

# "Legends and Legacies" Joint 2016 ARS-ASA Convention Report

*By Barbara Stump and Sherrie Randall—Nacogdoches, Texas*

If you weren't one of the 152 ASA members (326 total) people who attended the joint convention headquartered in Williamsburg, Virginia, April 20-24, 2016, you really missed a fabulous 5-star meeting, in our very personal views.

To all who worked on this convention, the Texas Chapter attendees offer huge thanks for a fabulous event! Walking into the absolute "to die for" plant show for the first time, an azalea lover had to stand there with mouth agape. The sale included over 4000 plants. Kudos to Carolyn Beck and all those that helped make that happen; may you plan many more. Thanks to Susan Bauer: our lunches and banquet meals were delicious. Rick Bauer and George McClellan found public and private tours that awed us with the diverse plant material. All the speakers were so knowledgeable and enlightening. Watch *The Azalean* for articles by some of them. Jim Trumbly's is in this issue, and Rick Lewandowski has promised one for the Fall 2016 issue. Finally, spectacular thanks to the 50 volunteers—according to Rick Bauer—who helped the organizing committee make this a wonderful, memorable convention!!

The thoughtfulness and combined organizational skills of the Northern Virginia ASA Chapter and Mid-Atlantic, Mason-Dixon, and Potomac Valley Chapters of the ARS were evident in every detail. Co-chairs Rick Bauer for the ASA and Don Hyatt for the ARS led a dedicated organizing committee and volunteer corps from both societies. The tours were carefully selected so that hundreds of us got to see wondrous gardens or historic sites or both. The breakdown by day: Richmond (204), Norfolk (243), Gloucester (251), ARS banquet (230), ASA banquet (226). It took four years

of incredible planning and execution to make this all happen. (See Figure 1.)

For us, the magnificent plant sale and gardens were our special interests. There were so many plants that plant sale chairs Ray Smith and Carolyn Beck and volunteers had to put some under tables or in the hallway leading to the plant sale room at first. The plant sale seemed to be "open" constantly after 4:00 p.m. on the 20th, and open even after the two banquets and three speaker sessions. We know Carolyn Beck propagated many plants at her house, and many Klimavicz Hybrids came from her talented fingers. Many other individuals or nurseries also grew plants and donated them to the sale. Over half the plants were sold by convention's end—to people like us, Robert Thau and Caryl and Harold Hall who drove from Texas just so we could haul back as many as we could. And we weren't the only ones, that's for sure. Total plant sales included 37 plants sold at the "Silent Auction," 17 at the ASA banquet auction, and 16 at the ARS banquet auction. After the convention officially closed, they allowed the public to buy plants, increasing sales receipts and possibly recruiting new members.

Carolyn Beck also created the incredible plant list that Paul Beck posted to the convention pages on the NV-ASA Chapter website. This had close-up photos of the plants, descriptions, and hybrid groups. Paul assures us that they

▼ Figure 1. Early convention planning committee meeting—four years ago!



## 2016 Convention Committee

Members of both the ASA and ARS served, and most were members of both societies.

Rick and Don said they began work in January 2012. Up to 50 other volunteers also made "it all happen."

Rick Bauer and Don Hyatt - Co-chairs (hotel, banquets, garden bus tours, speakers, workshops)

Paul and Carolyn Beck and Ray Smith and Sonny Coble-Plants - Plant Sale

Susan Bauer - Lunches/Committee Secretary

Dave and Virginia Banks - Registration/Dave - Local Tours (Williamsburg & environs)

George McLellan - Gloucester Gardens/Plants

Phyllis Rittman - Badges and Convention Bags

Mary Reiley - Flower Show

Richard and Ginny Mohr - Photography Show



Photo by Steve Henning

▲ Figure 2. Paul Beck and Leslie Nanney shown selling plants as fast as possible. At one point they were selling plants every 12 seconds, with very complete receipts!

will keep this up on the NV-ASA website, as it is a wonderful reference tool for their chapter or for anyone to use. To take a look, go to <http://www.nv-asa.org/plants>.

