

# Memories

Carol Flowers—Washington, D.C.

Each year I look forward to attending the ASA convention. I meet new people, catch up with people I have not seen since the previous convention, and get lots of gardening ideas. What occurred to me this year was just how many memories I have associated with azaleas.

As we went on tours this year, I remembered my college years. Long Island's Planting Fields Arboretum was the temporary site for Stony Brook University, and I was lucky enough to take four years of classes in those beautiful surroundings. As a science major, the spring was full of the stresses of lab reports to write, finals to prepare for, and what seemed like endless hours in classrooms and labs. In the middle of all this, daffodils, cherry trees, azaleas, and rhododendrons burst into bloom. I took time out to roam the 408 acres, look at all the plants and trees around me, and hear God say: "stay cool, relax, and enjoy the beauty that only I can provide."

The 2009 convention began with the traditional opening night talks. **Don Hyatt** entertained us as last minute technical glitches were fixed. I thought of the first Rhododendron Society chapter meeting I attended so many years ago. Don entertained then too. The meeting was devoted to auctioning off rhododendron and azalea cuttings. "Five," he said. "Do I hear 10, 20, 50, 75..."

"Seventy-five dollars," I thought. "I don't have that kind of money to spend on plant cuttings."

"Sold for seventy-five cents," said Don. I felt a little better. We had a new house, no excess money for fancy gardens, but still big dreams. Maybe I could learn to grow azaleas and create gardens like those I had seen at Planting Fields.

Eventually technical problems were resolved, and **Tony Dove** was able to talk about and show pictures of how his Maryland garden has evolved during the years. I remembered an earlier talk I had heard him give. The subject

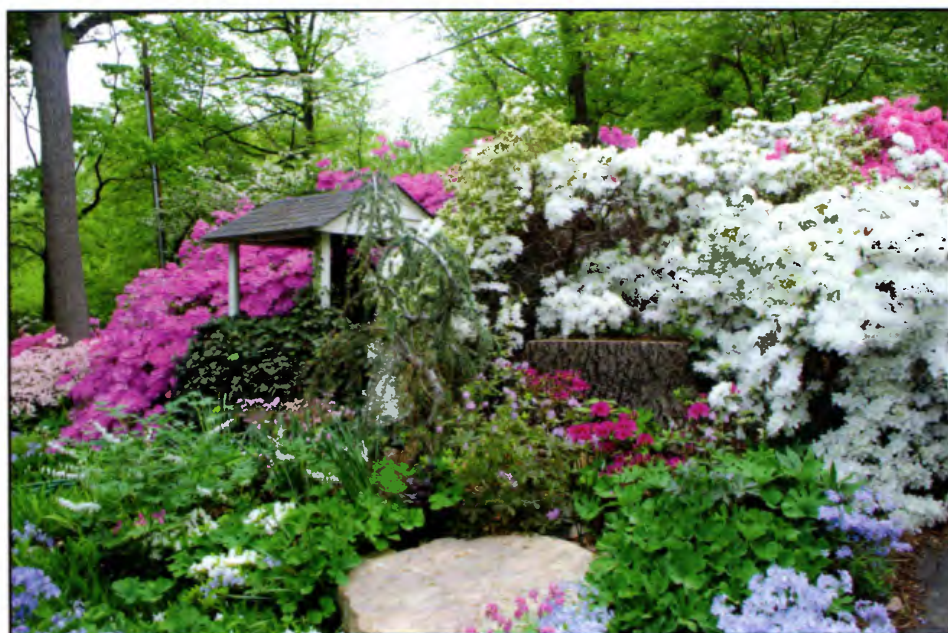


Photo Pam Fitch

▲ Don Hyatt's garden features many large evergreen and deciduous azaleas, rhododendrons, and companion plants, many of which Don has raised from seed.

▼ Since the late 1980s, Joe Klimavicz has been hybridizing evergreen azaleas in his one-third acre Vienna, Virginia, backyard.



Photo Pam Fitch

of that talk had been the design and development of one of his earliest projects as a professional horticulturist, London Towne Gardens. The talk was given at London Towne, and we had the benefit of experiencing the garden first hand. What I took away, and still remember to this day, was the importance of soil preparation. Before planting anything at London Towne, he amended the soil with copious amounts of composted leaves.

At the time I heard the talk, I was just beginning to garden. Our soil was sticky Maryland clay. About 20 years have passed, and lots of leaves, peat moss,



and other organic matter have made that clay more fertile. The plants I planted have probably been too successful. What were supposed to be foundation plantings are now 25-foot rhodies and hollies.

