



# Potomac Valley Chapter American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Spring Newsletter: March 2011

## Calendar

- \* **March 27, 2011** – National Arboretum: Barbara Bullock
- \* **April 15-17, 2011** – Middle Atlantic Chapter Meeting, Norfolk, VA
- \* **April 26, 2011** – Arboretum Trip to See the Glenn Dales in Bloom
- \* **May 7-8, 2011** – Joint Flower Show with Mason-Dixon Chapter
- \* **May 11-15, 2011** – ARS Convention, Vancouver, Oregon

## Chapter Officers

**President:** Richard Mohr

rngmohr@msn.com

**Vice-President and Secretary:** Open  
Please consider. It really isn't hard!

**Treasurer:** Phyllis Rittman

prittman@erols.com

## Next Meeting: Barbara Bullock

*“Designing with Azaleas”*

**Date: Sunday, March 27, 2011**

**Time: 1 – 4 PM**

**Location: U. S. National Arboretum**

Barbara Bullock will be speaking about “Designing with Azaleas” at our next meeting. We are trying out the Arboretum’s temporary visitor’s center, a double wide trailer which is located at the R St. entrance to the right of the same parking lot. Barbara has put together a new program that will show us how improve the landscape when we feature azaleas in our gardens.

Feel free to ask Barbara technical questions about azaleas, but please do not ask her to comment on anything related to the Glenn Dale Azaleas on Mt. Hamilton or the “Save the Azaleas” campaign. Don Hyatt can update you on those topics.

Spring should be starting at the Arboretum, so allow some extra time to see the gardens. The Bonsai display is wonderful any time of year. The Daffodil Collection should be lovely and it is planted with the National Boxwood Collection. Some of the earlier varieties in the Camellia Collection could be starting to flower and if we avoid spring frosts, the deciduous Magnolia Collection should be magnificent. There should be a number of plants in bloom in the Asian Valley, and wildflowers and trillium in Fern Valley. As you drive around Arboretum, look for the Prunus hybrids developed by Dr. Don Egolf. These cherry trees have deeper colors than those at the Tidal Basin and come in deep pink to red. They named a deep rose ‘First Lady.’

**Refreshment Duty:** Persons whose last names begin with **Q** through **Z** are asked to bring some refreshment goodies for the table.

**Directions:** The National Arboretum is located in northeast Washington, D.C., off of Bladensburg Road at 24th and R St. The Arboretum website provides excellent directions: [www.usna.usda.gov](http://www.usna.usda.gov)



*Barbara Bullock admiring R. prinophyllum*

## Arboretum Update: \$1 Million Donation By Don Hyatt

When Scott Aker announced last November that the 60-year old Glenn Dale azaleas on the hillside at Mt. Hamilton in the Arboretum were scheduled to be cut down in 2011 and stumps painted with herbicide, we were outraged. A major donation brought a reprieve but the fight is not over until policies are changed.

In our last newsletter, we presented some of the absurd reasons we had been given for destroying the azaleas. Scott said the display was too pretty and that attracted too many visitors which caused problems with parking and restroom use. Another reason given was that those majestic azaleas had lost their tags so the Arboretum wasn't sure what they were. Rather than trying to identify them, the decision was to start over. Cut down the plants now and eventually replace with rooted cuttings of known forms.

Of course, not only were the azaleas marked for destruction, but also the National Boxwood Collection which was fully documented, as well as related perennial collections including the daffodils, the daylilies, and the peonies. Nothing made sense!

Many of us became involved in a grass roots protest against this decision, and it truly went “viral” on the Internet. Steve Henning set up a website to focus our efforts: [www.savetheazaleas.org](http://www.savetheazaleas.org). Critics were not just local but from across the country and even overseas. Hearst Media taped a national TV news segment that appeared in many major US cities.

On January 24, we finally learned some of the real reasons behind the Arboretum’s actions. Apparently, when President Hu Jintao of the People’s Republic of China was in the US for his state visit, the USDA signed an agreement with China to install a new Chinese Garden on 12 acres at the Arboretum. This garden was proposed years before but never funded. Now it made sense why there was such urgency to ravage other collections in order to shift resources to this new project. People who loved the azaleas, boxwood, and other plant groups could see some of the reasoning but did not agree with their priorities.

On February 14, there was a startling turn of events. An anonymous donor had given FONA one million dollars to support the Azalea and the Boxwood Collections. The endowment’s principal cannot be touched, but the interest it generates will be used for only the azaleas and boxwood, and not for the Asian Valley, the new Chinese Garden, or other collections.

On March 10, the new Director of the Arboretum, Dr. Colien Hefferan, arranged a meeting of stakeholders to discuss policy decisions about the various plant collections. Representing the ARS were Ted Stecki, ARS President, and Steve Henning of the Save the Azaleas website. The ASA representatives were me, Don Hyatt on behalf of Aaron Cook, and Harold Belcher of the Ben Morrison Chapter.

