



Potomac Valley Chapter American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Newsletter: October 2009

Calendar

- * **October 23-25, 2009** – ARS Eastern Regional, Lionville, PA
- * **November 1, 2009** – Fall Banquet, JR's Stockyards, Tyson's Corner, VA
- * **January 10, 2010** – Reg. Meeting, National Arboretum: *Photography!*
- * **March 5-7, 2010** – Plant trip to NC Nurseries
- * **March 28, 2010** – Reg. Meeting, National Arboretum: *Tom Ahern*
- * **April 24, 2010** – Flower Show, National Arboretum
- * **May 14 - 17, 2010** – ARS Convention, Long Island, NY
- * **May 18-25, 2010** – International Rhododendron Conference, Bremen, Germany

Chapter Officers

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Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman

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Fall Banquet: *Sunday, November 1st* *“Three Seasons of Color”*

by **Bruce and Marianne Feller**

Where: JR's Stockyards Inn

8130 Watson St., McLean, VA 22102

Time: 4:30 – 8:00 PM

Please note the correct day of the week for our Fall Banquet this year is **SUNDAY!** In a rush to send out Fall Banquet registration forms with the September newsletter and dues notice, your editor made a *minor error* on the form. The date was correct, November 1st. The problem is that 11/1/09 is *Sunday*, not Saturday. Sorry... my bad!!

We are so pleased to have Bruce and Marianne Feller coming down from New York to speak at our fall banquet. Bruce is the Eastern Vice President for the ARS and he is also the chair of next spring's ARS Convention on Long Island. I am sure he will give us a preview of the upcoming convention when he speaks, but his talk is titled “Three Season's of Color”.

I have visited the Feller's garden in November when the Japanese maples were in full color. The contrast of the brilliant red and gold maple leaves against the blues and deep greens of the dwarf conifers and rhododendrons was spectacular.

If you have not registered for the banquet, the price per meal is \$40. Entree choices are fish, beef or vegetarian and the registration deadline is Monday, October 26th. Send your payment to our treasurer, Phyllis Rittman, 10840 Fairchester Dr., Fairfax, VA 22030.



Bruce Feller on his Patio: Japanese Maples are Excellent Companions with Conifers and Rhododendrons

Focus on Photography in January 2010

Remember that the January meeting always has our annual photography contest and we hope you have taken some great pictures this year. As before, we will have three categories for entries:

- 1. Flowers:** Close-up of a rhododendron truss or azalea spray
- 2. Scenery:** A picture featuring rhododendrons or azaleas in the landscape or in the wild
- 3. Other:** Rhododendron or azalea photographs that don't fit well in the first two categories including foliage, people, and events.

Prints must be no larger than 8" by 10" including matting if desired. We plan to have our entire program that day related to photography so come prepared to ask questions and learn more about taking pictures. Details in the next issue.

2009 Eastern Fall Regional

October 23-25, 2009

The early registration deadline for the ARS Fall Eastern Regional in Pennsylvania has passed, but there is still time to sign up to attend. Hosted by nearby District 8, the theme is "Rhododendrons in Penn's Woods." Enjoy a weekend with speakers on various topics including Joe Gable, hybridizers, companion plants, and a great plant sale.

The event will be held a few hours north of DC at the Inn at Chester Springs in Lionville, PA. There are a number of excellent gardens nearby that should have wonderful fall displays including Longwood, Winterthur, and others. For more information, check out the conference website:

www.arsfall2009.org

2010 ARS Convention:

Long Island, NY - May 14-17, 2010

Plan ahead for next spring's ARS Convention on Long Island, NY, from May 14-17. The conference opens Friday evening with tours planned on Saturday and Sunday. Details will be published in the Winter ARS Journal.

The beautiful 409-acre Arboretum at Planting Fields will surely be one of the highlights on the tours. It was for me when I attended my first ARS Convention back in 1978. I remembered so many magnificent trees and rhododendrons, I wondered if they would still there when I visited again, 30 years later. They are! Below is a recent photo I took standing beneath one of the huge Spiderleaf Japanese Maples at Planting Fields. The trees must be at least a century old and just spectacular!



