

# Chapter News

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## Northern Virginia Chapter

*Eve Harrison, President*

In May, chapter members gathered at **Dan Krabill's** for a local garden tour. The Krabills' have a great garden in a lovely setting. **Barbara** kindly provided coffee, drinks and sweets before she dashed off for Finnish lessons. Dan was a gracious, informative host and tour guide.

Members then caravanned to **Don Hyatt's** garden. His garden is lush, varied, and enticing. Don answered question after question about his many cultivars, and we were understandably inspired to return to our own gardens with lots of new ideas.

The day cooled measurably and spattered rain, but luckily most of us had rain gear, and we sloshed through **Joe Klimavicz's** amazing garden. We were mesmerized by his explanations of hybridization standards. A few of us received permission to "rescue" plants destined for the compost pile having failed to meet his strict requirements.

Thanks to **Lee McElvain's** steady supply of plastic bags to stow away castoffs, we all left with more plants and more knowledge of hybridization techniques and requirements. Joe's plants are simply stunning and light up the entire street.

The last leg of the tour was a 45-minute ride to Haymarket to feast our eyes upon Phran's Azalea Trails. The word heard most often in walking the grounds was "wow!" There was a mini-plant sale with plants supplied by **Carolyn Beck** and **Jim Gears** as well as many specimens dug by **Frances Louers** and potted up. The chapter did quite well at this impromptu sale and it seems probable that this might be a good prototype for future tours.

The **Louers** are generous hosts and work extremely hard to accommodate so many visitors to their amazing and gorgeous property.

In August the chapter will host its first public azalea auction at Merrifield Garden Center in Fairfax, Virginia. The chapter has held private plant auctions for more than 30 years, but members thought it was time to invite the public.

## Oconee Chapter

*Ruth Mellon, Secretary*

The April chapter meeting was held at the home of **Jim** and **Patsy Thornton**. The program consisted of **Joe Coleman's** narration of his and **Donna's** trip to the annual ASA convention in Nacogdoches.

He showed slides of beautiful azaleas taken in the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden (the largest azalea garden in Texas), the Ina Brundett Azalea Garden in Tyler, and tours of the historic districts in the area. He said the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden staff has done a good job of labeling more than 6,500 evergreen and native deciduous azaleas.

## Southern California Chapter

*George Klump, Vice President for Projects & Publications*

In March, the ASA Board of Directors unanimously approved the charter of a new chapter in Southern California. The new chapter was formed by members of the Southern California Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

The ARS chapter was established in the mid-1970s by **Carl Deul** and **Bill Moynier**. The chapter has grown and members have done remarkably well growing broad-leaf rhododendrons in an area where wisdom had decreed such plants could not be grown.

Due largely to the influence of the late **Pete Sullivan**, chapter members became interested in the species of the section *Vireya* of subgenus *Rhododendron*, sub-tropical plants which may be found anywhere from sea level to 13,000 feet elevation in some areas. The viteyas have flourished in the area quite well, and chapter members have spent many hours hybridizing various forms which are now accepted in the rhododendron plant world.

Members conducted experiments many years ago with various kinds of plant mixes. Members who lived on the west side of Los Angeles were atop a large vein of adobe clay, requiring them to develop raised flower beds. Different mix combinations were tried; however, the one which worked the best was an equal mix (1-1-1) of coarse peat moss, perlite, and redwood bark (shredded). The coarse peat moss provides a light but acidic medium which, together with the perlite, provides a way for oxygen to get to the root zone. The redwood bark does the same and simultaneously provides a little tannic acid, since it breaks down very slowly.

It has since been discovered that the organism which breaks down the wood is a predator of the *Phytophthora* organism which attacks the roots of ericaceous plants where drainage is a problem. Once that attack begins on an azalea or rhododendron, saving the plant is nearly impossible.

Last spring the idea of starting a chapter of the Azalea Society of America was discussed. Since azaleas are subgenera of the rhododendron genus, we did not see any conflict. The plants are all ericaceous and most of us grow azaleas. There is also precedent in the ARS for a combined chapter format.

Since there has not been an ASA chapter on the West Coast for some time, we felt it would be well to approach the national ASA with the idea of starting a chapter here which would parallel our existing ARS chapter. Receiving a positive response from the ASA Board, we began our organizing efforts in earnest.

Officers of the chapter are: **James Jaeger**, president; **John Morris**, vice president; **George Klump**, vice president for projects and publications; **Linda Kranen**, secretary; **Gladful DerSarkisian**, treasurer; **Fred Renich**, director; and **James McKechnie**, director.

