

GREATER PHILADELPHIA

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY :::::::::: WINTER 2021

Our first Zoom presentation

Tactics for dealing with deer

The January meeting of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter will be an online affair, with Steve Wright of Jenkins Arboretum appearing via the computer application Zoom. Members will receive an email with the “invitation” to the meeting, which includes a link to click as well as a meeting ID.

Anyone who has a computer with an internet connection can “attend” the meeting at no charge. Members who are new to Zoom are welcome to contact any board member via telephone to get tips. Those without internet may call in and listen; the two best call-in numbers are 301-715-8592 and 646-558-8656.

The meeting will begin at 2 p.m. Sunday, January 10. “Zooming in” at little before 2 p.m. is recommended but not essential.

While businesses, churches and extended families have been using Zoom for months during the current pandemic, this will be the first time for a chapter program meeting using the format. (Board meetings have been via Zoom for several months.) While there is no substitute for a physical gathering (coffee! cookies! friends!), there are some advantages to using Zoom. If there’s a half-inch of ice on the roads, there’s no driving. The speaker can be from the Pacific Northwest and there’s no expenses of flying her or him in to talk for 45 minutes (see next article).

The topic for the January 10 meeting is “Gardening in Deer Country.” Steve Wright is director of horticulture and curator of plant collections at Jenkins, and here is his preview of the presentation: “Losing your plants to the deer? You are not alone; it is estimated that whitetail deer cause over one billion dollars in suburban landscape damage each year. In this virtual presentation, Steve will discuss some issues affecting deer populations and offer some landscaping tricks and plant species that you could use to create, or maintain, a beautiful home garden that deer won’t eat. Tune in with your questions and a notepad and leave with some inspiration for your garden.”

Two “handouts” will be emailed to members shortly before the Zoom meeting: a deer resistant native plant list and a sheet of do-it-yourself deer repellent recipes.

Pandemic isn’t over – activities still iffy

As the fact of a January Zoom meeting attests, the chapter continues to work around the limitations brought on by Covid-19. Since March, the general practice has been to schedule events four to six months in advance, hoping conditions would improve. Only once – the September Plants-for-Members sale outdoors at Morris Arboretum – has a general membership meeting been carried out.

After the January 10 Zoom presentation by Steve Wright, the chapter is making arrangements for Steve Hootman of the Rhododendron Species Foundation Botanical Garden in Washington state to be presenter, live via Zoom in February, in lieu of the traditional joint meeting with the Valley Forge Chapter at the Uwchlan Meeting House. (Emails will circulate when all is pinned down.)

There will be no spring Philadelphia Flower Show (see article later in this issue), but if the Valley Forge Chapter's regular March meeting can be pulled off, consider attending but adhering to any advance reservation requirements.

The Greater Philadelphia annual banquet has been booked at Sunnybrook Golf Club on April 17. It is a tentative booking, of course.

A plant sale and the truss show in May are up in the air as yet.

What, that's not a flower?

By Bruce Palmer

Eureka Chapter ARS

Did you have a poinsettia for the recent holidays, perhaps still lingering in the family room (and getting oh-so desiccated)? Regardless of your answer, let us consider the word "bract."

The word derives from the Latin: *bractae*, a thin iron sheet. Bracts are modified leaves, though they often do not appear to be. Goethe, the famous author of the epic play *Faust: A Tragedy*, observed that "everything is leaf, and through this simplicity the greatest diversity becomes possible."

Bracts regularly serve as protective structures in flowering plants. Typically they drop off as the leaves or flowers develop, but not always. In grasses they persist and are the obvious features around nearly invisible flowering parts and around the seeds of grains before they are winnowed. The papery structures around tomatillos are bracts.

A number of flowering plants use brightly colored bracts as attractants for pollinators and landing platforms for pollinating birds. The poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) is a good example. The striking red structures are modified leaves, bracts, that serve to attract hummingbirds. The actual flowers are tiny yellowish structures, separate female and male, at the center of the display. If you are hoping to keep this season's poinsettia around to have it rebloom next year, forget it. Poinsettias are native to tropical Mexico and require a specific day length to bloom. Farther north, this can be duplicated only in a controlled greenhouse.

Joel Roberts Poinsett (1779-1851) was sent to Latin America by President James Madison to observe the progress of the uprisings that ultimately gave the countries their independence from Spain and was there during the War of 1812. Later he was the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, where he observed *E. pulcherrima* and had specimens sent to his South Carolina greenhouses. Those vibrant bracts apparently became an instant hit, and his name became enshrined as the plant's common name.

The loose pieces we remove to display our rhododendrons at the annual flower shows are also bracts. They are not trash but are there to protect the leaves or inflorescences (trusses) from the time the buds first develop until it comes time to flower or put on new growth. All rhododendrons use bracts to protect their leaves and flower clusters during development.

Rhododendron inflorescences have their protective bracts arranged in a whorl-like spiral interspersed among the individual flowers. As the flowers emerge, the bracts loosen and often drop off. With the exception of our fragrant rhodies, most rhododendrons do not have a calyx around the flower petals. With bracts a calyx is not needed for protection of the other flower parts. If they have a calyx, it is usually reduced to a small swelling at the base of the flower. Occasionally a sport appears where the calyx is well-developed and colorful. That can be desirable to horticulturists, who often call that configuration “hose in hose.”



Buds of *R. liliiflorum* emerging from protective bracts

As you enjoy holiday poinsettias, perhaps the colorful bracts will have a new meaning. They will certainly have importance to the hummingbirds who went south for their winter sojourn in Mexico, where the plant is native and can get 15 feet tall.

