

This Week in the Garden #08: “Happy Mother’s Day!” - May 9, 2020

by Don Hyatt - Potomac Valley Chapter ARS

Sunday will be Mother’s Day. I want to use this issue honor all the mothers and wish them very best this day and always. I must admit that Mother Nature is being a bit testy again. She has sent us another record cold spell this weekend and it is hard to believe that so far into the spring season, gardens to the west and north of DC are facing frost and freeze damage. Places in West Virginia and New England could even see measurable snow!

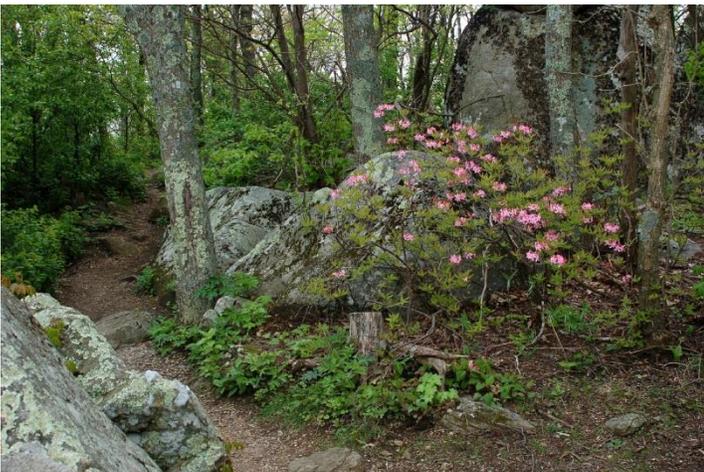
In this issue, I do want to mention a couple of special “senior” mothers. Sue Switzer of the Ben Morrison Chapter ASA just celebrated her 100th birthday. Sue and her late husband George were major figures in the azalea world locally. They were very interesting people which I will discuss briefly in an article about their azalea introduction, ‘Nannie Angell’, one of several white spider azaleas that is a favorite in Dianne Gregg’s garden.



Dogwoods & Blue Ridge Mountains West of Lynchburg Hyatt



R. periclymenoides at the Peaks of Otter Hyatt



R. prinophyllum on Apple Orchard Mountain Hyatt

Another senior we want to honor is Carol Segree’s mother, Mrs. Loraine Reaves. She will be turning 98 years old this year! On the next page is an article Carol has written about Heirloom Daffodils, memories from her childhood growing up on a farm west of Lynchburg, VA. Carol’s mother surely encouraged that interest.

Their 100-acre farm was in Bedford County near the James River and backed up to the mountains. Looking at the map, I realized that it is near a stretch of the Blue Ridge Parkway many of us have traveled frequently. Heading south on the Parkway, just after you cross the James River near Otter Creek (milepost 61.4) and Rt. 501, the Parkway goes up a steep incline to Apple Orchard Mountain, elevation 4224 ft (mp 76.5). That is the highest point on the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia. The Parkway continues to wind along the ridges all the way to the scenic Peaks of Otter at mp 86.

Over the years, we have admired the rich diversity of plants in that area but I had no idea we were in Carol’s back yard! We have studied forms of *R. catawbiense*, *R. prinophyllum*, and *R. periclymenoides*, colonies of pink and white *Trillium grandiflorum*, and large stands of wildflowers with yellow lady’s slippers. Gorgeous!



R. prinophyllum

Lady’s Slippers

Pink Trillium

My Heirloom Daffodils *by Carol Segree*

In spite of all we are dealing with in 2020, Mother Nature has given most of us a kind spring, if a bit wet. The gardens have been lovely, but it is very difficult that we are not able to share their beauty with each other, as usual. Because we are unable to get out and about, Don Hyatt has created outstanding newsletter supplements with beautiful photos and interesting articles that he emails us each week. It has made my stay-at-home life much more enjoyable and I really appreciate getting them, as I am sure we all do.

My daffodils this year have been the prettiest ever. After seeing his wonderful article about daffodils, I decided to write about my heirloom daffodils and how I have these 100+ year old plants in my garden. I was born in Washington, D.C., but my parents moved to Bedford County, near Lynchburg, Va., when I was two years old. They purchased a 100-acre farm and orchard. On the property at the foot of the mountain was a long-abandoned house that was collapsing. The house, which was considered quite elaborate for its day with indoor plumbing and a bath tub, had been built by an English family.



