

The Azalean

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Journal of the Azalea Society of America





President's Letter

Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina

As I write this, it is 3 pm on Tuesday, May 19, here in Hendersonville, NC. The outdoor thermometer reads 96 degrees, and it has been over two weeks with no rain. Once I finish this letter, I will head out to water a few new plantings. On the plus side, the established plants seem to be withstanding the heat and drought pretty well, so far.

I believe one of the challenges we face as a Society going forward is Climate Change and its effect on plant health. Even our native azaleas are sensitive to environmental changes. Increasingly severe weather events like Hurricane Helene, shifting climate zones, and emerging pests and diseases now pose a serious threat to azalea populations worldwide. Future azalea hybridizers will need to address climate resilience and plant health in the breeding of new azalea varieties.

However, it is not enough for our hybridizers to produce hardier plants. We also need to address some of the challenges we face as a Society. As we prepare for our 50th anniversary, here are a few things we need to be aware of.

• Maintaining and Expanding Membership

The ASA relies on a mix of home gardeners, collectors, hybridizers, and professionals. As interest in azaleas fluctuates due to changing gardening trends, climate shifts, or competition from other ornamental plants, keeping and attracting new members will be essential. Conference fees and membership dues need to remain affordable to keep the organization accessible to everyone.

• Funding and Resource Constraints

As a nonprofit, the ASA depends on membership dues, advertising revenue, and sponsorships. Rising costs—such as travel for conventions, publication production, and online platform maintenance—will continue to strain both Society and personal finances. Maintaining low dues and convention fees against rising costs will continue to be a delicate balancing act.

• Digital Transformation and Outreach

The Society's online database, Legacy Project, and *The Azalean* journal are vital resources, but maintaining and updating them requires ongoing investment in technology and content creation. Expanding digital outreach to reach a broader audience, especially younger gardeners—will be important for long-term engagement.

• Preserving Rare and Uncommercialized Hybrids

The goal of the Legacy Project to document and make rare, non-commercial azalea hybrids available is commendable. Without active promotion and support, these unique cultivars risk disappearing forever. The ASA must continue to advocate for their preservation and make them accessible to members and the general public.

• Coordination Across Chapters

With local chapters and small groups hosting conventions and events, ensuring consistent quality, safety, and coordination across regions will be a logistical challenge. Standardizing best practices, managing travel and accommodations, and fostering collaboration will be the keys to successful events.

• Public Awareness and Education

While the ASA has a strong base of enthusiasts, raising public awareness about the ecological and cultural value of azaleas will help secure broader support. Educational outreach, partnerships with schools, and media engagement will help strengthen this mission.

In summary, the ASA's future will hinge on balancing membership growth, financial sustainability, digital innovation, and the preservation of azalea heritage. Addressing these challenges will be critical to ensuring the Society's continued role as the leading advocate for azaleas in the United States.

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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Deadlines for *The Azalean*:

- Fall 2026 issue is due July 15, 2026
- Winter 2026 issue is due October 15, 2026
- Spring 2027 issue is due January 15, 2027
- Summer 2027 issue is due April 15, 2027

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

On the Cover

Spicebush swallowtail butterfly visiting the flower of a Plumleaf azalea (*Rhododendron prunifolium*). Photo by Carol Allen.



Member Profile: Peggy Cox



Peggy Cox with Encore® Autumn Lilac®. Photo courtesy of Allen Owings.

Peggy Cox is the former president of the Louisiana Chapter ASA and past board member of the ASA and an ASA Distinguished Service Award (2017) recipient. We asked her to tell fellow ASA members a bit about herself.

I retired from the LSU AgCenter in 2012 after 23 years. My job as a Horticultural Research Associate at the Burden Research Station in Baton Rouge suited me well since I loved being outdoors and gardening. My responsibilities included evaluating herbs and perennials for the nursery trade. I cultivated a beautiful herb garden and perennial borders along with growing these plants on the nursery container yard. During this time, I participated in several national herb conferences and I remain a member of the Herb Society of America, always growing culinary herbs close at hand. The last 10 years at Burden, I was the Curator of Windrush Gardens, which is the old historic family garden rooms created by Steele Burden around his family home adjoining the Rural Life Museum. This special 440-acre LSU property, in the middle of Baton Rouge, is now known as the Burden Museum & Gar-

dens. Since I retired, a new Welcome Center has been added along with several gardens and buildings in the front of the property. For several years, I conducted a March Azalea Stroll, guiding tour groups throughout Windrush to show off the many azaleas in full bloom. After caring for these old gardens full of ancient oaks, statues, camellias, and azaleas—restoring and renovating many areas after hurricanes and deterioration from old age, I am still very attached to this place.

When my husband (now deceased) and I found a property backing up to Sweetwater Creek (empties into the Tangipahoa River north of Hammond, LA) with *Rhododendron canescens* growing naturally along the Creek with many other special native shrubs, there was no question we would finish this hand-built wooden house and give up city life in Baton Rouge. I love having the woods, and the creek naturally keeps grandchildren and great grandchildren entertained in the wonderful outdoors. I am blessed with a large, loving family and have continued my passion for gardening with unbridled control. I am especially fond of growing and sharing flowers and edibles like blueberries and seasonal vegetables.

I have accumulated many gardening friends over the years like Allen Owings and Buddy Lee, but the one person who stands out as my greatest and dearest inspiration is the late nursery lady Margie Jenkins. She passed away in 2020 at the age of 98. I often visited her at her nursery east of Amite, LA, and the visit always included a golf cart ride around the nursery to see what was blooming and she always insisted on sending me home with plants for my ever-expanding home gardens. She was especially proud of her outstanding selections of *R. canescens* and the seedlings she grew. She also produced a beautiful assortment of Southern Indian azaleas with some of my favorites being 'Fisher Pink', 'George Lindley Taber', 'Southern Charm' and the fragrant 'Gulf Pride'. She promoted several Robin Hill Hybrids, naming a white selection for her deceased son Freddy. She loved 'Conversation Piece' for its variability of hot pink and white flower petals. Like Margie, I love the large ruffled flowers of the compact Robin Hills. Back in the 1970s, Margie had been inspired by noted landscape architect Neil Odenwald to grow native plants for the nursery industry and championed this mission of using natives throughout the South. I remember one of her presentations talking about several native shrubs, which occurred naturally on my home site including American beautyberry, strawberry bush, silverbell, *Illicium*, and *Itea*. I must mention the garden named for her at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station, which includes her favorite azaleas and many favorite native trees and shrubs. Our Louisiana Chapter of ASA often has meetings and workdays there to help with the upkeep of her garden.

Since Buddy Lee graciously donates his new Encore® introduction yearly at our national conventions as well as there always being more tempting azaleas offered for sale at the convention, I am running out of room for shrubs. I will always find room for another

Kurume or Satsuki Hybrid and I do love 'Hampton Beauty', 'Amelia Rose', 'Sunglow', and 'Red Slippers'.

My friend Jackie, as longtime treasurer of the Louisiana Native Plant Society, once told me she just plants/grows what she likes and does not worry whether it is native. I do try to grow as many natives as possible, at the same time realizing all our evergreen azaleas originated in Asia.

My flowerbeds are bursting with purple coneflowers and daylilies. If a deciduous hybrid azalea does not survive I may plant another blueberry plant in its place. Pollinator plants are included wherever I can find space, especially lantanas, verbena, and porterweed, cupheas and salvias for hummers and coleus for summer color. Mints are used as groundcovers until I need their space, but I baby lemon balm for my green tea. Come spring, I let cilantro go to seed and fill in with basil and roselle hibiscus for the summer. I had help thinning out my huge patches of swamp sunflowers and blue asters and am using the space for tomato plants, peppers, eggplant, and cantelope. I grow muscadines and blackberries on the property's cow fence next door. I feel the need to grow more of my own food, but at the same time I love sharing the gift of beauty and pleasure the azaleas contribute to our world.

Illicium floridanum remains as the primary undergrowth in the woods down by the creek, growing happily along with the native azaleas and huckleberries and an occasional witchhazel, silverbell, *Cyrilla*, and *Itea*. If we could only be rid of privet hedge and tallow trees. I am not fond of the briars that reach out and grab my delicate skin as well. The deciduous trees in the woods contribute shade for the delicate understory plants and chopped up dried leaves in the fall provide great organic mulch for my precious azaleas along with other favorite garden plants.



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The U.S. National Arboretum Azalea Collection: A History in the Making

By Haley NA. Gilbert—Springfield, VA

Prelude

The U. S. National Arboretum in Washington, DC, is fast approaching its centennial and there's much to celebrate out in the Azalea Collection. As one of the first gardens established on the grounds, the Azalea Collection represents the rich history of the Arboretum and has significantly influenced what it is today. Each collection at the Arboretum has a story to tell, and I'm here to tell the stories of the Azalea Collection and share what comes next.

I'm charmed by the thought that among the only ones to have witnessed the entire evolution of the National Arboretum over the past century are some of our oldest native trees. Walking beneath the tallest tulip poplars and white oaks, I imagine how this landscape has changed around them over the decades. Since my appointment as Horticulturist of the Azalea Collection, I've taken time to learn what I can about the development of this garden. I've rummaged through boxes of archival documents and studied old maps and photographs all in an effort to understand our past. To best manage this garden moving forward, I need to know the path that brought us here.

