

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY SUMMER 2024

A friendly, ad-free election

The chapter chooses a new president

The Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society marked its first birthday on June 30 and elected a new president.

For the past several years, the former Valley Forge and Greater Philadelphia Chapters held their Annual Meetings and Picnics as a joint event, with two separate elections for each chapter's cycle of officers and directors. Last year, the merger of the two chapters into the Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society resulted in some transitional processes at Annual Meeting time, with new bylaws adopted and the first set of officers and directors elected and empaneled. This year's Annual Meeting marked the end of the transition phase.

Outgoing president Karel Bernady, with input from other board members, assembled a slate of candidates, and, there being no nominations from the floor at the meeting, the slate was elected by acclamation.

Stuart Brooks was elected president, with Perc Moser as the new vice president. Incumbents Kim Kopple and Bob Smetana were reelected secretary and treasurer, respectively. Three members were elected to the Board of Directors: Mimi Favre, Maris Ogg and John Weygandt. Maris is a continuing board member from the previous election.

One nuance of the new bylaws is that terms of office begin September 1, to coincide with the national ARS and the chapter fiscal year of September through August. This puts us on a par with the United States with its period of roughly two months from congressional election to swearing in. (Do not expect any chapter inauguration festivities, however. It will just silently take place while most of us are asleep.)

The president-elect is a lawyer who lives in Tabernacle, N.J. Stuart was a Greater Philadelphia Board member and continued on the merged chapter's board for a year. He told the RhodoGravure: "I've always had an interest in gardening, which led me to become a landscape architect. After a few bends in



Stuart Brooks, Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society's next president, in his Pinelands garden.

the career road, and settling in the New Jersey Pine Barrens, I came to appreciate the rhododendron for its gorgeous flowers and handsome leaves. My searches for different hybrids led me to join the Greater Philadelphia Chapter.”

The Annual Meeting took place at a new venue for the group, the Wilson Farm Park in Tredyffrin Township, near Jenkins Arboretum, and included presentation of trophies for the May 11 cut-flower competition (the “truss show”; see article below). The event was organized by Jerry O’Dell, who is completing his term as vice president. With Karel Bernady out of town, Jerry presided as well, concluding the official proceedings by passing the chapter gavel made of rhododendron wood to President-elect Brooks.

Our next event: Auction and cutting exchange

You just never know what garden treasures will be available

This is one of the special opportunities, with unpredictable delights, of our club.

Every August, the cutting exchange and plant auction takes place. What will be available? You have to attend to find out – and acquire. If you’re the sort of rhodo-devotee who propagates cultivars at home, you’ll be able to choose among bags of cuttings brought by members. There may be a long-wanted gem or a promising purple. You’ll have to pay for them, however: \$1 a bag. Can you possibly conjure a better rhododendron bargain?

And then there’s the auction. More than just rhodos will be on the block. If trends continue, John Bartlett of Gettysburg may be donating some very choice items, woody and herbaceous. Rhododendrons from fellow members are the norm, some B&B and ready to be planted. (The curator of woodies at RhodoGravure headquarters has become a broken record, talking about primo acquisitions at the auction, for instance *Salix natsudana*, *Campylotropis macrocarpa* and *Stewartia malacodendron*.)



“Going, going, gone”: Karel Bernady as auctioneer in 2023.

Karel Bernady will be the auctioneer again. Proceeds benefit ARS Endowment Fund and ARS Research Foundation.

The chapter will provide beverages, finger food and dessert. (You are welcome to brown-bag a lunch.)

The event will be at Jenkins Arboretum, 631 Berwyn Baptist Road, Devon, Pa., rain or shine. If you’re bringing donations, arrive as early as 1:00 p.m. and then stroll the grounds until 2:00.

Cutting donors should take 6-inch cuttings of elepidote new growth, 4- to 6-inch cuttings of lepidotes and evergreen azaleas, preferably in the morning. If there’s another dry spell, irrigate the plant well the night before. Place six to ten cuttings of each cultivar in a separate zipper-style plastic bag, add

several drops of water, and refrigerate. Clearly label the bag with the cultivar and your name. No “unknown” varieties, please.

Donors of plants (rhodo, woody or herbaceous) should provide a written description of each plant, touting its greatness and noting any special needs. The auctioneer needs this info to get the bids up, and the winning bidder will be most grateful.

Favre, Gressmans and Mills share trophies

Truss show was largely an elepidote event due to early spring

When everybody's evergreen azaleas peak around May 1, there are precious few in bloom for a competition on the Saturday before Mothers Day. Likewise with lepidotes and, to a lesser degree, deciduous azaleas.

Thus it was that the May 11 cut-flower contest – the “truss show” in insider parlance – lived up to its nickname. The preponderance of entries were gorgeous elepidote trusses, some arriving from as far away at Long Island.

The total number of entries was rather low, presumably also a function of so many varieties' having finished blooming. Nine competitors entered 83 trusses and sprays, compared with 97 last year. Another year with unhelpful weather had 86 entries, in 2014 when excess rain did a real number on flowers.

