



Potomac Valley Chapter

American Rhododendron Society

www.arspvc.org

Early Spring Newsletter: March 2012

Calendar

- * **March 2-4, 2012** – Plant Trip to North Carolina Nurseries
- * **March 18, 2012** – Regular Meeting – Karel Bernady, Grafting!
- * **April 28, 2012** – Garden Tour (*Flower Show Cancelled!*)
- * **May 4-7, 2012** – ARS/ASA Joint Convention, Asheville, NC
- * **May 28-30, 2012** – Sandwich Club Trip, Cape Cod, MA
- * **June 24, 2012** – Chapter Picnic, Seneca Creek State Park, MD

Chapter Officers

President: Richard Mohr
rngmohr@msn.com
VP & Secretary: Still Open
Treasurer: Phyllis Rittman
prittman@erols.com

Next Meeting: Karel Bernady
“Grafting Rhododendrons: A Beginning”
Date: Sunday, March 18, 2012
Time: 1 – 4 PM
Location: National Arboretum

We will be back at the National Arboretum for our March meeting. The Administration Building will not be open yet, so our meeting will be held in the temporary trailer adjacent to that facility. Note that we have had to cancel our Flower Show in April since the Arboretum will need that trailer during the FONA Plant Sale. We are arranging a garden tour instead.

Our March speaker will be the always entertaining Karel Bernady from Philadelphia. We all remember his humorous presentation at our 2010 District Nine Lunch when he spoke on rhododendrons in Germany. This time he will share his personal experiences with a new grafting approach we saw while on that trip.

Karel Bernady is very active in the ARS. He has served as President of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter and co-chairs the Plants and Propagation Committee with responsibility for the Chapter's Plants for Members Program. He is the ARS Director of District Eight's five Chapters. He also serves as Chairman of the Trustees of the Research Foundation and co-chairs the Research Committee of the ARS.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter began its Plants for Members Program in 1986. When Karel was appointed to manage the program in 2003, he was determined to document the propagation performance of the various cultivars attempted. Experience over the last eight years with poor rootability of some plants and death of successfully rooted varieties during summer's heat caused Karel to consider grafting as a possible solution to these difficulties.

In May 2010 Karel attended the International Rhododendron Symposium in Bremen and the tours held afterwards, all in celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the German Rhododendron Society. At the Fredo Schröder Nursery, Timo Schröder



Our next Speaker, Karel Bernady

demonstrated in detail the grafting method used for elepidote rhododendrons, i.e. the simultaneous grafting and rooting of a scion/unrooted understock unit. The nursery propagates 1.5 million elepidotes per year by the technique.

Armed with information Timo provided, Karel tried the method in November 2010 on thirty-one elepidote cultivars. The results were very gratifying. He will share the information learned and encourage us to try the technique to propagate troublesome elepidote rhododendrons.

Try to allow some extra time before or after the meeting to tour the National Arboretum. Many spring flowers should be in bloom. Look for daffodils in the National Boxwood Collection, various cherry tree hybrids in the meadows, wildflowers in Fern Valley, the Magnolia Collection, and the Bonsai Exhibit.

Refreshment Duty: Persons whose last names begin with **Q** through **Z** are asked to bring some refreshment goodies for the table.

Directions: The National Arboretum is located in northeast Washington, D.C., off of Bladensburg Road at 24th and R St. The Arboretum website provides excellent directions: www.usna.usda.gov

North Carolina Nursery Trek: March 2 - 4

We hope many of you will participate in our annual North Carolina Nursery Trek to the Raleigh-Durham area. If you can get away that weekend, please join us.

As usual, Joe Marsala is coordinating the event and he has arranged special rates at the Comfort Inn in Garner, NC, which we use as our base of operation. Mention "Rhododendron Society" to get the rate of \$69, which is the same as AAA. Most people staying at the hotel at that time are plant fanatics like us so it is always a fun weekend. Here is the hotel we use:

Comfort Inn – Garner

126 Cleveland Crossing Drive
Garner, NC 27529 (919) 773-1110

The trip is very informal. We have no strict itinerary and people can come for any segment. Some of these nurseries are mail order and not open to the public except during a few weekends each year. Here is what most of us plan to do:

Friday, March 2:

On the way to Garner, stop at the Hellebore Festival at Pink Knot Farms to pick out hellebores in bloom. In addition to their hellebores, they also have had some other rare perennials and a few woody plants, too.

