

2021 Convention Preview—“Carolina in My Mind”

Charlotte, NC and Beyond

April 15, 16, 17, 18, 2021

By Kevin McCorkle—Charlotte, NC

“They came on one of April’s most brilliant days—a day as sparkling as a newly-washed lemon...a day when even the shadows were a mélange of blue and orange and jade, like the shadows that poured from the tipsy brush of Monet.”

— Beverley Nichols, “A Thatched Roof”

The Central Carolinas Chapter invites you to join us for the 2021 ASA Convention, April 15-18, in Charlotte, NC and surrounding areas. On the heels of the Houston Convention cancellation due to the pandemic, we initially feared the same fate for the Charlotte event. Out of the talks of cancellation came some “outside of the box thinking” and a quest to preserve as much of the event we had already planned, but in a way mindful of the current conditions. An informal query of ASA board members and chapter presidents revealed, surprisingly, that many others felt similarly. There were mixed responses, some with hesitation, but the majority indicated they would support and attend such an event. Buddy Lee may have summed it up best when he wrote: “We will still be able to see one another. Friend groups could go get meals and tour together. Best thing is that we get to see beautiful gardens and fantastic blooming azaleas.”

We set out to develop a new model in a new age, based on what may be the new normal for a while...an unconventional convention compared to those of the past, with the safety of our members as our primary concern and focus. This new model convention would be almost exclusively outdoors and built around the safety principles of social distancing. At the time of this writing, the State of North Carolina mandated maximum group size is 25 persons indoors and 50 persons outdoors, so this must be taken into consideration.

This event will differ from conventions of years past, including the following:

- There will be no tour busses. Each attendee is responsible for his or her transportation to and from the field trip venues and elsewhere.
- There will be no indoor sit-down group meals, banquet dinner, or annual meeting and awards program.
- There are no indoor speaking engagements or workshops scheduled at this time. Instead, the docents, garden owners, curators, or other knowledgeable individuals will take the role of speakers in each garden.
- To assist with maximizing social distancing and field trip venue manageability, attendance will be limited to the first 80 ASA member registrants.

- Many of our field trip venues are parking challenged and that has been a concern of the venue hosts. Therefore, registrants may be asked to consent to a carpool of a minimum of 3 masked persons per vehicle for short duration travel from a designated carpool rendezvous spot located near the associated venue.

The following is a summary of our current agenda at the time of this writing. Due to unpredictable future conditions with the COVID-19 pandemic, some venues or logistics may need to be modified if conditions do not improve, or if they worsen. Therefore, this agenda and list of field trip venues should be considered flexible and subject to change. Our goal is to have a clearer view of the final agenda prior to the time of registration. Again, the safety of our members is paramount, so we reserve the right to cancel the event if conditions should warrant.

By their nature, the gardens on tour are unfortunately not fully accessible for persons with disabilities or persons that use a wheelchair so please take this into consideration regarding attendance.

Thursday, April 15—Optional Open Garden Day, Welcome, and Plant Sale Social

On what would traditionally be a convention travel day, we have chosen to include an optional garden venue for those with the time and interest to attend. We have partnered with **Juniper Level Botanic Garden (JLBG)**, located near Raleigh (2.5 hours from our convention base hotel), to reserve an Open Garden Day for ASA Convention attendees on Thursday, April 15. In addition to informal strolling in the garden on a drop-in basis, scheduled tours of the garden will be led by celebrated plantsman Tony Avent and/or garden curator Amanda Wilkins, our speakers in the garden. **Plant Delights Nursery** will be open to our group for browsing and plant sales during that day. At any one time, over 1,500 of the perennial plants displayed in JLBG are for sale in the adjacent nursery.

Juniper Level Botanic Garden was founded by Tony Avent in the late 1980s when he realized he needed to trial and display the rare and unusual perennials he was offering through Plant Delights Nursery, Inc. What started as garden

areas around his first home on the property quickly grew to vast, sweeping beds full of thousands of perennials, trees, and shrubs.

