



Potomac Valley Chapter

American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Winter Newsletter: January 2026

Potomac Valley Chapter ARS – 2026 Calendar

- January 31, 2026 (Saturday!): Regular Meeting, Potomac, MD
- March 6 – 7: Annual North Carolina Nursery Field Trip
- April 12 – 15: ASA Convention, Athens, GA
- April 21 – 26: ARS Convention, Vancouver Island, BC, Canada
- May 2 – 3: Proposed Chapter Garden Tours
- June 20 – 21: Native Azalea Trip to Whitetop Mountain, Marion, VA

Chapter Officers

President: Carol Segree
csegree17@outlook.com
Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman
rittwoman@gmail.com
Membership: Norm Beaudry
beaunorm@gmail.com

Next Meeting: “Whitetop and Other Coming Attractions!”

Where: Potomac United Methodist Church
9908 S Glen Rd, Potomac, MD 20854

Date: Saturday, January 31, 2026

Time: 1:00 – 4:00 PM

Speakers: Don Hyatt & Carol Segree

Our January meeting will be a preview of coming attractions in 2026. One major activity will be an overnight trip in June to Marion, VA, to see the native azaleas (*R. calendulaceum*) on Whitetop Mountain. It should be during peak bloom. This is one of the best and most easily accessed populations of Flame Azaleas in the Appalachians. There are other attractions nearby including *R. catawbiense* at Grayson Highlands State Park. That requires only a modest hike and the area also has an entertaining herd of wild ponies that usually show up, too. Read more about this area in another article in this newsletter.

Since we are focusing on native azaleas at this meeting, we have planted some *R. calendulaceum* seeds that should have germinated by then. We will be giving those away and will talk about propagation techniques for native azaleas. See the article about raising native azaleas from seed in this issue.

Other activities we intend to discuss will be our trip to North Carolina Nurseries in March. We intend to arrange some garden tours in May, where we want to get feedback from members about rhododendron varieties that they would like to see in our Plants for Members Program. We are also considering a trip to Cape Cod around Memorial Day to see the Dexter Rhododendrons at Heritage Plantation as well as a few other places near Boston including the garden of our banquet speaker, Joe Bruso. One other idea is we want to get a group together that will organize a workshop on leaf castings that we can present at a later date.



R. calendulaceum on Whitetop Mountain



Germinating Seedlings



Summer Transplants

Refreshments: We would appreciate it if members whose last names appear in the first half of the alphabet (A – M) could bring a little something to share on the snack table. If that is inconvenient, please come anyway.

Directions: We will be in the Darvish Room of the Parish Hall which is on the second floor behind the main chapel of the Potomac United Methodist Church. The church is on the corner of Falls Road and S. Glen Road.

Potomac United Methodist Church
9908 S Glen Rd., Potomac, MD 20854

North Carolina Nursery Trip

Many of us look forward to an overnight trip to North Carolina to visit a few mail order nurseries during their open houses. We buy plants, socialize, go out to dinner, and have fun. This year, the dates will be March 6 – 7. Let Don Hyatt or Carol Segree know if you want to join us.

We try to convene at Camellia Forest Nursery by noon which is about 5 hours south of DC. After buying camellias and other plants, we head south to Sanford, NC, to buy more plants at Big Bloomers. Then we meet at the motel, have a glass of wine, and go out to dinner.

Friday, March 6

Camellia Forest Nursery

David Parks - Camellias, woodies, other rare plants

By appointment – Trying for noon on March 6

9701 Carrie Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516

www.camforest.com

Big Bloomers Flower Farm

Perennials, annuals, trees, shrubs, garden art

Friday or Saturday: 9:00 am – 5 pm

275 Pressly Foushee Road, Sanford, NC 27330

www.bigbloomersflowerfarm.com

Lodging: Hampton Inn Sanford

Friday Night, March 6

1904 S Horner Blvd, Sanford, NC 27330

919-775-2000

Dinner: The Flame Steakhouse, Sanford

Friday Night: March 6 (Open 3 pm – 9 pm)

109 Carbonton Road, Sanford, NC 27330

919-776-7111 (reservations recommended)

www.theflamesteakhouse.com

On Saturday, some may return to Big Bloomers in the morning before heading north to Plant Delights Nursery. It is about an hour north in Raleigh. Be sure to allow time to tour Tony Avent's impressive Juniper Level Botanical Garden. We try to leave there around noon and then visit Garden Treasures Nursery. It is not far away. From there, we head home.