Pine Knot Farms – Hellebore Festival (10 am – 4 pm)
681 Rockchurch Rd, Clarksville, VA 23927
www.pineknotfarms.com

Each evening we will gather in the hotel lounge area for "Happy Hour." Bring some snacks and your own alcoholic beverage if desired. It is fun to "talk plants" before going across the road for dinner.

Saturday, March 3:

We will try to visit two nurseries this day. The first will be Big Bloomers, which is about 1 hour south of the hotel. They have a huge assortment of annuals, perennials, greenhouse plants, and some woody plants. Their prices are very reasonable!

After lunch we will head back to Garner to visit Tony Avent's Plant Delights Nursery. He carries many rare plants and has a beautiful display garden. We just learned that Tony recently lost his wife of 34 years, Michelle, to breast cancer. She was that very cheerful lady who managed the cashier table. We extend our sincere sympathy to Tony and his family.

Big Bloomers Flower Farm

275 Pressly Foushee Road, Sanford, NC 27330
www.bigbloomersflowerfarm.com

Plant Delights Nursery

9241 Sauls Road, Raleigh, NC 27603
www.plantdelights.com

Sunday, March 6:

David Parks has been very accommodating for us, opening his Camellia Forest Nursery for our group on Sunday morning at 10:00 AM. They carry lots of camellias and woody plants including *Prunus mume*, a wonderful early blooming tree that is hard to find.

If you get up early, on the way to Camellia Forest you might stop by the J.C. Raulston Arboretum. It is on the west side of Raleigh off of Rt. 1 and I-440, about 25 minutes away from the hotel. It will be a slight detour on the way to Camellia Forest, or even a possible stop on the way back from Big Bloomers. The arboretum is small, about 10 acres, but they have a wonderful collection of rare plants and conifers. They are open 365 days a year and admission is free.

J.C. Raulston Arboretum (8:00 AM – 5:00 PM)

4415 Beryl Road, Raleigh, NC 27695
www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum

Camellia Forrest Nursery (Sunday at 10:00 AM)

9701 Carrie Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516
www.camforest.com

You will need to make your own hotel reservations and transportation arrangements. Let Joe know if you plan to participate so we can keep an eye out for you:

Joe Marsala:

joe-marsala@comcast.net

Chapter Library:

Our Potomac Valley Chapter does have a rather extensive library of books and publications, as well as few videos that members can check out. Please review the listings posted on our Chapter website:

www.arspvc.org/library.html

To check out something, just ask our librarian, Jean Beaudry, to bring the desired item to the next meeting. You will be expected to return that item at the following meeting. Please call Jean or contact her via email at least one week in advance:

Jean Beaudry:

beaujean@verizon.net

Chapter Website: Newsletters Online!

Your newsletter editor has finally updated our chapter website by posting at least 10 years of prior newsletters. There are many interesting articles out there, and with the online version, most of the photos are now in color. As always, we removed sensitive information like home addresses and telephone numbers so that such information is not shared via the Internet. Check out what we do have available:

www.arspvc.org/newsletter.html

No Flower Show - Garden Tour Instead!

Unfortunately, we just learned that we must cancel our April 28th Flower Show at the National Arboretum due to construction delays. They cannot accommodate us this year. We looked at other sites but they were either booked or *very expensive*, one as high as \$4860 for a non-profit! Members of the board have considered various options, and we feel that a garden tour might be the best alternative. We hope you agree.

This will be more than a garden tour since we will include an educational component, too. Expect expert demonstrations on hybridizing. Bring your cameras and questions since we will make this trip into a digital photography outing. We will discuss plans at our next meeting and provide details in our next newsletter.

Sandwich Club: Trip to Cape Cod

The Sandwich Club was established in 1988 as an ARS Committee that would study and evaluate the Dexter Rhododendrons at the Heritage Plantation near Sandwich, MA, on Cape Cod. Although the group has officially dissolved, many of us still enjoy going to Cape Cod to see their beautiful rhododendrons in late May to early June. The flowers on the Cape peak long after our gardens are finished, so this is a great way to extend the spring season and see one of the most spectacular rhododendron displays on the East Coast. We usually visit a number of gardens each day, and then go out to dinner in the evenings. Great fun!



