

RHODOGRAVURE

NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY SPRING 2024

Getting into the spring of things

National conference, plants sales, truss show, blooms galore

This clever planet of ours has done it again – revolved all the way around the sun from last spring. And thanks to that natty tilt of the orb’s axis, that year of revolution has given us spring, summer, autumn, winter and now spring again.

Spring! “Hallelujah,” sing we devotees of the genus *Rhododendron*. Let the blooms begin. And the planting. And the plant sales, and the conferences, and the truss shows, and the human intervention known as hybridizing.

For Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society members (and should-be members), there is plenty to do beyond our own backyards.

The national conference this year is in Bellingham, Wash., which is so far into the upper lefthand corner of the Lower 48 that it’s actually north of Victoria, British Columbia. The dates are May 2-5, and those who haven’t registered yet shouldn’t delay – April 21 is the deadline for guaranteeing a seat on the buses and at the dinners. Go to: <https://www.ars2024.org>. Don’t forget your passport; Canada is just a few blocks away.



Our chapter will not have an April meeting, since so many are going to the mini-confab this month in Annapolis (sorry, if you haven’t signed up, it has reached capacity).

Still in our first year as a merged chapter, we’re barreling ahead with not one but two plant sales. Simultaneously, even. The first weekend of May, we team up with Jenkins Arboretum in Devon and Tyler Arboretum in Media, selling oodles of choice azaleas, lepidotes and elepidotes. (See article below.)

The day before Mothers Day, Saturday, May 11, the annual cut-flower competition, or truss show, will be held at Jenkins. Entries are due by 9:30 a.m., and the show usually opens to the public around 12:30. All members will receive an email with details around the first of May.

Left: Judging the truss show last year: Cathy Keim, Karel F. Bernady, Peter Zale.



The Nicoletti garden in Snohomish, Wash., is on tour at the national conference.

Chapter to mount two plant sales

First weekend of May, at Jenkins and at Tyler

If there's one thing a true rhododendron lover cannot resist, it's a quality rhododendron plant sale. And this year, there are two in our zone.

The Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society will handle the rhododendron and azalea segments at the plant sales of both Tyler Arboretum and Jenkins Arboretum. Both sales are the first weekend of May.

Here's what makes these sales special: Both arboreta offer a wide range of nifty plants, especially native perennials and woodies. A significant proportion of the rhododendrons on offer via our chapter will be chapter-grown – not rooted cuttings, but garden-ready shrubs started three or so years ago by the propagation program of the erstwhile Greater Philadelphia Chapter. A hallmark of that program has been the collection of choice but uncommon cultivars that are rarely if ever available from commercial wholesalers. (Note: With the large number of varieties, some will be available in limited quantity; best shop early.)

Volunteers are needed for both sales. Set-up day will be Thursday, May 2, starting at 10 a.m. at each venue. Volunteers are also needed as sellers/experts during sale hours.

To volunteer to work on the sale at Jenkins, please contact Karel Bernady (bernadk@verizon.net; 484-888-8244).

To volunteer to work on the Tyler Sale, please contact Linda Hartnett (lindahartnett@gmail.com; 215-287-0731).

Tyler Plant Sale hours: Friday and Saturday, May 4-5, 9 a.m.-2p.m., 515 Painter Road, Media, Pa. 19063. (Friday is Tyler-members-only; to join go to: <https://tylerarboretum.org/membership>.)

Jenkins Plant Sale hours: Friday and Saturday, May 4-5, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., 631 Berwyn-Baptist Road, Devon, Pa. 19333. (Friday is a pre-ticketed party and sale, \$44.52 per person, 5:30-8 p.m.; to purchase tickets go to: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/plant-sale-weekend-opening-night-party-pre-sale-tickets-851116080107>.)

Visit the DVRS website:

<http://dvchapterars.org>

Hank Schannen's droll, reliable advice

By Steve Henning

Sadly, 14 years ago Hank Schannen passed away, on September 16, 2009, at the age of 71. He had joined the ARS Princeton Chapter 43 years earlier in 1966. Hank's enthusiasm for rhododendrons combined with his gregarious personality led him to visit rhododendron hybridizers as far away as the West Coast and Germany. Hank became a popular speaker not only for his knowledge and photography, but also for his down-to-earth humor.

He would say, "My idea of an erotic dream is 'Roseum Elegans' in 21 different colors."

Hank also knew how to make a point. After he died, the catalogue of his RareFind Nursery published his "Criteria for Success with Rhododendrons," a list that many had heard in his programs and took home on a handout. At this time of year, with neophytes joining long-term gardeners in festooning their gardens with yet more rhododendrons, it definitely bears repeating.

A marvelous thing happened after Hank started disseminating it in printed form when he gave a talk. He noticed a decline in questions about how to handle rhododendrons and azaleas. It turns out it helps, and that's no joke.

Hank Schannen's Criteria for Rhododendrons

12 Criteria for Success

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1. Drainage | 7. Acid pH |
| 2. Drainage | 8. Dappled shade |
| 3. Drainage | 9. Able to water when needed |
| 4. Drainage | 10. If containerized, loosen roots (viciously) |
| 5. Drainage | 11. When in doubt, plant <i>high</i> |
| 6. Drainage | 12. Hmmm – more <i>drainage!!</i> |

9 Ways to Kill a Rhododendron

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Site on the southwest corner of a house | 6. Plunk the containerized plant into the ground with root ball in pristine condition |
| 2. Full sun | 7. Ignore Criteria 1 through 7 |
| 3. Heavy clay soil | 8. Ignore Criterion 12 |
| 4. Wet, poor drainage | 9. Ignore Criterion 12 |
| 5. Down pout nearby | |

Stalking the wild ones

You, too, can be a rhododendron explorer

Do you have an inner John Bartram, a hankering to set out into the wild and see native species in bloom? Steve Wright, director of horticulture and curator at Jenkins Arboretum, is planning something for you.

