

This Week in the Garden #10: “The Midas Touch” - May 23, 2020

by Don Hyatt - Potomac Valley Chapter ARS

I expected newsletter supplement #09 to be the last one for a while but then I got some wonderful images from a few hybridizers this week. They are making great strides in developing hardy yellow rhododendrons so I decided to put together one more issue before shifting to our regular newsletter.

When I joined the ARS in 1968, the options for yellow rhododendrons we could grow in the DC area were slim. Plants that lived for a while like ‘Unique’, ‘Odee Wright’, and ‘Goldsworth Yellow’ were not really that yellow. I mused at the time that the same hue many rhododendron people were calling “yellow” was the very same color that daylily hybridizers and marigold breeders were calling “near white.” Rhododendrons like ‘Crest’ and *R. wardii* were good yellows but they rarely lived long enough in our area to ever see them bloom.

In 1978, I got my first hardy yellow at the ARS Convention on Long Island. It was my first convention, too. My number was drawn as one of the first to enter the plant sale. We were limited to three plants the first time through so I made a beeline for ‘Golden Star’, a yellow hybrid of (*fortunei* x *wardii*) I had seen on the garden tours. Then I grabbed ‘Hardy Giant’ for Newton Edwards. Newt was one of the founders of our Potomac Valley Chapter and had a small nursery in Annandale, VA. He desperately wanted that plant which was a large leaf hybrid of (*fortunei* x *rex* ssp. *fictolacteum*) that had just won “Best in Show” at the convention.

Things have certainly changed in the past 50 years. We have had many amateurs with the Midas Touch who have created new hardy yellow rhododendrons. We also have white daylilies and white marigolds now, too. In this supplement, I wanted to focus on a few East Coast rhododendron hybridizers and some of their great plants.



‘Hardy Giant’



‘Golden Star’



‘Goldsworth Yellow’



‘Odee Wright’



‘Crest’ Hyatt

Bob Furman

The late Bob Furman from Cape Cod has been one of the most successful hybridizers for yellow rhododendrons. He was a perfectionist, always reluctant to release plants that did not have perfect flowers, foliage, and plant habit. After he passed away, his late wife Audrey did allow the introduction of his best yellow. We called it ‘Bob Furman’s Big Yellow’, or “BFBY” for short.

The cross was [‘Golden Star’ x (‘Jalisco’ x *yak*)] x [(‘Dido’ x (*chlorops* x *lacteum*))] x ‘Golden Star’. One has to appreciate the amount of work that went into creating that huge yellow but Bob felt he still needed more time to improve the open plant habit and get darker foliage. All I saw was yellow!



Karel Bernady with “BFBY” & Bob Furman (right) Hyatt



'Bob Furman's Big Yellow' or "BFBY" Hyatt

"BFBY" has proven difficult to propagate. It will often root but then refuses to break dormancy so the cutting eventually dies. Karel Bernady has had success in grafting the plant and getting it to send out new growth. At the 2019 ARS Convention, he auctioned off the first "BFBY" released to the public. That small graft in a gallon pot went for \$190!

Bob had many other impressive yellow seedlings including one Audrey released as 'Atlantic Gold'. To many of us, even his rejects were to die for.



'Atlantic Gold' Beaudry



Joe Minahan & Norm Beaudry



'John Paul II' Hyatt

Joe Minahan

One of our Associate Members, Joe Minahan, has been an avid hybridizer for many years, too. We know him for his spectacular red, 'John Paul II'. Bob Furman gave Joe a cutting of "BFBY" and Joe successfully rooted it. Last summer, his cutting set four buds and he just sent me pictures. He must be crossing it with everything right now.

Joe also has a nice yellow hybrid he calls 'House of Gold'. It came from the cross ((Mary Belle x Mars) x Phipps 32). Reds like 'Mars' can help intensify yellows. Joe admitted he just crossed "BFBY" onto 'John Paul II'.