Dexter Rhododendrons near the Windmill at Heritage

This year, our tentative plans are to head up to Cape Cod around May 28th to 30th. We are not sure which gardens we will visit but we suspect the itinerary will be similar to what we did in 2008. Norman Beaudry wrote an excellent article about that trip in our Fall 2008 newsletter. Check it out on our website:

www.arspc.org/newsletter.html

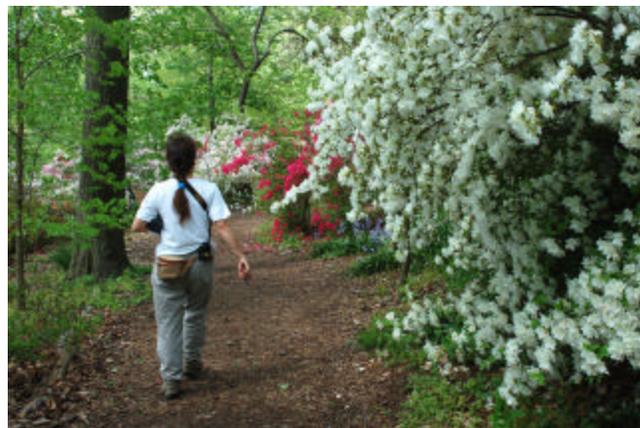
We will put more details in the next newsletter, but if you think you might be interested, let Norman know.

Norman Beaudry: beauorm@verizon.net

FONA Update: We're Making Progress!

Kathy Horan, the Executive Director of FONA, reported to us that the Save the Azaleas and Boxwood Campaign raised a total of \$57,020 in 2011 through numerous donations. She assured everyone: "Please note that all funds designated for this campaign past, present and into the future have been and will be placed in a restricted account, ensuring that all funds donated will be used only for the intended purpose."

She shared some other details. "The original \$1 million endowment we received for this campaign is established as a permanently restricted fund, meaning that the principal cannot be touched and all gains will be used only to preserve and enhance the Azalea and Boxwood (and related perennial) collections. 2011 was not a banner year for investments; let's hope that 2012 brings better growth to the endowment. The Arboretum will not require additional funds to support the Azaleas and Boxwood until 2013. Between the funds raised to date and the growth in the endowment we anticipate providing \$100,000 to the Arboretum in support of these two collections next year."



Barbara Bullock and Azaleas on the Glenn Dale Hillside

The goal is to raise another million dollars in order to permanently endow both collections. FONA will continue to seek donations from private individuals but will also try to obtain some major gifts in order to reach that goal sooner rather than later. Please don't forget about the Save the Azaleas Campaign when you consider possible charitable contributions this year. FONA will continue to need our support!

2012 Photography Contest Results

The Photography contest at our January meeting had so many lovely entries. In this issue is a double page of the photo contest winners printed in color. As in the past, the attendees voted for their favorite images, and it seems that Don Hyatt's picture taken in Portland's Crystal Springs Garden was the favorite.

Take lots of pictures at our chapter activities this spring. The ARS has a new photography contest, too!

Potomac Valley Chapter ARS 2012 Photo Contest

The photographs on these two pages were determined by attendee voting to be the favorites in our annual photography contest at the January meeting. On this page are the First Place winners and the picture chosen Best in Contest. The categories were: 1) Flowers, 2) Landscapes, and 3) Other. On the next page are the pictures that won 2nd or 3rd in the three categories. Congratulations to all who participated!



