

The Azalean

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Journal of the Azalea Society of America



President's Letter

Charlie Andrews—Cumming, Georgia

The very active Alabamense Chapter is the host for our next annual convention. I hope you will give serious consideration to joining us in Auburn, Alabama, April 2-4, 2024 for an enlightening and fun-filled three days. Look for the details in this issue and the previous Fall issue of *The Azalean* as well as the convention information on our website. I'll give you a little taste here.

We will have a world-class arboretum to see, outstanding public and private gardens, nurseries, various speakers you will not want to miss, and, of course, a plant sale of hard-to-find plants.

Alabama is a state with a large number of native flora. The Donald E. Davis Arboretum exists to display the native and rare plants of Alabama and the Southeastern United States. Part of the arboretum's mission is to safeguard, propagate, and conserve the rare and endangered plants of Alabama. Collections include its oaks, native azaleas, pitcher plants, and trillium. The native azalea and oak collections are national accredited. Early April will be an excellent time to visit.

In the Auburn area, we will tour two outstanding private gardens, Bob Greenleaf's and Ken Rogers'. This will be followed by a trip to Auburn University's Crooked Oaks Farm, once the private retreat of Auburn coach Pat Dye. He had a special interest in Japanese maples and had a nursery and garden with over 200 maple cultivars. We will also visit Callaway Gardens just over the state line in Pine Mountain, Georgia, which is world-famous for its azaleas. We should see both native and evergreen azaleas in bloom as well as many other wildflowers and plants as we tour the gardens. We will get to visit and shop at Botanic Garden Center (where we will eat lunch on Wednesday).

I was pleasantly surprised and excited about speakers the Alabamense Chapter has arranged for us. We'll hear about the history of land use in rural Alabama (Dr. Charles Mitchell), pollinators on deciduous azaleas (Dr. Samantha Pryor), using phone cameras for photographing plants and landscapes (Mike Atkins), 40 years of azalea breeding (Joe Klimavicz), and Lazy-K Nursery (Bob Patterson). Lazy K is renowned for native azaleas. It was owned for many years by Ernest Koone until his untimely death in 2022.

Of course, many of us will want to take advantage of the plant sale, beginning Tuesday afternoon. We will find evergreen and deciduous azaleas as well as companion plants.

The single registration fee of \$360 includes all tours, lunches on Wednesday and Thursday, dinner Wednesday, and the banquet dinner Thursday.

As I have said many times, the real reason I love to go to these conventions is to see my azalea friends. Register soon. I'll see you there.

~ *Charlie*



The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family (Ericaceae).

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At-Large Contact

Rick Bauer

Regular membership is open to all interested parties for an annual amount of \$30; life membership for one or two persons at the same address is \$600. Members receive *The Azalean* and are eligible for participation in all activities of the Society. For information and a membership application, write to Pat Insley, 13035 Farthingale Dr., Herndon, VA 20171, or visit www.azaleas.org.

The Azalean

Editor/Layout
Kathy Jentz

Editorial Advisory Board

Charles R. Andrews III
Aaron Cook
William C. Miller III
Barbara Stump

Advertising

Denise R. Lanclos
advertising@azaleas.org
<https://azaleas.org/advertising>

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Address editorial and business correspondence to:

Editor, *The Azalean*
826 Philadelphia Avenue
Silver Spring, MD 20910-4936
Email: theazalean@gmail.com

Society Website: www.azaleas.org
Mail list: azaleas@groups.io

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Deadlines for *The Azalean*:

- Spring 2024 issue is due January 15, 2024
- Summer 2024 issue is due April 15, 2024
- Fall 2024 issue is due July 15, 2024
- Winter 2024 issue is due October 15, 2024

On the Cover

Deciduous azalea hybrids growing with Spanish bluebells (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) in the foreground in the Pinetum at Winterthur. Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

Remember, you too can write for *The Azalean*! To submit your articles and photos for publication, contact: theazalean@gmail.com.



Preview of 2024 ASA Convention: The Loveliest Convention on the Plains

By John Torbert—Salem, Alabama

This year's convention will be on Tuesday, April 2 through Thursday, April 4, in Auburn, Alabama. These dates should be peak bloom time for many deciduous and evergreen azaleas.

We have an action-packed event of field trips, speakers, photo contest, and a plant sale. Except for an hour-long bus ride to/from Callaway Gardens on Thursday, there will only be a small amount of driving time.

We will operate out of the Courtyard by Marriott, located at the south edge of town, at exit 51 on I-85. Thirty-five rooms are reserved for \$109 plus the ordinary hotel taxes. This rate is good for reservations made at least 30 days before the convention.

Another 20 rooms are reserved at the Tru by Hilton for \$130. This hotel is in the same parking lot as the Courtyard. The Tru has a full breakfast buffet included in its price; the Courtyard does not include any breakfast. The Courtyard does have a bistro that sells Starbucks coffee and various breakfast items. It also sells beer, wine, and mixed drinks until 10 pm.

To make reservations, call the hotels:

Marriott Courtyard: 334-502-0111

HiltonTru: 334-521-0400

Be sure to remind them, you are with the Azalea Society Convention for the convention rate.

“Azalea 101” Workshop

This workshop, sponsored by the Alabama Extension Service, The Davis Arboretum, and the Alabamense Chapter of ASA, will be held on Tuesday morning beginning at 9:00 am, before the official start of the Convention, in the College of Forestry Building on the University campus. While ASA members are welcome to attend, it's primarily designed to be of interest to nonmembers that want to learn more about azaleas. We anticipate good participation from Master Gardeners and hopefully some of them will join the ASA.

This will be a five-hour workshop all about azaleas (both evergreen and deciduous), identification, site selection, planting, care, and propagation. Participants will leave with a small tray of



The namesake of the Alabamense chapter, the Alabama azalea (*R. alabamense*) is found throughout Alabama. Photo by John Torbert.

azalea seed ready to germinate and some rooted-cuttings ready to root.

Wednesday –April 3.

All activities during the day will be within Auburn town limits.

Donald E. Davis Arboretum: This attraction has one of the finest collections of deciduous azaleas anywhere, as well as a collection of all Southeastern oaks. We will learn about the Auburn Series of native azaleas, some of which will be in bloom.

Local Garden Tours: Through the decades, the town of Auburn has had some serious azalea enthusiasts that have transformed their yards into spectacular displays, including a music professor that designed his gardens to fit a symphony he composed for it.

Botanic Shopping & Lunch: A new upscale retail nursery with nice garden attractions, an opportunity to shop and good meals. Go to their website at <https://shopbotanic.com/landscaping/> to preview their selections.

Dinner at Crooked Oaks: A 20-minute ride from hotel. This was the private hunting retreat and Japanese Maple nursery of Auburn's Coach Pat Dye, who recently passed and donated this property to Auburn's College of Forestry and Wildlife.



Botanic Garden center. Photo by John Torbert and www.shopbotanic.com.

Thursday - April 4

Callaway Gardens (www.callawaygardens.com): Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia, is about a one-hour bus ride from the hotel. Callaway is a must-see destination for anyone interested in native and evergreen azaleas. We will have a full day here, beginning with an introduction by Callaway Gardens' horticulturist. We will move from stop to stop within Callaway Gardens on their tram system. One of the main attractions at Callaway is the famous Cecil B. Day Butterfly Center.

Dinner at Agricultural Heritage Park Pavilion, is three miles from the hotel. This will be the site for the annual Banquet and ceremonies.

Speakers

During this three-day event we will hear from:

- A welcoming committee at the Tuesday hospitality hour that should include the mayor of Auburn and the award winning Aubie, Auburn University mascot.
- Retired Extension Specialist Dr. Charles Mitchell. Charles is a popular speaker for his very interesting presentations about the history of land-use in rural Alabama.
- Dr. Samantha Pryor will tell us about her dissertation research on pollinators and deciduous azaleas.
- Mike Akins will tell us how to get the most out of our phone cameras to photograph azaleas and landscapes.
- Joe Klimavicz will talk about his 40 years of azalea breeding (and some of his varieties will be for sale).
- Bob Patterson will talk to us about his Lazy-K Nursery.

Plant Sale

Azaleas and native companion plants will be available for sale beginning Tuesday afternoon and throughout the meeting.

Video Preview

Here is a link to a video preview of the 2024 Convention with a sampling of some of the sights: <https://play.soundslides.com/885wYRKR>

Registration Fee

The registration fee of \$360 is the projected break-even cost, assuming 70-90 attendees for hotel meeting space, dinner venues, transportation, entrance fee to Callaway Gardens, field trip snacks, lunches and dinners on Wednesday and Thursday, insurance and miscellaneous incidentals.

Convention Website

More details, including convention registration, is available on the ASA website at: <https://www.azaleas.org/convention-2024>.

About the Author

John Torbert is president of the Alabamense Chapter and chair of the 2024 convention's planning committee. His email is john.torbert@gmail.com.