In its current form, JLBG is a botanical garden, conservation center, plant breeding hub, and research facility, encompassing 28 acres of gardens, research beds, and greenhouses. Plant Delights Nursery is nestled within the grounds and is one of the ways JLBG introduces new plants to home gardeners. The plant collection contains more than 28,000 unique plants from around the world, collected by Tony, JLBG staff, and research associates with a keen eye for the rare, unusual, or horticulturally unique. The garden trials these plants, displaying and evaluating them for form, growth habit, and ability to grow in USDA Zone 7b/8a, Raleigh, NC. The garden believes in getting good plants to the people and using home gardeners to aid in ex-situ conservation.

The JLBG azalea collection consists of Aromi Azaleas, Encore(R) Azaleas, Carla Hybrids, and an assortment of other azaleas. The garden (JLBG) has been working with folks on the Gulf Coast to get the Aromi Azaleas to Raleigh for evaluation. April is a beautiful time to experience the other major collections, including the Front Woodland Garden that comes alive during this time of year.

Thursday evening will feature the opening of the Plant Sale in an outdoor setting at the base hotel, along with an informal outdoor social to allow old friends to reconnect and new friendships to be formed.

Friday, April 16—Explore a Living Museum— The R.A. Bartlett Research Arboretum

We are fortunate to have the opportunity to spend the day enjoying the Bartlett Research Arboretum, which is not open to the public. During the morning hours, our speaker in the garden will be curator Greg Paige as he leads us on an overview of the grounds. He will be discussing the extensive plantings in the main collections and research areas. After lunch outdoors on the grounds, everyone will have the opportunity to re-visit their favorite area on their own for a more in-depth exploration. If you are a woody plant

▼ Photo 1—An enticing pathway on Rhodie Hill, Bartlett Research Arboretum.

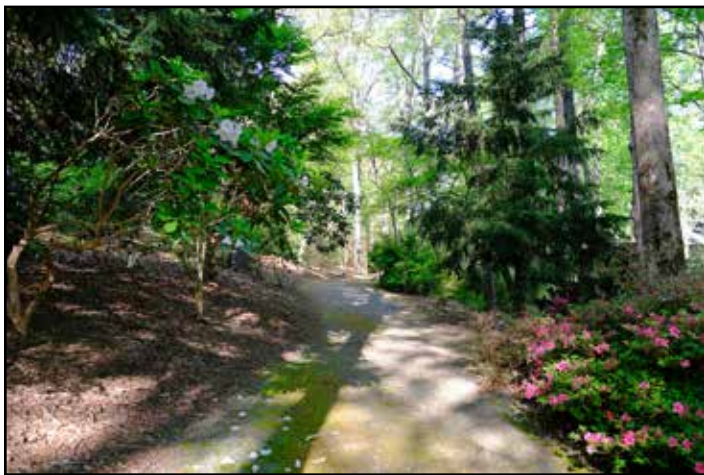


Photo Kevin McCorkle

person, this is your ultimate wonderland! The arboretum is a majestically peaceful place, and the serenity will stay with you long after a visit. Not to be missed: the vast variety of unique understory specimen plants within the woodland throughout “Rhodie Hill.” A personal favorite: the golden oak cultivar ‘Concordia’ (*Quercus robur* ‘Concordia’), a chartreuse wonder that draws your eye from afar.

Nestled within 350 acres, the private accredited Level IV Class **Bartlett Research Arboretum** contains an extensive collection of tree and plant species from around the world. With over 21,000 accessioned plants, the arboretum includes some of the best collections of rhododendrons, oaks, and conifers on the East Coast, the largest collection of magnolia cultivars in the world, and the third largest collection of holly in the United States. (See Photo 1.)

