



Potomac Valley Chapter

American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Winter Newsletter: March 2021

Potomac Valley Chapter Calendar – 2021

- June 3 – 6, 2021 – Virtual ARS Convention in Nova Scotia.
- TBA

Next Meeting: Sometime?

Due to the pandemic, most chapter activities continue to be canceled. Perhaps we will be able to get back to normal by summer or fall.

As your newsletter editor, I apologize for this combined Winter / Spring issue. As many of you know, I now write the Rhododendron and Azalea News for the ARS which has six issues a year. Trying to write copy for both has caused me to get behind at times. If you missed the R & A News, here are links to some key articles I wrote.



Rhododendron Foliage

www.arspvc.org/RA-News/V16.1/Foliage.html



Hollies, Hellebores, and Hamamelis

www.arspvc.org/RA-News/V16.1/Hellebores.html

Chapter Officers

President: Ginny Mohr
Ginnymohr64@gmail.com
Secretary: Diane Reinke
Isabelle49@aol.com
Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman
rittwoman@gmail.com



Japanese Maples

www.arspvc.org/RA-News/Maples.html



Fall Color – Plants in the Wild

www.arspvc.org/RA-News/Mountains.html

Dave Banks has now posted back issues of the *Rhododendron and Azalea News* with these articles and many other links:
<https://rhododata.online/>

Rhododendrons Down East!

*American Rhododendron Society
Convention 2021*

Early Bird Registration Ends March 31!

The American Rhododendron Society Virtual Convention 2021 will be offering all of the presentations, garden tours, ARS award ceremonies and networking opportunities *available online* to those with internet access!

We are extremely fortunate to be able to bring some very celebrated speakers to the convention, who will be addressing different aspects of our theme: **Rhodos Down East: Exploring the North Atlantic Region**. These will include **Ken Cox**, rhodo breeder and seasoned plant explorer from Glendoick Nursery, Scotland; **Joe Bruso**, veteran rhodo breeder from Massachusetts; and **Todd Boland**, author, educator and all-around horticultural expert, from Newfoundland's Memorial University Botanical Garden. Well-known plant experts Christina Woodward and Nick Yarmoshuk from Ontario, Philip McDougall an ex-pat Nova Scotian now living in B.C., and Kristian Theqvist of Finland, will also be active participants, and many more!

Networking opportunities will include the **Breeder's Roundtable** where you can discuss the latest trends in rhodo breeding and the **ARS Next Generation Project** on innovative ideas to engage the next generation in your local ARS chapter activities.

Registration for the virtual convention is open! Avoid the late registration fee if you register before April 1, 2021. Registration closes on May 1, 2021.

\$70.59 US for 4 days of virtual events! US and International registration:

Eventbrite: Rhodos Down East!

<https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/rhodos-down-east-exploring-the-na-region-us-intl-registration-v-registration-133017903129?aff=ebdssbeac>



'Gilbert Myers' and a Cicada

The Cicadas Are Coming!

"Brood X" of the Periodical Cicadas will visit us this May. This is the largest batch and much of the Eastern U.S. including the DC area will be blessed with billions of noisy bugs. These insects are often called 17-year locusts but they are not really locusts. The larvae live underground for 17 years sucking juices from plant roots much like an aphid. One night, these brown crustacean-like bugs emerge from the ground, en masse, climb on anything, shed their shells and metamorphose into adult cicadas. The insects are black with big red eyes and translucent orange wings. For about a month, the males make loud buzzing noises to "attract the ladies." The females find a mate, lay their eggs, and soon they all die. The eggs hatch, larva fall to the ground, and the cycle starts over.

The cicadas will not eat your plants but the females can harm small trees and shrubs. They bore rows of v-shaped holes into branches where they lay eggs. They prefer pencil-thick branches which often break off or die. A single female lays up to 20 eggs in each hole and about 600 eggs in all. With big infestations, small trees and shrubs can get clobbered but large trees just get a good pruning. Gardeners often cover dwarf trees and shrubs with gauze or mesh to protect them during the onslaught. In 2004, my rhododendrons came through just fine but some deciduous azaleas and dwarf maples were damaged.

