

GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODO GRAVURE

Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society ::::::::::: Spring 2015

Checking in with Joe Minahan

The Camp Hill hybridizer has some promising seedlings

If you grow and admire R. ‘John Paul II’, a remarkable red that might make a pope blush, give a tip of your hat to the Philadelphia Free Library branch on Bustleton Avenue.

In all aspects of life, many little acts and turns of events lead the way to eventual achievement, and a visit to the library in quest of information on some alluring shrubs called rhododendrons was one of those steps in Joe Minahan’s progress toward becoming one of our region’s noted hybridizers of elepidotes.

Interestingly, that doesn’t mean there are oodles of named-and-introduced Minahan crosses. Joe is a careful judge of a plant’s worthiness, and to date he has named only ten cultivars, five of which are registered. His overall approach to hybridizing sets him apart, too. It could be summed up as: Make only a few carefully considered crosses; grow many, many seedlings over a long period; observe and assess, observe and assess, observe and assess.

But back to the beginning. Joe’s first three rhododendrons attracted him by the exotic-looking new growth. They were at a supermarket garden department in Bustleton, labeled pink, red and white. And they all bloomed mauve. Then he saw photos of ‘Sappho’ and ‘The Hon. Jean Marie de Montague’ – “I was enraptured” – and he went to the library to learn what he could.

His first connections to rhodo people were Albert Potts, an azalea hybridizer working out of his rowhouse backyard, and George Austin Arrington, of the Tranquility Nursery in Bucks County. The latter was subjected to endless Minahan questions – “till it drove him mad” – and Arrington resorted to telling Joe to read David Leach’s huge book cover to cover.

When Joe’s three plants of ‘Jean Marie de Montague’ went into decline (they just don’t like our climate), Arrington’s reply was: If you want a good red, hybridize one yourself.

So Joe did, starting with pollen from ‘Cheer’ onto ‘Jean Marie’. He still has plants from that first cross, made in 1967.

Joe didn’t sow any seeds this year – heck, he has scads of seedlings from prior years that need transplanting from flats to the garden.

Here’s some of what’s in the works, that is, seedlings being assessed:

‘Fritzy Boy’ X ‘Orange Amber’. ‘Fritzy Boy’ is one of Joe’s seedlings of ‘John Paul II’ X ‘Harold Amateis’, notable for being



Karel Bernady photos

Joe and Winnie Minahan with R. ‘Cause of Our Joy’

Annual banquet

Learn about the famed Bartrams

Among the singular hallmarks of Philadelphia – one that modern gardeners revere – is the legacy of the Bartrams, native sons who were key participants in the transformative East-West horticultural exchanges that eventually arose from the events of 1492.

It is the Greater Philadelphia Chapter’s great honor to welcome Joel T. Fry, curator of Bartram’s Garden, as speaker at the annual banquet, Saturday, April 11, with a presentation titled “Rhododendrons on the Frontier: The Bartram Family, Plant Collectors and Naturalists in 18th- and 19th-Century North America.”

Fry, affiliated with Bartram’s Garden since 1975 and its curator since 1992, has written numerous books and articles on the Bartrams and plant exploration of their era. He has provided this prelude to his talk: “John Bartram and his son William were unique figures in early America—homegrown natural scientists



R. ‘Howard Roberts’

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Plants and Propagation: Karel Bernady & Linda Hartnett

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.”

Banquet

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and practical gardeners. John Bartram and his London correspondent Peter Collinson may be the first English-speaking gardeners to successfully collect and grow American rhododendron species. Ultimately three generations of Bartrams lived and worked at the family garden, which became a gathering point for scientists, artists, gardeners, and the curious.”

The banquet takes place at the Whitmarsh Valley Country Club. Cocktails and hors d’oeuvres are at 6 p.m., with dinner and presentation at 7 p.m. We conclude the evening with the popular “Rhododendron Roulette” plant exchange.

Please place your reservations promptly. If you did not receive an invitation or have misplaced yours, contact banquet coordinator Linda Hartnett at 215-287-0731 or lindahartnett@gmail.com.