Finally, special recognition for top-notch financial arrangements goes to ASA Treasurer Paul Beck who set up the very convenient “off the shelf” Square™ credit card processing system for the plant sale. He also set up the software on the NV-ASA web pages to handle displaying and searching plant sale data and printing the barcode tags for the plants, the barcode scanning system to include the barcodes on attendees’ badges, automatic plant lookup, and invoice preparation. This was great, because our invoices showed exactly what plants we bought, costs, and totals. It really speeded up buying plants. He’s offering this system to other conventions if they’d like to use it. (See Figure 2.)

Thanks to Dave and Virginia Banks, there was plenty of early American history on offer, tours of Williamsburg and local plantations, but we only had so much time, and concentrated on attending the meetings, gardens, and plant sale, so that’s what we can cover here.

Wednesday, April 20 the ASA Board of Directors met until 4:00 p.m., when the plant sale officially opened. It was a wild first-hour “feeding frenzy.” (See Figure 3.) Some people likely skipped dinner just to start their “hoards” of plants in their hotel rooms. As the theme of the convention states, the sale had many “legacy” azalea hybrids developed by legendary hybridizers that have just not been widely distributed. Example evergreen hybrid groups were Glenn Dale, Harris, Holly Springs, McDonald, Robin Hill, Satsuki, and Stewart. Deciduous azaleas included the Aromi and Dodd breeding programs as well as species selections. And yes, there were many unique elepidote rhododendrons and even tree peonies for sale.

Rick Bauer and Don Hyatt welcomed us that evening and invited us to an evening social session, to one of the concurrent “share sessions,” or to buy at the plant sale. As if that wasn’t enough, there were several “Special Events” like the Flower Show and Photography Show.

Thursday evening we were treated to two outstanding speakers: First, 18th century plantsman and botanist John Bartram in period clothing and language. (See Figure 4.) Then, modern-day Steve Hootman, Director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington, gave us an overview of many types and natural locations of species rhododendrons and some of the human trials of plant collecting. Visit their website, <http://rhodygarden.org/cms> to find out about their collections, publications, and research. This would be well worth both virtual and in-person visits.

Friday evening was the ASA banquet and annual meeting. (The food and fellowship were great at both banquets.) Keynote speaker Rick Lewandowski spoke on “Lessons Learned” from working as Director of Mt. Cuba Center in Hockessin, Delaware (near Wilmington). The center’s main mission is to conserve native plants for public education and enjoyment. He’s now Director of Shangri La Botanic Garden in Orange, in south Texas. We wasted no time in recruiting him as a member of the Texas Chapter!

When President J Jackson opened the annual business meeting, he thanked three outgoing directors—Rick Bauer, Larry Miller, and Dave Nanney—for their service, then announced three incoming directors: Jo Ann Smith (Texas Chapter), Chris Wetmore (Central Carolinas Chapter), and Larry Miller (Tri-State Chapter) who’s agreed to another two-year term. Treasurer Paul Beck presented his 2015 financial report and the board’s agreement with his proposed solutions to try to improve our bottom line. (See p. 36-37.) We also need to retain our current members and recruit both new members and advertisers to help pay for production of *The Azalean*. We ended with the fun parts—awarding the Exceptional Service Awards (see p. 32); announcing the Best *Azalean* Article Award for 2015 (Frank Robinson’s “The Impact of Simplicity: Design in the Japanese Style,” in the Fall 2015 issue, p. 65-70); the rousing plant auction; and breaking up to buy more plants!

Saturday night we attended the ARS national banquet and learned from keynote speaker Mike Stewart, a previous ARS President and nurseryman from Sandy, Oregon. He reinforced the theme of the convention by talking about the legacies of legendary hybridizers and some trials of plant collecting.

## Garden Tours

It took five buses to get our crowd to the fabulous and very unique gardens or historic sites, so we broke up into two buses for each destination. Regardless of the very cold winter that hadn’t let up until a few weeks before the convention, we saw many azaleas in bloom.