Saturday, March 7

Plant Delights Nursery

Tony Avent - Rare plants, woodies, display garden

Winter Open House: 9 am – 5 pm

9241 Sauls Road, Raleigh, NC 27603

www.plantdelights.com

Garden Treasures Nursery

Pat McCracken - Woodies, maples, perennials

By appointment - Trying for noon on March 7

3504 Edgemont Road, Wendell, NC 27591

919-722-9588

www.garden-treasures.com



Camellia Forest Nursery



Big Bloomers Flower Farm



Plant Delights Nursery



Garden Treasures Nursery

Remembering the Fall Banquet

We had an outstanding fall banquet staged at Richard Bradshaw's estate near Annapolis. The day was sunny, the food was delicious, and our speaker, Joe Bruso, was exceptional. Joe is the president of the Massachusetts Chapter ARS and one of the leading East Coast rhododendron hybridizers. He shared pictures of the spectacular garden he and his wife Nancy created at their home near Boston. They call it "Boulderwood" due to the many huge granite boulders on the property left from the Ice Ages. They make stunning accents in their wooded landscape. Special thanks to Richard for allowing us to use his facilities.

Joe's talk was titled "Recent Rhododendron Hybridizing Results: What Works, What Doesn't, What's in Demand." He showed some of his new creations, many of which are grown for their foliage. Joe and Nancy also brought some those plants with them which we offered at auction. I managed to get a beautiful *R. makinoi*, a Japanese species with very long, narrow leaves.

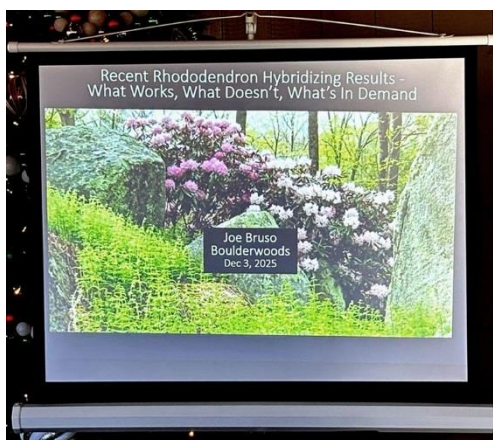


R. makinoi

I grew *R. makinoi* from seed and it was one of my favorite plants for over 40 years. In April of 2016, we had a late freeze prior to the ARS convention that caused severe bark split on that plant and several others. They died over that summer. I am so happy to have it back again!



Chapter Members Enjoying the Meal



Joe Bruso Speaks on Boulderwoods

Photos: C. Segree



Carolyn Beck converses with Nancy and Joe Bruso



Donn and Louise Teubner, Richard Bradshaw, Martin Nowakowski

I appreciate Carol Segree for taking pictures at the banquet and wanted to share them with you. We missed a few people but she photographed each table and we've tried to identify attendees from left to right. The entrée choices were very popular with most people choosing the Roast Salmon or the Beef Bourguignon and a few opting for the Cheese Tortellini. What a festive setting! Thank you, Joe, Carol, Richard, and all who helped!



Nettie Bernady, Sonny Coble, Harry Reid, Eric McDonald



George McLellan and Phyllis Rittman



Rosa & Bob McWhorter, Joanne & Dan Neckel, Leslie Nanney



Peggy & Bill Meyers, Bill Mangels & Maryanne Busse (in pink)



Richard & Ginny Mohr w/ daughter Tina Dubyoski, Justin Schmitz



Budne Reinke, Joe Miller, Diane Reinke

Joe Bruso extended an invitation for us to visit his garden. Below is his contact info. Please make arrangements in advance to find a convenient time.

Joe & Nancy Bruso

jpbruso@aol.com

Joe has been an Associate Member of our chapter for many years. If you want to become an Associate of the Mass. Chapter ARS, check out their website:

<https://massrhododendron.org/>

Other trips? Cape Cod Sometime?

I have been to Joe Brusco's garden twice and it is one of the best on the East Coast. We could arrange a field trip to Boston and Cape Cod this year or next if members are interested. For over 20 years, many Potomac Valley members made an annual pilgrimage around Memorial Day to Heritage Plantation to see the Dexter Estate. We belonged to the Sandwich Club, an ARS committee started in 1988 that would help evaluate and introduce some of the unnamed hybrids at Heritage. (see right).

We also visited private gardens owned by members of the Mass Chapter. Many gardens we saw no longer exist but perhaps we could visit the Brusco garden this time.



