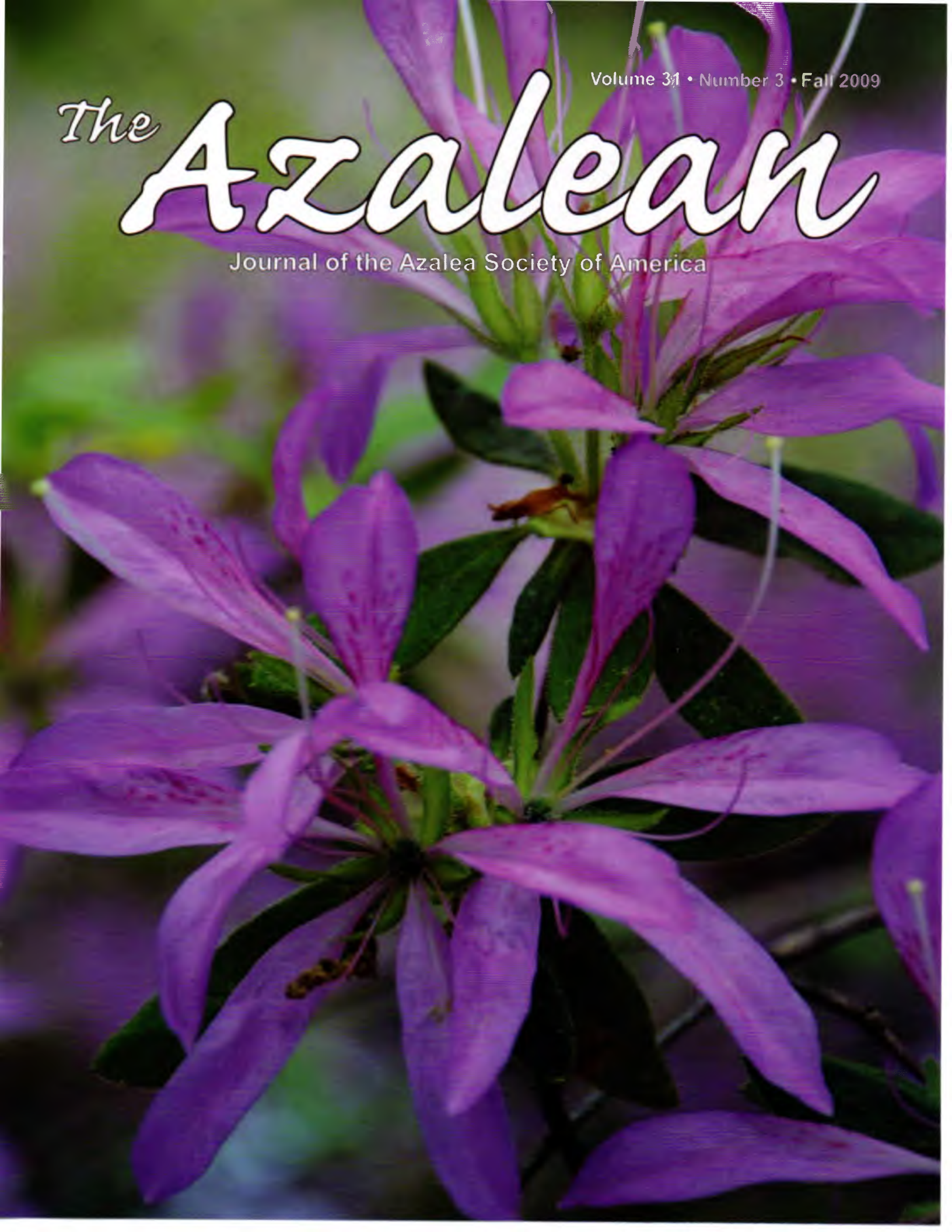
Volume 31 • Number 3 • Fall 2009

# The Azalean

Journal of the Azalea Society of America



# President's Letter

Aaron Cook — Valdese, North Carolina

On Friday, December 9, 1977, at 8 p.m. a meeting was held at Brookside Gardens for the purpose of forming an azalea society. Those in attendance were **George Harding**, **Mike White**, **Bob Caviness**, **Frank White**, **Emile Deckert**, and **Alice Holland**. **Emile Deckert** was asked to serve as the acting President and **Alice Holland** was asked to serve temporarily as Secretary/Treasurer.

There was apparently some discussion about whether or not to be part of the American Rhododendron Society. In the end, it was decided that the newly formed Azalea Society of America would be a separate entity, but would cooperate with and remain friendly with the ARS. By 1978, the society was well organized with by-laws, national officers, and a board of governors (now known as the board of directors).

Photo Pam Fitch

▲ Outgoing ASA President John Brown (left) wth incoming President Aaron Cook (right) at the 2009 National Convention in Virginia.

The first public meeting was held in Silver Spring, Maryland, with 43 of 100 society members present. In 1979, the annual meeting was held at the U.S. National Arboretum with 75 of the society's 140 members present. By the following year, there were five ASA chapters. New chapters in Louisiana and the Midwest were established in 1981 and the ASA has continued to grow ever since.

Currently we have more than 800 members and 11 chapters. We have an active on-line azalea discussion group and a Web site. In recent years, the board has worked diligently to provide additional services for our members and the general public. Some of our successes are the Azalea City program, the archives, the seed exchange, and the Azalea Research Foundation. By all accounts we seem to be doing well, and we have good reason to be proud of our Society. We have a broad-based core membership, the Society is financially stable, and we produce a colorful and informative journal.

So how do we build on our strengths and continue to improve? Let's begin by setting some goals for the next year. I strongly believe that if we are to continue to grow it will be at the local level through active chapters. If you are currently serving as an officer in a chapter, make it your goal to have at least six meetings in the coming year. Build your meetings around interesting speakers, seed exchanges, cutting exchanges, garden visits, and flower shows. Be a good azalea friend, sharing advice and plants with your neighbors, family, and friends. Often that gift plant is treasured for many years, a constant living reminder of the giver.

On the national level let's set a new attendance record at the New Orleans Convention in March. When this society started, nearly half of the membership attended the annual meetings. Let's set our goal for the next convention at 25 percent of the membership attending. I expect to see 200 of my azalea friends in New Orleans. Is there any better place to celebrate our successes, share and learn about new ideas and projects, and to enjoy good azalea fellowship than the Big Easy?

With the warmest of regards and looking forward to a bright future, your friend—*Aaron.*

Azalea Society of America

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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The Azalean
Journal of the Azalea Society of America

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Address editorial and business correspondence to:
Editor, ***The Azalean***
P.O. Box 632537
Nacogdoches, TX 75963
E-mail: theazalean@gmail.com

Society Web site: **www.azaleas.org**
Mail list: **azaleas@yahoogroups.com**

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# contents

VOLUME 31 NUMBER 3 FALL 2009

## Features



## Society News



### On the Cover

'Koromo-shikibu' is an azalea with hairy leaves and very unusual flowers. The long strap-like lavender flower petals spread out in a spidery fashion. Purplish pink flower petals are 1.5 inches long and .5 wide. Early-midseason bloomer.

Photo Pam Fitch

# Memories

Carol Flowers—Washington, D.C.

Each year I look forward to attending the ASA convention. I meet new people, catch up with people I have not seen since the previous convention, and get lots of gardening ideas. What occurred to me this year was just how many memories I have associated with azaleas.

As we went on tours this year, I remembered my college years. Long Island's Planting Fields Arboretum was the temporary site for Stony Brook University, and I was lucky enough to take four years of classes in those beautiful surroundings. As a science major, the spring was full of the stresses of lab reports to write, finals to prepare for, and what seemed like endless hours in classrooms and labs. In the middle of all this, daffodils, cherry trees, azaleas, and rhododendrons burst into bloom. I took time out to roam the 408 acres, look at all the plants and trees around me, and hear God say: "stay cool, relax, and enjoy the beauty that only I can provide."

The 2009 convention began with the traditional opening night talks. **Don Hyatt** entertained us as last minute technical glitches were fixed. I thought of the first Rhododendron Society chapter meeting I attended so many years ago. Don entertained then too. The meeting was devoted to auctioning off rhododendron and azalea cuttings. "Five," he said. "Do I hear 10, 20, 50, 75..."

"Seventy-five dollars," I thought. "I don't have that kind of money to spend on plant cuttings."

"Sold for seventy-five cents," said Don. I felt a little better. We had a new house, no excess money for fancy gardens, but still big dreams. Maybe I could learn to grow azaleas and create gardens like those I had seen at Planting Fields.

Eventually technical problems were resolved, and **Tony Dove** was able to talk about and show pictures of how his Maryland garden has evolved during the years. I remembered an earlier talk I had heard him give. The subject of that talk had been the design and development of one of his earliest projects as a professional horticulturist, London Towne Gardens. The talk was given at London Towne, and we had the benefit of experiencing the garden first hand. What I took away, and still remember to this day, was the importance of soil preparation. Before planting anything at London Towne, he amended the soil with copious amounts of composted leaves.

