

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY :::::::::: WINTER 2026



From left: 'Saran', 'Warpaint', 'Fukusuzume'

Photos by Jim Trumbly for ASA (left), Carolyn Beck (center and right)

Putting a little more spring into June

Evergreen azaleas are not merely for May

Delaying the inevitable is as human a sentiment as they come. Some of those inevitabilities we can indeed push back a bit, even if it's no fun (eat gobs of kale, do your calisthenics: live longer). Others are beyond our control.

And what rhododendron-azalea zealot wants to rush the inevitable end of spring bloom? Climate change certainly isn't helping in this regard. But perhaps we can be more strategic.

The RhodoGravure con-sulted some key devotees of evergreen azaleas to get some recommendations for late bloomers. Deftly insert a fair number of these in your garden, and your neighbors will be wondering, "Why are my azaleas all finished and yours still look great?" It's a great way to make your garden look really snazzy for a June garden party.

Carolyn Beck and Don Hyatt helped the RhodoGravure come up with a good number of late- and very-late-blooming azaleas. True, many will be found only at the most rarefied of plant sales and nurseries, but since evergreen azaleas are so easy to propagate in summer, you might be able to crowd-source established plantings from which you could cadge a few cuttings.

The following list is blend of recommendations from Carolyn and Don, with a few additions from RhodoGravure Headquarters. Satsuki azaleas and hybrids of *R. nakaharae* (notably many Polly Hill cultivars) dominate, and many are rather low, some with groundcover habits over time. Comments are from Carolyn, Don, registration data, and/or the principal azalea steward at RhodoGravure Headquarters.



From left: 'Balsaminiflorum', 'Glinda the Good Witch', 'Zuishi'

Photos by Robert Stelloh, Harold Sweetman, Carolyn Beck

Don't expect to pop over to any old garden center and find these. In addition to mail-order operations (start googling!), the highest odds of finding some for sale are at the plant sales of the Azalea Society of America conventions. The next one is April 12-15 in Athens, Georgia (info and a registration form: <https://azaleas.org/conventions>). A year later, head for Hendersonville, N.C., in late April.

Two dozen that are hits on the late show

- 'August to Frost'. *R. mucronatum* selection that starts blooming on new growth in August and continues to frost. There is a nice sport that has a red blotch.
- 'Chojuho' (Satsuki). This is an oddity. Quite dissected, almost strap-petal dark coral flowers with very long stamens. The "petals" persist for many weeks, undergoing color changes; some have suggested they are actually sepals. Whatever. While not gorgeous, it does seem to be in bloom two months after it opens. 'Senbazuru' has been cited as a starts-out-white-flower version of 'Chojuho'.
- 'Fairfax' (George Ring hybrid). Large single to semi-double blooms of light purplish-pink fading to greenish-white in the center. Compact and spreading plant habit.
- 'Fukusuzume' (Satsuki). Many of the flowers have pure white center and prominent rose-red picotee. June bloomer.
- 'Glinda the Good Witch'. Open-pollinated seedling with *nakaharae* in its parentage, named and registered in 2023 by Harold Sweetman.
- 'Hanabotan' (Satsuki). A fine double white with green at throat.
- 'Haru-no-Sono' (Satsuki) - Compact plant with great foliage and variable blossoms of orchid pink and white including solids and striped blossoms.
- R. indicum* 'Balsaminiflorum'. Compact plant with very double blossoms of coral pink. No stamens or pistil.
- 'Kingetsu' (Satsuki) - Variable blooms, white flowers bordered with red, some blossoms white with red sectors, some solid red or white. Compact and spreading habit that can cascade over a wall.



From left: 'Hanabotan', 'My Beloved', 'Wee Willie'

Photos by Jim Trumbly for ASA (left), Carolyn Beck (center and right)

'Kazan' ('Rukizon') (Satsuki). Great bonsai subject with very small, glossy pointed leaves and slow growth habit. Flowers are small and coral red.

'Marshy Point Young Dorothy'. A witches' broom of a Robin Hill that Harry Weiskittel introduced. One of the can't-make-up-its-mind combos of white-pink with red blotch or just red.

'My Beloved' (Pete Vines hybrid). Coral-red with a light pink center and dark red blotch. Late June in D.C. area.

