

# RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY ..... SUMMER 2025



Photo by Michael Martin Mills

This meticulous planting greeted visitors to the Halifax Public Garden while the ARS annual conference was in progress in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Article on the conference on Page 3.

## *The ever-surprising Plant Auction*

Hie thee to Jenkins on Aug. 17; Cutting Exchange also on tap

It's no revelation to state that gardening and nature are on a recurring cycle. The daffodils bloom in spring, not September, eh? Particular species and cultivars of rhododendrons have their particular times of blooming.

What does August hold? If you're lucky, some late native deciduous azaleas will be in flower in your garden (*R. prunifolium* and *serrulatum*, for instance). But there's also a special, niche, sorta private, surprise package event, the annual Cutting Exchange and Plant Auction. Try not to miss it: Sunday afternoon, August 17, at Jenkins Arboretum.

As its title implies, this is a two-part phenomenon. The cutting exchange is how aficionados share the wealth. Members are asked to collect and donate fresh cuttings of oh-so-gotta-have-it rhododendrons and azaleas, both classic good-doers and newer-special-rare cultivars. Nestled (and labeled!) in their plastic bags, the cuttings are spread on the groaning board, and members may buy bags to take home and propagate themselves. For those who've never propagated from cuttings, there will be advice on the technique from the chapter's savants. (The preferred process for collecting cuttings is below.)

Then there's part two, the auction. This auction – also largely supplied by our great guru gardeners – isn't like, say, a Sotheby's sale with a glossy catalogue that you can peruse and use to plot your bidding strategy. Here in rhodolandia, people find out what's on the auction block when they show up.

It's not just rhododendrons and azaleas. As always, selections from the chapter's propagation program will be available, but also diverse woodies and perennials. The late Randy Dalton would have called it the T.J. Maxx of plant sales, as in, it's never, ever the same thing twice. Corkscrew willow and silky stewartia are two examples from the past, and the RhodoGravure has inside knowledge that some of Perc Moser's one-of-a-kind hybrid seedlings may be on offer, as well as a few two-year-old *Magnolia asheii* grown from seed in a Philadelphia garden.

Proceeds from the cutting sales and auction are donated to the ARS Endowment Fund and ARS Research Foundation.

People bringing plants to donate to the auction should arrive between 1:00 and 1:30 p.m. The cutting exchange will begin at 2:00. Cash, checks or credit cards will be accepted.

You are encouraged to bring snacking items – sweet or savory. The chapter will provide drinking water.

### *How to take cuttings for propagation*

Cutting donors should take 6-inch cuttings of elepidote new growth, preferably in the morning. For lepidotes and azaleas: 4- to 6-inch cuttings. 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 for the auction (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.

### *Another great opportunity to spend money smartly*

The September meeting has long been a boffo event: A sale of rarities and other way cool rhododendrons that have been propagated and grown on under the leadership of Karel Bernady.

There will be oodles of yearling rooted rhodos, which cost a mere \$5 a pop, as well as larger plants with larger prices. All are appropriate for the local climate.

This used to be called the "Plants for Members" sale, to distinguish it from the spring public sale. But that had a whiff of exclusion to it, and Plants By Members is the new moniker, because it's the chapter members who do all the work. They grow many of the plants from which cuttings are taken every summer; they go to the Kristoph Nursery in deepest New Jersey to prep and stick each cutting one by one in trays of 24 cells. The next spring, it's potting-up time and members reconvene at Kristoph's to transfer the successfully rooted ones (it's not hard to tell them apart: a cutting that hasn't rooted over the previous seven months has that unmistakable Monty Python dead parrot look to it). Let's not forget mulching the pots and fertilizing them one teaspoon at a time. For those with nimble fingers, there is grafting season, later in the fall; this is tailormade for cultivars that prefer the dead parrot plot over setting good roots on their own. Plants that are not sold as small yearlings need to be up-potted into gallon pots, so call in the members again. Note also that all these successfully propagated and grown-on rhododendrons do not ring

up Uber on their own in order to get from New Jersey to Tyler and Jenkins Arboretums for sales events; yep, it's chapter members forming the wagon train.

That's a synopsis of the logistics leading up to the Plants BY Members sales. It's what's in the sale that will knock the socks off all but the most jaded rhododendron gardener. The inventory will not be taken until later this summer, after which the sales list of rooted cuttings and gallon-size plants will be circulated electronically.

