

# 2013 Annual ASA Conference in Athens

Mike Sikes, Athens, GA

The ASA Annual Convention was held in Athens, Georgia, home to the University of Georgia. This April 18-20 event was sponsored by the Oconee Chapter. Everyone was welcomed the first evening by Dr. Wilf Nicholls, director of the State Botanical Garden of Georgia. We visited the State Botanical Garden the next day for garden tours and lunch in the Conservatory.

Several private gardens with plant collections galore were the highlight of that day's tours. Vince Dooley's garden was a horticultural menagerie, with collections of Japanese maples, redbuds, azaleas, and camellias. Many one-of-a-kind plants made it even more interesting, especially Weepers' Corner, a collection of weeping trees.

The Charlotte and John Waters garden was a peaceful collection of garden rooms that led the eye in quiet and unique directions – especially the mirrored garden room. The natural woodland garden of Cindy and John Karp was outstanding, even in the brief downpour of rain. The unusual art throughout their garden was an added treasure.



Ram & Tom Giberson's garden

The final garden of the day was that of Ram and Tom Giberson. This connoisseur's garden was a collection of plants, garden rooms, water features and unique chicken and duck houses. A true plant lover's paradise, this garden had a loving spirit that was felt by all. It is not often that the garden hosts are awestruck by the tour guests, but Ram



Oconee Chapter members Mike Sikes, John Harrison, and Jim Thornton with Vince Dooley (holding plant).

and Tom expressed their gratitude in the following thank you note: *What a wonderful garden-loving group we got to meet today. Even though it was a rainy day, you all brought sunshine. When we built this garden we had no perception that it would be a source for the shared love for gardening that it has been. The garden itself seems to give love to people and people respond by sharing that love with*

*us. It was so delightful to spend an afternoon with a group that appreciates the beauty nature provides when we add a little creativity. Tom and I had an almost instant connection with you all as though we had known you for a lifetime. I have to say that this unique and unspoken connection was a real gift - it was just a lot of good feelings and sensations. Tom and I will treasure this moment throughout our lives. Thanks to the Azalea Society and to all of you who came to visit us today, April 19th, 2013.*

The second day of tours highlighted the nursery industry in the area. Tours and BBQ lunch at Homeplace Gardens was a special treat hosted by ASA member **Willis Harden**. Homeplace is a wholesale nursery that specializes in azaleas, rhododendrons, mountain laurel, and Japanese maples. After lunch everyone visited Transplant Nursery, owned by **Lisa and Jeff Beasley**. Many plants were available for sale and the busses quickly filled with blooming beauties. That evening our banquet speaker was Dr. Michael Dirr of international horticulture fame. The plant sale was a great success. Most cars left filled with beautiful and unusual azaleas and other ornamentals. Thank you to the Oconee Chapter for a wonderful spring weekend in the beautiful 'Classic City' of Athens, Georgia!



Plant sale at Transplant Nursery.