Callaway Gardens. Photo by Shane Harris

*So you want to learn more about the lovely
Glenn Dale Hybrid Azaleas?*

The Azalea Works in Bethesda, Maryland, has two books by Bill Miller and the late Dick West which detail the fascinating story about B.Y. Morrison, the 454 Glenn Dale cultivars, and the unpublished *PI* and *Bell Numbers* by which they were managed. For details, see the website at:

www.theazaleaworks.com

While you're at it, visit the extensive collection of azalea, companion plant, and animal .jpg images.

Society Officer Candidates

Allen Owings—Secretary

Allen Owings is an Louisiana State University (LSU) AgCenter Professor Emeritus of Horticulture. While at LSU, Dr. Owings was housed at the AgCenter Botanic Gardens in Baton Rouge (formerly Burden Research Plantation), the Department of Horticulture, and the Hammond Research Station in Hammond. He is currently serving as the president of the Louisiana Chapter, Azalea Society of America (ASA) and is serving as a Director on the ASA Board of Directors. Dr. Owings holds degrees in horticulture and plant sciences from Southeastern Louisiana University, Louisiana State University, and Mississippi State University. He is currently employed as horticulturist at Clegg's Nursery in Baton Rouge, LA, and Bracy's Nursery in Amite, LA, where he works in education, outreach, social media, and new plant production. A native of Hammond, LA, Dr. Owings now resides there again. He is a life member of the Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association and Louisiana Society for Horticultural Research. Dr. Owings belongs to numerous horticulture societies in Louisiana and across the South. He is an active member and former ruling elder at First Presbyterian Church in Hammond. He enjoys gardening, golf, and LSU sports.



Paul Beck—Treasurer

Paul Beck has been a member of Northern Virginia Chapter since 1983. Paul has been very active in that chapter since 2010, as treasurer, webmaster, and developer of the chapter's website. He has also been treasurer and co-webmaster of the ASA since 2014. He developed the ASA online membership database, the searchable azalea information repository, the online repository for *The Azalean*. He has automated the Northern Virginia chapter plant sales and annual auctions with a barcoding sales and inventory control system. In addition, Paul automated the 2016 ASA Williamsburg joint convention plant sale, the 2018 ASA Arkansas plant sale, and the 2023 ASA Atlanta plant sale. He also created a flexible con-



vention registration system for the ASA website. Paul retired from the US Air Force in 1984 after 20 years of service and then retired again in 2012 from his second career in the software development industry. Paul and his wife, Carolyn, have been married for 60 years, and they have two children and three grandchildren. He enjoys building and flying remotely controlled model airplanes. Paul holds a PhD in Operations Research and Statistics.

Rick Edwards—Director

Rick Edwards has been seriously gardening since he was about 10 years old. He was always trying new things and trying to grow things people said that he couldn't. He has killed more plants over his lifetime than he can count. But, he has found new ways of doing things and having success when the odds were stacked against him. It has caused him to become very good at research and growing methods of all kinds of plants. He loves all kinds of plants and also has many interests outside of the garden gate. He has a BS in Biology and Chemistry. He also has a strong background in taxonomy. He has a MS in Biology with an emphasis on Aquatic Ecology. At one point, he was considered by many as an expert on waterlilies. He had about 3,000 tropical tubers and well over 1,000 hardy rhizomes. He worked in landscaping for about 15 years. He owned his own yard grading business for another five years. He worked as a designer of live exhibits, field biologist, and taxonomist for several years. He has five teaching certifications and taught in public schools for 15 years. He also taught botany and plant taxonomy at the university level for three years. He has loved azaleas since he was a kid enjoying the Western Azalea (*Rhododendron occidentale*) in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. He has raised azaleas in his gardens and beds all of his adult life at every residence he's owned. Not being able to take them with him, he needed to learn how to propagate them. He started with evergreens, since those were mostly what he grew. He has learned from true experts and added a little from his own experiences—mostly failures! He looks forward to supporting the ASA as a director.



Shane Harris—Director

Shane Harris is the County Extension Coordinator for Tallapoosa County, Alabama. His primary area of expertise and professional experience is home horticulture, 4-H youth development, forestry and natural resources, and community & economic development. He has served as Extension educator with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System for over 21 years. Shane is an Auburn University alumnus, where he earned his BS degree in Agricultural Business & Economics in 1998 and Master of Education Degree in Agricultural Education in 2000. Shane states his interest in azaleas has passionately grown over the last few years. He collects evergreen and native azaleas for his private garden and recently started learning about and propagating azaleas. He joined ASA in 2020 to expand his knowledge and to meet fellow azalea enthusiasts. In 2020, Shane led the revision of the Extension publication “Evergreen Azaleas of Alabama” and published a new publication “Native Azaleas for Alabama” in spring 2021. He also coordinated the 2021 “All About Azaleas” Zoom webinar series, which was a local partnership between Alabama Extension and the Alabamense Chapter of ASA. Shane is currently serving as an ASA Director, is the Secretary of the Alabamense Chapter, and is on the committee for hosting the 2024 ASA National Convention in Auburn, AL. Shane resides in Dadeville with his wife Susan, his two sons Blake and Clay, and his two golden retriever dogs Aubie and Ranger. His hobbies and interests include admiring the great outdoors, gardening, photography, hunting, sports, and camping. He is also Southern Baptist preacher.



Terri Waterman—Director

Terri Waterman has been a member of the Arkansas Chapter of the Azalea Society of America since 2018, when she saw local news articles about the 2018 ASA Convention being held in Little Rock. Growing up and spending time in South Missouri gave her an early appreciation for native azaleas. She now grows many natives, as well as re-blooming and evergreen azaleas on her four-acre prop-



erty on Lake Catherine in Hot Springs. She has had the pleasure of gardening all over the U.S. over the last 40 years, and is currently a member of three garden clubs around central Arkansas and has been Club President for two of them. She has served as State President of the Arkansas Federation of Garden Clubs, and presently holds several State Chairman positions on the Executive Board. She has never met a Society she didn't like, and is also a member of the American Iris Society, the Central Arkansas Iris Society, and Vice President of our local Hot Springs Iris Society; North American Maple Society; Central Arkansas Rose Society; and the Orchid Society. Professionally, she retired from the Federal Aviation Administration, where she held numerous positions including Air Traffic Controller, Supervisory Air Traffic Controller, Air Traffic Facility Manager, and Instructional Lead for the FAA International Training Academy. She is also a trained Mediator and Instructional System Designer. One of her favorite opportunities was developing and providing national Leadership Training for the FAA's Management Team, as well as several airlines, including Southwest, American, and FedEx. She hopes that her background and passion for learning, as well as her administrative experience, will be of value to the ASA Board.

Azalea Society of America By-Laws Update

The operation of the Society is guided by our by-laws. By-laws are normally created upon the establishment of an organization. Most by-laws have provisions for updating to adjust to changes from a variety of sources (e.g., technology changes, mission modifications etc.). This is the case with our by-laws. A review of our by-laws showed they were out of date in a number of areas. In some cases, they were just being ignored because they were out of date. Based on this review, a number of changes have been proposed and the proposed changes reviewed and approved by the Society Board of Directors. Enactment of these changes requires the approval of two thirds of the voting attendees at a meeting of members where a quorum is present. This meeting will occur at the upcoming convention in Auburn, AL, April 2–4, 2024. A copy of the proposed changes, including the reasoning behind them is posted on the society website by selecting from the toolbar: About the Society>ASA Bylaws & Policies>Pending By-laws Changes. If you do not have access to the internet and need a copy of these proposed changes, contact Rick Bauer at (757) 771-4446 (leave message).

Azaleas and Rhododendrons at Winterthur

By Linda Eirhart –Wilmington, Delaware

“I do not know when I have enjoyed anything more and have come back fired with a desire to plant azaleas in all directions...” ~ H.F. du Pont letter to Charles Dexter, June 7, 1930

It was 1930 and Henry Francis du Pont had just returned from a visit to Charles Dexter, a prominent early 20th century Rhododendron breeder. Mr. du Pont had actually been planting azaleas and rhododendrons at Winterthur as early as 1905. Winterthur, a few miles outside of Wilmington, DE, was the family home of Henry Francis (H.F.) and had been in the du Pont family since the early 1800s. H.F. was born here in 1880 and considered himself the head gardener until he passed in 1969. His first plantings would have been in the family’s formal gardens in the early 1900s and in the creation of a narcissi grove on the slope to the north of the house. He was planting thousands of bulbs in the style of the “wild garden” promoted by William Robinson, a British horticulturist and author. Robinson’s own words summarize the concept best. “It is applied essentially to the placing of perfectly hardy exotic plants in places and under conditions where they will become established and take care of themselves.”¹ H.F. used this concept to create what many believe to be one of the premiere naturalistic gardens.

H.F. du Pont used broad sweeps of both exotic and native plants under a canopy of majestic oaks, tulip-poplars, and beech. He extended his garden to the fields and farmlands beyond. As with many 18th century English estates, the garden and the countryside merge in a seamless whole with no clear boundaries. For the formal areas, he turned to his friend and one of the first female landscape architects, Marian Coffin. She designed the layout for the Reflecting Pool, Peony Garden, and Sundial Garden, and du Pont selected the plants and color combinations.