At the time I heard the talk, I was just beginning to garden. Our soil was sticky Maryland clay. About 20 years have passed, and lots of leaves, peat moss,

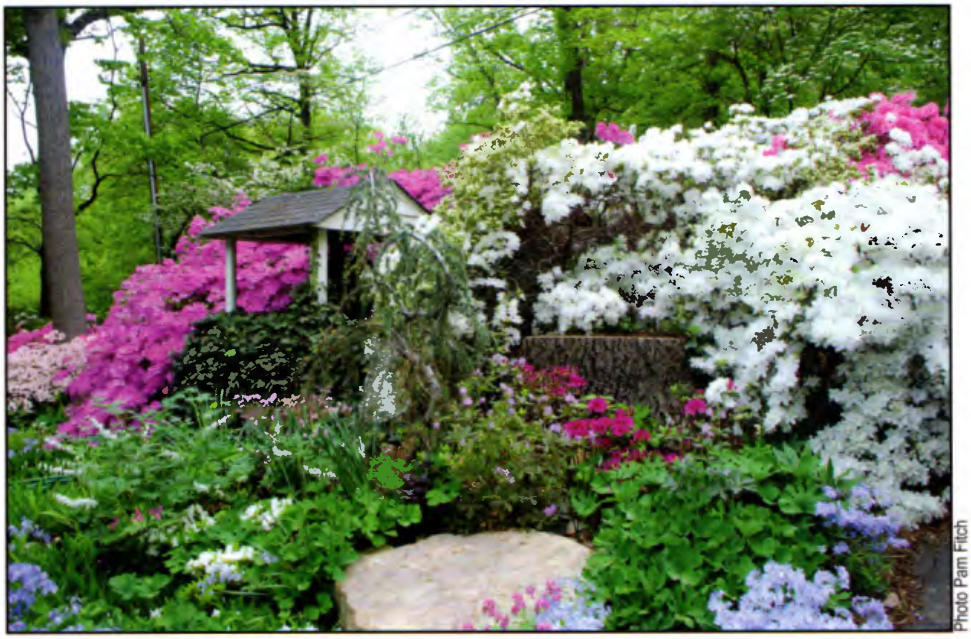

Photo Pam Fitch

▲ Don Hyatt's garden features many large evergreen and deciduous azaleas, rhododendrons, and companion plants, many of which Don has raised from seed.

▼ Since the late 1980s, Joe Klimavicz has been hybridizing evergreen azaleas in his one-third acre Vienna, Virginia, backyard.

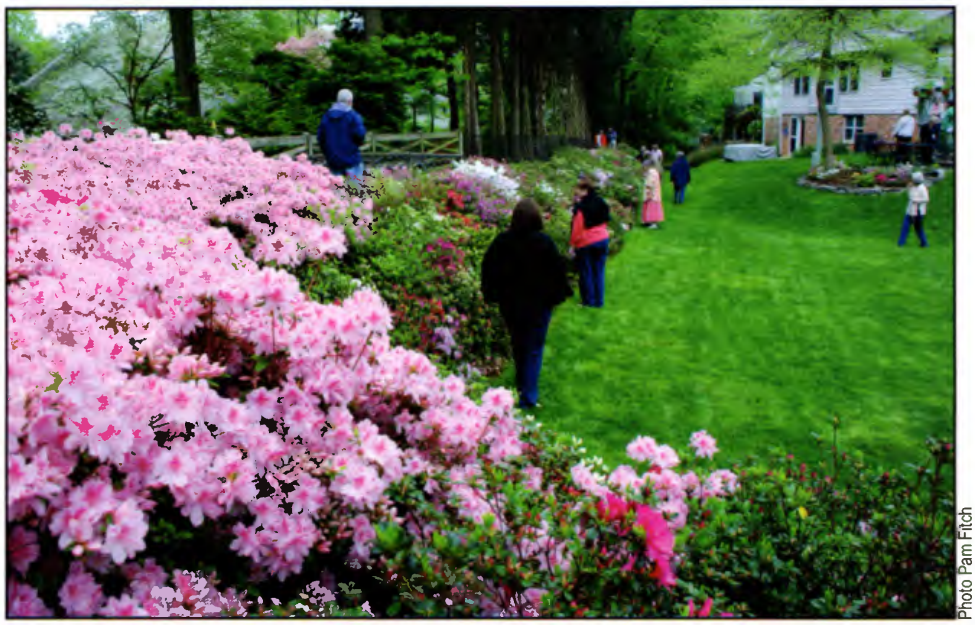

Photo Pam Fitch

and other organic matter have made that clay more fertile. The plants I planted have probably been too successful. What were supposed to be foundation plantings are now 25-foot rhodies and hollies.

Tilling leaves and grass clippings into the soil remains my favorite way of creating decent soil out of Maryland clay. Thanks, Tony, for explaining how nature makes its own soil and how I can get great gardening results by using nature's methods.

Part of the Friday night agenda was a presentation by **Rick Bauer**. What both Rick and Tony emphasized were the curve balls that challenge all gardeners. Rick talked about **Bob** and **Betty Stewart's** garden and the challenges he has overcome. Bob gardens on a suburban lot that for the most part is a steep hill. The slope provides the good drainage that azaleas like, but also the conditions for erosion and loss of good soil.

Bob rose to the challenge by terracing and growing the azaleas in large metal barrels. The metal cooked the soil during Virginia's hot summers. The azaleas rebelled and died. Bob rose to the challenge. Now, surrounding the metal barrels are wooden boards which act as insulation. The azaleas no longer fry in the heat. Because of Rick's presentation, I have a much better understanding of the work Bob Stewart has done to develop the many beautiful azalea hybrids we enjoyed on the garden tour.

Many years ago, my cousin's wife brought me over to the Stewarts' home to see first hand Bob's hybridizing operations. What I remember seeing was a basement containing shelves of tiny green plants. On this visit, I was looking forward to seeing this garden in bloom on the Sunday tour.

Saturday's garden tours took us to several private gardens. During the years, I had heard descriptions of each of them but never had the opportunity to see them during peak bloom season. All were on suburban lots. All showed the particular interests of the individual gardeners.

The Krabill family enjoys collecting. Because of this interest, they have amassed more than 1,100 varieties of azaleas. I took cuttings from Dan's plants last year. What impressed me is that he knew where each of these varieties was located. The Krabills have done a great job of combining all these plants and creating a beautiful garden.

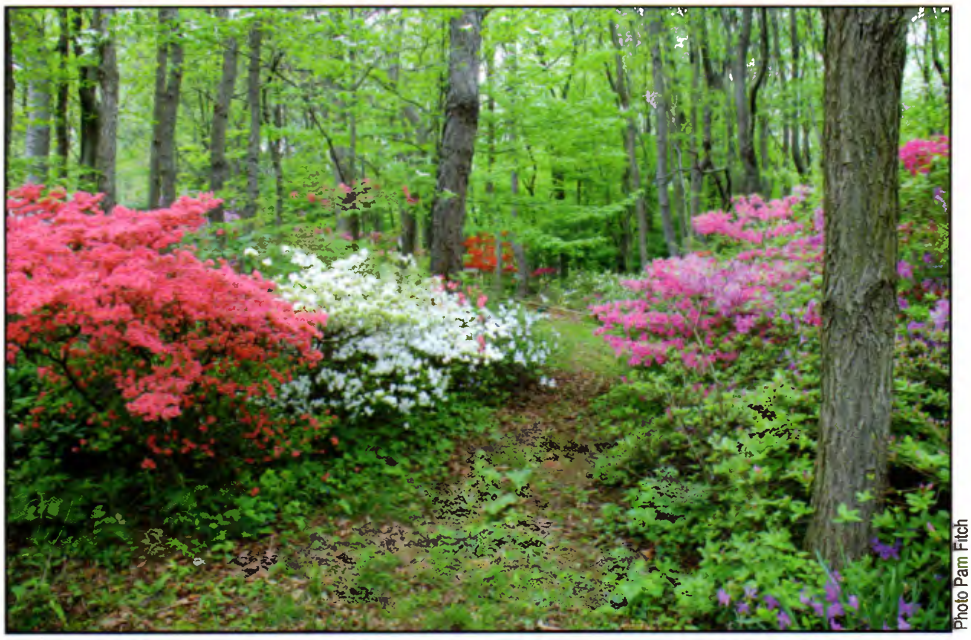

Photo Pam Fitch

▲ Phran's Azalea Trails (Phil and Frances Louer) includes approximately 150 separate flowerbeds of azaleas and rhododendrons along winding trails on five naturally landscaped acres near Haymarket, Virginia.

▼ The Krabills' garden began in 1990 with about 200 small azaleas. At present, the garden consists of approximately 1,100 varieties of evergreen azaleas.

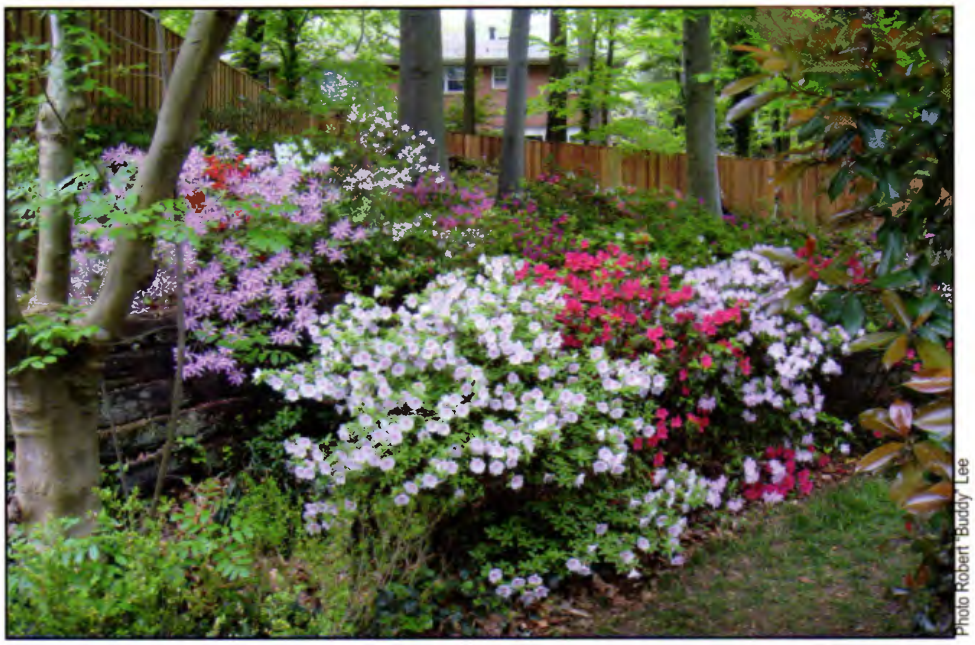

Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

As per **Tony Dove's** Friday night talk, gardens evolve. Plants are living and dying things. Don Hyatt has learned a lot about the dying part. During the last few years he has lost a lot of large, older trees and shrubs. He told me at a Christmas party last year that he didn't know how he was going to get his damaged garden in shape for the convention. The artist in Don came forth during the last few months. Old trees and shrubs may have been gone, but using his collection of wild flowers and other plants a new beautiful look emerged. Don probably enjoys having more sunlight envelop his garden.

