

GREATER
PHILADELPHIA

RHODO GRAVURE

Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society ::::::::::: Spring 2014

'A Rhododendron Confection'

The Flower Show is make-believe; this year our exhibit was, too

"Take a generous quantity of rose reds and hot pinks, add a heaping portion of pristine whites, top with a giant dollop of peachy cream, and garnish with fringe of sedge green. Add water as needed."

That was the legend for the Greater Philadelphia ARS exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower show in March. The theme of the show was "Articulture" – a mashup of art and horticulture. Our design team took a nod from the art of the confectioner and reimagined a fruit tart, in flowers.

The judges granted the exhibit an award for "Special Achievement in Creativity with Plants." The design team of Kim Kopple, Linda

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RIGHT: The ARS exhibit was a perfectly circular floral confection amid the other plant societies. Photo by Karel Bernadxy



He'll make you chuckle

Don Hyatt to speak at annual banquet

One of the most entertaining presenters on the rhododendron circuit has been booked for the chapter's annual banquet: Donald Hyatt of McLean, Va. If you've never been to one of Don's presentations, you've missed a jolly and highly informative time. For us, Don's topic is "The Bucket List," featuring a compilation of images taken in his post-retirement frequent-flier-mile binge to see as many beautiful garden spots as possible.

Unknown to many, Don is also a highly accomplished watercolorist, and he will be offering prints of several of his works for sale.

As in recent years, the banquet takes place at the Whitmarsh Valley Country Club, this year on Saturday, April 12, 6 p.m.

The evening concludes with the ever-popular "Rhododendron Roulette." For each reservation, please bring a plant (need not be a rhododendron) for the random exchange. A baby rhododendron from the chapter's propagation program will be the chapter's gift to each attendee.

All members should have already received a reservation form. If you lost it, *hurry* and contact Linda Hartnett for a last-minute reservation (and directions): 610-940-9478; 215-287-0731; lindahartnett@gmail.com.

LEFT: A scene captured by Don Hyatt at the Puget Sound garden of Frank Fujioka, with 'Bruce Briggs' in the foreground.



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Truss Show: Michael Martin Mills; Philadelphia Flower Show: Linda Hartnett

The American Rhododendron Society is a horticultural organization devoted to the genus *Rhododendron* – which includes azaleas. At the national level, the society holds annual conferences, publishes the quarterly *Journal of the ARS*, and fosters plant research and conservation. Its website, www.rhododendron.org, is a trove.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter gathers eight times a year. Sunday afternoon meetings are held September, October, November and January at Morris Arboretum. February through August we are more mobile, with a banquet, plant sale and picnic at various sites. The latest meeting information may be found at www.GPChapterARS.org.

Not already a member? Dues are \$40 per year, which includes chapter and national membership and a subscription to the *Journal*. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a member form or go to www.GPChapterARS.org; click on “Join us.”

The sale is coming! The truss show, too!

Nothing gets a rhododendron devotee’s anticipation up like a plant sale of the magnitude that our chapter and Morris Arboretum mount each May.

As ever, we will have a selection of rhododendrons and azaleas (also *kalmias*) that no garden center can come close to. This year there will be several lepidotes you shouldn’t overlook. Early-blooming lepidotes are a hard sell in May since they’re past bloom, but these are special. They were forced for the Philadelphia Flower Show, then held in a cool house; as a result they will have a two-month jump on the season with lush new growth. The cultivars are the fine white ‘Dora Amateis’, hot pink ‘Bubblegum’ (a tetraploid version of ‘Weston’s Aglo’), and ‘Landmark’, one of the closest-to-red lepidotes in existence.

The elepidote list is especially enhanced by our propagation program. For several years, some of the cuttings we’ve rooted have been grown on and now are handsome size. Grafts of hard-to-propagate cultivars will also be available, plus a good selection of azaleas, including seedling natives.

The plant sale is two days only: Friday, May 9, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and Saturday, May 10, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.. Friday is member-only day (ARS and Morris members), and members receive a 10 percent discount. Note that there will be no end-of-sale markdown this year.

Workers are needed. Please contact Linda Hartnett (phone, email at left) if you can work before or during the sale.

