

# Azaleas and So Much More in Arkansas!

By Barbara Stump—Nacogdoches, Texas

We had early Spring weather in Little Rock April 5-7 for the annual ASA convention: cold rain, some sleet, some snow. Great for watering the plants and providing interesting contrast to the vivid colors of azaleas, rhododendrons, and frequent rocky counterpoints in all our garden visits. Eighty-one people attended the convention, from 15 states and three from Ontario, Canada. Holding it at the Little Rock Holiday Inn Airport was such a convenient location, since all our meetings were held there, and people could fly in if they hadn't driven.

Kudos to Gerald Klingaman of the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks and Janet Carson of University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and volunteers from both the Arkansas Master Gardeners and ASA for their excellent organization of all elements of the convention. Along with the actual organization of the events, they also made sure the media knew the ASA was in the various locations in central and northwestern Arkansas, as evidenced by newspaper articles with wonderful color photos sent to me by Larry Coleman: Mary Jo Shivey's April 12, 2018 "Beyond Garden Variety: Azalea Group Tours Batesville Oasis" from the *Batesville Daily Guard* and Janet Carson's "Amazing Azaleas" January 27, 2018, article from the *Little Rock Arkansas Democrat Gazette*.

## Plant Sale

The first night got us all off to a great start with a reception held in the plant sale room. The plant sale team of well-known azaleaphiles, hybridizers, or propagators made this a truly select plant sale. Local Arkansas nursery owners Ronnie and Donna Palmer and Larry Coleman brought wonderful material as did Carolyn Beck and the Bauers, who brought in plants hybridized by Joe Klimavicz, Bob Stewart, as well as Holly Springs, Glenn Dale, and Satsuki hybrids. There were plants in 4-inch pots and some in 3-gallons. Buddy Lee brought Encore® azaleas for sale and for participant favors and large Southern Living® bags to tote our plants, since they helped sponsor the convention. Thanks to Paul Beck's

plant sales system, the plant list of 296 different varieties had been on the ASA web for weeks, and people who knew what they wanted could zoom in to pick up their list of special and rare azaleas, then check out with cash or credit card.



▲ Photo 2—You-Ying and Andy Whipple talk with Buddy Lee



▲ Photo 3—Charlie Andrews and John Perkins at the opening night reception and plant sale, likely discussing—what else—azalea heritage or taxonomy.

▼ Photo 4 - Buddy Lee and Peggy Cox from LA Chapter pose with Dale Berrong of Central Carolinas Chapter by the entrance sign of the Palmers' home gardens and nursery. Not only is Dale a frequent hiker in the Appalachians, but he was president of the North American Maple Society for several years.

▼ Photo 1—Plant sale conviviality and a wealth of great cultivars.





(But as always, you had to be fast to get everything on your list as LA Chapter member Jim Campbell and I found out.) A few specimen Japanese maples went out the door to early shoppers as well. Several Arkansas members helped with the automated checkout system, including Donna Palmer and Gerald Klingaman. Paul Beck is to be congratulated again for the design of this point-of-sale system that he can take to any convention. The plant sale was open the next two nights as well; plenty of opportunity to shop. [Photos 1-3]

## Garden Visits

The group of gardens and stops organized for this convention was superb, that's the only word for them. Even the bus rides with some rain, some sleet, were instructive. We were told that Arkansas topography is defined by the only mountain ranges between the Appalachians and the Rocky Mountains. South of Little Rock the Ouachita Mountains cut across Arkansas in a broad swath from southwest to northeast. Little Rock and environs are in the broad valley of the Arkansas River. Finally, the northwestern area of Arkansas, known to most of us as the "Ozarks" is the Ozark Mountain Plateau, the eroded remains of the Ozarks. We saw all three areas.

## April 6 Tours

**Azalea Hill Gardens and Nursery.** We first drove southeast of Little Rock to Pine Bluff to tour the Palmers' Azalea Hill Gardens and Nursery [Photo 4], which they began building in 1969. Their home place is on the property, so they are surrounded by 30 years of propagating and planting out. Even in the rain, it was wonderful to see his collections of both evergreen and deciduous azaleas. While there Stan Brown showed me "Angie", the azalea he named for his daughter. Of special note were both a deciduous Exbury hybrid, 'Cannon's Double', [Photo 5], and 'Lilacina'



Photo Allen Owings

▲ Photo 5—Allen and Dale found a stellar deciduous azalea in the rain at Azalea Hill Gardens and Nursery: R. 'Cannon's Double' which is an Exbury Hybrid.