Joe Brusco and Norm Beaudry in the Brusco Garden



Vista in the Brusco Garden

We often toured nearby public gardens like the New England Wildflower Society's Garden in the Woods.

<https://www.nativeplanttrust.org/visit/garden-woods/>



Sandwich Club members pose with 'Jack Cowles'

The Heritage Plantation has about 100 acres with impressive stands of mature rhododendron plantings throughout the property. The Dexter Dell (below) has a collection of named Dexter cultivars, but there are other plantings with more Dexters and plants bred by his gardeners like Tony Consolini and Jack Cowles.



The Dexter Dell at Heritage Plantation



Rhododendron 'Scintillation' at Heritage

In addition to the rhododendrons, Heritage has collections of hydrangeas and hostas. They are also known for their museums including an antique car collection. An antique carousel dating back to 1908 is very charming. Check out their website:

<https://heritagemuseumsandgardens.org/>

Whitetop Mountain – *Native Azaleas*

Our major excursion this summer will be a trip to Whitetop Mountain from June 20 - 21. Many of the places in North Carolina and Tennessee that we used to visit to see native azaleas in bloom became inaccessible after damage from Hurricane Helene in September 2024. Trees were blown down; roads and bridges were washed out. Virginia recovered more quickly.



Hurricane Helene damage on the road to Whitetop

We will stay in Marion, VA, and head to Whitetop on Sunday. That is the second highest independent mountain in Virginia. The road to the summit is the highest public road in the state but it did suffer damage from Helene. It has now been repaired. There is a large parking lot on top where the Appalachian Trail crosses the road. That is where the *R. calendulaceum* starts.



Parking area near the summit



Easy access to *R. calendulaceum*



The Appalachian Trail crosses the road at the parking lot

Many native azalea populations are hard to reach but that is not true on Whitetop. The parking area on the mountaintop is less than an hour's drive from our motel in Marion. The entry to the Appalachian Trail is at the corner of the parking lot and the azaleas are right there along the trail, a few hundred feet away. It is not wheelchair accessible but it is clearly one of easiest places for anyone who wants to see native azaleas in the wild and has limited mobility.



Azaleas along the Appalachian Trail

The trail is level but most of the azaleas are growing on adjoining slopes. Be careful when taking photos.



Meeting Other Hikers – Her trail handle “Knobs”

We do meet hikers on the trail. Karel and George are talking with a woman who was a solo hiker from Virginia Beach on her way to Maine. Her trail handle, the name she used while hiking the AT, was “Knobs.”



Whitetop Mountain, VA: Vista from the Appalachian Trail

Whitetop is a relative new discovery for us and we have Sally and John Perkins to thank for the revelation. They noticed some pictures posted on social media and decided to check it out. They shared details and now it is a favorite haunt for us. The ease of access and the wide variation in flower color has made it a popular choice for those of us who can no longer manage the more difficult hikes.



Roan Mountain, NC-TN: Vista from the Appalachian Trail

Whitetop Mountain became a very popular site for a Country Music Folk Festival from 1931 to 1939. The originators wanted to focus on Blue Grass music so there were strict limitations on who could play and what instruments could be used. The date for the performance was always in August so people must have been unaware of the spectacular azalea bloom on the mountain.

The festival drew about 3000 attendees the first year and then 4000 in the second year. In 1933, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt expressed interest in attending since her father had lived in nearby Abingdon, VA. That year, attendance grew to 12,000. People were hoping that her newly elected husband would attend. Most of them did not realize that FDR was crippled by polio and confined to a wheelchair. There were some personal conflicts among the founders, but in August of 1940, a hurricane dropped torrential rains in the region causing major infrastructure damage comparable to wrath of Helene. The festival was never resurrected.



***R. calendulaceum* variations on Whitetop**

Grayson Highlands



Massie Gap and trail to Wilburn Ridge

Some may want to visit Whitetop on both Saturday afternoon, June 20, and Sunday morning, June 21. An alternative is to convene at Grayson Highlands State Park on Saturday afternoon. There are some nice flame azaleas in the park, rhododendrons, and kalmia, too.

We usually park at Massie Gap and hike across the field to the Rhododendron Trail which connects to the Appalachian Trail at the top of Wilburn Ridge.



Wild ponies in the park are very entertaining

There are about 100 wild ponies in 8 different herds in the park. The animals are used to people but don't get too close since they can bite. Ponies graze on the grass and brush, but they don't eat rhododendrons. The herds also seem to keep the deer away. Sounds ideal!