Historic Hillside

The U.S. National Arboretum was enacted by Congress in 1927 with the directive to "establish and maintain a national arboretum for the purposes of research and education concerning tree and plant life"¹. The original portion of land acquired by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for this assignment included the highest point on the grounds, the Mount Hamilton hilltop.

Twenty years after the founding of the Arboretum, Mount Hamilton became the chosen site to trial thousands of Benjamin Y. Morrison's Glenn Dale azalea hybrids (1946–1947). This novel breeding project set the trajectory for the Azalea Collection and inspired the advancement of azalea breeding within the United States. In the years to follow, the Azalea Collection continued to amass, preserve, and display what would become one of the largest collections of azaleas in the country.

A Living Museum

The Azalea Collection is a living reference collection of azalea cultivars, species, and hybrids. Thirty-five

acres of woodland garden are segmented into distinct areas: the Mount Hamilton hillside, the loop area, the Morrison Garden, and the surrounding green spaces. The loop area showcases the progressive lineage of azalea breeding through its collection of cultivar groupings. Our goal within this space is to maintain a well-rounded collection of azaleas from numerous breeding programs that demonstrate an array of superior, horticulturally valuable traits. Swaths of Kurumes envelop the lower switchback trail and a variety of Satsuki Azaleas decorate the space around the Lee Garden Pond. Historic and local breeding programs are represented, including the Beltsville/Yerkes-Pryor, Kehr, Holly Springs, and Glenn Dale azaleas planted within and around the Morrison Garden. The most recent azaleas accepted into the collection were donated by Carolyn Beck of the Azalea Society of America. These cultivars are products of the Stewart and Klimavicz breeding programs.

After working in this collection for almost four years, I've developed an interest and appreciation for the outliers. I tend to gravitate towards our deciduous azaleas because of their warm colors and spherical flower trusses. Cultivars within the Aromi ('King's Trumpeter', 'Aromi Sunny-side-up', and 'Country Cousin') and Knap Hill ('Buzzard', 'Klondyke', and 'Sandpiper') groupings always stop me in my tracks when in bloom.

While *Rhododendron* is the primary genus emphasized within this garden, a variety of other exotic and native plants can be found throughout the entire Azalea Collection. Multiple varieties of cherry trees (*Prunus* spp.) adorn both sides of Azalea Road and awaken in a symphony of blushing blooms come early spring. The collection of witch hazels (*Hamamelis* spp.) on Mount Hamilton has some recent additions, 'Dishi' and 'Amethyst', both of which offer a vibrant splash of color in the dead of winter. I often encourage visitors to wander through the grove of dawn redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) to get a closer look at their majestic structure. These deciduous conifers become even more enchanting as their autumn foliage turns from green to rusty gold.

Mount Hamilton maintains its natural woodland aesthetic but is now being further developed to host a growing number of ornamental plants we manage



Dawn redwood grove at the U.S. National Arboretum. Photo by Haley Gilbert.

within our germplasm database. Masses of Glenn Dale azaleas remain on the hillside, and those who visit can walk amongst these original plantings as they stroll along the interwoven trail system.

The Mission of Discovery

A primary function of the U.S. National Arboretum is to serve as the Woody Landscape Plant Germplasm Repository (WLPGR) within the National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS). This designation signifies our role in maintaining genetically valuable botanical material and providing accessibility of this material to verified institutions for scientific research purposes. Botanists, plant breeders, universities, arboreta, and nursery professionals look to the Azalea Collection as a place where rare germplasm can be acquired through the distribution of cuttings.

Fulfilling this duty and curating this collection is a process of continual discovery. Our research team often ventures into wild spaces both nationally and internationally to collect germplasm deemed valuable for the advancement of horticultural research. The variety

within our wild-collected azalea species fascinates me. Our most interesting plants often come with the best stories:

Three men set out on a plant expedition in 2013 to locate an isolated population of *Rhododendron austrinum* growing on the riverbanks of the Escambia River in the Florida panhandle. This population had been discovered by one of the men, Ron Miller, who would act as their guide. Rick Lewandowski and Kevin Conrad, two highly regarded horticulturists with a thirst for exploration, launched their boat and motored upstream under Miller's direction. This population of *R. austrinum* was unlike any other, Miller had told them. The open-pollinated community had evolved to develop a distinct "chandelier-like" form with colors ranging from translucent pink to white with a yellow blotch to orange suffused with rose... (as recalled from my conversation with Kevin Conrad).

Years after this trip, Kevin Conrad would tell me the story of this expedition and recall how the shoreline



Mount Hamilton Glenn Dale azaleas, 1950s. Unknown photographer.



Mount Hamilton Glenn Dale azaleas, April 2026. Photo by Haley Gilbert.

was flush with hundreds of azaleas towering overhead as he drifted along the riverbanks taking cuttings. He made a point to convey the importance of continuing to source plants from the wild for research and why doing so upholds the mission of the U.S. National Arboretum. The plants collected on this trip are but one example of the unique material we have within the Azalea Collection and the role the Arboretum plays in germplasm preservation.

The Next Chapter

Managing the Azalea Collection at the U.S. National Arboretum has granted me the unique opportunity to apply my creativity and passion for the natural world to a space that achieves a greater purpose. I do not take lightly the responsibility of caring for a collection of this magnitude or importance. With this in mind, I have a lot to consider regarding the future of this garden. I am constantly envisioning and reimagining how to improve this collection in the years ahead.

True to the Arboretum's purpose, I aim to promote the Azalea Collection's relevance within the scientific

community by continuing to source and maintain valuable plants that can be requested by scientific institutions. More U.S. National Arboretum plant introductions and wild-collected germplasm are added to the azalea garden each year, and I encourage the proper entities to utilize this genetic treasure trove for horticultural advancement.

Last fall, a small team of my coworkers and I retrieved a group of 30 *Fothergilla* accessions from our research site in Maryland and transplanted them just north of the Morrison Garden. These plants were in decline at their previous location due to poor soil conditions. Four species of *Fothergilla* were planted: *Fothergilla gardenia*, *F. major*, and the more recently identified diploid *F. parvifolia* and *F. milleri*. *Fothergilla parvifolia* and *F. milleri* are very rare, and their unique genetic traits increase their scientific value. To ensure a successful transplant, we left half of this collection at their original site with plans to return for the rest this coming fall. I'm eager to see how they perform in their new location.

This garden has a long history of trialing azaleas to assess their value in the horticulture industry. I would like to reinitiate this practice and continue this tradition. I've been fortunate enough to connect with a local breeder, Joe Klimavicz, who has generously allowed me to shadow his azalea breeding program. Klimavicz has been developing a new generation of yellow deciduous azaleas that I am very impressed with. Through collaboration with present-day azalea breeders like Joe, I hope to continue to grow our collection of cultivars.

The Azalea Collection is the largest garden at the Arboretum, and over half of the collection is planted within a native woodland. A component of sustaining a forested garden of this kind is understanding woodland management. Developing a suitable environment for the plants we display involves retaining select species of native trees in order to support sequential generations of upper-canopy forest. To further explain, let me give you an example of the thought process behind this:

Due to the regional oak decline and impending beech leaf disease (BLD), certain members of the white oak group and native beech trees are subject to increased risk of premature failure. Given this inevitable situation, we must adapt our management strategies to better accommodate these changing environmental conditions. In place of some of our more susceptible trees, I may opt to maintain a canopy of alternative native species such as the black tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica*),

tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), or pignut hickory (*Carya glabra*) to create the necessary shade for our understory plants.

Companion planting is a delightful way to complement our azaleas and enhance the beauty of this garden. An obvious choice for this landscape is flowering understory trees such as dogwood (*Cornus* spp.) and redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), but planting lesser-known species such as hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.), loblolly bay (*Gordonia lasianthus*), and American yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentukea*) can provide diversified interest. In my opinion, necessary additions to the collection are *Kalmia latifolia* and more large leaf *Rhododendron*. I am currently in communication with Carol Segree, president of the American Rhododendron Society's Potomac Valley Chapter, to learn more about *Rhododendron* cultivars that can thrive in this landscape.

Managing this garden as the only full-time employee comes with many challenges. As you can imagine, it is quite difficult to inventory this massive collection when the majority of the plants look almost indistinguishable when not in flower. Removing invasive weeds, pruning the azaleas, and keeping our plants watered during the brutal summer droughts is not easy. This is precisely why I am so grateful for my small team of volunteers and my summer intern who dedicate their time and efforts to helping me improve this landscape. The work is never finished in a garden of this scale, and every one of them makes a difference.

Continuing the Legacy

The Azalea Collection remains a memorial of achievement for what the U.S. National Arboretum has accomplished over the last century. It is the plants we care for and the stories they tell that make this place remarkable. I am privileged to oversee this beloved collection as we continue the legacy and keep making history.

Notes and References

1. U.S. Code Sixty-Ninth Congress, Sess. II, Chap. 505, p 1422, uscode.house.gov/statviewer.htm?volume=44&page=1422.

About the Author

Haley Gilbert is the Azalea Collection Horticulturist, with the Agricultural Research Service at the US National Arboretum in Washington, DC. She can be reached at Haley.Gilbert@usda.gov.



