



Potomac Valley Chapter

American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Early Summer Newsletter: July 2014

Calendar

- * **July 11, 2014** – Volunteer Day at the White Garden, 9:00 AM to Noon
- * **July 13, 2014** – PVC Picnic and Plant Exchange, Seneca Creek St. Park
- * **August 8, 2014** – Volunteer Day at the White Garden, 9:00 AM to Noon
- * **September 7, 2014** – Regular Meeting, Potomac Community Center
- * **September 13, 2014** – Chapter Plant Sale, Green Spring Gardens
- * **September 26-28, 2014** – Western Regional, Everett, WA
- * **October 11, 2014** – Fall Banquet, Wildfire Restaurant: Harold Greer

Chapter Officers

President: Bob McWhorter
mcwho@comcast.net
Vice President: Dan Neckel
vaneckel@verizon.net
Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman
prittman@erols.com

Chapter Picnic, Plant Exchange and Sale!

Sunday, July 13, 2014: 1 – 5 PM

Seneca Creek State Park

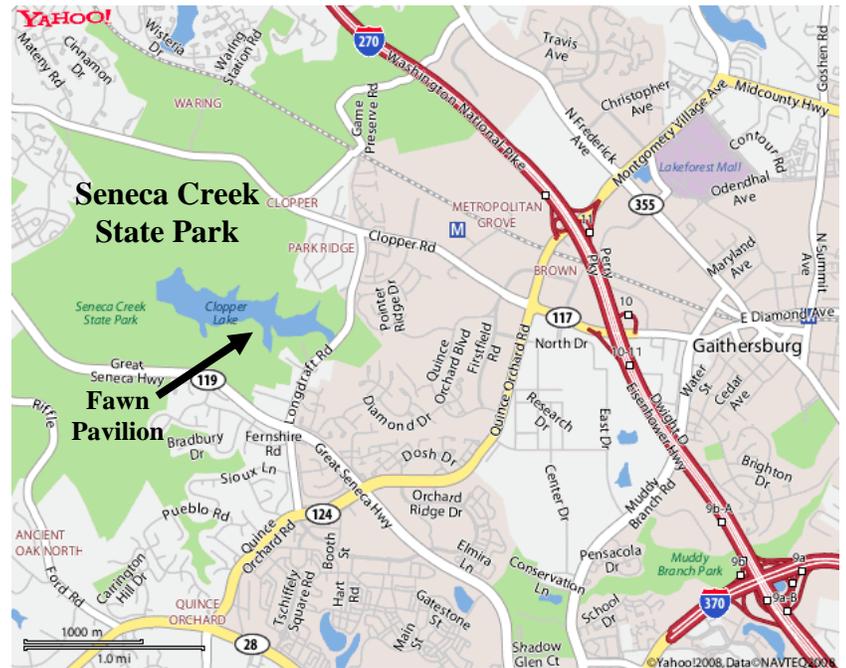
We are returning to Seneca Creek State Park near Gaithersburg for our annual picnic. The meeting will also include election of officers, a plant exchange, and a plant sale. The date is Sunday, July 13 and the time is 1:00 – 5:00 PM.

We are returning to the Fawn Pavilion, the same covered picnic facility we have used for many years. It is located on the south side of Clopper Lake in the park. Follow the signs or you can ask for directions at the gate. The park does charge a nominal entry fee but in prior years, senior citizens 62 and older have been exempt so be sure to inquire if appropriate.

As before, the chapter will be providing hotdogs, hamburgers, and buns. We will also have standard items like drinks, ice, condiments, plates, and eating utensils. We ask you to bring some other picnic type food like salads, sides, or desserts to share with others. Items that will not spoil quickly in hot weather are preferred, but it you may bring your own ice chest. Alcoholic beverages are not allowed so please leave that at home. There are no trash cans so we are expected to collect and remove our trash afterwards.

Plant Exchange: A popular part of our annual picnic is a plant exchange, so if you want to participate, bring a plant worth about \$5 to trade with others. Many chapter members bring excess plants so if you don't have something to trade, you can usually get plants after the first round.

Plants for Members: We will also have some named native azalea selections for sale at the picnic. These are rooted cuttings that we just got from Transplant Nursery. See details on the next page.



DIRECTIONS:

1. Take I-495 to I-270N toward Frederick
2. Merge onto I-270 Local N
3. Take the Exit #10 West, toward MD Rt. 124
4. Turn RIGHT onto MD 117 (Clopper Rd)
Turn LEFT into the Park: 11950 Clopper

An Intern at the White Garden!