R. catawbiense begins at Wilburn Ridge along the AT



Mass bloom at Rhododendron Gap is 2.1 miles south on the AT

There are other things to see in the area. Instead of heading back to Marion after coming off the mountain, turn right on Rt. 58 and travel an hour east to Galax to get on the Blue Ridge Parkway. In that area is the **Blue Ridge Music Center** which has an excellent exhibit on the origins of Country Music. The facility does offer concerts during the summer.



Blue Ridge Music Center

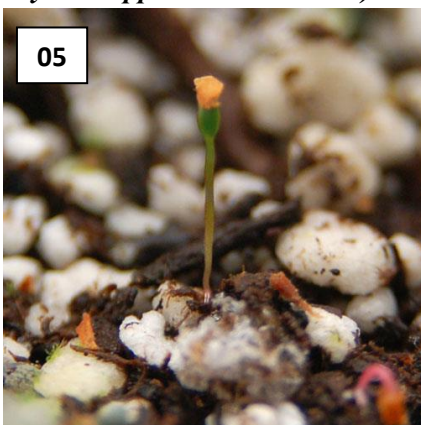
There are more attractions on the Blue Ridge Parkway to the north including a winery and scenic Mabry Mill. It is also possible to get on I-77 at Galax and then connect to I-81 near Wytheville for the trip home. That may actually save some time.

Native Azaleas from Seed

(Don Hyatt's Approach in Pictures)



Collect seed pods in the fall



Seeds germinate in a few weeks



Transplant to pots, fertilize lightly



Break open pods, remove seeds, & clean



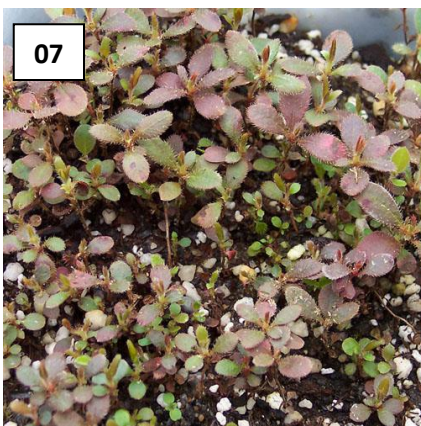
Seedlings grow slowly at first



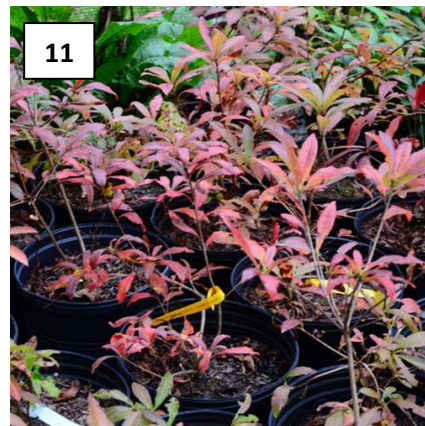
Shift to 4-inch pots or gallons by summer



Plant seeds on surface of Peat/Perlite mix



Harden off before transplanting



Allow plants to go dormant in fall



Put pots in plastic bags. Grow under lights



Move to community pots by early spring



Seedlings can bloom in 2 to 4 years

More Seed? The ARS Exchange should go online in January: <https://www.rhododendron.org/seedexchange1.htm>

Garden Tours - *Plants for Members*



We are planning to have some garden tours on the weekend of May 2 – 3. One goal is to have members identify plants that they would like to grow. We can root any azaleas people want but rhododendrons are more problematic. We suggest taking cuttings in the fall and sending them off to Van Veen Nursery in Portland. They do a great job and will send us liners the following fall. We only pay for plants they root!

<https://vanveennursery.com/>



Other Possible Activities?

With the ASA Convention in Athens, GA, and the ARS Convention in Victoria, BC, Canada, staged so close together, this spring is already very busy. Your chapter officers would still like to get your input on other activities you would like to see us offer this year or next. Here are some options.



Azaleas at the National Arboretum?

For several years, a pair of bald eagles decided to nest in one of the large trees in the Azalea Collection. That meant that the area was closed to the public during the flowering season in order to give the eaglets some privacy. The birds seem to be nesting elsewhere so we should be able to tour that area again.

Haley Noel Gilbert, the new Azalea Curator, has offered to give us a tour. In past years, late April was usually best for the new Kurumes but the Glenn Dales and Robin Hills peaked the first week in May. The Satsuki Bonsai specimens are awesome in early June.

Amish Nurseries near East Earl, PA?

