



The Blue Ridge Review



SOUTHEASTERN CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

March, 2019

Encouragement of the culture of Rhododendrons

RESCHEDULED SHARING OF SCANDINAVIAN TOURS OF A LIFETIME BY MCCARTER AND VAN RENS

On March 17 at Bullington (after our weather cancellation in December) four of our members who visited Scandinavia in 2018 will share their adventures with us. Pamela and Jackson McCarter took full advantage of their visit to the International ARS convention in Bremen, Germany last May. They participated in pre-and post convention tours which immersed them in European gardens for the entire month of May. Also, Chuck and Judy Van Rens celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with an exploration of western Norway, including a visit to the Arboretum at Milde, which has the largest rhododendron collection in Scandinavia. Jackson will share some of the highlights of their garden tours in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, followed by Chuck's presentation of a travelogue and some highlights of our tour of the University of Bergen Botanical Gardens and Arboretum.

Before the convention in Bremen, the McCarters spent a week touring gardens in Denmark and Sweden. Denmark has a surprisingly mild climate, incorporating hardiness zones 7b to 9a. Jackson will share information about many private gardens they visited, with several owners involved in growing rhododendron species from seeds and cuttings. The major public garden on their visit was the Bangsbo Botanic Garden featuring many rhododendron species and hybrids.

A 4-hour ferry ride brought our adventurers to Sweden where they visited 2 public gardens containing the most interesting rhododendron collections in Sweden. The Gothenburg Botanical Garden of 100 acres exhibits 16,000 plant species. The Sofiero Castle Garden (known as Europe's most beautiful park) features 500 rhododendron species planted in 2 valleys facing the sea.

Visiting Finland took them to a latitude that corresponds to Alaska, but with a much milder climate. Haaga Rhododendron Park in Helsinki is both a public park and a research garden focused on "Breeding Winter-Hardy Rhododendrons and Azaleas". Southeastern Finland features the 300 acre Arboretum Mustila, the oldest and largest true arboretum in Finland where hundreds of rhododendron flourish under a canopy of 150 to 200-year-old native Scots Pines. Talk about an extraordinary adventure!

Chuck and Judy Van Rens spent 10 days exploring the fjords and cultural centers of Western Norway. Chuck will share photos and adventures from our trip.

Sieglinde Says:

There will be a Board Meeting following the presentation on March 17.

There are several items of importance to discuss, and I am hoping the majority of Directors and Officers will be able to stay for about one hour to resolve some of these items.

Inside This Issue

Rhododendron	
Cultivars, A	2
Norwegian	3
Expert's	4
View	5
Scandinavian	6
Tours (cont)	
Calendar	6

The Blue Ridge Review

RHODODENDRON CULTIVARS –A NORWEGIAN EXPERT'S VIEW PORTRAYED IN GARDEN SIGNAGE



Rhododendron arboreum



R. Peter Koster



R. Cunningham White

Per H. Salvesen, the current curator of the University Of Bergen Arboretum and Botanical Gardens at Milde, shared with us the messages on the descriptive signs in the garden's Rhododendron Cultivar Collection. They were written by rhododendron aficionado Dr. Per Magnus Joergensen. As curator of the Bergen Botanical Garden from 1973 and later professor of botany at the University of Bergen; he developed what became a lifelong devotion to the genus. We thought you would enjoy this view of Rhododendron cultivars. Here are the public display signs:

The Historic corner

Rhododendron-breeding started in The British Isles during the 1820's as did so many other developments in modern horticulture. The basis was furnished by three closely related species: the American Rhododendron catawbiense and Rhododendron maximum, and the European Rhododendron ponticum. They gave rise to several hardy, rather leggy plants closely resembling each other, and producing flowers from pale pink to violet. The earliest one shown here is 'Roseum Elegans'. Even after developing forms with double flowers, like 'Fastuosum', or with strange foliage like 'Daphnoides' and 'Variegatum', the variation offered was still rather limited. The introduction of the handsome, red-flowered Rhododendron arboreum from Himalaya widened the assortment as to form and colour of the flowers, and denser more rounded inflorescences became available. 'Lee's Dark Purple' came as a result of such an improvement. Others were the old and brightly pink 'Jacksoni' and 'Nobleanum' that emerged around 1840.