Throughout the naturalistic and formal areas, du Pont used azaleas and rhododendrons. He especially valued them because they could provide color in the garden from early April through August. Though he was a collector at heart, once commenting that he must have been born with the desire to collect, it was important to him that his plants create a beautiful whole. He once wrote,



Figure 1. From left to right, Kurume Azalea #10 and ‘Pink Pearl’ on the edge of Azalea Woods. Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

“No matter how fascinating any plant may be, unless it looks well with its group, I do not want it.”²

This design concept guided his work as he expanded and added the newest azaleas to his garden. The most dominant azaleas at Winterthur are the Kurumes. In 1917, du Pont acquired 17 Kurume Azaleas from Cottage Gardens Nursery on Long Island, NY, just two years after they were first displayed at the Panama Pacific International Exposition. He planted these in a wooded area that had become more open due to the loss of American chestnuts to blight. That area is now called Azalea Woods.

In 1920, Professor Charles Sargent, Director of the Arnold Arboretum, invited du Pont to Boston for a show of E. H. Wilson’s “new race of azaleas” (Kurumes), stating that: “If these azaleas prove hardy in the middle states they will be the most important introduction to the gardens of that part of the country which has been made for a great many years.”³ Sargent sent him 50 individual plants derived from 21 different cultivars in 1922. Unfortunately, many of the original names did not stay with the plants so H.F. and his staff simply referred to these Kurumes by assigned numbers. H.F. propagated these initial plants and began

arranging them in large drifts of color. There are notes and letters through the years of transplanting azaleas to create just the right combinations of color. He designed the center of Azalea Woods as a vision of white with three different white flowering azaleas, *Rhododendron* ‘Snow’, *R. Kurume* #16, and *R. ‘Rose Greely’* (Gable Hybrid) under a canopy of white flowering dogwoods (*Cornus florida*) and above a carpet of white *Trillium grandiflorum*. (Figure 2.)

A few of the flower corridors spreading out from the center repeat the white, while others bring in shades of soft pink, rose, and salmon. Most of these are our numbered Kurumes but you may recognize the names ‘Pink Pearl’ and ‘Takasago’ (syn. ‘Cherryblossom’). (Figure 1.) The color intensifies to a bright pink with ‘Hinomayo’ and two similar colored numbered Kurumes that vary slightly in color and flower shape. Du Pont often used this technique of using similar-colored azaleas together most likely to maintain the design, while adding to his collection. It also adds another level of detail and interest to the garden.

Beside the sweep of ‘Hinomayo’ azaleas, the color transitions to lavender with just a touch of cherry red. The lavender is from what we believe are azaleas ‘Lavender Queen’ and ‘Mauve Beauty’, and is used with a few points of cherry red from the Arnold Azalea. Du Pont commented that it was to “chic it up.” Marian Coffin admired his talent with color when she wrote to him in 1948 after an early May visit to Winterthur. She wrote “I can shut my eyes and see it all and am still undecided which azalea effect was the loveliest. You certainly handled the discords or near discords, which in your knowing hands became harmonies with consummate skill, and with those vibrant pinks and magentas that is no mean feat.”⁴

The entrance to Azalea Woods is a path of the torch azalea (*Rhododendron kaempferi*) in shades of reds, salmons, and pinks. Du Pont used their height to create a tall corridor that would lead you in and then reveal the expansive panorama of flowering Kurume Azaleas at the heart of the woodlands. *Rhododendron kaempferi* was introduced to Winterthur in 1919 when Professor Sargent recommended and shipped plants to Winterthur.

Professor Sargent and Mr. Hunnewell of Wellesley, Massachusetts, also supplied a number of Kaempferi hybrids to Winterthur. Unfortunately,

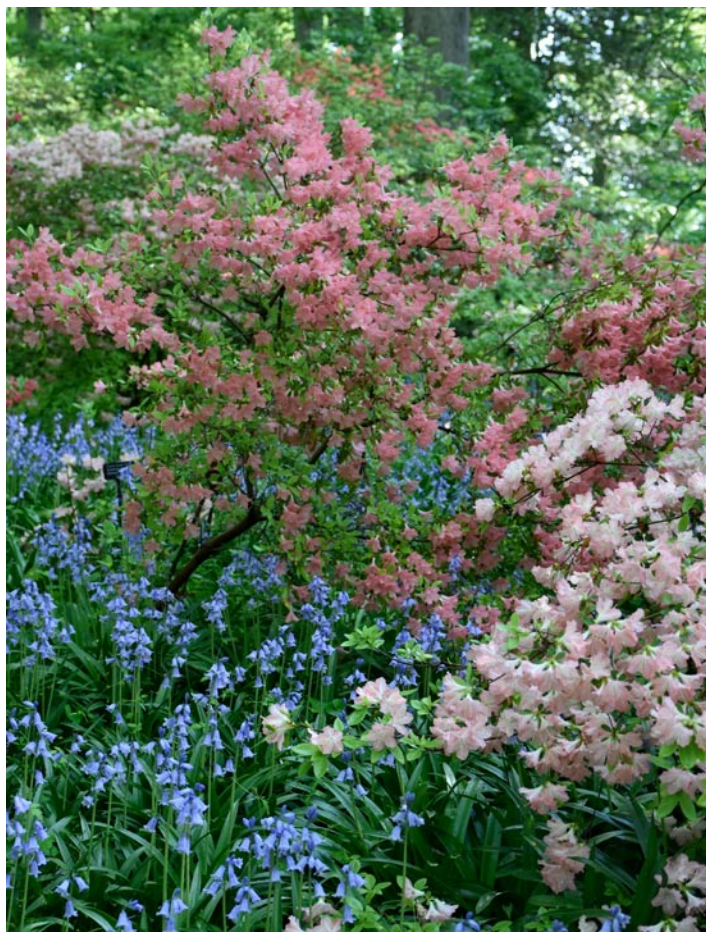


Figure 2, From left to right, Kurume Azalea #48 and Kurume Azalea #46 with *Hyacinthoides hispanica* in Azalea Woods. Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

we don’t know the parentage of these hybrids but they flower in late May and early June. Du Pont was searching for ways to extend the season of color so these were ideal for him. “I was always worried about the late bloom, but now I’m moving the Kaempferi Azaleas above the garden, and it will increase the showing.”⁵ There are two distinct color waves, which du Pont kept separate. Some flower slightly earlier and are described by

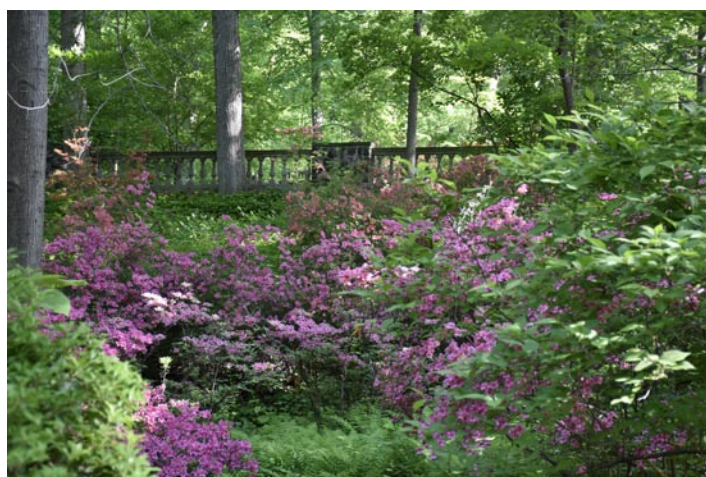


Figure 3. Kaempferi Azaleas in late May below Icewell Terrace. Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.



Figure 4. A path of white *R. mucronatum* with the golden flowers of *R. luteum* in the Pinetum. Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

him as red-pink, while the other form is a blue-pink. There are variations in each color form that we have documented, so that we can propagate and preserve these plants and the design. (Figure 3.)

The year 1919 also brought the recommendation from Professor Sargent to plant the royal azalea (*R. schlippenbachii*), with its delicate, pure-pink flowers in mid-April. Sargent noted, “Certainly it is one of the most beautiful of perfectly hardy azaleas and I am sure it will do well in Delaware.”⁶ Du Pont ordered six plants from Cottage Gardens in 1922. He planted them along the main allée of the Pinetum, another planting project encouraged and helped along by Sargent.

Another early 20th century addition to the garden were cultivars of *R. mucronatum* purchased from Cottage Gardens. (Figure 4.) Their flowering time overlaps with our Kurumes and carry the color later into May. Cottage Gardens was the source for ‘Magnificum’ (formerly Magnifica). Ours is a white-flowering form with a strawberry blotch, giving an overall light pink effect in the landscape. Du Pont named a sport of one of his plants of *R. mucronatum* ‘Winterthur’. It is a soft lavender and he used it and ‘Magnificum’ extensively throughout the garden. (Figure 5.)

In the 1930s, H.F. began a long correspondence with Joseph Gable, once referred to as the dean of rhododendron hybridizers. Just a few of the plants that Winterthur acquired from him included ‘Rose Greely’, noted earlier in Azalea Woods, and then ‘Springtime’ and ‘Mrs. C.C. Miller’ to lengthen the azalea flowering season. In 1939, du Pont wrote that he thought Gable’s new azaleas were

a “most interesting lot”⁷ and that Gable’s mauves were “lovely and a better mauve than any Kurume I have.”⁷ That most likely led to Du Pont acquiring Gable’s lavender-flowering forms of *R. ye-doense* var. *poukhanense* to provide April color.