In Gloucester we saw home gardens filled with fanciful or whimsical touches. Cam and Dean Williams’ garden had a full view of the North River, a huge yard, and large planting areas chock-full of plants around ancient specimen trees. For us Southerners it was a treat to see hundreds of hellebores and incredible tree peonies in bloom (and alive!). The owner also likes making fanciful wind chimes of old garden tools and a bird-house made from a boot and little raised “fairy gardens” of moss and tiny furniture. (See Figure 5.) The



**Hall Garden** was created by avid plant-lovers, former ARS Executive Director Barbara Hall and her husband Al, where we saw more whimsy in the form of many sculptures of cats, birds, dogs and a special frog. These were mingled with plants and seating areas on many different levels of their two-plus-acre garden in a typical subdivision. Every inch was filled with color and comfort, and a wealth of kinds of azaleas, moss, groundcovers, and specimen trees. Of all the home gardens, this had the most benches, so we could sit and enjoy a magical plant world that fit just that special spot. (See Figures 6 and 7.)

The **Jim and Pat Brant Garden** was on a verdant sloping site with a woodland ravine and trail leading down from the house. The ravine was filled with native azaleas and white and pink dogwoods, and their collection of a number of Dr. Sandra McDonald's hybrid azaleas nearer their home. (See Figure 8.)

## Design Principles in Action

We saw two private gardens created by owners who use both inspired design principles and very pragmatic construction practices: The **Liesfeld** and **Pinkham** Gardens.

The best example of this in Richmond was **Junko and Joe Liesfelds' Garden**. She is Japanese, and her design of their multiple-acre sloping site reflects classic Japanese design concepts. Her husband Joe is a construction contractor, so they've incorporated large industrial metal objects as well as huge raw, sculptural rocks into the garden, along with bonsai azaleas on their deck, tightly pruned, rounded azaleas at the entrance, and tall specimens along their creek and pond. (Large rocks are important in Japanese natural garden design and, luckily, are by-products of construction.) They also have a tea house by the pond. This garden was practically a Japanese landscape design school in one spot. (See Figures 9, 10, and 11.)

The **Bill and Linda Pinkham** garden in Gloucester was another object lesson in plant selection and placement for the finest design effect, but gained at a cost. Located on the James River, deer are plentiful; they love to "prune" azaleas and all other prized plants. As retired nursery owners, highly diverse plant collections are the hallmark of their garden. When the first garden was decimated by deer, he doubled the height of his deer fence to at least 10 feet (maybe 12!). This seems to have worked. His azaleas are located on his upstairs patio and a wonderful orange deciduous azalea is in a small yard below, complemented by a unique sculpture and carefully chosen colorful evergreens. Their hillside is a botanical garden of unique shapes and colors of evergreen plant material. While the garden may not have had lots of azaleas, we learned how to use a variety of colors, heights, and natural and pruned shapes of other types of woody plants as accents and companion plants. (See Figures 12, 13, 14.)

As described in the Winter 2015 *Azalean*, **Sue Perrin's Garden** shows her expertise and hard work as a retired landscape designer. The plantings by the house are formal and symmetrical, with a very large open lawn area in front. Along the sides of this lawn she's planted a fabulous collection of viburnums, deciduous azaleas, and other ornamental trees. The brightest blooming deciduous azaleas



Photo by Steve Henning

▲ Figure 3. Plant sale finally opens. Carolyn Beck reported the 2016 ARS/ASA Convention Plant Sale included over 4000 items representing many cultivars from dozens of rhododendron and azalea hybridizers, along with species and natural hybrids. Growers from the Northern Virginia Chapter concentrated their efforts on the Legacy Hybrids. Thanks to the enthusiastic buyers, the "Legends and Legacies" theme will live on in many states. To learn more about the project to recognize and perpetuate the work of breeders in their area, go to <http://www.nv-asa.org/legacies>.

were near a tall trio of bald cypress trees and an old-style windmill covered with 30 feet of yellow blooming 'Lady Banks' roses. (See Figures 15 and 16.)

