

# GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODO GRAVURE

Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society ::::::::::: Spring 2016



*The team that moved the Great Smoky Mountains*

**... into the Pennsylvania Convention Center for the Philadelphia Flower Show.**

**From left: Karel Bernady, Joan Roberts, Michele Hawk, Victoria Buckley, Myo Myint, Tom Lloyd, Linda Hartnett, Glenn Frederick (in hat), and Toby Roberts. See article on Page 2.**

## *Legendary landscaper headlines banquet*

Don't miss Kirk R. Brown portraying Frederick Law Olmsted

What can you say about the man who coined the phrase "landscape architecture" and for his first foray into the field designed and supervised the creation of Central Park?

Quite a lot, actually, and the Greater Philadelphia Chapter is excited to present Kirk R. Brown in the role of Frederick Law Olmsted at the annual banquet, Saturday, April 16.

Here's what a California garden club had to say about Brown's portrayal of Olmsted: "The audience was captivated as Kirk energetically and passionately took on the persona of Frederick Law Olmsted. Fredrick's life story was brilliantly told through beautiful photographs, historical facts, and Kirk's amusing acting."

Olmsted, whose landscape career spanned the last four decades of the 19th century, strove to create settings that would counteract what he saw as the demoralizing effects

of the dense urban environments of his era. A list of Olmsted-crafted landscapes includes grand city parks, scenic parkways and college campuses. He has been labeled the "Father of American Landscape Architecture," and his parks are still revered.

As in past years, the banquet takes place at the Whitemarsh Valley Country Club in Lafayette Hill (a few blocks from Morris Arboretum). We gather at 6:00 p.m. for cocktails and conversation with dinner and the program at 7 p.m.

The evening concludes with "Rhododendron Roulette," a fun plant exchange. (Each attendee is asked to bring an azalea, rhododendron, or companion plant.)

All members should have received and invitation and reservation form in March. The reservation form may also be found on the chapter website, [www.GPChapterARS.org](http://www.GPChapterARS.org). The deadline for reservations is April 14.



**Frederick Law Olmsted,** as portrayed by Kirk R. Brown.

Greater Philadelphia Chapter  
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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](http://www.rhododendron.org), is a trove.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter gathers eight times a year. Sunday afternoon meetings are held September, October, and January at Morris Arboretum. February through August we are mobile, with a banquet, plant sale and picnic at various sites. Latest meeting information may be found at [www.GPChapterARS.org](http://www.GPChapterARS.org).

Dues are \$40 per year, for chapter and national membership and a subscription to the *Journal*. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a form or go to [www.GPChapterARS.org](http://www.GPChapterARS.org); click on “Join us.”

## Accolades at the Flower Show

Here's a telling indicator of the deftness the ARS exhibit designers for the Philadelphia Flower Show: people familiar with Great Smoky Mountains National Park were impressed with how the tiny exhibit accurately reflected the plant communities of the real thing. The forced specimens of Gray's lily (*Lilium grayi*), lent by Joan and Reid Warren, particularly wowed viewers. Linda Hartnett, co-chair of the exhibit, reports that the display was well received, and the exhibit was awarded a silver medal.

This year the teams that assembled the exhibit and served as docents had a new level of participation from other chapters, such as first-timers Victoria Buckley and Michele Hawk, of the Lehigh Valley and Valley Forge chapters, respectively.

Next year's Flower Show theme is Holland. Rhododendrons behind the dikes? One idea is to focus on plants bred for the greenhouse trade, which should make forcing an easy task.



## In memoriam

### Randall L. Dalton, 1948-2016

Randy Dalton's love of rhododendrons was something of a family thing. His great-uncle by marriage was Joseph B. Gable of Stewartstown, Pa., husband of Mary Dalton, sister of Randy's grandfather. Randy first visited the Gable home and nursery in 1964 when his family traveled east from Wisconsin.

In the early 1980s, when he and Michael Martin Mills were a new couple, Randy was eager to take Michael to Stewartstown. That first visit resulted in a rich friendship with Caroline Gable, Joe's daughter, and Randy and Michael's rhododendron adventure began in earnest.

As a member of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, Randy successfully avoided being elected to the board or office, but he became an indispensable figure in the chapter's activities, notably its exhibits at the Philadelphia Flower Show. He hefted more than his share of plants for chapter sales, and he and Michael often hosted chapter picnics at their home in Philadelphia. He received the Bronze Medal in 1999.

For the last 25-plus years, Randy's passion was art and its role in bettering society in general and Philadelphia in particular. He became a sculptor of creative lamps using found objects and blue illumination. He called his campaign “Do Blue” and passed out blue lapel buttons for people to show their support for the arts.