Jim Barlup photo

‘Orange Amber’, created by Jim Barlup, is a parent to a new round of Minahan hybrids.

Crossing with Minahan

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pure red – corolla, pistil, stamens. It received pollen from Jim Barlup’s West Coast plant, whose parentage is ‘Dazzler’ X ‘Hill’s Low Red’. Joe hopes to pick up orange from the Barlup and hardiness from ‘Harold Amateis’. One of those seedlings, sown only in 2012, has set a bud for this spring.

‘John Paul II’ X ‘Orange Ruffy’. The latter is a hybrid by Tom Ahern of Bethlehem, Pa. The flower of one seedling, Joe says, is “a red that makes ‘Taurus’ look blue. ... Brightest cardinal red, luminescent, like a light in the garden.” Its hardiness is unknown, though this winter gave it a good test.

(‘Marybelle’ x ‘Mars’) X ‘Phipps Yellow’. This 1995 cross has yielded two cultivars that Joe intends to register: ‘Cause of Our Joy’ and ‘House of Gold’. The original ‘Cause of Our Joy’ has more than 75 buds for this spring, Joe reports, and is almost as dense as a yak without any bud pruning.

About 15 seed-grown plants in the Minahan garden have budded and will bloom for the first time this spring. They are part of the Minahan approach to hybridizing. Since 1967 he has made only 27 crosses, but he grows the seedlings on for many years. That’s the only way to find variability and garden-worthiness, in Joe’s opinion. Other hybridizers start culling seedlings when they are quite small, but Joe wonders how they know that a future winner hasn’t destroyed.



R. ‘John Paul II’

Speaking of winners, Joe is a frequent trophy collector at flower competitions held by chapters in the region. He has retired two trophies in the Greater Philadelphia truss show, and the Joe Becales Hybridizer’s Trophy is littered with his name and his win-

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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 7, Tuesday Board of Directors meeting. Home of Kim Kopple. 7:30 p.m.

April 11, Saturday Annual chapter banquet, Whitmarsh Valley Country Club. Speaker: Joel Fry of Bartram's Garden. 6 p.m. See article on Page 1.

April 16, Thursday Valley Forge Chapter meeting. Program: Michael Mills, "Name That Clone." Jenkins Arboretum, 7:30 p.m.

April 18, Saturday Workday at Steve Kristoph Nursery, central New Jersey. Cuttings rooted over the fall and winter will be potted. 9 a.m.-early afternoon, BYO lunch. Contact Karel Bernady (phone, email on Page 2) for directions and more information.

May 8-9 Chapter plant sale, Morris Arboretum

May 6-10 ARS annual convention, Sidney, British Columbia (just north of Victoria). Celebrating the 70th anniversary of the club. Info: <http://2015rhodo.ca>.

May 10, Sunday Flower Show (Truss Show), joint Valley Forge-Greater competition, produced by Valley Forge. Jenkins Arboretum. Entries accepted 7:30-10:30 a.m. Open to the public 1-5 p.m.

May 30, Saturday Workday at Steve Kristoph Nursery, central New Jersey. Grafted propagations will be potted. 9 a.m.-early afternoon, BYO lunch. Contact Karel Bernady (phone, email on Page 2) for directions and more information.

June Annual chapter picnic. Site to be announced soon.

Aug. 16, Sunday District 8 Cutting Exchange and Plant Auction. Home of Wayne and Doris Guymon, Chadds Ford, Pa.

Minahan

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ning crosses. Odds are some of the seedlings mentioned above will end up on the trophy too.

Minahan cultivars, registered

'Dan Layman' – 'Mars' X 'Polynesian Sunset'
'Frederick Prigger' – 'Mary Belle' X 'Mars'
'Howard Roberts' – 'Mary Belle' X 'Odee Wright'
'Jessica Marie' – 'Mars' X 'Prelude'
'John Paul II' -- Mars X ('Cheer' x 'The Hon. Jean Marie de Montague')

Not registered

'Cause of Our Joy' – ('Mary Belle' x 'Mars') X 'Phipps Yellow'
'Fritzy Boy' – 'John Paul II' X 'Harold Amateis'
'Gangbusters' – 'Mary Belle' X 'Mars'
'House of Gold' – ('Mary Belle' x 'Mars') X 'Phipps Yellow'
'Winnie' – 'John Paul II' X 'Harold Amateis'



Seeing stars

Another Flower Show nailed

Randy Dalton, Linda Hartnett and Karel Bernady (above, from left to right) were indispensable leaders in the creation and erection of the chapter's exhibit at the Philadelphia Flower Show in early March, along with Kim Kopple (not pictured).