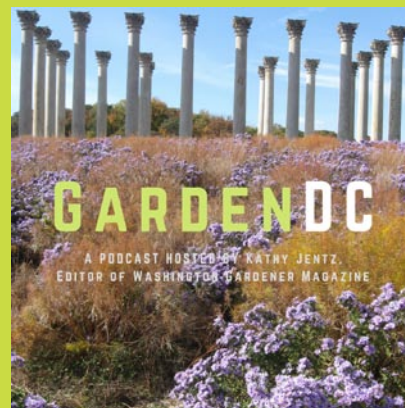
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2026 Distinguished Service Award Winners: **Joseph Klimavicz** **and Sandra F. McDonald, Ph.D.** *By Robert Lee—Independence, Louisiana, and Charlie Andrews—Cumming, Georgia*



Joseph Klimavicz (left) received the 2026 Distinguished Service Award from Aaron Cook (right), President, of Azalea Society of America (ASA), at the recent ASA annual meeting in Athens, GA. Photo by Kathy Jentz.

Joseph Klimavicz

In recognition of Joseph Klimavicz's many contributions to the Azalea Society of America he was presented with a 2026 Distinguished Service Award. Klimavicz is a well-known figure within the azalea community. He has been a hybridizer of evergreen azaleas since 1980, and, more recently, deciduous azaleas, providing azalea lovers with dozens of new and exciting cultivars. The Klimavicz hybrids are known for their beauty and vigor. They are featured in a newly dedicated Klimavicz Legacy Garden at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna, VA.

Klimavicz has been generous in sharing his knowledge of azaleas, their hybridization, and their propagation. He has spoken at Azalea Society conventions,

chapter meetings, and to other plant groups. He has given countless tours, organized and ad hoc, of his home garden and the azalea test beds, and has readily shared plants, cuttings, and seeds with many people and groups.

Klimavicz has served as President to the Northern Virginia Chapter for multiple terms. He has generously donated the naming rights of some of his hybrids as a means of generating funds for the chapter.

The Society greatly appreciates his past and continued contributions and the promotion of azaleas, and thanks him for his service and dedication.

Sandra F. McDonald, Ph.D.

For over 30 years, Sandra F. McDonald, Ph.D., has volunteered her talents and technical expertise in support of the goals of the Azalea Society of America.

She is an accomplished hybridizer whose many azalea introductions grace private and public gardens. She is a prolific author who has written many excellent articles. You transcribed Henry Skinner's hand-written notes from his 25,000-mile excursion studying native azaleas and developed an outstanding illustrated reference for researchers.

For this and your many other contributions to the Azalea Society, we take great pride in awarding McDonald the Distinguished Service Award.

Note: McDonald was not able to attend the awards presentation in person, so no photo is available. The award certificate was delivered to her following the event.

Best Article Announced

Congratulations to the Best Article in *The Azalean* in 2025! The members voted for "Remembering the Past: Our First Ten Years of ASA" by Aaron Cook in the Winter 2025 issue.

The Elusive Azalea Plant Bug

By Carol Allen—Germantown, Maryland

The azalea plant bug (*Rhinocapsus vanduzeei* Uhler), is a bug that does it all! They are predators, scavengers, and herbivores, and will take the occasional nip out of an irritating human.

They emerge from their over-wintering egg stage just about the time that the first deciduous azaleas are flowering. Kristine Braman and Ramona Beshear wrote of seeing them on Florida, Alabama, Piedmont, and flame azaleas during the months of March and early April in their study in the early 1990s. They were looking at the emergence of several different plant bugs and their predation on species of thrips, both in the field and in laboratory trials.

R. vanduzeei's sucking mouthparts distinguish it from other species of plant bugs that feed on thrips. The azalea plant bug was found to feed on other small insects and on azalea pollen.

In the mid-1970s, Silver Spring residents, Dr. August Kehr and Judson Hardy observed their feeding on *Rhododendron bakeri*, *R. calendulaceum*, and *R. viscosum*.

Their observations added to the work of Thomas J. Henry and A. G. Wheeler, working out of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, also in the 1970s.

They hypothesized that the azalea plant bugs might be detrimental to azalea breeding operations due to their feeding on azalea pollen and stamens.

Although first described in 1890, there have only been a few references to *R. vanduzeei* in the literature. The Maryland Biodiversity Project has only four reports of the insect being observed in Montgomery, Prince Georges, and Baltimore counties, all in the month of May.

It is a small insect, measuring only 3.5 to 4.0 mm long as an adult. The nymphs are bright-red and mature to more of an orange color with darker wings. They have a peculiar habit of ducking to the underside of a leaf when disturbed and immediately emerging on the top of the leaf at the other side.

Azalea plant bugs are native insects that are found from Ontario south to North Carolina and west to Missouri. The few records of its presence may be due to its short life cycle. Although it emerges in April, after feeding on the azalea bloom flush, it disperses to raspberries and is generally not found by mid-July in the DC region.



Azalea Plant Bug in Prince George's County, MD.
Photo by Bill Johnson, <https://www.marylandbiodiversity.com/>.

Have you seen it? If you do, there is no reason to control this elusive insect because its damage seems to be largely insignificant.

About the Author

Carol Allen describes herself as a committable plant-a-holic. She has more than 25 years' experience in the horticulture industry, with a special interest in plant pests and diseases; is a Licensed Pesticide Applicator in the state of Maryland; and is an ISA-Certified Arborist.

This article previously appeared in *Washington Gardener* Magazine's "InsectIndex" column.

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2026 Annual Convention Summary

By Kathy Jentz—*The Azalean*, Editor

The 2026 ASA National Convention was held in Athens, Georgia, from Sunday, April 12, to Wednesday, April 15, 2026. Athens is the home of the University of Georgia and it is a charming college town with wonderful hospitality and beautiful gardens.

This year's meeting was unique in that it was not hosted by a local chapter, but instead was put on by the ASA Board of Directors and local volunteers. This model proved quite successful and might be duplicated in the future.

The Board met on Sunday and that was followed by a social hour to make new friends and connect with previous acquaintances. Following that, Todd Lasseigne, Executive Director of Bellingrath Gardens in Theodore, Alabama, gave a presentation on the history of azaleas at Bellingrath and how staff are working to significantly increase the azalea presence in the future.

This was followed by the plant sale in a nearby hotel room. Plants were provided by Ronnie Palmer, Shane Harris, Vivien Abney of East Fork Nursery, Lazy K Nursery, and Buddy Lee. Buddy Lee also provided the convention favors. Encore® Autumn Kiss®, which is a reblooming semidouble bicolor with hot-pink edges and a blush-pink center.

On Monday morning, we toured the State Botanical Garden of Georgia with Jason Young and his staff. The gardens included many native plants to the Georgia Piedmont region as well as a children's garden, bog garden, threatened and endangered species garden, and much more. The Asian Garden is where most of the azalea collection is located. We ate lunch there and then spent the afternoon at White Oak, the home garden of Dale Berrong. Berrong's property is 225

acres of wooded land with dramatic elevation changes up to 175 feet. There are mature stands of southern hardwoods and beneath are planted tens of thousands of plantings of both evergreen and deciduous azaleas, other rhododendrons, Japanese maples, magnolias, camellias, and many other species.

On Tuesday, we went to four gardens. Two of these gardens are those of colleagues and famous horticultural authors/plant breeders, Dr. Michael Dirr and Dr. Allan Armitage. Dr. Armitage eagerly shared facts behind many of the unique plants in his garden, while Dr. Dirr quizzed us mercilessly on Botanical Latin names and plant identification.

The lovely garden of Mike and Susan Floyd had many deciduous azaleas that were numbered and a handout provided attendees the name of the cultivar and the hybrid group. The bloom display was incredible and we seem to hit the timing there just right. In addition to the azaleas, the Floyds had impressive collections of clematis, Japanese maples, daylilies, and camellias.

Ram Giberson's private garden was chock full of a diverse collection plants and water features as well as interesting pieces of garden art and seating areas. Multiple paths wound through the landscape revealing a delightfully eclectic garden.

In between the garden tours, we had a catered lunch at Oconee Veterans Park near Watkinsville, Georgia.

That evening was a buffet dinner at the Athens Country Club. During the meeting, awards were presented to Aaron Cook for the best article in *The Azalean* for 2026. Distinguished Service Awards were presented to Dr. Sandra McDonald and Joe Klimavicz. Cook extended an invitation to attend the 2027 ASA Convention in Hendersonville, NC. Charlie Andrews spoke about Georgia's azalea hybridizers. They included Ralph W. Pennington, James Harris, John Kohli, Earl Sommerville, and George and Mary Beasley.

Each morning, the attendees gathered for breakfast provided by the hotel and this was perfect to sit and get to know folks better. We exchanged tips on nearby gardens and garden centers to visit as well as those to visit on our journey home. Carol Allen and I shopped at the Cofer's Home and Garden in Athens and visited South Carolina Botanical Garden at the recommendation of some fellow attendees.

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.



Dr. Allan Armitage points out unusual plants in his home garden.



The entrance water garden at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia.



Dr. Michael Dirr described the Redbud 'Black Pearl' in his home garden.



**Above, Dale Berrong, Buddy Lee, and Shane Harris at the White Oak garden.
Below, a group of azaleas at Dale Berrong's White Oak garden.**



Planted pots on pedestals in Ram Giberson's home garden.



On the back cover, Group/Bus 1 (top) and Group/Bus 2 (bottom) at Mike Floyd's garden. In the middle is one of Mike's front azalea borders.

All photos are by Kathy Jentz. Many more photos from the 2026 National Convention are posted to the Azalea Society of America's Facebook page.

