

GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODO GRAVURE

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

A historic collection and its future

Jerry O'Dell to speak on Tyler's Wister collection



O'Dell on the job at Tyler Arboretum.

Beyond solid green

Cultivars with variegated leaves

By Philip Waldman

One of the most beautiful plants to brighten a shady corner of the garden with variegated leaves is the rhododendron. Among the best rhododendrons that show variegation in their foliage, adding tremendously to their year round ornamental, are:

'Claydian Variegated'. A tissue culture sport of 'Madame Masson' from Clay Nurseries in British Columbia with leaves having a distinct white border enclosing a green center. White flowers touched by a golden flare bloom in May. It is a well shaped plant and hardy to -15 degrees Fahrenheit, but is a slow grower.

'Goldflimmer'. A German introduction with splashes of sunny yellow in the center of the leaf. It is probably a *R. ponticum* sport with rather non-descript lavender flowers in May. It is an excellent grower, rather vigorous, and propagates easily. The plant is well shaped, and it is hardy to -15F. There is a slight tendency for reversions of all green shoots, which should be removed. Similar plants include 'Sunsplash', which was found in Malcolm Whipple's garden on Long Island, and a large unknown plant growing at Weston Nurseries in Hopkinton, Mass.

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The rain finally returned, we've crossed the equinoctial moment into days shorter than night, and now it's time to have good old-fashioned Rhododendron Society meetings.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter begins its program year with a presentation that links our deep local rhododendron history to the future of one of the gems of the region, Tyler Arboretum's Wister Rhododendron Garden. Our speaker on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 9 will be Jerry O'Dell, principal steward of the Wister collection. His presentation is titled "The Wister Rhododendron Garden: Rewards and Challenges of Managing a Historic Collection."

For many chapter members, Tyler is an old friend, site of meetings and truss shows past. But sometimes we don't keep up with old friends as much as we might, and for those yet to make its acquaintance, Tyler and the Wister Garden should be on one's "must see" list – or "must see again."

The arboretum's collection was begun in 1825, when brothers Minshall and Jacob Painter started planting the land their forebear had acquired from William Penn in 1681. In their lifetimes, they collected 1,000 or more species and varieties of trees and shrubs. The modern era began in 1946 with the appointment of John Wister, already the director of the Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore College, as first director of the newly established Tyler Arboretum. Among Wister's many interests – iris,

lilacs, bulbs – were rhododendrons. Many that he planted are numbered seedlings, now grown vast, from which many local gardeners have obtained propagations. Groups of Dexter, Gable, Nearing and Wister hybrids are prominent.

For five years, Jerry O'Dell has been working on the Wister Rhododendron Garden, which has recently significant changes and upgrades, part of the transition under way at

Tyler from a cultivar collection to a garden designed with major focal points. Jerry says the horticultural challenges have been significant, but in the process he "has developed a deep appreciation for the Rhododendron Collection that Dr. Wister created. As



Sw58-279MM is among the unnamed cultivars at Tyler.

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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, 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.

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; click on “Join us.”

Temple-worthy

Folks who took advantage of a rare opportunity this summer got to see the newest Philadelphia painting with rhododendrons.

Before the formal dedication of the new Mormon Temple on Vine Street in Philadelphia, members of the public could take tours of the fascinating facility. (Since the dedication in early September, the temple is open only to Mormons in good standing.) The level of workmanship in the 18th-century architectural idiom that was chosen for the structure is astonishing. Unlike a church or cathedral, the temple does not have a large space for Sunday worship. Rather, it has smaller spaces used for the various sacraments of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Throughout the temple are paintings commissioned for the facility, and in one of the Instruction Rooms is a large landscape of a natural North American setting. Of course it includes native rhododendrons.



A glimpse of the Wister Rhododendron Garden in May 2016.

The future at Tyler

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the garden design slowly moves forward, maintaining the integrity of these magnificent specimens will always be a major goal.”

Jerry spent 30 years in corporate landscape design and maintenance. He chairs the Schuylkill Township Environmental Advisory Council, and is an International Society of Arboriculture certified arborist, a graduate of the Penn State Ornamental Nursery Management Program and has a BA and MS in Organizational Management & Leadership from Cabrini College.

Our meeting takes place Sunday, Oct. 9, in the Widener building of Morris Arboretum. Conversation and refreshments begin at 1:30 p.m., with the program at 2 p.m. (When arriving at Morris, tell the person at the entrance kiosk you are attending the rhododendron meeting and you’ll be admitted free of charge.)

November combo

On Sunday, Nov. 13, the Greater Philadelphia monthly meeting takes place coincident with and part of the Valley Forge Chapter Annual Banquet, at the St. David’s Country Club in St. David’s. A buffet luncheon will be served, with a cash bar. The speaker will be the ARS’s former national president, Bruce Feller of Long Island. His topic will be “Woody Companion Plants for the Rhododendron Garden.”

Reservation forms will be sent to members in October.



At the District 8 Cutting Exchange and Auction in August: Steve and Connie Wheeler and Eva Jackson.

Variegation

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'Ponticum Variegatum'. A popular variety with long dark green leaves enhanced by a white margin. It is an upright vigorous grower, hardy to -15F, and has reddish-purple flowers in spring. It roots well and grows easily.

'President Roosevelt'. A variety with a golden yellow variegation in the middle of the green leaf and a picotee flower of a red edge fading to a white center. This plant was discovered in Holland in the 1920s and is not very popular. It has limited hardiness and a propensity toward a poor root system. It has acquired the derogatory nickname of "Tumbling Teddy" due to its weak stems and their tendency to break off easily from the root ball.