Tilling leaves and grass clippings into the soil remains my favorite way of creating decent soil out of Maryland clay. Thanks, Tony, for explaining how nature makes its own soil and how I can get great gardening results by using nature's methods.

Part of the Friday night agenda was a presentation by **Rick Bauer**. What both Rick and Tony emphasized were the curve balls that challenge all gardeners. Rick talked about **Bob and Betty Stewart's** garden and the challenges he has overcome. Bob gardens on a suburban lot that for the most part is a steep hill. The slope provides the good drainage that azaleas like, but also the conditions for erosion and loss of good soil.

Bob rose to the challenge by terracing and growing the azaleas in large metal barrels. The metal cooked the soil during Virginia's hot summers. The azaleas rebelled and died. Bob rose to the challenge. Now, surrounding the metal barrels are wooden boards which act as insulation. The azaleas no longer fry in the heat. Because of Rick's presentation, I have a much better understanding of the work Bob Stewart has done to develop the many beautiful azalea hybrids we enjoyed on the garden tour.

Many years ago, my cousin's wife brought me over to the Stewarts' home to see first hand Bob's hybridizing operations. What I remember seeing was a basement containing shelves of tiny green plants. On this visit, I was looking forward to seeing this garden in bloom on the Sunday tour.

Saturday's garden tours took us to several private gardens. During the years, I had heard descriptions of each of them but never had the opportunity to see them during peak bloom season. All were on suburban lots. All showed the particular interests of the individual gardeners.

The Krabill family enjoys collect-

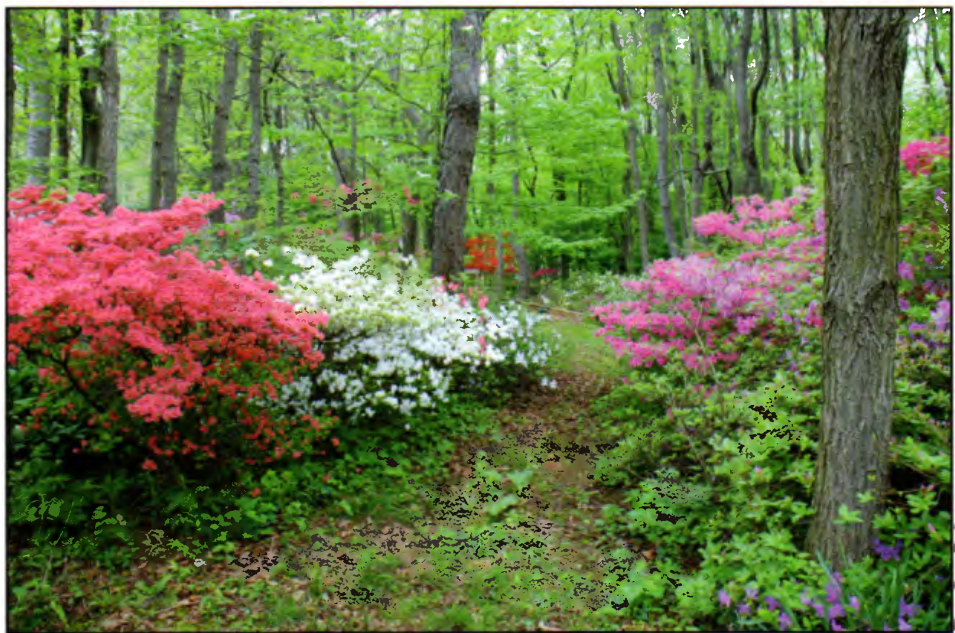


Photo Pam Fitch

▲ Phran's Azalea Trails (Phil and Frances Louer) includes approximately 150 separate flowerbeds of azaleas and rhododendrons along winding trails on five naturally landscaped acres near Haymarket, Virginia.

▼ The Krabills' garden began in 1990 with about 200 small azaleas. At present, the garden consists of approximately 1,100 varieties of evergreen azaleas.