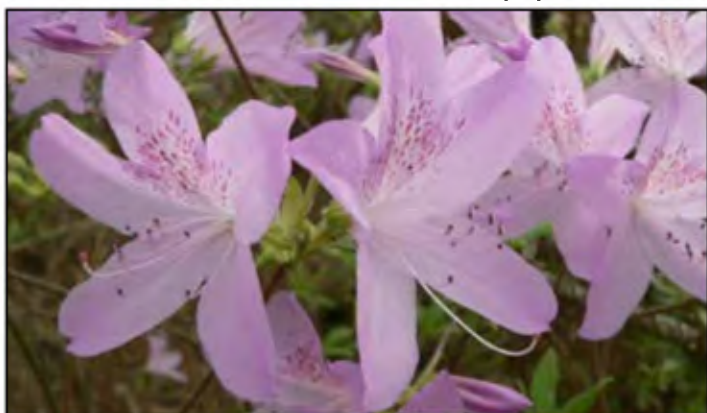


Photo Unknown

▲ Photo 6—Evergreen *Mucronatum* azalea 'Lilacina' purpureum at Palmers' nursery. The day was very wet and dark, so this image is from the ASA website.

▼ Photo 7—Garvan Gardens offered golf cart tours (for hire) to those who wanted to see the whole garden. Shown here (l to r) Jim Brant, Guide, Carolyn and Paul Beck, Senora Simpson, and Dianne Gregg.



Photo William C. Miller III

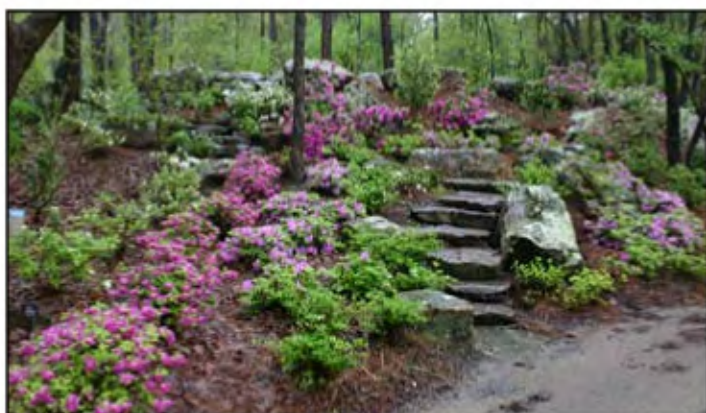


Photo Barbara Stump

▲ Photo 8—Large banks of Kurume azaleas were in bloom in the Garden of the Pine Wind.

▼ Photo 9—Large banks of Kurume azaleas were in bloom in the Garden of the Pine Wind.

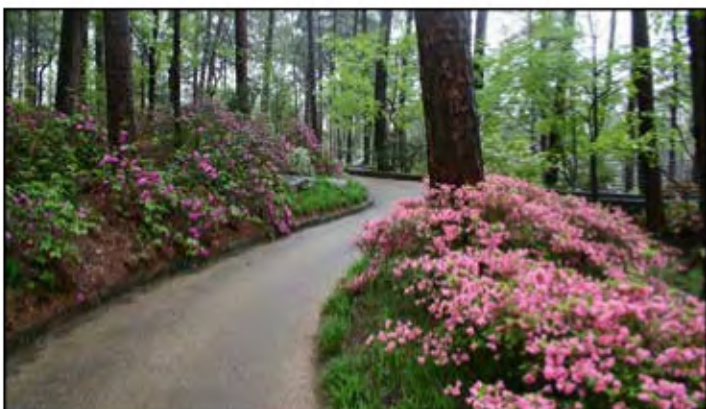


Photo Barbara Stump



the only fragrant evergreen azalea spotted by Bill Miller. [Photo 6]

