



Potomac Valley Chapter American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Spring Newsletter: July 2010

Regional Calendar

- * **July 18, 2010** – Potomac Valley Ch. Picnic, Seneca Creek State Park
- * **July 25, 2010** – Mason-Dixon Ch. Cutting Exchange, Bear Branch
- * **September 19, 2010** – Potomac Valley Ch. Meeting, Potomac, MD
- * **September 24-26, 2010** – Middle Atlantic Ch. Meeting, Winchester
- * **October 8-10, 2010** – ARS Western Regional, Florence, Oregon
- * **October 24, 2010** – Potomac Valley Chapter Fall Banquet

Chapter Officers

President: Bob McWhorter
mcwho@comcast.net
Vice-President: Richard Mohr
rngmohr@msn.com
Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman
prittman@erols.com

Chapter Picnic and Plant Exchange Sunday, July 18, 2009: 1 – 5 PM Seneca Creek State Park

We will hold our annual picnic and plant exchange again near Gaithersburg at Seneca Creek State Park from 1:00 – 5:00 PM. We will be returning to the Fawn Pavilion, the same covered picnic facility we have used the past two years. It is located in the park on the south side of Clopper Lake so either follow the signs or ask for directions at the gate.

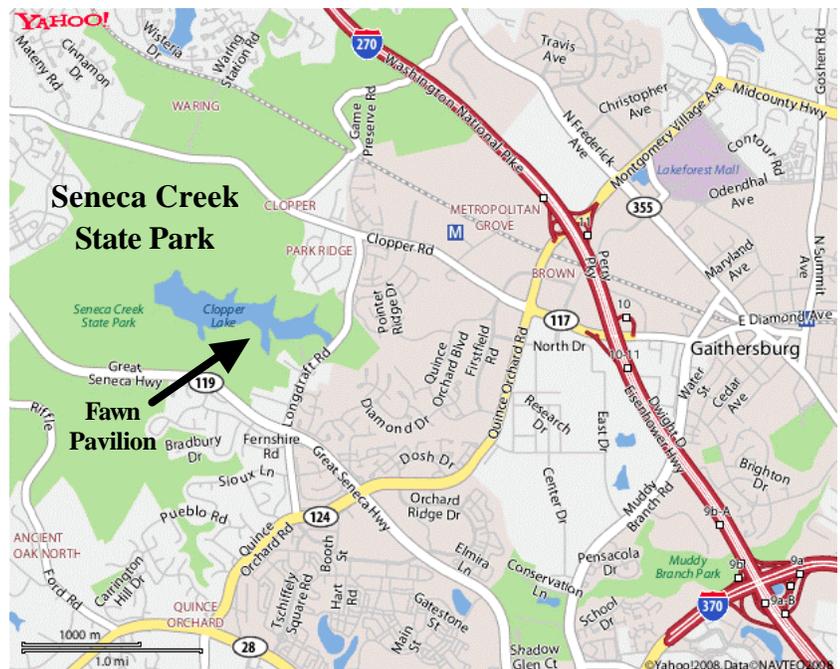
The chapter will be providing hamburgers, hotdogs, and buns, plus standard items like drinks, ice, condiments, plates, and eating utensils. However we ask you to bring some other picnic type food to share with others. Please bring items that will not spoil quickly on a warm day or provide an ice chest. If you wish to participate in the plant exchange, bring a plant worth about \$5 and trade with others.

Due to new park rules this year, alcoholic beverages are no longer allowed so please leave your wine or other spirits at home. There are no trashcans so we are expected to collect and remove our trash afterwards.

The park does charge a nominal entry fee but check at the gate since senior citizens 62 and older did not have to pay those fees in prior years.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Take I-495 to I-270N toward Frederick
2. Merge onto I-270 Local N
3. Take the Exit #10 West, toward MD Rt. 124
4. Turn RIGHT onto MD 117 (Clopper Rd)
5. Turn LEFT into the Park: 11950 Clopper Rd



Seneca Creek State Park - Fawn Pavilion
11900 Clopper Rd., Gaithersburg, MD 20878



Another Picnic at a Different Fawn Pavilion
(Don Hyatt's Ravaged Garden)

The 2010 PVC Flower Show

When we scheduled this year's Flower Show at the National Arboretum for April 24 so it would coincide with the FONA Plant Sale, we thought such an early date might mean that flowers would be scarce, especially with the rhododendrons. We couldn't have been more wrong!