Cut-Flower Competition (Truss Show)

A new/old location this year: Morris’ Widener Education Center (where we have meetings). Saturday, May 10, deadline for entries: 8:45 a.m. Classification brochures and tags will be available at the April 12 banquet, and the catalogue of previous entries will be on www.GPChapterARS.org. Direct questions and entry tag requests to show chair Michael Martin Mills (phone and email at left).

R. yum versus R. yuck

Next time you’re in the hill country of Uttarakhand, India, and adjoining Nepal, make sure to partake of a refreshing rhododendron squash. But if it’s a bit too tart for your taste, don’t fail to query your host as to the origin of the honey that’s offered to sweeten it.

That first paragraph is something of a tease, based on tidbits discovered in Wikipedia, the online, crowd-sourced compendium of usually reliable information.

“Rhododendron squash”? In the English vocabulary of the mother country and the Indian subcontinent, a squash is a beverage that includes a fruit juice. While the locals seem to have stretched the definition of fruit a bit, “burans” is the name of a drink made from the juice of the crushed rhododendron flowers. Inhabitants of the region also pickle the flower, and both fresh or dried rhododendron flowers are added to fish curry. A certain sourness is associated with the blossoms.

Wikipedia does not stipulate the species involved, but *R. arboreum* is the national flower of Nepal.

Not that far away, Kashmir has made *R. ponticum* its state flower. Uh-oh. Long before *ponticum* started taking over the British Isles, it was being fingered as the bad guy in poisonous honey. Both its pollen and nectar contain grayanotoxin, which can end up in honey.

Wicked rhododendron honey was implicated in at least two major skirmishes of the ancient world. Pliny and Xenophon cited its ill effects on Greek soldiers in 401 B.C. And in 67 B.C. during the third war between Rome and King Mithridates VI of Pontus (Pontus: Pontic: *ponticum*), the Pontics are said to have put out the toxic honey for soldiers led by Pompey the Great to find, resulting in lethality.

What a confluence: a refreshing squash and a poisonous honey all from one genus.

Dealing with a scourge

Soon the joy of a rhodoholic will emerge: the flowers. And with them, for too many of us, will be that ghastly phenomenon known as petal blight, or *Ovulinia azaleae*, a fungus. Unfamiliar? Count your blessings. Flowers collapse and get slimy. End of joy.

There are ways to combat petal blight, and if you're diligent you get the upper hand. (A dry spring will help a lot.)

G. David Lewis of Rutgers wrote in the Winter 1999 Journal: "Spray! If you do it right you will have difficulty in finding blight in your garden. If you don't do it right, you are wasting your time and a lot of money. ... The trick is in the proper timing and the proper application."

Lewis and others say that spraying must begin *before blight is seen and before flowers open*. His first application is when early evergreen azaleas are showing color, followed by weekly applications for four weeks. If it is more rainy than usual, shorten the interval to five days.

The buds (and any open flowers) must be covered. Don't bother spraying foliage. A University of Massachusetts extension article also recommends spraying the surface under and around azaleas and rhododendrons, because this is where the ovulinia has overwintered, waiting for warmth and water to release spores.

Cultural practice can help. When deadheading, the spent flowers go in the trash, not on the ground or in the compost. Increase air circulation by spacing plants and pruning them. Avoid overhead watering.

Back to spraying. Various fungicides work. Multiple sprayings, as Lewis recommends, will mean lots of fungicide.

This web page lists several fungicides and rates of application:

<http://pnwhandbooks.org/plantdisease/azalea-rhododendron-spp-ovulinia-petal-blight>

The UMass article is at

<http://extension.umass.edu/landscape/fact-sheets/ovulinia-petal-blight>

A floral confection

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Hartnett, Debby Evans, Randy Dalton, Michael Mills and Karel Bernady began work in the fall, with pre-setup construction in Randy's dining room and Richard Willis' basement. A host of volunteers erected the confection in a few hours.

At the top was a specimen plant of 'Janet Blair,' provided by Frank Brouse, and it was surrounded by rings of white azaleas, lepidotes and silver sedge (*Carex platyphylla*). At the base of the lepidote was a screen of *Magnolia grandiflora* leaves, individually stapled to the form. Once again, the rhododendrons were forced in the facilities of Fairmount Park by Dan O'Brien.

