Potomac Valley Chapter

American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Spring Newsletter: April 2026

Potomac Valley Chapter ARS – 2026 Calendar

- **April 21 – 26: ARS Convention, Vancouver Island, BC, Canada**
- **April 25 (rain date 26): NV-ASA Plant Sale, Meadowlark Gardens, VA**
- **May 1-3: Landon School Azalea Festival, Bethesda, MD**
- **May 3: White's Nursery invitation to ASA & ARS, Germantown, MD**
- **May 3: Beaudry Garden open to PVC members, Bethesda, MD**
- **May 4: Field Trip to the National Arboretum & Segree Garden**
- **May 7 or 8: Nursery Trip to Amish Nurseries in Pennsylvania**
- **June 20 – 21: Native Azalea Trip to Whitetop Mountain, Abingdon, VA**

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

A Busy Spring! (Or is it summer?)

After a terrible winter with many record cold temperatures in February, we have now had a stretch of extremely warm weather in March and April, alternating at times with cold spells and frosty nights. That managed to destroy some of the early bloom. It seems that nature is confused and many plants are blooming out of sequence. Even so, there were many options to see flowers this spring!

The Middle Atlantic Chapter had a great meeting in Richmond before Easter and the excellent ASA convention just finished up in Athens, GA. Some of our members are already on their way to the ARS convention in Victoria, BC. We offer some more options to visit local gardens in the coming weeks.

Sunday, May 3, from 10 AM to 4 PM.

White's Nursery is usually only open for business on Fridays and Saturdays. This year, Mike and Deb White have invited just ASA and ARS members for an Open House to see their plantings in bloom:

White's Nursery
22531 Wildcat Road
Germantown, Maryland 20876
www.whites-nursery.com

Norm Beaudry has invited our Potomac Valley members to visit his garden on that same Sunday, May 3, between 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. We have to restrict this to just PVC members and associates. Do not pull in the drive but park at the street. Go through the pedestrian entry to the left of the gate and walk down the driveway. Parking is limited so please try to carpool and stagger arrivals. Be careful.

Norman Beaudry
Bethesda, MD

Beaudry Garden

Other options that Sunday include the Landon Azalea Festival, 6101 Wilson Lane, Bethesda, MD.

www.landon.net/azalea

There is also Brookside Gardens, 1800 Glenallan Ave, Wheaton, MD 20902

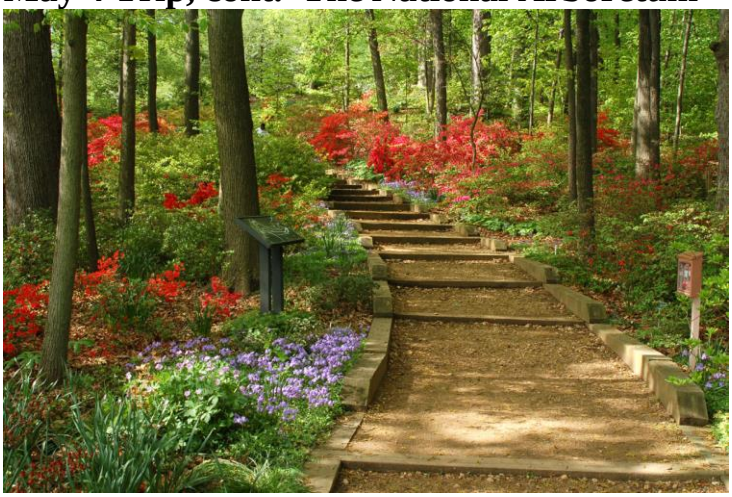
www.brooksidegardens.org

Monday, May 4, Arboretum: 10 AM to 2 PM

On Monday, May 4, we are planning a trip to see the azaleas at the National Arboretum. The display had been closed to the public during flowering season for a number of years because of a pair of nesting eagles but it is open again. The new Curator, Haley Gilbert, will give us a tour. We will start our tour of the azaleas at 10:00 AM (after rush hour). Bring a bag lunch. Haley has reserved a classroom in the administration building for us from 12:00 noon to 1:00 PM. Then we can tour other exhibits and leave by 2:00 PM to avoid traffic.