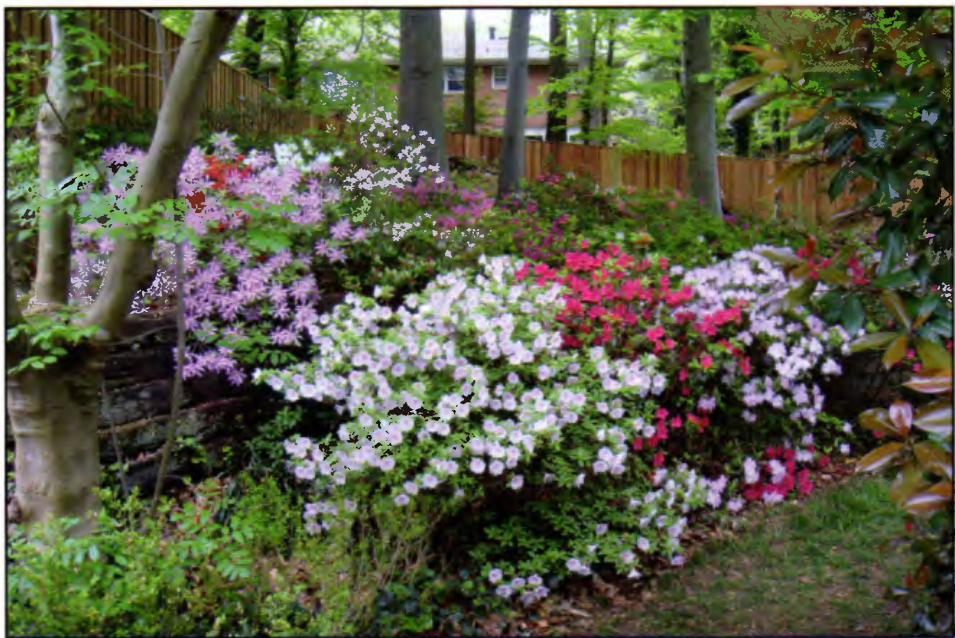


Photo Robert 'Buddy' Lee

ing. Because of this interest, they have amassed more than 1,100 varieties of azaleas. I took cuttings from Dan's plants last year. What impressed me is that he knew where each of these varieties was located. The Krabills have done a great job of combining all these plants and creating a beautiful garden.

As per **Tony Dove's** Friday night talk, gardens evolve. Plants are living and dying things. Don Hyatt has learned a lot about the dying part. During the last few years he has lost a lot of large, older trees and shrubs. He told me at a Christmas party last year that he didn't know how he was going to get his damaged garden in shape for the convention. The artist in Don came forth during the last few months. Old trees and shrubs may have been gone, but using his collection of wild flowers and other plants a new beautiful look emerged. Don probably enjoys having more sunlight envelop his garden.



The science involved in hybridizing shows up in **Joe and Brenda Klimavicz's** garden. I have heard Joe talk about his hybridizing hobby and how he gives away his reject plants to suburban neighbors. As we entered the subdivision where the family lives, I knew we were getting close to his home. Many of the surrounding homes had lots of azaleas in bloom, most likely compliments of Joe's hybridizing program. The hybridizing program is a family affair. Joe and Brenda's daughters have used azalea hybridizing as subjects for school science fair projects. I hope all of us will pass on our knowledge of azaleas to the children we know.

The final garden tour on Saturday was at **Phil and Fran Louer's** home in Haymarket, Virginia. Like the Krabill family, Phil and Fran are serious collectors and have filled their five acres with thousands and thousands of azaleas, rhododendrons, wild flowers, and other companion plants. I particularly liked the many ferns, wildflowers, and native plants that have been incorporated into this garden.

After each convention event, participants headed toward the plant sale. Generally these plants will not be found at local nurseries. Always, there are different hybrid groups and interesting companion plants. **Bob Stewart's** hybrids, Holly Springs hybrids, and native azaleas enticed a lot of us. The plants add interest to our gardens.

**Bob Stelloh and John Brown** made a joint presentation Saturday evening. They have hiked and explored the habitats of azaleas growing in America's East Coast mountain regions. Many of us have magnificent gardens, but after seeing the vistas captured in their photographs one realizes no matter how lovely your own garden is, gardens created by nature will always be grander and more beautiful.

**George McClellan** expanded on Bob and John's presentation by taking us across the United States and Canada through pictures showing the native azalea and rhododendron plant world. Environmentalists are recognizing the beauty of these native habitats. In recent years, work has begun to protect



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ Convention attendees explore Bob Stewart's hybridizing operation.

▼ The garden of Leslie and Dave Nanney is a two-and-a-half-acre woodland garden containing over 2,500 azaleas and over 1,000 varieties.

