

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE GREATER PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY :::::::::: SPRING 2022

It's going to be 'wild' at the banquet

Saturday, April 5 – make reservations now

After two years upended by the pandemic, the rhododendron world is edging back into a more familiar pattern. It begins with the Greater Philadelphia Chapter's annual banquet on Saturday, April 9.

Rare is the rhododendron devotee who doesn't gravitate to exceptional forms of flowers (and foliage, of course). So the presentation at the banquet will be particularly enticing.

With the title "The Wild, the Weird, and the Wonderful," Steve Wright of Jenkins Arboretum [right] will lead us through his marvelous quest for distinctive, naturally occurring variations among native eastern species.

As most members know, Steve is the Director of Horticulture and Curator of Plant Collections at Jenkins, and his portfolio was expanded two years ago when Jenkins initiated its Rhododendron Germplasm Repository. In less scientific lingo, this is an effort to collect and grow lots of American plants with really nifty – even wacky – flowers. And therefore, Steve has been on the prowl. He drops in on individual collectors of cool, checks out the specialty nurseries, and treks through the Appalachians to acquire propagules of remarkable plants. His presentation will feature both nifty discoveries he's made and his wish list of variants he wants to add to the collection. It's all very wild, in more than one meaning of the word.

The banquet will again take place at Sunnybrook Golf Club in Plymouth Meeting, Pa. We gather at 6 p.m. for hors d'oeuvres, drinks and conviviality, with dinner at 7, followed by



***R. atlanticum* 'Plyler's Paintbrush' has been added to the Jenkins collection.**

Calendar of chapter events

Please see Page 7

the presentation. Note that, despite recent inflation, the prices are the same as in 2013 – nine years ago.

The evening will conclude with our great plant-exchange tradition dubbed Rhododendron Roulette. Attendees are asked to bring a rhododendron or companion plant (one for each reservation). Using the chapter's special sauce, a random distribution takes place – there's no telling what wonderful plant you'll get to take home. Not only that, everyone will receive a table favor of a rooted cutting from the chapter's propagation program.

A reservation form is included with this issue of the RhodoGravure, but do not dither. The deadline is April 5; please email or call Linda Hartnett by that afternoon (lindahartnett@gmail.com; 215-287-0731). You may pay at the door, cash or check.



***R. canescens* 'Creel's Confetti'. If you have this, Steve Wright wants a cutting.**

Back after a hiatus: Truss show at Jenkins

Mothers Day event will be a fully integrated two-chapter affair

Hard to believe, but it has been four years since the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters have had a classic cut-flower competition, which just about everyone simply calls the “truss show,” a phrase that can raise eyebrows among the pre-indoctrinated.

In 2019, in keeping with long-established practice, the chapter-level show was on hiatus as the District 8 chapters hosted the national convention. The national ARS stipulates that the spring convention must have its own truss show, and that year a “people's choice” format was adopted. The pandemic forced cancelation of the show the next two years.

This year, the competition will be at Jenkins Arboretum, on Sunday, May 8, entries accepted 7:30-9:30 a.m.

For many years, the two chapters used an alternating-host system. In even-numbered years, Greater Philadelphia hosted the show at Morris Arboretum, using the chapter's rules, regs and trophies. In odd-numbered years, the Valley Forge Chapter was host at Jenkins, with somewhat different fine print and its own set of trophies. In the mid-teens, the two chapters' catalogues of previous entries was merged.

This year there will be a fully integrated joint show. Perc Moser of Valley Forge and Michael Martin Mills of Greater Philadelphia are co-chairs.

As a result, regular entrants from each chapter will notice a few changes. The display vases and entry tags, for instance, will be from Valley Forge, and the blended classes and rules are closer to Greater Philadelphia's, but the sweepstakes point system largely comes from Valley Forge. Since Valley Forge was cagey a number of years back and ordered a scillion ribbons (buy in bulk!

save money!), all winners will take home ribbons imprinted “Valley Forge Chapter.” Trophies will be a mix from each chapter, with the older, no-more-room-for-engraving ones being retired.

A few key points for people entering trusses of rhododendrons and sprays of azaleas – which the co-chairs hope will include everyone in both chapters who has a garden with plants of our favorite genus:

- Entries will be accepted from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m., Sunday, May 8, Jenkins Arboretum. This is a bit earlier in the day than the schedule Valley Forge used, a bit later than the Greater Philadelphia habit.
- Please use Valley Forge entry tags only. It’s always more efficient for the show crew if entrants fill out the tags before arriving, and tags will be available at the Greater Philadelphia Banquet/Valley Forge April meeting on Saturday, April 9. Or contact Perc Moser (percmoser@gmail.com; 610-635-8290) or Michael Mills (mmm19119@gmail.com; 215-844-6253) to have tags mailed to you.
- Refer only to the 2022 brochure and catalogue when filling out tags, or you’ll get some things wrong. The brochure will also be available April 9, and it and the catalogue and brochure will be posted on both chapter websites around May 1.