Please consider helping out at the White Garden this summer. Green Spring was able to hire a student intern for the garden, Ashlan Smith. We have two volunteer dates posted in our calendar but Ashlan has set up weekly sessions on Fridays or Saturdays where she would like people to help out.

Plants for Members (P4M)

Native Azaleas for Sale at the Picnic (7/13/2014)

One of the reasons many people join a plant society is to get choice plants at good prices. At past picnics, our P4M offerings have included rhododendrons and azaleas that the chapter has propagated. This year we will have some native azalea selections for sale.

These azaleas came from Transplant Nursery, a major wholesale supplier in Lavonia, GA. They were rooted cuttings of named selections, most of which are from their popular "Maid in the Shade" series. This year they had a surplus of some varieties and instead of throwing them out, they offered them to local ARS and ASA chapters but we had to pick them up, ASAP.

Our chapter did request some of the seven varieties. We wanted plants to grow for future plant sales, but also some to offer to our members. Since several of us would be in North Carolina for this year's mountain hikes, we planned to take a detour to Georgia to pick them up before heading home. Jim Brant coordinated an order of over 1000 plants for various groups in our region. He picked up some in his truck. I brought back over 200 plants for our Potomac Valley Chapter in my Subaru, and George McLellan got the rest.

These were not first-year rooted cuttings, but are 2 to 3 years old. Some of the plants were over 40 inches tall and still in a 2-inch pot. They were pot bound and needed attention, but should recover quickly at this time of year. We are moving them up to larger pots, teasing out the root systems so they establish better, cutting them back, and applying some slow release fertilizer. We will shift to gallons later. We offer the following varieties in this year's P4M sale at \$4 each:

- **Camilla's Blush** (*R. canescens*) – Fragrant, soft pink selection of the Piedmont azalea.
- **Kennell's Gold** ((*R. atlanticum* x *R. periclymenoides*) x *R. austrinum*) – Ball-shaped trusses of fragrant gold flowers. Named for past ARS President and MAC icon, Austin Kennell.
- **Lisa's Gold** – (*R. austrinum*) – Fragrant, bright gold selection of the Florida azalea.
- **My Mary** (Nacoochee x *R. austrinum*) – One of the best landscape plants with very fragrant yellow flowers touched with orange. Excellent foliage.
- **Nacoochee Princess** (*R. atlanticum* x *R. periclymenoides*) Fragrant white flowers tinged with pink on a stoloniferous plant.
- **Rosy Pink Nudiflorum** (*R. periclymenoides*) Rosy pink selection of our native species.
- **Summer Eyelet** (*R. viscosum*) – Late white fragrant flowers with a light, spicy fragrance.

For more information about the azaleas, check out the nursery website. Click on the link to their catalog which has descriptions and some pictures:

www.transplantnursery.com



P4M Choice: 'My Mary'

Fall Banquet, October 11 *Save the Date!* Harold Greer to Speak

Be sure you save the date October 11, 2014. We will be having our Fall Banquet at the Wildfire Restaurant in Tyson's Galleria and it will be a great event. We decided to make this a District 9 Meeting and have invited the other two chapters in our District, the Mason-Dixon and Middle Atlantic Chapters. We also extended an invitation to the Northern Virginia Chapter ASA. We want all four groups to meet and get to know each other. As you know, we will be hosting a Convention in 2016 and we will need everyone's help to pull off that event.

Our speaker will be Harold Greer from Eugene, OR. Harold is one of the most knowledgeable nurserymen on the planet, and runs Greer Gardens which is world renowned. Harold is a phenomenal photographer, too.

Harold is very busy so it has been very difficult to get him to come east. We feel extremely lucky to get him as a speaker. We will have more details later, but calendars can fill up quickly so be sure to keep this date free. This is one meeting you won't want to miss!

Other Fall Activities

September 7, 2014: Karen Rexrode

Our first meeting in the fall will be back at the Potomac Community Center where local horticulturist Karen Rexrode will speak on Plant Explorers.

September 13, 2014: Green Spring Plant Sale

Our chapter will have a booth at Green Spring Gardens in the Fall Plant Sale. We will need people to assist.

October 12-16: Fall Mountain Trip

We may head to the mountains to collect native azalea seed and plant more flame azaleas on Hooper Bald after the banquet. If interested, let Don Hyatt know.

Dates TBA: Potting Party

Sometime this fall, Van Veen Nursery will send us the cuttings that they have rooted for us. We'll need to pot them up. We need people to help care for some, too.