The unprecedented warm weather this spring caused the season to be at least two weeks ahead of schedule and our 2010 show turned out to be one of our most colorful ones in recent memory.

Top honors including "Best Rhododendron" and "Best in Show" went to Carol Segree for her flawless truss of 'Phyllis Korn', a pale creamy yellow with gorgeous foliage (bottom center in Jon Wallenmeyer's photo below). The Beaudry's spray to the right is their greenish-yellow "Pineapple Mollis" which took "Best Azalea."



Other varieties winning "Best in Class" pictured on the Show Table are: (Top row, left to right): 'Epoch,' a blush pink tetraploid form of *R. carolinianum*, 'Windbeam,' a blush pink lepidote spray, *R. yakushimanum* 'Ken Janek,' the bicolor purplish red and white *R. kiusianum* 'Komo Kulshan' and the pink evergreen azalea 'Ellie Harris.' On the bottom row to the left of 'Phyllis Korn' is a pale pink Exbury azalea, 'Mary Clare.'

Special Award winners not pictured are the yellow edged white *R. austrinum* 'Millie Mac' and several evergreen azaleas including the purple spider 'Koromo Shikibu,' the white striped red 'Florence Waldman,' rose red 'Saybrook Glory,' and John Keshishian's lovely spray of 'Snow.'

Unfortunately, this will be the last time we can meet at the National Arboretum for a number of years since the Administration Building will be undergoing renovation.

The 2010 ARS Convention:

Long Island, New York by Don Hyatt

Did you get to the ARS Convention on Long Island held from May 14-17? If not, I'll give you a brief description of some highlights.

Naturally, the garden tours are always a prime draw but the cool wet summer from the prior summer resulted in a low bud set in New York and then the early spring season meant that bloom was not as heavy as usual. Unlike the ASA Convention in New Orleans, though, we did see flowers.



Dick Murcott (right) talks hybridizing with Bud Gehrlich

The weather was perfect on Long Island and the gardens were lovely. On Saturday, our first stop was the garden of noted hybridizer Dick Murcott (above). I had seen his garden when I attended my first convention in 1978 but his plants are much larger now. I was very impressed with some of his new hybrids including several gorgeous warm pinks with yellow undertones from the cross ('Janet Blair' x ('Margolit' x 'Woodbench')). One of those is pictured below.



Murcott Hybrid: Janet Blair x (Margolit x WoodBench)

Our next stop was the incredible Phipps Estate which was one of the highlights of the 1978 Convention. As before, it was equally stunning. We admired the exquisitely landscaped property with its magnificent old trees, rhododendrons, perennials, fountains, lawns, and sweeping vistas.



Old Dissectum Japanese Maples in the Phipps Garden

We had a chance to see some of the exciting new rhododendron hybrids of George Woodard who has been superintendent there for 28 years. George has produced many fantastic new hybrids in a broad range of colors and one of his rich burgundy reds took “Best in Show” at the ARS Convention Flower Show. He is surely one of the leading hybridizers in the U.S.



Phipps Estate Superintendent, George Woodard

At the Phipps Estate there is room for those huge, large leaf “tree rhododendrons” and George is breeding for those, too. We could see a few spent yellow blooms on some robust seedlings of his cross of (*brachycarpum* x *macabeanum*). The plants are apparently rock hardy with stunning foliage and will become massive plants in time.



*Werner Brack admires George Woodard's seedlings of (*brachycarpum* var. *tigerstedii* x *macabeanum*)*

We were scheduled to have lunch at the Phipps Estate but few of us would have expected such a lavish sit-down affair served in the garden under a huge white tent at the back of the house. The lunch for 150 people was hosted by the Phipps family. The sumptuous meal featured salmon and white wine. We had wine at almost every garden!



Fountain and the Lunch Setting at the Phipps Estate

The final garden was that of Dr. Philip Waldman, former owner of Roslyn Nursery. We saw azaleas he introduced including ‘Green Glow’ which seems resistant to petal blight. It came from seed I sent to the ARS exchange and I take no credit. I am just glad someone got a good plant!