U.S. National Arboretum
3501 New York Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
www.usna.usda.gov

May 4 Trip, cont. The National Arboretum



Our chapter used the National Arboretum for all of our meetings from the 1970s until about 2009 when the Administration Building was closed for renovation. We held our flower show and plant sale there on the Mother's Day weekend. When the building reopened, the administration adjusted fees and the cost was too high so we had to find another place to hold our meetings.

Spring bloom is hard to predict but the Glenn Dales and Robin Hills typically peak the first week in May. The season is early but there is always something in bloom!

Glenn Dale Azalea 'Shimmer'

Our last organized trip the Azalea Collection was in 2011 (below) when we launched the "Save the Azaleas" campaign. Arboretum supervisors had proposed that the original Glenn Dale plantings should be cut down and we fought it. Our past newsletters in 2011 tell the full story.

www.arspvc.org/newsletter.html

We were successful in fighting that idiocy and many of us returned in subsequent years until that pair of bald eagles decided to nest in the large trees above the Azalea Collection. That area was closed off to the public during the flowering season. The young eaglets needed privacy. The birds seem to be nesting elsewhere now so we can tour that area again. Please join us for this excursion!

'Nancy of Robinhill'

The Satsuki azaleas in the Bonsai and Penjing Museum (below) are awesome in late May to early June but the other specimens are incredible, too.

At 2:00 PM, people can head home before rush hour starts, or if you prefer, Carol Segree has invited us to her garden which is about 20 minutes east via New York Ave (Rt. 50) in Gambrills, MD.

Carol Segree
Gambrills MD 21054

We can then have dinner at one of the restaurants in the area and go home after traffic has subsided.

Reflecting on Winter Damage

The past few winters have been brutal in my garden. In 2024-2025, there was a long cold spell but it was also very dry before the cold arrived and little moisture at all during a prolonged freeze. The cold north winds were relentless and I lost many mature azaleas that had been in the ground for 40 to 50 years. They just seemed to be "freeze dried" - totally desiccated. Many plants I had in containers that I thought were fully hardy were not. The deciduous azalea 'My Mary' is supposed to be hardy in Zone 5 (-10° F to -20° F) but several plants that were in pots clustered together and mulched died that winter. My temperatures did not get below zero.

'My Mary' suffered winter damage in a container

I remember reading some research at the University of Maryland that noted that many plants have different hardiness figures for various parts of a plant. We often refer to flower bud hardiness in our rhododendrons but the leaves and roots may have different levels of cold tolerance. For instance, *R. prunifolium* is considered fully hardy to -10° F and established plants have taken winters of -20° F. However, the root system seems to suffer damage when the soil temperature is only +20° F. The root systems of hollies and deciduous magnolias are known to be cold sensitive.

This February was a real test. Normally, a snow cover will protect young plants and root systems. However, my 8 inches of fluffy snow topped off with 4 inches of sleet and freezing rain settled into 6 to 8 inches of rock-hard "snowcrete." The temperature was in the single digits to low teens for almost the whole month and only got above freezing a few times and just for a couple of hours. It took me two weeks just to chip my way to the street for the first time and almost a month to clear the rest of my circular driveway. I could see my plants were suffering.

BFBY – 'Bob Furman's Big Yellow'

One of the most sought-after rhododendrons for decades has been 'Bob Furman's Big Yellow' or "BFBY" developed on Cape Cod. Nearly impossible to propagate by cuttings or tissue culture, it has only been available by grafting. I bought a plant that was grafted on 'Cunningham's White', a common under stock. When the thaw final came, my "BFBY" was shriveled up and looked dead. Its leaves turned brown but a month later, they started to unfurl. The foliage was damaged but my plant was alive. Other nearby plants like *R. makinoi* were fine By April, BFBY was sending out strong new growth! YAY!!!

BFBY in late February

***R. makinoi* in late February**

BFBY in late March

BFBY in April

Others experienced similar problems with plants grafted on 'Cunningham's White'. However, Norm Beaudry had a second BFBY grafted on 'Roseum Elegans' and it had no difficulties. Lesson learned!