Chapter News



Attendees celebrated the Margie Jenkins Azalea Garden 20th anniversary celebration. Photo courtesy of Allen Owings.

Louisiana Chapter

Allen Owings

The LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station recently hosted a 20th anniversary celebration on March 12 for the Margie Jenkins Azalea Garden located on the grounds of the station. Much work and re-planting of this special garden has taken place over the last couple years due to extensive hurricane damage.

Established in 2006, the Margie Y. Jenkins Azalea Garden honors the extraordinary legacy of Margie Y. Jenkins, a nationally recognized plantswoman and horticultural pioneer celebrated for her passion, generosity, and decades of influence on the nursery and landscape industry. Over the past 20 years, the garden has become a vibrant showcase of azalea diversity, a living resource for research and education, and a treasured destination for Louisiana gardeners and visitors. The anniversary garden party brought together friends, supporters, horticulture professionals, and community members to commemorate two decades educational outreach, and the enduring impact of Margie Jenkins' work.

Guests were given an opportunity to enjoy walks through the garden, connect with AgCenter faculty and staff, and experience the garden at one of the most beautiful times of the year.

"We are proud to honor Margie Jenkins' remarkable contributions to not only Louisiana horticulture but to Southern horticulture," said Dr. Christine Coker, Station Coordinator. "The azalea garden stands as a testament to her passion for plants and people."

Event sponsors were Buddy Lee, Allen Owings, Bracy's Nursery, Azalea Society of America-Louisiana Chapter, Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association, Plant Development Services, and the Southeast Louisiana Nursery Association.

Northern Virginia Chapter

Rick Bauer, Corresponding Secretary

The chapter held our first meeting of the year on March 22. We had a great turnout of 28 members to hear Dr. Sally Valdes from the Xerces Society, give us an interesting presentation on pollinators. She described the different types of pollinators, focusing mainly on insect pollinators. She also described things which adversely impacted on these pollinators such as insecticides and loss of habitat. The presentation was well-received with members asking many questions throughout the presentation and at the end.

We also had another of our very popular plant exchanges. Members were able to share their extra plants and acquire new ones to add to their collections. Being early in the season, a large number of hellebores were available as well as amaryllis, azaleas, and other plants.

The chapter was well represented at the society convention in Athens, GA, with 21 members in attendance. The chapter will be sponsoring the 2028 ASA National Convention in Northern Virginia.

We conducted workdays at the Klimavicz Legacy Garden at Meadowlark Botanical Gardens on April 21 and 30. We are in the process of finalizing the signage for the garden. We also held a plant sale at Meadowlark on April 25. This is our major fundraiser for the year.



Joe Klimavicz assists a customer at the Meadowlark plant sale. Photo by Carolyn Beck.



Dr. Vales gives her presentation on pollinators. Photo by Rick Bauer.



Mini-Convention with the Arkansas and Texas Chapter in Shreveport, Louisiana. Photo courtesy of David Creech.



Scholarship recipient Nicholas Hunter with his sponsoring professor Dr. Michael Maurer. Photo courtesy of Dr. Maurer.

Texas Chapter News

Sherrie Randall, Secretary

Our March 2026 meeting preceded the Mini-Convention with the Arkansas and Texas Chapter in Shreveport, Louisiana. President Carol Power reported she has communicated with personnel at Millard's Crossing for a new azalea garden site determination and approval. Chapter members have since traveled to Forest Hill, LA to purchase 3-gallon azaleas for this fall project.

Our 2025 plant sales were so successful, Sherrie Randall made a motion to once again sponsor a \$1,000 horticulture scholarship. Our recipient Nicholas Hunter, is shown here with his sponsoring professor Dr. Michael Maurer.

The Texas Chapter would like to thank Ronnie Palmer, President of the Arkansas Chapter, for his idea of a mini-convention to held in our tri-state area of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Convention visits included the Norton Art Gallery and Gardens, the American Rose Center, nurseries, and concluded with some good Italian food. The mini-plant sale included Aromi evergreens and a selection of azaleas from Ronnie and Donna's Azalea Hill nursery. We look forward to next year's mini-convention site in Arkansas.

Vaseyi Chapter

Aaron Cook, President

The Vaseyi Chapter had a busy spring. We had 24 members attend the Athens convention. It was a great convention and we had a good time socializing with other Society members and visiting some beautiful gardens. On Saturday, April 25, we visited Marilyn Grist's garden "A Tout Le Monde." Marilyn's garden is really many gardens in one. The Asian Walk and Conifer Hill were particularly notable. On Tuesday, April 28, members traveled to visit Vivian Abney at East Fork Nursery. We had a great day of shopping, socializing, and having milk and cookies. The Chapter also presented Vivian with our highest award. The Augie Kher Memorial Award. We are also working on completing the planning for the ASA 2027 Convention. Save the dates for April 25–28, 2027!



Vivian Abney at East Fork Nursery was presented with the Augie Kher Memorial Award by the Vaseyi Chapter. Photo courtesy of Aaron Cook.

Welcome New Members!

Alabamense:

- Lisa Browne & Scott Rush, Newnan, GA
- Julie Conrey, Mobile, AL
- Debra Kulaw, Hartselle, AL

Arkansas:

- Jason Chaplin & Emily Edwards, Branson, MO
- Gavin Hawk, Saint Louis, MO
- Carol Habarka, North Little Rock, AR
- Linda Kuiken, Hot Springs Village, AR
- Georgia Pagan, Cabot, AR

At-Large Members:

- Grace Dorsey, Delta, PA
- Virginia Griswold, Clarksville, GA
- Tanner Hamerling, Athens, GA
- Sandee & William Khoury, Byron, GA
- Trent McCracken, Athens, GA
- Lav Yadav, Griffin, GA

Ben Morrison:

- Ethan & Lynne Assal, Potomac, MD
- Daniel Johnson, Lewes, DE
- Paul Lockwood, Silver Spring, MD

Northern Virginia:

- Ira Burnim, Silver Spring, MD
- John Ferrell, Milford, DE

Texas:

- Cindy Smyers, Grapeland, TX

Texas Forest Country:

- Kelsey Jouanicot, Colmesneil, TX

Vaseyi:

- Steven Ayres, Asheville, NC
- John Walter, Asheville, NC

Remembering the Past: Our Third Decade (1999-2008)

The Azalea Society of America

By Aaron Cook—Hendersonville, North Carolina

In this third edition of our history, we look back at the Conventions held from 1999 through 2008. I have shortened and changed the tense in many of the original articles. To give full credit to the original authors, I have included their byline with each section. As I worked on this article it brought back many fond memories. I helped with the planning and execution of both the 2001 and 2008 Conventions. I first met Bob and Rosa McWhorter at the 2004 Convention and was saddened to hear of his recent passing.

21st ASA National Convention—1999

(Credit: Maarten van der Giessen)

The 1999 Azalea Society of America Annual Convention was held from March 31 through April 2 at the historic Radisson Admiral Semmes in Mobile, Alabama. Sponsored by the Louisiana Chapter, the event marked a welcome return to the “Azalea City,” a location fondly remembered by many members from the successful 1985 convention.

Built in 1940 and renovated in 1985, the Admiral Semmes stood as Mobile’s oldest and most elegant hotel and served as an ideal headquarters for the gathering. Conveniently located on Government Street in the heart of old Mobile, the hotel placed attendees within walking distance of the Dauphin Street entertainment district and the historic site of the original 18th-century settlement at Fort Condé.

Mobile proved to be a fitting host city. Home to some of the largest and most innovative commercial azalea nurseries in the United States, as well as some of the oldest Southern Indica gardens in the world, the region offered a rich horticultural setting. The combined influence of Louisiana and Alabama hybridizers further enhanced the experience, making the convention a true feast for azalea enthusiasts.

The convention officially opened Wednesday afternoon with registration at the Admiral Semmes, followed by a well-attended social hour and the ASA plant sale. As always, rare, and unusual plants were quickly claimed. The evening program featured a presentation by Tom Dodd III of Dodd and Dodd Nursery, who introduced the “Confederate Series,” the culmination of two decades of his breeding work.

Thursday was devoted to garden and nursery tours. Attendees traveled first to the gardens of Tom and Becky Root, formerly known as Clarke Gardens, which had been carefully restored after years of closure and storm damage. The group then visited Bellingrath Gardens, a renowned estate famous for its extensive azalea and camellia displays and year-round floral interest. From there, participants crossed Mobile Bay to Flowerwood Nursery’s research and development facility, Plant Development Systems, Inc., where Jim Berry shared Flowerwood’s vision for introducing new plants into the retail market. The day concluded with a visit to the garden of Bobby Green, noted for his work preserving and reintroducing historic camellias and species azaleas.



Fig. 1 Dr. Eugene Aromi, a retired Professor of Education from the University of South Alabama and the developer of the Aromi Hybrid Azaleas, was a speaker at the 1999 ASA Mobile National Meeting. His presentation was entitled “The Aromi Hybrids.” His breeding and selecting began in 1969 with evergreen azaleas and in 1971 with deciduous azaleas. Recognizing the poor performance of the Exbury-type deciduous azaleas in the Mobile area, his goal was to develop large flowering Exbury-like azaleas that would thrive in the deep South by incorporating American native azaleas into a breeding program. Photo by William C. Miller III.

