

ties. This could be one out of 236 plants!

Aaron had a very important side note. The renowned Augie Kehr explained to Aaron why this is important. Augie believed genetic variability is vital for use in an established breeding program. If there is not enough genetic variability, there will be a bottleneck of plant development. Overzealous digging from the wild is not helpful, because we need to maximize the range and find new genetic traits that can be used to improve the breeding program. The primary sources of germplasm are really good cultivars/breeding lines, and secondary sources are from the wild. The genetic variability decreases the odds of predicting the outcome of crosses in a breeding program. Augie said this makes it hard to stay on the original goal. He also encouraged Aaron to convert diploid into tetraploid research. Tetraploids are probably the future with larger leaves, flowers, and seeds, though there is somewhat slower growth.

Aaron started hybridizing daylilies about 20 years ago. At that time it took two years to see the bloom; now it only takes nine months. At the conclusion of the program Aaron gave us a "Wow" moment. He showed us daylilies 20 years ago: the usual gold, yellow, and burgundy colors. Then we saw the current crop: double petaled, technicolor, bi- and tri-colored with ruffled edges! We were awestruck!

Aaron said today's azalea breeding is where daylilies were 20 years ago. We will see spectacular cultivars with new traits and good performance. It was a magic carpet ride to future possibilities.

John Turner was the guest speaker at the March chapter meeting. John is founding director of the Southern Highlands Reserve, a private non-profit institution, having been involved with its concept, design, and implementation. The Southern Highland Reserve is a 120-acre reserve located at an elevation of 4,500 feet at the summit of Toxaway Mountain. A 20-acre Core Park display garden features the Azalea Walk (Gregory Bald azaleas), the Vaseyi Trail and Pond, the Wildflower Labyrinth (late summer meadow species), and the Woodland Glade. It is home to the world's largest natural stand of *R. vaseyi*.

John's presentation, *One Man's Vision: Our Gardens' Future*, concentrated on the two main areas of focus at the Reserve for the coming year— ecological restoration and phenology monitoring. The restoration of azaleas for Hooper's Bald and red spruce for the Northern Squirrel is fantastic. The 600-foot azalea garden trail designed through the woodland in huge color groups that merge from hot colors to light pinks then go back to hot orange is stunning and inspiring. What a treasure!

Phenology is the study of nature's calendar. The Reserve will host a series of presentations this year, focusing on how horticulture meets ecology.

In May, the chapter hosted three fantastic field trips. The Vaseyi Chapter received a gracious invitation from Parker Andes, director of horticulture at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. This is the 70th Anniversary year of Edith Vanderbilt Gerry honoring Chauncy D. Beadle by accepting his native and hybrid collection and renaming the

20-acre garden the Azalea Garden. Staff members were present to lead a walk and discuss the garden.

Bob Stelloh and **John Brown** organized a beautiful Azalea Garden Tour on May 8 featuring four gardens. The **Doley** and **Melody Bell** garden was started in the 1970s by David and Naoma Dean, who deserve credit for much of the garden design. This remarkable garden has an estimated 3,000 rhododendrons and azaleas! It is also a certified wild-life habitat.

Bob Stelloh and his late wife, Denise, moved to Hendersonville 14 years ago, and brought along about 600 mature plants from their 15-year-old garden near Washington, D.C. Named "Kairaku" (Japanese for "joint pleasure"), this informal woodland shade garden covers about one acre of a two-acre lot, divided into planting beds by a half-mile of winding trails.

Six years ago, **James** and **Mary Ann Stewart** acquired the Stewart Garden, an extensive garden developed over a 24-year period by the late Dr. August Kehr, one of the world's more pre-eminent plant scientists. The Stewarts have become superb stewards of this fabulous garden.

The final garden on the tour was that of **Mary** and **Ed Collins**. Four years ago they purchased the property which was previously owned by the late Charlie Larus. Ed is currently incorporating the thousand-plus plants they brought from their previous garden.

Five hundred tickets were printed for the garden tour. The cost of each ticket was \$15 which could be upgraded to include ASA membership for an additional \$10. For more information about the garden tour, visit www.azaleas.org/eco.html.

The chapter's final field trip was to The Azalea Candy Store and East Fork Nursery. **Vivian Abney** owns the East Fork Nursery on Jones Coves Road in Sevierville, TN, on the farm where she was born. She started the nursery in 1987. The nursery specializes in native azaleas, but also grows a wide variety of plants including hardy camellias, dwarf conifers, hollies, crape myrtles and more. She has built a small lab and is producing selected native azaleas from tissue culture.

Vivian's azaleas from Gregory Bald were used by the Southern Highland Reserve in their 600 foot long azalea garden trail, in dozens of beautiful colors.

Letters to the Editor

Louisiana Lagniappe—A Superb Convention

I just want to say thanks to the Louisiana Chapter for putting on such a wonderful show. Spring may have been late down south due to the record cold winter—our hosts were apologetic since not many of the azaleas had opened yet. However, there was no snow in New Orleans and we did see flowers—some early azaleas as well as camellias, magnolias, snapdragons, Icelandic poppies, delphinium, cool weather annuals, and more. After this winter, I would have

been happy to see a dandelion. I was not disappointed in any way. What was most gratifying for me was to see that such a beautiful and historic region of our nation seems to have recovered completely from the wrath of Hurricane Katrina. We toured places that had been under many feet of water for weeks on end but there was no evidence of that to me. Everything was clean, freshly painted, and beautiful.