We held a rhododendron plant sale in April 2006 at Descanso Gardens, La Canada Flintridge, California. We sold vireyas and azaleas. This year we hosted the plant sale again with the sale of both plants being very successful. We are planning to do this more often and through other venues as well; e.g., the Los Angeles Horticultural Society and the Los Angeles Rose Society.

The success of these ventures and the public relations it has created for the vireyas (we sold a vireya to one of the rose society officials and, we believe, made a good friend there!) has led us to think we'd be remiss not to pursue such activities. Vireya seems to be becoming more popular with landscapers who know about the plant.

Timber Press published a book in 1992 called "The Sub-Tropical Garden" which features the vireya as a plant for all seasons and for all reasons. However, the authors got some of their information crossed up in that they stated that vireyas are epiphytic and do not grow well in the ground. That is not entirely correct. I have about 75 or 80 of them growing well in the ground here at my home.

Like azaleas, vireyas love fast draining soil. Unlike azaleas the little seeds have "tails" on both ends so they are often picked up by trade winds in the wild and land in tree branches. In areas where it rains nearly every afternoon, the seeds will take root in trees and, of course, the water drains off the tree branch just about as fast as it rains.

The seeds will also take root in light soil which drains well. The flower colors are kaleidoscopic, from white, yellow, orange, pink, red and magenta, to various bi-color combinations. And like the elepidote rhododendrons, they tend to form very attractive trusses some of which are quite large. They fit well with azaleas, and I have them mixed in with different sorts in my garden where they work perfectly.

## Vaseyi Chapter

*John Brown, Newsletter Editor*

**Dr. Joe Coleman** presented a program entitled "Photographic Highlights of the Nacogdoches Convention" to 14 members and guests at the chapter's May meeting.

He presented an interwoven history of the Nacogdoches region combined with the flora and a few examples of the fauna. ASA President **John Brown** provided a review of the business meeting that occurred at the convention.

The Chapter had plants for door prizes along with rooted cuttings of the Glenn Dale plants 'Litany' and 'Trinket' taken from plants in the Morrison Garden at the National Arboretum last year.

The chapter's annual propagation meeting and cutting exchange was held June 24.

## Creel-Way Propagation

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learn more from failures and partial successes than I do from a total success. You never seem to figure out how something worked, and often cannot repeat the successful experiment.

A recent invention of mine is the Sunnyside Propagation Tower, which accommodates 16 large to medium hanging baskets. I converted the baskets to fast drainage using a pattern of 3/4-inch holes. With such a tower you can grow 16 large pots in a ground footprint of four-by-four feet square. I intend to cover the soil beneath the tower with white sand to maximize sun reflected on the bottom of the pots. I am using the Sunnyside Tower to grow various native plants, including azalea seedlings.

I plan to make a shaded version called the Shadyside Tower that will have a square support over the tower to hold a 65 to 70 percent shade cloth. This will enable me to hang dome-pots off the ground with shade but upward reflected sunlight from sand on the ground beneath.

I have not tried everything in propagation yet, but continue with new small-scale experiments such as leaf-bud cuttings for native azaleas in leaf or dormant; rooting large-leaved species in large domes and pots; trying vented dome-pots in the sun; and making a dome pot top and bottom from a single one-gallon spring water bottle. I would also like to make a propagation device based on "nurse logs" found in the wild.

## Conclusion

I believe that home propagation of native plants is an important conservation tool and educational incentive. We should always be seeking ways to involve young people in the appreciation of native plants. Gardeners who share natives they have propagated prevent others from digging wild plants. Cuttings and seeds grow better outdoors than those grown indoors or in a greenhouse. Seeds planted outdoors in a well-draining pot will germinate and grow by nature's schedule. Cuttings stuck outdoors need only native soil inoculation, constant humidity, and excellent drainage. In my opinion, fertilizers, fungicides, and pesticides kill native soil bacteria and weaken plants. Cuttings and seedlings grown by my methods create strong plants that thrive with little care.

*Mike Creel's first loves are his family followed by the two family felines, but after that, he turns "green," venturing to a seven-acre native garden and the wilds of South Carolina to propagate, preserve, and share every worthy native plant he encounters. He considers propagation a critical tool of native plant conservation. A 1977 University of South Carolina journalism graduate, he recently retired from state government as writer and photographer on environment and natural resources. Through workshops, Web correspondence and U.S. mail he shares his simple propagation techniques and plants with people across America and abroad.*