Friday’s tours focused on Semmes, Alabama, the heart of the nation’s azalea industry. Stops included Dodd and Dodd Nursery, the Blackwell family’s florist azalea operation, Van der Giessen Nursery’s propagation facilities, Magnolia Nursery, and Mobile Botanical Gardens. Each site offered insight into different aspects of azalea production, breeding, and display.

On Saturday, the Board of Directors met in the morning while the plant sale reopened for a final opportunity. Many attendees lingered to enjoy additional time with friends, explore Mobile, or simply reflect on a memorable and enriching convention in the deep South.

22nd ASA National Convention—2000

(Credit: Buddy Lee)

The annual meeting and convention of the Azalea Society of America was held in Charleston, South Carolina, from March 22–24, 2000, and proved to be an adventurous and exciting series of events. According to the official Charleston visitors’ guide, Charleston was described as America’s most beautifully preserved architectural and historic treasure, boasting a rich 300-year heritage. Since its founding in 1670, the city had played an important and often pivotal role in American history. The people

of Charleston were exceptionally helpful and welcoming during the planning process and expressed great enthusiasm that the Azalea Society of America had chosen their city as the site for this national convention.

A wonderful array of knowledgeable speakers was assembled for the evening lectures and slide presentations. These speakers provided informative and engaging programs, and the time and energy devoted to each presentation were clearly labors of love and generous gifts of expertise to the membership. On Wednesday evening, presentations were given by Kathy Woolsey, horticulturist at Cypress Gardens, who spoke on azaleas in the Charleston area; Donald H. Voss of Vienna, Virginia, who discussed how azaleas came to American gardens; and Hank Bruno, trails manager at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia, who explored azalea diversity. Thursday evening featured Jeff Beasley, co-owner of Transplant Nursery in Lavonia, Georgia, speaking on native azaleas; Fred and Jean Minch of Puyallup, Washington, discussing azalea hybridizing; and Maarten van der Giessen of Van der Giessen Nursery in Semmes, Alabama, presenting commercial criteria for azalea evaluation. The Friday night banquet featured Barbara Stump, editor of *The Azalean*, who shared insights on building the Ruby Mize Azalea Garden from the ground up.

Planning the convention tours proved challenging due to the abundance of fascinating sites in the Charleston area and the limited time available. With only two days scheduled for tours, difficult choices were made, and attendees were encouraged to extend their visits before or after the convention. On Thursday morning, March 23, buses departed early for Magnolia Plantation, a historic 17th-century estate known for America's oldest public gardens and one of the nation's largest collections of azaleas and camellias. The tour then continued to Middleton Place, a carefully preserved 18th-century plantation and national historic landmark, where lunch was served. If time permitted, the day concluded with a guided bus tour of Charleston's Historic District.

Friday's tours began in the Moncks Corner area with a visit to the azalea and camellia gardens at Mepkin Abbey, a former plantation transformed into a monastery and developing botanical garden. The next stop was Carolina Nurseries, Inc., the largest nursery in South Carolina, where lunch was served and a presentation on azalea hybrids was given. The day concluded at Cypress Gardens and ended with a garden bus tour of historic Summer-ville, known as "Flowertown in the Pines," where azaleas and dogwoods were in full bloom.

23rd ASA National Convention—2001

(Credit: Bob Stelloh)

"Celebrating Native Azaleas" was the theme of the 2001 ASA Convention, held June 14–17 in Asheville, North Carolina. It was the first convention held outside of the normal spring flowering season and served as a major celebration of the region's extraordinary diversity of native azaleas and other plant species. William Bartram 1791 described the view of *Rhododendron calendula-ceum*, in the following manner. The brilliant orange and yellow blooms were so vivid that he believed the mountainside was on fire. This species, along with 15 other azaleas native to North

America—nine of which grew naturally in the Blue Ridge Mountains—formed the thematic foundation of the convention.

Asheville served as an ideal host city, both culturally vibrant and ecologically remarkable. Founded in 1792 at the confluence of the French Broad and Swannanoa Rivers, the city has grown into the largest urban center in western North Carolina. Its winding streets, historic architecture, and thriving arts community make it a popular destination. Yet, its greatest distinction lies in its botanical richness. Around 10 million years earlier, land bridges had connected Asia, Europe, and North America, allowing plant species to migrate freely. As climates shifted and glaciers advanced, northern species were pushed southward, leaving isolated populations in the Appalachian Mountains as the ice retreated. The region's dramatic variations in elevation, moisture, and exposure created a patchwork of microhabitats where rare and endemic species thrived. Many of these plants are accessible along the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Parkway, making the area a haven for botanists and plant enthusiasts.

Convention headquarters were located at the University of North Carolina–Asheville, where attendees lodged, dined, and gathered for evening presentations. The dining hall served as the central hub for meals, social hours, and lectures, while the campus's wooded setting provided a peaceful backdrop. The convention's tours were designed to immerse participants in the natural and cultivated landscapes of the region, each offering a full day of exploration.

Tour B featured the Biltmore Estate, where visitors explored George Vanderbilt's grand mansion and Frederick Law Olmsted's extensive landscape designs. The estate's informal Azalea Garden, planted with early 20th-century collections gathered by Chauncey Beadle, was highlighted as a point of special interest. The tour continued at the North Carolina Arboretum, home to the National Native Azalea Repository, a five-acre conservation planting representing 13 species.

Tour C offered a strenuous hike to Copper Bald, rewarding participants with sweeping mountain vistas and encounters with *R. calendulaceum*, *R. arborescens*, *R. viscosum*, *R. cumberlandense*, and numerous natural hybrids. The route included stops along forest roads, seeps, and coves rich with wildflowers before culminating in a steep ascent along the Appalachian Trail.

Tour H highlighted private gardens in Hendersonville, including the woodland garden of Denise and Bob Stelloh, the waterfall-accented landscape of Mary and Ed Collins, and the whimsical rock garden of Ev and Bruce Whittemore. The tour concluded with a short hike in Dupont State Forest to view native azaleas in the wild.

Tour P followed the Blue Ridge Parkway, offering scenic overlooks, short hikes, and encounters with native azaleas and wildflowers. With elevations ranging from 649 to 6,047 feet and bloom times that vary dramatically with altitude, the Parkway was the motorcoach equivalent to a hike along the Appalachian Trail.

Tour W led attendees to Wayah Bald, where clouds of white *R. arborescens* and panoramic views awaited.



Fig. 2 Past ASA National President, Jim Thorton (left), requested a point of personal privilege to present an ASA Exceptional Service Award to Dr. Bob and Bee Hobbs for their 10 years of service as editors of *The Azalean*. During their tenure *The Azalean* made significant progress to include a color cover and eventually color images in the articles. Photo by William C. Miller III.

Evening programs featured expert speakers who shared decades of experience in hybridizing, cultivating, and studying azaleas.

- Buddy Lee (*Azalea Hybridizing and Seedling Selection*) described his almost 30 year endeavor to produce the multi-season blooming Encore® Azaleas.
- Ed Collins (*Copper Bald: Azaleas and Allies*) discussed the hybrids found along the Appalachian Trail at Copper Bald.
- Ted Stecki (*Linwood Hardy Azaleas*) gave a talk about Al Reid who developed the Linwood Hardies, describing his new crosses, plants used for breeding, and what Al envisioned for the future.
- Joe Schild (*Deciduous Azaleas: East Meets West*) gave a talk on searching for unique forms of deciduous azaleas.
- Don Hyatt (*The Best of the Best: In Search of Native Azaleas*) recounted his frequent hikes to the mountains in North Carolina and Tennessee to search for the finest forms of our native azaleas. His slides showed the views along the Appalachian Trail near Roan Mountain, as he documented exceptional forms of *R. calendulaceum*. He described his strolls through the hybrid swarm of native azaleas on Gregory Bald as one of the greatest flower shows on earth.

The event was a rich blend of education, exploration, and celebration of the botanical treasures of the southern Appalachian region. The convention also featured an extensive plant sale and an unexpected fire drill in the middle of the night.

24th ASA National Convention—2002

(Credit: Roger Duval)

The 2002 Joint ARS/ASA Convention was held in Atlanta, Georgia, from April 17 to April 21. The convention was headquartered at the Atlanta Marriott Century Center. Its location gave attendees easy access to major city attractions such as the Atlanta Botanical Garden, the Atlanta History Museum, Lenox Mall, and Phipps Plaza. The Azalea Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and the Oconee Chapter of the Azalea Society of America

jointly sponsored the event. Both groups have had long histories of promoting azaleas and rhododendrons. The Azalea Chapter was chartered in 1968 under local hybridizer and nurseryman Ralph Pennington, while the Oconee Chapter was chartered in 1991, with former ASA president Jim Thornton serving as its first president.

The Convention highlighted the South's horticultural traditions while drawing attention to the plants that had long shaped their gardens. Broadleaf evergreens—including magnolia, camellia, gardenia, and azalea—have remained staples across the region, while rhododendron and mountain laurel have continued to define the southern Appalachian landscape. Atlanta's climate places it in a rare position: gardeners here have been able to grow nearly all of these plants successfully. Organizers gave particular attention to Georgia's 13 native species of deciduous azaleas. Though less widely planted than evergreen favorites, these native azaleas have gained visibility, and many of the tour gardens featured them prominently.