And who should stop by one day during the exhibit but a real Janet Blair. That's her maiden name, actually, and with a couple of rhododendrons in her garden, she's decided she'll look for a 'Janet Blair' to add come planting time.

Calendar

Important: If you do not receive this newsletter electronically, you will not receive email reminders a week before events. Please use this calendar to mark your own.

April 12, Saturday Annual banquet, 6 p.m., Whitmarsh Valley Country Club. Speaker: Don Hyatt. See article on Page 1.

April 17, Thursday Valley Forge Chapter meeting. 7:30 p.m., Jenkins Arboretum, Chuck Feld, "Boxwood Blight; It's Here."

April 22, Tuesday Board of Directors meeting. 7:30 p.m., home of Maris Ogg.

April 26, Saturday Propagation workday; potting cuttings rooted last fall. 9 a.m. and after, Kristoph Nursery, central New Jersey. Contact Karel Bernady for info and directions (phone and email on Page 2).

May 9-10, Friday-Saturday Plant Sale, Morris Arboretum. See article on Page 2

May 10, Saturday Cut-Flower Competition, Morris Arboretum. See Article on Page 2

May 15-18 ARS national convention, Painesville, Ohio (40 miles west of Pennsylvania line). Speakers include Rick Lewandowski, formerly of Morris Arboretum and Mount Cuba Center. Tours include Holden Arboretum, Cleveland Botanical Garden and the David Leach Research Station. Info: www.greatlakesrhodies.org

May 30 & 31, Friday & Saturday Propagation workdays; potting grafts made last fall. 9 a.m. and after, Kristoph Nursery, central New Jersey. Contact Karel Bernady for info and directions (phone and email on Page 2).

June 22, Sunday Chapter picnic and annual meeting. Chanticleer, Wayne, Pa.

August 17, Sunday District 8 Cutting Exchange and Auction

October 20-24 New Zealand Rhododendron Association's 70th Jubilee International Conference. Dunedin, South Island, New Zealand. Info: www.rhododendron.org.nz/conference_info.php. See article on Page 4

Nothing to hide

Hewing to the spirit of openness, not to mention the tax code, the chapter treasurer, Myo Myint, reports that copies of the 2013 Greater Philadelphia Chapter's federal income tax return, Form 990EZ, are now available to members and associate members, upon request submitted to myintm933@verizon.net.

Our favorite genus, a star in the Antipodes

Here's a suggestion for those who would rather not spend October raking leaves: Take a *long* flight and check out the amazing rhododendron world of New Zealand. When we're shutting our gardens down, spring is in full flower in the lands Down Under, and the New Zealand Rhododendron Association is marking its 70th year with a truly alluring International Jubilee Conference.

Folks who've taken in the New Zealand spring (such trips are among Morris Arboretum's most popular offerings) rave about the beauty and other-worldliness. Not only do rhododendrons flourish there, along but the landscape is replete with intriguing plants that evolution bestowed on that segment of the globe. And the English style of landscaping has achieved a remarkable height with the comingling of species from Europe, North and South America and those native to New Zealand and Australia. Imagine: English oaks, giant sequoias, pohutukawas, lovely elepidotes – and lots of spring lamb on the menus.

For information on the Jubilee Conference, go to www.rhododendron.org.nz/conference_info.php.



**Pohutukawa, the
New Zealand
Christmas tree,
which comes into
flower in late spring
– there.**

Dig this

One of the advantages of gardening with rhododendrons, as we all know, is the fact that their shallow, fibrous root systems make for easy transplantation. Place three 15-inch plants in a pleasing arrangement and, when they put on some size, dig up the middle one and plant it elsewhere. Even moving a 5- or 6-foot elepidote, while no picnic, is relatively doable.

But a dogwood? Witch hazel? Alberta spruce? When they get some size, most gardeners think in terms of leaving well enough alone.

Frank Brouse to the rescue. He is offering an on-site short course in How to Dig a Big One. Frank's wholesale nursery, located in the outskirts of Norristown, hews to the old style: field-grown plants. When a plant is sold, it has to be dug, and Frank is without peer in this skill.

Frank wants to schedule the demonstration this spring when it's convenient for the most people. So give him a call at 610-539-4620 and let him know which dates are good for you. He'll figure out what date works best and will schedule the event.