Daffodils, Old and New

Segree



Carol and Rhododendrons in Her Garden

Hyatt



Heirloom Double Daffodil Segree

Leucojums

Most impressive was the terraced garden made with rock walls. They were planted with thousands of bulbs—daffodils of many varieties and leucojums. As children we picked the flowers for our family, friends, and often for our teachers. Many bulbs were dug up and replanted in my mother’s garden. Daffodil and leucojum bulbs came to Maryland to live in my gardens 50 years ago.

There was another house, also built by an English family, on an adjacent property near the top of a mountain range. It was still occupied by elderly people when I was a small child. During the Depression, the CCC camps built a road near the top of the mountain range, just below this house. About 70 years ago the house was abandoned. The property was purchased by a paper mill that demolished the house because they feared unauthorized people might use it and cause fires in the mountains.

Some years ago my brother purchased that property. When I visited one spring he took my mother and me on a tour of the mountains. When we got to the location where the house had been, we saw hundreds of daffodils in bloom. Of course, I said “let’s go get a shovel.” So we did and the rest is history.

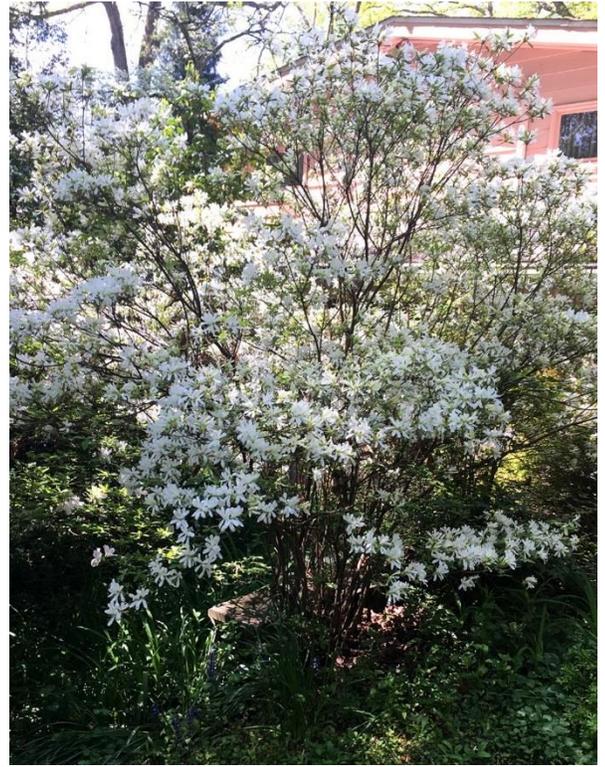
I am still amazed that these bulbs have survived for more than 100 years—certainly more than 70 years with no care. The double ones don’t always open up well and the single ones are smaller and are not that unusual, but they are very special to me.

‘Nannie Angell’

Dianne Gregg shared some images of a favorite plant in her garden, a white strap-petal or “spider” type azalea known as ‘Nannie Angell’ introduced by George and Sue Switzer. It has shorter, more rounded petals than other spiders. She got it at a convention years ago, and it has become a showpiece in her garden. The plant is perfectly symmetrical and now measures 6 ft. wide by 6 ft high. Note the spelling of the name with the double “l” in Angell. It was named for Sue Switzer’s mother.

George and Sue Switzer were very active in the azalea world. They originally lived in Bethesda, MD, but moved eventually to a place known as Scientists Cliffs in Calvert County, MD. It was a 752-acre community with vacation cottages and permanent homes where many scientists in the region chose to retire.

The Switzers did eventually move to an assisted living facility near Solomon’s Island. George passed away in 2008 at the age of 93 but Sue still lives there under strict lock-down. Budne and Diane Reinke still keep in touch as well as Bee Hobbs. They could not visit Sue to wish her a happy 100th birthday in person earlier this year but they and many others including her children, grandchildren, and greatgrandchildren had to express their well wishes over the phone. Below is an image of George and Sue Switzer taken by Bee Hobbs and appeared in a salute to the two in the Winter 2000 *Azalean*.



‘Nannie Angell’ in Dianne Gregg’s Garden Gregg



‘Nannie Angell’ Hyatt
(Short Rounded Petals)



George & Sue Switzer
(Photo by Bee Hobbs)



‘Wagner’s White Spider’
(Long Pointed Petals)



‘Primitive Beauty’ Hyatt
(Long Spoon Shaped Petals)



The Hope Diamond Smithsonian

I have been fascinated by the professional side of George Switzer. A Harvard graduate with a PhD in mineralogy, he had a distinguished career at the Smithsonian. As a long-time curator, he established the National Gem and Mineral Collection at the Museum of Natural History.

