

# RHODOGRAVURE

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

## *A regular old chapter meeting*

Oct. 17 presentation is 'Native Plants for Difficult Sites'

As the pandemic seems to wane (emphasis on “seems”), the chapter will conduct its first old-fashioned, ordinary, indoor meeting with a speaker since early 2020.

On Sunday afternoon, Oct. 17, Nancy Bell, a frequent speaker and program leader at the Mt. Cuba Center in Delaware, will present “Native Plants for Difficult Sites.” For generations, gardening Americans have had a penchant for trying to grow classic plants – roses, delphiniums, rhododendrons – in climes and sites that just won’t work. And they keep trying. But what was growing there before the fussbudget plants were blithely added to the situation? Native species, of course.

In addition to her Mt. Cuba gigs, Ms. Bell is the education and garden coach coordinator at Gateway Garden Center in Hockessin, Del. She has certificates of merit in ornamental horticulture and landscape design from Longwood Gardens.

Simply because the pandemic is no longer at its worst in Philadelphia doesn’t mean we can yet go back to meetings just as they were. In recent years, the October meeting has been a brunch affair, but that will not be possible this year. Morris Arboretum, which is part of the University of Pennsylvania, must follow Penn’s rules, which stipulate no food or drink of any kind at the meeting. (If you need coffee to avoid nodding off, finish it in the car in the parking lot.)

Unsurprisingly, masks will be required of all people, regardless of vaccination status, and the square footage of the meeting room translates into a limit of 20 people. Don’t be late!

Sunday, Oct. 17, 1:30 p.m., Widener Visitor Center, first building at the top of the winding driveway, Morris Arboretum, 100 E. Northwestern Avenue, Philadelphia 19118. At the entry kiosk, say you’re there for the Rhododendron Society meeting and you’ll be admitted at no charge.

## *Just days away: The free ARS Fall Conference*

Improved registration link for the online event

On Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 23-24, “Fall Into Gardening” will be presented online by three Vancouver Island organizations, the Mount Arrowsmith and Nanaimo ARS Chapters and the Vancouver Island Master Gardeners Association. There is no charge for anyone, and non-ARS gardeners are welcome to register.

Both days will have four presentations each day, starting at noon Eastern Daylight Time. Among the presenters are California hybridizer Don Wallace on fragrant rhododendrons; David Millais of the United Kingdom on conserving heritage rhododendrons; and Germany's Hartwig Schepker on Sichuan, China.

Some ARS members have hit glitches with the previously published link for registration, which is required. Please use (and share) this link: <http://rhodyman.net/Fall2021.html>

## *Thoughts on producing a deeper chrome yellow in rhododendron hybrids*

By Perc Moser, channeling Joseph F. Minahan

Normally, as Joe Minahan confirmed in an extended June conversation at the Minahan home, a cross of a yellow rhododendron with another yellow produces a white flower rather than the desired yellow. So, after Joe starting hybridizing in the 1980s and successfully achieving his initial goal of getting a very decent red with 'John Paul II', he turned his focus to produce a better yellow with excellent foliage and a deeper color.

By chance, Joe's first efforts were crosses with 'Mary Belle', whose breeding lineage contains important factors that would prove to enhance yellow in its offspring: *R. haematodes*, which comes from *R. decorum* X *R. haematodes*, specifically a seedling dubbed 'Dechaem'. Over many years, Joe observed that the species in Gable's 'Mary Belle' produced much better yellow in their throats. Though the offspring might be tri-colored (pink, apricot, yellow), the yellows in their throats were much deeper when the cross involved 'Mary Belle'. For example, a 'Mary Belle' cross with 'Mars' (deep red) produced beautiful multicolored flowers but with a yellow throat more intense than in either of the parents. (Parentage of the relevant hybrids is detailed at the end of this report.)

Joe's continuous observations over time led him to the conclusion that to produce deeper, richer yellows – as good as if not better than 'Bob Furman's Big Yellow' and 'House of Gold', and the soon-to-be registered – 'Perc Moser' and 'Ark of the Covenant' – one should use hybrid parents that are the result of the *R. haematodes*, *R. griersonianum* and other species that enhance the yellow color.

In recent years, Joe took note of the work of Delbert Brim in the mountains of North Carolina, where Brim used the pollen of 'Helen Vieira' to fertilize for color ("Hybridizing Rhododendrons in the Shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains, North Carolina," Journal American Rhododendron Society, Spring 2010). Minahan observed that 'Helen Vieira', as far as a color-enhancer for its progeny, seems to work only as a male plant, i.e., the pollen source. For example, Brim put 'Helen Vieira' pollen on a nondescript *R. fortunei* and achieved a beautiful, mottled – like 'Helen Vieira' – yellow cross comparable to 'House of Gold' and 'Bob Furman's Big Yellow'. Friend and hybridizer Norm Beaudry is familiar with Brim's work and has pictures of the yellow flowers, which can be found on the web as well as the ARS journal. Brim would probably say that

the cross, while serendipitous, produced an entirely unexpected but noteworthy blossom. However it happened, it was achieved by using ‘Helen Vieira’ as the pollen source.