**Garvan Woodland Gardens.** Next, we motored northwest to near Hot Springs for our “lunch stop” set in a garden paradise. Now part of the Fay Jones School of Architecture + Design at the University of Arkansas, this huge garden began as a legacy project of philanthropist Verna Cook Garvan, in remembrance of her father’s successful Malvern Brick and Tile and lumber businesses that she managed in later years with her husband, Patrick Garvan. This huge public garden is certainly set up for visitors—not only did they have a nice meeting room for our box lunches, but they provided large (six-person) golf carts with guide/drivers to carry people around if desired. [Photo 7] The people who took this option were able to see more of the garden than I did, but I chose to walk the four-acre Garden of the Pine Wind, an incredible Japanese-style “...rock and stream garden designed by Little Rock landscape architecture firm MESA (Merle E. Seamon & Associated) in conjunction with Dr. David Slawson, a nationally recognized expert in Asian art and garden design, and Liz Frazier of LA Design Company in Hot Springs, AR,” according to the Garvan Legacy leaflet from the gift shop. As our photos show, this was a grand garden stop. [Photos 8-10] This was also where I realized that we were visiting a part of the US where rocks are important aspects of the economy. Our hotel also had a large “rock fall” beside the road leading to check-in.

Our two hours at Garvan allowed many of us to fill our cameras with sights of bridges, manicured evergreen azaleas, exquisitely pruned *Viburnum* trees, and many pools and views of Lake Hamilton. All this was connected by smooth asphalted trails wide enough for the golf carts and several people to walk abreast. The entrance to the Pratt Welcome Center was an effective use of bright orange “Florida Azaleas,” huge rocks, trimmed evergreens, and ferns leaning over a pool of quietly circulating water. This garden is a treasure and has benefited from lots of support over the years. The presence of the huge many-sided open-air Garvan Pavilion, Anthony Chapel, a carillon tower, a named Bride’s House, and a named Groom’s House, plus the current construction of a major “treehouse” project to help interpret nature to children indicate robust financial support. In addition, our guide said that they get over 1,000 hours

▼ Photo 10—True to the Japanese design aesthetic, rocks were integrated into planting beds and into sculptural bridges.



Photo Barbara Stump



Photo Barbara Stump

▲ Photo 11—Ann Woods’ Garden gave us lots to consider if we wanted to add herbaceous perennials and Japanese maples to our gardens.

▼ Photo 12—Bleeding heart (*Dicentra* sp.) in the Woods’ Garden. Perfect timing for early spring bloomers.



Photo Barbara Stump

▼ Photo 13—The Woods’ cottage gardens were well-protected from bad weather and animals by a stone wall, with insets of stained glass. Shown here is one of the specimen Japanese maples.



Photo Barbara Stump

▼ Photo 14—To be honest, the day was cold and wet. Some truly enjoyed the Woods’ workshop with a roaring fire.



Photo William C. Miller III





Photo Barbara Stump

▲ Photo 15—The warm salmon pink of this *Magnolia* hybrid in full bloom shone like the sun next to the Woods' farm pond.

▲ Photo 16—Miss Margie Jenkins, Buddy Lee, and Margie's niece Sue Madison of Arkansas.



Photo Barbara Stump

▼ Photo 17—The Batesville County Recreational Facilities... what a resource, which we truly enjoyed for our lunch break.



Photo Barbara Stump

▼ Photo 19—Luckily the Japanese maples were fully leafed out to frame the fabulous views of the garden.

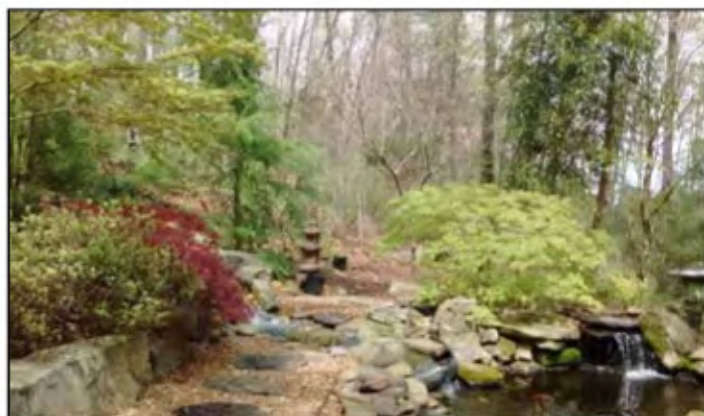


Photo Barbara Stump

of volunteer time from six senior retirement communities in the neighborhood, especially during set-up of their very successful annual Christmas lights show. For more information, visit [www.garvangardens.org/](http://www.garvangardens.org/)