Japanese Maple (Acer palmatum Dissectum)



Vista in Rhododendron Park, Bremen, Germany H. Schepker

International Rhododendron Conference: Bremen, Germany - May 18-25, 2010

In celebration of the German Rhododendron Society's 75th Anniversary next May, there will be an International Rhododendron Conference in Bremen Germany. Expect garden tours to all of the finest public and private gardens in the region as well as a series of talks in English by speakers from around the world. Conference coordinator, Dr. Hartwig Schepker, spoke at our 2006 Convention. He will publish full conference materials online very soon:

www.rhodo.org/2010

Bremen Rhodo Conference Summary:

May 18-20: Symposium

Fourteen speakers from around the world.

German Rhododendron Society 75th Anniversary

May 20-23: Garden tours and special events near the Bremen Rhododendron Park

Post Tour Convention Tour

May 24-25: Tours and sightseeing near Hamburg including Hobbie Gardens and Hachmann Nursery

Acer Acres Trip: Japanese Maples

We are trying to arrange a fall field trip to Acer Acres, a wholesale Japanese maple grower south of Fredericksburg, VA. They grow 450 cultivars! We have inquired about visiting on November 6 during fall color season since it is convenient for people attending the MAC meeting that weekend. If interested, ask Don Hyatt for more details.

The Garden Blues: *Thoughts on Color*

By Don Hyatt

I love blue in the garden but finding plants with blue flowers is not always easy, especially with rhododendrons. There are some wonderful alpine rhododendrons like *R. impeditum* that I would like to grow. It has tiny leaves and dark, purplish blue flowers but the plants rarely last 6 months before the summer heat does them in. The plant sold as *R. impeditum* in our local garden centers is usually *R. fastigiatum* instead. Of course, that makes no difference since they both die just the same.

In cooler climates like our Pacific Northwest and British Isles, the larger growing *R. augustinii* gets my vote for the best blue. Joe Gable raised *R. augustinii* seed many times and actually had one that survives in Stewartstown, PA. Gable's hardy form may not be as intense a blue as other named varieties, but it is at least a building block for those who want to breed for better blues rhodos.



(Epoch x augustinii) an Augie Kehr Hybrid

A hardy blue lepidote was one of Augie Kehr's hybridizing goals. He decided that he should first cross *R. augustinii* with 'Epoch', a tetraploid form of *R. carolinianum*. It would give heat tolerance and then he could back cross it with other blues to intensify the color. His hybrid has lovely, icy blue-white flowers... a great plant in its own right.

Other blue lepidotes that seem to grow for us include the darker purple-blue 'Crater Lake' and an unnamed softer blue selection from George Ring that is a hybrid of *R. carolinianum* x 'Crater Lake.' The hybrids 'Ramapo' and 'Purple Gem'

have been disappointments for me and I must have tried 'Blue Diamond' twenty times with no success. They just don't seem to take our heat.

I have killed the Haag's 'Blue Ridge' several times as well, but I will try the plant again. It has such great color and I want to use it in breeding. I have Delp's (*Tet carolinianum* x *fastigiatum*), which seems to do well. I bought 'Rosalie' at Rarefind Nursery and will try 'Blaney's Blue' one day, too. Did you get 'Rhine's Luna' in our Plants for Members program this year? It is supposed to do well in our area and is a light blue.

In the larger leaf rhododendrons, there really isn't a good blue, certainly nothing that compares to the smaller leaf lepidotes. 'Blue Ensign' has always been a favorite in my garden with its ruffled trusses of lavender blue accented by a strong blotch. Below is a picture of my 'Blue Ensign' that measured 8 ft. tall by 13 ft. wide after 40 years. Sadly, all of those plants were crushed by a falling tree in April of 2008 and are no more.



Blue Ensign and Azaleas, Before the Tree Disaster

'Blue Peter' has more blue in the lavender than 'Blue Ensign' but it never made as nice a plant for me. 'A. Bedford' is a good lavender-blue with large trusses, but it is tall and has a more open habit. The Girard hybrid 'Peter Alan' is a strong blue-purple that has done well in our area. I think it was one of Ed Reiley's favorites.

Since good blue rhododendrons are difficult to find and often harder to grow, we can always look for companion plants with blue flowers to use in the landscape. Of course, one of the most striking



R. impeditum



R. augustinii



Himalayan Poppy (*Mecanopsis*)



R. 'Blue Ensign'



R. carolinianum x Crater Lake



Phlox divaricata

Garden Blues



Blue Alpine Rhododendrons, Edinburgh



R. 'Peter Alan'



Wood Hyacinth (*Scilla*)



Veronica 'Georgia Blue'



Anemone blanda



Blue Bells (*Mertensia*)

blue flowered plants and also one of the most difficult to grow is the Himalayan Blue Poppy, *Mecanopsis betonicifolia*. It is challenging, even on the West Coast. When it blooms, the tall stems topped by brilliant peacock blue flowers will be the focal point in any garden, not only for the spectacular beauty of the blossoms, but also for the pride of the gardener who was able to raise it.