A Letter from Joe Gable to John Creech

This is a portion of a letter written over 70 years ago by Joe Gable to Dr. John Creech, one of the Directors of the National Arboretum. It discusses some of the problems with cold weather that Gable experienced while living in Stewartstown, PA. I transcribed this from the letter Dr. Creech shared with me that we have placed in the ARS Archives. The full text can be found on our chapter website in the Late Spring 2005 Newsletter.

http://www.arspvc.org/articles/News2005-05.html

January 1st, 1954

Dear Mr. Creech,

I have just come across your letter of Dec. 4, which it seems has not been answered. It is a most interesting letter and I laid it aside until I could get more time to answer – and to check up on just what I have along these lines and what I might have for you. Also, I was away for over two weeks in December. I plan to answer a letter and think over what I can do about it and then – sometimes – I think I have written it down and mailed it.

(text deleted)

The rhododendrons prunifolium, alabamense and canescens that you mention have all passed out here though canescens lived to flower quite similar to roseum which is much prettier, hardier and difficult to obtain satisfactory –i.e., -fertile hybrids from.

Prunifolium ought to be hardy and I would like to try it again as I hear it grows in spots that should be as cold as I am. I do not know where to obtain a good plant well dug and all. The plants I had were apparently collected –and roughly- and never came back to normal vigor.

Alabamense I should think is hopeless but austrinum was hardy enough though I have lost my plant from drought. This last by luteum has given some fine tall growing, vigorous yellows and quite fertile. The flowers are on the small side but make up for it in the masses produced.

As to there being no place for any other azaleas but those of the Obtusum group, in areas where they are hardy – it may prove true. But this I know. If we ever get back to our normal winter climate again in the eastern U.S. the present great fringe area where thousands and millions of these plants are being grown now for some 8-10 years it is going to be practically wiped out and a lot of varieties and species will disappear from the more favored sections too. And the so-called “hardy” Gable azaleas will get a black eye too – perhaps both eyes. We have had several periods of mild winters in my azalea growing experience with a corresponding build up in the number of varieties and amount of plant material which we lost when a hard winter came but never such a long continued series of mild ones as this.

We used to cut ice for summer use and store it every winter. We thought it had to be six inches thick to be of any use. Until we got our electric refrigerator I never knew a winter when we did not get plenty of it and once cut ice two feet thick – too d - - n thick for the guy who has to do it! Now I do not think we have had six-inch ice on our pond in ten years or more. I have no record and may be wrong but it has been a long time. Could it be that we will never see twenty below again? Around zero and that only for a night or two has been all we have gotten lately. Once we had about a week when the temperature staid below the whole time or nearly so. I do know that it was seven below at noon one day when a neighbor came and asked me to help dig a grave in 28 inches of frozen soil where it was bare. There was two – four feet of snow among my plants.

Well let’s hope those extremes of around twenty below are no more anyhow.

I had a nice New Years wish for “Plenty of Work and a Lot More Success” – which might be a good one to pass on to you?

With Most Sincere Regards,

Joe Gable

Hybridizing for Yellow Rhododendrons

Audrey Furman (left) and Bob Furman (right) greet visitors

Bob Furman was one of the leading hybridizers of yellow rhododendrons in the Eastern United States. He and his wife Audrey lived on a small tract of land on Cape Cod. Members of our chapter would visit the Furmans when we traveled up to the Cape to see the Dexter and Cowles hybrid rhododendrons at Heritage Plantation.

Bob produced some excellent hybrids but he was never satisfied with his yellows. The plant habit might be open or the foliage wasn't a dark green. After Bob passed away unexpectedly from a fall in his garden, Norm Beaudry and John Delano did get permission from Audrey to register two of his best yellows, 'Bob Furman's Big Yellow' and 'Atlantic Gold'.

John Delano and Norm admiring BFBY in the Furman Garden

Bob Furman was a perfectionist and although he liked the color and large blossoms of BFBY, he was not happy with its open habit and lighter green leaves. He felt he needed another generation to create his ideal plant. Norm and John continued to make crosses at the Furman home after Bob passed away. After Audrey passed and grafted plants of BFBY were getting around, they stopped making crosses in the Furman garden on the Cape.

John Delano admires 'Atlantic Gold'

'Atlantic Gold' had a more compact habit and better foliage, but the truss was smaller and the color not quite as deep as BFBY and it had a red blotch in the throat. Norm and John continued to evaluate seedlings in the Furman garden as they bloomed.