The science involved in hybridizing shows up in **Joe** and **Brenda Klimavicz's** garden. I have heard Joe talk about his hybridizing hobby and how he gives away his reject plants to suburban neighbors. As we entered the subdivision where the family lives, I knew we were getting close to his home. Many of the surrounding homes had lots of azaleas in bloom, most likely compliments of Joe's hybridizing program. The hybridizing program is a family affair. Joe and Brenda's daughters have used azalea hybridizing as subjects for school science fair projects. I hope all of us will pass on our knowledge of azaleas to the children we know.

The final garden tour on Saturday was at **Phil** and **Fran Louer's** home in Haymarket, Virginia. Like the Krabill family, Phil and Fran are serious collectors and have filled their five acres with thousands and thousands of azaleas, rhododendrons, wild flowers, and other companion plants. I particularly liked the many ferns, wildflowers, and native plants that have been incorporated into this garden.

After each convention event, participants headed toward the plant sale. Generally these plants will not be found at local nurseries. Always, there are different hybrid groups and interesting companion plants. **Bob Stewart's** hybrids, Holly Springs hybrids, and native azaleas enticed a lot of us. The plants add interest to our gardens.

**Bob Stelloh** and **John Brown** made a joint presentation Saturday evening. They have hiked and explored the habitats of azaleas growing in America's East Coast mountain regions. Many of us have magnificent gardens, but after seeing the vistas captured in their photographs one realizes no matter how lovely your own garden is, gardens created by nature will always be grander and more beautiful.

**George McClellan** expanded on Bob and John's presentation by taking us across the United States and Canada through pictures showing the native azalea and rhododendron plant world. Environmentalists are recognizing the beauty of these native habitats. In recent years, work has begun to protect these areas in order to keep these native plants healthy. Bob, John, and George showed pictures that made me want to work at getting more physically fit. Seeing first hand the mountainous vistas where rhodies and azaleas grow naturally would be a wonderful experience.

Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ Convention attendees explore Bob Stewart's hybridizing operation.

▼ The garden of Leslie and Dave Nanney is a two-and-a-half-acre woodland garden containing over 2,500 azaleas and over 1,000 varieties.

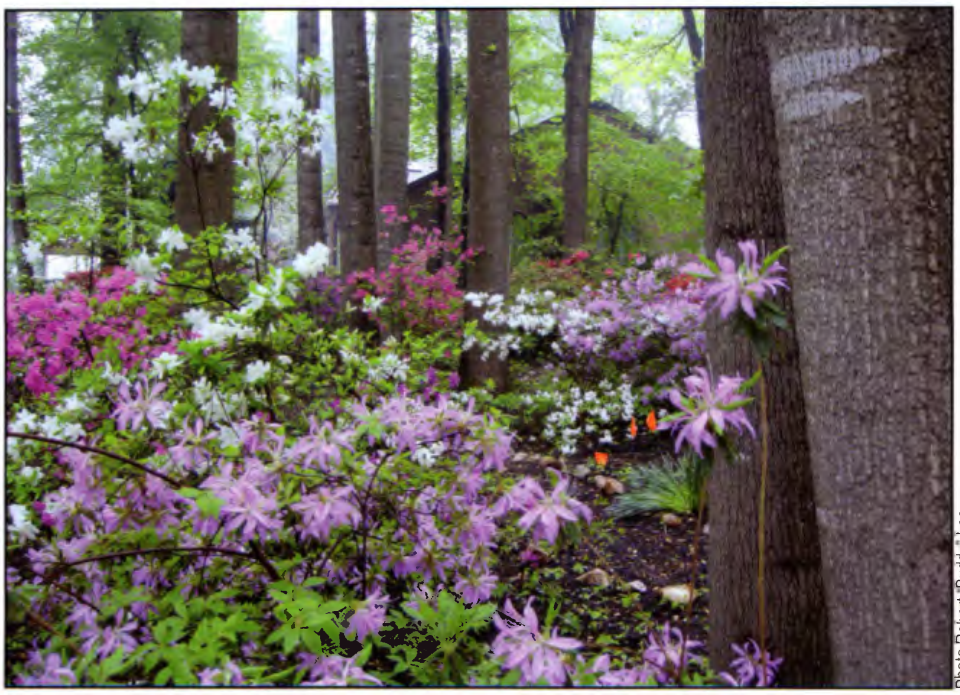

Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

Saturday was a cloudy day, and Sunday we woke up to steady rain. Umbrellas came out, and we saw gardens from a different perspective. On tour was the Stewart garden, **Dave** and **Leslie Nanney** garden, and **Carolyn** and **Paul Beck's** beautiful home in the woods.

The cover of one of Galle's books on azaleas has an exquisite picture of the Stewart garden hillside filled with blooming azaleas. It is a beautiful picture but does not compare with seeing first hand the real thing. I hope Bob will continue to develop hybrids for many years to come.

The Nanney and Beck gardens were woodland gardens where tall, old trees provided a canopy for the azalea collections grown below. On a sunny day shafts of light probably fill the understory in these gardens and enhance the beauty of these regal plants. Both gardens had extensive evolving azalea collections. Both gardens were becoming filled with expanding collections of companion plants. Wildflowers were becoming more prominent in Dave and Leslie's garden, and dwarf conifers in the garden of Carolyn and Paul. After touring gardens for two days we all had new ideas for our own gardens.

Both **Rosalie Nachman** and **Don Hyatt** gave presentations at the Sunday night banquet. Over the years, I have heard both of them speak. I think of Rosalie as the Erma Bombeck of the plant world. This year she entertained us by interspersing pictures of a trip she took to India with her pictures and information on the latest plants that excite her. Thanks, Rosalie, for your willingness to share with us all you have learned about the plant world.

Don based his talk on a presentation he had given to a plant group in Scotland. For the plant scholars, lots of educational information was provided. For the backyard gardener beautiful photographs of azaleas appealed.

I returned home after this year's convention inspired by all I had seen and heard. I thought of the many previous conventions I had attended. Like Tony Dove's garden, my own has evolved. The little Gable hybrid rhododendron I planted many years ago is now in full bloom and more than 20 feet tall. This year the first azalea cuttings I successfully rooted created a 40-foot display of purple and white blooms along a backyard fence. I don't even pay 75 cents for cuttings anymore because I just ask my many azalea friends to give me cuttings.

Happy azalea memories are a part of my life. These special plants and their beautiful flowers have been stress relievers during difficult times, and during tranquil times surrounded my life with beauty. As usual, I bought too many plants at the plant sale. They are adding to my already too large collection of plants in pots. Maybe someday I'll get all of those plants planted.

Thanks Northern Virginia—the convention truly did celebrate the azaleas in your part of the world.

Photo Robert "Buddy" Lee

▲ The Beck garden is situated at the edge of a well-established development against a backdrop of wooded parkland.

▼ Dave Nanney hosted a post-convention tour of the Pentagon. Pictured are (left to right) ASA Immediate Past President John Brown, President Aaron Cook, and Past President Robert "Buddy" Lee.


*Before retiring,* **Carol Flowers** *managed a computer help desk for the U.S. Census Bureau. Her interest in azaleas came from her many childhood visits to the Planting Fields Arboretum in Oyster Bay, New York. She has been a member of the Azalea Society of America for more than 25 years.*

# The Quest for the Yellow Evergreen Azalea

Don Hyatt—McLean, Virginia

*Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of articles based on Don Hyatt's presentation at the 2009 ASA Convention.*

One unrealized goal in hybridizing is the quest for a yellow evergreen azalea. There are a number of evergreen azaleas with flowers of light cream to greenish yellow. Some are arguably as deep as the dwarf yellow *Rhododendron keiskei* but nothing has approached the yellows found in the deciduous azaleas.

Some yellowish evergreen azaleas include the Kurume 'Mizu-no-yamabuki', the Glenn Dale 'Puck', and Robin Hill azaleas 'Olga Niblett' and 'Bob White'. All of those except 'Puck' have hose-in-hose flowers so they are female sterile and do not set seed. Sadly, one often runs into sterility in hybridizing. I once paid dearly at an auction for a small plant of a light yellow evergreen azalea raised from seed of *R. kaempferi f.* album by Dr. Sandra McDonald. I wanted to use it in hybridizing but discovered that it is sterile in both directions. It is difficult to root, too.