The meeting was well attended by at least 40 people including representatives of various plant societies and garden interests. Dr. Hefferan introduced her staff and a panel that would lead off the discussion. The three panel members presented views on plant collection policies and it seemed that most of them tried to put a positive spin on the Arboretum’s past decisions.

The other attendees had only 3 minutes each to make a statement. Two speakers agreed with the panel, but most of us were definitely opposed to the Arboretum’s policy. Jeanne Connelly of FONA said that people were upset because nobody had any input. Kevin Walek of the Hosta Society summed it up by saying, “This was a dictate, not a dialogue.”

Dr. Hefferan was concerned about the lack of trust and hoped to change that. Interestingly, Dr. Ramon Jordan and Scott Aker attended but didn’t speak. Dr. Jordan sat beside us, and it reminded me of Godfather II, “Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer.”

## 2011 Photography Contest Results

Congratulations to all who entered in January’s Photography Contest. Once again, it seemed that everyone who entered left with a prize. Don Hyatt won best picture for his landscape photo of a tree and reflections in the Lütetsburg Garden in Germany last May. There were a number of ties in the categories, but the top winners are listed below. If you were a winner, please email Don the image of your prize winning photo so we can publish it in a later issue.

**Category I: Flowers** – Jon Wallenmeyer, *R. alabamense* var. ‘Frosty’

**Category II: Scenery** – *Tie:* Don Hyatt and Bill Wallenmeyer

**Category III: Other** – *Tie:* Jon Wallenmeyer and Bob McWhorter

## North Carolina Nursery Trek

### A Grand Success *by Don Hyatt*

We had a great turnout for our North Carolina Nursery Trek. Joe Marsala said the official count was 26 attendees. Wow! Every year we seem to be getting more and more people. That’s a good sign!

Friday’s first stop was Pine Knott Farm for the Hellebore Festival. The hellebores were lovely, and my favorites were the doubles, yellows, and bicolors.



*Striking Bicolor Hellebore at Pine Knott Farms*

I arrived at Pine Knott shortly after they opened. I met up with George McLellan who was leaving from there to go to Cam Too Nursery in Greensboro, NC, so I joined him. George was picking up an order of camellias for a landscape job he was doing. Cam Too is strictly wholesale, but the Mason-Dixon Chapter ARS has placed group orders with them. Our chapter may want to do the same one day, too.

I was amazed at the scale of their operation. They have 30 acres of greenhouses on their rolling land, hundreds of large hoop houses filled with camellias, an

incredible inventory of 1.5 million plants. Since the greenhouses are still covered with white plastic, the impression is one of a hillside covered with snow stretching to a line of trees at the far horizon.

To keep track of their plants, Cam Too uses a detailed computer inventory. The greenhouses are arranged in blocks on the hill, and each group has a unique letter (A, B, C...). Each greenhouse within the block is then numbered (1, 2, 3...), and inside each greenhouse are the plants, all extremely well grow and arranged in straight rows. The camellias they usually sell are landscape sizes in 3-gallon pots or larger.

For instance, to pick up six plants of the camellia 'Crimson Candles,' a tall light red that many of us have admired in Tony Avent's garden, staff checked the inventory and printed out a list showing several locations where they had plants. We got in one of their golf carts and rode to the K-block of greenhouses which was about the center of the hillside, and then looked in greenhouse K-22. There they were!



*30 Acres of Greenhouses at Cam Too Nursery*

Cam Too does allow visits from plant societies, but I am not sure how easy it would be for our group to add it to the NC plant trek. It is not a place to just stroll through and look for something that catches your eye. It is just too huge. They do not sell retail, either.

The next morning, we were off to Big Bloomers and then went to Tony Avent's Plants Delight Nursery in the afternoon. I did the most damage at Big Bloomers.



*Huge Agave Plant in Tony Avent's Garden*

Heavy rains were moving on Sunday, but many of us who still had room in our cars managed to get to Camellia Forest Nursery to pick up more plants. The trip home, at least for me, was slow through the rains.

Once again, we want to thank Joe Marsala for organizing the trip. He told me he is already getting psyched for next year. We discovered that the Comfort Inn has a meeting room, so maybe next time we can arrange to have a speaker one evening to tie into our socializing.

If you were not able to go this year, perhaps you can join us next time. As for me, I have already blocked out the first weekend in March on my calendar.

### ***Upcoming Events:***

#### **Arboretum Field Trip: April 26**

Even though we seem to have been successful with our Save the Azaleas campaign, we will still be holding a multi-chapter field trip to the National Arboretum on the Tuesday after Easter, April 26. In a normal year, that is the week when the early Glenn Dales begin to reach peak bloom. The trip will be very informal, and people are encouraged to carpool. There may be some news people there, too.

Most of us will head down to the Arboretum after the morning rush hour is over and will probably arrive around 10:00 AM. We expect to return before the evening rush so we should be on our way by 2:00 PM. Bring a bag lunch if desired, and something to drink since there are not many places nearby to have lunch.