Recent Email Address Changes:

Ginny Mohr: ginnymohr63@gmail.com

Richard Mohr: rmohr1953@gmail.com

Carol Segree: csegree17@outlook.com

Phyllis Rittman: rittwoman@gmail.com

Rhododendron arboreum

By Don Hyatt

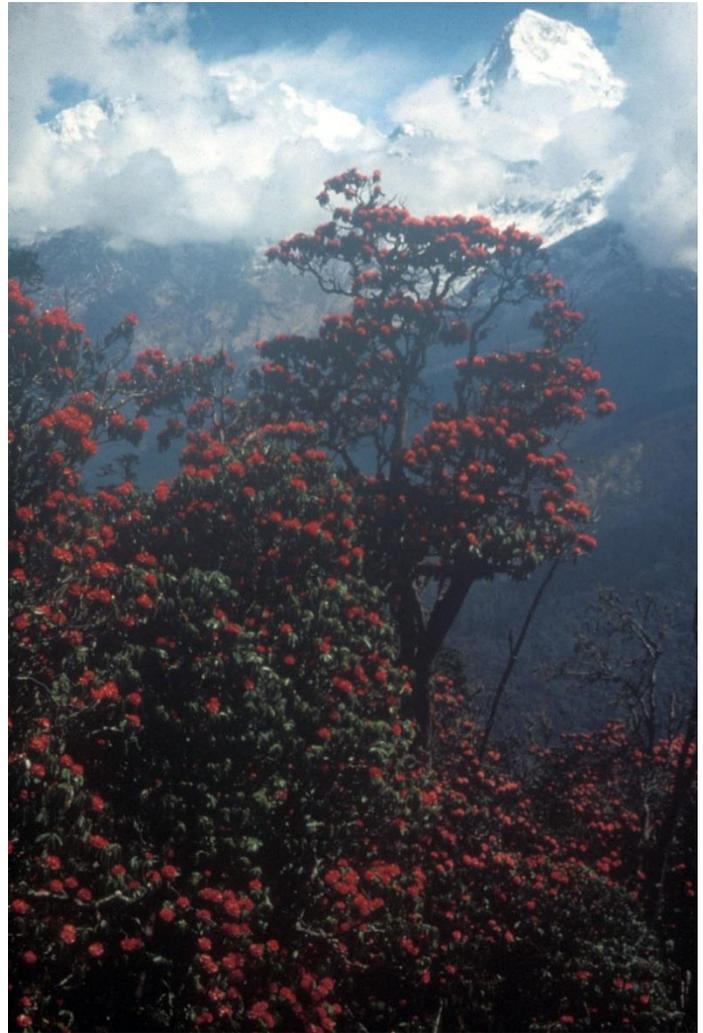
About the time I started hiking trails in the Appalachians photographing native plants, I was also deeply moved by a lecture given by Tony Schilling, the Curator of Wakehurst Place, part of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. At this meeting, we all sat in stunned silence as he showed slides from Nepal and the Himalayas as he discussed the incredibly rich flora from the region. We didn't want him to stop but when he did conclude, many of us flocked to the podium to thank him for such an inspiring presentation.

I will never see that area in person but I have no doubt it is one of the most spectacular floral displays on this earth. He kindly offered to send me copy of one of his slides that I could share with others. The image to the right is a scan of his slide. Thank you, Tony! I was happy to see that Tony was honored in 2019 by Nepal for his major contributions to horticulture. Tony helped start the National Botanical Garden of Nepal.

Rhododendron arboreum is one of the most widely distributed species in the world growing in broad areas of Asia, especially near the Himalayas in South Western China, Northern India, and Nepal. It is a tree, often reaching heights of 80 feet tall or more. The typical form has blood red flowers in large, tight trusses of up to 20 blossoms, and each flower can measure up to 2 inches across. Some forms at higher elevation are rose, pink or even white. The world's largest rhododendron of any kind is a specimen of *R. arboreum* discovered in 1993 at Mount Japfu in India. It measures 108 ft tall.

Blooming typically in March and April, the stature of mature specimens is amazing but the setting where they grow in places like Nepal with the snow-capped Himalayas in the distance is beyond perfection. It is Nepal's national flower.

The species was introduced into England in 1811 and became a parent of many colorful hybrids by being crossed with hardier species. The cross (*caucasicum* x *arboreum*) produced 'Nobleanum' and (*catawbiense* x *arboreum*) produced 'Russellianum'.