Azalea ‘Green Glow’ in the Waldman Garden



**Vista at Planting Fields Arboretum with
Viburnum plicatum 'Mary Milton'**

On Sunday, we headed straight to Planting Fields Arboretum to explore the huge estate with its enormous old trees and extensive woody plant collection. We could easily have spent the whole day there but we had other gardens to see.

The next stop was the garden of Bud and Ruth Gehrlich. Bud is a past ARS President and a recipient of the ARS Gold Medal. We strolled along wooded paths and admired his landscape with many companion plants. Everyone seemed to congregate around one of Bud's hybrids, a huge plant that must have been at least 8 ft tall and was in full bloom. It was his #1 selection from a cross of ('Janet Blair' x 'Phipps Yellow') and had huge trusses of strong yellow with contrasting red spotting in the throat. 'Janet Blair' has proven to be a great parent that carries other colors.



Gehrlich Hybrid: (*Janet Blair* x *Phipps Yellow*) #1

From there, we stopped by to see Werner Brach's garden and view his new hybrids. Due to the poor bud set this year and early bloom season, few of Werner's seedlings were in bloom but many of us have already been impressed with

some of his hybrids like the soft pink and yellow 'Stonybrook' that took "Best in Show" at our 2006 ARS/ASA Convention in Rockville or his 'Janet's Fantasy' with its orange buds opening to peachy yellow flowers, another 'Janet Blair' hybrid.

The last garden of the day was the home of Bruce and Marianne Feller. The Fellers are well known for growing plants to perfection and although Bruce claims the reason is due to the rare microclimate created by the effects of the bay and Long Island Sound, there is no doubt that he is a master horticulturist, too. Their garden is filled with an incredible collection of plants including rare dwarf conifers and Japanese maples. Their rhododendrons and azaleas were lovely, too, and their garden seemed flawless, at least now that we were indulging in our third wine tasting of the day.



Conifers and Maples in the Feller's Garden

That evening was the ARS banquet and annual meeting. Dr. David Creech, Professor of Horticulture at Stephen F. Austin University in Texas, gave an extremely entertaining keynote address that covered a broad range of topics including the university's azalea garden and agricultural trends in China. Werner Brach was presented with one of the ARS Silver Medals awarded that evening and there was one Gold Medal award announced, too, but that person was not present. The recipient was our Don Voss! Ann Mangels and I called Don rather late in the evening to let him know. It was a very memorable convention and we all had a great time.

Diana Nicholls – A Tragic Loss

It is with great sadness that we report the loss of Diana Nicholls. She died at home apparently from a severe allergic reaction to insect stings.

Don Voss Receives ARS Gold Medal

We want to congratulate our own Donald H. Voss who was the 2010 recipient of the ARS Gold Medal. Since Don was unable to attend the ARS Convention on Long Island where the award was announced, Bruce Feller, ARS East Coast Vice President, joined President Bob McWhorter and District 9 Director Ann Mangels to make the formal presentation at our District 9 Meeting.

Congratulations Don! You were such a deserving candidate! This honor is just one small way that we in the ARS can let you know how much we have appreciated all the things you have done for so many years! The citation is below.



Don Voss holding his ARS Gold Medal Citation

Donald H. Voss ***ARS Gold Medal***

For decades you have been a recognized authority on flower color, taxonomy and nomenclatural issues in the genus Rhododendron.

Through selfless volunteer efforts and willingness to share your specialized knowledge, you have benefited botanists and horticulturists worldwide, which will have an impact for years to come.

You are a prolific author who has written for the ARS Journal and many other prestigious publications.

Your meticulous attention to detail, keen intellect and analytical skills have been appreciated in many ways, as District Director, technical reviewer, curator of herbarium specimens and advisor for many plant registrations.

For these and many other lasting contributions you have made to the goals of the American Rhododendron Society, we are pleased to present the Gold Medal to Donald H. Voss.

District 9 Meeting at Maggiano's *Plus Thoughts on Germany by Don Hyatt*

We had a wonderful luncheon at Maggiano's Italian Restaurant on June 19. There were two talks including Karel Bernady's great presentation on the Rhododendrons of Germany and a slightly different version of my talk on the Legacy of Joe Gable. We paid tribute to the legacies of Jane Goodrich and Margaret White and also had a slide show to remember some past members of our District 9 who have left legacies, too. I intend to write an article on Gable later but the rest of this piece will include a few thoughts about the recent International Rhododendron Conference in Bremen that Karel Bernady and I attended in May.