H.F. continually propagated, purchased, and rearranged azaleas to expand or improve upon his color display and collection. In 1955, he was contacted by Dr. Thomas Wheeldon of the Mid-Atlantic chapter of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS) about a group visit. This association led to the planting of a corridor of Wheeldon’s ‘Miss Susie’, a late April/early May pink flowering azalea. (Figure 6.) It also brought the naming of an azalea ‘H.F. du Pont’, a deep-red azalea that du Pont used at the edge of Azalea Woods. Equally important, because of their communication, Dr. Wheeldon supplied him with many of the then “new” hybrids. H.F. noted “I am grateful to him for letting me try all these new plants, which, if I waited for them to be offered by the nurseries, I would have long since left this planet.”⁸

Some of these new plants included the Glenn Dale Hybrids, which du Pont had started to acquire as early as 1949 from Henry Hohman of Kingsville Nursery. He used these and the Chisolm-Merritt Hybrids in areas outside of Azalea Woods to expand his display. The salmon forms of ‘Mayflower’, ‘Lullaby’, and ‘Coral Cluster’ brighten a portion of the Pinetum. Later-flowering forms such as ‘Alight’, ‘Buccaneer’, ‘Martha Hitchcock’, and ‘Scout’ were used on Sycamore Hill and Oak Hill.

Dr. Wheeldon and Dr. Henry Skinner, then with the Morris Arboretum, were instrumental in bringing additional deciduous azaleas to Winterthur. Native and oriental deciduous azaleas were used

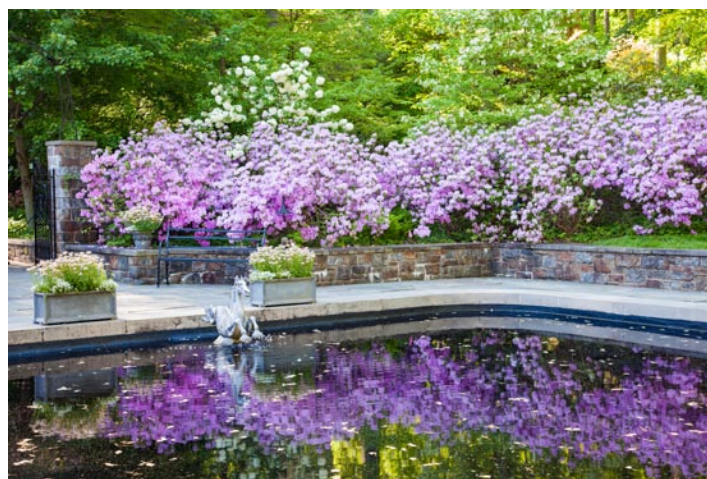


Figure 5. *Rhododendron mucronatum* ‘Winterthur’ at the Reflecting Pool. Photo credit: Lois Mauro.



Figure 6. Corridor of 'Miss Susie' in the Pinetum in late April/early May. Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

in the garden in the early 1900s, as early as 1907 for *R. arborescens* and several Ghent and Exbury Hybrids in the 1940s. In the Pinetum, he combined their soft-yellow, pink, and orange flowers with the blue of Spanish bluebells (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*).

In the 1950s, he helped sponsor the doctoral work of Dr. Henry Skinner on native azaleas and in return received several plants. Our azalea flowering season ends with the plum-leaf azalea (*R. prunifolium*). S.D. Coleman and the U.S. National Arboretum sent several shades of orange-red plum leaf azaleas in the early to mid-1960s and they continue to brighten Oak Hill in July and August. (Figure 7.)

Perhaps it is best to summarize du Pont's love of azaleas in his own words from an article written for the *Quarterly Bulletin of the ARS*, 1962: "The longer I grow azaleas, the more I realize how beautiful they are when grouped in harmonious colors and pleasing contrast. They naturalize in every imaginable terrain and contour (no

other species are in bloom in Delaware for almost four months) and due to their various height and habit of growth are never monotonous, and are perfect with countless varieties of bulbs and wild bloom."⁹

Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library will be on tour for the 2025 convention of the Azalea Society of America.

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About the Author

Linda Eirhart is the Director of Horticulture, Senior Curator of Plants at Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library. Linda and her staff are responsible for the horticultural care, design, and documentation of the Winterthur Garden. Their goal is to preserve H.F. du Pont's original design intent for the garden while enhancing the seasonal display and plant collection. She recently revised the Winterthur Garden book, "The Winterthur Garden Guide: Color for Every Season."



Figure 7. Evergreen azalea 'Firefly' with natives, *R. austrinum* and *R. canescens* on Oak Hill. Photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.

Chapter News



Jean Beaudry bench dedication at London Town and Gardens.
Composite group photo courtesy of Don Hyatt.

Ben Morrison Chapter *Diane Reinke, Secretary*

The Ben Morrison Chapter members joined with members of the Potomac Valley Chapter (PVC) of the American Rhododendron Society at London Town & Gardens in Edgewater, Maryland, on September 20 for the dedication of a memorial bench to the late Jean Beaudry of the PVC. Both chapters had contributed to the cost of the bench, which overlooks the South River. Jean's husband Norm had selected this lovely location for the bench. The Beaudry Garden in Potomac, Maryland, features many beautiful azaleas and rhododendrons, along with numerous companion plants. Attendees at the event enjoyed a delicious potluck picnic at London Town, and Phyllis Rittman, Treasurer of the PVC, spoke in memory of Jean, highlighting her friendly welcome to new chapter members. A toast in Jean's memory concluded the event.

London Town & Gardens is well worth a visit. The site, which is open from April to November, features year-round blooms, including wildflowers, redbuds, azaleas, crepe myrtles, beauty berries, golden rod, hellebores, camellias, and winter jasmine.

Northern Virginia Chapter *Rick Bauer, Corresponding Secretary*

The Northern Virginia Chapter held our fall meeting on October 22. We had a good turnout with 35 in person attendees and four more online. We tried something new this time. Instead of an outside

speaker, we had a number of our members give presentations on their gardens. This included a couple of presentations on azalea bonsai. We had five presentations and three in reserve which we will probably give at a future meeting. As we have done at many of our meetings, we also had a plant exchange. While some plants were brought by members, we once again had a large number of azaleas from the chapter inventory which we are trying to reduce. Everyone had the opportunity to get at least four or five plants.

After the meeting, we had our Executive Committee meeting where we went over the chapter finances for the year and the proposed budget for next year. We identified the slate of officers for next year and finalized our schedule for 2024. We had a successful year financially and identified end of year donations for 2023.

Our last meeting of the year is our Holiday Social/Annual meeting which will be held on December 3 at Kirkwood Presbyterian Church.



President Barb Kirkwood welcomes the attendees. Plant exchange plants are in the foreground. Photo by R. Bauer.



Joe Klimavicz presents photos of his garden which mainly consists of his hybrids. Photo R. Bauer.

Renewal Time is Here!

By Pat Insley, Membership Administrator

The holiday season is coming up fast and before you get swamped, please remember that it's also time to renew your Azalea Society of America annual membership for 2024. You have two ways to check and see your renewal status: check the expiration date on the mailing label of *The Azalean* OR check your membership data on the ASA website.

If your membership date expires on 12-31-2023, on the label or is only through 2023 on the website, then you will need to renew for 2024. Dues will remain at \$30 per year. I will send out paper mailing reminders and printed renewal forms in mid-December for those members who typically renew by regular mail with a check. At that time, I'll also email reminders for the folks who renew online. Please let me know if you didn't previously receive an email reminder or if your email changed so that I can make sure we are communicating. My contact information is listed below.

As a refresher, to renew online use the JOIN US, RENEW OR DONATE link on the ASA website (<https://azaleas.org/joinus/>). If you prefer to renew by mailing in a printed renewal form, one may be found in the envelope with your issue of *The Azalean*. You can also print a form from the ASA website.

As in previous years, if you are renewing online, we recommend using the PayPal credit card payment service. When you SUBSCRIBE to renew, your annual membership fee will be automatically deducted through the PayPal service. To set up this option, click on YEARLY AUTOMATIC SUBSCRIPTION near the bottom of the Join Us page (<https://azaleas.org/joinus/>)

If you would prefer to not renew online, but would like to use a credit or debit card, you can contact me directly and I can process your payment information. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about your membership and thank you again for your continuing participation in The Azalea Society of America, Pat Insley, Membership Administrator, Azalea Society of America, 13035 Farthingale Dr, Herndon, VA 20171, 703-597-7539, membership@azaleas.org.



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Member Profile: Buddy Lee

Editor's Note: This issue begins a series of prominent ASA member profiles told in the member's own words.

Tell us about yourself and your background.