#### **Joint Flower Show: May 7 -8**

As we pointed out in the last newsletter, our annual Flower Show will be held in conjunction with the Mason-Dixon Chapter ARS at the Shipley Arena at the Carroll County Agricultural Center in Westminster, MD. We will need to set up on Friday and our group must supply some of tables they need. Trusses can be entered on Friday from 6:30 to 7:30 PM., or on Saturday morning before 9:30 AM. We will need to take down the show on Sunday afternoon, too.

We will really need people to help out on this event, so please assist us. We not only need people to set up and take down, but people to bring their flowers.

Mason-Dixon Chapter President Ray Smith said he will try to get to our meeting on March 27 to answer questions and provide additional details.

**Directions:** From the south, take I-270 to Rt. 27 north. Just prior to Westminster, turn right at the light onto Kate Wagner Road. In approximately 1.2 miles, turn left onto Gist Road and continue to the new Ag Center entrance which is on the left. It is near the hospital.

706 Agricultural Center Dr, Westminster, MD 21157

## Woes of Winter Storm Damage

by Bob McWhorter

Considering the cold temperatures, amount of snow, ice and high winds experienced over the last two winters it is no wonder that we bemoan the damage to our gardens. I am sure our experience here at Rosa Gardens is not unlike yours. Following each of these storms Rosa and I bundle up and venture out to survey what damage has occurred; often shaking snow from prostrate plants, making feeble attempts to tie up large broken branches and resolving to return at a better time with electrical tape to seal the breaks from insects, etc. Then too, there is “pick up sticks”, a childhood game that is a gardener’s pain in the...back!



*Many Branches Were Broken by the Heavy Wet Snow*

For those who received the winter 2010 issue of *The Azalean* I am certain we have all read Part 1 of Don Hyatt’s article *A Winter to Forget: “Snowmageddon 2.0”* about the impact of recent winters in his beautiful garden. His photographs give us a vivid example of what we all have experienced. Rosa and I look forward to Part 2 of Don’s article.

At the last PVC meeting Jean Beaudry was kind enough to bring along some past issues of *The Rhododendron Society Notes*, which she offered to those in attendance. When just about everyone had departed the meeting I offered to take the remaining issues and she gladly gave them to me. The *Rhododendron Society Notes* were reprinted by *The Pacific Rhododendron Society* in 1976. One of the first issues I picked up contained a series of articles titled ‘Members’ Notes for the year 1927’.

One short article titled “Notes from Wakehurst” may give some perspective, if not consolation, to our present winter garden woes. The author G.W.E. Loder tells us that ‘If the season of 1926 was a record one for the profusion with which *Rhododendrons* flowered, that of 1927 was as remarkable the other way.

Whether the cause is to be attributed to weather conditions or some unknown cycle in the life history of the genus, one cannot say. All we know is that two good flowering seasons rarely follow one another”.

Loder goes on to say “As I write, at the end of December, we are experiencing the effects of the heaviest fall of snow and most severe blizzard of recent years. Not since the winter of 1916-17 has there been anything so trying. It is impossible to say yet what has succumbed to the cold, but the disasters wrought by the snow are evident enough, large branches having been broken off many of the larger specimens. Let us hope 1928 will be a more propitious year for *Rhododendrons*”.

**Moral of the Story:** Upon hearing my bemoaning broken branches, split trunks or buds that will never bloom Rosa reminds me that “It is nature’s way of pruning”. I think to myself “Well, she is a damn poor pruner”. Upon further reflection I conclude nothing lasts forever, mother nature will have her way and we must take what happens and be glad of all else in the garden that will delight us in the spring. If Gerald Loder were here today I am sure he would say “Let us hope 2011 will be a more propitious year for *Rhododendrons*”.

## Save the Azaleas and Boxwood!

The Friends of the National Arboretum, FONA, has a long range goal of trying to endow all of the major collections at the Arboretum but it will take an estimated \$50 million. With the obvious interest and support expressed for the Azalea and Boxwood Collections this year, they have decided to focus their efforts on those two collections first. The anonymous \$1 million donation announced in February is a start, but since only the interest can be used from the endowment it will only generate about \$50,000 per year. That is not enough to fully support both gardens. If we could raise a second million, the interest would be ample to support those two gardens in perpetuity.

Since approximately 100,000 people visit the Arboretum each year during peak azalea bloom, if each visitor made a mere \$10 contribution, we could raise that second million in just one year.

Please consider making a tax exempt contribution to FONA to support the Azalea and Boxwood fund. You may call FONA at **202-544-8733** and make a credit card pledge over the phone. You may donate online at **www.fona.org**, or send a check made out to **FONA** and mail it to the Friends of the National Arboretum at **3501 New York Avenue, Washington, DC 20002**. Be sure to specify the Azalea and Boxwood Fund.