### *Be a sticker*

Late summer is when the chapter must swing into propagation mode. Karel Bernady has scheduled two works days for sticking new cuttings: Thursday, August 7, and Friday, August 22. The work takes place at the Kristoph Nursery in Englishtown, N.J. Please contact Karel Bernady in advance to indicate your participation and to get driving instructions: 484-888-8244 or bernadk @verizon.net.

## *Report from Nova Scotia*

Annual ARS conference had a maritime tinge

Four years after the covid pandemic ruined things for a June-in-the-Maritimes 2021 ARS conference, the real deal was held this year, in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Six Delaware Valley folks were in attendance, one of the largest chapter contingents from the United States.

Most of Nova Scotia is farther north than Green Bay, Wisc., so isn't the rhododendron situation, shall we say, limited? Hardly. The Gulf Stream does a potent job of mitigating the cold, and the ocean mists seem to delight our favorite genus. But high latitudes do have other effects. Thus it was early June and the province was just coming into peak bloom, and sunset was so late that the remarkable Irving Botanical Gardens across the street from many attendees' lodgings stayed open till 10 p.m.

In the current international-relations climate, what sort of reception did we Yanks get from Canadians? An utterly warm and friendly one. Still, the RhodoGravure's roving reporter noted seeing numerous Canadian flags at businesses and homes, some looking no more than, say, seven months old, as well as numerous "Made in Canada" signs among the products in stores.

One of the unexpected aspects was the presence of many Pennsylvania cultivars in public gardens, predominantly Joe Gable hybrids. The fine Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens (about 70 miles west of the conference site, and not part of the main ARS event) has an admirable rhododendron collection (species and Gables seemed dominant) as part of the well-curated acreage. Away from Wolfville and the provincial capital of Halifax, it was intriguing to see many more horse chestnuts (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) along highways and in towns than is the case

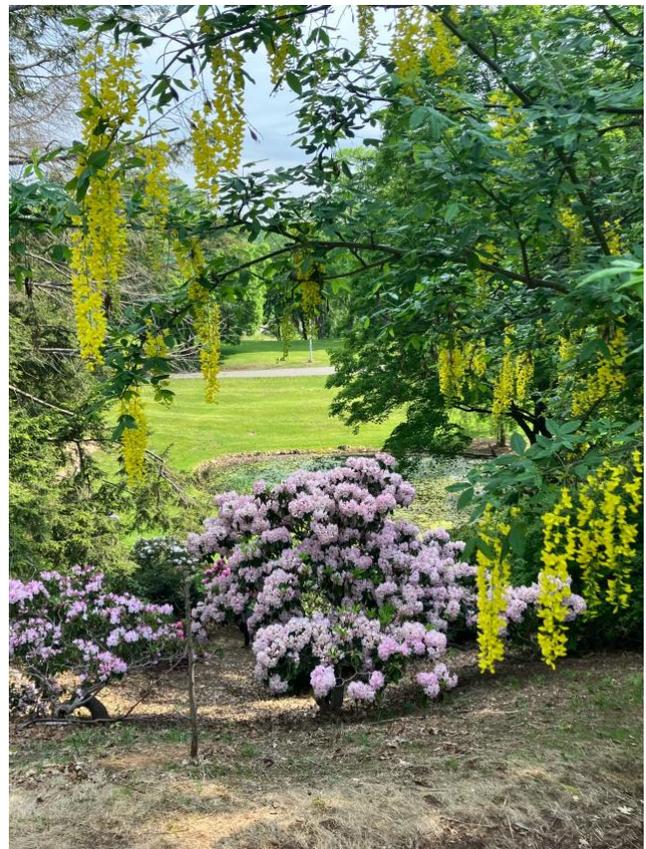


Photo by Michael Martin Mills

**A scene** at the Kentville Research Station in Nova Scotia, a stop on the conference tour. Golden chain trees (*Laburnum*) were almost commonplace in the province.

in the Philadelphia region, and the popularity of *Laburnum anagyroides*, the golden chain tree, in home gardens was quite noticeable. Both were in peak bloom during the conference. In inland and semi-rural areas, as well as towns, thriving deciduous azaleas stood out, though it seems ‘Gibraltar’ and ‘Klondyke’ are all that many nurseries offer. A home with a full-bloom 20-foot-wide, 12-foot-tall elepidote plop in the middle of the front yard was a frequent sight.