I grew up on a dairy and row crop farm in Southeast Louisiana about 50 miles north of New Orleans. This area at that time was a very backwoods rural place and there were only five students in my first-grade class. I always loved being outdoors and was fascinated with both plants and animals. I began collecting different types of seedlings from the wild when I was around six or seven years old. As a child, in the springtime, my family and relatives would visit a large, regionally well-known azalea and camellia garden. This garden, Zemurray Gardens, would attract thousands of visitors each spring during the azalea blooming season. I was amazed by the vibrant colors of these beautiful azaleas that were planted in massive beds under towering pine trees. It was a real joy to walk along the trails that encircled a 20-acre lake in this garden. The reflection of the blooming azaleas would light up the edges of lake, and the effect was stunning. When I was 15 years old, along with my chores at our farm, I began working part-time and summers at local wholesale plant production nurseries located a few miles from our farm. Evergreen azaleas were a major production crop at these nurseries. I loved working at these plant farms. I basically “cut my teeth” in the horticulture industry at these businesses. The owners of these nurseries allowed me to train and work in every aspect of the industry, from propagation to production, sales to whatever needed to be done. I graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana, and later from the University of New York, Albany, New York. My major areas of studies included health, biology, and agriculture. I always had a small nursery from a young age; however, in the late 1970s, I began expanding the business. The name of the nursery was Savannah Spring Nursery, located on an area of our family farm. In 1983, I married Dixie Toepke from Bloomington, Illinois. We had a son, Ryan, in 1984, and a daughter, Kelsey, in 1987. I continued to grow and expand my nursery until around the end of the 1980s, when a couple periods of extremely cold weather damaged a large percentage of my nursery stock. At this time, I began working at other jobs to supplement the family income. In the early 1990s, with the help of my wife and children, we made the

decision to continue my nursery, not as a production nursery anymore, but as a new plant development and evaluation nursery. I named this new venture Transcend Nursery. From the early 1970s, I had been collecting different genera of plants and dabbling in controlled pollination with a goal of developing new and different plants, especially evergreen azaleas. All this plant stock became the basis of my new push into plant breeding. At this time, I began working night shift as a registered nurse at a local hospital. The night shift nursing position allowed me to work at my nursery during the daylight hours. Alone with my wife and children, we potted up and cared for thousands of little seedlings from controlled crosses and/or open pollinated selections. I began looking for a partnership with a larger nursery to assist me in this new plant project;



however, at that time, nearly all the large production nurseries were not that interested in adding any new plants to add to their listings. Flowerwood Nursery in Mobile, Alabama, showed some interest and with a good bit of back-and-forth conversation, ups and downs, and lots of time and effort, the first wave of the new Encore® Azaleas marched onto the market initially in Atlanta, Georgia, around 1995. I have continued to be very involved with plant breeding and connected very closely with Plant Development Services Inc., a new plant development business that works directly with Flowerwood Nursery Inc.

“cut my teeth” in the horticulture industry at these businesses. The owners of these nurseries allowed me to train and work in every aspect of the industry, from propagation to production, sales to whatever needed to be done. I graduated from Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana, and later from the University of New York, Albany, New York. My major areas of studies included health, biology, and agriculture. I always had a small nursery from a young age; however, in the late 1970s, I began expanding the business. The name of the nursery was Savannah Spring Nursery, located on an area of our family farm. In 1983, I married Dixie Toepke from Bloomington, Illinois. We had a son, Ryan, in 1984, and a daughter, Kelsey, in 1987. I continued to grow and expand my nursery until around the end of the 1980s, when a couple periods of extremely cold weather damaged a large percentage of my nursery stock. At this time, I began working at other jobs to supplement the family income. In the early 1990s, with the help of my wife and children, we made the

Who are your influences/heroes?

I would say that my parents and extended family had a large initial impact on my insight into plants. Growing up on a farm, you just get caught up in the cycle of preparing, planting, caring for, and harvesting crops. It became almost second nature. Other influences would include people from my area that had nurseries or were plant enthusiasts such as Margie Jenkins, Dr. John Thornton, Dr. Larry Brown, James Campbell, John and Evelyn Rochester, and many others, as well as nurserymen such as Price Magee, Susie Magee, Hezzie Loyd, Greg Smith, Greg Smith Jr., Tom and Bill Dodd, Howard Schillings, Clarence Mizell, and numerous others. Later, academic professionals such as Dr. Augie Kerr, Dr. John Creech, and Mr. Fred Galle were always encouraging—offering advice. Finally, I must mention the many members of the Azalea Society of America and the American Rhododendron Society, from whom I absorbed much excitement and knowledge of the genus *Rhododendron*.

Other than azaleas, what other plants do you like to grow, collect, or hybridize?

Over the years, I have grown, collected, or hybridized countless varieties of plants from numerous genera. I have long-term projects with gardenia, holly, crepe myrtle, blueberry, distylium, and numerous native plant groups. I never saw a plant that didn't stir my interest.

What got you started on azalea hybridizing?

I would say that growing up in a farming environment really set my thoughts to the miracle of plants. The steps of preparing the soil, planting the seed, nurturing the young plants, watching them mature, pollination, seed/crop set, and then finally the harvest is just an amazing cycle of events. With just a bit of imagination, all those farming concepts became my gateway to ornamental plant breeding.

What is your favorite of all your introductions?

Well, I really do not have a favorite of my introductions. Whatever variety that is in full bloom at the time that I am looking at it is my favorite introduction at that time. As a plant breeder, always attempting improvement, I would usually ponder the idea of what I could have bred or selected for that would have made that plant even more spectacular. However, if I had to choose one of my introductions and label it my "favorite," I would choose Autumn Rouge® simply because this azalea was not only the first seedling to bloom from the multi-blooming azalea project, but also was the first azalea that was named from that project.

What are you working on now in terms of future azalea hybrids?

One of the pie-in-the-sky attempts of most evergreen azalea plant breeders is to develop a plant that has golden yellow bloom that is highly fragrant. I continue in that pursuit and can report that I am 40 years closer to that goal than I was 40 years ago. Presently, I am working to develop and stabilize various leaf colors on evergreen azaleas. The potential for exciting new azalea cultivars looks very promising.

What advice would you give to beginner azalea hybridizers?

If you are really interested in plant breeding, you need to just jump right into the process. Plant breeding is a long-term process with a lot of ups and downs. Even under the best of situations, the learning curve of all the processes can be challenging. Build on your failures and successes. Appreciate and enjoy each of the steps along the way. Have a basic understanding of azaleas and build on your knowledge of them, however, you do not need to be an azalea "expert" to be successful. In today's world, you are only a computer click away from all the information that you will need to help you along the way, but always remember, nothing can ever replace the face-to-face interaction and the exchange of information and ideas that you get when you meet and talk to some well-seasoned and

experienced azalea gardeners, enthusiasts, collectors, and breeders.

What do you do for fun when not working?

Dixie and I have eight grandchildren and we enjoy all the activities that they are involved with. They are a real joy in our lives. I love vegetable gardening and sharing all the excess produce. I enjoy hiking and have come to appreciate "native meadows." I also enjoy genealogy research.

Anything else you want to add or think would be of interest to ASA members?

I became a member of the ASA in 1982 and have continued to be a member of the Louisiana Chapter since that time. I served a couple terms as national president and was active on the national board for numerous years. I was very interested in evergreen azaleas even before I ever heard of the ASA. Looking back, joining the ASA had an enormous impact on all my azalea endeavors. The collective azalea knowledge of the entire group was impressive to say the least. The exchange of ideas and information was and continues to be free flowing. Lifelong friendships were established.

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If I Could Save Blooms in a Spreadsheet...

By Barry Sperling—Alexandria, VA

...The first thing that I'd like to do,
Is to save every flower 'til eternity passes.
Bouquets. Displayed brightly for you
~ inspired by Jim Croce's "Time in a Bottle."

I stared at one of the last surviving azaleas, planted decades earlier, then ignored. Plants weren't of interest, but I did mow the lawn. (When I was told to do so.) Mid-summer was harsh, and the inspiration appeared, although I don't know from where, to water the plant. Strangely enough, it lived and grew! I was encouraged to grow more azaleas.

Starting in 1995, I noted the first full flower date (FFF) of each plant. Why? It's been too many years to remember, but I've always kept notes on interesting things. I wrote the FFF of each plant beside its icon on my hand-drawn maps of the beds.

Year after year, I'd make new maps and compare the previous ones' FFF dates, plant by plant. Both the azalea collection and the pile of maps grew.

Spending time with the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA, I found several uses for the data:

1) I estimated the dates when the most plants would be in full bloom, based on data from early bloomers. The early plants were found to be in

full bloom about two weeks after their FFF; mid-season ones about one week. Invitations to other gardeners to see the best displays went out early enough for their planning purposes.

I organized group visits to good display gardens in the Northern Virginia region, again with enough time for people to arrange their schedules and join the tours. Early seasons and late seasons could be accounted for, without the need to say "You should have been here last week!"

2) I played with a spreadsheet creating an average FFF date of typical plants. After some years, graphs made sense, and I even threw in records of early snowdrops and crocuses. I've documented several of the azaleas for 28 years. To be in the spreadsheet, a plant must be in roughly the same microclimate year after year: place, soil, and shading.