Best in Contest: Don Hyatt
“Crystal Springs”



1st Category 1: Don Hyatt
“Rhododendron occidentale”



1st Category 2: Jon Wallenmeyer
“Lounge Chair View”



1st Category 3: Don Hyatt
“John Delano Sees Gold”

2012 Photo Contest Winners (cont.)

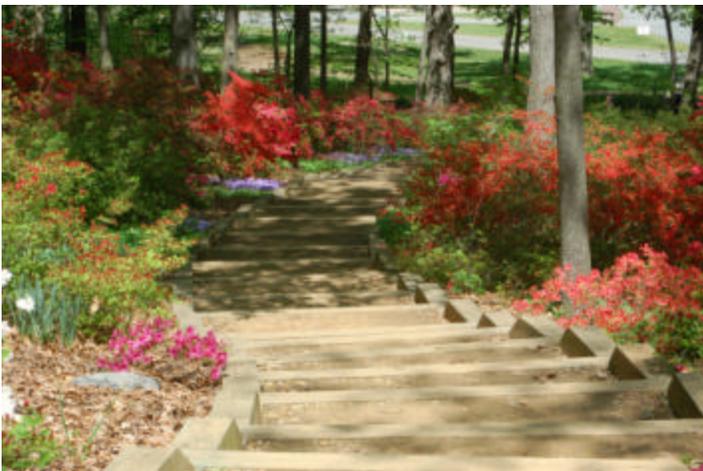
Here are more winning photographs from this year's contest. Thanks to all who entered!



3rd Category 3: Bob McWhorter
"Bald River Falls"



2nd Category 3: Carolyn R. Segree
"A Fungus Amungus"



2nd Category 2: Dan Neckel
"Azalea Gardens Hillside Path"



2nd Category 1: Jon Wallenmeyer
"Marina"



3rd Category 2: Don Hyatt
"Engine Gap"



3rd Category 1: Bill Wallenmeyer
"Katherine Dalton"

The Rhododendron Species Foundation Suffers Severe Winter Storm Damage

Much of the continental U.S. has enjoyed a rather mild winter so far, but those of us in the DC area feel we deserve a break after the abuse we endured two winters ago. Yes, this is the second anniversary of “Snowmageddon” when many local suburbs received more than 50 inches of snow in just 10 days.

However, other parts of the world have been having some of their worst winter weather in memory. There has been extreme cold with heavy snow in much of Europe. Parts of Alaska have set both cold and snow records. For instance, in Valdez, AK, by February they had 26 feet of snow with 3 more months to go. The town of Bettles, AK, set an all-time record for cold in January, an average temperature of -35.6° F!

Some of that cold weather worked its way into the Pacific Northwest in January. From January 18-23, parts of Oregon and Washington experienced a series of storms with hurricane force winds, heavy snow, and ice. The Rhododendron Species Foundation and Botanic Garden in Federal Way, WA, (RSBG) seemed to be one of the most severely hurt areas. Steve Hootman, the speaker at our fall banquet, is the Director of the RSBG. He and his staff have provided some details of what has happened there. Many of us have visited that garden and we are saddened to learn of the devastation they experienced in late January.



Sales Area at the RSBG in 2005 (Photo by Don Hyatt)

Chip Muller of the RSBG reported that they experienced a thick coating of ice on top of the heavy snow that accumulated over two days. That caused significant damage to many of the trees. Although no damage occurred to any of their buildings, the garden has suffered dearly and they are faced with an immediate need of \$15,000 to help remove broken tree limbs in the tops of the large conifers that provide so much shade to the plantings. Ken Cox and others have already made some major gifts to assist with cleanup. Others wishing to donate can send a check directly to

the RSBG, PO Box 3798, Federal Way, WA 98063. Consider becoming a member, too. Details can be found on their website: www.rhodygarden.org

Steve Hootman shared some details in a recent email. “We have lost six of our finest mature Stewartia trees including all of the specimens in the new ‘May Garden’ which was just opened up last year. We have also lost virtually all of our beautiful Amelanchier specimens (flowering cherry relative with great spring flowers and amazing fall color).”



Tree Damage at the RSBG (Photo by Dennis Bottemiller)

Steve continued, “In addition we have had the tops taken out of some of our finest and rarest flowering trees including numerous specimens of our Magnolia collection (both evergreen and deciduous), several fine and rare specimens of maple grown from wild collected seed, the top half of what may be the only specimen of *Alniphyllum* in North America (a rare and beautiful relative of the styrax). All but two specimens of our impressive collection of birch species have been topped or completely destroyed, many of our largest and finest specimens of Rhododendron, some dating from the original plantings in the late 1970s, have been pulled out of the ground, tipped over or broken off.”