*A sobering message from Germany*

Saturday evening’s banquet presentation was, given the state of the planet, timely and erudite, if sobering. Hartwig Schepker, managing director at Botanischer Garten und Rhododendron-Park Bremen in Germany, spoke on “The Impact of Climate Change on Rhododendrons.”

Dr. Schepker is a preeminent figure in European rhododendron matters. The botanical garden is considered the world’s largest collection of the genus, and he reported that 80 percent of commercial rhododendron propagation for all of continental Europe takes places in the immediate area.

He had vast amounts of intriguing and useful information in his presentation, some of which follows. The most amusing was the phrase “an egg-laying wool-milk sow” – in other words, something that does it all. As for rhododendrons, he pronounced ‘Taurus’ to be “almost” such a marvel.

As for the effects of climate change, Schepker cited scorched foliage from too much sun and suffering from heat waves and long droughts. As well, heavier rains can create a “bathtub effect,” with phytophthora problems worsening. For the public, these factors are making an already evident “lack of popularity” even worse. Compounding the climate effects are “an increasing lack of basic knowledge” and bad planting decisions, such as bad sites and bad soil.

Interestingly, Schepker considers the United States to be ahead of Germany and the rest of the European Union in dealing with heat tolerance (for instance, *R. hyperythrum* hybrids are rare in Germany). He said to beware of *wardii* crosses, for they are already doing badly in heat. Among deciduous azaleas,

the Ghent strains were touted for heat tolerance because they have North American genes, though the later Ghents, in which *R. molle* was added to the hybridization menu, inherited susceptibility to powdery mildew, which we all knows loves damp heat.

At least, Schepker opined, previously tender cultivars may now survive father north due to climate change. And hybridizers were encouraged to use the following “new species” due to their relative heat and drought tolerance: *R. cardiobasis*, *faithae*, *jingangshanicum*, *nymphaeoides*, *platypodium*, *polytrichum* and *yuefengense*.

Three heat-tolerant elepidotes he touted were ‘Madame Fr. J. Chauvin’, ‘Mrs. T. H. Lowinsky’ and ‘Pink Pearl’. Polyploids showing both sun and heat tolerance based on observations by seven north German devotees: ‘August Lamken’, ‘Caruso’,

‘Frentano’, ‘Haithabu’ and ‘Pearce’s American Beauty’. Deciduous azaleas getting high mark from Schepker were ‘Comeille’, ‘Daviesii’, ‘Frère-Orban’, ‘Pucella’ and ‘Van Dyck’. The last of those was once feared to be extinct but a plant was lately found and apparently the north Germans are going to be propagating it a lot; here’s hoping it gets across the Atlantic, for the image Schepker showed was utterly alluring, a hose-in-hose tubular funnel of subtle pastel orange.



DVRS contingent at the Nova Scotia conference. Front: Darelene and Steve Henning. Rear: Michael Martin Mills, Ron Rabideau, Tara Speers, Barbara Olejnik.

The various cultivars and species recommended for hotter times are good for ARS members to know, but the RhodoGravure notes that Dr. Schepker was pointing out a more profound matter: if rhododendrons begin and/or continue to perform badly in a changing climate, the decline in their popularity among generic gardeners may accelerate. Therefore the ARS and its members should intensify their efforts to make sure that ordinary home owners are well-versed in proper planting, siting and maintenance of newly acquired cultivars of the genus. Or they could get ticked off and never buy another one.

Look closely and you can see chapter member Ron Rabideau at the site of the fabled Nova Scotia nursery of Richard Steele, whose rhododendron legacy in the



## *And the winners are . . .*

International judging panel chooses recipients for seven truss show trophies

Nothing caps off the end of the rhododendron blooming season like polished silver trophies, and the Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society presented seven to winners in the May 10 Cut-Flower Competition. The trophies were bestowed at the June Annual Meeting and Picnic at Chanticleer.

Bud and Marilyn Gressman made a return appearance in the spotlight by winning the John C. Wister Best in Show Trophy with an unnamed deciduous azalea they have grown for years, identified as “Choptank seedling.” The same plant won Best Deciduous Azalea just 12 months earlier. The Gressmans have won Best in Show multiple times over the years, famously for ‘Roseum Elegans’ the first time they ever entered the truss show, back in the previous century.