(Reprinted with permission from the newsletter of the Eureka Chapter, American Rhododendron Society.)

The lesser celandine chronicles

If your garden is cursed with that deceptively attractive low-growing weed known as lesser celandine (*Ficaria verna*, formerly *Ranunculus ficaria*), it’s worth noting that the despicable being is already emerging. And particularly worth noting, if you are willing to use herbicide: now is a good time to go on the attack.

By spring, it will be lush little mounds, if not vast swaths, of bright green foliage with bright yellow flowers. Once it is in bloom, it is getting too late for herbicides to work – the foliage will burn off but the little bulbs will survive. But earlier, well before flowering, it is susceptible and in many cases few if any desirable nearby plants are above ground to be unintentionally hit and killed. (The exception of course is lesser celandine in the lawn, in which case a broadleaf-only herbicide, such as Weed-B-Gon, should be used instead of the nonselective RoundUp.)

The first flushes of lesser celandine are from bulbs near the surface; deeper ones will sprout later, so this is not a one-time endeavor if you wish to substantially set back your infestation. Apply the herbicide on a dry, warmish day (40s or high), sunniness preferred, with no rain forecast for 24 hours.

One of the common names for the plant is pilewort. If you don’t know what “piles” means in a human physiological context, look it up. Just as repulsive as the plant.

Calendar

**All listings should be considered tentative pending coronavirus developments.
Members will be advised by email of changes and cancelations.**

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.

January 10, 2:00 p.m. Chapter meeting, via Zoom. Presenter: Steve Wright, Director of Horticulture at Jenkins Arboretum, on gardening with deer. (See article on Page 1.)

February 9, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting via Zoom.

February 21, Sunday Joint Valley Forge-Greater Philadelphia meeting. Details for Zoom meeting in progress. Presenter: Steve Hootman, Rhododendron Species Foundation Botanical Garden.

April 10, Saturday Annual banquet. Presenter: Nancy Bell of Mount Cuba Center.

May Plant Sale and Cut-Flower Competition plans to be announced.

June 3-6 ARS national conference, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada, hosted by the Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society. Current plans are for both an in-person convention and a digital streaming version for those unable or unwilling to travel due to the pandemic. For more details: <https://ars2021.org>. "Registration for the virtual convention will open January 15! Registration for the on-site convention will open on February 15, event dependent on Public Health restrictions."

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American Rhododendron Society
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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 typically 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. Several events are held in conjunction with the Valley Forge Chapter of the ARS. 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.”

Chapter Minutes

Board of Directors Meeting,
Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society
December 8, 2020

In attendance by video conference: Craig Conover, Karel Bernady, Stuart Brooks, Bill Halberstadt, Linda Hartnett, Michael Martin Mills, Kim Kopple, Myo Myint, Ron Rabideau, Maris Ogg.

Publication of minutes: Michael Mills proposed that the Board approve the distribution of Board minutes to the membership via the quarterly newsletter. The board discussed this proposal and decided that such publication should exclude details of chapter assets but note that members may contact the treasurer for more specific information. This resolution was passed unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report: The Chapter account balance is very close to the balance 12 months ago, and includes \$2,000 received from the Martin Foundation, a typically annual gift from the foundation created by Alfred S. Martin, a chapter member who was national ARS president in the early 1970s. The chapter’s bank account also serves as depository for the Northeast Regional Conference fund. Currently we have 71 member households, including 15 associate members. [Editor’s note: Details of the accounts are not published online. Members in good standing are welcome to contact the treasurer to obtain such information.]

Flower Show Status: Linda Hartnett reported that the 2021 PHS Flower Show will be an outdoor event at FDR Park in South Philadelphia, in the first half of June lasting for 10 days. FDR Park is on Broad Street near the sports complex north of the Navy Yard. The theme is “Habitat: Nature’s Masterpiece.” This gives us broad leeway to craft an exhibit. We have been invited to participate and have been told that no docents will be necessary. We will not force any plants, but will work on finding late-blooming rhododendrons and will use lots of deciduous azaleas. We will also need perennials that are in bloom. We do not yet have deadlines and schedules. Linda will call for volunteers and will form a committee. We will not have a tent; other details, like the location and size of our space, are not known.

Plant sales: Karel Bernady said that we have no information about possible plant sales for 2021. He does believe that we will be able to participate with Tyler again this year. We do not know if its in-person spring sale will occur this year.

Meeting schedule: Our January 10 meeting could be held by Zoom. Our speaker is Steve Wright, but we need to finalize this. Steve was planning to talk about deer. There was discussion of canceling the joint meeting in February. The board agreed that our chapter members should attend the Valley Forge meeting in March if that occurs. We are planning to have our banquet in April at Sunnybrook Golf Club if possible. Sunnybrook is holding the date, April 17. Nancy Bell of the Mount Cuba Center is scheduled to speak.

Ron attended a Hardy Plant Society Zoom meeting with Tom Smarr as the speaker. Tom spoke live and Ron said it was an effective meeting. We could think about doing something similar, perhaps in conjunction with Valley Forge. Ron reported that National ARS has filmed a meeting with Steve Hootman, which we could broadcast if we think members would like to attend. Ron will discuss this with Jerry O'Dell.

Truss Show: If we are planning to hold a truss show this year, we need to discuss with Valley Forge which Chapter will be hosting the show. Jenkins is the likely location if our chapter is host-organizer. The show is typically held on Mother's Day weekend.

There was no update to the work of the Joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge Committee. The committee needs to schedule another meeting.

The next board of directors meeting is Feb. 9, 7:30 p.m., presumably by Zoom.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

– *Maris Ogg; Michael Martin Mills, ed.*