The plant below was one that really grabbed our attention in late May of 2011. It had dark green, glossy leaves that stayed on the plant for 5 years so we referred to it as the "Five Year Leaf". The flowers lacked the color purity of BFBY, so Norm crossed BFBY onto it and raised more seedlings.

'Five Year Leaf'

Norm crosses 'BFBY' onto 'Five Year Leaf' as Jean Beaudry, Carol Segree, and Furman's garden helper watch.

Some of Norm's Hybrids:

Below is one of the seedlings from the cross Norm made of the 'Five Year Leaf' seedling at the Furman garden with 'BFBY' back in 2011. He has admired the glossy, dark green leaves of this rhododendron which remain on the plant for a number of years.

We both remarked that it is an outstanding foliage plant whether it bloomed or not. Inspecting the leaves from this year and past seasons, I didn't see any sign of winter leaf damage, especially after this exceptionally brutal season. Regardless of the flower color, it looks like a great parent for future hybridizing.

'Five Year Leaf' x 'BFBY' – Foliage

This year, the plant had its first bloom. It was an excellent light yellow in a truss with five flowers. The flower shape is similar to that of the 'Five Year Leaf' parent with rounded petals and a prominent calyx. The color is a much clearer yellow although not as deep as what Bob Furman would have preferred. Maybe Norm will cross it with BFBY again or even 'Atlantic Gold'. Personally, I like the lighter lemon yellows in the landscape since they blend so well with other pastel shades. I do prefer ruffled flowers but it was lovely.

'Five Year Leaf' x 'BFBY' – First Bloom

One of Norm's earlier hybrids I have always admired is 'Lara Janine' named for Norm and Jean's daughter. It has full trusses of ruffled lemon-yellow flowers and a modest plant habit. Its foliage is a medium green with a slight luster and only seems to be held a year or two. If I could have that truss on a plant with the foliage of his (Five Year Leaf x BFBY) seedling, that would be my idea of perfection.

Beaudry hybrid 'Lara Janine'

Another one of Norn's hybrids that caught my attention is the superb red pictured below. I didn't catch the parentage but he told me it was also from some of Bob Furman's breeding lines. The plant has excellent foliage that was not damaged by this winter. It has bloomed before and he told me Karel Bernady has already taken cuttings of this plant for evaluation.

Another Beaudry hybrid building on Bob Furman's work

The exciting thing about plant breeding is that you will be the first person to see a new hybrid when it flowers in your garden. ***It is never too late!*** Charles Dexter was diagnosed with a bad heart and retired from the textile industry at age 59. He then started breeding rhododendrons as a hobby and lived to the ripe old age of 81. He was anxious to see his latest creations!

Whitetop Mountain – June 20 - 21

We will send you an update in late May about our June trip to Whitetop Mountain to see the native azaleas in the wild. Some people were concerned about the two-star hotel in Marion, VA, that we have used in the past. Dining options are also limited in Marion.

The town of Abingdon is just 30 minutes south of Marion and has multiple hotel choices and also many more places to eat. The distance to Whitetop is not that different from either location so we intend to use Abingdon as the central hub for our activities.

Some of us are thinking of adding another day to our schedule by heading south to Sevierville, TN, on Monday. We would like to buy some native azaleas from Vivian Abney at Eastfork Nursery. She has some of the best and rarest native azalea around.

No More ARS Conventions? *Bummer!*

Our ARS President Mike Bamford announced at a March 3 Zoom Meeting of Board Members that there would no longer be any ARS Conventions after the current one in British Columbia. He said no chapters had offered to host a meeting. How sad! Conventions are the best part of our organizations. They are places to get inspired, meet people, share ideas, and learn.

The ARS was founded in Portland, OR, in 1945 and held its first Convention there in 1961. The ARS has had a convention every year since then and I attended my first in 1978. I have been to at least 33 ARS conventions now and when I didn't get to an ARS meeting, I usually attended an ASA convention. I helped stage at least five ARS conventions and five ASA conventions, two of which were joint meetings.

Next year's ASA convention is in Henderson, NC, from April 25 – 28. I was surprised to see that Mike Bamford was the Registrar. The 2028 ASA convention will be in DC, and many of us will be involved. Maybe Mike can find a host for an ARS meeting while attending this year's convention in Canada.