The R.A Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories and Arboretum is actively developed, curated, and managed to support learning, discovery, research, and training, and to serve as a resource to the employees and customers of The Bartlett Tree Expert Company. The arboretum seeks to contribute to, and showcase, a wide range of plant material as well as set an example of a sustainable, enjoyable, and thought-provoking living museum. A more extensive article on the Bartlett Research Arboretum was published in the Summer 2020 edition of *The Azalean*.¹

See the 2021 ASA Convention webpage located here <https://www.azaleas.org/convention-2021/> for a beautiful aerial video of the arboretum grounds set to music. “The 4 Seasons of Bartlett” was recorded and produced by Sean Henry with Bartlett Tree Research Laboratory.

The 445-page alphabetized Master Inventory Plant List as well as the Ericaceae inventory is posted on the 2021 Convention webpage. ASA members that register for the convention will be provided with an aerial grid map of the arboretum that will key the grid location of a specific plant from the list to an area on the ground. All plants are labeled with embossed metal dog tags providing the botanical name, cultivar name, and accession source. The combination of plant list, keyed map, and plant tags can result in interesting botanical “Easter egg” hunts, often resulting in discovering other unique plants along the way.

Please note that due to current conditions and required social distancing, this will be a walking tour and adventure. Attendees should be prepared for extensive walking over regular and uneven ground, rain, or shine. Although a large property overall, most of the major collections are not far apart. There will be time to rest and reflect during the day.

Saturday, April 17—Sunday, April 18— Scheduled Tours

University of North Carolina at Charlotte Botanical Gardens. The UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens has 10 acres of outdoor gardens, and 5,000 sq. ft. of greenhouse display. If conditions at event time will allow, this scheduled tour will be led by botanical gardens staff, knowledgeable volunteers, and Director Emeritus Dr. Larry Mellichamp, who has worked with the gardens for 45 years. The outdoor gardens represent three distinct themes.

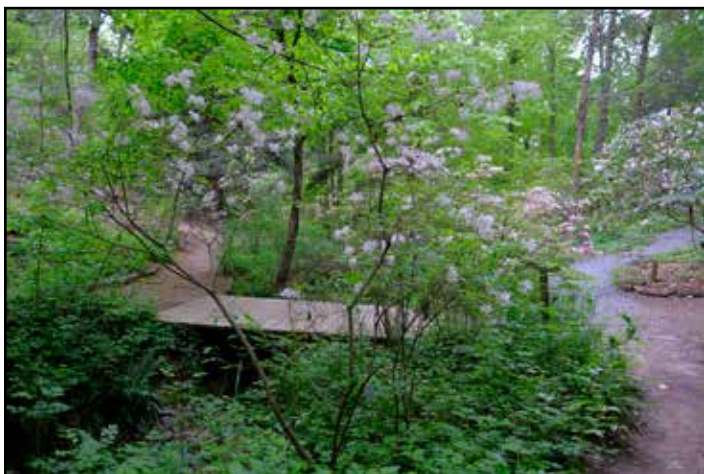


Photo Kevin McCorkle

▲ Photo 2—Wooden footbridge through deciduous azaleas within the Van Landingham Glen, UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens



Photo Kevin McCorkle

▲ Photo 3—A room with a view: the pond within the Susie Harwood Garden, UNC Charlotte Botanical Gardens, as viewed from the gazebo.

