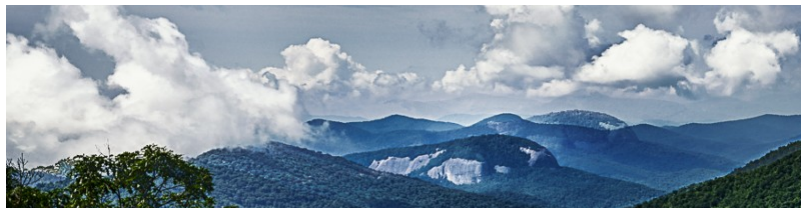




# The Blue Ridge Review



SOUTHEASTERN CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

**February/March, 2016**

**Encouragement of the Culture of Rhododendrons**

## **BROADLEAF EVERGREENS —Hale Booth Will Enlighten Us**

Join us for our next SE-ARS meeting on Sunday, March 20, at 2 pm. Hale Booth has put together a delightful program on Broadleaf Evergreens. Hale has a consuming interest in woody plants and is a knowledgeable authority on a wide variety of plants, gardening issues, and deer fence building. Although a few of the plants he will show us are rhododendrons, most of them are unusual plants that will be fascinating to many of us, for example *Ilex pedunculosa* and *Rhododendron purdomnii*.

Hale and his wife Susan garden on Signal Mountain near Chattanooga, Tennessee, where they maintain an ever-expanding eclectic collection of hollies, rhododendrons, azaleas, bamboos, camellias, magnolias and other interesting forms of Chlorophyll. Hale is the District 10 Director for the American Rhododendron Society, a member of both the American Conifer Society and the American Holly Society. As a member of the Azalea Society of America, he is the Director of the Azalea Research Fund, which has a mission to foster increased knowledge and improvement of the standards of excellence with regards to azaleas by promoting and supporting research activities in the areas of classification, hybridization, culture and education. Every year he selects research grant proposals to be funded. One of the recent grants funded is to find shorter, bushier deciduous azaleas.

## **Joint ARS/ASA Convention in April**

This year's convention will be April 20 through 24, 2016 in historic Williamsburg, Virginia. The dates mark the beginning of Historic Garden Week in Virginia. In most years, this time frame is when Virginia's beloved native dogwoods (*Cornus florida*) are in bloom.

The convention will be at the Fort Magruder Hotel and Conference Center, which is within a mile of Historic Williamsburg. The convention will feature distinguished speakers, a flower show, diverse garden tours, a plant sale, and other activities designed to enrich your love of plants within the Rhododendron genus, as well as your understanding of gardening in this very special part of our country.

You will find further information on the following website:

<http://www.arsasaconvention2016.org/>

### **October Plant Auction**

Spring is a great time to start planning and preparing plants to share with others at the October Plant Auction!

### **Inside This Issue**

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## Holly Tour at Ray's Garden

On December 5th, eleven SE-ARS members visited Ray Head on his 40+ acres just south of Rutherfordton, NC. The weather was perfect, and we all felt that the two hours wandering with Ray through his diverse and appealing gardens left us more knowledgeable and inspired about the holly family. Though Ray's holly collection was the focus of our tour, we found out that Ray has a special affection for four plant groups: deciduous holly, deciduous native azalea, blueberry, and dogwood.

Since most hollies need sun, Ray's expansive open areas are especially suited for his spectacular collection. He willingly shared the knowledge he has gained after growing them for 25 years. Holly's are easy to root, and Ray rooted most of his collection 15 to 18 years ago; the key is to take cuttings that are growing straight up on the plant. Also, it's good to know that the male and female plants are separate. However, it might be kind of hard to tell the difference on some of them this year because last year's late spring frost destroyed many of the buds that normally yield fruit.

Here are some of the wonderful holly species Ray showed us: Ray's favorite for year-around appeal is native Foster's #2 (*Ilex x attenuata* 'Fosteri'). It's a grand and beautiful specimen, but can also be used in hedges. His least favorite deciduous holly is Warren Red Possumhaw (*Ilex decidua* 'Warren's Red'), but he says it's sold the most. We were 'wowed' by Hume #2 (*Ilex opaca* 'Hume #2') with its smooth, dark leaves and large clumps of berries. I wrote, "I want it," in my notes when I saw the Nasa holly (*Ilex attenuata*) with its narrow, pointed leaves and gorgeous presentation. Then he showed us some of the golden hollies: Byers Golden (*Ilex decidua* 'Byers Golden') was a standout deciduous holly with its soft leaves. Ray also introduced us to the only two yellow native deciduous azaleas: Finch's Golden (*Ilex decidua* 'Finch's Golden') placed right next to Sundance (*Ilex decidua* 'Sundance'). We ended our tour with an introduction to Blazer Holly (*Ilex attenuata* 'Blazer'), a beautiful plant with an amazing display of fruit. Ray says the problem with this beautiful plant is that you can't find it anywhere for sale.

