

# GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODOGRAVURE

Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society ::::::::::: Spring 2017

## Checking in with Howard Kline

With 50 years, 12 acres were transformed

People become rhododendron people in all sorts of ways, but inside a department store?

Howard Kline says that “way, way back” he was once in Hess Bros. department store in Allentown. In those days, Hess’s was the real thing, and it had a renowned annual indoor flower show. And at one of those, rhododendrons and azaleas were prominent. Howard was impressed, and the genus captivated (captured?) another long-term devotee.

For more than 50 years Howard lived in Penn Township, Berks County, on an impressive 12-acre plot, part of which ran up the side of a modest mountain. When the Klines arrived, there were the previous owners’ small vegetable plot, lawn around the house, native oaks and ash, evergreen trees on the hillside, but no rhododendrons or azaleas. Boy did that change!

Howard’s early childhood was on a small farm in Berks County, so he knew something about growing plants. He started clearing, and planting. Many plants came from ARS chapter plant sales, as well as from the small nursery operated by Clarence and Evelyn Rahn. “They really got me started with deciduous azaleas,” Howard says.

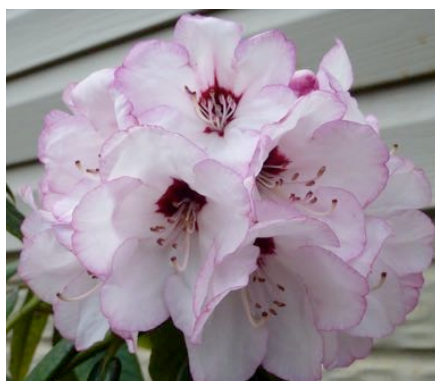
He became active in the Valley Forge Chapter (then only five years old) in 1972, which was about the time he started growing rhododendrons from seed, ordering from the national seed exchange.

That of course means growing plants from other people’s crosses. It was not long before Howard embarked on making his own. The Rahns, Bob Huber, Caroline Gable and Tom Ahern were among his sources for pollen, as well as the old pollen bank operated by Ron Rabideau.

Howard confesses that he wasn’t exactly scientific in making his crosses. More “like working with crayons,” he said

recently. Well, it was a pretty sophisticated box of crayons, for he chose plants with good qualities, including foliage.

There were some surprises in the course of Howard’s hybridizing, such as crosses of ‘Blue Peter’ with its prominent blotch that turned out



R. ‘Catherine Josephine’

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Photos courtesy Howard Kline

**Bloom time** at Howard Kline’s longtime garden.

## Annual banquet

Where the wildflowers are

So, you’re flipping through a lush coffee table book, or a slick gardening magazine, and there it is: a photo of a sweep of trillium in bloom, or a stunning close-up of lady’s slipper or a bumblebee emerging from a closed gentian. And you just want to be there, not with a two-dimensional, unscented, birdsong-free collection of ink dots in your lap, but *right there*, in nature, with those living flowers.

Janet Novak can lead you there, if only you attend the April 8 Greater Philadelphia Chapter Annual banquet. Janet’s topic will be “The Wild Place Next Door: Finding Wildflowers in the Mid-Atlantic.”

The banquet takes place at the Whitemarsh Valley Country club, 6 p.m., Saturday, April 8, and there’s still time to place a reservation. All relevant details are in the invitation being distributed with this issue of the RhodoGravure. You may also call Linda Hartnett at 215-287-0731.

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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](http://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](http://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](http://www.GPChapterARS.org); click on “Join us.”

## The busy month of May

Do you know where you’ll be May 10 through 14?

The correct answer includes: Morris Arboretum and Jenkins Arboretum.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter’s plant sale takes place Friday and Saturday, May 12-13, at Morris, in the Bloomfield Farm section, with setup midweek beforehand. On Sunday, May 14 (Mothers Day), the joint flower show of the Valley Forge and Greater Philadelphia Chapters will be mounted at Jenkins.