Beds of Phlox divaricata Compliment the Azaleas

In my garden, my favorite blue flowered companion plant is the Wild Blue Phlox, *Phlox divaricata*. It grows about 8 to 10 inches high and combines well with everything. The lavender-blue flowers start opening in early April and they continue until almost June. It is not always easy to grow, though, since the foliage can get mildew in summer and the plants seem to be the preferred food for bunnies, deer, and slugs. It reseeds in my lawn, so before I cut the grass, I pick out seedlings and move them to the garden border where they will provide that wonderful blue color in spring.

Another good blue for the spring garden is the Wood Hyacinth, *Hyacinthoides hispanica* (*Scilla campanulata*) 'Excelsior'. The bulb produces 10 to 12-inch spikes of blue flowers that are much more delicate than the stiff blossoms of the standard Dutch Hyacinths. Those always remind me of "corn dogs", or wads of cotton candy stuck in the ground. Wood Hyacinths multiply quickly, developing into large clumps that can be divided in just a few years. My deer munch the expanding foliage in early spring, but it is not their favorite.

The Virginia Blue Bells, *Mertensia virginica*, seem to be deer resistant and they are great plants for blue color. Like the Wood Hyacinths, their

foliage ripens off early in the season so the area can be replanted with summer annuals by June

Another deer proof plant is the Lungwort, or Pulmonaria. It is closely related to Virginia Blue Bells, and has pink buds that open to blue flowers but it has persistent foliage that is very attractive. Many of the varieties have dark green leaves spotted with silvery white, but one I got from Plant Delights during our Plant trip last year was the variety 'Samouri.' It has been superb! The foliage is long and narrow, and rather being spotted it is solid silvery white with a green edge. The plant has formed a lovely clump spreading nearly 18 inches across and has not been bothered by deer or slugs. At the end of the summer the plant is still spectacular and would make a great replacement for hosta where deer are problematic.



Silvery-leafed Pulmonaria: 'Samouri'

I hope others will share their favorite plant purchases from the North Carolina Nursery trips. I have obtained so many excellent plants and will discuss a few more favorites with blue flowers.

One super plant is the dwarf creeping *Veronica peduncularis* 'Georgia Blue.' It is not from the state of Georgia but was discovered in the Russian Republic of Georgia in 1979. Introduced to the nursery trade just within the past decade, it only grows 6 to 8 inches tall and is covered with deep blue flowers in early spring. It seems to be both heat and cold tolerant with an amazing hardiness rating: Zone 4 – 9! It forms a nice creeping groundcover that doesn't seem to get out of hand. Nothing seems to eat the plant so far, which is a real plus in my garden. It does require a half-day

to full sun to bloom well, but an added benefit is that during the winter months, the tidy green leaves turn to a deep burgundy color.

Another great plant I got at Big Bloomers several years ago was *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost.' It is a patented selection of Siberian Bugloss and has small blue flowers in mid spring, similar to a forget-me-not. The real attraction is its silvery, heart-shaped foliage that is veined with deep green. It is a wonderful perennial in shade and contrasts well with ferns all summer long.



Silvery Foliage of Brunnera 'Jack Frost'

There are two excellent blue Anemone species that I highly recommend. The first one, *Anemone blanda*, is a carefree bulb that should be planted in the fall. It comes in various colors including blue, white, pink, and rose but I prefer the blue and the white forms in my garden. The bulbs will form larger clumps in time but it does not seem to spread except for an occasional stray seedling.

The other species, *Anemone nemorosa*, has creeping rhizomes so it is a groundcover and can form large beds under rhododendrons and azaleas. The single flowered form I have is a light lavender blue and looks similar to *A. blanda*. There is a charming white selection with a tufted center selection called 'Vestal' that is superb. I saw that plant for the first time in Oregon at the Cecil Smith Garden where it had spread underneath a large bed of *R. yakushimanum* plants. The white flowers of the anemones were perfect companions with the white flowered yaks and looked like a carpet of stars under the rhododendrons.