We ended our tour with a wonderful lunch at Strawberry Hill just down the road from Ray's Garden.



Yellow Holly Berries!



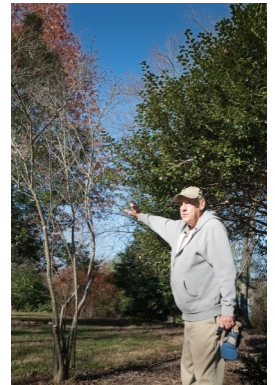
Foster's #2



Byer's Golden



Ray's a good teacher!



Beginning our tour





### ARS & ASA: Why The Split?

Why did the Azalea Society of America separate from the American Rhododendron Society? This was the question I posed on the Azalea Society website. To my delight, there were many responses. And, Audrey Stelloh, President of the Vaseyi chapter of the Azalea Society of America, brought me an article from *The Azalean* of Spring 2013 by Alice Holland, *How It All Began*.

Let's begin with the formation of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS). It was founded in 1944, according to horticulturalist and author J. Harold Clarke, by a small group of people in and around Portland, Oregon. Soon rhododendron enthusiasts in other parts of the U.S. joined and began new chapters. In his book, *Getting Started with Rhododendrons and Azaleas*, Clarke writes, "The purpose of the society is to give service, in any way possible, to its members, who have the common bond of an intense interest in rhododendrons or azaleas or both."

Our ARS website states, "The Society provides a medium through which people interested in rhododendrons and azaleas can communicate and cooperate with others via its publications, events, local and regional meetings and international conferences. ARS chapters are located throughout the United States and Canada and in Denmark, Finland, Holland, Scotland, Sweden and Sikkim."

In *The Azalean* of 2013, Alice Holland describes how the Azalea Society of America (ASA) began. She lived in Kensington, Maryland, and fell in love with evergreen azaleas and wanted to learn more about them. At her husband's suggestion, she started an azalea club. The first meeting was in December 1977 and the six people present certainly considered being a part of the ARS. But, their meeting minutes state, "After much discussion we decided: 1. to be a separate entity, 2. to cooperate with ARS, and 3. to seek their support in a friendly manner."

The discussion Holland mentions in the 1977 minutes continues today as you can see from following excerpts from the responses to my ASA website question: **"Why did the ASA separate...?"**

**Harold Greer**, Greer Gardens, Eugene, Oregon:

*"As to why the Azalea Society formed from the ARS, [it] is because a few people thought they were not getting represented by the ARS. This is somewhat true, but not completely. As president of the ARS, I tried very hard in the 1980's to bring the two groups back together, because I think there is strength in [a] greater numbers of members, but some in the South would not hear of it. I am sure we all would be better off today, with declining membership in most all garden societies, if the ARS and ASA were one."*

**Mike Creel**, Lexington, South Carolina (USDA Zone 8a):

*"I am a member of both organizations, but I think some rhody folks tend to be more high-falutin' than we down to earth woodsy azalea guys and gals. We azalea folks definitely have more color variety and certainly a sweeter scent as a rule. No evergreen rhododendron can match the fragrance of the *arborescens* and *eastmanii* in our yard."*

**Chris Wetmore**, Maiden, NC:

*"I am a member of both organizations. I have done some asking around on my own because having two separate organizations for the same purpose drives me nuts. The answer I got was, politics. I often sit and wonder what the two organizations will look like when I retire in 30 years. I think the ARS will continue to do well in the northeast and northwest. [But] elepidote rhododendrons are not popular in the southeast. Like Mike Creel said, people down here mostly want deciduous azaleas. I like reading the ARS journal but my gripe is that coverage in it is dominated by plants that will not grow in the south."*

*(This discussion continues on page 4.)*

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**Chris Wetmore's** discussion continues —

