

# RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY :::::::::: AUTUMN 2025



Planting day at Tyler Arboretum, with DVRS members and Tyler personnel in the background.

## *It's real ... and it's growing*

With 87 plants in the ground, Hybridizer Garden at Tyler is started

It took more than five years: this fall, the rhododendron hybridizer test garden at Tyler Arboretum became a real thing. Now what it needs are sun and rain, weeding and time, so that 35 cultivars from 21 relatively local hybridizers can be evaluated.

On October 1, 87 rhododendron plants went in the ground, largely in twos and threes of a given hybrid. What had been a weedy, overgrown space at Tyler is now a new garden, conveniently situated close to the arboretum's historic rhododendron collection. It is the critical milestone borne of the musings and what-if-ing of a handful of rhododendron enthusiasts in the southeastern quadrant of Pennsylvania.

Credit Jerry O'Dell with the germ of the idea. In his capacity working with the genus at Tyler, he had helped create an azalea garden, and he floated the concept of an elepidote version to hybridizer Perc Moser and propagator Karel Bernady. Ooh, good idea, said they. The conversation was expanded to include two more hybridizers, Joe Minahan of Camp Hill and Tom Ahern of Bethlehem. They were all frustrated with the fact that the commercial rhododendron world was way out of date, selling a limited number of cultivars, most of which had been around

*Two fine fall programs*

George Woodard, October 19  
Andrew Bunting, November 16

*See Page 3*

for decades. The three hybridizers were acutely aware that they were among a large number of hobbyist and professional breeders who had developed hundreds of hardy hybrids that greatly expanded the diversity of colors, foliage forms, shrub shapes and growth rates. How could the best of these alluring new hybrids become a part of the wider gardening world, instead of being minimally propagated and, sadly, often doomed to extinction?

The answer (a really condensed interpretation): Just the facts, ma'am. That is, prove how good certain new hybrids are, with documented information on growth performance, and make the information available to the wider rhododendron world and the commercial gardening system. How? Easy, plant a garden, collect data. Well not so easy, but clearly doable.

Speed version of the idea-to-reality sequence. With Joe Minahan in his last days, Perc and Tom recruited Michael Martin Mills, the North American registrar, to join the Founding Task Force. Tyler was formally approached and responded positively, leading to negotiations and a detailed Memorandum of Understanding. A nomination and selection process was created for deciding which of myriad cultivars to include. A sophisticated fundraising effort was carried out. Cuttings were taken and rooted, using the procedures developed by the Greater Philadelphia Chapter. Tyler began clearing the designated plot of brambles and worse. Rooted cuttings were grown to three-gallon-pot size. Shovels went into the ground.

Folks attending the October 19 Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society meeting at Tyler (see Page 3 for details) will be able to stroll over to the site and see the trial garden in its infancy. And perhaps meet Rowan Saroka, the Wister Rhododendron Gardener on the Tyler staff, who has been and will continue to be a key figure in the project – among other things she designed the layout of the garden.

The sign greeting Tyler visitors.



Perc Moser getting one of the 87 plants happily situated.

What's next? The real work. Trialing new cultivars is not for the instant-gratification set. Rhododendrons are long-term garden commitments – many who plant a one will move to new digs when the plant is reaching its prime. Therefore, multiple years of observations and data will be needed. Is Cultivar 3313 a shy bloomer until it's five or eight years old? Does Cultivar 632 hate too much sun? Does Cultivar 705 never outgrow the rambunctious new-growth phase of young plants? Uh-oh, it seems Cultivar 1019 is very prone to chlorosis. Why did Cultivars 1807 and 6617 die after only three years? And how does climate change affect everything?

One task is devising an evaluation and criteria system (probably a huge spread sheet for the 35 cultivars with various data cells). Then, several times every year, the data will need to be collected on site. At some point – no guessing how many years from now – observations will be turned into a report that indicates which of the 35 appear to be the good-doers of the 21st century. With an update appropriate several years later.

Fundraising must also continue. The Memorandum of Un-

Continued on Page 4

# Gonzo trusses and 40 years of favorites

October and November programs have notable speakers

There are gardeners who like to make a statement – maybe you’re one. For the shady spot, you opt for Hosta ‘Empress Wu’, the one that forms a mound 4 feet tall by 9 feet wide. For sun, ‘Mongolian Giant’ sunflowers are just the ticket at 14 feet tall, flowers more than a foot wide. And for dappled conditions, you should talk to George Woodard, whose



**Which is bigger: George Woodard’s head or that bravura truss?**

*Tyler Arboretum, 515 Painter Road, Media, Pa. 19063.*

:::::

The annual banquet of the chapter takes place Sunday, November 16, at a familiar haunt, the St. Davids Golf Club.

One of the region’s standout horticulturalists, Andrew Bunting, will be the speaker. Now vice president of horticulture at the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, he previously held positions at the Chicago Botanic Garden, Chanticleer and Scott Arboretum. Scott, of course, is John Wister turf, with a remarkable rhododendron collection. Andrew’s presentation is titled “Favorite Rhododendrons from 40 Years in Public Horticulture.”