Rhododendron arboreum from the Himalayas implies a new leap in the breeding work. It is in itself a very variable species, in color of the flowers (from white to blood-red), as well as hardiness and leaf-form. This is reflected in the cultivars developed from it. There are the ones carrying pure white flowers, as the tall 'Sir Charles Lemon' or the low German Seidel-hybrids 'Helene Schiffner'. Then there are those red-flowered ones; it took a lots of work to make them pure red, without any trace of blue. At the lower end(near the bamboo) we present the brightest red ever made, like 'Peter Koster'.

Large flowers were highly prized too, but rather difficult to accomplish until species of the Rhododendron decorum-group were introduced. Of the old R. catawbiense-cultivars, 'Cynthia' from 1856 has the largest flowers.

A great impact was the yellow white Rhododendron caucasicum which contributes to lower, denser plants and blotched flowers. The well known 'Cunningham White' is one of the children. They are 'the maculate, noble ladies' of which 'Lady Eleanor Cathcart', from 1844, is the oldest .

The Blotched Corner

A great number of Rhododendron species have blotched flowers, often purple-colored, more rarely greenish yellow. They serve as guide-lines for insects in search of nectar or pollen. For rhodoholics they give the flower an extra beauty. These blotches are particularly conspicuous in some species often used as parents for the more spectacular cultivars, Rhododendron caucasicum and Rhododendron maximum. (Continued on page 3)

RHODODENDRON CULTIVARS (continued)

The latter is a parent of 'Humboldt' - a long-time favorite. Now there are some improved successors, e.g. 'Holstein' and 'Kokardia'. The species *Rhododendron caucasicum* has, however, been the most important and has been the origin of several wonderful, new cultivars, particularly 'Mrs. Furnival' and her offspring, 'Mrs. Furnival's Daughter' and 'Hachmann's Diadem.

The Dwarfs

On the humid, weather beaten island Yakushima at the southern tip of Japan, a low, compact, nearly mound-formed rhododendron was discovered in the 1930's. It has pinkish-white campanulate flowers and dark leaves with brownish indumentums and was named *Rhododendron yakushimanum*. It was the discovery of the century and revolutionized the cultivar assortment, particularly in the 1970's with a series of low, dense floriferous plants suitable for small modern gardens.

Some of the first ones, Waterer's, were appropriately named after the seven small dwarfs. We have a few of these, 'Bashful' and 'Dopey'. Gradually other colours coming from higher, older cultivars have been crossed into this species, even yellows ones: 'Babette' and the more pinkish 'Percy Wiseman' have been created. A particularly glowing color has been achieved by crossing with *Rhododendron repens*, yielding the spectacular 'Lampion' and the unsurpassed 'Fantastica'.

Rhododendron yakushimanum cultivars are easily cultivated and are particularly well suited to our climate.

The Yellow Stripe

Yellow 'genuine' *Rhododendron* cultivars has been rather common, simply because there are few species with yellow flowers in the Nature. The first to be discovered was *Rhododendron campylocarpum*. It has cream-colored flowers, and has given rise to pale forms like 'Harvest Moon', later improved by Mr. H. Hachmann into the exceptional sisters 'Simona' and 'Maharami'.

Truly yellow forms were first achieved in the 1940's after the discovery of *Rhododendron wardii*. Through diligent use of this species, breeding improvements have furnished us with all kinds, from vigorously growing plants with large flowers, like 'Crest', to the low and intensely yellow ones, like 'Goldkrone'. Constantly new breeds are marketed, particularly many exciting ones from the USA, and we are now trying out these at Milde- among them the profusely flowering 'Virginia Richards'.

Rhododendron wardii hybrids flower early from the middle of May, and are well suited for the moist climate of Western Norway.