Morris Arboretum’s plant sale is one of the premiere such events in the Philadelphia region, and for many years the Greater Philadelphia Chapter’s rhododendron and azalea sale has been an integral part of it – great synergy of Morris’ site and drawing power coupled with ARS expertise. One of the best aspects is that ARS members get to shop on Morris’ members-only

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**Howard Kline on a visit to Welkenweir in Chester County.**

## Howard Kline

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basically pure white. “I got some nice plants but nothing like I expected from using *R. niveum* as a pollen parent. In good forms, dusty purple, sometimes with a darker center.”

Howard, who is 90 years old, has named and registered only one of his creations, ‘Catherine Josephine’, an elepidote named for his wife, who died in 1993. Its parentage is Gable’s 41-64 X *R. glischrum*. (The pollen parent is an Asian species that will grow in England and the Pacific Northwest, but not in our parts.) There are some beauties among his deciduous hybrids, but since he sold his home, it’s unlikely he’ll be able to register any of them.

Speaking of that home, it was by no means a rhododendrons-only affair. The RhodoGravure’s editor was bowled over by the collection of choice woodies of all sorts. A wonderfully fragrant ‘Beauty of Moscow’ lilac and a billowing pillow of the Japanese maple ‘Garnet’ are near the house. What else? Many other outstanding Japanese maples, a weeping form of Alaska cedar (*Cupressus*



**Unnamed deciduous azalea hybrid by Howard Kline**

*nootkatensis*), *Enkianthus*

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# Mix and plant

Recipes for the root zone

Hank Schanen was noted for saying that the three most important considerations for growing rhododendrons were drainage, drainage and drainage. That, ipso facto, means soil or growing medium with the proper structure (as well as being on the somewhat acid side of the pH scale).

Here are two recipes for planting rhododendrons. The first is Werner Brack's potting mix, to be used for seedlings, cuttings and up-potting plants that haven't yet found a home in the garden. The second is Michael Martin Mills' approach for amending or supplementing soil in the garden.

## Brack Potting Mix

(1 part = a 5-gallon bucketful)

- 1 part peat moss
- 1 part perlite
- 2 parts pine bark mulch or mini-nuggets
- 1 pint dolomitic limestone
- 1 pint gypsum
- 2 pints superphosphate

Mix ingredients thoroughly.

Note that this is a soil-less potting mix, presumably free of weed seed and spores. None of the ingredients is particularly heavy (who wants to be wrestling with unnecessarily heavy potted plants?), and drainage will be superb.

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While Brack's mix can be used to amend soil when planting, it's not really affordable for a large planting area. Ironically, any potting mix, if used exclusively for a small bed, could lead to drainage problems due to the imbalance with surrounding soil and be susceptible to severely drying out when rain is scarce.

Michael Mills has been tinkering with components for improving soil in a rhododendron bed for a number of years. He offers this approach for preparing a manageable-size planting area (with the caveat that it is based on his experience with the conditions in his garden).

## Mills Bedding Mix

(1 part = a wheelbarrow load)

- 1 part decent, loamy topsoil
- 1 part compost (need not be totally broken down, but on its way)
- 1.5 to 2 parts pine bark mulch
- 0.5 part clean sand
- 0.5 part pea gravel
- modest amounts of superphosphate and iron sulfate

Mix all together and spread in the planting area so that it is at least 4 inches higher than the surrounding soil, because it will compact significantly. Water in and allow to dry before planting.

Why these components? The goal is to give the plants something approaching the conditions in the wild. As Caroline Gable once told Michael, rhododendrons need to be in dirt, not mixes designed to make a commercial nursery's life easier. Compost and pine bark, both immediately and over time, enhance the acidity, friability and porosity. Pea gravel and sand

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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 8, Saturday, 6 p.m.** Greater Philadelphia Chapter Annual Banquet, Whitmarsh Valley Country Club. Speaker: Janet Novak, "Wildflowers of Our Region." See article on Page 1 and accompanying reservation form.

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

**April 27-30** ARS Annual Convention, Eureka, California. For details and registration form go to <http://eurekarhody.org/convention.php>

**May 12-13** Greater Philadelphia Chapter plant sale, Morris Arboretum. See notice on Page 2.

**May 14, Sunday** Joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge Flower Show (Truss Show), Jenkins Arboretum. See notice on Page 2.

