

Azaleas in Arkansas!

By Gerald Klingaman— Fayetteville, Arkansas

The 2018 ASA convention is being held in Little Rock, Arkansas, Thursday April 5 through Saturday April 7. Arkansas' ASA convention is being hosted by the Louisiana Chapter with help from the few members scattered here in Arkansas. Buddy Lee, Allen Owings, Janet Carson, Ronnie Palmer, Larry Coleman, Stan Brown, Gerald Klingaman, and Bob Stassen, president of the Ozark Chapter of the ARS, are the planning committee organizing the event. We invite you to come check out the azaleas here in "The Natural State" (Photo 1).

The Little Rock meeting will be held at the Airport Holiday Inn, 3201 Bankhead Drive in Little Rock. Preregistration packets will be available on Thursday afternoon, April 5. Except for the ASA Board meeting, scheduled for Thursday, April 5 from 1:00 until 4:00 p.m. at

the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service Headquarters, 2301 S. University Avenue, all events will be at the Airport Holiday Inn. Contact information and prices for rooms are listed on the registration form.

Azaleas 101, a primer intended for Arkansas gardeners—especially Arkansas Master Gardeners—is scheduled for Thursday 9:00 am until 3:00 pm at the Cooperative Extension Service auditorium. It is being organized by Allen Owings and Janet Carson, Arkansas' Master Gardener coordinator, and hopefully will spur interest among attendees in becoming ASA members. Enrollment is limited to 50 people, and it is anticipated most of these will join ASA members on the Friday and Saturday tours. Registration for the azalea workshop is being handled separately.

Speakers will kick off on Thursday evening with Janet Carson giving an overview of Arkansas and the work she has done to build a strong statewide network of over 2000 Master Gardeners throughout the state. These volunteers support a diverse assortment of garden-related activities and help elevate the level of garden expertise throughout the state and region.

Charlie Andrews, current vice president of the ASA and president of the Azalea Chapter of the ARS, will be the keynote speaker, giving an overview of American native deciduous azaleas. Gerald Klingaman, Operations Director at the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks, will present an overview of azalea and *Rhododendron* distribution around the world and the geologic and climatological forces that left them scattered throughout the world. Stan Brown, a Clarksville, Arkansas-based plant breeder and nurseryman, will highlight some of the woody plant breeding efforts carried out in Arkansas during the past century (Photo 2).

The plant sale is being coordinated by Ronnie Palmer who will have an assortment of his Azalea Hill Nursery plants

▼ Photo 3—Huang 2-4-41 is one of the azaleas we hope to see in bloom at Ronnie Palmer's garden and nursery.



Photo Gerald Klingaman

▲ Photo 1—Ronnie Palmer (left) and Larry Coleman (right) are key members of 2018 ASA convention planning committee.

▼ Photo 2—'Angie' is an azalea developed by Stan Brown, nurseryman and plant breeder from Clarksville, Arkansas.



Photo Gerald Klingaman



Photo Ronnie Palmer



Photo Gerald Klingaman

▲ Photo 4—The Garvan Pavilion, designed by the late architect E. Fay Jones, is one of the architectural gems of Garvan Woodland Gardens in Hot Springs.



Photo Gerald Klingaman

▲ Photo 5—Garvan Woodland Gardens has over 180 kinds of azaleas that bloom throughout the spring blooming season.

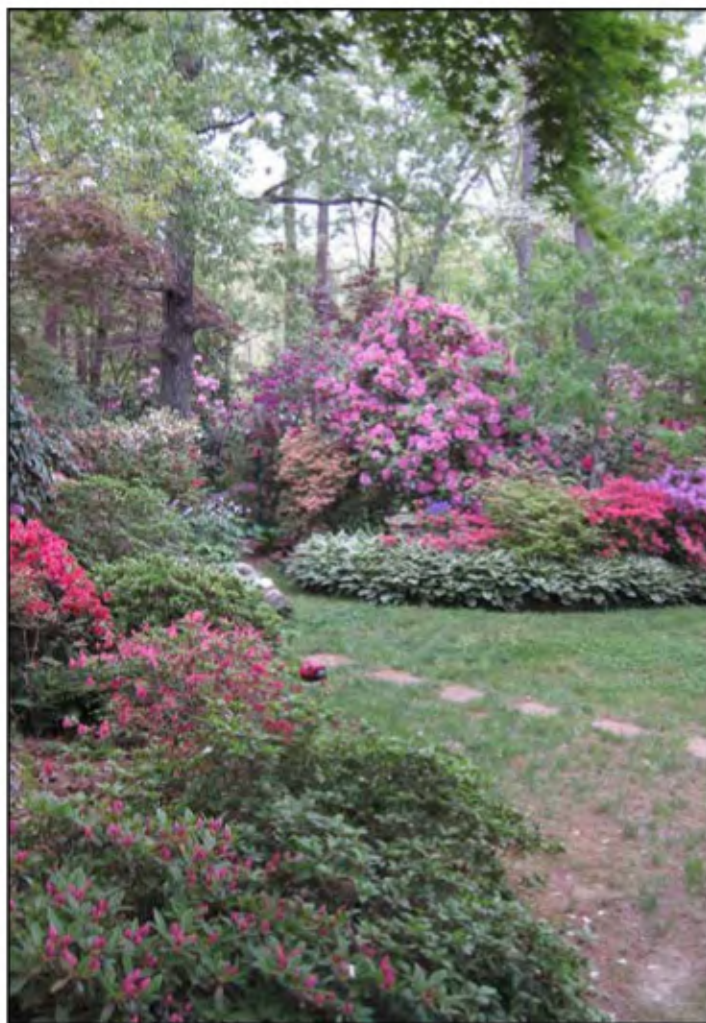


Photo Gerald Klingaman

▲ Photo 6—Larry Coleman Garden view in Batesville.