The evergreen azalea with probably the strongest yellow color to date is 'Melba's Dream.' It is a most unusual plant. Reported to be a cross of an evergreen azalea called 'Lois' with a yellow Exbury azalea, it has small flowers of an unmistakable yellow hue. It is not an easy plant to grow, though. I am not aware of it being used in other crosses, so its use as a parent may be questionable. Perhaps it is sterile, too.

A very interesting side note about 'Melba's Dream' is that it seems to be immune to petal blight! Those small petals are unique in that they have obvious hairs on the margins, reminding one of a calyx or a leaf rather than a typical petal. Since petal blight does not attack the foliage of azaleas, perhaps these strange petals have some property akin to leaf tissue that makes them immune to the disease. Another azalea that seems to be immune to petal blight is the Satsuki variety, 'Chojuho.' It has small, long lasting flowers of a coral red color and its petals have hairs on the edge, too. I am not aware of any other azaleas or rhododendrons immune to pet-

Photo Don Hyatt

▲ 'Mizu-no-yamabuki'

Photo Don Hyatt

▲ Yellow deciduous azalea *R. calendulaceum*

▼ The yellow evergreen azalea 'Melba's Dream' seems to be immune to petal blight.

Photo Don Hyatt

▼ Kehr hybrid ('Gyoten' x Pryor Yellow)

Photo Don Hyatt

al blight, but this might be an interesting feature to explore.

Dr. August Kehr ("Augie") was convinced it was possible to produce an evergreen azalea with strong yellow color. [1][5] Although he pursued that goal for many years, he passed away before achieving it. He has, however, left us a rich legacy. Not only do we have the remnants of his hybridizing program but also the knowledge he gained in his research that he willingly shared.

Among Augie Kehr's notable introductions was 'Cream Ruffles', which is a rather nice cream-colored hybrid in its own right. 'Kehr's Moonbeam', that came from the cross (578-8A x 'Green Glow'), was his last, and probably best, greenish yellow. Interestingly, the pollen parent in that cross, 'Green Glow', is a double greenish white introduced by Roslyn Nursery from seed I sent to the ARS Seed Exchange. The cross was (('Eri' x 'Glacier') x 'Anna Kehr').

Augie noted that the only yellowish pigments found in evergreen azaleas are pale ivory-colored compounds called flavenols. Hybrids that merely concentrate those pigments can never produce a flower deep enough to be called yellow. He felt it necessary to introduce the much stronger yellow pigments found in other flowers like marigolds, daffodils, dandelions, and many deciduous azaleas. Those yellow pigments are called carotenoids. [9] Evergreen azaleas do not have them so they must be introduced from some another source, likely the deciduous azaleas.

Robert L. Pryor at the U.S. Agricultural Research Service in Beltsville, Maryland, experimented with wide crosses between deciduous and evergreen azaleas for nearly 10 years. [7] He used diploid Mollis hybrids for one parent and various Kurume and *kaempferi* cultivars for the other. Pryor ended up with many albino seedlings that eventually died, but he raised hundreds of hybrids with varying degrees of persistent foliage, although none were strong yellow. An important point he did observe is that persistent foliage seemed linked to the maternal parent.

Work by Ureshino and others at Kyushu University had similar results. In the cross ((*R. kiusianum* x *R. eriocarpum*) x *R. japonicum* var. *flavum*), the resultant seedlings were albinos, presumably due to genetic incompatibilities. [10] Because seedlings get only half of their genes from each parent, in wide crosses such as these, perhaps some of the essential genes needed for growth were missing in the seedlings.

Augie Kehr decided that it was necessary to use a tetraploid evergreen azalea as one parent, preferably a hybrid that did not have any tendency for purple color. He converted several evergreen azaleas to tetraploids using colchicines so he could better pursue his hybridizing goal. [3] 'Cream Ruffles Tetra' is one such example. He then crossed those with a tetraploid yellow deciduous azalea. The resulting plants would be allotetraploids and would have a full complement of genes from each parent and thus should be more vigorous. He recommended avoiding orange deciduous azaleas since they could introduce anthocyanin pigments that might interfere with flower color expression. [6]

Augie chose *R. calendulaceum* as the deciduous parent since it was known to be tetraploid. Dr. Tom Ranney has found other tetraploid yellow deciduous azaleas including the fragrant plants like *R. austrinum, R. luteum*, and 'Admiral Semmes'. [2] Fragrant yellows would be very nice!

Augie made several crosses with one of Pryor's seedlings, (75-305). He called it Pryor Yellow. It is not likely that the plant is still in existence, since Augie lamented that it was a sickly plant that seemed to defy propagation attempts. Pryor Yellow had light yellow flowers, and it was apparently fertile. Augie's plant eventually died, but some seedlings from his hybridizing program still exist. I have observed eight clones that have strong cream to light yellow color. Although many did not have tags, I found two, ('Banka' x "Pryor Yellow") and ('Gunka' x Pryor Yellow), that were excellent and they may be useful parents, especially if they are fertile tetraploids.

Santamour and Dumuth experimented with backcrossing evergreen and deciduous azalea hybrids for multiple generations. [9] They did find evidence of carotenes in several of the "yellow" seedlings, but they noted that the heaviest concentrations were in the blotch regions. This made me think that azaleas with expanded blotch areas might be extremely useful in this project. With a larger blotch region, it might be easier to concentrate the stronger yellow pigments. Carotenoids are not dissolved in the sap, but must be carried in plastid bodies found in the blotch areas.

I am now looking for azaleas that have large blotches since they might be useful in this breeding project. Naturally, white-flowered varieties would be preferable but one plant that caught my eye is Marshy Point's 'Pam Corkran.' It has a blotch that can extend to at least 75% of the corolla. Unfortunately, this plant is probably not useful in its present form, but it could be valuable in the future. The first problem is that it is not white, so it carries an anthocyanin pigment that will complicate the yellow color expression in its seedlings. At least it is not purple! Second, the fact that the flowers have a colored border implies that the azalea is a diploid. Azaleas with bordered flowers have been shown to be diploid plants except for the colored flower edge, which is actually tetraploid tissue. To use the plant in breeding, it will be necessary to convert the whole plant to tetraploid in order to cross successfully with a deciduous azalea.

It is clear that the quest for a yellow evergreen azalea is not going to be easy, but it is an admirable goal. Now that I am beginning to understand Augie Kehr's approach, I see a possible path to success, but it will take several stages. First, it will be helpful to convert other evergreen azaleas to tetraploid forms, selecting for creamy whites with no evidence of purple pigment. It would also be great if they have large, heavy blotch regions and superb foliage. The next stage will be to cross yellow deciduous azaleas onto those plants to produce an F1 generation. It is not likely that those will have the persistent foliage and deep yellow flower color we desire, so it will then be necessary to cross those with siblings and other promising parents to produce additional generations. Hopefully, we can concentrate that yellow color while

*Continued on Page 64.*

# Society News

## Membership Renewals Due

*Dan Krabill, ASA Treasurer*

It is almost time for most of us to renew our memberships in the Azalea Society of America. The year your membership expires appears on the top line of the address label for this issue of ***The Azalean***. If the year 2009 appears on that line, your membership expires at the end of this year.

Dues notices are mailed in early November. If we get your check before then (or an e-mail saying you're sending it), you may take a $1 "early bird" discount off the amount of the check. That's our thanks for not having to spend the time and money to mail you a dues notice. Or, if you know you are not going to renew, please let us know by letter or e-mail, so we will not have to mail you a dues notice.

First, review the information on your address label and make any needed corrections. Also, if your telephone number or e-mail address has changed, please provide us with the correct information.

Then, circle an amount in the table below to show the number of years and the type of membership you would like. The table includes a $1 discount for each year paid in advance, up to $5 per year. Those years are paid in full, even if the dues are increased later. For example, to renew for four years as a Regular Member, circle $94 in the table.

| Years | Regular | Contributing | Supporting | Endowment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | $25 | $50 | $100 | $200 |
| 2 | $49 | $99 | $199 | $399 |
| 3 | $72 | $147 | $297 | $597 |
| 4 | $94 | $194 | $394 | $794 |
| 5 | $115 | $240 | $490 | $990 |
| 6 | $135 | $285 | $585 | $1185 |

Subtracting $1 for your "early bird" discount? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Or, consider joining for life, for the one-time payment of $500 or five consecutive annual payments of $100 each. Sorry, this is not available for organizations or overseas members.

Finally, write your check or money order in US dollars for the total amount, payable to the "Azalea Society of America." Mail it along with a copy of this page to:

Dan Krabill, ASA Treasurer
6009 Copely Lane
McLean, VA 22101-2507

Alternatively, you may pay your dues with a credit card online through Paypal (http://www.paypal.com). Send your dues payment to: PayTheASA@aol.com. You can open a PayPal account in minutes (and if it asks, please mention PayTheASA@aol.com as the person who referred you). Then describe your changes, your membership type, and the number of years you are renewing for in the comments section.

## Recognizing generous ASA donors

*Dan Krabill, ASA Treasurer*

I would like to recognize and thank those individuals who have donated to the ASA by paying dues in excess of the $25 per year standard amount. We have three categories for donations in excess of regular dues -- Endowment ($200 or more per year), Sustaining ($100 or more per year), and Contributing ($50 or more per year).

Below is a list of members in these three categories for 2008 and 2009.