## Two Great Botanical Gardens

The scale of the two huge botanical gardens and their missions showed us a totally different approach to design and use of azaleas. Articles have appeared in the 2015 fall and winter issues of *The Azalean*, but nothing quite prepared us for the scale of what we saw in person. Just the massing of healthy, blooming azaleas was glorious. And all the trails were very accessible.

Construction of **Norfolk Botanical Garden** had begun with limited funds in 1939, but now has all the amenities an ardent garden visitor might want. For us, the azalea collections were fabulous: especially the large areas dedicated to ASA member hybridizer Dr. Sandra McDonald, the Glenn Dale Hybrids, a European deciduous azalea (*R. luteum*, the Pontic Azalea), and American deciduous specimens on "Azalea Point." (See Figures 17 and 18.) We ate lunch near this area, so we could easily amble around, take pictures, and read the very well-signed azaleas.

NBG was also hosting a huge installation of Chinese art, including a 3-4 story "temple" made of blue and white willow-ware cups and saucers and 29 other very colorful installations. (See Figure 19.) These special events increase visitor numbers and fund special projects such as a children's garden, with rest room facilities. There was also a lovely azalea-ringed area for "special functions" such as weddings and graduation photos. They are very used to hosting large groups of visitors, as they had open-sided covered trams that took us from our buses in large groups. Very knowledgeable young garden guides with microphones drove us through





Photo by William C. Miller III

▲ Figure 4. Modern plant lovers (L to R), Carolyn Beck, Carol Flowers, Rick Bauer, Don Hyatt, Kirk Brown, and Rosa McWhorter watch as 21st tech wizard Don helps 18th century John Bartram, Official Botanist to King George III get his PowerPoint presentation "John Bartram: The King's Gardener" loaded. He enthralled us in his authentic colonial English description of his hunting for rare and wonderful plants. Bartram's Garden is still a public garden in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Photo by Sherrie Randall

▲ Figure 5. "Fairy Garden" at Cam Williams'. Her many garden beds were filled with whimsical details like this.

▼ Figure 6. Every inch of the Hall Garden was planted with azaleas, rhododendrons, other unique plants, and the many benches made close-up viewing easy.



Photo by Sherrie Randall

the large beautiful garden spaces and pointed out special collections.

The **Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden** in Richmond was almost startling in its huge combined conservatory, visitor center, orchid collection displays, and gift shop. While this garden is 50 acres, it feels intimate because of many special garden areas dedicated to specific plant collections or areas for special events. For example, the Healing, Medicinal Garden. (See Figures 20 and 21.) Its history was also covered in the Winter 2015 issue, but its' future will be expanded, thanks to the owners of the **Cosby Garden** in nearby Rockville. That garden was about half past its' peak when we visited, but the hundreds of well-labeled azaleas read like a living azalea reference book. They were planted in large sweeps under tall trees, with wide grass spaces between them, so it was easy to see the collections and find favorites. As mentioned in the Winter 2014 article by Rick Bauer, this garden has been willed to the Ginter Botanical Garden as a wonderful azalea resource for years to come, to be known as the Lewis Ginter Nature Reserve.

Many pictures and descriptions of azaleas and gardens are shown on pages 42 to 46. Thanks to the kind member-photographers who contributed to this issue, we could illustrate some of our garden-visitor observations. But these only give you a tiny taste of the wonderful flowers, events, gracious and talented home gardeners, and outstanding public gardens. We are sure that hundreds of photos were taken, and we had a tough time making selections.

Chapter program organizers, take note: The photos taken by your members but not shown here would make great PowerPoint programs for chapter programs and recruiting tools. These plant-centered conventions are a fun way to learn about azaleas and how to grow them from the best growers,

propagators, and plant-hunters in the world. Fellowship is a key component of each convention. (See Figure 22.) We look forward to seeing you in Hammond, Louisiana, in 2017!