In May and June, he'll organize day trips into deep Pennsylvania (well, the Poconos and Susquehanna River) to see *Rhododendron periclymenoides*, *canadense* and *arborescens* in bloom. As in, exploration trips, not drive-bys or public garden strolling. Mind your footgear.

Participants will provide their own transportation (carpooling recommended) and pay for lunch at some Pinxterburger Cafe.

Dates and other details will be set when it's easier to judge bloom time in those colder zones. If you're interested, contact Steve at steve@jenkinsarboretum.org.

These darlings have but a short time in the spotlight

Spring ephemerals will not wait for you; get out and see them

Some early, frost-defying rhododendrons are blooming now, a harbinger of the big show in May. Right now, though, the essence of early spring is the ephemeral wild flowers. They pop up fast, bloom fast, and fade fast, accomplishing the annual growth and seed-production cycle in just a few weeks, before the trees have leafed out and they can no longer receive enough sunlight to persist above ground.

The Friends of the Wissahickon has published a fine commentary on them at <https://fow.org/spring-ephemerals-in-the-wissahickon-park>.

Since the woodland habitat of native ephemerals is typically acidic (eons of decomposing oak leaves and pine needles), many growers of acid-loving rhododendrons incorporate ephemerals into their



Native trout lilies in the Punnett garden.

plantings. (Tip: They need late winter and early spring sun, so don't plant them on the north side of a huge elepidote.)

Hope Punnett of the West Mount Airy section of Philadelphia has an amazing patch of yellow trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), and once every few years her neighbor Michael Martin Mills may have a few flowers of the white trout lily (*E. albidum*). Trout lilies have been called suicide flowers, because the contractile roots of the little corm never give up, constantly pulling the plant deeper underground. Some say to place a flat rock underneath when planting them to encourage blossoming, though Michael says he's not convinced it works.

Another that goes dormant quickly after blooming is Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucularia*, say it fast and giggle: coo-cue-LARRY-ah), which has fine, ferny foliage and is much easier to keep in the garden than its cousin called squirrel corn (*D. canadensis*), which seems to like performing its vanishing act permanently.

Spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) is an oh-so-low charmer, and it multiplies well. Some say too well – Bill and Mich Steele used to weed it from their azalea collection in West Chester. Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) will also seed in prodigiously, but a quick deadheading session just when the flowers are over will contain a patch. The stalks always seem to lean almost horizontally toward the sunniest side of their site, so the seeds drop 15 to 18 inches from the plant's crown, and thus the patch can annually expand sunward.

Take a look at the Friends of the Wissahickon writeup, then find a local woodland to visit to take a look at the real things. Just don't delay. It's an ephemeral experience.



Dutchman's breeches

The looming election

No, not that one, but the peaceable chapter version

The Annual Meeting and Picnic of the Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society on June 30 will include election of officers and several directors.

All four offices – president, vice president, treasurer and secretary – will be filled. Karel Bernady and Jerry O'Dell have declined to serve another term as president and vice president, but treasurer Bob Smetana and secretary Kim Kopple are ready to continue in office. In addition, three seats on the board of directors will be filled.

A nominating committee is being formed, so far including Karel and Michael Martin Mills.

The newly merged chapter will thrive only with engaged leadership. If you haven't been on the board of either chapter before, why not step forward now and help ensure the chapter's success? Please contact Karel or Michael (emails and phone numbers on Page 6).

In memoriam

Pauline Raughley, 1922-2023

At the beginning of the year, delayed word reached the RhodoGravure that Pauline Raughley had died on October 15. She was 101.

For years, Pauline and Francis Raughley were stalwart members of the Valley Forge Chapter and associate members of Greater Philadelphia. They provided a particular service to the members in the form of a micro-bookshop devoted to gardening, which they set up at almost every meeting of both chapters. Pauline was a never-fail contributor of baked goodies for the refreshment table, and she always worked as a clerk for the truss show.

The Raughley garden was quite an accomplishment. They developed and tended it for 56 years, until Francis died in 2008. There were so many plants of such diversity, including hollies you could park your car under. They belonged to numerous garden societies, and the garden reflected that. The last spring they were in the house, their dove tree, *Davidia involucrata*, finally bloomed.

Pauline is survived by two daughters, two grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

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 its 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.

May 2-5, Thursday-Sunday. ARS national convention, Bellingham, Wash. More info: <https://www.ars2024.org>

May 2-5, Friday-Sunday Chapter plant sales, Jenkins Arboretum and Tyler Arboretum. More information on Page 2.

May 11, Saturday. Chapter Cut-Flower Competition, Jenkins Arboretum. Deadline for entries: 9:30 a.m.

May 28, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Chapter Board meeting, Jenkins Arboretum.

June 30, Sunday, 2 p.m. Picnic and Annual Meeting. Venue to be decided.

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 for Members sale. Jenkins Arboretum.

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 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. 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."