I had never been to Germany so didn't know what to expect. Since I don't travel easily, to fly directly from the ARS Convention in New York to Bremen was quite an ordeal for me. I did buy German books but never learned important travel phrases. To my surprise, everywhere we went the friendly German people wanted to practice their English so I had no problem communicating.

I felt humbled to be included on the list of conference speakers from around the world. All the presentations were in English and I fretted over my talk on the Native Azaleas of North America. I was scheduled for day two. It went well, and I invited attendees to see our native azaleas. After that I could enjoy the rest of the trip.

What a convention! We were treated to one of the most impressive floral displays imaginable. Ken Cox is usually quite critical but he deemed it the "best rhododendron conference ever." In five days of tours, we saw diverse sights including historic Bremen, Germany's oldest port city which dates back to 1043. We visited gardens that surpassed any rhododendron displays in the US. We toured wholesale and retail nurseries. In our region, rhododendrons are relatively rare but when I toured Scotland they were everywhere. That was my epitome for rhododendron culture. Germany now seemed like Scotland on steroids to me!

The focus of our first tour was Bremen's Rhododendron Park, which is under the direction of Dr. Hartwig Shepker. Hartwig was one of our keynote speakers at our 2006 Convention and conference chair for this meeting. What I didn't

realize is that his Rhododendron Park was the largest garden of its kind in continental Europe. It was huge, well over 100 landscaped acres and had a collection of over 3000 rhododendron cultivars including 1550 large leafed hybrids and 235 dwarf rhododendrons such as the latest *R. yakushmanum* hybrids in a wonderful array of new colors pictured below. They also have an extensive collection of evergreen and deciduous azaleas. Even better, there was no sign of petal blight!



Hartwig Schepker in Rhododendron Park's Yak Garden

In the eastern United States, we experienced a relatively poor bud set for the 2010 season and the spring was so hot that everything was two weeks early. In Germany they had a fantastic bud set the prior summer followed by a cool spring season that delayed flowering until we arrived. Then with the 10 days of glorious sunny weather during the meeting, every garden burst into peak bloom.

Among the public areas we visited, the serene garden of Lutetsburg Castle was a definite favorite with pastoral vistas and reflections of century old



Vista at Lutetsburg Castle Garden

trees and rhododendrons. The Park of Gardens in Bad Zwischenan had an impressive display of Knap Hill and Mollis azaleas that rivaled what I could remember of my brief trip to Exbury Gardens in England in 2000.

Hamburg's public garden, Planten un Blomen, includes several theme gardens with impressive stone landscaping and water features. We spent all our time in two Japanese gardens since Hartwig said they were the most dramatic. Just awesome!



Tea House in one Japanese Garden at Planten un Blomen

Among the commercial nurseries we visited, the 173 acre Hobbie garden which is nearly 80 years old had the largest specimens including a few of the first *R. yakushmanum* plants imported to Europe. They must have been 8 ft tall or more and spread 15 ft wide but were still compact!



*Joe Miller photographs *R. yakushmanum* at Hobbie's*

The Hachmann Nursery was impressive with gorgeous blooms and lots of new hybrids on the way. Holger Hachmann had taken over the nursery after his father's death. Karel had been

there before and noted that the nursery business had greatly expanded. Holger is very fond of blotches and showed a number of new hybrids, some of which used 'Midnight Mystique' as a parent. That plant was developed by American Frank Fujioka from Washington State and seems to throw bordered progeny. Below is one such purplish red and white bicolor named 'Hans Hachmann' in honor of Holger's father.



We saw some exciting new evergreen azaleas in Germany, too. Hachmann's 'Marushka' with its red flowers and dark glossy foliage has been popular in Europe. The current rage is an azalea called 'Maraschino,' a double crimson red with the same dark burgundy-chocolate colored foliage that maintains the color for 10 months of the year. Neither azalea is generally available in the U.S.



Burgundy Foliage of Evergreen Azalea 'Maraschino'

We were all impressed with the Bruns Nursery which is the largest in Europe and possibly the world. They carry a huge inventory of mature trees that can be delivered anywhere in Europe on short notice. They also offer an extensive line of

topiary plants and we saw acres and acres of artistically trimmed evergreens that were decades old but ready to go.