Pennsylvania Nursery Trip – May 7 or 8?

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 are shooting for May 7 or 8.

This is a one-day trip but we have changed the order of the nurseries compared to what we have done in the past. We intend to drive to the farthest away nurseries first and buy the big items making sure we can get them in the car. Then we will work our way back to DC and be home by dark. Meals are on your own. Below are the nurseries and target times. You can always visit these on your own. Interested in a group, let Carol or Don know.

Conestoga Nursery: 2.5 hrs from I-495 & I-95
(Visit: 11:00 – 12:25 PM)
310 Reading Road, East Earl, PA 17519
717-445-4076
Conestoga Nursery is a smaller outlet that carries choice trees, dwarf conifers, shrubs, and some perennials. They are closed on Tuesdays and Sundays.

Black Creek Greenhouses: 5 min from Conestoga
(Visit: 12:30 – 2:30 PM)
211 E. Black Creek Road, East Earl, PA 17519
717-445-5046
Black Creek Greenhouses offer an enormous selection of bedding plants, house plants, hanging baskets, and various other annuals and perennials. Prices were very reasonable. Great for Mother's Day flowers.

Groff's Plant Farm: 45 min from East Earl
(Visit: 3:15 – 5:00 PM)
6128 Street Rd., Kirkwood, PA 17536 717-529-3001
www.groffsplantfarm.com
Groff's sells annuals, perennials, wildflowers, hostas, and shrubs. They do not take credit cards so bring cash or your checkbook.
Back to the Beltway: 2 hrs from Groff's
(Home by 7:00 PM?)

Note: *Joe Bruso, our fall banquet speaker, has given us permission to reprint the following article he wrote on hybridizing with the Red Max. This will eventually appear in the ARS Journal. Thank you, Joe!*

The Red Maximum Effect

By Joe Bruso

Many of you are familiar with a variety of *Rhododendron maximum* which exhibits an unusual amount of reddish pigment in the flowers, foliage, stems and/or sap. This article presents results I've obtained using one cultivar of *R. maximum* as the seed parent in hybridizing.

Introduction to Red Maximum

The rather mysterious "red maximum" has been written about many times, including in JARS (see references). Don Hyatt wrote an excellent illustrated article on this subject that appeared in the September 2019 Newsletter of the Potomac Valley Chapter ARS and is worth reading for a good summary of this subject. Here I'll provide just a brief overview, rather than repeating what has been written by others and then move onto results of using a seedling from one of the original red maximums in my hybridizing efforts.

The original red maximum was discovered in the 1930s by an engineer working on construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway. This engineer was not a botanist, but recognized the plant as unusual, and brought it to the attention of others. What must have attracted his attention were the red flowers, darker than any other in the area, and the bands of red pigment in the leaves. Over the decades, many treks have been made to the original location by rhododendron enthusiasts. Seeds, cuttings, layers, and even whole plants have been brought back to gardens and distributed to interested rhododendron people. Some cultivar or another of a red maximum is available to most people in the rhododendron world. Cultivars derived from plant material from the original location go by different names, including 'Mt. Mitchell', 'Curtis Creek' or just 'Red Max'. Within this article, I'll refer to all of these simply as red max.

At last report, one or more red maximums is still alive at the original location, having survived a recent wildfire that damaged most of the area.

I have dubbed the phenomenon whereby cultivars of *R. maximum* and its hybrids show extra red pigment in sap, stems, leaves, and/or flowers the "red max effect". This effect can be very variable in terms of what parts of the plant show extra pigment, the intensity of the pigment, the pattern in which pigment is exhibited, and how persistent it is over time.

My Cultivars of *R. maximum* showing the red max effect.

The plant I use in all my *maximum* hybridizing is from seed obtained from the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden (RSBG) about 1997 listed as accession 75/137 described as: "*maximum* 'Mt. Mitchell' form, selfed. Parent from N.C. mountains, erratic marbling with red pigment in leaves and flowers." The RSBG plant originated from cuttings of Joseph Gable's red max sent to the RSBG by his daughter. Gable's red max originated from cuttings, layers or plants obtained from the original red max near Mt. Mitchell, NC.