He was able to secure a donation of the Hope Diamond for the centerpiece of the collection. Working with Harry Winston, the jeweler in New York who donated the gem, there was concern about getting it to DC. Perhaps as a way to throw off thieves who might try to rob a courier with a stone worth hundreds of millions of dollars, he had them mail him the gem in a plain box wrapped in brown paper. It got there!

Wikipedia has more stories like a trip to Paris fraught with troubles where he had the gem to sewn into his pants. He was the first to analyze the rocks from the moon. An amazing man!

The “Barboretum”

Barbara Bullock sent some pictures of her garden that she is enjoying now that she has retired. After spending 29 years as the Curator of the Azalea Collection at the National Arboretum, Barbara says she is happy to be home this Mother’s Day weekend, one of their buzziest times of the year. Barbara may not have any children of her own but I am sure the azaleas she mothered over there for nearly 3 decades miss her and send their Mother’s Day well wishes. We send her our warmest regards, too, and thank Barbara for the fine work she did there for so many years.

Barbara refers to her private garden as the “Barboretum” now. A long-time friend gave her a wonderful sculpture with that phrase to commemorate her retirement. It seems that birds have now decided that a lamp above the piece of art makes a good place for them to nest. At least she doesn’t have to deal with eagles that chose to nest above the azaleas at the Arboretum. Barbara now has time to find places for choice plants in the garden and is looking forward to when she can entertain friends in her refuge.



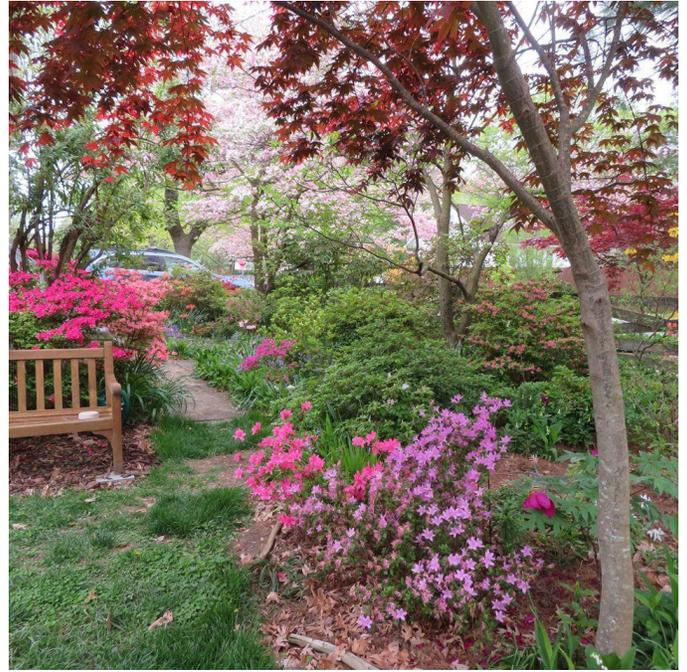
Barbara Bullock & National Arboretum Azaleas Hyatt



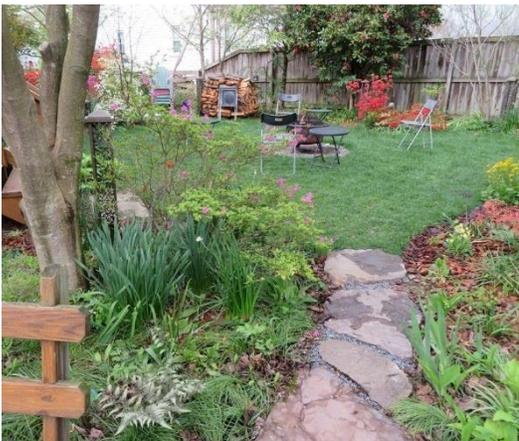
Native Honeysuckle in Tree
(*Lonicera sempervirens*)



The Barboretum Bullock
and Bird Nest



Azaleas & Maple at the Street Edge Bullock



Backyard & Entertainment Areas Bullock



Plants to Repot Bullock



Aromi ‘Robert E. Lee’ on a Path

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