## April 7 Tours

**Woods Country Garden.** We first visited a very special woodland garden built by two “hands-on” Arkansas Master Gardeners. Ann Woods and her husband, Tony, have a large country lot with a big fish pond, home, and barn near Searcy, AR, northeast of Little Rock. The private garden behind their wooden Arts & Crafts-looking house was small, but exquisite. It was truly a plants-person's garden, filled with specimen annuals and perennials just beginning to flower. Those of us who now live in the too-warm South salivated over plantings of *Edgeworthia* ‘Akebono’, *Heuchera*, *Baptisia*, *Epimedium*, blooming hellebores, bloodroot, *Aquilegia*, *Viburnum* ‘Keno’, tree peonies, specimen Japanese maples, and her favorite azalea, ‘Mt. Saint Helens’. Sally Perkins pointed out a Smoky Mts. native *Uvularia grandiflora* commonly known as “Mary Bells.” [Photos 11 & 12] The Woods' rose garden was pruned and ready for the season, protected by a low warm-golden stone wall. The wall itself was a garden feature, having insets of stylized stained-glass lilies. [Photo 13] The Woods not only opened their garden to our ASA convention, they were also hosting the Arkansas Master Gardeners in the afternoon. Another wonderful aspect of this stop was the equipment barn in which there was a roaring fire in a stove and plenty of seating for those who needed to warm themselves. [Photo 14] As we were leaving, *Magnolia* x ‘Coral Lake’ was in full bloom, with welcome warm salmon pink flowers silhouetted by their large farm pond. [Photo 15]

**Lunch in Batesville.** We moved northward on to Batesville, AR, the oldest incorporated city in Arkansas for our lunch stop at the Batesville County Community Center and Aquatics Park. This project provides a wide range of recreational services—swimming, gymnastics, manicured public park, event spaces, meeting rooms—to the whole county, including four school districts. What a fine facility, and an excellent option to get us out of the cold weather.

▼ Photo 18—Fresh snow on bright red Kurume ‘Christmas Cheer’ azalea in Larry Coleman's garden. One of over 30 hybrid groups in his collection. Because of the cold weather, most blooms during tour time were Kurumes and large-leaf rhododendrons.



Photo Buddy Lee





Photo Robert Stassen

▲ Photo 20—From here the trail through Larry's garden looks nice and easy.

▼ Photo 21—Larry Coleman caught in front of the tea house he built overlooking one of his koi ponds. Also shown (l to r), Rosa McWhorter (NVA) and Nancy Niehaus (TX).



Photo Barbara Slump

▼ Photo 22—ASA membership chairman and Texas Chapter President Robert Thau studies Larry Coleman's engineering of his stone retaining walls, ponds, and waterfalls. Robert's home garden is not as steep, but chances are he'll figure out a way to channel frequent rains away from his ever-growing collection of azalea cultivars.

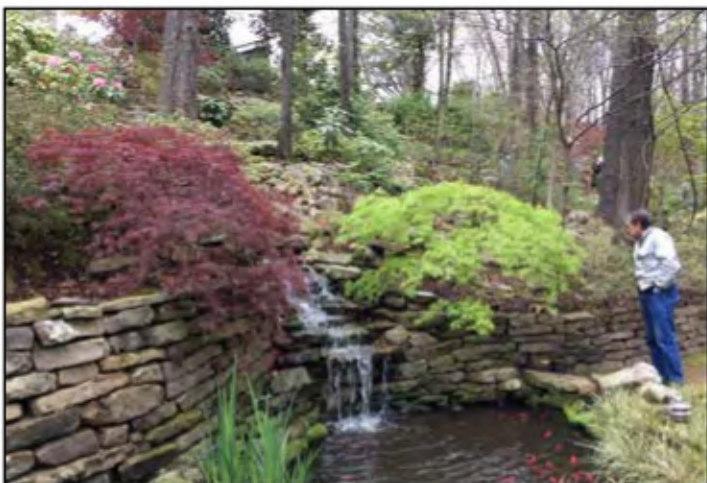


Photo Robert Stassen



Photo William C. Miller III

▲ Photo 23—Old Mill Gardens was in full early spring bloom when we visited. A glorious way to end a full day of beautiful gardens.