Randy Dalton died February 5, two days after suffering a severe stroke. He was 67. A memorial service will be held Saturday, April 9, 4 p.m., at Germantown Friends Meeting, 47 W. Coulter St., Philadelphia 19144.

### Winfield Howe, 1931-2016

The list of Win Howe's endeavors for the rhododendron world is daunting, and the Valley Forge Chapter has indeed lost a key figure. Win died on February 6 after a long illness.

For starters: plant sale, propagation, truss show, judging other chapters' truss shows, banquet coordination, board membership, chapter president (1994-96), and associate district director. Plus a yeoman's job as chair of the 2004 national ARS convention.

Win and Anne's outstanding garden in Upper Uwchlan Township was often on tour, and many other gardening organizations benefited from his participation: Longwood Gardens, Jenkins Arboretum, Green Valleys Watershed Association at Welkinweir, Elverson Garden Club. Numerous organizations, institutions and fellow gardeners were beneficiaries of his generosity in giving away azaleas, rhododendrons and other plants he had propagated, from seed and cutting.

Win served his country in the Marines and joined a family concern that produced soaps, detergents and many specialty products. He was vice president in charge of manufacturing.

In addition to Anne, he is survived by children Martin and Rebecca and three, granddaughters, Melissa, Alena, and Emily.

After a private military service, there will be a public memorial service on the afternoon of May 20 at the Uwchlan Meeting House in Lionville.

# You too can hybridize

A primer on the rhodos and the bees

By Don Hyatt

How do new rhododendron crosses come into being? The bees have no trouble making crosses, but since that is not their goal (getting nectar is), they keep no records of what pollen they may be spreading around. When a breeder wants to create a new hybrid, hand-pollinated crosses where both parents are known are the rule.

A typical flower is composed of a number of basic parts. Protruding from the center of the flower are the important parts needed for hybridization. The female part of a rhododendron blossom is a solitary structure called the pistil. Typically, it is a little longer and thicker than the male parts of the flower, which are the stamens. At the far end of the pistil is a sticky surface called the stigma. This is where pollen must be placed in order to make a cross. At the other end where the pistil adjoins the flower is the ovary. This will later become the seedpod. The portion between the ovary and the stigma is called the style.

Most rhododendron and azaleas have from five to 10 stamens and each stamen has an obvious pollen sac at the end called the anther. With some rhododendrons like *R. fortunei*, the anthers contain so much pollen that it drools from the holes at the end and hangs in long strands. Pollen seems to exude from the anthers more readily when the stamens are jostled or twirled as when visited by a bee. With other rhododendrons, the pollen is not easily accessed and sometimes the anthers must be cut open to get to the grains. I prefer to use "promiscuous parents" with gobs of pollen.

The process of making a cross is rather simple. Just remove a couple of stamens from one flower and dab the pollen on the stigma of another blossom. Pollination is done! Within a day or two, the minute pollen grains on the stigma will germinate and send tiny tubes down the style to fertilize the undeveloped seeds in the ovary. By midsummer, the ovary should be much larger than it was when the flower was first pollinated, and the rest of the pistil will have withered and turned brown. As the seedpod dries out in late fall, it will split open to release the tiny seeds inside. At that time, the seeds can be planted but they can also be saved for future years. Seed viability does diminish with time, so if they are not planted during that first year, it is best to store them in a refrigerator in order to keep germination rates high.

There are some procedures that hybridizers use to ensure a "pure" cross with no possibility of contamination. If you simply place

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

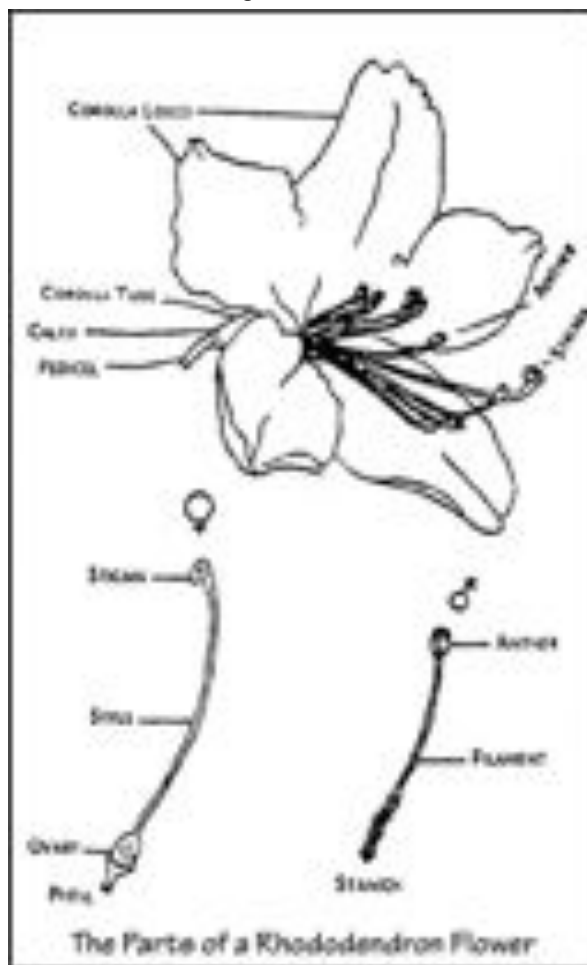
**April 16, Saturday, 6 p.m.** Greater Philadelphia Chapter Annual Banquet/Valley Forge chapter meeting. Whitmarsh Valley Country Club. Kirk Brown as Frederick Law Olmsted. See article on Page 1.