Despite the preponderance of elepidote entries, Best in Show, the John Wister Trophy, was won by a spray of the evergreen azalea ‘Pocono Pink’, entered by Michael Martin Mills. It also received the Lloyd Partain Best Evergreen Azalea Trophy.

The Long Island entries were brought by Bruce and Marianne Feller, who periodically make the trek southwest for our competition. They took both first and second place in the increasing competitive section for yellow elepidotes, with ‘Big Deal’ and ‘Extraordinaire’. (Even into this century, yellow trusses are uncommon, but new yellow cultivars are making their way into gardens. At last.) Other cultivars that drew particular attention were ‘White Elegance’ from Bud and Marilyn Gressman’s garden and Ron Rabideau’s ‘Monsieur Marcel Menard’.

2024 Trophy Winners

Best Foliage, Dan and Betts Layman Trophy
‘Max Tietjens’, Michael Martin Mills

Best species, Karel Bernady Trophy
Rhododendron catawbiense, Mimi Favre

**Best Rhododendron Hybrid,
Mr. & Mrs. James S. Sorber Trophy**
Heritage 1000-5, Michael Martin Mills

Best deciduous azalea, Steven Wright Trophy
Choptank seedling, Bud and Marilyn Gressman

Best evergreen azalea, Lloyd Partain Trophy
‘Pocono Pink’, Michael Martin Mills

Best in Show, John Wister Trophy
‘Pocono Pink’, Michael Martin Mills

Sweepstakes for Most Points, Judi Meade Trophy
Michael Martin Mills

*Spend some time
at the DVRS website*

If you haven't been to DVChapterARS.org, you are missing out.

Since the merger of the two predecessor chapters, the wealth of information has definitely increased.

In particular, please click on the “Events” tab on the top line of the home page. Here is information about what's coming up for the Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society, plus recaps and photos of past events.

The “Links” tab has articles on good horticultural practice for rhododendrons and azaleas, where to see them, and mail-order sources.

The webmaster (and main photographer) is board member Steve Henning.

It's time to propagate, if the weather cooperates

The chapter will soon be sticking cuttings

Oh the weather outside is frightful, and that may put a crimp on late July propagation of exceptional rhododendrons for future sales and distribution. With all the heat and a paucity of rain, plants are under stress. New growth may be limp or worse, and robust cuttings are much preferred over weak ones.

In hope of better weather, two work days have been tentatively scheduled at the Kristoph nursery in central New Jersey, Friday, July 19, and Saturday, July 27, both starting at 9 a.m. But the weather may not cooperate, so willing participants must call propagation honcho Karel Bernady in advance to find out if it's a go. Karel can be reached at 484-888-8244. Please do not show up at the nursery without calling Karel three or four days earlier.

Can science do us a big favor?

How to turn 'GMO' into an acronym every gardener would love

By Michael Martin Mills

You can't go to the grocery store these days without encountering incessant assurances that your selections of kale, TV dinners, veal chops or pluots ("pluots"?) are verifiably non-GMO. That is, free of genetically modified organisms, untainted by mad food scientists who treat genes like Tinker Toys. Reassuring. It would seem.

The cadre of mad scientists at RhodoGravure headquarters have been mulling this state of affairs lately. Beset as they are with a veritable war against foreign aggressors, the rising consensus is a promising, indeed alluring, concept. Why not divert the attention of the modification set from what goes into our stomachs to what incessantly and infuriatingly emerges from the soil of our garden plots against our wills? We are speaking, of course, of weeds.

To wit, what the world needs now is a new class of GMOs. Be they worms or insects or cute little vest-pocket-size mammals, as long as their genes have been modified just so, gardeners of the world will rejoice and the herbicide industry will weep.

Just imagine: a little burrowing beetle that has been GM'ed (that's mad scientist-speak for "genetically modified") to thrive on, yea to utterly require, a diet of mugwort. The little MD ("mugwort dependent") beetles arrive in your garden and set their petite mandibles to gnawing on the mugwort leaves and stems. So happy at the availability of the desired, indeed only form of food it can or will ingest, the little beetles gnaw on and on, spurring their reproductive cycle, so that there are more and more MD beetles. Having gnawed down all the above-ground evil mugwort, they go into burrowing phase and hungrily get to the root of the matter. Silently and out of sight, our beloved MD beetles utterly vanquish the invader (mugwort is not native to the Americas and got here before our borders were secure). When the supply of mugwort is all eaten by the beetles, they go into a cicada-suggestive dormancy phase, which is interrupted whenever another mugwort invasion manifests itself in general proximity to the dormant beetles.

Is this not a brilliant use of science or what? Forget the non-GMO cornflakes and work on the GMOs we crave.

It makes a gardener swoon: A GM'ed worm that depends on and devours Canada thistle! A new shrew that, thanks to the GMO set, decimates kudzu! And when they run out of thistle or kudzu, do they switch to zinnias or deciduous azaleas? Heavens no: they've been GM'ed *not to*.

The grant-making department at RhodoGravure headquarters is drafting outlines for funding GMO scientists working along these lines. It is hoped that results will be published in future issues of the scholarly journal General Narrative Annals of Weed Science (GNAWS).