I refer to my seedling of the above plant by the unregistered name of *maximum* 'Red Picotee', or "*maximum* RP" for short, due to the bright pink/red pigment around the outside of the corolla of each flower. This plant also exhibits red stems and sap. The leaves never contain extra pigment. The way the red max effect exhibits itself in this plant and all rooted cuttings from it is 100% consistent. Never have I seen a truss or foliage that differed from the above description.

maximum 'Red Picotee' (unregistered)

A second cultivar of *R. maximum* I grow that shows the red max effect was grown from seed from the RSBG, collected in 1997 with the description "*R. maximum* 'Mt. Mitchell' 1975/137 X *R. maximum* 'Compactum' 83/192". The red max effect didn't express itself in this seedling until it was about 15 years old. The expression is quite different from *maximum* RP, and is very unstable, coming and going in any given terminal or set of terminals from year to year. Flowers

with the red max effect are bicolor with darker pigment at the base of the flowers and with some reproductive parts pigmented, others not. Pigmented flowers always occur on terminals with pigmented leaves and sometimes produce partly pigmented seedpods. I have not used this cultivar in hybridizing, but it is interesting to see differences in how the red max effect can be

exhibited within the species itself.

R. maximum 'Mt Mitchell' X *R. maximum* 'compactum' seedling with pigment in flowers, leaves and part of the seed pods. Flowers are variably bicolored.

Hybridizing Results

Over 25 years I've made hundreds of crosses using *maximum* RP. Pollen parents included most hardy species, many tender species, and numerous hybrids. A small percentage of the resulting seedlings show the red max effect. In any given cross, of which I generally grow 10 to 20 seedlings to a reasonable size, only one or a few seedlings show this effect. In one instance, however, 100% of the plants grown to flowering size show the red max effect. Among these hybrids displaying the red max effect, the effect is very variable in terms of what parts of the plant show extra pigment, the intensity of the pigment, and the pattern in which extra pigment is displayed.

Seedlings showing the red max effect

The following table lists pollen parents crossed with *maximum* RP that produced plants with the red max effect. The number of individual plants showing the red max effect (out of the 10-20 seedlings grown), and what part(s) of the plants show red pigment are provided. Most also have red stems and sap.

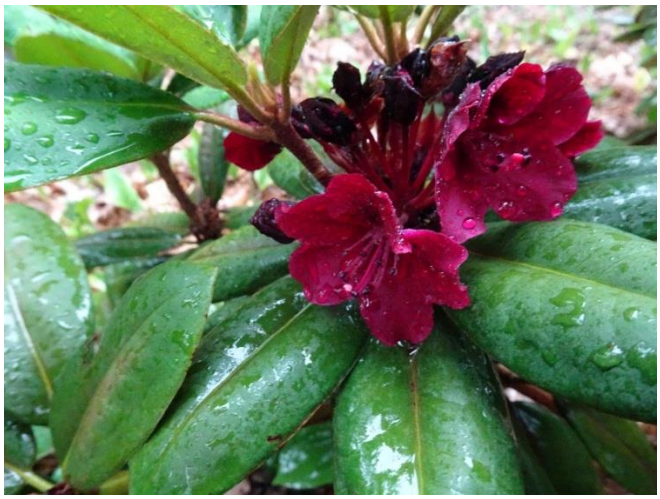
Pollen Parent	#	Pigmented Parts	Notes
R. adenopodum	1	Foliage	Not yet bloomed. Widest pigmented foliage band.
R. brachycarpum X *(R. mallotum* X *R. proteoides)*	4	Foliage, flowers	Flower pigment exceptionally variable
R. brachycarpum X *R. roxieanum*	1	Foliage	Pigment began very young, sub-blooming size.
R. elegantulum	7	Foliage, flowers	All plants grown to blooming size show the red max effect, all have exceptional foliage. Extremely variable amounts of pigment in the flowers.
R. hemsleyanum X *R. rex*	1	Foliage	Red max effect began at two years old.
R. lacteum	1	Foliage, flowers	All but one plant was destroyed due to lack of hardiness. Saved plant began displaying red max effect at 12 yr.
'Neat-O' (*R. campanulatum* X *R. degronianum* subsp. *yakushimanum* 'Koichiro Wada'	2	Flowers	A few solid red trusses, some stacked, solid red above, bicolor below, the rest light pink/white.
R. pachysanthum	2	Foliage, flowers	Half of foliage, all trusses on one plant, some trusses on another have red pigment.
R. pronum	1	Foliage	Very dwarf grower, no blooms yet.
R. proteoides	1	Foliage	Blooms to-date have been on non-pigmented terminals and have been pink.
R. recurvoides	2	Foliage, flowers	Bicolor flowers, pigment at base.
R. ungernii red form	3	Flowers	Pollen from Richard Flavell. His plant greatly resembles a *R. maximum* showing the red max effect.