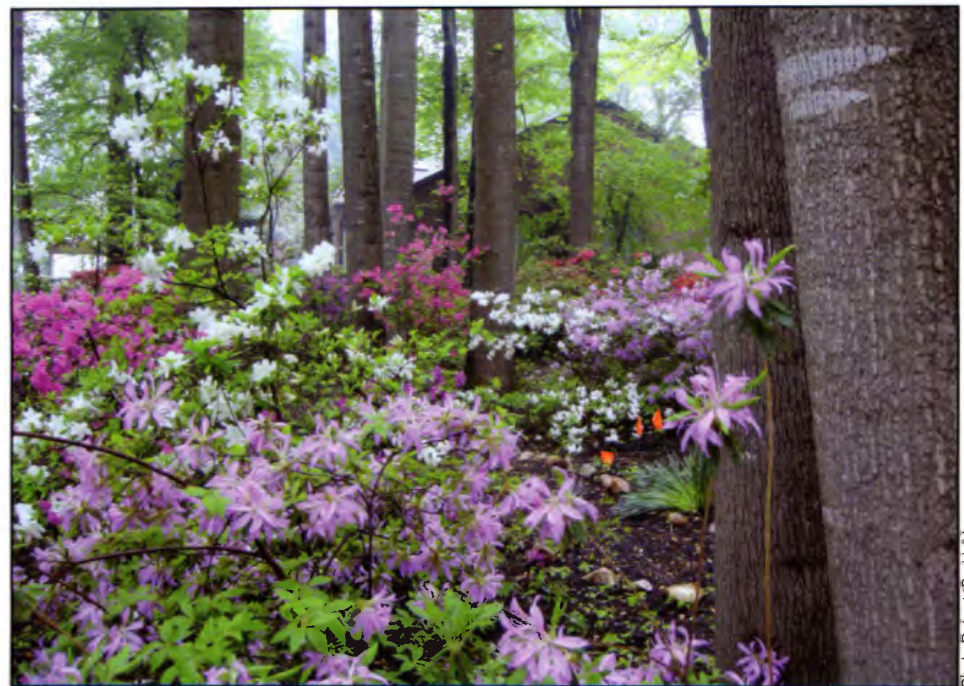


Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

these areas in order to keep these native plants healthy. Bob, John, and George showed pictures that made me want to work at getting more physically fit. Seeing first hand the mountainous vistas where rhodies and azaleas grow naturally would be a wonderful experience.

Saturday was a cloudy day, and Sunday we woke up to steady rain. Umbrellas came out, and we saw gardens from a different perspective. On tour was the Stewart garden, **Dave and Leslie Nanney** garden, and **Carolyn and Paul Beck's** beautiful home in the woods.

The cover of one of Galle's books on azaleas has an exquisite picture of the Stewart garden hillside filled with blooming azaleas. It is a beautiful picture but does not compare with seeing first hand the real thing. I hope Bob will continue to develop hybrids for many years to come.



The Nanney and Beck gardens were woodland gardens where tall, old trees provided a canopy for the azalea collections grown below. On a sunny day shafts of light probably fill the understory in these gardens and enhance the beauty of these regal plants. Both gardens had extensive evolving azalea collections. Both gardens were becoming filled with expanding collections of companion plants. Wildflowers were becoming more prominent in Dave and Leslie's garden, and dwarf conifers in the garden of Carolyn and Paul. After touring gardens for two days we all had new ideas for our own gardens.

Both **Rosalie Nachman** and **Don Hyatt** gave presentations at the Sunday night banquet. Over the years, I have heard both of them speak. I think of Rosalie as the Erma Bombeck of the plant world. This year she entertained us by interspersing pictures of a trip she took to India with her pictures and information on the latest plants that excite her. Thanks, Rosalie, for your willingness to share with us all you have learned about the plant world.

Don based his talk on a presentation he had given to a plant group in Scotland. For the plant scholars, lots of educational information was provided. For the backyard gardener beautiful photographs of azaleas appealed.

I returned home after this year's convention inspired by all I had seen and heard. I thought of the many previous conventions I had attended. Like Tony Dove's garden, my own has evolved. The little Gable hybrid rhododendron I planted many years ago is now in full bloom and more than 20 feet tall. This year the first azalea cuttings I successfully rooted created a 40-foot display of purple and white blooms along a backyard fence. I don't even pay 75 cents for cuttings anymore because I just ask my many azalea friends to give me cuttings.

Happy azalea memories are a part of my life. These special plants and their beautiful flowers have been stress relievers during difficult times, and during tranquil times surrounded my life with beauty. As usual, I bought too many plants at the plant sale. They are



Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ The Beck garden is situated at the edge of a well-established development against a backdrop of wooded parkland.

▼ Dave Nanney hosted a post-convention tour of the Pentagon. Pictured are (left to right) ASA Immediate Past President John Brown, President Aaron Cook, and Past President Robert "Buddy" Lee.



adding to my already too large collection of plants in pots. Maybe someday I'll get all of those plants planted.

Thanks Northern Virginia—the convention truly did celebrate the azaleas in your part of the world.

*Before retiring, Carol Flowers managed a computer help desk for the U.S. Census Bureau. Her interest in azaleas came from her many childhood visits to the Planting Fields Arboretum in Oyster Bay, New York. She has been a member of the Azalea Society of America for more than 25 years.*