'Little Red Riding Hood' and her Sisters

Rhododendron Williamsianum is one of the most elegant Chinese species, a densely growing beauty with unique shiny leaves and early pink bells when flowering. Unfortunately it is rather unpredictable in cultivation, but several good cultivars have appeared after crossing with other rhododendrons. 'Rodhette' ('Little Red Riding Hood') is a quite untypical representative of this group, being red and late-flowered. *(continued on page 4)*



R. Fantastica



R. Crest



Rodhette at the Bergen Arboretum

The Blue Ridge Review

RHODODENDRON CULTIVARS (continued)



R. Gartnerdirektor Glocker



R. Trude Webster'



R. Molly Ann



R. Glory of Littleworth

Most of her sisters flower in early May with pink flowers and young shoots that are bronze-colored. This is particularly prominent in 'Gartnerdirektor Glocker'. The dense mound-like growth form is best developed in 'Vater Bohlje' which is extremely hardy as well, but regrettably has pale, insignificant flowers.

Rhododendron Williamsianum cultivars need an open position to get an optimal development with rich flowering. In colder regions they need protection. Their buds swell so early that they may be burnt by late spring frost. They can, however, be forced into flower indoors.

The Giants

The dream of creating large-flowered cultivars was first realized after the species of the *Rhododendron griffithianum*. These have not only given really large flowers, but also more substance to them, so they last longer and in some cases also have scent. The foliage is vigorous and good. The weakness is the tendency to tree growth, with naked stem below, as in the 'Pink Pearl'. The latter has been improved in the American 'Scintillation', 'Lem's Monarch', and the 'Trude Webster', perhaps the biggest-flowered of all. Really compact is the Czech 'Dagmar', also well scented.

Also in this group one has aimed for pure red-flowering types. Few can match the "evergreen" 'Jean Marie Montague' though it has been improved both in growth form and hardiness, by 'Grace Seabrook' and 'Taurus'. The darkest red rhododendron ever is Gartnerdirektor Glocker'.

The Red Square

Rhododendron repens is Nature's gift to those who want pure red flowers, a goal many breeders have aimed at. The German Dietrich Hobbie really knew how to use this source. In the 1950's he bred a number of compact, hardy, floriferous cultivars, like the well-known 'Baden Baden' and 'Scarlet Wonder'. These are mainly crosses with 'Essex Scarlet', an excellent, frequently-used garden plant. But there are many more to choose from, and a greater variation to exploit. Just consider the early, more pinkish red 'Satin' or the late, deep red 'Buketta', and the procumbent, fiery 'Carmen', as well as the exotic 'Ruby Heart'. A new development which has mainly taken place in USA, is crosses with *Rhododendron williamsianum*. This has resulted in a completely new kind of Rhododendron, like the unusual 'Molly Ann' or the hit 'Better Half' and its pinkish cousin 'Kimbeth'.

Azaleodendron

It has always been an exciting challenge to cross the deciduous (Azaleas) with evergreen rhododendrons, since the chance of success is so minor. Unfortunately, the result does not reflect the efforts. Many of the resulting plants have proved to be short-lived and difficult in culture since they are so intermediate. They appear to have difficulties in deciding on keeping or losing their leaves in the winter. Even if they survive the winter, the specimens look deplorable and are without vitality. The flowers, however, are unusual and beautiful, particularly so in 'Glory of Littleworth'. (continued on page 5)

March, 2019

RHODODENDRON CULTIVARS (continued)

Before the discovery of *Rhododendron wardii*, the yellow azaleas were the only ones which could provide that flower-colour, so they were frequently used in crossing experiments, for example with *Rhododendron ponticum*. We have only managed to obtain a few of these Azaleodendron which are poor garden plants, but botanically interesting.

Mollis-azaleas

These deciduous *Rhododendron*-cultivars are mainly the result of crosses between the large-flowered species *Rhododendron japonicum* and *R. molle*. It was the Belgian Louis van Houtte who created the first ones about 1870. They were later developed further by the Dutch firm Koster. The colour-range is rather restricted from yellow (rarely) via orange - e.g.. 'Polly Claessens' to fiery red-like 'Kosters Brilliant Red'. Quite special is the colour of 'Appleblossom', which is really pink, like appleblossoms. These are hardy plants, best grown in full sunshine. They may appear as rather stiff and sturdy, so they have mainly been displaced by the more elegant Knap Hill cultivars.