The number of seedlings exhibiting the red max effect reflect only the relatively small number I've kept. Most seedlings are given away or sold before blooming size, either as small seedlings or plants. Though a very small number of seedlings start showing the red max effect when two

to three years old, most don't show it until older. Much of the seed produced has been donated to the ARS Seed exchange and other exchanges. There may be a lot more plants in other growers' gardens showing the red max effect. I know of two examples of this: *maximum* RP X *R. pachysanthum* grown by Paul Chaffe, which shows an extraordinary amount of pigment in the foliage. As of 2025, it has not yet bloomed. The second plant is the only instance I know where *maximum* RP was used as the pollen parent and pigmented foliage resulted: *R. ungernii* red form (Flavell) X *maximum* RP, grown by Peter Norris. Because the *R. ungernii* also shows lots of extra pigment, especially in the flowers, it isn't clear which was responsible for the extra pigment in the hybrid. I use *maximum* RP exclusively as the seed parent, primarily because this allows me to extend the hybridizing season into July due to *R. maximum*'s late bloom time.

maximum RP X *R. adenopodum*


Left: *maximum* RP X (*R. brachycarpum* X *R. roxieanum).* Right: *maximum* RP X (*R. hemsleyanum* X *R. rex*).




maximum RP *X* (*R. brachycarpum* X (*R. mallotum* X *R. proteoides*)) – variable trusses

maximum* RP X *R. elegantulum

One hundred percent of plants of this cross grown to blooming size show the red max effect in flowers and foliage. *R.* e*legantulum* pollen was sourced from the RSBG accession 1981/129. Among the seven plants that I retained, expression of the red max effect is extremely variable, both on the same plant and between plants. Expression is somewhat, but not completely consistent from year to year. One plant has almost all red trusses, others are a variable mix of red, bicolor and pink.

maximum RP X *R. elegantulum*, Clone 1

maximum RP X *R. elegantulum*, clone 2

maximum RP X *R. elegantulum*, clone 3

maximum RP X *R. lacteum*

maximum RP X *R. lacteum*

maximum RP X ‘Neat-O’

maximum RP X ‘Neat-o’ – stacked bi-color

maximum RP X *R. pachysanthum* – all red

maximum RP X *R. pachysanthum* – pigmented and unpigmented new foliage

maximum RP X *R. pronum* – very slow grower

maximum RP X *R. proteoides*

maximum RP X *R. recurvoides*

maximum RP X *R. recurvoides* – bicolor

maximum RP X *R. ungernii* red form Clone 1

maximum RP X *R. ungernii* red form, Clone 2

Conclusions

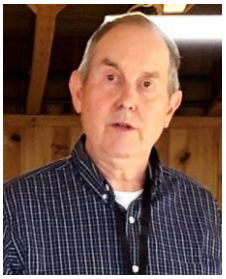
The red max effect is very unstable and expresses itself unpredictably. If the original red maximum is in the parentage, there is always the possibility that red pigment can be expressed in flowers, foliage and/or other parts of the plant. In all my results, the red max effect is stable to the extent that once it shows itself in a particular plant, it is always present to a greater or lesser degree in that plant.

To date I've done very limited propagation via cuttings of these plants, but so far the red max effect has continued to show itself in the resulting plants. I find straight *R. maximum* to be difficult to root, including *maximum* RP. However, hybrids with it have so far been much easier to root.

Unanswered Questions

- Why is the pigment displayed so variably – from plant to plant, from one part of a plant to another, from year to year?
- Why does my *maximum* RP seed parent never exhibit pigment in the foliage, yet so many of its offspring do?
- What is the mechanism for turning pigment production on and off? More than one mechanism has been suggested, including transposons ("jumping genes"), but to my knowledge, no serious study of this phenomenon has been undertaken.