Shorter notes

An alluring online album of Ron Rabideau's beauties

The former president of Greater Philadelphia and alumnus of RareFind Nursery in its heyday, Ron Rabideau, has a secret garden. It's in Ashburnham, Mass., which he started planting long, long ago.

He has assembled an album of photos from this spring. Go to: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/WhLuDy8DRS6VznKYA>. If you click on a photo, you'll get the name and other info on the cultivar. As some know, Ron is a hybridizer of both rhododendrons and magnolias, and there are some yellows from each of those genera that are sure to float your boat.



Right: ('Goldbucket' X Weston's 89-220)

Regional ROYs

Annually, the American Rhododendron Society names "Rhododendrons of the Year" (ROYs), organized regionally. For each region, there are an elepidote, a lepidote, an evergreen azalea and a deciduous azalea. For 2024 in the Mid-Atlantic zone, they are (in that order) 'Ingrid Mehlquist', *R. minus* var. *minus*, 'Pocono Pink' and 'Admiral Semmes'.

How serendipitous that the Best in Show at the 2024 Delaware Valley truss show was 'Pocono Pink'.

Huge new rhododendron 'book,' free online

Temperate Rhododendrons is a massive undertaking by Julian Taylor-Whall, published by the Royal Horticultural Society's Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group. Of the eventual eight volumes, six have been published and are at <https://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/publications/books/temperate-rhododendrons>.

The volumes published so far are mostly about species from around the world – many varieties that even the most ardent U.S. rhododendron enthusiast has never heard of. The book is gorgeously illustrated with abundant photos. By "temperate," the author basically means "can be grown in Britain," which of course includes a fair number of plants that eastern North America would kill, with either cold or heat. (The book uses the 2012 RHS hardiness system, which differs from U.S. hardiness zones. U.S. zones, in which Philadelphia is 7a, are geographic, with lower numbers being colder. The RHS codes are for species and cultivars of plants, and the higher numbers are more cold tolerant; H5 is the crude equivalent for the Philadelphia area.)

The two volumes yet to be published "will survey the Azaleodendrons, Deciduous and Evergreen Azaleas, Lepidote and Elepidote Hybrids created through directed pollination" – i.e., what most of us grow.

The senior book reviewer at RhodoGravure headquarters has noted some online chatter in the picky-picky zone, faulting the author for writing, say, *R.hyperobscurium* instead of *R. hyperobscurium* subsp. *niftyleafium*.

All that said, *Temperate Rhododendrons* is a remarkable publication, and it's free online. Those who think they may refer to it often probably should download the six volumes to a separate hard drive, since it will eat up a lot of space in a computer.

Another medal for Karel Bernady

What with this year's national ARS convention being so far away (the upper-left-most corner of the Lower 48, Bellingham, Wash.), some savvy folks in Maryland organized a regional confab, which took place in Annapolis. A number of Delaware Valley members attended and were oohing and ahhhing about the lovely spring gardens.

There was a surprise afoot as well. The Potomac Valley Chapter bestowed its Bronze Medal on our Karel Bernady. The citation lauded him as "an invaluable supporter of many of our key activities." Next time you see Karel, ask him about his other rhododendron medals.

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Thanks to Steve Henning for content contributions to this issue of the RhodoGravure.

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: At a recent meeting the DVRS Board decided to regularize all Sunday afternoon meetings. Gather as early as 1:30 p.m. for coffee and conversation; the program will begin at 2 p.m.

July 16, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Chapter Board meeting, Jenkins Arboretum.

August 18, Sunday, 2 p.m. Cutting Exchange and Plant Auction, Jenkins Arboretum.

September 17, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Chapter Board meeting, Jenkins Arboretum.

September 22, Sunday, 2 p.m. Chapter meeting, Plants By Members sale. Jenkins Arboretum.

October 20, Sunday, 2 p.m. Chapter meeting. Steve Kristoph speaking on ironclads. Tyler Arboretum. More details at [DVRS events](#).

May 7-9, 2025 Azalea Society of America national convention. Hosted by Jenkins Arboretum.

June 5-8, 2025 ARS national convention, Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society

A chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

DVChapterARS.org

Officers

President: Karel F. Bernady (2023-24), 610-827-0113; bernadk @ verizon.net
Vice President: Jerry O'Dell (2023-24), 610-608-2018; westdell @ verizon.net
Treasurer: Bob Smetana (2023-24), 610-996-0661, vfarssmetana @ yahoo.com
Secretary: Kim Kopple (2023-24), kopple.kim @ gmail.com

Directors

Terms expiring 2024: Craig Conover, Darlene Henning, Steve Henning, Maris Ogg, Steve Wright
Terms expiring 2025: Stuart Brooks, Bill Halberstadt, Linda Hartnett, Perc Moser
Terms expiring 2026: Michael Martin Mills, Ron Rabideau, Kathy Woehl

Committees

Finance: Bob Smetana, chair
Plant Propagation and Sales: Karel F. Bernady, chair
Membership: Maris Ogg and Steve Wright, co-chairs
Program: Jerry O'Dell, 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, is a trove.

The Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society is the result of the 2023 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. 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; in the Table of Contents, click on "Join."