The speaker program drew on a wide range of expertise. Sessions covered native azaleas, hybrid rhododendrons, evergreen azaleas, kalmia, and companion plants, while additional presentations addressed landscape design, pest control, and the growing role of computers in gardening. The lineup included academics, landscape designers, authors, nursery managers, hybridizers, and amateur horticulturists. Together, the sessions offered both practical guidance and broader perspective for gardeners interested in expanding their knowledge and refining their landscapes.

Garden tours formed a major part of the convention program, giving participants access to more than 21 private and public gardens across Metro Atlanta, Athens, Pine Mountain, and Auburn, Alabama. Six tour packages over four days combined nursery visits, mountain scenery, shopping stops, and gardens noted for wildflowers, evergreen rhododendrons, deciduous azaleas, and camellias. Callaway Gardens offered a private look at the new 40-acre Brothers Azalea Bowl and the Mirror Pond garden planted by Fred Galle. The schedule also featured a large plant sale with over 5,000 plants, including Georgia native azaleas, named hybrids, evergreen azaleas, and rhododendron species. A mini trade fair connected growers and buyers, and a judged flower show highlighted the range of plants that thrived in the region. Other events included a plant auction, a bonsai demonstration by Hubert Jones, a hybridizers' roundtable moderated by Fred Minch, and a propagation roundtable led by Ed Collins. Taken together, the convention offered both an educational program and a broad survey of southern spring gardening.

25th ASA National Convention—2003

(Credit: Barbara Stump & Joe Schild)

The Azalea Society of America marked its 25th anniversary by hosting the 2003 National Convention in Chattanooga, Tennessee, from May 1–4. Attendees were welcomed to enjoy a relaxed gathering that emphasized fellowship, education, and exploration of both private and public gardens. The convention adopted "Cumberland Spring" as its theme, and participants were offered opportunities to hear speakers discuss azaleas, wildflowers, and native plants. A plant sale room featured evergreen and deciduous azaleas, wildflowers, ferns, and select native shrubs.

The convention's garden tours formed the heart of the event. Organizers intentionally selected routes that required minimal bus travel, using smaller 36-passenger buses to navigate narrow mountain roads. Visitors were reminded to request permission before taking plant cuttings and to use restrooms whenever available, as not all stops offered facilities.

On Friday, May 2, the tours began with the Frances Jones Garden, located on the South Palisades of Signal Mountain. The garden offered sweeping views of the Tennessee River Valley, Lookout Mountain, and the distant Cherokee National Forest. Jones had created an immaculate landscape filled with labeled species, hybrids, wildflowers, ferns, and exotic plants. Sculptures and whimsical art pieces added charm, including a humorous figure named "Skeeter." Over the years, Jones had expanded her garden by acquiring adjacent woodland and open land, creating a tranquil space with pergolas, gazebos, and winding paths.

Nearby, the Jimmy and Ilona Wooten Garden occupied several acres in Walden. Their log home sat within a thoughtfully designed landscape featuring rhododendrons, azaleas, wildflowers, and an herb garden. The Wootens favored the color purple, and Jimmy, a Master Gardener, applied his knowledge of shade, contour, and moisture to shape the garden. A newly opened area highlighted young plantings that would eventually enhance the woodland setting.

Across the road, the Robert J. Enck Garden displayed decades of horticultural dedication. Enck, a longtime resident and orchid grower, had developed a landscape filled with towering hybrid rhododendrons, his own large-flowered hybrids, Japanese maples, viburnums, magnolias, and unusual conifers. His property also included remnants of his former orchid business and a wildflower cove.

The day continued at Reflection Riding Arboretum and Botanical Garden, a 300-acre urban forest bordered by national parkland. Visitors toured by vehicle, stopping at notable sites such as the Philip Memorial Garden, which featured young plantings of native azaleas and rhododendrons. Trails led to Wildflower Cove, where thousands of wildflowers thrived beneath large *Rhododendron maximum*. Additional stops included the Holsomback Garden and the developing Glenn Dale Azalea Resource Collection, which was scheduled for planting later in 2003.

On Saturday, May 3, tours shifted to gardens in the Hixson valley area and Lookout Mountain. The Vernon Carpenter Garden, perched above Lake Chickamauga, demonstrated how rhododendrons could flourish even in difficult cherty soil. Carpenter enriched the ground with compost from Chattanooga's municipal yards, creating a vibrant landscape shaded by oaks and hickories.

The Dr. Rudolph and Alice Hoppe Garden spanned over 100 acres of natural woodland, featuring native azaleas, mountain laurel, wildflowers, and remnants of an 1840s grist mill. Trails led to a spring-fed irrigation source and additional plantings across a footbridge.

Finally, the Joe and LaShon Schild Garden highlighted a dense collection of native and Asian azaleas, rhododendrons, kalmias, and hybrids within less than an acre. With approximately 1,500 shrubs, it served as a personal test garden and nursery.

The Keynote speaker on Saturday night was renowned plantsman Don Shadow.

26th ASA National Convention—2004

(Credit: Debra Hughes)

The 2004 ASA Convention, hosted by the Ben Morrison Chapter, brought together more than a hundred azalea enthusiasts for four days of learning, garden exploration, and lively camaraderie in Bowie, Maryland. Held May 6–9, the event blended peak-season azalea displays with expert presentations, engaging tours, and a spirited plant sale that kept attendees buzzing with excitement.

Participants arrived from nearly every ASA chapter, along with many At-Large members, eager to experience "The Best Blooming Azaleas in Bay Country." For many—including members of the host chapter—the convention provided their first clear understanding of the region's unique horticultural identity. Bob Hobbs opened the educational program with an overview of azaleas in Bay Country, setting the stage for a series of well-received talks.

The speaker lineup covered a wide range of topics. Courtland Lee shared his extensive knowledge of the Glenn Dale azaleas, while William C. Miller III delivered the keynote address on Ben Morrison and his influential breeding work. Sandra Austin explored the role of color in garden design, explaining how light, texture, and color families shape the visual experience of an azalea landscape. Ethel M. Dutky offered practical guidance on azalea diseases, emphasizing the narrow window for treating petal blight. Dr. Michael J. Raupp followed with an introduction to Integrated Pest Management, advocating for diverse plantings that encourage beneficial insects. Jonathan S. Kays rounded out the program with strategies for minimizing deer damage—an ongoing challenge for gardeners despite fences, repellents, and other deterrents.

Four major tours—Baltimore, Annapolis, Southern Maryland, and the U.S. National Arboretum—gave attendees a firsthand look at the region's azaleas and companion plantings. Each tour showcased distinctive landscapes and provided opportunities for members to exchange ideas and admire mature plantings in both public and private gardens.



Fig. 3 Fred Minch (left), a serious hobbyist and hybridizer of azaleas and rhododendron from Puyallup, WA, chats with Earl Sommerville (right), another serious hobbyist, hybridizer, collector of native azaleas, and a practitioner of the art of tissue culture, from Marietta, GA...taking a break during the 2001 ASA National Convention garden tours. Photo by William C. Miller III.

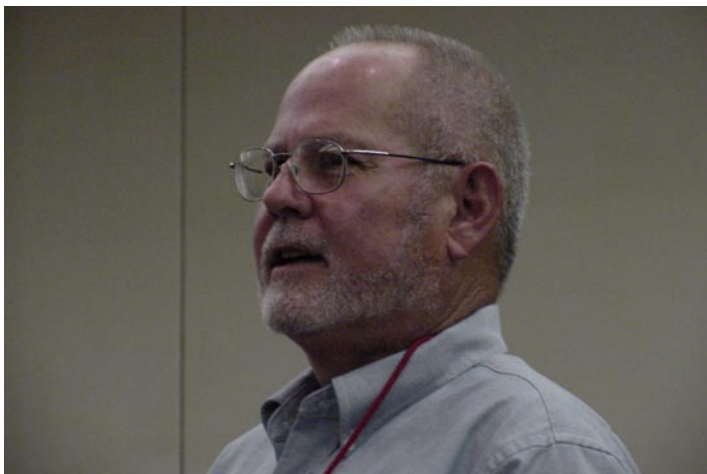


Fig.4 Bill Pinkerton, a long time hobbyist from Crossville, TN, was a speaker at the 2005 ASA National Meeting in Holland, Michigan. The title of his presentation was “Landscaping with Glenn Dale Azaleas.” “Genesis Gardens,” his personal garden and residence, contained perhaps the most complete collection of Glenn Dale Hybrids anywhere. In azalea season, the garden annually serves as a popular, free venue for the public. He has collaborated with the U.S. National Arboretum to provide Glenn Dale cultivars that the it lacked. In 2004, he introduced ‘Clara Haler’, an open-pollinated volunteer discovered under the Glenn Dale Hybrid ‘Glacier’. Photo by William C. Miller III.

The Saturday evening banquet drew a full crowd and featured Maryland crab cakes along with the Society’s annual business meeting. ASA President Buddy Lee received the “Best *Azalean* Article Award” for his profile of Margie Jenkins and generously donated the honorarium to the Azalea Research Fund. Members also approved a By-Laws amendment and welcomed newly elected board members Bob Hobbs, Ronald Hooper, and Tom Milner.

Throughout the weekend, the plant sale and auction remained a major attraction. Hundreds of azaleas and companion plants—donated by chapter members and notable growers—found new homes as attendees wheeled carts overflowing with treasures back to their rooms. Don Hyatt presided over the auction with characteristic enthusiasm, helping raise funds while keeping the crowd entertained. The flower show, coordinated by the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, saw Bill Bedwell sweep the awards, while Bob Hobbs won the photography competition.