▼ Photo 24—This rusticated bridge over the stream in the Old Mill Garden is an example of the work of artist Dionicio Rodriguez.



Photo Barbara Slump

▼ Photo 25— New Arkansas members join other chapter members and reluctantly leave the Old Mill Garden (shown l to r): Stan Brown; Senora Simpson (Ben Morrison Chapter), Bob Stassen, Tom Milner (Louisiana Chapter), Janet Carson.



Photo William C. Miller III

[Photos 16 & 17]

**Larry Coleman Garden.** Our next garden stop was Larry Coleman's garden, also in Batesville situated in the northern part of the state in the Ozark Mountain Plateau. It turns out the cover photo for the Winter 2017 issue of *The Azalean* didn't do this garden justice. Our buses turned into what looked like a nice typical suburban subdivision, with Kurume azaleas decorated with snow. [Photo 18] We were led to the "backyard" and invited to visit with Larry about his antique car and license plate collections in his garage and then to see the rest of the garden in his backyard. The Japanese maples were in full spring leaf color and several winding paths led us down his very steep 250-foot-tall hillside. [Photo 19] Everywhere we turned there were exquisite expertly pruned Kurume azaleas, and views that could take your breath away. Our dear friend Miss Margie Jenkins made it down the very steep zig-zag trail with Aaron Cook and others helping her. [Photos 20 & 21] At the bottom of the garden we saw Larry's tea house and four koi ponds. He built the 100-foot-long retaining wall, the ponds, and the tea house himself. [Photo 22] When asked why he chose a Japanese theme for the garden, he said he "just likes Japanese" inspirations. Again, for those of us from further South, it was a treat to see lepidote rhododendrons thriving in a garden where cold-tolerance is more important than heat-tolerance.

The feeling was of being on the side of a steep hillside in Japan. The sound of running water into the four ponds accompanied our frenzied snapping of pictures. Hard to explain, but this garden was nearly vertical and a wall of color and variety in leaf and flower. We couldn't have come at a better time.

Unique specimen plants from his 25 years of work on the garden included a mature Japanese Umbrella Pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*) he'd grown from seed, a Japanese double-flowered Kerria, and 200 other specimen trees. One of his special favorites was a 65-year-old Formosa azalea he inherited from his grandmother. He told me he has some 30 hybrid groups of azaleas, but he is "...more about different colors where I want them along with early, middle, and late blooms." He had four or five macranthas in bloom in early June and will have some natives later. He now has a man who helps him once a week for a few hours.

**Old Mill, North Little Rock.** Our last tour stop was along Lakeshore Drive, which allowed us to visit the Old Mill, built in 1933 to look as if it dated to the 1830s when such mills were used to grind grain. Built next to branch of the Arkansas River, the site is part of the Lakewood neighborhood and is built in a wide ravine. The "rusticated" bridge and ancillary concrete structures designed by artist Dionicio Rodriguez to look like gnarly wood make this a frequent stop for visitors. While we were there students from a local high school prom were everywhere taking photos in their "prom best." This is a Pulaski County Parks & Recreation Department project and the gardens by the entrance and an overlook are maintained by the Pulaski County Master Gardeners and volunteers. Because of its age and historical importance, the site has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. [Photos 23-25]

## Speakers—April 6

**Stan Brown—**

### "Woody Plant Breeding in Arkansas"

At-large member from Clarksville, AR, introduced as one of the best plantsmen in the state, gave an overview of his wide range of plant breeding experiences as well as an overview of early plant selections in Arkansas as far back as the 1880s and on into our century. For example, two are still in the trade today: an apple "picked out of random seed orchards" ('Arkansas Black' apple selected in the 1880s) and a native herbaceous perennial Arkansas *Amsonia hubrichtii* commonly called "Blue Star" in the 1930s.

Another way to get new plants is to cross them. The first day he began to work for the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville in 1960 he made blackberry crosses. The university has introduced almost 100 different plants since then, mostly focusing on fruit varieties.