What is of interest is that the parentage of ‘Helen Vieira’ is ‘Grierosplendour’ and *R. fortunei*. In turn, ‘Grierosplendour’ is *R. griersonianum* X ‘Purple Splendour’. Joe deduces, that the *R. griersonianum* in ‘Grierosplendour’, that was obtained via ‘Helen Vieira’, has contributed to the production of this yellow. (*R. griersonianum* also makes nice reds, e.g., ‘Vulcan’ and ‘Vulcan’s Flame’).

Confirming his own early work with ‘Mary Belle’ and more recent work with ‘Helen Vieira’, Joe and his colleagues have now begun to use not only *R. haematodes*, but *R. griersonianum* in hybridizing for yellow. Perc Moser, a friend and colleague put ‘Grierosplendour’ on ‘Bob Furman’s Big Yellow’ in order to enhance its offspring – not only in flower color but in structure and leaves. Joe made one cross this year – ‘Bob Furman’s Big Yellow’ on a Wister plant - ‘Scintillation’ X *R. haematodes* – ‘Irresistible’. The pods on both plants were swelling in late summer. If all goes well, the seeds will be harvested and sown this winter, and in a few years the resulting plants should confirm Joe’s theory.

Soon the serious hybridizers will be off to conquer a deep, deep orange plant. Needless to say, ‘Mary Belle’ will likely be with us again, along with other plants that have *R. haematodes*, *R. griersonianum*, or *R. dichroanthum* in their parentage.

## Hybrids and their parentage

‘Mary Belle’ = ‘Atrier Group’ X ‘Dechaem Group’ (Gable)  
Atrier Group = ‘Atrosanguineum’ X *R. griersonianum*  
Dechaem Group = *R. decorum* X *R. haematodes*  
‘Atrosanguineum’ = *R. catawbiense* hybrid

Helen Vieira = ‘Grierosplendour Group’ x *R. fortunei*  
Grierosplendour Group = *R. griersonianum* x ‘Purple Splendour’

‘Bob Furman’s Big Yellow’ = [‘Golden Star’ x (Jalisco Group x *R. degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum*)] X {[Dido Group x (‘Chlorops’ x *R. lacteum*)] x ‘Golden Star’}  
Golden Star = *R. fortunei* X *R. wardii*  
Jalisco Group = Lady Bessborough Group X Dido Group  
Dido Group = *R. dichroanthum* X *R. decorum*

‘House of Gold’ = (‘Mary Belle’ x ‘Mars’) X ‘Phipps Yellow’  
‘Mars’ = *R. griffithianum* hybrid  
‘Phipps Yellow’ (Phipps 32) = ‘Golden Star’ X unknown yellow seedling

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*Editor’s note: On June 17, 2021, Joe Minahan shared his ideas on how to produce a deeper chrome yellow color in rhododendron hybrids with fellow hybridizer Perc Moser, who took detailed notes, resulting in this article. Joe died a month later, July 18.*

## *Many plants get new homes*

August and September included two plant-dispersal events, the District 8 Cutting Exchange and Auction at Jenkins Arboretum and the Greater Philadelphia Chapter's Plant for Members sale at Morris Arboretum.

The August auction depends entirely on donations of plants from members and chapters. As so many members have come to appreciate, John Bartlett of Gettysburg Gardens was a prime donor. Total receipts were \$864, half of which is donated to the ARS Endowment Fund, half to the society's Research Foundation.

Plants available at the Plants for Members event were particularly robust, a function of good growing weather at propagation central (Steve Kristoph's nursery in central New Jersey) and also a silver-lining result of the pandemic, since they had an extra year before landing on the sales tables. Both year-old rooted cuttings and older propagations were available, including some never-before-offered varieties: several hybrids by Fred Winter (all parentage unknown) and a newly registered azalea, Robert Stewart's 'Michael Martin Mills'. Gross receipts were \$1,911.

## *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.

**October 17, Sunday, 1:30 p.m.** Chapter meeting. Morris Arboretum Widener Visitor Center. Presenter: Nancy Bell. See article on Page 1.

**October 23 & 24, Saturday & Sunday, noon-4 p.m. (EDT)** ARS Virtual Fall Conference. Presented by three British Columbia chapters and clubs. Speakers include Don Hyatt, Hartwig Schepker of Germany, and David Millais of Britain. **FREE**, registration required via <http://rhodyman.net/Fall2021.html> More information: <http://rhodyman.net/Fall2021.pdf>.

**January 9, 2022, Sunday, 1:30 p.m.** Chapter Meeting. Details pending.

**May 4-8** ARS Convention, Portland, Ore.

# Greater Philadelphia Chapter 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](http://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](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.”