1. The **Van Landingham Glen** is a seven-acre native woodland garden in a north-east facing, gently sloping creek valley with informal gravel and wood-chip paths. Started in 1966, The glen contains over 1,000 species of native plants of the Southeast, but at one time had some 3,000 specimens of species and hybrid traditional evergreen rhododendrons. Over time, many of the evergreen rhododendron have declined due to heat exhaustion, but there are still quite a few beauties. The glen contains all the southeastern native azaleas and many hybrids. It is a spring garden, with bountiful wildflowers at their peak in mid-April. Many native shrubs are included, for example rare species such as *Dirca palustris* (eastern leatherwood), *Ribes echinellum* (Miccosukee gooseberry), most native hollies, dwarf pawpaw, chalk maple, Carolina hemlock, needle palm, horse-sugar, and *Stewartia malacodendron*. It is a pleasure to walk the secluded paths and pretend that you are in the mountains. (See Photo 2).
2. The **Susie Harwood Garden** is a three-acre semi-formal garden started in 1980, displaying exotic trees, shrubs, and flowers from around the world. It has an eclectic feel with bridges, a gazebo, moon gate, and an Asian garden. There are many evergreen and some deciduous azaleas, numerous dwarf conifers (including a very fine Florida torreya), and some 40 Japanese maples. Decorative rockwork, a lively pond, stone steps, and other unique features adorn the garden. (See Photo 3.)
3. The **Mellichamp Natives Terrace** is a half-acre garden devoted to demonstrating the uses of southeastern species in a variety of typical homeowner situations (such as rain garden, sunny border, patio, deck, lawn, rock wall, contemporary setting). A small area has edible native fruit plants. The play of light and texture in this carefully

constructed garden is enjoyable. This may be the only such public native plant garden of its type in the Southeast.

Other Scheduled Tours—Saturday, April 17

The magnificent private garden of **Margaret and Price Zimmermann**, a few miles north of Charlotte in Huntersville is also available for touring. Designated *Pian del Pino* (meaning a level spot among pines), their 30-year-old estate has a European flavor with Italian architecture and statuary. Hundreds of rare woody and herbaceous plants are discovered throughout a delightful walk on moss-covered paths in formal and informal settings. Many evergreen and deciduous azaleas will be seen in garden context. The patches of ostrich ferns with new fronds unfurling and masses of wildflowers are a pleasure to behold in the spring. (See Photo 4.)

Sunday, April 18

MapleWalk, the garden of **Lib and Tom Nunnenkamp** is a two and one-quarter-acre labor of love located in southeast Charlotte. (See Photo 5.) In the words of Tom and Lib: “Little did we know when we bought our home in December 1990 that our plans for the property would take on a life of their own. While our garden is named MapleWalk

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▲ Photo 4—A mossy path covered with petals within the woodland garden of *Pian del Pino*.



Photo Tom Nunnenkamp

▲ Photo 5—Stone stairsteps among the beautiful Japanese maples at MapleWalk.

to reflect the over 90 different Japanese maples, it has become much more, with hundreds of perennials, over 20 different dogwoods, nine varieties of redbud, a myriad of dwarf conifers, deciduous azaleas, and many unusual trees and shrubs. The 1600 feet of path are lined with Tennessee fieldstone laid by Tom. MapleWalk is very animal friendly, containing thirteen bird feeders, and a home for two rescued rabbits who live in the “Taj Mahutch.” Tom Nunnenkamp will serve as guide and speaker in the garden for this scheduled tour.

Additional gardens may be added as unguided side tours on Sunday pending availability based on conditions at the time of registration. Be sure to check the 2021 ASA Convention webpage <https://www.azaleas.org/convention-2021/> for updates.

The Collector’s Plant Sale

The location of the plant sale has been chosen to be both convenient to attendees as well as more conducive to ventilation and social distancing. Located on a rooftop terrace at the base hotel, the location has a commanding view of the University Place Lake and provides an ideal location for both the plant sale and a place to socialize outdoors. The plant sale will be open intermittently every day throughout the convention week.

Assembled with the collector in mind, the plant sale will feature a carefully chosen and exciting mix of evergreen azaleas, deciduous azaleas, and companion plants, many of which are unique, hard-to-find, or not available in the trade. Included in the deciduous offering will be selections and hybrids from the late Kelly Strickland, as well as Earl Sommerville, Sally and John Perkins, and others. A special group of stellar Gregory Bald seedlings produced through micropropagation will be included.

Many of these may only be available at this sale. A complete list of plants will be made available to registered attendees prior to the sale. Watch for pop-up silent auctions of unique specimen plants throughout the convention.