“In addition and probably most critical is the damage to dozens of our large native conifers. Many of these have had massive amounts of damage with branches stripped out and broken off. Many of these large branches are now hanging 50 to 100 feet in the air directly over our garden paths and these represent an imminent danger to staff, volunteers and any visitors (we are still closed due to this issue). Some of the “widow-makers” are six inches or more across at the base and are instant death to anybody below.”

Steve acknowledges that even though the garden may never look the same, there may be some benefits. He notes, “In the end, this thinning, removing of dead wood and branches and lifting of the ‘skirts’ of these giant conifers will not only make the garden safer, it will also make it lighter and more attractive.”

Thoughts on Propagation and Grafting

by Don Hyatt

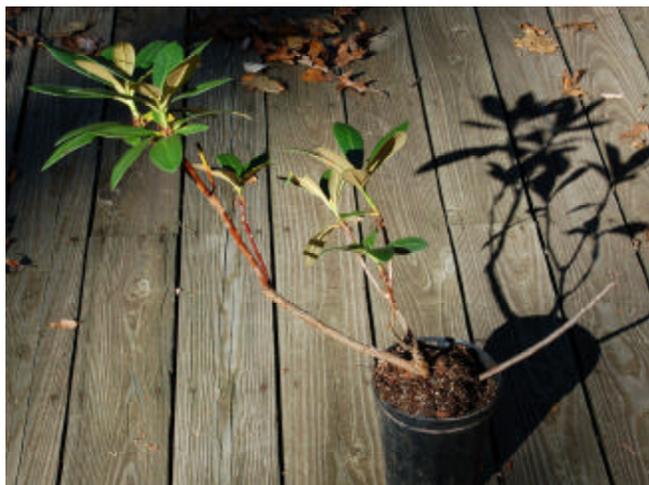
Karel Bernady will be giving us an exciting new presentation on grafting at our next meeting. He and I saw that technique demonstrated when we were in Germany, so I thought a little bit of background on propagation methods might be appropriate for this newsletter. I did some grafting when I was in college, but very little since. I am anxious to try again, so I just bought myself a grafting knife. It is relatively small, very sharp, and beveled on only one side.



Typical Rhododendron Cutting

With rhododendrons and azaleas, nurserymen in the U.S. usually root cuttings to propagate their plants. In late summer or fall, we take a hardened off piece of new growth, remove the flower bud and a sliver of bark from both sides of the stem. Then we treat the base of the cutting with a rooting hormone and stick it into rooting medium. We must keep it humid, either with mist or by enclosing the entire pot inside a plastic bag. As the wound heals, roots develop in the callus region. After several months, we have a new plant.

Another process that is commonly used on a small scale is called “layering.” The end of branch that is low to the ground is wounded, and then weighted



Layered Branch of a Rhododendron

down to the ground by a rock or something heavy. Some people set the branch on a pot filled with porous rooting medium since it is easier for the plant to form new roots and easier to care for afterwards. After a year or two when an ample root system has formed at site of the wound, the branch can be cut away from the mother plant and the new layer moved elsewhere.

People also reproduce rhododendrons by tissue culture but that requires sterile laboratory techniques, which is not easy for hobbyists. The problem with all of the techniques we use to propagate rhododendrons by these methods is that if the original plant happens to have a weak root system or is prone to root rot, so will be all the clones we propagate from it.

For other woody plant materials like Japanese maples, dogwood trees, magnolias, conifer selections, and fruit trees, most nurseries in the U.S. propagate by grafting. Grafting is the most common propagation technique used in Europe for rhododendrons, too, but definitely a rare approach in the US. The process is often more labor intensive. A branch of the desired variety must be attached to another plant that will provide the root system for the rhododendron.

Of course, one obvious reason to graft plants is to propagate varieties that are notoriously difficult to root by cuttings like “BFBY” (Bob Furman’s Big Yellow). It is one of the best yellow rhododendrons that any of us have seen. The soft pink ‘Jack Cowles’ is also impossible to root, but I do have a grafted plant.