R. nakaharae. Several selections from Polly Hill such as 'Mt. Seven Star', 'Wintergreen' and 'Pink Pancake'. The large-flowered 'Pink Pancake' is the last evergreen azalea to bloom at RhodoGravure Headquarters, so late that sometimes the azalea steward thinks it has decided to skip a year.

Orange strap petal. Parentage unknown, once sold by RareFind Nursery with the misleading name 'Orange Koromo'. Forms a low, dense mound; small early June flowers. Michael Mills is considering registering it as 'Tufts of Flame'.

'Saotome' ('Rice Kernel') (Satsuki). Grown mostly for the tiny leaves since it rarely produces flowers. Blossoms are also small and coral colored. In 20 years, the plant at RhodoGravure Headquarters has produced a total of two flowers on one terminal.

'Saran' (Satsuki). Good clear red, semi- to fully double.

'Shiryu-no-Hamare' (Satsuki). Compact plant with dark green leaves and reddish-purple strap-petal flowers like 'Koromo-shikibu'. The new leaves on this plant curl inward providing an interesting foliage effect.

'Sir Robert'. Robin Hill hybrid with pale pink single blooms with occasional stripes and sectors of coral pink. Great foliage.

'Wakaebisu' (Satsuki). Nice yellowish pink, hose-in-hose, forms a fine mound over time. Pronounced as five syllables, WAH-ka eh-BISS-oo; name means Young Goddess.

'Warpaint'. Pink, stippled. June.

'Wee Willie' (Robin Hill group). Lovely soft pink, June bloomer.

'Wine Drop' (Glenn Dale group). White with purple blotch and sectors. Larger plant.

'Yamato' (Satsuki). Variable blossoms of white with dark pink stripes, light pink with irregular white borders and red blotch, or solid deep pink flowers. Glossy foliage.
'Zuishi' (Satsuki). Orange-red over white. June bloomer.

Prostrate in the snow, oh no!

The smart way to handle sprawled bushes

The previous two winters hereabouts were so pitiful snow-wise that some gardeners may have forgotten what it's like to look out and see azaleas and others splayed and sprawled with inches of white stuff accumulated in the foliage. This year the weather seems to be a snowy reversion to (or beyond) the mean.

While hardy evergreens of most genera have largely evolved to handle snow, sometimes crummy things happen anyway, as in broken branches, and often a few days into the persistence of a heavy layer of snow. Some plants may permanently become a bit wider and shorter due to the distortion if it lasts a while. So put on the anorak and get to work.

First do no harm. Never remove snow by starting at the top of the shrub, and always work with upward, never downward, motions. Adding weight to already weighted down branches is a bad idea, as in, "Dang, I just broke that limb." If you start at the top, the snow falls onto the lower branches, which have enough snow stress already. Likewise, if you use a pole or such to bonk the branches from above, that's more downward stress.

Start at the bottom, with a broom handle or, even better, a canoe paddle. Stick it under the branch and gently jostle it upward. The snow should sift through and below the branch. Continue up the bush. When you're done, the bottommost branches may again be snow covered; gently lift them to be on top of the snow. If you don't take that last step, you're risking breakage as the accumulated snow compacts and pulls the branch down with it, perhaps pinning it to the ground in a solidified icy mass, perhaps snapping it.

Good food and natives to converge in Uwchlan

Feb. 15 meeting features Morris Arboretum Living Collections Manager

It's a lead-pipe cinch that readers of the RhodoGravure have heard of the 21st century movement to get more native species in our gardens.

The arguments favoring witch hazels and trilliums over dove trees and daylilies are not crazy anti-immigrant fervor. In a super-succinct summation they boil down to two things: evolution and our smaller friends in the animal kingdom.

When plant species evolve together over the eons, getting along with each other is enhanced. One example: Many are aware that black walnuts and most rhododendrons are a bad combination, in which the nuts win. (The culprit is juglone, a natural chemical compound that is produced by black walnut trees and is in nearby soil; it is fatal to almost all rhododendrons.) A

quick perusal of a list of walnut-tolerant plants shows a preponderance of native species, while the list of plants ruined by walnuts has oh so many non-natives.

Plus, and really more important, is the amazing phenomenon of pollination. You want to eat a blueberry? Better hope that the appropriate insect has transported pollen from blueberry stamens to blueberry stigmas. You may think that as long as there are bees this is not that big a deal. Ixnay. Many flowering plants depend on particular insects for pollination (also hummingbirds).