***Rhododendron arboreum* in Nepal**

Photo: Tony Schilling



R. arboreum

Photo: Don Hyatt



R. arboreum ssp. cinnamomeum var. roseum at Benmore. Steve Krebs (right) admires the trunk.

Never having seen *R. arboreum* the wild, I am writing this article from personal observations of some gardens I have visited. There are several subspecies and variants of *R. arboretum* and all of them seem to become impressive tree-like specimens.

The best reds are forms of *R. arboreum ssp. delavayi* from lower elevations near the Himalayas and *R. arboreum ssp. zeylanicum* from Sri Lanka. They are much less hardy than other forms but they do seem to grow in many sheltered gardens. *R. arboreum ssp. cinnamomeum* is much hardier since it tends to grow at higher altitudes in the region. The flower color can be rose, pink, or white and the dark green foliage is lovely. It seems to be hardy in the UK and Pacific Northwest, but I have not seen it in the eastern US.



R. arboreum ssp. cinnamomeum var. roseum

Below are two *R. arboreum* forms I admired in June Sinclair's garden. Notice the foliage!

A large *R. arboreum ssp. cinnamomeum var. roseum* I saw at Benmore in Scotland was becoming an impressive tree with a gnarled trunk. Its lovely rounded trusses open pink and fade to almost white as they age. (pictured left)

I had a chance to visit June Sinclair's sheltered garden on the Olympic Peninsula, WA. It was serene and wild, filled with rare species and wildflowers under tall trees. It was easy to imagine I was in Nepal. She had many forms of *R. arboreum* in red, pink, and even a stunning white. I wondered if some came from Tony Schilling's seed.

I am reminded of a prophetic warning Tony shared during his talk. The beautiful scenery in Nepal was under siege. There is stress from climate change. Forests are being cut down; denuded slopes are eroding. Even foot traffic from admiring naturalists is harming some delicate ecosystems. Sadly, that is true almost everywhere. Check out his 1997 ARS article on Rhododendron Conservation:

<https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/v51n3/v51n3-schilling.htm>



R. arboreum ssp. cinnamomeum var. album



R. arboreum ssp. cinnamomeum



Steve Krebs admires *R. arboreum ssp. delavayi* at Benmore Botanic Garden in Scotland



R. arboreum ssp. delavayi



Buransch Juice
A tonic made from flowers of *R. arboreum*

Mad Honey – Deli Bal

Many rhododendrons contain toxic substances that can be of medicinal value when used properly. They can also be dangerous if one is not careful. A natural neurotoxin called grayanotoxin is present in varying amounts in many rhododendron species. It is a known hallucinogen that can cause problems even in small amounts.

Bees that gather nectar from certain rhododendrons can produce “Mad Honey”, also known as “Deli Bal”. In Turkey, the native yellow azalea *R. luteum* and purple rhododendron *R. ponticum* are both high in grayanotoxin. The hallucinogenic honey produced by bees in this region can be quite debilitating.

In 69 BC, an army of Roman soldiers invading the Black Sea region under the command of General Pompey, found chunks of honeycomb along the road left by the local people. They happily consumed the honey, but became disoriented by the intoxicating substance and were easily slain by the local opposing army.

Mad Honey from Nepal

In Nepal, there are no native plants of *R. luteum* or *R. ponticum*, but the flowers of *R. arboreum* also contain ample amounts of grayanotoxin. The honey produced from this region is red due to the flower color of this species rather than the dark brownish yellow color typical of Deli Bal from Turkey. There is also a red health tonic called Buransch Juice made from *arboreum* flowers.

If one consumes too much Deli Bal, outcomes can range from hallucinations, a slowed heartbeat, nausea, temporary paralysis, and unconsciousness. There have been no reports of deaths from Mad Honey in recent years but people should be careful to limit its use. The recommended dose is no more than one teaspoon a day.

Promoters of Mad Honey claim that this natural medicine can be used to cure pain, reduce stress, relieve hypertension, resolve sleep disorders, provide mental clarity, give people more energy, and even serve as a substitute for Viagra. It almost sounded like it was a panacea for the ills brought on by the pandemic. Mad Honey is popular, and the most expensive honey in the world. A pound sells for \$60 to \$80 on the Black Market!