Adding a touch of humor and whimsy were the anonymous “Pot Heads,” two oversized walking flowerpots who made surprise appearances throughout the convention. Their antics delighted attendees, even if their tongue-in-cheek flower show entry, *R. fikus*, failed to impress the judges.

The convention concluded with a well-attended propagator’s roundtable on Sunday morning, featuring presentations on growing azaleas from seed and propagating native species through cuttings and alternative methods.

Thanks to the dedication of the Ben Morrison Chapter—led by chair Carol Segree and President Bob McWhorter—the 2004 convention was marked by warm hospitality and strong fellowship. As the event closed, attendees were invited to the 2005 ASA National Convention in Holland, Michigan, promising another memorable gathering for azalea lovers.

27th ASA National Convention—2005

(Credit: Joe Shield, John Migas, and Sandra Wearne)

The Lake Michigan Chapter of the Azalea Society of America welcomed attendees to the 2005 National Convention, held in Holland, Michigan, from May 19–22. The city, famous for its annual Tulip Time Festival, hosted hundreds of thousands of visitors alongside ASA members. The convention adopted the theme “Azaleas in the Landscape,” highlighting gardens that demonstrated mature plantings, thoughtful design, and the unique microclimates of western Michigan. Participants explored seven private gardens, three nursery gardens, and two public sites, many of which had been cultivated for decades.

Friday Tours: The first day began at Windmill Island, a 20-acre attraction known for its Dutch windmill, tulip displays, dancers, and festival atmosphere. During Tulip Time, the island drew visitors from around the world, and convention attendees enjoyed its colorful spring landscape. The tour continued to Fennville, where the Alexander and Hutchinson Gardens sat across from each other. The Hutchinson property spanned more than 30 acres, with four acres devoted to a pond, gazebo, and mature plantings. The Alexander Garden featured azaleas, rhododendrons, dogwoods, and Japanese maples set among white pines planted over two decades earlier.

Next, attendees visited the Hartsuiker Garden, a landscape inspired by a 1975 Chicago Flower Show. Designed by Ross Alexander, the garden included mature oaks, azaleas, rhododendrons, ornamental trees, perennials, cedar fencing, brick patios, and a pond edged with railroad ties. Over the years, it has become a popular setting for gatherings and family portraits. Lunch was served at the Hop Garden, located on the Lake Michigan shoreline. Guests enjoyed a pig roast before exploring the property’s magnolias, dogwoods, redbuds, and 40-year-old azaleas and rhododendrons. The stop also included a visit to Wavecrest Nursery, known for its rare and unusual hardy trees and shrubs. The nursery specialized in propagating its own selections and displayed plants in combinations meant to inspire gardeners.

The fifth stop brought visitors to the Button Art Gallery Garden, an English-style landscape created 38 years earlier by Charles Mann. Designed to reflect the founder’s English heritage, the garden blended rhododendrons, azaleas, flowering trees, heather, ferns, and Japanese species such as maples and cherries. The climate near Saugatuck, moderated by Lake Michigan, allowed many traditionally English plants to thrive.

The final Friday destination was Rosebay Nursery, founded in 1977 to supply field-grown rhododendrons and azaleas suited to Michigan’s climate. Spread across 14 acres, the nursery included poly-houses, test gardens, and a wide range of rhododendron and deciduous azalea hybrids. Its varied growing environments allowed new plants to be evaluated under different conditions.

Saturday’s schedule featured fewer stops, beginning with Veldheer’s Tulip Farm, established in 1945. What began as 400 bulbs had grown into a massive operation planting more than four million bulbs annually, including hundreds of tulips, daffodil, and perennial varieties. The next visit was the Willis Garden, a mid-20th-century property whose landscape had evolved significantly since 1997. New owners expanded the garden to nearly



Fig. 5 Dr. Charlie Evans, President, Brookside Gardens Chapter (left) and Robert E. (Buddy) Lee, ASA President (far right), present an ASA Distinguished Service Award to Dr. John Creech in special recognition of his many “contributions and services as a patriot, scientist, and horticultural ambassador,” at the 2006 ASA meeting in Rockville, MD. Photo by William C. Miller III.

five acres, adding allees, azaleas, hollies, magnolias, Japanese maples, *Stewartia*, bamboo, ornamental grasses, and extensive groundcovers.

Attendees then toured The Flower Basket Garden, the long-time home of Charles and Lorna Mann. Known as one of the Midwest’s most beautiful gardens, it showcased formal English design with terraces, sunken gardens, stone walls, and sweeping views over the Kalamazoo River. Lunch was held at The Woodlands, home of John Migas, where tall red pines created a cathedral-like canopy over azaleas, rhododendrons, dogwoods, viburnums, and lilacs. Migas had been hybridizing azaleas since attending the 1997 ASA Convention.

The final stop was the Alexander Garden in Saugatuck, a young but impressive landscape featuring raised beds, companion plantings, brick walkways, and a pond. David Alexander shared his ongoing experiments with soils, fertilizers, and plant care.

28th ASA National Convention—2006

(Credit: Joe Schild & Carol Flowers)

The 2006 joint convention of the ASA and the American Rhododendron Society unfolded as a lively “Capital Adventure” in Rockville, Maryland, just outside Washington, DC. Members from across the country gathered from May 12–15 to celebrate their shared passion for azaleas and rhododendrons, reflect on past achievements, and explore new directions for the future. The weekend format allowed attendees to avoid weekday traffic and enjoy reduced hotel rates, making the DoubleTree–Rockville—connected directly to the Metro’s Red Line—a convenient home base for the event.

Guests arrived from three major airports and by train, settling into a schedule that blended garden tours, educational sessions, and opportunities to explore the nation’s capital. The convention opened on Friday evening, setting the tone for a long weekend filled with horticultural discovery.

Saturday offered two tour options. Tour A stayed close to Rockville, beginning with Brookside Gardens, a 54-acre public garden known for its formal displays, intimate garden rooms, aquatic features, and expansive azalea collections. Visitors wandered

through conservatories, the Japanese Teahouse, and a newly built visitors’ center before moving on to a series of private gardens maintained by ASA members.

Each private garden revealed the personality of its caretakers. Barry and Nancy Bosworth’s one-acre landscape wound through paths, a waterfall, and a fishpond surrounded by dozens of azaleas and wildflowers. Dianne and James Gregg’s wooded property showcased azaleas that bloomed in succession, representing a wide range of hybrid families. Jane and Bob Kinzie’s park-like garden featured a pond and hundreds of azaleas lining gravel paths beneath mature trees. Nearby, Janet and Bill Miller’s half-acre garden overflowed with evergreen and deciduous azaleas from nearly every major hybrid group. Glenn and Nancy Thompson’s 1½-acre landscape offered a series of garden “rooms,” each protected from deer by an iron fence.

Tour B took guests north to Baltimore, returning to favorite sites from the 2004 convention. At Marshy Point Nursery, visitors explored the home and wholesale nursery of Harry Weiskittel, where rare trees, new hybrids, and Marshy Point introductions filled the landscape. A second private stop, Dr. Jerry Hudgen’s “Fern Dell,” revealed a 4½-acre woodland garden rich with native plants, ferns, wildflowers, and carefully labeled botanical treasures. After lunch, the tour continued to the U.S. National Arboretum, where guests explored the rejuvenated azalea collections on Mount Hamilton and visited the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum, the Gotelli conifer collection, and the Asian and Herb Gardens.

Sunday’s single tour, Tour C, featured three large private gardens and the five-acre McCrillis Gardens, once a private estate and now a public shade garden filled with mature azaleas, specimen trees, and companion plants. Ed and Mary Reiley’s five-acre garden served as both a landscape and a test site, containing more than 775 cultivars and species, including many of Ed’s own hybrids. A nostalgic stop followed at the former home of George Harding, one of ASA’s founders, where his grandson now operated a retail azalea nursery. The final private garden, belonging to Norman and Jean Beaudry, offered a sloping woodland filled with more than 500 rhododendrons and azaleas, including decades-old Beltsville Dwarf specimens and collections of Japanese maples, magnolias, conifers, and wildflowers.

After the main convention, many attendees embarked on an overnight excursion into the Blue Ridge Mountains. They visited Phran’s Azalea Trails—home to more than 8,000 azaleas—enjoyed lunch at historic Michie Tavern, toured Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, and traveled along the Blue Ridge Parkway to admire native azaleas in bloom. The group spent the night at the peaceful Peaks of Otter Lodge before continuing to Roanoke to explore Paul and Barbara James’s expansive mountain garden, renowned for its Delp rhododendron collection and sweeping natural beauty.

Throughout the weekend, distinguished speakers shared insights on plant exploration, hybridizing, pest management, and global rhododendron diversity. Evening banquets brought members together in celebration, and the hosting chapters prepared rare plants for sale, showcasing regional hybrids and seedlings collected from the wild.

During the annual meeting Dr. John Creech was presented with the Distinguished Service Award for his many years of contributions made to the plant world.

By the convention's close, attendees carried home not only new plants and knowledge, but also the sense of community that had long defined both societies.