The plants and the pollinators evolved together. Plants from the other sides of the oceans may find no ready pollinators in North America. Insects in North America may be starved if there aren't enough of the flowers they evolved with. So the numbers of insects decline. Which means the number of birds that eat insects declines. There are many more ripple effects. It's all a highly elaborate synergistic system that the RhodoGravure cannot adequately explain, but the bottom line is that native plant species matter. (Especially if you want to eat anything. Ever.)

Time to bone up. The Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society's February 15 meeting is just the ticket, and you can get some tasty noshing in as well (note: everything you'll eat will have relied on pollination at one or many stages).

Pam Morris Olshefski of Morris Arboretum will present "Great Native Plants for Your Landscape."

As she informed the RhodoGravure, "From amelanchier to viburnum, there are many great native plants you can use to enhance your garden. In this illustrated lecture you will learn about many good choices, the conditions they require to grow, and how to successfully work them into your landscape. She will focus on woody plants that provide seasonal interest with attractive flowers, fruit, fall color, and bark texture. She will also discuss good native plant cultivars that have been bred for appealing garden traits." Ms. Morris Olshefski is Plant Records and Living Collections Manager at Morris Arboretum, where natives and exotics live in apparent harmony.

On the brief pre-presentation agenda will be introduction of a small set of bylaws amendments recommended by the chapter's Board of Directors. The changes are largely housekeeping and clarification in nature and will be voted on by the membership at the June Annual Meeting.

Continuing many years' tradition, the February 15 meeting is at the Uwchlan Meetinghouse in Lionville, Chester County. Gather as early as 1:30 p.m.; the program will commence at 2:00.

All are exhorted to bring something yummy – savory or sweet – for the customary Major Snacking Event following the presentation. The chapter will provide beverages, including wine. (While we may use the meetinghouse kitchen, oven privileges are not included.) Given the weird street configuration at the meetinghouse, driving directions will be transmitted with the electronic version of the RhodoGravure. The address is 3 N. Village Ave., Exton, Pa. 19341, but there are doubts that all GPS systems have mastered the maze.



Uwchlan Meetinghouse, now 270 years old.

Amazing possibilities

It's time to order from the ARS Seed Exchange

Yes, it takes patience, but fabulous never-ever-seen rhododendrons can be grown from seed. By you, in fact. The ARS Seed Exchange is now open for placing orders, and the crosses are quite alluring.

Every year, devoted hybridizers match pollen from one cultivar to the stigma of another, resulting in seeds. Most of these crosses are done with particular goals (compact version of a sprawler, or a hardy orange elepidote, for instance).

Go to www.rhododendron.org/seedexchange.htm for the catalogue and ordering instructions. Take careful note of the locale of the seed donor. West Coast hybridizers typically work with cultivars that are too tender for the northeastern United States. True, a cross of a super-hardy cultivar with a frost-phobic one may result in something that can survive in the east, but don't bank on it.

For a tutorial on growing from seed, here is an online article by Alan and Shirley Anderson: www.rhododendron.org/v48n1p10.htm.

Tracking the wild flames

Want to go *calendulaceum*-gawking in June?

For many years, an evolving band of native azalea enthusiasts has traveled to the storied stretches of the southern Appalachian Mountains to see incomparable June sights of vast swaths of hill and dale in bloom.

Care to join them?

The dates are June 20-21 and a target species this year is *Rhododendron calendulaceum*, the flame azalea, at Whitetop Mountain in Virginia, in the westernmost part of the state. Organizers are Don Hyatt and Carol Segree, both of the Potomac Valley ARS Chapter and well-known to our chapter: donaldhyatt@verizon.net for him and csegree17@outlook.com or 443-790-2789 for her.

This is not a conference or a hyper-structured group tour. Given the relatively informality, anyone interested in driving down Interstate 81 to modest Marion, Va., and its two-star Econo Lodge should definitely contact Don or Carol soon to get the particulars. An article in the Potomac Valley newsletter (with abundant photos) is at www.arspvc.org/newsletter.html.



***R. calendulaceum* on Whitetop Mountain in Virginia**

Donald Hyatt

Go to Page 6. According to Don, “This is one of the best and most easily accessed populations of flame azaleas in the Appalachians.” Note that this flame-athon coincides with the summer solstice – sunset at 8:48 in Marion.

A pair of spring change-ups

Back to the Flower Show; ahead for the truss show

After a gap of a few years, the chapter will again participate in the Philadelphia Flower Show, though not at the level of the past.