Joe Minahan's "BFBY" Cutting Minahan



Unnamed Furman Seedlings Hyatt



Minahan's 'House of Gold' Minahan

Joe also sent a picture of a seedling from one of Norm Beaudry's crosses, (Janet Blair x Phipps 32). 'Janet Blair' is a valuable parent since it provides hardiness but doesn't mask the color of the other parent. Some plants like *R. yakushimanum* will totally dominate color expression in its hybrids. 'Phipps 32', also known as 'Phipps Yellow', came from a 'Golden Star' cross by Howard Phipps on Long Island. Its plant habit is lacking but its strong yellow color is valuable in breeding.

Bud Gehrlich used the same cross (Janet Blair x Phipps 32) to produce his 'Lemon Zest', another good yellow for our region. Bud also introduced 'Bud's Yellow' which does well here.

The late Augie Kehr named a double yellow 'Golden Star' hybrid for himself. It seems to be a bit touchy but may perform better as a grafted plant.



'Janet Blair' Hyatt



'Janet Blair' x 'Phipps 32' Minahan



'Phipps 32' ('Phipps Yellow') Hyatt



'Lemon Zest' Hyatt

Norm Beaudry

Norm has been hybridizing for many years and was also the chair of the ARS Seed Exchange. He often made crosses on his plants for others, and made promising crosses to share via the Exchange. I have always admired the Beaudry's hybrid 'Lara Janine' named for their daughter. It has ruffled flowers of light lemon yellow.

I am not certain about all of Norm's goals but I am sure they included rhododendrons with yellow flowers and breeding for plants with large leaves. Norm and Jean have a magnificent 'Hardy Giant' in their garden which is one of the few big leaf rhododendrons that will grow in our area. He now seems to be working on plants with both qualities, big leaves and yellow flowers.

Bob Furman had recommended to Norm that he try putting the yellow flowered *R. macabeanum* on 'Hardy



'Augie Kehr' Hyatt



'Lara Janine' Hyatt



The Beaudry's 'Hardy Giant'

Giant'. That species doesn't grow here but seems hardier than large leaf yellows like *R. sinogrande*. People have sent him pollen to use. One problem with big leaf species is that they are not always cooperative parents. For whatever reason, the pollen does not always take, or the seeds are not viable. Norm made that cross before 2015 and he did get seedlings that showed the characteristic foliage of *R. macabeanum*.

R. macabeanum is native to northeastern India near the Himalayas. The species has spectacular foliage as you can see in Dick Cavender's photo of his plant in Oregon. The flowers are yellow but some forms are deeper than others. Norm used pollen from a very strong yellow form that came originally from Trewithen Gardens in Cornwall. Bob Zimmerman sent him that pollen from Port Ludlow, WA.



R. macabeanum, Cavender Garden D. Cavender



R. macabeanum, Trewithen

One of Norm's seedlings set a bud last summer and it did bloom this spring. The flowers were disappointingly white but that was not unexpected. Bob Furman used to warn hybridizers that you need yellow genes on both sides to get good yellows from a cross. Norm just put pollen Richard Flavell and Chris Trautmann sent him from their large leaf hybrid in Oregon, *R. sinofalconeri* x *macabeanum*. Native to southern Yunnan and Vietnam, *R. sinofalconeri* is yellow but does it also have some heat tolerance? With 3 of the 4 parents having yellow flowers, this could be a breakthrough for a big leaf hardy yellow!



('Hardy Giant' x *R. macabeanum*) Beaudry

These other images are favorites of mine like my yellow lady's slippers I have had since high school. I shake garlic powder on them to repel deer. It works!



Some of Hyatt's Yellow Lady's Slippers Hyatt



Lady's Slippers



Iris 'Summer Olympics'



R. calendulaceum 'Big Bird'



Azalea 'Sweet Christie' Hyatt



'Narcissiflorum'

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