29th ASA National Convention—2007

(Credit: Barbara Stump and Barbara Wagner)

The 2007 ASA Convention welcomed visitors to a version of Texas many had not expected—one defined not by deserts or sprawling cities, but by the lush Pineywoods region of East Texas. Centered in Nacogdoches, a historic crossroads along El Camino Real, the event highlighted the area's rich plant diversity, deep cultural history, and thriving horticultural community. Hosted by the SFA Mast Arboretum with support from the Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Tyler Council of Garden Clubs, and the ASA Louisiana Chapter, the convention was designed as a true "Texas Garden Party."

East Texas, spanning more than a third of the state, offers an impressive 3,402 native and established plant species—more than two-thirds of Texas's total flora. The region's nearly tropical Zone 8b climate, abundant rainfall, acidic soils, and long growing season have created ideal conditions for azaleas, hydrangeas, roses, and numerous Asian ornamentals. Even after winter lows, plants rebounded vigorously, and early spring blooms made the late-March convention perfectly timed.

The organizers emphasized plant diversity, history, and the legacy of regional gardens. Attendees experienced two themed days of tours—an "Away Day" in Tyler and a "Home Day" in Nacogdoches—using SFA's purple-and-white team buses to maintain a collegiate spirit.

The Away Day on March 30 took participants to Tyler, home of the renowned Azalea Trail. The first stop was the historic Tyler Rose Garden, a 1938 WPA project that has grown into a major rose-industry landmark. With 30,000 rose bushes and more than 450 cultivars, the garden had served as an important trial site where heat-related virus detection advanced rose health nationwide. Visitors also toured the IDEA Gardens, maintained by Smith County Master Gardeners, which showcased innovative planting combinations, composting systems, and ornamental tree selections.

The group then visited the Ina Brundrett Azalea Garden at Tyler Junior College, a young but impressive landscape designed by ASA member Naud Burnett. Local officials and garden supporters greeted the group, highlighting the college's long-term arboretum vision. A short bus tour of the eight-mile Tyler Azalea Trail followed, avoiding the heavy weekend crowds that typically flocked to the 150 participating homes.

Lunch was served at the historic Tyler Woman's Building, located in the heart of the Azalea District. Guests explored nearby gardens, including the Pyron Garden—celebrated for its companion plantings, creek-side azaleas, and Arts-and-Crafts pergola—and The Children's Garden, an ADA-accessible memorial park honoring children through community-funded design. The final stop was Ravenwood, the formal Georgian-style estate of Elmer and

Betsy Ellis, featuring six structured gardens, 1,500 azaleas, and a landscape recognized by the Smithsonian's Archives of American Gardens. The day concluded with a return to Nacogdoches for a Tex-Mex buffet and evening speakers.

March 31, a home day, kept attendees close to the convention hotel. After breakfast, the group visited the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden at SFA, which has matured significantly since its early planning stages. Expanded through generous donations from ASA nurserymen, the garden featured 45 beds, 8,500 plant specimens, and 6,500 azaleas representing 52 hybrid groups and 525 cultivars. Volunteers have labeled thousands of plants, and visitors were also encouraged to explore the adjacent Mast Arboretum.

A genuine Texas brisket lunch followed at the restored 1901 Queen Anne home of Mike and Barbara Stump, set atop Irion Hill and surrounded by eclectic plantings. The afternoon included a drive along the 24-mile Nacogdoches Azalea Trail and a visit to Naconiche Gardens, a specialty nursery offering heritage plants, Texas-adapted species, and design services. Attendees were encouraged to purchase plants before returning to the hotel.

The convention also featured a plant sale, annual meeting, banquet, and auction, with offerings from regional growers and the Arboretum's spring sale. Throughout the event, speakers Dr. David Creech, Greg Grant and Dr. Lem Miller shared insights into East Texas horticulture, plant diversity, and the cultural traditions that shaped the region's gardens.

30th ASA National Convention—2008

(Credits: Carol Flowers, Bob Stelloh, and Ed Collins)

The ASA 2008 convention returned to Asheville, NC, and honored three influential figures in the azalea world—Henry Skinner, Augie Kehr, and Chauncey Beadle—each of whom had deep ties to the region. Beadle, originally sent to the area by Frederick Olmsted on what was meant to be a temporary assignment, ended up spending more than 60 years shaping the Biltmore Estate's gardens. He and his colleagues, known as the "Azalea Hunters," traveled widely to collect native azaleas that would eventually form the foundation of the estate's extensive plantings.

Henry Skinner, while working at the Morris Arboretum, once undertook a 25,000-mile expedition across the eastern and southeastern United States to collect azaleas. He shipped thousands of herbarium specimens and hundreds of live plants back to Pennsylvania. His passion for the genus later influenced the expansion of azalea collections at the National Arboretum, where he served as an early director.

Augie Kehr, remembered as a gentle and generous plantsman, spent his retirement in Hendersonville, North Carolina, developing new azaleas, rhododendrons, and magnolias. Over more than two decades, he registered dozens of new cultivars and shared his knowledge freely with younger horticulturists.

The convention's Thursday evening speakers brought these historical figures to life. Bill Alexander recounted Beadle's contributions to the Biltmore Estate; Barbara Bullock, curator of the National Arboretum's azalea collection, shared insights into Skinner's legacy; and Dr. Dan Veazey offered personal stories about Kehr's kindness and dedication. Their talks highlighted the passion and perseverance that shaped modern azalea cultivation.



Fig. 6 Robert E. (Buddy) Lee, Immediate Past ASA President (left) and John Brown, ASA President present an ASA Distinguished Service Award to Ms. Margie Y. Jenkins (aka "Miss Margie") of Amite, LA, for her lifetime contributions to the landscape and nursery industries. She has inspired, educated, and promoted the use of azaleas in the green industry and has been recognized by numerous nursery and landscape associations for her contributions. Photo by William C. Miller III.

The main Friday and Saturday tours visited notable gardens in the Asheville and Hendersonville areas. Friday's Asheville tours featured several horticultural highlights, including the Biltmore Estate Gardens, the Charles Dexter Owen garden, the North Carolina Arboretum, and Haywood Community College. The Biltmore Estate Gardens are especially significant for their history and design, having been created by Frederick Law Olmsted, the landscape architect behind New York City's Central Park.

Saturday's Hendersonville Garden tour offered a rich look at the region's horticultural beauty and the dedication of the gardeners who have shaped these landscapes over time. The tour began with the Bell garden, originally developed in the 1970s by former educators David and Naoma Dean and later cared for by Doley and Melody Bell. This remarkable property features thousands of rhododendrons and azaleas, along with a wide range of ornamental trees and shrubs, creating a colorful and diverse display. The Stelloh Garden provides a contrasting woodland setting. Denise and Bob Stelloh brought hundreds of plants from their former Washington, DC-area home and transformed more than two acres into a network of planting beds connected by winding trails. Their garden blends native wildflowers and mature trees with cultivated azaleas, rhododendrons, and maples, shaped in part by the dramatic effects of storms over the years. The Collins Garden highlights renewal and change. After relocating to a new seven-acre property with a stream, Ed and Mary Collins began integrating more than a thousand plants from their previous home into an already established landscape filled with dwarf rhododendrons, azaleas, perennials, and unusual conifers. Next door, the Stewart garden preserves the legacy of noted plantsman Dr. August Kehr. Spanning more than 10 acres, it included extensive collections of azaleas, rhododendrons, and magnolias, as well as plants tied to Kehr's hybridizing work. The tour concluded with the former Skinner garden now owned by Dot Turlington, where native azaleas collected and hybridized by Henry Skinner reflect a lifetime of plant exploration across the Southeast. Together, these gardens showcased the natural beauty and horticultural history of Hendersonville.

A special alternative on both Friday and Saturday was the *R. vaseyi* tour, which gave participants the opportunity to see this native species in its natural habitat. *R. vaseyi* grows wild only in a few counties in western North Carolina and possibly one in northern Georgia, generally at elevations between 3,000 and 5,000 feet. These tours included stops at locations such as Pilot Mountain, Highway 215, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the National Native Azalea Repository.

A Sunday post-convention tour to Southern Highlands Reserve offered yet another chance to enjoy natural stands of *Rhododendron vaseyi* along with other unique plants.

Friday's speakers shifted the focus to contemporary work in the field. Jeff Jones discussed advances in genetic plant research and how new scientific discoveries were reshaping hybridizing methods.

J. Jackson described his and Lindy's progress in refining methods for growing native azaleas from seed, enabling plants to reach the trade more quickly.

Joe Klimavicz shared his unconventional hybridizing approach, conducted in his garage and backyard in the Washington, DC, area. With limited space, he constantly evaluates and discards less promising plants to make room for new seedlings. His work demonstrated how much could be accomplished by dedicated hobbyists working outside traditional research settings.

Dan Krabill, another DC-area enthusiast, presented his extensive collection of Glenn Dale azaleas and distributed CDs of his photographs. Many of the varieties he grew are no longer available commercially.

The convention concluded with a banquet featuring keynote speaker Dr. Joe Coleman, whose photographs of azaleas spoke more eloquently than words. His images captured the elegance and diversity of the genus, reinforcing the sense of wonder that draws people to azaleas in the first place.

Part 4 of this series will be in the Fall 2026 *Azalean* and will cover the fourth decade of the Azalea Society of America. We will cover the rest of the decades throughout each of the 2026 *Azalean* editions to mark the 50th anniversary of the Society in 2027.

About the Author

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The ASA 2026 National Convention at Mike Floyd's garden. Group/Bus 1 (top) and Group/Bus 2 (bottom). The middle image is one of the Floyd's azalea borders.