available including Huang, Holly Springs, Linwood Hardy, Glenn Dale, North Tisbury, and other azaleas. Other plants will be provided by Robert Thau who propagates from the over 400 azalea clones he grows in East Texas, Buddy Lee of Encore fame, and possibly others. Stan Brown will make available some of this crape myrtle clones he has developed, and Bob Stassen will offer up some of the hyperthrum rhododendrons that do well in the South. Hopefully we will be able to include a couple of the clones selected by the late John Carden, a Fort Smith azalea grower whose material circulates in western Arkansas. Mitch Mortvedt, from Woodland Wonders Nursery at Gilbert, Arkansas, along the Buffalo National River, will have some of his deciduous azaleas available.

Friday and Saturday will be devoted to touring. Going south out of the state capitol, we will visit Ronnie and Donna Palmer's Azalea Hill Gardens and Nursery near White Hall. Ronnie and Donna have been growing and collecting azaleas since 1971. What began as a hobby has evolved into a collection that serves as the source of cuttings for their azalea nursery. They have specialized in evergreen azaleas that have done well in south-central Arkansas, including stalwart classes such as Glenn Dales, Back Acres, Satsukis,

and less familiar groups including introductions by Robert Stewart, the Holly Spring lines, and the Huangs (Photo 3).

Garvan Woodland Garden is located six miles from Hot Springs National Park, a national treasure that has been protected as a National Preserve since 1832, with National Park designation granted in 1880. Garvan Woodland Garden is a 210-acre botanical garden sitting on a peninsula jutting into Lake Hamilton that began as a private garden in the 1950s but didn't open to the public until the end of the 20th century. In 1995, the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Arkansas was bequeathed the garden by Verna Cook Garvan with the stipulation they build a world class botanical garden. The garden is built in a mature woodland setting and contains architectural gems such as the award-winning Anthony Chapel and its accompanying bell tower, Garvan Pavilion, and a raft of elevated walkways and bridges that showcase the natural beauty of the site (Photo 4).

The gardens themselves are also stunning, especially in the spring when the over 100,000 tulips bloom and the collection of over 180 kinds of azaleas do their thing. They also have an extensive collection of mature Japanese maples, camellias, and other woodland plants. The four-acre



▲ Photo 7—The Old Mill in North Little Rock is one of the masterpieces created by Mexican artist Dionicio Rodriguez.

Garden of the Pine Winds showcases a wide array of Asian plants and has been voted as one of the best Asian gardens in America (Photo 5).

Private gardens won't be overlooked. Larry Coleman's garden in Batesville, Arkansas, was begun in the 1990s as a way to make use of the steep hillside that falls away from the back side of his house. Following a series of trails down the slope, he has added an impressive collection of rhododendrons, azaleas, and an assortment of other interesting plants that grow well in his Ozark garden. To date he has planted more than 600 azaleas, 300 rhododendrons, and around 100 Japanese maples. His waterfalls, ponds, and tea house anchor the garden at the base of the hillside. Though his sloping hillside is completely planted, he continues to add trails and plantings on the steep hillsides of his neighbors on either side of his property (Photo 6).

Ann Wood's garden in Searcy is a parklike space with a collection of mature trees and a small, but immaculately designed and maintained cottage garden. Her garden

changes with the seasons, showing a different face to visitors throughout the year.

The Old Mill, a North Little Rock gem, is part of a public park and housing development that began development in 1931. The mill was envisioned as a reminder of the water-powered mills that once dotted the back country of Arkansas and were so pivotal in the state's development. Dionicio Rodriguez, a Mexican born concrete artist who did works from Maryland to New Mexico, was commissioned to build the mill. Using his special blend of artistry and craftsmanship, he built the mill and surroundings completely from concrete. The project was completed in 1933 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 (Photo 7).

Those wishing to see more of Arkansas before or after the convention may consider some of the other state attractions. The William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum is just a few miles from our hotel and would make a good stop for the political junkie. I haven't been there in a while, so I don't know if the infamous blue dress is still on display.

The city of Hot Springs, Arkansas, with its iconic Bath House Row and horse races might be of interest. Not far from Hot Springs, Crater of Diamonds State Park near Murfreesboro presents a unique opportunity to prospect for diamonds in the remnants of an ancient volcano. Every year or two some sharp-eyed prospector will come across a stone large enough to make the news.

Going northwest out of Little Rock takes you into the Ozark Mountains. The 150-mile-long Buffalo National River, the first National River, presents an excellent opportunity for hiking and canoeing along its length. Lost Valley, located near Ponca on the upper Buffalo, is an easy way to see some of the natural beauty and not get too far off the beaten path. The native *Rhododendron prinophyllum* found in the area don't usually bloom until the last of April into early May.

Fort Smith National Historic Site, sitting on the edge of Oklahoma, is where the wild west of popular imagination begins. The old fort preserves the history of American expansion into the western states and is a must-see stop for the history buff.

In the northwest corner of the state in Fayetteville you will find the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks, a six-acre garden that features a series of display gardens showcasing a unique blend of whimsy and artistry. Up the road a few miles in Bentonville is Crystal Bridges of American Art, a world-class art gallery in a beautiful natural setting where the Walton family has created a not-to-be-missed display of art, architecture, and nature.

We hope to see you in Little Rock this spring!

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