R. luteum



R. ponticum

The Lure of Lepidote Rhododendrons

By Don Hyatt

The first rhododendrons to bloom in my garden are the small leaf Lepidotes. Over the years, I have really come to admire these charming plants. Some can be tall but many have dwarf habit and small flower size making them suitable for bonsai or a rock garden. In the landscape, they provide a floral effect similar to the evergreen azaleas. What attracts me is that they come in colors we do not see in the evergreen azaleas, especially yellow and blue.



R. angustinii - Deep Blue Lepidote Species

These plants are distinguished from the other rhododendron groups because they have “scales” on their leaves and stems. These tiny structures appear as waxy dots on the surfaces, and are best viewed with a hand lens.

One additional plus in my garden situation is that lepidotes often have aromatic foliage and the deer in my region are not fond of that favor. My deer usually eat something else first before they start on the lepidotes. I realize that may not generally be true for all regions since some deer may have developed a preference for them and will munch on lepidotes first.

Many of the dwarf lepidotes are from alpine regions so they are ideal to use in a rock garden. Being used to cold and snow, they are often quite winter hardy and can succeed in northern gardens where evergreen azaleas tend to struggle. However, they are usually less heat tolerant so those of us who live in warmer climates are more

limited in our choices. That does give some hybridizers a focus: breeding for heat tolerance.

The most impressive rock garden I have seen is in Scotland at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. The design is free flowing and artistic. The plant materials are rare and the place was immaculate.

In one area, an undulating grassy lawn is planted with masses of dwarf lepidote species that fit naturally into the terrain. These are primarily alpine species but there are tall evergreen trees and small pockets of perennials that complete the design.

In another area, a series of gravel paths wind through rock masses where dwarf rhododendron species and choice companion plants grow in a natural setting. It is so nice to be able to appreciate small treasures at eye level.



Lepidotes – Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh



Rock Garden Vista - Edinburgh



***R. keiskei* - Lepidote Species from Japan**

The plants one chooses for a rock garden does depend upon the climate. I am always impressed by the horticultural skill of many people in my local chapter of the North American Rock Garden Society. They seem to be able to create rare microclimates and thus have success with some very difficult plants. I often have good intentions but I manage to neglect my plants at some critical time and that is usually fatal.

In the Washington DC area, my favorite dwarf yellow lepidote is *R. keiskei* from Japan. It seems to do quite well even without careful attention. Some of the very dwarf forms like 'Yaku Fairy' are less forgiving but I do have 4 or 5 selections that succeed. Haag's '24 Karat' is yellow hybrid taller than *R. keiskei* and seems very tough.

Augie Kehr's blush pink 'Southland' was derived from a rare Florida species called *R. minus* var. *chapmanii*. It has significant heat tolerance. Nearing's apricot 'Mary Fleming' and light pink 'Windbeam' are excellent but are not dwarf. They can easily become 3 to 4 ft tall in



'Mary Fleming'



Nearing's 'Windbeam'

time so they will need pruning to keep them within bounds.

Lepidotes that are also in the medium range for plant size are Weston's bright pink 'Aglo' and 'Olga Mezitt'. They rarely get frozen in my garden because they are hybrids of our native *R. minus* var. *carolinianum* from North Carolina which blooms a bit later. They are not only winter hardy but also heat tolerant.



'Aglo'

'Olga Mezitt'

There are many blue lepidote species that I admire on the West Coast that I wish I could grow. *R. augustinii* is one of the most spectacular blues and can tower 8 ft tall. I have killed it many times but we try to use it in hybridizing in hopes of getting a hardier form. One of its hybrids, 'Blaney's Blue', does grow for us. 'Rhein's Luna' is a lighter lavender blue hybrid from Pennsylvania and it does well, too.



'Blaney's Blue'



'Rhein's Luna'

The dwarf species *R. impeditum* is a lovely specimen for a rock garden but very difficult to grow in warm climates. I kept one alive for 3 years until a storm damaged trees and changed the shade pattern. I think it died in less than a month. *R. fastigiatum* looks very similar and it is equally hard to keep alive.