*Both authors are members of the Texas Chapter. Barbara Stump is the ASA vice-president and editor of The Azalean, and Sherrie Randall is chapter secretary.*



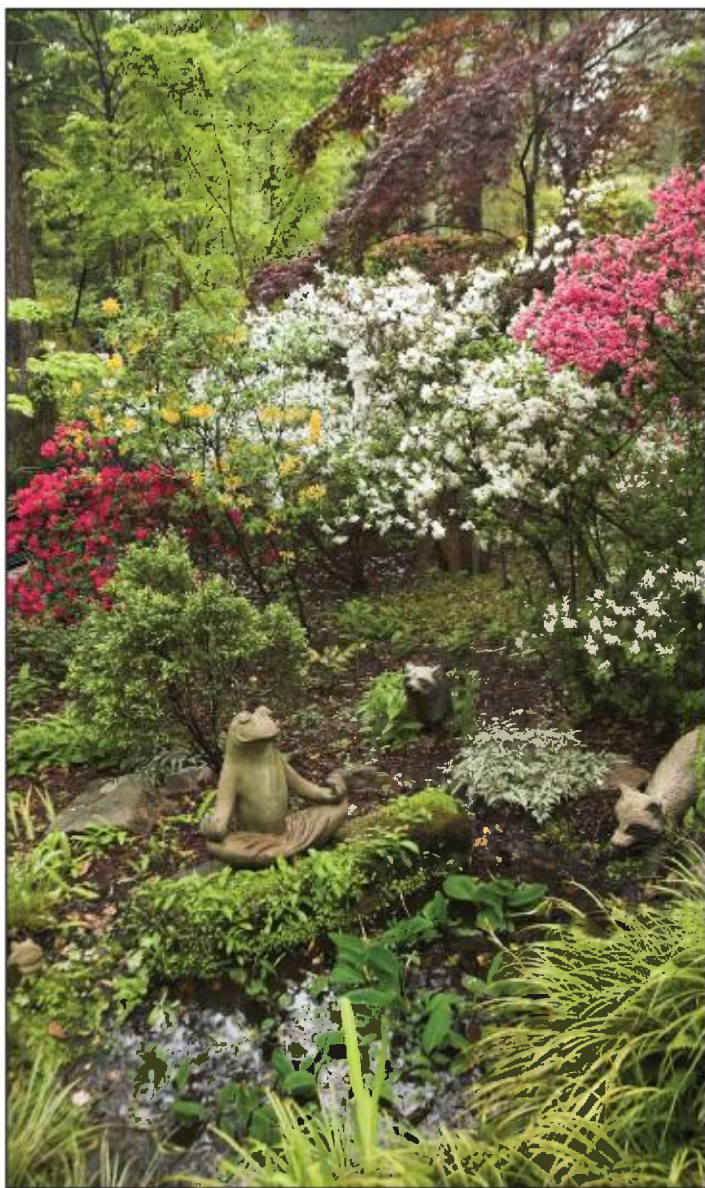


Photo by Barry Spelling

▲ Figure 7. Many whimsical sculptures intermingled in the Hall Garden, such as this frog in Lotus Position, reminding us to slow down and enjoy the beauties around us.



▲ Figure 8. Just a sample of the McDonald Azalea Hybrids at Brants' Garden: Lovely white-and-green R. 'Sandra's Green Ice.'



Photo William C. Miller III

◀ Figure 9. The Liesfeld Garden exemplified classic Japanese design principles from the start—one monumental rock amid formally pruned azaleas near entrance.

▶ Figure 11. View up-hill from pond toward the Liesfeld home with a huge boulder and azaleas in the middle distance—enjoyable from their deck, tea house, or the pond.