Accommodations

We have chosen the Hilton Charlotte University Place as our recommended base hotel. The hotel is located along the northeastern edge of the city and is close to and easily accessible from I-85 and I-77. Attendees will be able to travel to and from the hotel and the field trip venues via major highways without having to enter the more urban areas of center city. For the more adventuresome interested in visiting center city for sightseeing during their stay, there is a light rail rapid transit station within a short walk from the hotel. There are also many restaurants with a wide variety of cuisines in the commercial areas immediately adjacent to the hotel.

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A courtesy block of rooms has been reserved for us by the hotel and a specialized web page will be provided for ease of registration for attendees: We request that attendees wait until the hotel registration website is published at the time of convention registration rather than reserve accommodations in advance. Parking at the hotel is complimentary, except for valet parking.

The Hilton Charlotte University Place has stated that rooms reserved via the courtesy block are refundable if cancelled the day before the reservation date.

Registration

More information about registration, including venues, registration fees, hotel rates, and a more detailed schedule will be forthcoming.

The opening of registration may be delayed beyond that of past conventions, as we monitor and assess conditions with everyone's safety in mind. We expect registration to open in early 2021 but no later than Feb 1, 2021. An email or mailed reminder will be sent to all ASA members in advance of the opening of registration. Please check the ASA home page <https://www.azaleas.org/> and the Convention webpage <https://www.azaleas.org/convention-2021/> for updates.

We hope to see you in Charlotte in 2021 and together we will enjoy April's most brilliant of days.

*"In my mind I'm gone to Carolina
Can't you see the sunshine?
Can't you just feel the moonshine?
Ain't it just like a friend of mine
To hit me from behind?
Yes, I'm gone to Carolina in my mind."*

—James Taylor

References and Acknowledgments

- ¹Franklin, Patrick and Sean Henry. "The Hidden Botanical Wonderland of the Southeast—The R.A. Bartlett Research Arboretum." *The Azalean*. Summer 2020: 42(2):34-36.

The author thanks Amanda Wilkins and Dr. Larry Mellichamp for providing valuable input for this article, especially some of the copy/ information for Juniper Level Botanic Garden and UNCC Botanical Gardens. Used here with their permission.

Kevin McCorkle is a practicing Landscape Architect in Charlotte, NC, and president of the Central Carolinas Chapter since 2017. Kevin also serves as the Legacy Lead for the Kelly Strickland and Aaron Varnadoe ASA Legacy Projects.

Welcome New Editor Kathy Jentz

New Editor/Designer for *The Azalean*

Kathy Jentz will take over editing and design of *The Azalean* with the Spring 2021 issue. Since 2005, Kathy has been founder, editor, and publisher of *Washington Gardener Magazine*, the gardening publication published specifically for the local metro area—Zones 6-7—Washington, DC, and its suburbs. In this work, she coordinates the work of eight to ten steady columnists and over 20 volunteer book reviewers. She is a life-long gardener from a family of farmers and dedicated gardeners. Her mission is to turn black thumbs green. Kathy believes that growing plants should be stress-free and enjoyable. Her philosophy is inspiration over perspiration.

Currently, she is President of the Silver Spring Garden Club and on the board of several other clubs and organizations. You can read Kathy's work in the *Washington Examiner* and *Washington Woman* in addition to regular guest spots on Channel 9, Channel 4 and WAMU radio. Kathy's work has been featured in numerous area publications including the *Washington Examiner* newspaper, *Pathways* magazine, and *Washington Woman* magazine. In addition, she appears on regular gardening guest spots on Channel 9, Channel 4, as well as WTOP, WAMU, and WOWD-LP radio stations in Washington, DC.

She is currently the Green Media columnist for the *Mid-Atlantic Grower* newspaper, where she does a great deal of hand-holding and coaxing to get independent garden centers, plant breeders, and other horticultural businesses to join the social media revolution and maximize their online brands. She also edits the quarterly *Water Garden Journal*, the official publication of the International Waterlily & Water Gardening Society. Welcome to the ASA!

▼ Kathy Jentz does it all: gardens, writes, publishes.



Photo Drena J. Galaza, WGM