'Yaku Princess' sport. A new variety that offers excellent possibilities. It has a distinct gold center in the leaf, contrasting well with the dark green margin. It has light pink flowers and appears to be stable.

Other sports have been observed in gardens and collections, but, due to difficulties in propagating them or their excessively slow growth, they are not suited for commercial production.

There were very few variegated azaleas available in the United States until recently, but with the public interest in new and unusual varieties, more are becoming available. Originally there were only a few variegated Satsuki varieties. These were:

'Keigetsu'. One of the earliest blooming Satsukis with light pink flowers and a red margin. The green leaves are flecked with white on a low spreading plant.

'Uki-nishiki'. White flowers with many variegations of stripes, flecks, etc. of a dark purple. The leaves are flecked with yellow.

'Shira-fuji'. The flowers are variable, generally white with purple variations. The leaves have an attractive distinct white margin on a dwarf plant. This is a newer introduction and a worthwhile plant.

'Shinryo-no-tsuki' sport. Very large white flowers with crimson blotches bloom in June. The leaves sport cream stripes longitudinally throughout.

'Fuji-no-mine'. A dwarf cultivar admired for its unusual foliage – the leaves are variegated with many flecks of yellow. Pink flowers with a darker circle bloom in June.

American growers began introducing variegated azaleas in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of the most popular and now widely available is 'Silver Sword', a sport of 'Girard's Rose' with a distinct white margin bordering a dark green leaf. It is a vigorous grower, and the leaves have a beautiful reddish color in winter. Other Girard plants with white margined foliage included 'Girard's Variegated Gem', a sport of pink-flowered 'Border Gem', and 'Hot Shot Variegated' with bright orange-red flowers. These varieties tend to have a lighter green color in their leaves.

Two recent introductions which are sports of 'Girard's Rose' and similar to 'Silver Sword' are 'Brianne', which is a



R. 'Goldflimmer'

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.

October 9, Sunday, 1:30 p.m. Greater Philadelphia Chapter monthly meeting, Morris Arboretum. Speaker, Jerry O'Dell, head of the Wister Rhododendron Garden at Tyler Arboretum. See article on Page 1.

October 11, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Kim Kopple.

October 20, Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Valley Forge Chapter monthly meeting, Jenkins Arboretum. Speaker, Greg Thompson, "Fungal Diseases Affecting Rhododendrons, Azaleas and Trees."

November 7, Monday, 7 p.m. Convention 2019 planning meeting, Jenkins Arboretum (with teleconferencing available).

November 13, Sunday, 1 p.m. Valley Forge Chapter Annual Banquet and Greater Philadelphia Chapter monthly meeting, St. David's Country Club. Speaker: Bruce Feller, "Woody Companion Plants for the Rhododendron Garden."

December 13, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Kim Kopple.

January 8, 2017, Sunday, 1:30 p.m. Greater Philadelphia Chapter monthly meeting, Morris Arboretum.

January 15, Sunday, 2 p.m. Valley Forge Chapter monthly meeting, Jenkins Arboretum. Speakers, Bob and Rosa McWhorter, "Gardens of Germany and Denmark."

March 11-18 Philadelphia Flower Show

April 27-30 ARS Annual Convention, Eureka, California.

Blue Sterling Nursery introduction and is supposed to be hardier and has a much thinner and longer green leaf with the white margin, and 'The Robe', a Buds & Bloom introduction that is almost identical to 'Silver Sword'.

Two southern varieties of the white-margined types discovered in the 1980s are 'Southern Belle', a sport of 'Pink Ruffles', and 'Red Ruffles Variegated'. Another lovely choice is 'Silver Streak', a Greenwood hybrid with white-margined foliage and purple flowers; it is a sport of 'Deep Purple'.

There are very few variegated deciduous azaleas. Among them are two species, a white margined *R. canescens*, which was found in Florida, and *R. austrinum* 'Don's Variegated'. Both have bright green leaves with creamy marbled flecks.

Philip Waldman, formerly of the New York ARS chapter, now lives in Florida. Reprinted with permission of the New York Chapter newsletter.

2019 convention will be based in Malvern

The site for the 2019 ARS national convention has been selected: the Desmond Hotel in Malvern. Members of the planning committee are enthusiastic about the ambience and setting of the Desmond. Although situated just off the junction of Routes 29 and 202, it does not feel like part of a highway strip development, and its large deck flanked by trees will, weather permitting, allow breaks and conversation outdoors.

A highly intriguing element will be that one of the evening dinners will be an off-site affair, likely at the American Helicopter Museum nearby in West Chester. In addition to the change of pace from several days in one hotel, there will be the opportunity to see dozens of helicopters. (Alas, transport from the Desmond to the museum will not be via helicopter!)

At the convention committee's September meeting, Steve Henning and Karel Bernady were unanimously chosen to be co-chairs of the event. With the location determined, the next focus is establishing and fleshing out the various committees that are essential to pulling off the event. Committees are: Finance; Hotel and Catering; Plant Sale; Registration; Speakers and Programs; Tours; Website; Flower Show; Photo Contest; Publicity; Corporate Sponsors; Sales (non-plant), Raffle and Auction. While some committee chairs and members have been identified, there remains a great need for participation in the various com-

mittees.

All ARS members from Greater Philadelphia, Valley Forge, Susquehanna Valley and Lehigh Valley Chapters are asked to volunteer for committee work. For some months, most committees will be in information-collection mode and the drafting of timetables leading up to the big event. Contact Karel Bernady at bernardk@verizon.net or 610-827-0113 or Steve Henning at rhodyman@earthlink.net or 610-987-6184 to take part.



Desmond Hotel grounds.