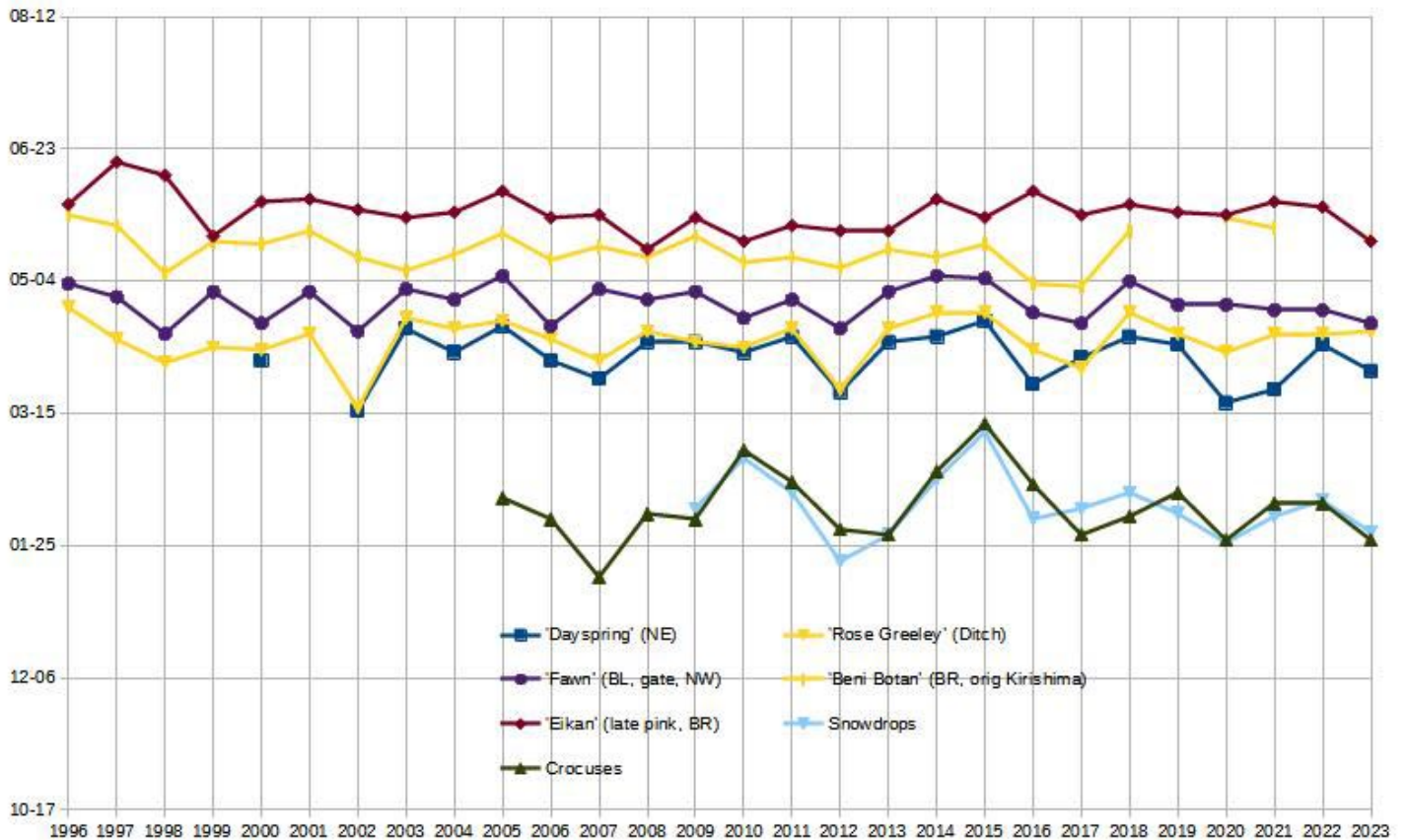
3) The most important value of FFFs, for me, is that they support my desire to see explosions of color in the spring. After the previous dark, cold, gray, white, and brown season, a large mass of color is perfect. I get that profusion, not by collecting together plants created by the same hybrid-

Pictured below and on next page are backyard panoramas of the Sperling Garden. Photos by Barry Sperling.





Graph of First Full Flower Dates in Barry Sperling's garden.



Historical Bloom Time Data

From the Garden of Barry Sperling, Hybla Valley VA

	'Dayspring'	'Coral Bells'	Rose Greely'	'Amoenum'	'Red Ruffles'	DVW	'Bee Gee Red'	'Prudence'	'Fawn'	'Lorna'
1996		04-19	04-24	04-24			04-27	05-01	05-03	05-03
1997		04-03	04-12	04-13			04-22	04-28	04-28	05-04
1998		03-30	04-03	04-03		04-11	04-16	04-13	04-14	04-23
1999		04-05	04-09	04-16	04-27	04-29	04-27	04-27	04-30	05-07
2000	04-04	03-31	04-08	04-06	04-12	04-17	04-17	04-25	04-18	04-26
2001		04-11	04-14	04-22	04-30	04-23	04-24	04-25	04-30	05-01
2002	03-16	03-20	03-17	04-02	04-16	04-19	04-19	04-19	04-15	04-23
2003	04-16	04-16	04-20	04-22	04-22	04-22	05-04	04-29	05-01	05-03
2004	04-07	04-17	04-16	04-20	04-23	04-22	04-23	04-25	04-27	05-07
2005	04-17	04-19	04-19	04-21	04-29	05-03	05-05	05-02	05-06	05-10
2006	04-04		04-12	04-10	04-12	04-17		04-25	04-17	04-24
2007	03-28	04-04	04-04	04-20	04-22	04-25	04-27	04-27	05-01	05-09
2008	04-11	04-10	04-15	04-18	04-26	04-20	04-30	04-26	04-27	04-29
2009	04-11	04-17	04-11	04-20	04-28	04-23	04-26	04-28	04-30	05-07
2010	04-07	04-07	04-09	04-10	04-19	04-17	04-15	04-19	04-20	04-25
2011	04-13	04-14	04-16	04-19	04-17	04-26	04-21	04-25	04-27	05-01
2012	03-23	03-25	03-24	03-27	03-29	04-09	04-09	04-13	04-16	04-16
2013	04-11	04-12	04-16	04-15	04-15	04-25	04-25	04-27	04-30	05-05
2014	04-13	04-18	04-22	04-26	05-05	04-26	04-27	05-02	05-06	05-09
2015	04-19	04-20	04-22	04-23	04-23	04-30	04-27	05-04	05-05	05-08
2016	03-26	04-01	04-08	04-04	04-12	04-20	04-19	04-23	04-22	04-28
2017	04-05	04-04	04-01	04-02	04-11	04-15	04-14	04-17	04-18	04-24
2018	04-13	04-16	04-22	04-23	04-30	05-02	05-02	05-03	05-04	05-07
2019	04-10	04-09	04-14	04-17	04-20	04-21	04-21	05-01	04-25	04-29
2020	03-19		04-07	04-01	04-03	04-14	04-18		04-25	04-26
2021	03-24	04-08	04-14	04-15	04-10	04-21	04-20		04-23	04-30
2022	04-10	04-10	04-14	04-15	04-13	04-25	04-23		04-23	04-30
2023	03-31	04-07	04-15	04-05	04-04	04-25	04-17		04-18	04-25
Count	23	26	28	28	25	26	27	24	28	28
Earliest	03-16	03-20	03-17	03-27	03-29	04-09	04-09	04-13	04-14	04-16
Latest	04-19	04-20	04-24	04-26	05-05	05-03	05-05	05-04	05-06	05-10
Average	04-05	04-08	04-11	04-13	04-18	04-21	04-22	04-25	04-25	04-30

izer, but by transplanting those with similar FFFs to the same bed. Then, the bed erupts as an amazing display, as you can see in the accompanying pictures.

Another possible use involved the effects of climate change. Unfortunately, this topic has become politicized beyond the science, so I'll only speak to the data in the graph. Any warming trend seems slight, and I haven't applied any fancy stats here, such as linear or non-linear regressions. An effect of warming is to strengthen storms, but strong spring storms have a northerly wind component on their trailing edge, which brings down cold air from Canada more aggressively than weaker storms. In 2023, a strong, late-season storm froze the early azalea buds, which had been encouraged to swell by the warm winter, leading to a later than expected blooming. Thus, warming produces pluses and minuses, and this data might not be appropriate to throw into the debate.

I'm completing a second full notebook of maps, their plant icons marked with names and FFFs, ready to start a third. This has no endpoint, as the roll of the seasons brings spring around again and

again, with beds eager to show off, and hundreds of FFFs to brighten our lives!

About the Author

Barry taught math and computer science in Northern Virginia public schools for 31 years, retired, and then went into industry, programming for 13 years. In the mid-1990s, he attempted to keep a few azaleas alive, then joined the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA. He served in the capacities of President, Vice President, and, for 10 years, the editor of their publication, *The Clipper*. He's also written a variety of articles for *The Azalean*.