For the last couple of years, the Flower Show has featured a combo display for several plant societies. But it’s definitely not some whacko melange of rhododendrons, African violets, ferns and cacti all “growing” in some mad gardener’s moronic planting scheme. Rather than a classic Flower Show make-believe garden tableau, the plant society display has been segmented, with each club given a modest space to exhibit modest-sized exemplars of its horticultural niche, to tout its activities, and – here’s the real goal – to sign up new members. DVRS board member Leslie Morris-Smith is the point person for whole combo display and for the rhododendron niche as well. The Flower Show opens to the public on Feb. 28 and concludes March 8.

The Rhododendron Society stepped away from the Flower Show in 2023. That was the first year back indoors after the two pandemic-era shows at FDR Park in South Philadelphia. Two things drove the chapter’s decision. The square footage the Horticultural Society offered was decidedly dinky – basically room for two specimen plants and three daffodils. Plus, the reality was that the burden of designing, forcing, executing and staffing the exhibits had become a true strain for the few stalwarts who did all the heavy lifting (that phrase is both a metaphor and a physical fact). The return on the personal investment – one, maybe two new members, but innumerable deer questions – just wasn’t worth the effort. The new Flower Show arrangement strikes the chapter board as a worthwhile activity at a reasonable input level.

If you’re interested in working on the exhibit or taking a docent shift (yes, free admittance to the Flower Show is part of the deal), contact Leslie at leslm5791@gmail.com.

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In another let’s-face-reality scenario, the annual truss show will be a week earlier this year – the first Saturday in May instead of the day before Mothers Day.

In recent springs, it has been abundantly evident that our favorite genus is blooming earlier due to climate change. Across the region, lepidotes and evergreen azaleas are largely bloomed out by the second weekend in May, with a paltry number of entries for the latter and one or none for the former. So, no more ice skating when the pond is thawing. (Being a week earlier will also have the salutary effect of our not having to survive Jenkins’ parking lot mayhem on Mothers Day weekend.)

Some takeaways from Connor Ryan

Those who were able to join the Zoom meeting on January 18 were treated to fascinating information from Connor Ryan, the Rhododendron Collections Manager at the Leach Research Station of the Holden Arboretum near Cleveland.

Rhododendron devotees should be gratified at the level of hybridization and trialing that Ryan and colleagues are pursuing, with goals of getting new cultivars that are both beautiful in flower and have improved hardiness and disease resistance. Two comments he made in the Zoom presentation stood out. “The bane of our existence is ironclads” was one. His point was that ironclads (dating from previous centuries) still have a substantial presence in the market, squeezing out modern improvements – something to the effect of, If the old varieties are easy to propagate and the gardening public still buys them, why mess with a good thing?

Ryan also said that in the Holden program “we try to homeowner-proof” rhododendrons. In other words, many people who buy rhododendrons are not going to pay enough attention to the cultural nuances that so many luscious cultivars need; ergo, use sophisticated breeding and trialing to make those nuances less essential.

Holden has introduced several cultivars in recent years. Go to this web page to learn more about them: <https://holdenfg.org/rhododendron>.

Another site to visit is from Overdevest Nurseries, a wholesale propagator in New Jersey. Marketing director David Wilson gives a chatty thumbs-up to five of the Holden series of cultivars, especially as to their robustness for the northeastern climate: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wSbrKr7kow>. Here is a link for retail nurseries that get plants from Overdevest: <https://grownbyoverdevest.com/retail-locator>.

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.

February 15, Sunday, 1:30/2:00 p.m. Chapter meeting, Uwchlan Meetinghouse, Lionville, Pa. Presenter: Pamela Morris Olshefski. See article on Page 4.

February 28-March 8 Philadelphia Flower Show, Pennsylvania Convention Center, Philadelphia

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

Late March or April Chapter meeting, as yet in the works. Details to come.

April 21-25 ARS Convention, Vancouver Island, Canada. “Rhododendrons and Companions in a Changing Climate.” Registration is now open: <https://marsrhodos.ca/2026-ars-convention>

April 23-26, Thursday-Sunday Chapter Plant Sale, Jenkins Arboretum

May 1-3, Friday-Sunday Chapter Plant Sale, Tyler Arboretum

May 2, Saturday Cut-Flower Competition (Truss Show), Jenkins Arboretum

Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society

A chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

DVChapterARS.org

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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 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; in the Table of Contents, click on “Join.”