Interestingly, those rhizomes do not seem to be eaten by voles and although they spread into a thick mat, they don't seem to compete with other plants. Perhaps that is because they do all their growth in very early spring when most other plants are dormant but go dormant themselves in the summer when the other things are growing.

Some other favorite spring flowers I use in my garden for blue include various Iris species like *I. cristata* and *I. techtorum*. I also like other blues including pansies, violas, columbine, and clematis.

For summertime blues, I do use ageratum generously since it is deer resistant. I picked up another great little plant at Big Bloomers called the Blue Star Daisy, *Kalimeris incisa*. It has made a wonderful mound about a foot across and has bloomed all season long. I also like Stokesia 'Peachie's Peak.' It has that great blue color but doesn't fall over as easily as other Stokes Asters.



Stokes Aster: Stokesia 'Peachie's Pick'

In late summer, my big display is the Blue Lobelia, *Lobelia siphilitica*, a native perennial wildflower. It comes up from the base each year but also reseeds everywhere. It looks like a blue form of our native Cardinal Flower (*L. cardinalis*) but begins to bloom a week or so later. Keep them separate since the Blue Lobelia is more robust and will crowd out the red Cardinal Flower in time.

The color page accompanying this issue has pictures of some garden blues mentioned in this article. I am a sucker for blue flowered plants so if you have some suggestions, please let me know. Between now and March, I will be making my list and checking it twice. I want to be ready for the North Carolina Nursery trip.

In Memory of Hank Schannen

It is with great sadness that we report the loss of one of the American Rhododendron Society's most knowledgeable leaders, Hank Schannen. Hank passed away suddenly on Wednesday, September 16, at the age of 71.



Hank Schannen

A past President of the ARS and recipient of the ARS Gold Medal, Hank was a renowned rhododendron expert but he had that rare gift of a skilled orator and could captivate any crowd.

Hank was a founding partner of a marketing research firm in New Jersey, but also established Rarefind Nursery. The nursery served not only as a test garden for new and unusual plants but also a place we could go to find the latest introductions. Rarefind's catalog was a fantastic resource, filled with valuable information. Hank was an avid rhododendron hybridizer, too, and 'Solidarity' is perhaps his most famous introduction.

Hank's family and the staff of Rarefind Nursery have indicated that they will try to continue the operation in his absence. We extend our sincere sympathy to them, and to anyone who knew and was inspired by this great man. Hank was indeed a rare find, someone who will be greatly missed and impossible to replace.

Dues Are Due!

Please remember to renew your membership in ARS and our local chapter. Regular membership is \$40 per year and Associate Membership if you belong to another chapter is \$10. Return your payment to our chapter Treasurer, Phyllis Rittman:

prittman@erols.com

The Annual Flower Show: April 24, 2010

It seems like April 24th is a long way from now but this year we need to plan ahead. The Potomac Valley Chapter has accepted an offer to host our Annual Flower Show during the FONA Garden Fair (plant sale) at the National Arboretum Administration Building. This will likely be our last event held at the facility for quite some time since the building will be undergoing extensive renovations. The Saturday date during the FONA sale will mean increased crowds attending our show, but also that it will cause some logistical problems.

We will be able to have free access to the auditorium for setup on Friday but on Saturday, volunteers must arrive at the Arboretum between 7:30 and 8:00 AM and check in with security. There will be no parking near the auditorium on Saturday and many lots are expected to be full by 9:00 AM. People will be able to drive up to the auditorium, stop for 5 minutes to unload flowers, but then will have to park cars and return by shuttle bus to complete entries.

We will need volunteers to assist that day, so please think about helping us out. We will also have some short educational programs staged every hour, all day long. It will be a great time to meet other plant people, possibly recruit a few new members, and even buy some plants.

The Seed Exchanges:

Norman Beaudry has taken over as Chairman of the ARS Seed Exchange. He is interested in receiving cleaned seed of rhododendron and azalea crosses, species, and plants from the wild to put into this year's offering. Use the following email to contact Norm about the ARS exchange:

arseed@gmail.com

Don Hyatt will continue to run our local Potomac Valley Chapter seed exchange this year but he intends to scale back the number of offerings so we can put effort into the ARS Seed Exchange. If you have some seed to donate, please let him know. We will publish our list in late December with the next newsletter.

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