Rhododendron minus var. "smokianum"

Seeking Smokianum: A compact purple form of *R. minus* that grows in the Smokies By Don Hyatt

For many years, we have seen occasional plants of a small leaf rhododendron with purple flowers hanging off rocky cliffs in the Smokies. They can be seen along the main road, Rt. 441, as it descends from Newfound Gap to Gatlinburg. Since it blooms very late, we have only been able to inspect a few plants on past trips.

It doesn't look like the other forms of *R. minus* that we grow. *R. minus* var. *carolinianum* flowers in early spring with flat flowers in a totally different color range. It doesn't look like the taller *R. minus* var. *minus* common in the south. It has tubular flowers as does *R. minus* var. *chapmanii* and neither one is purple.

Ron Miller discussed these plants in his article "Stalking the Wild Lepidote" in a recent Journal article. (JARS: Vol. 67, No. 2, Spring 2013) He calls the late purple *minus* "smokianum" which is a good choice since it has a limited range at high elevations in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The strange weather we had this year caused us to miss much of the native azalea and rhododendron display we normally see in June. However, that gave us an opportunity to search for "smokianum" since it blooms at the end of the season, usually in mid July.

Rather than hiking up to Gregory Bald to see the end of that display this year, we decided to hike out the Appalachian Trail toward Mount LeConte in the Smokies instead. That is the likely center of that population of late-blooming, purple *R. minus*.

I have never been to Mount LeConte but it is supposed to have a lot of that rhododendron. For most people, that is a two day hike including an overnight stay in cabins on LeConte that must be reserved in advance. There is a big population a bit closer, a few miles from Newfound Gap as the trail crosses Mt. Kephart (6217 ft). From there, a side trail to one of its northern spurs goes out to a place called the "Jumpoff" (6133 ft). The Jumpoff is a steep cliff that drops off



Vista from the Jumpoff where *R. minus* var. "smokianum" grows

about 1000 ft. The views are spectacular and its rocky crags are also covered with that purple rhododendron.

Unless you can hover like a hummingbird at that elevation, it is not easy to study the plants up close or even to take many good pictures. Trail guides do warn that the Jumpoff can be dangerous. One careless step could easily prove fatal!

George McLellan and I had gone out that trail once but we didn't get all the way. The purple minus wasn't opened yet and we were tired from hiking to Gregory Bald the day before. Karel had been there before. He, George and I decided to make the hike, hoping that the rhododendrons would be in bloom. They were!

We had nice weather for most of the day, but thunderstorms did roll in about 4:00 PM as we were in our cars heading elsewhere. Glad we were off the trail!

It is a very pretty trail but challenging in places, harder than anything we encounter on the Gregory hike. The round trip is only about 6.5 miles which is about half the distance we normally hike when going to Gregory. However, it seemed every bit as exhausting.

This is not a casual hike but requires good hiking gear... heavy boots, hiking poles, and plenty of fluids to drink on the trail. The round trip took us nearly 7 hours and we were all sore and tired when we finished.

Much of it was a steady climb, but hikers encounter some rocky places that are quite steep and difficult to navigate along the way. We had to scale giant boulders and outcroppings entangled with roots at times. I was amused many times when I grabbed onto a small tree beside the trail to help pull me up a slope. The bark was as smooth and polished as any fine furniture, due to the hands of countless hikers before me.

Going down some of those transitions was more difficult than going up, too. It was hard on my knees and having gained weight recently, I had extra momentum on descents. I envisioned rolling all the way to Gatlinburg if should I lose my balance and happen to fall. Look out below!

We reached the Jumpoff after 12:00 noon. It was gorgeous with breathtaking views and billowing clouds. The purple *minus* was in full bloom. I looked over the edge a number of times but held onto my glasses since I had lost them once on Roan. If I dropped them here, there was no hope searching for them. I am not fond of heights so overcoming that fear was a personal challenge. I did take many pictures.

Most of the prime view spots have room for only one or two people so it is important to go with a small group rather than a big crowd. In the image below, Karel is trying to hold his tripod with camera attached over the edge of the cliff, hoping to get a picture. George was operating the cable snapping pictures. If you look at the ground about 2 ft from where they are standing, you can see where someone stepped too close to the edge and it had given way.



Karel Bernady and George McLellan take pictures off the cliff.

It is really hard to predict when peak bloom will be in the mountains. The purple *R. catawbiense* was completely through on Roan Mountain but according to reports, it was in tight bud just ten days before we arrived. It must have lasted only a few days, probably due to adverse weather conditions. We did see *R. calendulaceum* there and also on Hooper Bald.