***R. impeditum* at the RSBG**



'Vibrant Violet' in Frank Fujioka's Garden

There are many beautiful blues I have admired on the West Coast and overseas. In Frank Fujioka's garden on Whidbey Island, he has several forms of *R. augustinii* in varying shades of blue. The real show stopper is one of his own hybrids, 'Vibrant Violet' (*impeditum* x *augustinii* 'Towercourt'). It is a rich deep violet blue and is a striking companion with his other hybrids like his orange 'Seaview Sunset' and his yellow 'Saffron Silk' as seen below. We can dream!



'Seaview Sunset' with 'Vibrant Violet'



'Saffron Silk' with Maples and *augustinii*

2021 Rhododendrons of the Year

Here are the top rhododendrons and azaleas in 2021 for our District. Many of these were runner up choices in last year's competition.

'Jack Cowles' is one of the favorite plants at Heritage Plantation on Cape Cod. It was named and introduced by an ARS study group called the Sandwich Club in 1991. The heavily ruffled flowers are warm pink at the edges fading to light yellowish pink in the center. It is difficult to propagate by cuttings so it is usually grafted.

'Weston's Pink Diamond' is an early blooming lepidote rhododendron hybrid with double pink flowers. Introduced by Wayne Mezitt in the Boston area from a cross of a 'PJM' hybrid with the species *R. mucronulatum* 'Cornell Pink', it is quite winter hardy. It has rather sparse winter foliage and the deer in my community do not seem to like the aromatic foliage.

'Betty Ellen' is an evergreen azalea developed by Bob Stewart, one of our local hybridizers from Springfield, VA. The lovely flowers measure 2 to 3 inches across and are very delicately colored. The wavy petals are white brushed with pink on the tips and there is a touch of green in the throat. It forms a nice compact plant.

R. austrinum is a very fragrant native azalea that is also heat tolerant since it is native to Florida. The flower color we typically see in the market is deep yellow with orange-red floral tubes like the cultivar pictured below, 'Escatawpa'. Plants



2021 Deciduous Azalea: *R. austrinum*

Photo: Don Hyatt



2021 Elepidote 'Jack Cowles'

Photo: Don Hyatt



2021 Lepidote 'Weston's Pink Diamond'

Photo: Don Hyatt



2021 Evergreen Azalea 'Betty Ellen'

Photo: Carolyn Beck

in the wild grow along the banks of rivers and swamps so it will not be happy in a dry area. Wild populations have significant variability and can be light yellow to orange, and even white to pink.

2021 PVC Seed Exchange

I apologize for the late posting of our seed exchange. I really did not expect to have one this year because we did not get out to collect seeds in the wild this fall. Most of us did not make any crosses either. We just hunkered down, social distanced, wore masks, and waited for an early end to the pandemic which didn't happen.

Several people did send me some seed so we can offer it to you at this time. The column to the right has images of some seed sources. Quantities are generally low but I do have enough of **R. prunifolium** donated by Dr. Ralf Bauer from Germany to make at least 10 packets. He has raised a number of plants from seed sources in Providence Canyon. He crossed them to produce seed, and is sharing it with others. Check out the newsletter supplement #11 on August 13, 2020. It has pictures of **prunifolium** in Ralf's garden.

<http://www.arspvc.org/articles/ARS-PVC-ThisWeek11-2020.pdf>



R. prunifolium

You might also want to check out the website Ralf is building to chronicle his many trips to the US to photograph native azaleas. He calls his site "*Pentanthera*", the subgenus of *Rhododendron* that has our native azaleas. He has both German and English versions but parts are not finished. Check out his link to "Habitat Pictures/Travels" which is in English. Beautiful! I can't believe how many places he has been. His first trip was with us to Roan in 2015. That is not finished yet!

Ralf Bauer's Website on Pentanthera:

<https://pentanthera.de/en/willkommen-english/>



Carol Segree's (Odee Wright x wardii), (op)



Carol Segree's Yak x metternichii



Carol's "Red Max" (raised from wild seed)



'Hardy Loderi' (fragrant!)

2021 Seed Exchange – Potomac Valley Chapter ARS

The following seeds are offered to chapter members and associates at \$0.60 per packet including postage. Available seed will be divided among those who request the selection. Thanks to donors: Ralf Bauer (**BA**), Norm & Jean Beaudry (**BE**), Don Hyatt (**HY**), and Carol Segree (**SE**). Please return orders to Don Hyatt with payment to Potomac Valley Chapter ARS. Seed will be distributed starting April 9.