**April 20-24** ARS-Azalea Society Convention, Williamsburg, Va. Deadline for early-bird rate has been extended to April 5. Go to [www.arsasaconvention2016.org](http://www.arsasaconvention2016.org).

**May 6-7, Friday-Saturday** Greater Philadelphia Chapter Plant Sale, Morris Arboretum.

**May 7, Saturday** Cut-Flower Competition (truss show), under Greater Philadelphia auspices at Morris Arboretum. Deadline for entries: 8:45 a.m. Contact Michael Martin Mills ([mmm19119@gmail.com](mailto:mmm19119@gmail.com)) for brochure and entry tags.

**June 19, Sunday** Greater Philadelphia picnic and annual meeting, Awbury Arboretum, Germantown section of Philadelphia.



pollen on a stigma and do nothing else, the bees may still come seeking nectar and leaving who-knows-what pollen, often from the adjacent flower; the bee pollen may end up joining your pollen in the fertilization process. When someone has a hybridizing goal in mind, why waste time raising stray seedlings that don't meet goals of the desired cross? (However, hybridizers will admit that some of the best things often come from those chance seedlings.)

Personally, I like to force budded plants in my greenhouse so I can make crosses in late winter where there will not be a problem with rain, wind, or bees bringing in stray pollen from another flower.

When making crosses outside, it is best to remove the corolla and stamens from unopened buds of the proposed seed parent prior to making a cross (this is known as emasculation, since the pollen-bearing stamens are the male component). That way, insects will not be attracted to the flower and without stamens there will be less chance of self-pollination.

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# Home hybridizing

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Because the flower parts were removed in the bud stage it is not easy to tell when the flower would be open and thus ready for pollination. The stigma should be watched carefully to see when it becomes moist and sticky, since that is when it is ready to accept pollen. After pollen is applied, many hybridizers protect the stigma with a small piece of aluminum foil crimped over the tip or even a plastic bag covering the entire flower truss.

I usually try to pollinate at least half the flowers in rhododendron truss. That way if I see big seed pods develop on flowers where I made a cross, and only undeveloped ovaries elsewhere, I feel certain the cross is good. It also provides extra seed to share. Always label the cross so it is easy to find later and there is no confusion as to the parentage. By convention, the seed parent is listed first and the pollen parent is listed second.

When the seedpods are just mature (turning from green to brown) in late summer or early fall, collect them, store in envelopes with complete information of the seed and pollen parents and date of crossing, and store in the refrigerator until sowing indoors in early winter.

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*Editor's addendum:*

While hand-pollination can be carried out with any rhododendron cultivars, sometimes with marvelous serendipitous

results, thoughtful selection of seed and pollen parents is recommended. To create hybrids that will survive in the Philadelphia area, at least one of the parents should be cold hardy and heat tolerant, or one of each.

Over the years, the ARS Journal has published articles in which accomplished hybridizers articulate their tactics and preferred parent plants for achieving particular goals, such as a red flower without blue tone or a hardy yellow. Their near-scientific approach can be daunting for a first-timer.

One way to piggyback on their success is to study parentage data of quality cultivars, both in books and in the compilation of newly registered plants in the Journal. Look for plants hybridized in this region. Identify those that you like and determine whether you have access to their parent plants. You could repeat the crosses or go for variations on a theme. Remember that pollen can come someone else's garden, or an arboretum (or, if you have the moxie, a nursery). If you examine the data on enough hybrids, you'll begin to notice that certain parent plants show up with a degree of frequency, usually because they are relatively reliable at passing on their good genes.

It's interesting to note that intentional hybridization of flowers is not that old a practice and that in the pre-Darwin era the earliest forays were considered a sensation – and not in the positive sense of the word. Thomas Fairchild is credited with the first human-made plant hybrid, *Dianthus caryophyllus X D. barbatus*, in 1717. Many regarded it as an act of blasphemy.