Yes, we may have missed the bloom in some places we go every year. When something is not in flower, we can usually find plants in other locations or at different elevations. For years we have been anxious to see “smokianum” in bloom and this year we made it!

I traveled almost 1800 miles by car on this year’s week-long trip. I probably hiked less than 25 miles, though. These trips are always worth it to me since the lure of those mountains with their botanical richness is totally captivating.

Now we will start planning again for next year. If you want to join us, keep your calendars free between June 10 and June 25, 2015. When spring arrives in the mountains, we’ll be on our way!



‘Harold Amateis’ in the garden of Blossom McBrier

Hail to the Red, White, and Blue!

By Don Hyatt

Since this newsletter should arrive slightly before the 4th of July, it seemed appropriate to be patriotic and mention some of the red, white, and blue azaleas and rhododendrons that impressed me this year. Some of the plants mentioned can be seen on the color page.

Among red rhododendrons, ‘Taurus’ (Jean Marie de Montague x *strigillosum*) is always a show-stopper. It was unfazed after this harsh winter which is surprising since both parents are relatively tender. At the ARS Convention in Cleveland, many rhododendrons were damaged or killed by their extreme cold. The best plant I saw (above) was at 90-year old Blossom McBrier’s garden, a magnificent specimen of ‘Harold Amateis’ (*maximum* x *strigillosum*). There was not a hit of any leaf damage. It was just opening but those bright red flowers and the deep green foliage were stunning.

Dr. Sandra McDonald has a number of new azalea hybrids that she is introducing including two double reds with dainty flowers, ‘Hampton Ruby Red’ and ‘Tidewater Ruby’. They are compact growers with dark burgundy winter foliage, too. Charming!

There were several white azaleas that caught my eye. Sandra also had a tall plant that we decided was *R. colemanii*, a native azalea that was determined to be a new species in 2008. A very dwarf evergreen azalea that I love is a witch’s broom sport of ‘Hardy Gardenia’. The flowers look just like the namesake but the plant only grows a few inches a year. The lepidote ‘Kehr’s White Ruffles’ (‘Epoch’ x *mucronulatum* album) continues to impress me. The flowers open pink but change to white and are nicely ruffled.

Blue rhododendrons are scarce and not really true blue either. Most of the “blue” alpine species won’t grow for us but a deep purplish blue hybrid, ‘Blaney’s Blue’, seems to be an exception. None of the large leaf rhododendrons are as blue as the lepidotes, but old favorites like ‘Blue Peter’ with its perfect conical trusses and ‘Blue Ensign’ which has more rugged foliage both bloomed beautifully. Share your favorites!

Hail to the Red, White, and Blue!

Some Plants Admired by your Editor in the Spring of 2014



2014 Convention Highlight: 'Harold Amateis'



A new McDonald azalea: 'Tidewater Ruby'



A dwarf Witch's Broom of 'Hardy Gardenia'



A new native azalea species: *R. colemanii*



A lepidote that lives in our area: 'Blaney's Blue'



An old hybrid that puts on a show: 'Blue Peter'

District Director's Report

by Don Hyatt

Our big push in District 9 for the next two years will be the 2016 ARS/ASA Joint Convention we will be hosting in Williamsburg. The convention committee has been busy this spring touring private and public gardens in the three areas we hope to visit. We have commitments from most of them. We will have three major tours with one going to Richmond, one to Norfolk, and one to Gloucester. We have also been trying to line up speakers and flesh out other program details. As things get finalized, we will update our website but check it out when you can:

www.arsasaconvention2016.org

Each chapter has been working on propagating rare rhododendrons and azaleas for the convention plant sale and I am in awe when I see the plants we should have on the way. Many groups will need volunteers to help with repotting in the near future. As the convention draws near, we will have a greater need for volunteers. I hope that each member will be able to find some small way to help us host this event.

As your District Director, I did attend the board meeting at the 2014 ARS convention in Ohio. The overall attendance at the convention was low, about 160 people, and the attendance at the board meeting was similarly low but we did have a quorum.

Before moving to Board actions and concerns, I think the Great Lakes Chapter deserves a lot of credit for putting on a first class event under difficult circumstances. The meeting and tours were well organized, and the only real problems were weather-related and they had no control over that. The Polar Vortex that ravaged most of us who live in the eastern third of the US was much more severe up there. Some said it was their worst winter in 40 years or more. Needless to say, many of the gardens were ravaged by the cold and with spring being three weeks late, rhododendron and azalea flowers were scarce.