Photo by Don Hyatt

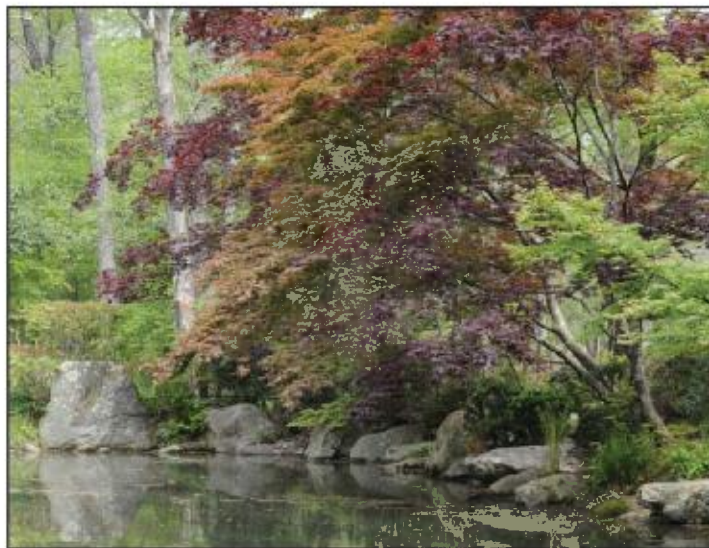


Photo by William C. Miller III

▲ Figure 10. Japanese maples and rocks artfully arranged around pond to reflect their colorful glory in many seasons.

▼ Figure 12. Plants were carefully selected and sited in the Pinkham Garden to highlight color combinations and unique plant structures.



Photo by William C. Miller III



Photo by Sherrie Randall



▼ Figure 13. Incredible variety of plants at Pinkham Garden.

► Figure 14. Unique fire pit and stone bench show off the Pinkhams' love of stones in artistic groupings. What a great view of their hillside garden and the river.



Photo by Barry Sperling

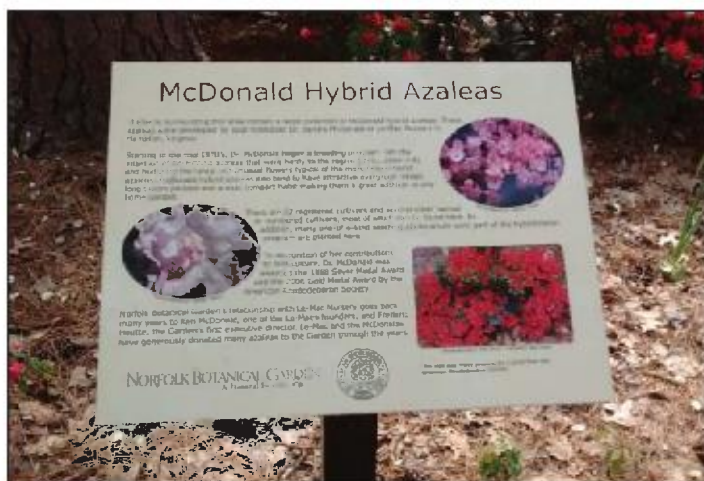
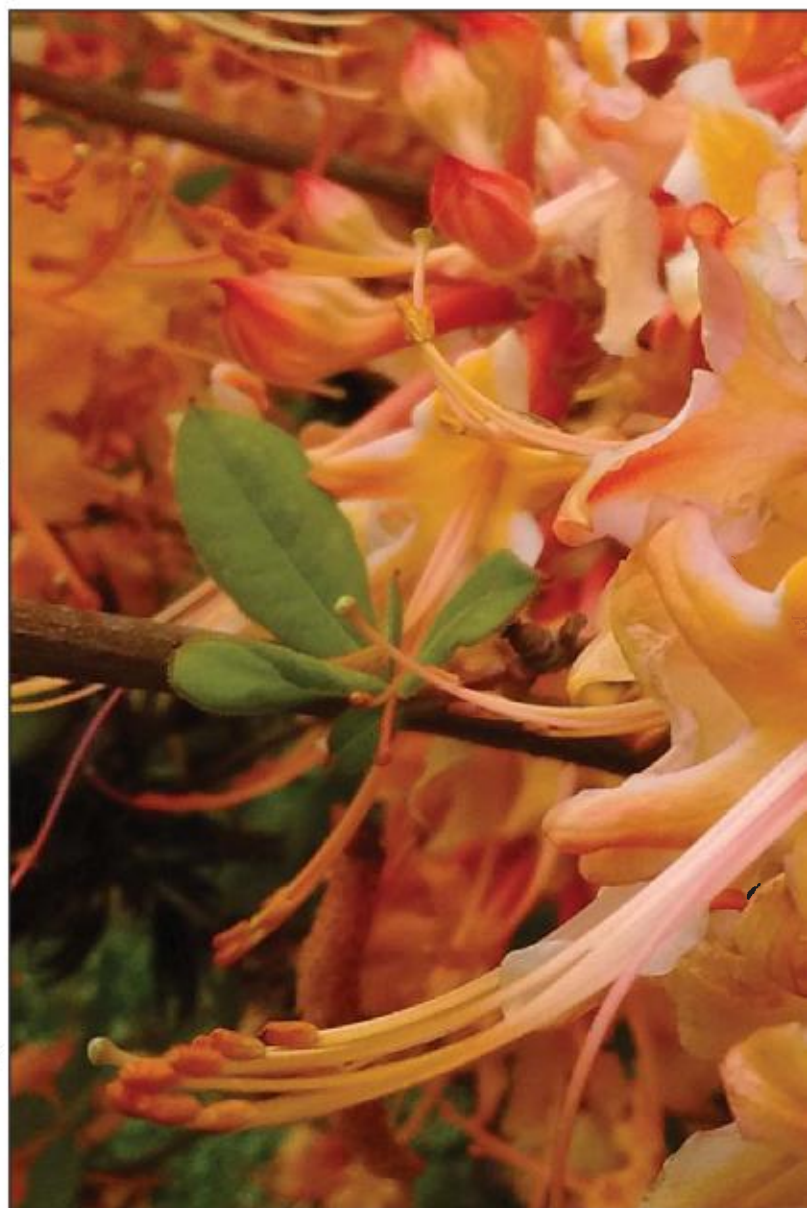