R. diversipilosum 'Milky Way'

Overall themes at the Flower Show are definitely a break from the past, and this year's theme was movies. Our design team thought, "Movies?" But what do movies always have? *Movie stars*. So the Greater Philadelphia exhibit was titled "Reach for the Stars" – as in rhododendron and azaleas that can take starring roles in your garden. One of those star cultivars was *R. diversipilosum* 'Milky Way', undoubtedly being exhibited for the first time in the history of the Flower Show. This selection from way north was in the genus *Ledum*, but taxonomists shifted all the species in that genus to *Rhododendron*. Its petite trusses of tiny flowers are highly distinctive. Others in the exhibit were 'Taurus', 'Purple Gem', 'Linda Stuart' and 'Maraschino', arranged in a star formation. The plants that were forced for the exhibit will be offered for sale at the chapter's May 8-9 plant sale at Morris Arboretum.

The committee is very thankful to all who helped on set-up and take-down days and to all the docents during the show.

Some random tips

Very low-tech garden tactics

Sometimes the best solution for a minor task in the garden costs next-to-nothing or less.

Applying herbicide to something growing amid desirable plants can be dicey – it's so easy to kill what you want to keep. Get a paper towel or toilet paper tube. Place one end on the target weed and spray through the tube. Beware that the tube will get soggy and may drip if you do this several times, so have several on hand.

For a humid environment for starting seeds indoors, get a grocery store plastic cake container (tall cakes are best). Put the watered pots on the tray, snap the cover on. When the seedlings get near the top, take three or four days to wean them of high humidity and remove the cover so they can grow unimpeded.

Old shoelaces, fancy shopping bag handles made of soft cord, and Velcro strips intended for computer cables are excellent for tying stems to stakes. Unlike skinny string, they are thick and soft enough to avoid pinching tender stems.

If black vine weevil is a problem in your garden, spread some birdseed and some flower-bed preemergent around the base of the affected rhododendron. Birds attracted by the seed will also eat the adult weevils, and the preemergent will prevent unwanted bird-food seedlings.

Looking toward May

As ever, the pace, the thrill, the intensity of being into rhododendrons ratchets up several notches in May (with the possible exception of odd people who have committed themselves solely to *R. dauricum*, *R. prunifolium* and *R. maximum*).

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter's plant sale again will be in conjunction with Morris Arboretum's sale, May 8 and 9. The first day is members only, both ARS and Morris members. Linda Hartnett will schedule workers. Please contact her if you're interested (phone and email on Page 2).

Valley Forge will host the flower competition (truss show) this year, at Jenkins Arboretum on Sunday, May 10. Deadline for entries is 10:30 a.m.

Email recipients of the RhodoGravure will receive updates and details in due course.

Our numbers are yours

Did you know that every year our treasurer must file a chapter tax return with the IRS? This added burden is probably in response to the shenanigans of Bernie Madoff and the like, but treasurer Myo Myint has risen to the occasion again. Unlike your personal income tax return, it is a public document, and Myo reports that copies of the 2014 Greater Philadelphia Chapter's Form 990EZ are now available to members and associate members, upon request submitted to myintm933@verizon.net.



R. 'Howard Roberts'

Bernady Photo

Yak, yak, yak, what's best?

A few decades ago, hybrids of *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum* started entering the market in great numbers. Ooh, ah. Yes, but. The degree of sameness in many of these is a pity. The RhodoGravure seeks members' recommendations for distinctive yak hybrids. Send nominations to Michael Mills (mmm19119@gmail.com) – *and state why they are distinctive and superior.*

Calling all designers