Species, collected in the wild (cw)

1. *calendulaceum*, Hooper Bald, (2019 seed) cw, (HY)

Species, hand pollinated, wild source plants (hp)

2. *prunifolium* red, hp (BA)

Species, open pollinated garden origin (op)

3. *fortunei*, Gable Form, pale lavender-pink, op (BE)
4. *hyperythrum*, white, op (BE)
5. *maximum*, red, op (SE)
6. *metternichii*, pink, (2019 seed) op (HY)
7. *pseudochrysanthum*, dwarf white, op (BE)
8. *schlippenbachii*, light pink, op (BE)

Rhododendron Hybrids open pollinated (op)

9. Bellringer, cream, op (SE)
10. Cadis, blush pink, op (SE)
11. Cornelia Sanders, blush pink, op (BE)
12. Dr. Rock, peach pink, op (SE)
13. GiGi, red, op (SE)
14. Hardy Loderi, cream, op (BE, SE)
15. Mt. Siga, peach fading to buff, op (SE)
16. (Odee Wright x wardii, op), white, op (SE)
17. Yak x metternichii, compact white, op (SE)

2021 Seed Order Form - Potomac Valley Chapter ARS

Return to: Don Hyatt, donaldhyatt@verizon.net (Reply by April 9)

Name: _____
(Please Print)

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Packet No.	Variety		Packet No.	Variety

_____ **Total Packets** x **\$0.60 each** = _____
 (Make checks payable to **Potomac Valley Chapter ARS**)

Potomac Valley Chapter ARS - Newsletter
 Donald W. Hyatt, Editor
 donaldhyatt@verizon.net



Potomac Valley Chapter
of the
American Rhododendron Society

The Potomac Valley Chapter ARS is one of three American Rhododendron Society chapters located in District 9 which represents the Middle Atlantic region of the United States. Some of our chapter activities include:

- Regular Meetings with Speakers
- Annual Chapter Banquet
- Garden Tours
- Field Trips to Nurseries or to Wild Stands of Native Azaleas and Rhododendrons
- Local and National Seed Exchanges
- Plants for Members Program
- Flower Show
- Informative Chapter Newsletters
- Annual Photography Contest
- Access to Chapter Library Books

Our regular chapter meetings are usually held four times a year at the Potomac Community Center in Potomac, MD, on Sunday afternoons. However, we do hold occasional meetings at other locations in nearby Maryland, Virginia, or Washington, DC.

We encourage you to check out our chapter website which includes at least 16 years of previous newsletters that contain interesting articles, more color pictures, and examples of past activities:

www.arspvc.org

As a member of our local chapter you will also become a member at the national level of the American Rhododendron Society. This entitles you to a year's subscription of their outstanding quarterly **Journal** filled with information and many color pictures. You will also be invited to attend national conventions or regional conferences.

The cost of ARS membership is \$40 per year and includes membership in a chapter of your choice, such as our Potomac Valley Chapter. If you are already a member of another ARS Chapter, you may join the Potomac Valley Chapter as an Associate Member for only \$10 per year but you will need to identify your home chapter.

For more information about the American Rhododendron Society, check out their website:

www.rhododendron.org

Membership Application
American Rhododendron Society

Name _____

Address _____

City/State _____

Zip/Country _____

Telephone _____

E-mail: _____

Memberships are on a calendar year basis and include the local chapter membership:

Individual/Family.....	\$40.00
Student (proof of age required).....	10.00
Commercial/Corporate.....	90.00
Sustaining	75.00
Sponsoring.....	150.00
Life, single	1,000.00
Life, family.....	1,500.00
Associate Membership*.....	10.00

**Associate Members must identify home chapter*

I would like my "home" chapter to be the Potomac Valley Chapter

To join our chapter, contact our treasurer:

POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER ARS
PVC-ARS Chapter Treasurer
prittwoman@gmail.com

You may also send this form with US Funds payable to the national organization:

AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 214
Great River, NY 11739

To pay online by credit card, follow the link to "Membership" on the ARS website:

www.rhododendron.org

More ARS National Contact Points:

Phone (631) 533-0375, Fax (866) 883-8019

Email: member@arsoffice.org