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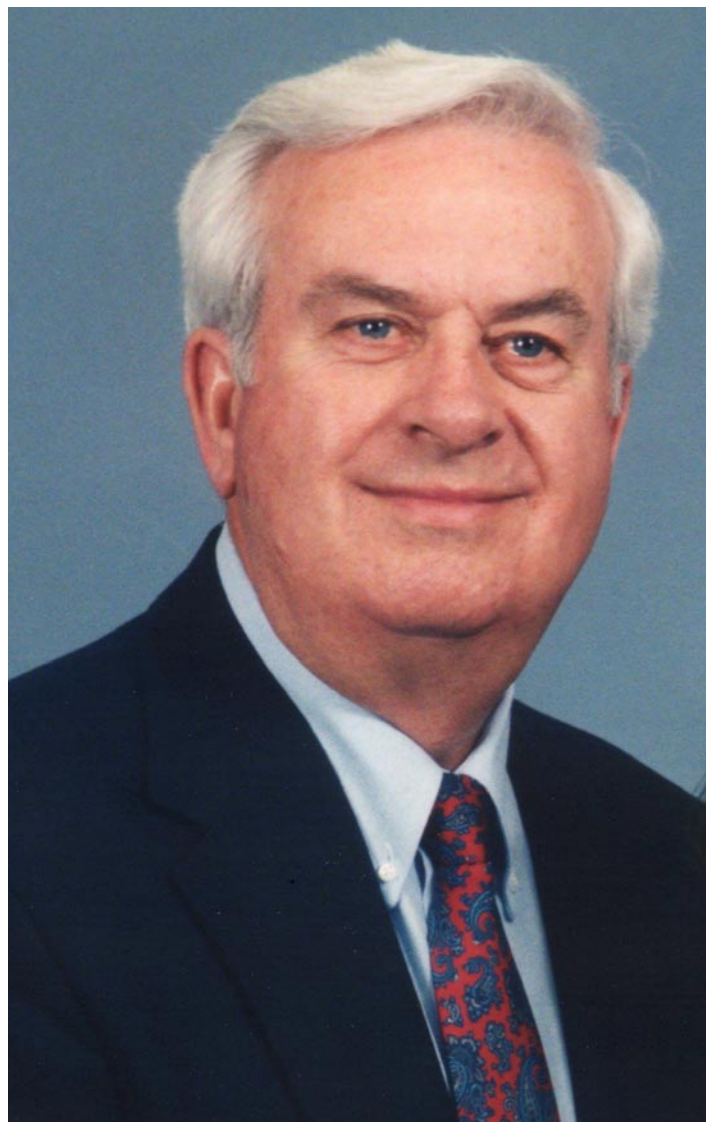
In Memoriam: Earl Sommerville

By Ken Gohring—Marietta, Georgia

Earl Sommerville, a native of Palmyra, Indiana, passed away on October 17, 2023. After graduation from high school, he served nine years in the US Air Force, concluding his service in Marietta, Georgia, where he married and settled, later forming an automatic sprinkler company that he operated for over 20 years. As an avid game hunter, he observed native azaleas in areas where he hunted. Earl developed a special interest in native azaleas and collected attractive plants for his residential garden. This interest grew, and he studied and became an ardent propagator of the plants. He communicated with others of like interests. That and study of the work of others enabled him to become efficient in propagating and growing deciduous azaleas. These relationships with others resulted, in some cases, the gift of select varieties collected from natural populations. He developed natural hybridizing techniques where he arranged the pollination of different species by planting selected plants in close proximity. His early work included propagating many plants with seeds and cuttings. He arranged for the registration of some 28 of his selections. One of the outstanding features of the Sommerville Azaleas is the number of ball-truss blooms, something that Earl worked on in his hybridizing efforts.

Some of the plants he worked with were extremely difficult to propagate with asexual means. For example, his *R. flammeum* hybrid selection ‘Orange Carpet’, a tested triploid, is almost impossible to propagate efficiently with cuttings. Such experience led him to pursue different propagation methods. So, at the age of 70 years, he proceeded to study micro propagation techniques. He learned the methods and set up a tissue culture laboratory in the basement of his home. He successfully propagated most of his named cultivars and supplied plantlets to nursery people to be grown to a marketable size. Earl offered his services to others, particularly for azaleas species that were difficult to propagate with conventional methods. He inspired others to use micro propagation techniques.

For his work, Earl has been recognized as an Azalea Society of America Legacy Hybridizer. While his work did not include the methods that



many recognized hybridizers use, his methods and results were considered to be significant and worthy of recognition. One prominent nursery person has characterized his work: “He has done more than anyone else I know to promote and help get into commercial production azaleas that do well in the Southeast. He did this at his own expense and time and effort and never asked for a penny in return...”

An early description of Earl’s garden can be found in the winter 2001 issue of *The Azalean* and an article appeared in the Summer 2006 issue of *The Azalean* on some of Earl’s named azaleas. Both articles are available on azaleas.org to ASA members. His website is <https://www.earlsommerville.com>.

Clean Seed: No Soap Required

By Rick Edwards—Cedarcreek, Missouri

I will share with photographs and text a simple method of processing azalea seed pods to extract all of the seed with no residue or trash. The results are clean pure seeds. I use simple tools easily obtained at little cost. The methods are easy to follow and share with others. Initially this method appears to be slow and perhaps takes more time compared to crushing, crumbling, or pulverizing dozens of seed pods at a time. However, when considering the time required to sort out the trash from the seed leaves no doubt that for the end result of clean pure seed, this method crushes the competition and the time clock. From my own experience, I am convinced that most folks don't realize they probably throw out at least one-third of the seed with the trash! This method has proven itself with deciduous and evergreen azalea seed pods. I'm sure it will work equally as well with *Rhododendron* species and cultivars also.

We need a clean white dinner plate. The smooth surface makes moving, sorting, and sweeping seeds and trash easy, efficient, and clean. There are no obstacles, nooks, folds, crevices, for seeds to hide in, or a rough surface for seeds to cling to, or for dust and debris to accumulate in or on. In one quick sweep of a napkin or tissue, we have a spotless, clean, surface to work on as we move to a different batch of seed pods, whether more of the same or a new species or variety.

We also need a six-inch pair of new, or lightly used, side cutters also called diagonal pliers or dikes. We need very sharp blades. Second, they must be completely free of grease, oil, dirt, or electrical tape adhesive residue. Azalea seed are tiny, light, and many species and varieties have thin membranous extensions on the seeds for aiding in wind distribution.

Next, we need some fine-point tweezers in the six to eight inch size range. It can be a benefit to have two pairs with one pair having the point smooth and another pair with serrated points. We will use these to handle and dissect each seed pod. I sometimes use a larger set of tweezers for getting small seed pods out of the bottom of yogurt cups I use for drying them.



Fig. 1 Here are the tools I use. Nothing costs more than \$10. For the purpose of taking photographs without distracting glare from lights, I used a white plain paper plate. The pencil is for size reference only.

When I have large batches of pods, I sometimes use plastic cricket cups with screened lids. You can make your own with sour cream or cottage cheese tubs with lots and lots of small holes in the lid. A small drill bit and battery drill or screw driver will get the job done. If you can't secure your open-top containers, you need to have a lid. But you must have excellent air exchange or you may get fungus problems. That can ruin a whole batch of seed if you don't catch it in time to stop it. Check them once a week. Take time to dump them onto a plate or even your hand if it's just a few, and let some air flow around them. If they feel a little damp, wad up some tissue and stuff the bottom of the cup with it. After a few days, pull the tissue and replace it if you need to. This should prevent any fungus from getting a start.



Fig. 2 All seed pods should be dry before harvesting seed. Yogurt cups are ideal for drying. Larger batches of pods can put into larger containers. Be sure to place a label with each batch of pods. Set them aside away from any chance of kids or kittens knocking them over. Do not dry them in direct sunlight.

The pods should be dry to the touch for harvesting. Depending on their condition when they were collected, most will probably dry to a brown color, but some may retain quite a bit of green coloration. The key points are they should be completely dry to the touch and hardened. If you can easily squeeze them between the thumb and finger, they probably should dry for another week. They don't need to be hard as concrete, but there should not be any give when you squeeze them.

I usually keep just two or three pods on my plate at a time. With very large pods, which may produce well over 100 seeds per pod, I may work with one pod at a time on the plate. However, azalea seed pods come in a variety of sizes from 0.5 cm to well over 4 cm length. They can be squat and fuzzy to a skinny banana smooth as a baby's bottom. At all times the pods should be held and kept over the plate. At all stages, seeds may be falling out of the pod and we want every one of them.



Fig. 3 Seed pods can be various sizes and shapes.



Fig. 4 After the pods dry, I put them into sandwich bags with labels inside the bag and store them in the freezer until I am ready to process them and separate seed from their pod. I can keep them for at least three years and for most species/varieties up to five years without any reduction in germination rates.

Sometimes, I wear magnifying eyewear. I don't always and I try to get by without them. But, there are times when I need a little magnification. Some species seeds are very small and it can be a little hard to tell between seed and debris. Even though my method keeps the seeds very clean, it's not perfect. In that case, I recommend buying a set of magnifying head gear. You need both hands free to manipulate the seed pods.

