



Azalea Society of America 2021 Virtual Convention

May 20–22, 2021 • Friday–Sunday

By Rick Bauer—Yorktown, Virginia

COVID-19 has been adversely impacting all of our lives. With the arrival of viable vaccines, hopefully this difficult period will soon come to an end. Unfortunately, it will continue to impact our lives for the immediate future.

As COVID started raging last spring, the first society impact was the cancellation of the national convention in Houston. The health and safety of our members is foremost. We had been monitoring the COVID status, specifically in Houston. The weekend before the convention there was a spike in COVID cases at Rice University, in the vicinity of our convention hotel. Given that situation and the risk of flying in an enclosed space with possibly infected passengers, we reluctantly made the decision to cancel.

The planning for the Charlotte convention was already well underway. COVID required them to re-examine the planning of the convention. All efforts were made to conform to the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). All indoor activities (e.g., banquets, busses, speakers) were cancelled. The open garden venues (reached through private transportation) and the outdoor plant sale remained. Individual members would have the opportunity to meet with friends, informally in small groups (hopefully complying with CDC guidelines). Given the continued COVID threat, the two main venues cancelled their support of the convention. This necessitated the cancellation of the convention.

Most of us have become accustomed to “meeting” virtually through media such as Zoom. A suggestion was made to try to hold the convention virtually. Apparently other societies have attempted this successfully. The society board of directors agreed to give this approach a try.

The convention will be held the weekend of 20-22 May and will consist of speakers, recorded garden tours (both private and public gardens) and the annual meeting. It will be free of charge. Society members are encouraged to send in videos or video slide shows of their gardens. Videos should be in .wmv, .mp3, or .mp4 format. They should not violate copyrights. If you are planning on providing videos, contact Paul Beck at treasurer@azaleas.org to arrange for transfer of the video. All videos must be received by 9 May.

Because of the current uncertainty as to what videos we’ll have available for the convention, a final agenda can’t be published until after 9 May. It will be provided via email and on our society website no later than the week before the convention. We will also include instructions for accessing the convention at that time.

I know this has been a difficult time for all of us. Hopefully, we’ll all be able to get back to normal soon. We are looking at possibly holding a regional meeting in the fall to be able to meet in person. We also are looking forward to next year’s convention in Lafayette, LA. A preview of that convention will be part of our virtual convention.