Photo by Barbara Stump



▲ Figure 17. Example interpretive sign for the Dr. Sandra McDonald Azalea Hybrids at Norfolk Botanical Garden. There was also one for the Glenn Dale Hybrids.





Photo by Sherrie Randall



Photo by Barbara Slump

▲ Figure 15. Long row of ornamental trees leading up to the more formal garden at Sue Perrin's home.

◀ Figure 16. A favorite in her deciduous azalea collection was *R. 'Millie Mac'*, brilliant tangerine with white picotee edge, that Sue Perrin bought from Transplant Nursery in Georgia years ago.

▼ Figure 18. 'Venus' Baby', a lovely frilly McDonald evergreen azalea at NBG.



Photo by Barbara Slump



Photo by William C. Miller III





Photo by Sherrie Randall

▲ Figure 19. NBG also had a huge artistic installation for two months this spring: The Chinese "LanternAsia—Art by Day, Magic by Night" exhibit, for which the garden was open 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. with special events. The 30 structures, or "lanterns," were lighted at night. This "Thailand Dragon" was the length of five school buses.

▼ Figure 20. One of the special gardens in Lewis Ginter Botanic Garden was the very peaceful Healing, Medicinal Garden. Notice not only the very helpful interpretive text, but also the bronze foliage on top of the frame.



Photo by Sherrie Randall



Photo by Sherrie Randall

◀ Figure 21. Two more long-distance drivers, Ronnie and Donna Palmer from Arkansas, in this same garden area. They own Azalea Hill Gardens & Nursery and are long-time members and *Azalean* advertisers.

▼ Figure 22. One of the many groups sharing garden fellowship (and planning for next year, no doubt) while on tour: (L to R) Jim Trumbly, Buddy Lee, Dave Nanney, and Tom Milner.



Photo by William C. Miller III