One of the advantages of using Jenkins is that the Mothers Day throng of flower lovers provides an ample audience to see the colorful array of our flowers in their vases. (Mothers Day also results in a full parking lot at Jenkins, but those who bring their entries Sunday morning will beat the rush. Hint, hint.)

Chapter plant sale will be at Tyler Arboretum

Volunteers are needed

Mark your calendar for the first full weekend of May: the Greater Philadelphia Chapter’s rhododendron and azalea sale.

Like the 2021 sale, this year’s will be at Tyler Arboretum outside Media, Pa. The long practice of combining with the plant sale at Morris Arboretum ended when Morris decided to get out of the plant sale business entirely. Then covid arrived. Starting with a pre-order only fall sale in 2020, the chapter teamed up with Tyler, followed by last spring’s relatively regular outdoor sale. Both sides of the equation – chapter sale organizers and Tyler staff – consider the collaboration to have been quite salubrious, and now a Memorandum of Understanding is in place to govern procedures and finances.

The sale at Tyler is not unlike the arrangement at Morris. There will a big, comprehensive array of plants (perennials, annuals, and an impressive variety of woodies), with the rhododendrons and azaleas supplied by our chapter and with chapter members on site to assist buyers. All sales are completely integrated.

Dates and hours: Saturday and Sunday, May 7 and 8, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., rain or shine, no admission charge. The address is 515 Painter Road, Media, Pa. 19063, which is actually 3 or so miles from the Borough of Media, but GPS doesn’t care and will direct you. This Tyler website also has directions: <https://tylerarboretum.org/directions-hours-admission>. If you are a member of Tyler, you’ll receive information directly from Tyler about the members-only shopping period.

Many of the rhododendrons for sale will be plants the chapter has propagated and grown to size. That means a selection of choice cultivars that no commercial nursery in the area can

match. Of note will be a number of native American azalea species, including some large specimens of *R. calendulaceum*. More details will be emailed to members at the end of April.

It's true that Tyler is farther from many of our members than Morris. But included with the expedition will be the opportunity to stroll the abundant Wister collection of rhododendrons at bloom time. Many of them are vast plants in situ for more than a half-century. While there, check out the adjoining site of the coming ARS-Tyler test garden. No, it doesn't look like much now – excess trees have been removed and Tyler may have started the daunting weed- and brush-removal operation. But it's on schedule, with planting anticipated in 2024 and 2025.

An ARS plant sale would be a lesser affair without members to set up the sales area and assist customers. Workers are needed each day, Thursday, May 5, through Sunday, May 8. (If you're entering the truss show at Jenkins Arboretum on Sunday, best not to volunteer to work that day at Tyler.)

Please contact Linda Hartnett (lindahartnett@gmail.com; 215-287-0731) to volunteer.

Nominations sought for test garden

Cultivar selection committee will decide what's to be planted

Actualization of the new rhododendron test garden at Tyler Arboretum, first reported in the winter issue of the RhodoGravure, is proceeding at such a pace that the Founding Task Force is seeking nominations of plants to be included. Do you know of an excellent, relatively new cultivar from the mid-Atlantic region that ought to be more widely grown?

A Memorandum of Understanding between the parties was executed in January, tree removal has taken place in the designated plot, and a selection committee has been assembled. With a goal of propagating cultivars for the garden in the coming fall, the selection committee will be making decisions over the summer on what to include in the first planting of the test garden.

As reported in the last issue, the concept of the garden is to select and evaluate rhododendrons (principally *elepidotes*) hybridized and grown in the mid-Atlantic region, with a long-term goal of broadening the choices (commercial and otherwise) that gardeners have when choosing rhododendrons for their homes. Preventing extinction of superior new hybrids is another goal.

The selection committee consists of Ron Rabideau, Greater Philadelphia president and ARS Eastern vice president; Carol Segree, ARS Potomac Valley Chapter; Steve Wright, director



Site at Tyler Arboretum after tree removal

of horticulture, Jenkins Arboretum; Peter Zale, associate director, Longwood Gardens; the members of the Founding Task Force (Tom Ahern, Karel Bernady, Michael Martin Mills, Perc Moser); and a representative of Tyler Arboretum.

To make selections, the committee needs nominations. As Tom Ahern recently wrote, “Here is where you come in. We know that there are many hybrids out there that have been hybridized by ARS members over the years that have had little or no chance to be propagated and distributed to chapter members and the general public.

“We are seeking nominations from the hybridizers themselves, from anyone growing the plant or a clone, or even if you have a neighbor who is growing one. If the plant is worth propagating and you would like to nominate it, please download our application form and submit it. You can submit as many as you wish but we are limiting the number of plants in the garden by a single hybridizer to three.”

In addition to background data on the cultivar, the nominations need to be accompanied by photographs (truss and full plant out of bloom). Plants need to be from this region, specifically within 150 miles of Tyler in Media, Pa. As well, a nominated plant must have bloomed at least three seasons and by the end of this coming summer it must have at least six stems of current year’s growth (2 inches or longer) available for cuttings.