At the Board Meeting, much of the time was spent talking about the budget and some serious financial problems facing our organization. When our District hosted the 2006 Convention, the ARS had over 5000 members and we were in good shape, financially. At present, the ARS has only 2800 members, and that is causing serious financial problems. Since the ARS keeps only \$30 of your \$40 membership dues, our annual revenue from dues is only \$84,000. There are many fixed costs that don't change with the reduced membership and that is the big problem. We are not concerned about default at this point, but when expenses far exceed income, something must be done.

Our society's primary expenses are really split between two main areas, the Administrative expenses of the ARS Office and the production of the Journal. I

will try to give a rather simplistic view of the situation so you can see the difficulty we face.

The Administrative Expenses in 2013-14 were \$82,231 which almost matches the income we receive from dues. Those expenses includes a salary of \$51,081 for Laura Grant, \$3000 in room rental in her home, accounting fees of \$5900, salary for an administrative assistant at \$2500, \$2700 we pay Laura for auto travel to Niagara in the US to pick up mail, a travel allowance of \$2800 to attend meetings, \$2500 for postage, and various other office expenses.

The other major expense is related to producing the Journal and that was \$68,785 in 2013-14. It included an honorarium of \$17,998 for editor Glen Jamieson, \$9,037 for assistant editor Sonja Nelson, \$22,400 to print the Journal and \$13,750 to mail it, \$1800 for travel allowances, and some other minor costs.

One cost saving action recommended immediately was to ask chapters to no longer mail anything the Director at the PO Box in Niagara but to send things directly to Laura's home in Canada. It will cost us \$1.15 to mail letters but at least we cut down on that \$2700 we pay to pick up mail. Here is her address:

Laura Grant
27 Taylor Dr
Toronto, ON M4C 3B4
CANADA

The ARS does have other assets it can use to meet short term deficits, but the reality is that the ARS needs to make some major changes. If membership was back at 5000 again, we would have no financial problem. Until that time, President Bruce Feller, new ARS Treasurer Sam Burd, East Coast Vice President Ann Mangels and other officers and advisors will be seeking long term solutions for our financial problems.

There were other actions of the Board of minor import such as approving the Portland Chapter to host the 2020 Convention which will be out of sequence for a West Coast event. It will be the 75th Anniversary of the ARS. Bruce Feller will explore the possibility of joining with the Conifer Society to host the 2015 Fall Regional since no East Coast chapter was willing to handle that event. Steve Henning reported on the ARS Store which is earning us a commission when people use it before purchasing online from participating vendors like Amazon.

There was significant discussion about the Journal advertising, especially for meetings like our upcoming convention. The compromise was to authorize the Journal to provide four pages of black and white space free of charge to announce conventions. If we need more space than that, or if we want an insert on heavy paper, we would be charged standard advertising rates.

The next ARS Board meeting will be in Everett, WA, in on September 25. If you have issues or concerns, please let me know before that time.

Grafting Update by Don Hyatt

In our Winter Newsletter, I reported on how to graft rhododendrons. That fall, Norman Beaudry and I spent several days in New Jersey at the Stephen Kristoph Nursery where Karel Bernady showed us the process. We were trying to graft varieties that are often difficult to root by cuttings.

On May 30 and 31, Norm and I joined Karel and several others from his chapter at the nursery to see how well we did. We planned to pot up the successful grafts and grow the bulk on for our 2016 Convention Plant Sale. Success! We potted up over 700 grafts in those two days!



The cuttings had been in the propagation house with mist and bottom heat since we stuck them last fall. Karel brought out the trays and most of them were masses of roots with new shoots emerging from the scions that we had grafted. In the image above, Karel is cutting through the roots in a tray with a large butcher knife to separate the grafts. Norm was recording data. Below is an example of the heavy rooting we found.



We potted up each graft and then carefully cut off the exposed shoot of the understock. Karel had warned us how difficult it can be to tell the difference between the two. By leaving only two untrimmed leaves on the understock and three on the scion that were trimmed in half, it did help. In

the left image below, notice the larger leaves of the understock, 'Roseum Elegans'. On the right, that was removed so only the scion remains.



As we filled a cart with plants, we watered them well, applied some slow-release fertilizer, a systemic insecticide, and sprinkled the surface with a pre-emergent herbicide to discourage weeds. Norm is doing that in the image below.



Finally, we moved the pots to the hoop house where they will grow the rest of the summer. They have 50% shade cloth and automatic watering. With luck, we'll have some great plants for 2016.



Potomac Valley Chapter ARS - Newsletter
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