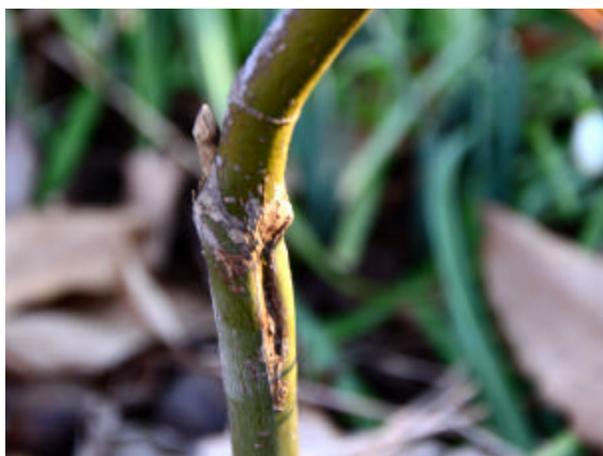
Bob Furman’s Big Yellow: “BFBY”

There are other advantages, too. With a grafted plant, the propagator can select a rootstock that is much more adaptable to the local environment. Some of the West Coast plants that do not grow for us die because of weak root systems. When soil temperatures get high, some roots stop growing. Other varieties are prone to root rot, a fungus disease called phytophthora prevalent in wet soils and warm temperatures. There are resistant varieties so we should graft on those!

In 1980, scientists in Germany began working on the development of a new rhododendron rootstock called INKARHO. Many European nurseries use this patented rootstock, partly because the root system is very robust and even tolerates lime. They can now grow rhododendrons in a wide range of soil conditions using plants grafted on INKARHO stock.

With fruit trees, rootstocks have been developed that will provide a dwarf habit to normally large growing varieties. For those limited on space, some companies will even sell single trees that may have as many as five different varieties grafted on one trunk.

There are many ways to graft. With deciduous trees like dogwoods, a common approach is called T-budding where a T-shaped wound is made into the bark of a seedling that will serve as the under stock. Then, a small piece of bark that includes a dormant bud of the desired variety is inserted under the bark at the site of the wound. The area is tied tightly and protected with tape or wax to keep the bud from drying out as the wound heals. Afterwards, the top of the seedling is cut back which will cause the bud to sprout. That growth will then form the top of the new plant.



Graft Union on a Japanese Maple

Other approaches use side or cleft grafts where a small branch of the desired clone is inserted into a notch made in the trunk of the rootstock. Those grafts are quite common with maples and conifers. In the image above, the graft union where the notch was made into the under stock is still visible. You can also see the stub left over where the top part of the rootstock was cut back to give the graft priority.

A whip graft uses a similar approach except that the branch piece is attached at the end of the stem of the under stock. Some hybridizers of plants like fruit and nut trees that take a long time to reach maturity will graft branches from their seedlings onto mature trees. That way they can evaluate their results much sooner than if they were to wait years for seedlings to mature.

At our District luncheon in July of 2011, Karel Bernady showed some images of the grafts made by the Schröder Nursery in Germany. That approach is similar to side graft, except that the under stock had not been rooted yet. The graft union and the rooting process occur simultaneously. In the image below, you can see both before and after examples of grafts made using Schröder's method. Karel Bernady will show us how to make such grafts at our next meeting.



Example Rhododendron Grafts

Volunteers Needed at the White Garden

Mary Olien, the Director of Green Spring Gardens in Annandale, will soon post the schedule for work sessions at the White Garden. We need people to help clean up after the winter and to remove invasive plants. Ask Mary to put you on her email list:

Mary Olien: Mary.Olien@fairfaxcounty.gov

Mary has also lined up some activities this spring to help raise funds to support the White Garden:

**April 17, 2012, 7:30 – 8:30 PM: (Presentation)
“Things I Tried that Died” by Don Hyatt**

In this humorous talk, Don will discuss difficulties in raising rhododendrons and other plants but it also includes a thread about the White Garden. (Fee: \$15)

**May 6, 2012, 2:00 – 3:30 PM (Walking Tour)
“Meet the White Gardens” by Mary Olien**

This fundraiser is a private tour of the White Garden led by the Director of Green Spring Gardens. It should be peak rhododendron bloom time. (Fee: \$15)

Attendees must register in advance at Green Spring Gardens: **www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp**

More Sad News

Our Chapter President, Richard Mohr, lost his younger brother Bill to melanoma cancer on January 12, 2012. We extend our sincere sympathy to him and his entire family during these difficult times.

2012 Potomac Valley Chapter Membership List

(Not listed with the Online Version)

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