Without a doubt, the jaw-dropping highlight of the trip was the tour of the Fredo Schröder Nursery operated by the late owner's son, Timo. Schröder's is the largest wholesale supplier of rhododendron liners in Europe but rather than relying on tissue culture or growing cuttings on their own roots as is done in the US, they graft all of their plants, an amazing 1.5 million per year.

Timo demonstrated their nursery's grafting procedure. They take a scion of some variety they want to propagate as well as an unrooted scion of 'Cuttingham's White' that they will use for the root stock of the grafted plant. They make a sharp, diagonal cut on both scions and tie them together with cotton cord. They make sure to extend the 'Cunningham's White' below the other scion since it will form roots while the graft union heals. The cotton cord rots away within a year. The top part of 'Cunningham's White' will be cut off but the roots will remain to support the other scion that will grow into the desired plant.



Schröder's Grafting Process

Timo then took us on a tour of the nursery. We boarded carts pulled by tractors and sat on hay bales for the tour. We drooled at the display garden, three to five plants of approximately 1500 varieties all carefully labeled and in full bloom. We wanted to stop but there wasn't time. Timo seemed to have a slight grin as we toured those areas since he knew the best was just across the road, a rarely viewed portion of the nursery where

they get those 1.5 million scions to use in grafting. Apparently, few of the local Germans had seen that area either. We were all blown away!



Vista on a Hay Ride at the Schröder Nursery

I had seen photographs of the tulip fields in Holland and imagined what it would be like to see them in person. I was not expecting to see the equivalent floral display with rhododendrons in Germany. Schröder's nursery had blocks and blocks of mature rhododendrons that they use for their cuttings that stretched to the horizon.

We saw acres of older clones like 'Nova Zembla' and blocks of newer Hachmann hybrids like 'Fantastica' and 'Charmant.' There were huge swaths of color in every shade... white, pink, red, purple, blue, yellow, and peach. We looked in awe at a quarter of a mile of the yellowish pink yak hybrid called 'Percy Wiseman.' Timo said when a customer orders 250,000 'Percy Wiseman' plants, they will have the material. Incredible!!!

Mountain Trips and the "Red Max"

Immediately after the District Luncheon, some of us native azalea loonies headed south to the North Carolina and Tennessee mountains. Due to the warm spring, the season was way ahead of schedule so places we normally visit like Roan Mountain and Gregory Bald were nearing the end of their season but that meant we focused on other plants we normally don't see.



The "Red Max"- R. maximum

I was anxious to photograph the rare "Red Max" since it has always been in bud when I went there before. Maybe it would be in bloom.

That plant is very distinctive, in or out of flower. Stewards in the ARS have been watching over it for more than half a century. The blossoms are red colored due to its pigmented sap that looks like cranberry juice. The color does not go all the way to the edge of the leaf, though, so the center of the leaf is red but the margins are still green.

Driving near Mount Mitchell, we did notice the area experienced several bad ice and snow storms this winter and the tops of most deciduous trees had been broken off. As we drove down a Forest Service road off the Parkway, I became concerned since there were signs of fire in that region, too.

As I walked down the trail, I could see that charred plants on the trail's edge were beginning to regenerate from the base. When I cut into a "rhododendron hell" at the edge of a field to wind my way up the hill to the "Red Max" I saw that the fire had been far more intense there. Huge old *R. maximum* plants were completely burned with no signs of regeneration. I was concerned that the famous red *R. maximum* had met a similar fate.

As I neared a small clearing near the crest of a hill where the "Red Max" grows, I suddenly spied some red color through the dead branches. I actually had chills up my spine. Not only was the plant alive and well, but it was in full bloom!

How that fire managed to miss the spot where the "Red Max" grows is a complete mystery. I could see where flames had been within feet of its base and yet it had no damage! All I could think of is that the spirits of ARS greats like Joe Gable, David Leach, Augie Kehr, and many others who had watched over that rare plant for so many years must have gathered round to deflect the flames.

Later, I learned that the Forest Service unknowingly conducted a controlled burn in that area on Easter weekend to reduce the potential fire danger of the broken tree tops. The "Red Max" is safe... for now!

Donald W. Hyatt, Newsletter Editor
Potomac Valley Chapter ARS
Don@donaldhyatt.com