They also researched crape myrtles and began plant breeding, setting out different varieties to evaluate them. He mainly worked with grapes, peaches, and apples, and four crape myrtles. Also, in the 1960s he worked with a Dr. Watts on one butterfly bush and two red-leaf peaches; one weeping and one dwarf peach are in the trade today.

Brown also worked with crape myrtles crossing *Lagerstroemia faurei* with *L. indicia* to develop hybrids and planted them out in fields to develop the most disease-resistant and reddest foliated varieties. The National Arboretum introduction of 'Tonto' was based on Brown's use of these crosses. *L. x 'Freedom'* does rebloom and is tolerant of adverse conditions and free plants were available for Brown's work. Another smaller selection was patented and is in the trade.

He did not ignore azaleas either. The most prominent azalea grower, with many of his own "originations" was John Carden of Ft. Smith, AR. Brown bought plants from Carden's Nursery in the late 1960s and 1970s for resale. Carden collected seed from his favorite varieties and selected from the seedlings. His daughter Mary Margaret Carden and husband Gerald Harris continue to grow John's selections and some of their own at Carden-Harris hybrids in Branch, AR; they grow 30-40,000 azaleas including those from other hybridizers each year. Several Carden-Harris azalea hybrids were in the convention plant sale, including a dwarf 'Martha Hitchcock'.

Bob Bogle, one of Brown's friends, was the first store manager of Sam Walton's first Wal-Mart store in Bentonville. He asked Brown if he could get him nursery stock for the store. Brown delivered; a good number of the plants were Mr. Carden's azaleas, and so were some of the first plants sold at a Wal-Mart about 1970.

In Fayetteville, AR, cold hardiness was a factor so Brown did cross Gable azaleas and other varieties, so they would be hardy in northwestern Arkansas and available to the public. One selection went with him when he moved to Clarksville, AR: It was propagated locally, and he says it's his best so far. He named it 'Angie' for his daughter, and he knew Miss Margie didn't have it. He made a special presentation of



this azalea to Miss Margie Jenkins, and AR member Ronnie Palmer said he'd propagate some 'Angie' plants for future convention plant sales.

## Gerald Klingaman

A key member of the team who put this convention together, Gerald has been the Operations Director of the Botanic Garden of the Ozarks in Fayetteville, AR, since 2010. He writes weekly horticulture columns for the media. His presentation on the "World Wide Distribution of Azaleas" will be featured in a future issue of *The Azalean*.

## Annual Meeting—April 7

President Rick Bauer opened the annual meeting on April 7; he summarized the key elements in his President's Letter in this issue (see p. 26). Paul Beck followed with the Financial Report for 2017, which is shown on p. 36, and an update on the ASA website redesign. Exceptional Service Awards are shown on p. 47. [Photos 26-28]

- Photo 26—Treasurer Paul Beck delivers his reports on ASA finances and website redesign.



Photo William C. Miller III

- Photo 27—Membership Chairman Robert Thau delivers his report: "Each one recruit another one."



Photo William C. Miller III

- ▼ Photo 28—Editor Barbara Stump congratulates Rick Bauer on being the author of the Best Article Award in *The Azalean* for 2017, "The Legacy Project Update," which was published in the Winter 2017 issue.



Photo William C. Miller III



Photo Unknown

- ▲ Photo 29—Reverend John Drayton Chapter President Tom Johnson and his wife Mary Ann invited us all to attend the 2019 convention in Charleston and Summerville, SC. Early details are available at the Magnolia Plantation & Gardens website (see back cover ad), with more coming in the fall 2018 issue of *The Azalean* and on the ASA website.

- ▼ Photo 30—The Little Rock location made it possible for four society presidents with nine years of presidential wisdom and talent to attend and add depth to BOD and member conversations throughout the convention. Pictured here (l to r): John Migas (2011-2012; MI Chapter), Aaron Cook (2009-2010; Vaseyi Chapter), Rick Bauer (2017 to date; NVA Chapter), Buddy Lee (2003-2006; LA Chapter).



Photo Gerald Klingaman

- ▼ Photo 31—ASA member-lecturers provided the best of the best in each area of azalea background and horticultural practice in the Azaleas 101 program. Pictured, front row (l to r): Larry Palmer, Margie Jenkins, Charlie Andrews, Robert Thau, back row: Allen Owings, Buddy Lee, Rick Bauer.



Photo William C. Miller III