**Contributing Members 2008**
**Annual Dues Payments of $50 to $99**

Virginia & Samuel Burd
Jozef M. Delvaux
Marianne & Bruce Feller
Bob & Martha Kelly
Joan Lunney
Magnolia Plantation
W. T. Norris, Jr, MD
Cid & Liza Scallet
Bruce Seal & Liz Rachun
Mr. Frederick L. Thane
Mr. & Mrs. Art Vance
Phillip Dale Westmoreland

**Sustaining Members 2008**
**Annual Dues Payments of $100 to $199**

Louis J. Appell, Jr
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens
Kinney Nursery
Dan & Barbara Krabill
Dr. & Mrs. Donald E. Moreland
Barbara & Michael Stump

**Endowment Members 2008**
**Annual Dues Payments of $200 or more**

Robert & Dixie Lee
Donald H. Voss

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**Contributing Members 2009**
**Annual Dues Payments of $50 to $99**

John Bartlett
John & Carolyn Brown
Virginia & Samuel Burd
Jozef M. Delvaux
Deborah B. Head
Bob & Martha Kelly
Richard and Nancy Lear
Magnolia Plantation
Dr. Patrick McKenna
Dr. W. T. Norris, Jr.
Mr. Frederick L. Thane

**Sustaining Members 2009**
**Annual Dues Payments of $100 to $199**

Louis J. Appell, Jr
Kinney Nursery
Dr. & Mrs. Donald E. Moreland
Cid & Liza Scallet
Shangri La Botanical Gardens
Barbara & Michael Stump

**Endowment Members 2009**
**Annual Dues Payments of $200 or more**

Robert & Dixie Lee
Donald H. Voss

## Report from the ASA ARF

*James O. Thornton, chairman*

In the last issue of ***The Azalean*** we applauded the Board of Directors for approving the formation of the Azalea Research Foundation, and we gave you an overview of the foundation and what it will be doing.

Now, let's go a little further and cover some of the details, like the areas of research we will be considering for grants. You might find these areas interesting in that most of these items have been a nemesis of azaleaphiles for years. I'm sure that you will, as I have, find several problem areas you would personally like to fund!

**Classification (Systematic Botany)**

- plant identification
- chromosome studies
- phylogenetic grouping

**Hybridization**

- climatic hardiness
- disease resistance
- pest resistance
- plant habit
- flowering improvement (apomixis in plants, polyploidy, color)
- studies relating to mechanization programs for hybridizers
- naming and registration standards for hybridizers' new introductions

**Cultural**

- studies regarding the prevention of diseases and pests, such as:
  - *Exobasidium vaccinii* (leaf gall)
  - *Phytophthora* (root rot)
  - *Phomopsis* (die back)
  - *Ovulinia* (petal blight)
- fertilization influence
- pruning
- growing-on procedures, maintenance, schedules, etc. for cuttings, seedlings, and tissue culture

**Public Relations/Education**

- illustrated papers
- computerized presentations regarding all aspects of growing azaleas for the average gardener
- how-to booklets

As you can see the list is long, and there is plenty of room for more areas of research in our quest for the "perfect" azalea.

How do we go about accomplishing this work? In the beginning, we'll provide grants to researchers. Grants meaning dollars, and dollars meaning a bank account with lots of money coming from contributions. Contributions come from our "first responders," meaning you, our ASA members. We'll also seek funds from the rest of the world of folks who have the same interest and love of our azaleas. Please note, it will be to our advantage for members to give to show that the ASA stands behind us in this new undertaking. So please step forward.

We already have some money in the bank and we have a plan to spend as we go. We need your gifts to keep the process sustainable. The money we have in the bank comes from members and others who had the vision of the ASA having a research group long before the board decided to formally create one.

The list goes back to 1991 when the Oconee Chapter was given its charter. Then-ASA-President Malcolm Clark came down to formally welcome us into the fold. While visiting with me, he shared his wish to donate a sum to the Society for research. At that time, he was uncertain what that might be since it was based on the sale of some property. After his passing, that sum amounted to $10,000. What a visionary! What a benefactor!

There are others I'd like to list for they too had that same vision but contributed in different ways, whether it was donating their speaker remuneration or chapters donating a portion of their convention proceeds. Contributions were also made in memory of someone who loved the azalea.

Freda Barry
John and Carolyn Brown
Malcolm Clark
Tadeusz Daukza
David Dethero
Ian Donavan
Jan Flick
Carol and Dale Flowers
Fred and Jan Hertel
Donald Hyatt
Dan and Barbara Krabill
Robert "Buddy" Lee
Betty and Tom Loggia
Ken and Rita Majer
William and Mary McDavitt
Sandra and Ken McDonald
Dr. and Mrs. Don Moreland
New York Chapter ARS
Bob Stelloh
Southeast Chapter ARS
Patty Stratton
Art and Diane Vance
Kathy Van Veen
Northern Virginia Chapter ASA
Vaseyi Chapter ASA
Mary M. Wise
2003 ASA/ARS Convention
2008 ASA Convention

As I said, these are people who gave long before the Azalea Research Foundation received its approval and we are very grateful for their generosity. Since then, we made the official announcement in the last journal and made a plea for your donations. Sad-to-say but the response was less than expected—but it's a start. We are delighted to have received donations from the following:

Larry Asbill
Gerald Hudgens
James and Patsy Thornton

Maybe you haven't read the last journal or maybe you just set our envelope aside, but for whatever reason, go back and take another look at the list, think about our cause, our future, and help promote the Azalea Research Foundation! Can't find the envelope? No problem. Just send your donation to: Azalea Research Foundation, c/o James O.Thornton, 884 June Dr., Conyers, GA 30094-5016.

# Society Honors Distinguished Members

The Azalea Society of America has an awards program, and during the years has presented awards to our outstanding members who have made major contributions of time and energy to improve the Society. During the Society's national meeting in Herndon, Virginia, Awards Committee Chairman **Robert "Buddy" Lee** presented some well-deserved awards for service to Society members.

The first Distinguished Service Award went to **Phillip and Frances Louer** with the following inscription:

*For nearly thirty years, you have generously given your time, energy and knowledge to spread appreciation for the beauty of azaleas. Frances, you were a founding member of the Northern Virginia Chapter, and have served since the beginning as its only corresponding secretary. For the last ten years, you have been THE nominating committee, insuring continuity and shared leadership amongst our members. Phil, you have composed and distributed the Azalea Clipper, the chapter's newsletter, with a professional quality that makes it one of the best of its kind. You have chaired the 2009 convention committee, using your leadership skills to assure its success. Together, you have developed one of the premier azalea gardens on the east coast, and shared it with many garden clubs and other civic organizations every spring. You have given plants to many people, helping them to share in your love of these magnificent plants.*

*Phil and Frances Louer, we greatly appreciate you and your long-standing contributions and we thank you.*

The second Distinguished Service Award was presented to **Robert B. Stewart**. The inscription read:

Photo Pam Fitch

▲ ASA President John Brown, far left, and Past President Robert "Buddy" Lee, far right, presented the Distinguished Service Award to Phil and Frances Louer. Also pictured is their daughter, Leslie Nanney.

▼ ASA President John Brown, far left, and Past President Robert "Buddy" Lee, far right, presented the Distinguished Service Award to Jane Newman. Also pictured is Northern Virginia Chapter Member Dan Krabill.

Photo Pam Fitch

*For nearly thirty years, you have generously given your time, energy and knowledge to spread appreciation for the beauty of azaleas in the Northern Virginia area. You were a founding member of the Northern Virginia Chapter, and have hosted tours of your garden both locally and for the ASA National Conventions. You are known as the "Azalea Man" because of your incredible azalea garden. You have successfully developed new "Bob Stewart hybrid" evergreen azaleas, with approximately 15 already named and more under evaluation. Your kindness and generosity are witnessed as you*

*contribute plants to the Chapter plant sales and with friends and visitors. Photos of your garden are in the Galle Azalea book, the principal reference for evergreen azaleas.*

*Bob Stewart, we greatly appreciate you and your long-standing contributions and we thank you.*

The third Distinguished Service Award was presented to **Jane Newman**. The inscription read:

*For nearly thirty years, you have generously given your time, energy and knowledge to spread appreciation for the beauty of azaleas in the Northern Virginia area. You were a founding member of the Northern Virginia Chapter, and have served on the editorial advisory board for the Azalean. Your extensive knowledge of the Glenn Dale azaleas makes you one of the premier experts on that collection. You have shared your garden, written articles for the Azalean, and generously contributed to our local chapter plant exchanges.*

*Jane Newman, we greatly appreciate you and your long-standing contributions and we thank you.*

The fourth and final Distinguished Service Award was presented to **Donald Hyatt**. The inscription read:

*For nearly thirty years, you have generously given your time, energy and knowledge to spread appreciation for the beauty of azaleas in the Northern Virginia area. You were a founding member of the Northern Virginia Chapter. Your contributions to the chapter and to the Azalea Society at large are almost too many to report. You have written articles, hosted garden visits, developed world-class talks using photos, music, and computer magic to demonstrate your love of azaleas. Every spring you organize and lead*

Photo Pam Fitch

▲ ASA President John Brown (left) and Past President Robert "Buddy" Lee (right) presented the Distinguished Service Award to Don Hyatt. Also pictured is Phyllis Rittman.

*visits down the east coast to visit your best loved Gregory Bald. You have hybridized azaleas and rhododendrons, and your contributions to the seed exchange have resulted in other named hybrids. Your expertise, ability to communicate and simple joy of sharing this vision have given thousands of plant lovers an appreciation for hybrid and native azaleas.*

*Don Hyatt, we greatly appreciate you and your long-standing contributions and we thank you.*

The Society has many hardworking and selfless members who have contributed much to the success of the Society over the years. We have recognized a few of these people for their efforts and need to recognize many more. One of the perks of hosting a national convention is the hosting chapter's ability to select award recipients who would not normally be able to travel to distant conventions.