Regina Bracy told us “lagniappe” meant “a little something extra” but from my point of view, this convention was a lot of something extra—extra nice people, delicious food, great accommodations, wonderful southern hospitality, delicious food, entertaining speakers, delicious food, delightful weather, excellent tours, delicious food, lovely gardens, and more. Oh, did I mention the food? One of the guidebooks for New Orleans said, “If you can manage the typical 5 to 6 meals a day, here are some other restaurants to try.” I think we had a minimum of five meals every day and for those of us who arrived early or left late, we had a chance to savor the treats at a few of the world class restaurants in town.

It seems as though we ate all day long and everything was delicious. For instance, we started with an ample breakfast at the hotel and a few hours later were treated to homemade gumbo and pecan pralines at **Buddy Lee’s** home. Who will ever forget that amazing shrimp and catfish fry at **Regina Bracy’s** pristine garden followed by ice cream at **Margie Jenkins’** place? We were all stuffed but still managed to put away the buffet dinner later that evening at the Hammond Research Center. When we got back to the hotel, around 9:30 p.m., some headed out to Bourbon Street for a Hurricane or a Mint Julep nightcap to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day. The fish dinner at the banquet was one of the finest meals any of us can recall at a convention. I think I could become addicted to that bread pudding with whisky sauce.

Thanks to all who were involved in putting on such a first class convention. This may have been my first trip to New Orleans but it will not be my last.

Don Hyatt
McLean, Virginia

Growing *R. prunifolium* ‘S.D. Coleman’

I loved the article *S. D. Coleman—An Azalea Pioneer* by Tadeusz Dauksza in the Spring 2010 issue of *The Azalean*. I have always wondered who exactly S. D. Coleman was, since I have two large specimens of *R. prunifolium* ‘S.D. Coleman’. While the original tag indicated ‘S. D. Coleman’, we conclude that it was a reference to the source and not to the vivid reddish orange cultivar of the same name that was introduced and registered by David Leach.

A little background—In May 1987, the ARS and ASA held a combined convention in Eugene, Oregon. Since neither my husband nor I had ever been to Eugene, and since we loved azaleas and rhodos, we signed up. I had been a member of the Brookside Gardens Chapter since the early ‘80s. I love lectures on azaleas and buying unusual plants. My husband likes visiting beautiful gardens. It was a terrific convention. The weather was good; the lectures, plants,

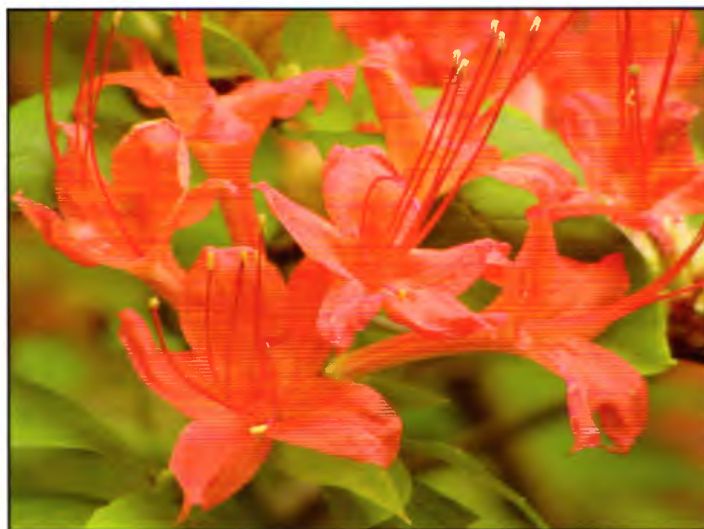


Photo William C. Miller II

▲ This coral-colored specimen of *Rhododendron prunifolium*, from a 1987 joint ARS/ASA national convention, has adapted well to its current Potomac, Maryland, environment.

people, and the fantastic rhododendron gardens were truly memorable.

At the banquet everyone was given a four-inch pot of *R. prunifolium* ‘S. D. Coleman’. I had never heard of *prunifolium* or Coleman. I flew the two little plants back to Washington, D.C. in an open tote bag—no problems. We planted them in two different places in our woodland garden. One was situated in an open spot, slightly SE of the house, and the other in a shadier place. The one in the open place grew strongly from the start and is now 10 feet high. The other one languished. It was moved around many times, hardly growing at all. Finally we moved it about six feet from the other one, at a slightly lower elevation. It is now half the size of the big one but is doing well. It starts blooming a week earlier than the bigger one, around the third week in July.

The blossoms are identical on both plants in color and size (about 1½”). Depending on the weather, the plants bloom for one month. They open slowly until the whole plant is in bloom. The color is not the same as the one on the Spring 2010 *The Azalean* cover—it is more coral. I wonder if they are one of the other July cultivars? There is a very large one at the U.S. National Arboretum that is the same color as mine. And there is a picture in Galle’s *Azaleas* book that is the color of my *R. prunifolium*.

The plants have never had any insect problem or powdery mildew. They got through the two blizzards we had here this winter. The larger one is recovering. The other one did not suffer at all. Both of them now bloom reliably. If they have one fault, it is that you cannot cut them for a flower arrangement because the next year’s buds are fully formed before they bloom—you would be cutting next year’s flowers as well as this year’s. If you could spare a whole side branch, it would be great for an Ikebana arrangement.

Dianne Gregg
Potomac, Maryland