**Visit the DVRS website:**  
<http://dvchapterars.org>

Two apprentices from Jenkins Arboretum, Riley Callow and Julia Matthews, were responsible for three trophies that went to Jenkins. On the rainy day before the show, the novice duo (who had never even heard of a “truss show” a week or so earlier) traipsed about the arboretum collecting entries.

The panel of judges was noteworthy for its geographic breadth, including Laura Grant of Toronto, former executive director of the American Rhododendron Society. It is believed that this was the first time for an international group of judges for this chapter (and its antecedents). Other judges were John and Sally Perkins of New Hampshire, Carol Segree of Maryland, Nettie Bernady of West Virginia, and Karel

Bernady of Chester County. All were in town for the coinciding national convention of the Azalea Society of America.

### *2025 trophies*

Best Foliage, Dan and Betts Layman Trophy  
Michael Martin Mills, for 'Taurus'

Best Species, Karel F. Bernady Trophy  
Jenkins Arboretum, for *R. degranianum* subsp. *yakushmanum* 'Blue Velvet'

Best Deciduous Azalea, Steven Wright Trophy  
Bud and Marilyn Gressman, for unnamed Choptank seedling

Best Rhododendron Hybrid, Mr. & Mrs. James Sorber Trophy  
Jenkins Arboretum, for 'Betty Hume'

Best Evergreen Azalea, Lloyd Partain Trophy  
Mimi Favre, for 'Roehr's Peggy Ann'

Best in Show, John C. Wister Trophy  
Bud and Marilyn Gressman, for unnamed Choptank seedling

Sweepstakes for Most Points, Judi Meade Trophy  
Jenkins Arboretum

Editor's note: The Jenkins entry that won best species is something of a mystery. The arboretum's available records have no information other than the name and location. No current information was found in an online search. Odds are that it is a yakushmanum selection that RareFind Nursery listed in its 2007 catalogue. Hank Schannen referred to it as "from Japan," and Ron Rabideau, Schannen's key employee, believes it may have been acquired as a seedling from a West Coast grower. The unpublished database of the International Registrar includes 'Powder Blue Velvet', a Schannen-approved renaming of the RareFind yak clone, since the name 'Blue Velvet' was already taken.

### *Election returns*

As part of the Annual Meeting of the chapter in June, four officer and board seats were up for election. The incumbent board recommended a slate, and there being no nominations from the floor the following were duly elected:

- Stuart Brooks (incumbent), elected to a two-year term as president.
- Linda Hartnett (incumbent), Bill Halberstadt (incumbent) and Leslie Morris-Smith, elected to three-year terms as directors. Leslie, relatively new to our chapter, brings experience as a leader in the Delaware Valley Fern and Wildflower Society and has social-media savvy the board looks forward to utilizing.

## *Pop Quiz faux pas*

The RhodoGravure sheepishly acknowledges flaws in the Winter issue's feature of matching garden quotations with their authors. Here are all six, properly matched:

"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow." — Audrey Hepburn

"If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need." — Marcus Tullius Cicero

"Gardening is a work of a lifetime: you never finish." — Oscar de la Renta

"If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people." — Confucius

"Gardens are not made by singing 'Oh, how beautiful,' and sitting in the shade." — Rudyard Kipling

"Anyone who has time for drama is not gardening enough." — Anonymous

## *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.

**August 7, Thursday** Propagation workday. Kristoph Nursery, Englishtown, N.J. 9 a.m. Please contact Karel Bernady in advance: 484-888-8244 or bernadk @verizon.net.

**August 17, Sunday** Cutting Exchange and Auction, Jenkins Arboretum, 631 Berwyn-Baptist Road, Devon Pa., 19333 (see article on Page 1)

**August 22, Friday** Propagation workday. Kristoph Nursery, Englishtown, N.J. 9 a.m. Please contact Karel Bernady in advance: 484-888-8244 or bernadk @verizon.net.

**September 21, Sunday** Plants By Members sale, Jenkins Arboretum (see Page 2).

**October (Sunday to be determined)** Chapter meeting (members will be notified by email as soon as date and details are firm)

**November 16, Sunday** 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"

# 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

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

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

Secretary: Kim Kopple (2024-26), 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.”