The U.S. Post Office will not forward ***The Azalean*** nor deliver it to a bad mailing address. Please notify the Society of any errors or changes in your mailing address.

Submit address changes to:
Carol Flowers, ASA Secretary
700 New Hampshire NW, Apt. 1011
Washington, D.C. 20037
E-mail: vze1onzd@verizon.net

# Chapter News

## Brookside Gardens

*William C. Miller III, President*

The speaker at the April 5 chapter meeting was **Jim Gears** of Octoraro Nursery. His presentation was a slide show entitled *Favorite Azaleas and Where They Grow.* Jim has been interested in the native azaleas for many years and has become known as a favorite source for all sorts of interesting and well grown plants. The Bob Stewart Door Prize was won by **FloAnn Bowen**, the White's Nursery Door Prize was won by **Janet Miller**, and the beautiful specimen of 'Bobbi Gail' (donated by **Jane Kinzie**) was won by **Mary Rutley.**

The chapter's 30th annual flower show was held May 1-2 and was highly successful. The Best-in-Show Award went to **Yoriko Chin** for her specimen of 'Girard's Hot Shot'. **Bill Miller** amassed the greatest number of points and received the Sweepstakes Award. The annual flower show is one of the chief public outreach activities sponsored by the chapter and much advice was dispensed to the information hungry public. For a list of Best-in-Show winners since 1980, see the Brookside Gardens Chapter Awards page at: **http://www.azaleas.org/bgawards.html**.

▼ Yoriko Chin (left) with her husband Ming, standing behind her Best-in-Show specimen of 'Girard's Hot Shot' at the 2009 Brookside Gardens Chapter's 30th annual flower show at Brookside Gardens on May 2, 2009.

Photo: Janet C. Miller

The chapter's annual azalea sales at the Tilden School parking lot on May 9 and at Brookside Gardens on May 17 were blessed with good weather. Well attended by the public, many plants found new homes.

The annual chapter picnic was held July 12 at the home of **Roberta** and **Gordon Hagen** in historic Cabin John, Maryland. Very active in the Magnolia and Azalea societies, the Hagens are equally interested in all kinds of plants. The Hagen garden is a collection many years in the making and a landscape worth seeing. The hospitality, the food, and the fellowship were delightful.

As of this writing, the next event will be the annual chapter auction at Brookside Gardens on Sunday, September 20. Historically, this has been a very popular event with the membership and the public—owing perhaps to the wide variety of plants that are available. All of the plants are donations and due to the highly diversified nature of our group, there is no way to predict what interesting plants will grace the auctioneer's stand. While there is always a good selection of azaleas, many rare plants and the occasional exotic plant turns up. In recent years, two such exotics were *Epiphyllum oxypetalum* (night blooming cereus) and *Plumeria* (the source of flowers for Hawaiian leis).

The speaker for the October 11 chapter meeting at Brookside Gardens will be **Bill Johnson**. The title for his presentation is *Hillwood Through the Seasons*. A past chapter president, Bill is a horticulturist and volunteer coordinator for Hillwood, the 25-acre Marjorie Merriweather Post estate (museum and gardens) located in northwest Washington, DC.

The last chapter event for 2009 will be the December 6 meeting. **Jane Kinzie**, the president of Kinzie Farms, will be the speaker and her presentation is entitled *Azaleas—A Local Grower's Perspective.* At this meeting, we will have the annual election of officers and the presentation of the F. P. Lee Commendation for 2009. For a complete list of recipients of the F. P. Lee Commendation, see the Brookside Gardens Chapter Awards page at: **http://www.azaleas.org/bgawards.html.**

## Lake Michigan

*John Migas, Treasurer*

The temperatures here in the Midwest have been way below average, and above average rainfalls have been welcomed by all. Plants have been growing extremely well and summer budset is excellent. The chapter is planning a late summer cutting party for August or early September.

Chapter President **Phil Lanning** along with **John Migas** have been working on updating the roster list, mostly e-mail addresses. Plans are in the making for the Lake Michigan

Photo Allen Owings

▲ Margie Jenkins (left) speaks to a group gathered at the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station. Also pictured is Louisiana Chapter Member Regina Bracy (right).

Chapter to host a future event here in the Midwest, along with plans for the chapter's first Christmas holiday gathering.

## Louisiana

*Allen Owings, President*

The late spring meeting of the Louisiana Chapter was held on Sunday, May 17 at the home of **Randall** and **Regina Bracy** in Amite. Boiled crawfish were enjoyed by the 25 members in attendance. Chapter member **Wayne McLaurin** presented **Margie Jenkins** a beautifully framed photograph of her in the azalea garden at the LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station. A large framed edition was also presented to **Regina Bracy** for display at the LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station.

The group is actively working on plans for the ASA national convention in New Orleans scheduled for March 14-17, 2010. Information and registration forms will appear in the Winter issue of ***The Azalean***.

## Northern Virginia

*Rick Bauer, Vice President*

The Northern Virginia Chapter was busily engaged in final preparation for the national convention in May. We were concerned that the economy would put a damper on attendance, but were all pleasantly surprised with the turnout—153 ASA members attended various aspects of the convention and 118 participated in the garden tours each day. While Mother Nature didn't completely cooperate with us, it didn't seem to dampen the spirits of the participants. We'd like to thank those ASA members who were able to attend this year's convention. It was a pleasure meeting you.

The last Sunday in March the chapter met at the George Mason Library in Annandale to hear a presentation by **Don Hyatt** on **Bob Stewart's** hybrid azaleas. This presentation was highlighted by the many beautiful pictures of Bob's azaleas which were taken by **Carolyn Beck**. This segment was later included in the **Bob Stewart/Pete Vines** presentation given the first night of the convention. Bob is a long-time member of the Northern Virginia chapter, and many of the convention attendees were able to see his hybrid azaleas first hand during the garden tours.

On July 12, we held our annual cutting exchange at George Mason Library. This event is eagerly anticipated by our members each year, since it provides them an opportunity to obtain cuttings from a wide variety of azaleas. It also provides us the opportunity to sample **Lee** and **Carole McElvain's** homemade ice cream and toppings.

## Oconee

*Ruth Mellon, Secretary*

The Oconee Chapter met May 17 with 12 members in attendance. **Frank Bryan** was the main speaker with his PowerPoint presentation on native azaleas. This was an excellent program with superior photographs. Frank also provided a highly detailed handout that could be used by any novice to identify native azalea plants.

After a short break, Frank presented a fun piece on "bugs," again showing his expertise in photography. **Jim Thornton** then showed the group a new version of the Oconee Chapter Web site presentation which can now be seen on "YouTube" (search "Azaleas Oconee").

Vice President **Keri Roberson** conducted a business meeting where such items as programs, membership, and shows, and the annual Master Gardeners Fall Festival set for the first week in October. In addition, the post of Oconee Chapter Newsletter Editor is still open. At the close of the meeting, the members recognized **Allison Fuqua** on his 95th birthday.

## Vaseyi

*Suzanne W. Medd, Secretary*

The chapter held its annual cutting exchange on July 26 at the Bullington Center. **Leeann Connelly-Shearouse**, known as one of the leading authorities on aquatic plants, was the guest speaker. Through the years, Leeann has developed many new tropical and hardy water lilies. It is widely accepted that she was the first to develop the now popular double anemone form of the tropical day-blooming water lily. This was from some crosses she did involving *Nymphaea colorata*, *N.* 'Midnight' and *N. ampla*. Many of today's modern double hybrids come to us through this work.

In 1987, she founded Tropical Pond & Garden, and she also served as a contributing editor and featured columnist for *Water Gardening Magazine*. In 1998, she received international recognition and was awarded the Banksian medal

from the Royal Horticultural Society of London, England, for one of her tropical day bloomers 'Helen Nash'. Today, she is semi-retired and lives at Cedar Mountain, NC.

Other works from Connelly include a series of hybrid water iris called 'Fallen Heroes'. Each iris in this series is named for a police officer killed in the line of duty. Photos of her *Nymphaea* 'Blue Anemone', *N.* 'Joseph Baynard Shearouse', and *N.* 'Stormy Weather' are available online at www.internationalwaterlilycollection.com.

# New Members

**Ben Morrison**
Peter Wharton
4535 Camp Roosevelt Dr.
Chesapeake Beach, MD 20732

**Brookside Gardens**
Marjorie C. McCeney
510 Prince George St.
Laurel, MD 20707

**Lake Michigan**
Dan Kunst
601 Port Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Todd and Mary Pierce
1356 Linden Drice
St. Joseph, MI 49085

**Louisiana**
Peggy Cox
4560 Essen Lane
Baton Rouge, LA 70809

Carmel Foret
13455 Lynnwood
Hammond, LA 70403

Lois and Maurice Manuel
1003 Greenbriar Rd
Lafayette, LA 70503-3528

**Northern Virginia**
Kathy Andrews
9434 Dutch Hollow Road
Rixeyville, VA 22737

Marino Brito & Greg Burd
3810 Hunt Manor Drive
Fairfax, VA 22033

Lina Burton
PO Box 373
Aldie, VA 20105

Bill & Val Lorenz
8610 Running Fox Court
Fairfax Station, VA 22039

David & Carolyn Smith
135 Marcella Rd.
Hampton, VA 23666-2509

Jack Stevenson
10406 Headly Ct
Fairfax, VA 22032

Benjamin D. Taylor
109 Valentine Circle
Yorktown, VA 23692

**Oconee**
Nick Hambrick
75 Townley Rd.
Oxford, GA 30054

**Southern California**
Olivia I. Lin
27954 Alta Vista Ave.
Valencia, CA 91355

**Texas**
Carlos R. Carman
513 Eastbourne Place
Memphis, TN 38117-3643

**Tri-State**
Alycia Church
PO Box 44
Petersburg, IN 47567

Eric Heidenreich
403 Main Street
Evansville, IN 47708

Bill & Diane Layman
4015 Kleitz Rd
Evansville, IN 47720

Donald Pancake
10267 S State Road 61
Oakland City, IN 47660

Matt Wrhel
110 W. Elm St.
Tipp City, OH 45371

## Quest for the Yellow Evergreen Azalea

*Continued from Page 57.*

selecting for vigor and superior evergreen foliage.