Chapter members have enjoyed a day trip to buy plants at several Amish Nurseries near East Earl, PA. They have bargains on bedding plants, perennials, woodies, evergreens, and other items. We typically go in the middle of April but may have to wait until May.

Revisit 2025 ASA Convention Gardens?

Last year's ASA convention visited some spectacular gardens. Many of us want to see them again. One favorite was Chanticleer, but Winterthur, Tyler, Mt. Cuba, and the Jenkins Arboretum were great, too.



Chanticleer

2026 Convention Planning

If you are thinking about attending one or both of the conventions, now is the time to make your plans. Here are a few items to consider.

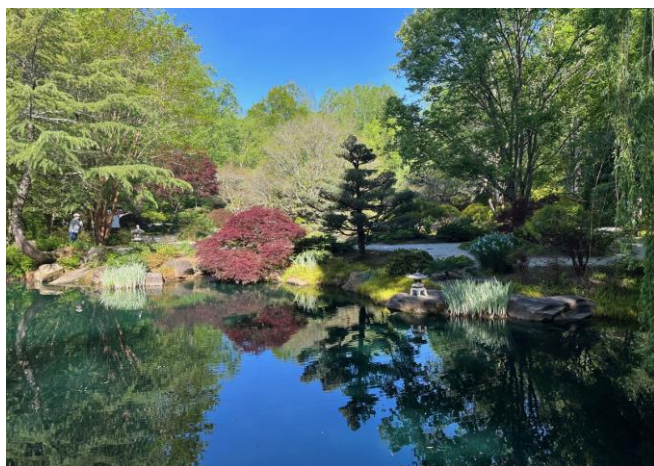


ARS 2026: Vancouver Island, BC, Canada April 21 – 25, 2026

<https://marsrhodos.ca/2026-ars-convention/>

There are two pre-tours by bus near Victoria before the meeting. Butchart Gardens is not one but I always like to see it when I am out that way. There is no main convention hotel but attendees will have to choose from the many smaller hotel accommodations in the area. The other tours will require carpooling. Friday, April 24 is the primary meeting day with speakers. The Saturday tour will be by carpool. I like to fly into Seattle and then visit the Rhododendron Species Foundation afterwards.

<https://rhodygarden.org>



ASA 2026 Convention: Athens, GA April 12 – 15, 2026

<https://azaleas.org/convention-2026/>

Dinners will be on your own for Sunday, April 12, and Monday, April 13. There are tours on Monday and Tuesday, with the banquet on April 14, Tuesday night. The convention ends Wednesday morning but there will be some options to tour afterwards. High on my list will be Gibbs Gardens in North Georgia.

<https://www.gibbsgardens.com/>



Leaf Casting Workshop this Summer?

In the summer of 2018, we had a very inspiring speaker, Rachel Yungman from Roanoke, VA, who gave us a demonstration on how to do leaf castings. Leaf castings are concrete impressions of actual leaves that can be attractive features in the garden or used as artistic accents in the home. We had been anxious to have Rachel back again to give her demo or lead a hands-on workshop. Unfortunately, she has retired and is no longer giving presentations.



We are trying to get a core group of craft-oriented people together this summer so we can experiment with the process and become skilled enough so we can offer that demo or workshop ourselves. It will require a time commitment over several days since concrete needs time to cure. There will be some costs for the purchase of supplies. If you think you would like to be part of this committee, let Carol Segree know. It would also be wise to plant something in the garden this spring with big leaves that deer won't eat. Boxwood foliage is not suitable for leaf castings!

Potomac Valley Chapter ARS - Newsletter
Donald W. Hyatt, Editor
donalddyatt@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
- Seed Exchanges
- Plants for Members Program
- Flower Show
- Informative Chapter Newsletters
- Photography Contest

Our regular chapter meetings are usually held four times a year 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 20 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 (3 issues) of their outstanding **Journal** in printed or digital form. It is 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 \$50 per year for both printed and digital form, or \$40 for just digital. It 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. Please 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 (Print & Digital).....	\$50.00
Individual (Digital Only)	40.00
Student (proof of age required).....	10.00
Commercial/Corporate.....	90.00
Sustaining	75.00
Sponsoring.....	150.00
Life, single	1,000.00
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, send this form with payment to:

POTOMAC VALLEY CHAPTER ARS
PVC-ARS Membership Chair
7921 Deepwell Drive, Potomac, MD 20817
Beaunorm@gmail.com

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

AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 43
Craryville, NY 12521

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