The festive event begins with conviviality, hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar at 12:00 noon, Sunday, November 16. The buffet luncheon with program begins at 1:00 p.m.

A reservation form accompanies this issue of the RhodoGravure. The deadline is November 11.

Note that Rhododendron Roulette, the plant swap tradition begun by the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, will not be part of the afternoon. The consensus is that November is rather late for digging and planting rhodos or companion plants, so the exchange will be returned to its spring origins next year.

*St. Davids Golf Club, 845 Radnor Street Rd., Wayne, Pa. 19087.*

rhododendron hybridizing exploits have focused on giant individual flowers on extra-large trusses – “big as my head,” in his own words.

The Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society is almost giddy to present George Woodard at its October 19 meeting, Sunday, at Tyler Arboretum.

Less than a year ago, George moved to Lancaster after retiring from 40 years as superintendent of the Phipps estate in Old Westbury, N.Y. The property was renowned for its botanical collection, most notably the rhododendrons. Howard Phipps Sr. started a rhododendron hybridization program, which George continued for 32 years. In addition to those hefty trusses, he also focused on genetic diversity and saturated colors.

We gather as early as 1:30 p.m., with the program beginning at 2:00, Sunday, October 19, in the Edible Garden Building at Tyler, where the chapter has been having occasional meetings for a couple of years (ask at the admission building if you’re unfamiliar with the location of the building).



**Andrew Bunting**

Continued from Page 2

derstanding requires paying Tyler \$4,000 a year. There is money on deposit with the national ARS for this purpose, but it's not enough for the long-term needs of the garden, which will require weeding, watering, signage, mulching and other maintenance for the long haul.

Given what's taken place already, maybe the appropriate response is: Gosh, it took only five years?

Following are lists of the cultivars now growing in the test garden, as well as the people who have been involved in and supportive of the project. More photos on Page7.

<b>Cultivar</b>	<b>Hybridizer*</b>	<b>Cultivar</b>	<b>Hybridizer*</b>
Ahern 101**	Tom Ahern	'Kenny Mac'	Sandra McDonald
'Anita Gehnrich'	Philip Waldman	'Lavender Ice'	Hank Schannen
'April Rhapsody'	A. and S. Anderson	'Love Child'	Schannen
'Austin's Firecracker'	John Doppel	'Lumos'	Ahern
'Bisque'	Ahern	'Madeline Winter'	Moser
'Bob's Peach'	Bob Bondira	'Mike O'Hara'	Minahan
'Cause of Our Joy'	Joseph Minahan	'Rhein's Luna'	William L. Rhein
'Cosmic Candy'	Perc Moser	'Rhein's Picotee'	Rhein
'Cyclops'	Ron Rabideau	'Ruth's Showstopper'	Doppel
'Cynosure'	Benjamin Shapiro	'Scintillation x 'Apritan'	Donald Hyatt
'Diane's Delight'	Doppel	'Sidney V. Burns'	Richard Murcott
'Dream of Kings'	Kathleen Frederick	'Sugaree'	Moser
'Elmer's Gift'	Elmer Morris	'Sun Dust'	Andersons
'Garnet Thomas'	Ahern	'Tiered Yellow'	Minahan
'Gilbert Myers'	Helen Myers	'Winsome Winnie'	Dennis MacMullan
'Great Gatsby'	Werner Brack	'White Elegance'	Brack
'Hannah Grace'	Ahern	'Yellow Eyes'	A.R. Fitzburgh
'John C. White'	George Ring		

\* Includes growers of open-pollinated seed

\*\* *R. pseudochrysanthum* X (*degronianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* x *pachysanthum*)

### Founding Task Force

Tom Ahern

Karel Bernady

Michael Martin Mills

Joseph Minahan (deceased)

Perc Moser

### Funders

Stuart Brooks

Michael O'Hara

Debby Sauer

Carolyn R. Segree

Tom Lloyd

Karel Bernady

Tom Ahern

Royal Furer

Percival B. Moser, III

Julia E. Klees

Bill Mangels

Donald Hyatt

**Funders (continued)**

John Weygandt  
 Marshall "Bud" Gressman  
 Minahan Family  
 Michael Martin Mills

Jonathan Wood  
 Cathy Keim  
 Robert Smetana  
 Lorraine Rubin  
 Steve and Darlene Henning

Mike and Marie Zaia  
 Howard and Rita Bickerstaff  
 Donn and Louise Teubner

American Rhododendron Society Chapters: Delaware Valley, Greater Philadelphia, Lehigh Valley, Middle Atlantic, Valley Forge

**Selection Committee**

Tom Ahern  
 Karel Bernady  
 Mike Karkowski  
 Michael Martin Mills

Perc Moser  
 Ronald Rabideau  
 Carol Segree  
 Christian Stolz

Steven Wright  
 Peter Zale

**Planting Crew**

Perc Moser  
 Tom Ahern  
 Rowan Saroka

Mimi Favre  
 Ron Rabideau  
 Bob Smetana

Bruce Keyser  
 Bill Halberstadt  
 Tyler volunteers

## *Calendar*

**Important:** If you do not receive this newsletter electronically, you will not receive email reminders about a week before events. Please use this calendar to mark your own.