I call on all azalea hybridizers in the ASA to join in the hunt for the yellow evergreen azalea. It will take time, experimentation, collaboration, and plenty of luck, but I am certain we can do it! Of course, when we eventually get that race of perfect yellow evergreen azaleas, rock-hardy plants with glossy dark green foliage and strongly fragrant, large ruffled flowers in shades of light lemon to deep gold that also resist petal blight, then we can start working on our next goal, a blue azalea. Hey… we can dream, can't we?

**Don Hyatt** *has been an avid hybridizer of azaleas and rhododendrons for more than 30 years, with a particular interest in deciduous azaleas.*

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# In Memory

## John L. Creech

John L. Creech, age 89, of Tryon Estates, Columbus, NC, passed away August 7, 2009 in St. Luke's Hospital, Columbus, NC. Born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, he was the son of the late Edward and Bessie Faulks Creech. He was first married to Amy Wentzel Creech who died in 1984, and was the widower of Elaine Innis Creech who died in 2003.

Dr. Creech was a graduate of the University of Rhode Island with a Bachelor of Science degree in Horticulture. He received a Master of Science degree from the University of Massachusetts and a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Maryland.

Dr. Creech served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was a prisoner of war from 1943 until 1945 and received both the Bronze and Silver Stars. He retired as director of the U.S. National Arboretum in Washington, D.C. in 1980 before moving to North Carolina. Dr. Creech then served as interim director of the Western North Carolina Arboretum and remained active as a member of their Board of Directors until his death.

He was a member of OFLAG64 Prisoner of War Association and numerous international scientific organizations. Dr. Creech is survived by two daughters, Diane B. Martin of Lavonia, Georgia, and Victoria C. Waterstradt of Largo, Florida; one son, John Creech (Connie) of Orlando, Florida; and his fiancee, Norma VanSchaick Kuhn of Tryon Estates, Columbus, North Carolina. Also surviving are three grandchildren, Charles L. Brittle Jr., James Hodge, and Candi Atkinson and two great grandsons, Charles L. Brittle III and Evan Atkinson.

A memorial service was held in the Tryon Estates Auditorium on Tuesday, August 11, 2009. Memorials can be made to the Western North Carolina Arboretum, 100 Frederick Law Olmsted Way, Asheville, NC 28806-9315 or Hospice of the Carolina Foothills, 130 Forest Glen Drive, Columbus, NC 28722.

## Thomas Phillips

Thomas Phillips, age 65, of Silver Spring, Maryland, passed away on his birthday, July 30, 2009 after battling kidney cancer. Phillips was the owner and operator of Hour Printer, the company that printed ***The Azalean*** from late 1989 until mid-1999. He would often call former editors Bob and Bee Hobbs and say "I'm on my way," personally delivering ***The Azalean*** to the Hobbs' home (which was an hour and a half drive from his shop).

Tom considered ***The Azalean*** his favorite job and really enjoyed printing it. Many people will remember his presentation on color printing ***The Azalean,*** using paste-up poster boards and "tins." We've come a long way compared to the CDs of today!

Photo Bob McWhorter

▲ The Potomac Valley Chapter of ARS hosted its annual flower show during the 2009 ASA Convention. Pictured are Dan Neckel, volunteer; Bob McWhorter, PVC president; Joe Coleman, judge; Rosalie Nachman, judge; Bill Bedwell, judge; Don Voss, chief judge; Carol Segree, volunteer; and Jim Hayes, volunteer.

## Flower show winners

*Bob McWhorter, Potomac Valley Chapter ARS*

The Potomac Valley Chapter of ARS wishes to thank the Northern Virginia Chapter of ASA for the opportunity to conduct its annual flower show in conjunction with the 2009 ASA convention. We thank everyone who entered flowers and it is our hope that each of you found some time to enjoy the show.

Special thanks are extended to Don Voss, chief flower show judge (Northern Virginia Chapter); Joe Coleman, judge (Oconee Chapter); Bill Bedwell, judge (Northern Virginia Chapter); and Rosalie Nachman, judge (at large). We also want to recognize flower show volunteers Carol Segree, Rosa McWhorter, Joe Marsala, Dan Neckel, Jim Hayes, Richard and Virginia Mohr, and Ray Smith.

The following awards were presented: Class 1—Lepidote ("scaly") species, no entries; Class 2—Lepidote ("scaly") hybrids, First Place and Best in Class, Carol Segree ('Yellow Eyes'); Class 3—Elepidote ("large-leaf") species, no entries; Class 4—Elepidote ("large-leaf") hybrids, First Place, Best in Class, and Best Rhododendron in Show, Rosa McWhorter (*R. yakushimanum* 'Ken Janeck'); Class 5—Deciduous Azalea species, First Place and Best in Class, Valerie Lorenz (*R. canescens*); Class 6—Deciduous Azalea hybrids, First Place and Best in Class, Carol Segree ('Queen Emma'); Class 7—Evergreen Azalea species, First Place and Best in Class, John Keshishan (*R.indicum*); and Class 8—Evergreen Azalea hybrids, First Place, Best in Class, and Best in Show, Don Hyatt ('Rose Greeley').

The following special awards were presented: Class 8—Evergreen Azalea Hybrids (light peach), Walter Przypek ('Dreamsicle'); Class 8—Evergreen Azalea Hybrids (pink and white), John Keshishan (unknown pink and white); Class 8—Evergreen Azalea Hybrids ('Madame Butterfly'), Rosa McWhorter ('Madame Butterfly'); Class 8—Evergreen Azalea Hybrids (deep violet), Rosa McWhorter ('Girard's Fuchsia').

# *Rhododendron vaseyi* and the Southern Appalachians

John Brown—Cleveland, South Carolina
Bob Stelloh—Hendersonville, North Carolina

*Editor's Note: The following article was adapted from a presentation made by John Brown and Bob Stelloh at the 2009 ASA Convention in Herndon, Virginia. It was adapted by them from a presentation originally prepared by Don Hyatt and George McLellan. The presentation included 188 slides, and may be made available as a CD-ROM.*

*Rhododendron vaseyi* A. Gray, one of the finest and more unusual native North American azalea species, was discovered at the "summit of a balsam mountain seven miles south west from Webster, Jackson County, North Carolina." [1] by Dr. George Vasey in 1878. This is shown by the leftmost star on the *R. vaseyi* Distribution Map. It was named by Asa Gray in honor of Dr. Vasey's son, who was also a botanist. In 1899 it was renamed *Azalea vaseyi* (A. Gray) Rehder by Alfred Rehder as part of his reclassification of the genus *Rhododendron*. In 1903 it was then renamed *Biltia vaseyi* (A. Gray) Small by J. K. Small to honor George W. Vanderbilt, owner of the Biltmore Estate near Asheville, North Carolina. (Now 8,000 acres, the Biltmore Estate once included more than 125,000 acres of forest land, of which 86,000 acres was sold to the United States in 1914 to become the Pisgah National Forest, home to many *R. vaseyi*). It is now safely back in the genus *Rhododendron* as *R. vaseyi*, with the common name Pinkshell Azalea.

### Description

Relative to other native American azaleas, *R. vaseyi* has distinctive buds, flowers, leaves, and seed pods. It has perhaps the most limited distribution of our native azaleas, being found only in the more mountainous counties in western North Carolina. Not known to cross with any other azaleas, it is probably most closely related to the more northerly-growing *R. canadense*.

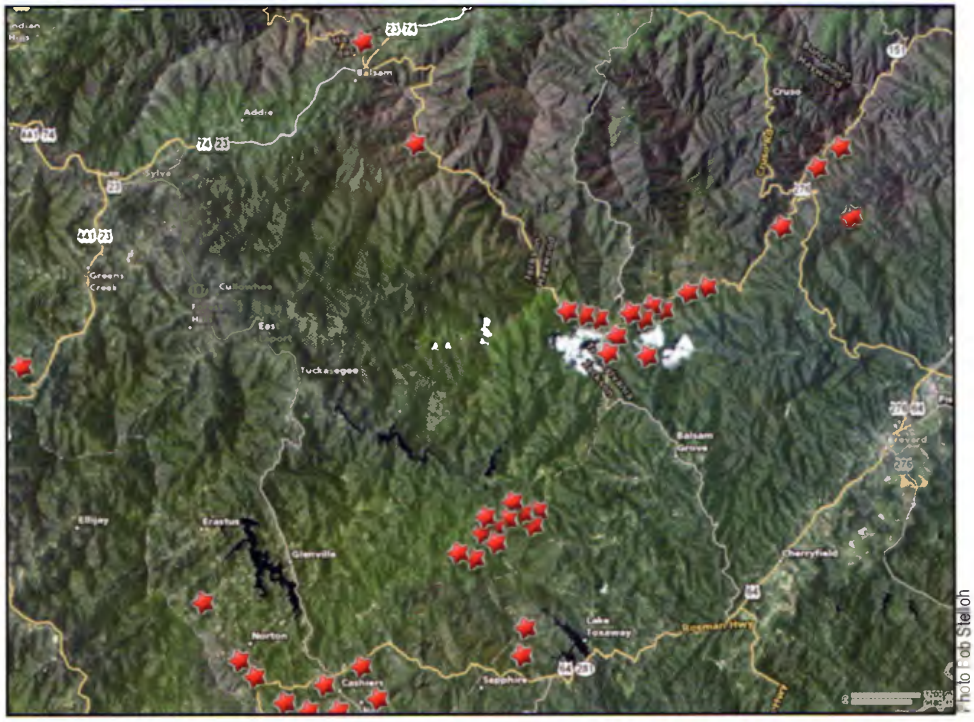


Photo Bob Stelloh

▲ *R. vaseyi* Distribution Map: Blue Ridge Parkway (not labeled) starts at the top right, arcs down to right of center and back up to the top left of center.