Bio



Joe Bruso is a hybridizer, propagator and grower of rhododendron species and hybrids, with a focus on attractive foliage as well as flowers. Maintains a 5-acre woodland display garden in Hopkinton, MA, and is the current president of the Massachusetts Chapter.

References

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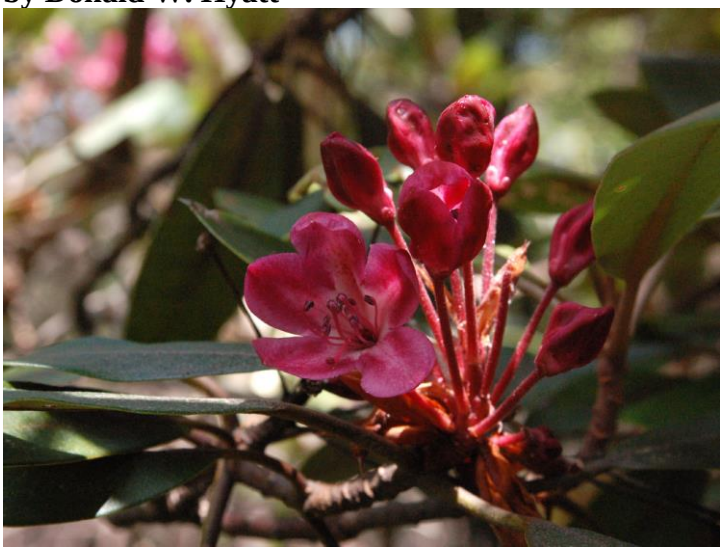
The Mystery of the 'Red Max'

by Donald W. Hyatt



The original 'Red Max' in the wild is one of the rarest plants in existence. It is also incredibly hard to find. It grows in a remote location not far from Mount Mitchell. (elevation of 6684 ft) in a region that is very heavily forested and difficult to traverse except on a few roads. The primary access is via the Blue Ridge Parkway, but that stretch was washed out by Hurricane Helene in September 2024.

The 'Red Max' is not visible from Parkway but grows on a forested hillside near Curtis Creek about milepost 347. Access is via the Parkway, then on a dirt road, followed by a hike on a trail, but finally blind-faith bushwhacking through a dense thicket or "rhododendron hell" up a hill until you arrive at the plant.

According to legend, a man helping to lay out the Parkway in the 1930s was following a bear trail through the dense forest and encountered a population of about 15 to 20 plants of *R. maximum* that had crimson red flowers. He was not a botanist but immediately recognized their significance and brought others to the site.

Joe Gable visited it several times as did others but by 1992, the original 'Red Max' in the wild had died, likely due to excessive competition and dense shade.

It was a sad loss since that plant was estimated to be at least 100 years old and spread 35 to 40 ft. across. It had trunks 5 to 6 inches in diameter. At that time, some Southeastern Chapter members including Ed Collins became stewards of the lone plant remaining in the wild. It was pitiful with one spindly trunk that leaned at a 45° angle. (see lower left)

It might have been a layer of the original plant or else a seedling. They were not sure so they called it the 'Curtis Creek' form. They cut down trees to provide additional light and it slowly began to recover. When I first saw a decade later, the plant was still small but has now recovered.

The 'Red Max' has some very unique properties. The flowers are red, at least most of the time, instead of the white to blush pink we associate with the species. However, the plant is very distinctive, in or out of bloom. It has red sap the color of cranberry juice that saturates its stems, leaves, and flowers. The sap does not reach the leaf edge so the margins will be green while the rest of the leaf is red. The foliage is quite striking, especially when backlit by the sun.

The 'Red Max' has survived some serious close calls in the wild. In 2009 and 2010, there was a major ice storm in the area that brought down many trees and branches. The trunk on the plant already leaned at an angle and the plant could have broken off. Then in the spring of 2010, there was a fire on the hillside where it grows. Some rhododendrons and native azaleas can recover from a wildfire and branch from the base. *R. maximum* generally does not. Somehow, that fire came within feet of the Red Max and spared the plant. For a more complete version of this article check out our **Fall 2019** newsletter.

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
- 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
Beaunorm@gmail.com

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

AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
P.O. Box 43
Crary ville, 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
Email: member@arsoffice.org