**June 11, Sunday** Greater Philadelphia Picnic/ Annual Meeting.

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

**August 8, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.** Board of Directors meeting. Home of Kim Kopple.

**August 20, Sunday** District 8 Cutting Exchange and Auction.

**May 21-26, 2018** ARS Annual Convention, Bremen, Germany, with pre- and post-convention tours.

**May 16-19, 2019** ARS Annual Convention, Desmond Hotel, Malvern, Pa.

## Howard Kline

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*perulatis*, dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), and both *Stewartia pseudocamellia* and *S. koreana* (is there any difference? Howard wonders). His cutleaf English oak (*Quercus robur asplenifolia*) was only 8 or 10 inches when he acquired it at Sears, which sold it for bonsai purposes, but Howard opted for the terrestrial approach and it's now 18 inches in diameter, 30 feet tall – and another example of a department store in Howard Kline's gardening odyssey.

Howard's favorite is a 15-foot *Fagus sylvatica* 'Aurea Pendula', or golden weeping European beech.

Those who know Howard Kline as the generous, genteel gardener par excellence may be surprised to know that he went to Temple University, became a CPA and when he started commuting from Reading the trains still had a pot-bellied stove in the passenger cars.

And he has this bit of advice for would-be hybridizers: Start early, it takes time. Even at 90, though, he peruses the seed exchange catalogue and admits to being tempted.

More photos on Page 5

# Mix and plant

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improve drainage for the long term, since they do not decompose. In winter, the freeze-thaw cycle creates tiny air pockets around the pieces of gravel. Note that it must be pea gravel, also known as white-and-tan gravel; crushed-stone gravels and the like are likely to leach lime and other undesirable constituents. Superphosphate promotes strong root systems (and bud set), and iron sulfate helps with the acidity.

About the topsoil component: If there is an area in your garden where acid-loving plants are doing well and you can spare some, get the topsoil there. If having a load delivered from a landscaper, check it out in person before purchasing; there is a tendency for such topsoils to be too clayey. A tip if you do have a load of topsoil delivered: sprinkle the pile with a pre-emergent (corn gluten for the chemical-wary) and cover the pile with a tarp to keep it dry; otherwise, you will have a pile of topsoil sprouting lots of weeds and, depending on its makeup, it may get rock hard when it dries after rain.

Note that this mix is *not* likely to be free of weed seeds (unless you go through an elaborate heat-sterilization process that, given the volume, is truly impractical).

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The RhodoGravure invites other ARS members to submit their mixes for potting and soil amendment. Contact the editor at [mmm19119@gmail.com](mailto:mmm19119@gmail.com).

# Plant sale and truss show

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day, Friday, May 12, starting at 10 a.m. Not only will the selection be best, but ARS members get the 10 percent discount on all purchases, from daylilies and tomatoes to elepidotes and kalmias.

No such endeavor happens without the involvement of chapter members, and Linda Hartnett will coordinate the schedule of volunteers for setup and sales. (Irresistibly, volunteers get an additional discount!) Contact Linda at 215-287-0731 or [linda-hartnett@gmail.com](mailto:linda-hartnett@gmail.com).

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For almost a decade, the two chapters have had a joint truss show, as ARS members dub what is basically a cut-flower competition. This year is Valley Forge's turn in the driver's seat, and the event takes place at Jenkins Arboretum. Debby Schmidt is chair. Entries will be accepted from 7:30 to 10:15 a.m. Rules and regs will be posted on the Valley Forge website closer to show time ([valleyforgears.org](http://valleyforgears.org)).

One of the wonderful aspects of the show at Jenkins is the visibility due to the high Mothers Day attendance.

**Next issue:** Photos from the Philadelphia Flower Show and an eyewitness report on the effects of forest fire on deciduous azalea sites in the Smokey Mountains.

# More photos from the Kline garden

A bonus for digital recipients of the RhodoGravure



**Unnamed Kline hybrids** (from top left): *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum* X 'Wareham'; 'Ice Cube' X 'Everestianum'; two deciduous azaleas.



*Fothergilla monticola* (Alabama fothergilla)



*Berberis gilgiana* (wildfire barberry)