Knap Hill Azaleas

Most of the so-called garden azaleas in the trade today belong to this group, named after the nursery in England where two generations of Waterer created them at the end of the 19th century. They crossed the small Ghent-azaleas with the large flower Mollis-types. In this way they achieved a larger variation in color and form of the flower, and combined the best properties of both groups.

Knap Hill azaleas are continually being improved and reformed, and their mixed origin shows. The old fashioned pink 'Homebush' is close to Ghents, while the new American large-flowered 'Mount St. Helens' is very much like a Mollis-azalea. There are different lines of development, like Exbury azaleas. These all originate from Knap Hill cultivar 'George Reynolds', and one of the first named in this line was the fiery 'Hotspur'. Also in Germany further breeding has given good results, as the wonderful yellow 'Goldpracht'.

The Nordic Corner

So far surprising few cultivars have been developed in our region. The international ones have been sufficient. Finland with its harsh continental climate has been worst off. They have started a development based on the very hardy *R. brachycarpum* ssp. *tigerstedtii*. Some of their plants, though not particularly well suited to our climate, have done surprising well, e.g. 'P.M.A. Tigerstedt' and 'Pohjola's Daughter'.

Some crosses have taken place also in Denmark, under influence from Northern Germany. One of the oldest is a *R. repens* cultivarsis named 'Aksel Olsen' after the well known nurseryman, and now we have 'Jens Jorgen Sorensen', a *R. makinoi* cultivar, as well as 'Great Dane', a *R. rex*-cross.

The Swedes have not contributed with much yet, but they have new things underway. Norway cannot boast either, except for some "hummel-hybrids" of which a few have been named: 'Madam Felle', 'Hilario' and Fritz C. Rieber'. Our best cultivar 'Bergensiana' was done by Hans Hachman, by crossing 'Madame Jules Proges' and 'Hachmanns Diadem'. **(continued in next issue !!)**



Rhododendron wardii



R. Appleblossom



R. George Reynolds



R. Pohjola's Daughter

**Southeastern Chapter of
American Rhododendron Society
280 Trammell Rd.
Travelers Rest, SC 29690**

Officers and Directors

(beginning July 1, 2017)

President: Sieglinde Anderson

Treasurer: Jackson McCarter

Vice President: Jerry Neff

Directors until 2018—Doley Bell,
John Kendall, and Leon Pace

Directors until 2019—
Wayne Hutchins, Jay Jackson,
Chuck Van Rens

Secretary: Pamela McCarter

Editor: Judy Van Rens

Mark your Calendar

Sunday, March 17, 2 p.m.

**SCANDINAVIAN
GARDEN TOURS— by
Jackson McCarter and
Chuck Van Rens**

at Bullington Gardens,
95 Upper Red Oak Trail

Saturday, April 20 and 27 from

**2 to 4 — visit AUDREY
STELLOH'S GARDEN**

Saturday, April 27 - 8 to 4

Annual Flower Show

St. John in the Wilderness

Sunday, July 21 — picnic

Sunday, Sept. 15—

**Steve Pettis— Diseases of
Rhododendrons and Azaleas**

Articles for next newsletter due April 15

MARCH 17 SCANDINAVIAN TOURS (continued)

We found that Norway is more about nature than it is about population centers. The atmosphere of large swathes of breath-taking islands surrounding small coastal urban centers like Bergen set the tone of a unique adventure. The magnificence of the fjords dotted with charming small villages and farmsteads enthralled us. A visit to the popular Birksdahl Glacier (an arm of the largest glacier in Europe) added to our awe and admiration of this beautiful country.

On our last day in Bergen, we had a free day. We had heard of the Arboretum at Milde, run by the University of Bergen, and decided it would be a fitting end to our adventure. The best way to reach the Arboretum was to take public buses for the hour-long ride to Milde. The driver dropped us off at a seemingly deserted rural corner. Luckily we had a map of the arboretum, which occupies 125 acres in a fairly remote rural area. We wandered for 3 hours especially exploring the Rhododendron species garden and the Rhododendron cultivar garden, which also featured many azaleas. We also were drawn to the rose garden, which had many wild roses (rose hips), something we don't see much here: another perfect day in Norway!