The nomination process is entirely digital, structured with the help of Steve Henning. Click on over to <http://arsstore.org/TylerTestGarden/Documents/HybridizerGardenFillableForm.pdf> for the form, which has instructions, including how to submit photos.

If you have questions about the garden or the nomination process, please correspond with the Founding Task Force via email at arstylergarden@gmail.com.

You may read more about the concept and plans for the garden (with photographs) at <http://arsstore.org/TylerTestGarden> and <http://arspvc.org/RA-News/V17.1/TestGarden-02.pdf>.

Sometimes, plant aficionados go bonkers

A lesson from Netherlanders of yore

At the end of winter, the Master of the Beds at RhodoGravure headquarters was granted leave to take an overseas jaunt to rejuvenate before the crush of spring activities in the rhododendron and perennial beds. While away, he was able to catch up on some reading, which included *Tulipomania*, a fascinating book by Mike Dash that chronicles the flabbergasting Dutch tulip craze of 1636-37, in which hundreds of Netherlanders amassed and lost (paper) fortunes by selling and buying tulip bulbs for absurd prices. It all went bust in the space of a few weeks. (The book had amazing timing; it was published in 1999, when the American dot-com bubble was raging, before it crashed in March 2000.)

For the entertainment of 21st-century gardeners, the RhodoGravure offers some excerpts and resultant musings.

Around 1720 in Istanbul, which had its own post-Dutch tulip infatuation, the French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire attended a grand party. He reported: “Beside every fourth flower is stood a candle, level with the bloom, and along the alleyways are hung cages fill with all kinds of birds. The trellises are decorated with an enormous quantity of flowers, placed in bottles and lit by an infinite number of glass lamps of different colors. The lamps are also hung on the

green branches of shrubs, which are specially transplanted for the fête from the neighboring woods and placed behind the trellises. The effect of all these varied colors, and of the lights that are reflected by countless mirrors, is magnificent.”

What an inspiration! If the Philadelphia Flower Show ever returns to an indoor event in March, this offers a grand template for an ARS display. A plenitude of candles, lights and mirrors hung in and about the forced-into-bloom rhododendrons, ooh-la-la. With cages of trilling birds added, it would be certain to make the Flower Show crowds swoon.

Discussing the early days of tulip introduction in Europe (tulips are native to the Tien Shan Mountains of what is now Kyrgyzstan), author Dash writes: “... there were no firm rules and certainly no central authority that could impose any sort of order on the way tulips were named. Anyone who created a new variety had the privilege of conferring a title upon it, and generally they chose either to give it an overblown name that hinted at the exceptional qualities they felt it possessed, or to name it after themselves. Quite frequently they managed to do both.” These words ring utterly true to anyone who has served as rhododendron registrar.

Another passage caught the eye of the Coordinator of Guest Services at RhodoGravure headquarters, who is quite taken with the thought of a twilight garden soiree with lighting that was employed at one tulip fanatic’s digs: “... guests – all strictly forbidden to wear clothes that clashed with the flowers – wandered through tulip beds illuminated by candles fixed to the backs of slow-moving tortoises.”

National convention is just weeks away

Oregon chapters to host event celebrating 75 years of the ARS

The grand convention to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the American Rhododendron Society in the city where it all began, Portland, Ore., takes place May 4-8, and the tours and activities well befit such an auspicious milestone. (Yes, we all know, it’s two years late, due to the pandemic. Also, the convention hotel is actually in Vancouver, Wash., a suburb of Portland.)

Accompanying this issue of the RhodoGravure is a one-page preview of the convention prepared by the host committee. The website for the convention has even more information: www.ars2022.org. Plus, there are moving pictures to whet your appetite for tender yellows and flabbergastingly big leaves: www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRW8rw44yEw.

This affair has one notable and atypical feature: there is no deadline for registration. As Steve McCormick, co-chair of the event, told the RhodoGravure, if folks “want to roll in on Wednesday morning and ‘join the fray’, we’ll take ‘em!”

If you’re not a last-last-last-minute person, check out the website, which has hotel information, pre- and post-convention add-ons, the cancelation policy, and covid information.

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.

April 5, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting, via Zoom

April 9, Saturday, 6 p.m. Annual Banquet, Steve Wright, presenter. Sunnybrook Golf Club. See article on Page 1. Reservation form accompanies the email edition of this issue.

May 4-8 ARS National Convention, Portland, Ore. See article above. More info: www.ars2022.org and www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRW8rw44yEw.

May 7 & 8, Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Chapter Plant Sale, in conjunction with Tyler Arboretum annual plant sale, Media, Pa. See article on Page 3.

May 8, Sunday, 7:30-9:30 a.m. for entries Joint Cut-Flower Competition (truss show) with Valley Forge Chapter. Jenkins Arboretum. See article on Page 2.

June 19, Sunday Chapter Annual Meeting and Picnic. Site to be finalized.

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, 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.”