Fig. 5 I found this pair for less than \$20. Absolutely money well spent! With the adjustable Velcro head band, it fits all sizes. It flips up completely out of the way when I don't need it. The drop down circular lens raises the magnification up to counting hairs on a gnat's bottom! (Take a breath, relax. Life is good. Look at all those seeds!)



The next necessity is good lighting. But, you don't have to go out and buy special lighting. With the advent of LED lights, any old desk lamp from school days, flea markets, or the basement is fine. The LED bulbs deliver high lumen output with very low wattage usage, so those old lamps will carry the electrical load and them some! When I have a choice, I opt for full spectrum daylight temperature of 6500K (Kelvin scale). Most daylight bulbs are 5000K, which is fine—but choose 1600 lumen, also referred to as equivalent to 100-watt output. I use two lamps and light from opposite sides so as not to create any shadows.

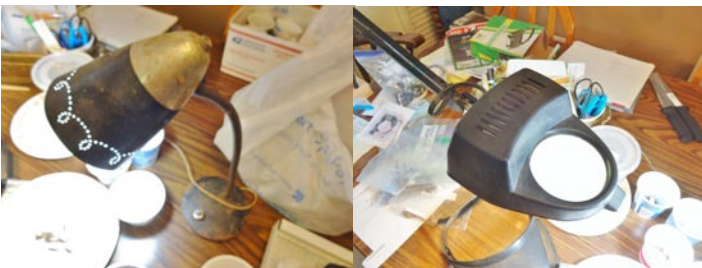


Fig. 6 At left, a very old desk lamp with an LED 5000k 100watt equivalent bulb. At right, an extension lamp with a 6500K daylight bulb. This lamp has a built-in magnifying lens.

So, let's get started. Here are three *Rhododendron prinophyllum* seed pods. (Fig. 7) These are wild collected (WC) pods from a plant growing along the Buffalo River, Newton Co., Arkansas. I collected them when they were completely green at the end of July. They were full sized, but a long

way from ripe. I didn't want to drive several hours to go back down there, then hike a couple miles back to the site in late September. So, I collected a few of the largest pods. I allowed them to ripen/dry in a yogurt cup. The seed matured and I will show you good ripe seeds from these pods.



Fig. 7 *R. prinophyllum* seed pods, on the plant in July (left) and dried and ready to be dissected or processed (right).



Fig. 8 I use the side cutters to crimp or slightly cut into the seed pod—just enough to create a crease or score completely around the pod. I am not cutting the pod in two. I rotate the pod—making sure to score each of the segments or capsules. Notice I cut near the base or receptacle end of the seed pod. You'll see the reason for this shortly.



Fig. 9 Here is a pod "creased" completely around. Notice where the crease is.



Fig. 10 I take my fingers and gently work the two parts of the pod back and forth to crack them into two parts or ends of the pod. I gently tease the two parts away from each other until they are completely separated. Pictured at right is the cap or base of the seed pod. Notice the cap is empty. That's what I like to see! Nice and clean and no seeds trapped or left in the cap. Always check this and use the points of the tweezers to extract any seeds.

Fig. 11 Here's the other part or end of the seed pod. The central column (placenta) with the seeds attached remains in the end section of the seed pod.





Fig. 12 See those sections or capsules in Figure 9 and 10? I use my thumbnail and run along those seams to separate each of those capsules from the others. I want to deal with each capsule individually to clean the seed out of each one. After I separate them, I use the tweezers to gently pull each capsule away from the placenta.

At left, one capsule is pulled away from the placenta. At right, each capsule has a central structure shaped like a knife blade. It is actually the part of the placenta that supports the seeds in the capsules. You can see it sticking out of the capsule in the left photo. Use the tweezers to gently pull it out of the capsule. **MAKE SURE TO DO THIS OVER THE PLATE.** Seeds will come falling out of the capsule as you do this. At every step seeds will be falling out of the pod.



Fig. 13 Next, take the point of the tweezers and gently run it down the length of the capsule to pull out any seed left in the capsule. There usually is, so do this every time.

Fig. 14 Each capsule is pulled away from the others. Look at all the seeds falling out and I haven't done anything yet to remove seeds from each capsule! In the process, a section of the placenta is included in each capsule. The seeds are attached to the placenta.



Fig. 15 At left, all done with this seed pod. There are exactly 99 seeds from this one pod. I counted them! At right, this is what it's all about! Nice, clean seeds and an equally neat little pile of trash.

Another approach is to pull each capsule gently toward the end of the pod. This works well with large seed pods. Each capsule will come away from the placenta pulling seeds with them. Remember, do everything over the plate. You will usually have the entire placenta completely intact. Seeds will be scattered over the plate but there will always be seeds left on the placenta. Often, there will be a lot of

seeds left on the placenta. Use your tweezers to gently scrape them away from the placenta. The seeds are arranged like shingles on a roof or scales on a fish. See the figures below.



Fig. 16 At left, pulling a capsule from the placenta. At right, on the left side of this photo is the placenta with the capsules removed and a pile of pure clean seed.



Fig. 17 Here is the placenta with seeds attached. The capsule outer shell has been removed.

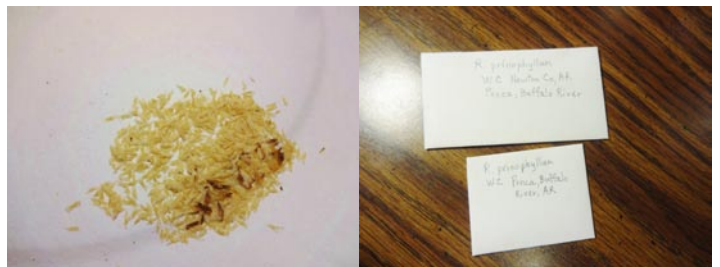


Fig. 18 Estimate 600 to 800 seeds from nine pods. Packaged and ready to share.

Fig. 19 Even the trash pile is nice and clean when you process the seed pods this way. It beats the pants off beating and crushing seed pods and trying to clean the seed from the trash!



The next page are some photos showing variation in seeds and pods.

If the pod is completely brown and the end has started to split open, the seed near that open end can be much darker than the rest—the end will often stain a darker color than those deep inside the pod. Sometimes the seed looks like it was burned with flame, but it's still very good seed. (See Figure 20.)

I would add this. If you don't think you will be back there, take a chance! You might be surprised! Grab a few seed pods and see what luck brings! Besides, you might have some little gold nuggets to share with friends...and me... maybe? Life is good. It's better with friends and azaleas!

Welcome New Members!

New At Large members include:

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- Shawn Varughese, Tampa, FL

The Alabamese Chapter welcomes:

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- Michael Cloyd, Indian Spgs, AL
- Tara & Tim Nelson, Dadeville, AL
- Linda Pearce, Auburn, AL
- Carolyn Plott, Auburn, AL
- Eileen Vogel, Grand Bay, AL

The Arkansas Chapter welcomes:

- Tina Coley, Sherwood, AR
- Julia Rivera, Hot Springs, AR

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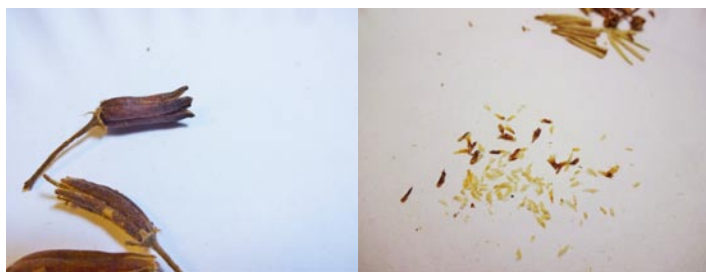


Fig. 20 A very ripe pod that has opened. The seeds at the open end are stained, but are still very good viable seeds.



Fig. 21 These are high elevation *R. arborescens* pods. Most were not pollinated and then drought caused a low percentage of pods maturing. But, one lone pod produced good fully ripe seeds—enough to have a start in your garden.



Fig. 22 This method required a delicate touch aided by good light and magnification, but here is the reward from patience and a good method of processing seed pods.

As a word of encouragement, I will share a short story from a friend of mine, Jonny Larson from Norway. He said, “I would like to show you this photo. It is a twig of *Rhododendron vernicosum*, I self-pollinated the plant in May. In late August I had an accident and cut the twig off! I really wanted those seeds, so in desperation it put it in a glass of water in my greenhouse where it remained for some weeks. The seed pods were still green. Then I took it out of water and just set it on shelf in full sun, still in the greenhouse, to give it heat. In the end, it looked like you see on the photo. The seed pods had turned brown, and the seeds were fully ripe, not even green any more, rather brownish. Note that the leaves and twigs are more or less dead. Voila!” Figure 23 is the branch Jonny tells us about.



Fig. 23

About the Author

I'm Rick Edwards. I live in Cedarcreek, Missouri—a post office and thousands of acres of Oak/Hickory forest and glades. I live at the highest point of a three-mile-long dolomite ridge above Bull Shoals Lake southeast of Branson, Missouri. I can be contacted at rickedwards098@gmail.com. See more about me on page 78 of this issue.

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