The buds are shorter and fatter than those of other native American azaleas, and they open before the leaves expand. In the wild, they typically open from mid-April to May depending upon the elevation. This coincides with the bloom time of many other ericaceous plants along the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Rather than having the trumpet-shaped flowers of all other native American azaleas (except *R. canadense*), *R. vaseyi* flowers have a flat face on a long flower stalk (pedicel), with three somewhat fused upper petals and two longer and flaring lower petals. The flowers are typically pale pink to pale purplish pink with a greenish throat and brownish red dots at the base. Along with many shades of pink, sought-after color variations range from pure white

Photo Bob Stelloh

▲ *R. vaseyi* bud.

Photo Don Hyatt

▼ Almost a picotee

Photo Sally/John Perkins

▲ 'Cherry Pink': Salem, New Hampshire

Photo Don Hyatt

▲ Three petals

('White Find') to deep pinkish red ('Don's Red'), with color patterns ranging from solid to near-picotee with darker margins. The flower width ranges from 1.5 to 2.25 inches. Flowers may have 5 to 7 stamens, of which 2 (of 5) or 3 (of 6 or 7) are short and straight, and the others are long and curving. The flowers are not fragrant.

A number of flower-form variations have been found, including flowers with six petals and with three petals. Petal shapes range from rounded to narrow, all the way to strap petals. The flowers are arranged as 5 to 15 flowers per truss with occasional ball trusses. The number of flowers per truss is not consistent from year to year, and may depend upon growing conditions.

*R. vaseyi* has two distinct leaf shapes: 2.5 inches long and narrowly elliptical toward the ends of the stems; to 5 inches long and broadly ovate toward the base of the plant. The leaves are alternate, with more closely spaced internodes toward the tips of shoots. On many plants, particularly when grown in full sun, the dark green leaves turn a beautiful maroon color in the fall before dropping off.

*R. vaseyi* has relatively small seed pods which, rather than splitting open at the ends as with other azaleas, instead open in the middle of the pods to disperse the very small seed.

The plant habit of *R. vaseyi* varies from dense and full when grown in full sun, to open, arching and artistic when grown in shade. It typically grows as an upright shrub to about 15 feet.

## Culture

We can learn how to care for a plant in our garden by observing where it grows in the wild. *R. vaseyi* grows in thin soil on steep slopes over rocks and near moist seeps, which translates to a need for good drainage in the garden, although experience shows it needs no more moisture than most azaleas. It grows both on exposed ridges and under deciduous forest canopies. Growing on exposed ridges translates to full sun, where it develops its typically beautiful maroon fall foliage quite early in the growing season. Growing under deciduous trees translates to part shade. As with most azaleas, full sun usually produces a more compact plant and more bloom (but a shorter bloom time) than when it is grown in part shade.

## Distribution

*R. vaseyi* is being grown well in gardens from a small Zone 9 area in Denmark (which is mostly Zone 8), Nova Scotia and British Columbia (Zone 6) in the north to Lexington, South Carolina (Zone 8) in the south. However, probably due to the climatic needs of its seedlings, it grows native in only a small number of mountainous counties in northwest North Carolina, and possibly Georgia. That "small number" is growing as more populations are discovered. Fred Galle's *Azaleas* [2] lists four counties, *Vascular Flora of the Carolinas* [3] lists six counties, Clarence Towe's *American Azaleas* [4] lists seven counties in North Carolina and one in Georgia, and the North Carolina National Heritage Program (NCNHP) *List of Rare Plant Species of North Carolina* [5] says 11 counties. The NCNHP database gives the geographic coordinates of the populations as shown by red stars on the *R. vaseyi* Distribution Map.

Many of these *R. vaseyi* populations are visible along the Blue Ridge Parkway, sometimes called the "Appalachian Trail for cars." Much more than just a road, the Blue Ridge Parkway is a unique 81,000-acre, 469-mile long by 1/4-mile wide no-fee National Park along ridges of the Appalachian Mountains, extending from Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina. Begun in 1935, the parkway was planned by landscape architects based on mile-by-mile diagrams they drew to show the trees and major shrubs to be removed and/or planted to help guide visitors' eyes to 1,200 vistas along the road. The road also has 275 paved overlooks and goes over 151 bridges and through 26 tunnels. Parts of the parkway are traveled by about 20 million visitors per year to appreciate the views and the 1,600 plant species within its borders. Most of the plants, 80 percent of them wildflowers, are visible from the road. One of the more notable sites for a variety of wildflowers is Milepost 437, at peak bloom in late

June.

Dr. Larry Mellichamp of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte postulates that finding many of the known *R. vaseyi* populations along roads is no accident (nor the result of lazy plant-hunters), but rather that many of these populations are the direct result of clearing and disturbance of the soil as the roads were built. He goes on to say "Go up there and dig some holes. We need another ice age to get disturbance and regeneration of southern balds. Perhaps only every several dozen years do *R. vaseyi* seedlings get really established—when a combination of right conditions occur —cool, wet all summer. Can you find any really young plants? But they have to try every year—never know when the conditions will be good. Some of those plants up there may be as old as the parkway itself—got started when the roadside was cleared. Then landslides and fires help." [6]

Authorities generally agree that most of the native *R. vaseyi* populations are found from around 3500 to 5500 feet elevation. As shown by the red stars on the *R. vaseyi* Distribution Map, they first appear along the Blue Ridge Parkway for a few miles at Milepost 305 near Grandfather Mountain (off the map to the top right), then again near the Pisgah Inn at Milepost 408 and extending to Beech Gap at Milepost 423 where it intersects State Road 215, with a notable population on Pilot Mountain a few miles due south of Milepost 418. They then sweep southwest along the Tanasee Ridge to Toxaway Mountain (above Sapphire, North Carolina) and beyond to Cashiers and Whiteside Mountain, and perhaps into northern Georgia at Rabun Bald.

### Exploration

Notably, the type location of *R. vaseyi*, below Webster, North Carolina, is well to the west of most of the known populations. This suggests a fruitful area for further exploration could be along the ridges between the type location and the Cashiers area, including all of the area east to SR 215. A local botanist, Richard Bryson, indicates at least one large colony on Sassafras Mountain, [7] one of the peaks northwest of Toxaway Mountain. Access to this area is limited due to a lack of roads, the terrain and private property boundaries. The population of *R. vaseyi* on Toxaway Mountain is the largest known contiguous colony, extending for several miles along the north face of the mountain, according to Dick Bir and Richard Bryson. The population on Tanasee Ridge south of the Blue Ridge Parkway may well be the second largest if it extends to the western slope of the ridge.

A smaller population located on SR 107 just south of Cashiers has long been the subject of legend and controversy. The population is strung out along a creek bank and a swampy area at 3000 feet elevation, near the location of an extinct nursery. Urban legend says the *R. vaseyi* in the area escaped from the nursery. A botanist old enough to have personal knowledge reports that the nursery took its *R. vaseyi* collection from the local plants, which may be the southernmost tip of the natural range. This population is interesting because of the diversity and range of color in the flowers. One plant is pure white with no sign of a blotch.


Photo Don Hyatt

▲ Pale pink and six petals

*R. vaseyi* was reported to be found near the junction of three trails on on the north face of Rabun Bald in northwest Georgia. Repeated attempts to verify this location have not been successful. The writers observed several plants on the south face of Whiteside Mountain which is in a direct line of sight to Rabun Bald.

One of the most attractive locations to appreciate a large expanse of *R. vaseyi* is the north slope of Pilot Mountain. Starting at a trailhead accessible from Forest Service roads connecting to US 276 and SR 215, a moderate hike on the Art Loeb Trail up Pilot Mountain gives stunning views of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and passes through a magnificent colony of mature *R. vaseyi*. To make a visit even more enjoyable, the local wildflower population explodes in cadence with the azaleas. A carpet of *Trillium vaseyi, T. erectum, T. undulatum,* and *T. catesbaei* surrounded by Umbrella Leaf (*Diphylleia cymosa*) under a canopy of *Magnolia fraseri* and Buckeye (*Aesculus spp.*) fill in the few spots not covered by the soft pink abundance of *R. vaseyi*.

Both known and likely *R. vaseyi* haunts are favorite targets for azalea enthusiasts in early spring, because of their beauty, diversity, and accessibility. Since the popularity of native American azaleas is on the upswing, there is little doubt this exploration will stop, and there is little doubt that more populations and more diverse specimens of *R. vaseyi* will be discovered. To join in, please contact the authors.

**John Brown** *is immediate Past President of the ASA.* **Bob Stelloh** *previously served as ASA Treasurer, and is currently very involved with the azaleas e-mail list and the ASA Web site.*

### References

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