**A note on meeting times:** With the exception of the Annual Banquet, the time of all regular Sunday afternoon meetings: Gather as early as 1:30 p.m. for conversation; the program will begin at 2:00 p.m.

**October 19, Sunday, 1:30/2:00 p.m.** Chapter meeting, Tyler Arboretum, Edible Garden Building. Presenter: George Woodard, "Big As My Head." See article on Page 3.

**November 16, Sunday 12:00 noon/1:00 p.m.** Annual banquet luncheon, St. Davids Golf Club, 845 Radnor Street Rd., Wayne, Pa. 19087. Program: Andrew Bunting, "Favorite Rhododendrons from 40 Years in Public Horticulture." Cash bar, hors d'oeuvres, conviviality from 12:00 on; program at 1:00. See article on Page 3. Reservation form accompanies this issue of the RhodoGravure.

**November 18, Tuesday, 7 p.m.** Board of Directors meeting, via Zoom.

**January 20, Tuesday, 7 p.m.** Board of Directors meeting, via Zoom.

**March 17, Tuesday, 7 p.m.** Board of Directors meeting, via Zoom.

**April 21-25** ARS Convention, Vancouver Island, Canada. "Rhododendrons and Companions in a Changing Climate."

# Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society

A chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

[DVChapterARS.org](http://DVChapterARS.org)

## Officers

President: Stuart Brooks (2025-27), 609-268-7007, [sabnj100 @ gmail.com](mailto:sabnj100@gmail.com)

Vice President: Perc Moser (2024-26), 610-525-3651, [percmoser @ gmail.com](mailto:percmoser@gmail.com)

Treasurer: Bob Smetana (2024-26), 610-996-0661, [vfarssmetana @ yahoo.com](mailto:vfarssmetana@yahoo.com)

Secretary: Kim Kopple (2024-26), [kopple.kim @ gmail.com](mailto:kopple.kim@gmail.com)

## Directors

Terms expiring 2026: Michael Martin Mills, Ron Rabideau, Kathy Woehl

Terms expiring 2027: Mimi Favre, Maris Ogg, John Weygandt

Terms expiring 2028: Bill Halberstadt, Linda Hartnett, Leslie Morris-Smith

## Committees

Finance: Bob Smetana, chair

Plant Propagation and Sales: Karel F. Bernady, chair

Membership: Maris Ogg and Steve Wright, co-chairs

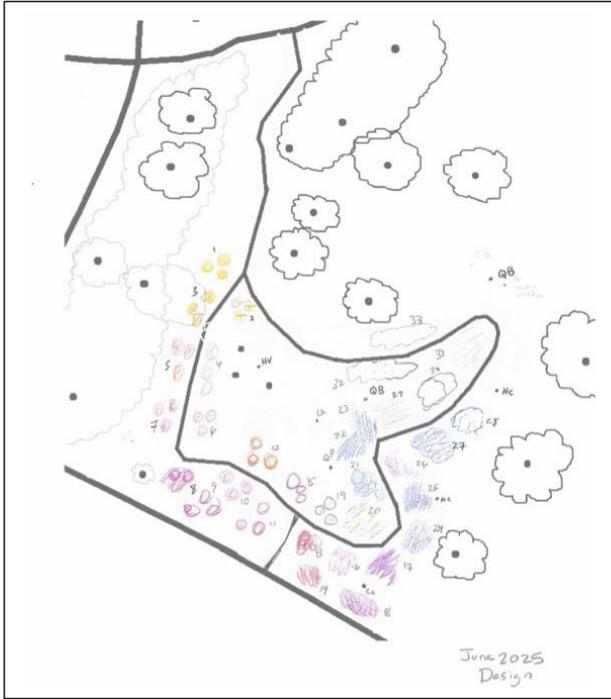
Program: Maris Ogg, chair

Communications: Michael Martin Mills, chair

Mailing address: 14 Northwoods Road, Radnor, Pa. 19087

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 Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society is the result of the recent merger of the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters of the ARS, and serves rhododendron and azalea enthusiasts in Philadelphia, Southeastern Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Delaware – from the Atlantic Ocean to the Susquehanna River. The group typically gathers monthly (except July and December) for program meetings, summer picnic, autumn banquet and multiple plant sales. Activities are at various locations, mostly on Sunday afternoons. Dues are \$40 per year, for combined chapter and national membership and a subscription to the Journal. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a form or go to [DVChapterARS.org](http://DVChapterARS.org); in the Table of Contents, click on “Join.”



**Clockwise from top left:  
The planting scheme for the  
Hybridizer Garden at Tyler  
Arboretum, showing color  
groupings; Rowan Saroka,  
Bud Gressman, Perc Moser  
on delivery day; Tom Ahern  
and a few of the 87 plants;  
Ron Rabideau (left) and  
Mimi Favre (right) on  
planting day.**

Photos here and on  
Pages 1-2 by Perc Moser, Tom Ahern  
and Tyler Arboretum staff.