepped on. There on its top, sunning himself or herself was a T I M B E R RATTLESLAKE as thick as a baseball bat; it did not move or rattle; it just followed us with its black beady eyes. Needless

stepped on a fawn, which exploded out of the tall grass in front of me, a strong heart was needed. Despite all this, you may be assured that we will return.

ALDERMAN LIBRARY from Kendon Stubbs

The Alderman Library of the University of Virginia recently purchased fifteen rhododendron and azalea books that they did not have from the recent catalog from Sutton in Kentucky. These books were purchased with interest from the trust fund set up by MAC with major donations from some MAC members and support from MAC.

They were able to purchase the extremely rare early reference on rhododendrons in the Himalayas by Royle. *Field Notes* by Kingdon-Ward and Rand's 1871 *The Rhododendron and American Plants* were two other exceptional titles the library was able to purchase.

RICHMOND AREA REPORT from Bill Bedwell

I just took a 45 minute tour around my garden, beginning at 12:45 P.M. on this hot, 97 degree, extremely bright, August 17. We have been lucky in Dinwiddie Courthouse to get some of the spotty rain at

crucial times this summer, with 0.7 inch last Thursday and the same amount on Monday of the previous week. Richmond has not been so lucky in many parts — but the spotty factor favored some. In my garden, there was an extended dry period around the time that new growth should have been developing from the side



Bill Bedwell

of old flower trusses and that apparently has delayed some growth and stunted other growth. The result is long, vigorous new growth from the few branches that did not have flower buds last spring with much of the growth around old trusses being stunted. Now the natural conclusion is that the lack of deadheading caused the stunting. Not so! At least one-quarter to one-half of growth around trusses is vigorous ON THE SAME PLANT.

I have not watered the garden in 3 or 4 years, except for individual plants transplanted in the last several years. Even in really dry years, I do not think a lot of watering is good. The "less is better than more" philosophy applies to watering as well as fertilizing, in my opinion. Just enough to keep them alive — let them go dormant during extended drought instead of stressing them into trying to continue growing. Only the commercial growers need to promote growth during a drought, in my opinion, and my experience has shown this is an okay approach to watering in sandy clay soil. Those people with very sandy or gravelly soil that drains rapidly and dries out quickly may have to apply more water more often than I do. Also, I have been lucky not to have a horrible drought during these years.

As for fertilizing, I never got around to it this year! I did it once last year, and not at all in 1995. Most of my plants are too big to need a boost. I think it was Bill Stepka who told me years ago that he fertilized the next spring after he noticed short new growth. In 1995 the new growth was short so I fertilized in 1996. I did not get around to applying it until late May because of the trip to Scotland, so it did not affect the new growth until this spring. Most new growth this year is vigorous, except where new growth was delayed, until the dry spell.

I have not deadheaded this year and have not done thorough deadheading for many years. How has this affected bud set? I can't see any real correlation

between bud set and lack of deadheading because there is good budset where the old truss remains, but probably less budset around a spent truss where the twig is weaker. When the plants are young and easy to deadhead, I think it may be helpful to promote vigorous growth and flower bud production. Now my plants are too big for this chore, or I have gotten too lazy, but I have still had good flower production for the last several years, just like everybody else. There is no question that deadheading, even limiting it to where you can reach easily, makes the plants look better. Last year, I did this as a late winter clean-up in preparation for the mid-April tour and found that deadheading is much easier at that time when the old truss is completely dried up and easy to snap off without worrying about breaking off new growth.

On another subject: as an aftermath of my visit to Scotland, I bought six heath plants this spring when I could not resist them in a 3-for-the-price-of-2 sale at a local garden center. I have been expecting them to die in our heat. But five of the six look OK. One is an *Erica* species (heath) and four are *Calluna vulgaris* varieties (heather). The heath was in bloom when I bought them and the heathers look like they are about to start. Two are the variety, 'Multicolor', with the very bright yellow-green foliage that has remained very pretty all summer. They are in front of my conifer border and the foliage colors fit well.

WORLD'S OLDEST PLANT?

Science, Vol. 277, page 483, reports that a team of Tasmanian botanists claims to have found the world's oldest living plant. It is a vast, low-growing, one-of-a-kind shrub, first found in 1934, and born more than 43,000 years ago. If they are correct, this plant *Lomatia tasmanica*, which is a member of the Proteaceae family and is otherwise known as King's holly, would be more than three times as old as the previous record holder, which is a 13,000-year-old box huckleberry in Pennsylvania.

The research team leader, Rene Vaillancourt, says the plant ranges over an area of 1.2 km. Its age was estimated using carbon-14 dating of charcoal found along with fossilized leaf fragments. There is no direct evidence linking the plant fossil to the living plant. But he said the time it takes for the slow-growing organism, which scientists have been monitoring for several years, to spread so broadly in the nutrient-poor soil is consistent with the isotope dating.

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.

Sandra McDonald, Ph.D., Editor
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