*"For people in the south and east coast the ASA Azalean is better than the ARS Journal. Anytime you have an ARS and an ASA chapter within a short drive of each other, one of them will close or they will merge operations because [they] have the same interests. Funny that it can happen on a chapter level but can't on a national level."*

**David Banks**, Williamsburg VA:

*"I have wondered about the 1979 split in the societies since I joined both – decades ago. Chris is correct, at least in part, [that it was] politics. But, there is another, more basic, reason. Many, many of the (ARS) members are in the Pacific Northwest – US and Canada. We may admire what they grow but [we] can't grow them here.... Likewise, aside from Occidentale in California, they don't have native deciduous azaleas. Even without politics, this forms a barrier to merger. Ultimately, the two societies MAY merge and find a way to support both the Northwest and the Southeast. It's not happening now but the joint conventions are, which is a very good start."*

**Don Hyatt:**

*"I joined the ARS in 1968 and was President of the Potomac Valley Chapter in the Washington DC area at the time of the "big schism" in 1979. Most of the leaders of the ASA movement were members of my chapter. I found it very frustrating since some of those people were quite angry and vocal during our meetings. The big complaint was that azaleas were being treated like second class citizens. Evergreen azaleas were the most widely planted members of the genus Rhododendron planted in the Eastern US. They performed much better than most lepidote and elepidote rhododendrons in our area. Our chapter met at the National Arboretum surrounded by hillsides of Glenn Dale azaleas. Our flower shows were filled with glorious azalea sprays each spring. [People] wanted to read more articles about evergreen azaleas in the Journal and they complained about the dearth of awards for azaleas, too."*

**David Banks:**

*"The geographic problem is kind of fundamental as something to be dealt with if there is ever to be a merger. And yes, eventually if both societies keep dwindling there will have to be some kind of merger if both are to survive..."*

In sum, rhododendrons have their enthusiasts and azaleas have their enthusiasts and each group is keen to have a medium through which it can communicate and cooperate with others via publications, events, and meetings. Yet, membership in both the ARS and the ASA is dwindling and a merger might help them to survive.

Here's an idea: Imagine a merged ARS/ASA that is flexibly organized so that an ASA chapter can exist in any location where azalea enthusiasts live and an ARS chapter in any place where rhododendron enthusiasts live, or there can be one of each in the same location, or there can be just one ARS/ASA chapter catering to both groups. Regardless of chapter arrangements, all would pay dues to only one (now larger) organization.

*Submitted by — Frances Jones*

### Seed Starting Lessons

Accepting Audrey's invitation to SE-ARS members to attend last November's Vaseyi Meeting turned out to be a treat. We were greatly enlightened about techniques and processes for growing native azalea specimens from seed by ASA seed exchange overseer, Lindy Johnson and ASA President, J. Jackson. Lindy gave us a hands-on demonstration of seed-starting using Fafard Professional Growers mix with the correct moisture content (determined by squeezing the soil until it holds together and won't drip). She emphasized the importance of knowing the parent of the seeds and collecting them at the correct time in the fall. She suggested collecting the seed pods in an envelope when the tips of the seed capsules are a little bit brown and starting to open.

As she demonstrated the steps in successful seed-starting, she gave us tips that are helpful for each stage of the growing process:

Tip 1 - Spray the newly scattered seeds with Actinovate to prevent fungus.

Tip 2 - After the first leaves appear, apply quarter-strength fish emulsion every 10 days.

Tip 3 - After the second leaves appear, soak the roots again with Actinovate by drenching the plants with a sprayer.

Tip 4 - The first transplant should be to a 50/50 peat to pine bark fines.

Tip 5 - The second transplant is to straight pine bark fines.

Tip 6 - It's good to cut the tops off after the plants adjust to the second transplant; this will create branching and stimulate the roots.

Thanks to Lindy and J. for such thorough and specific lessons about seed-starting.

### Sad News

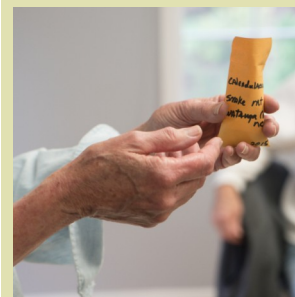
Ray Head wanted to let the group know that **Caroline Dean** of Opelika, Al. passed away in late January at age 97.

Ray said, "Caroline was a very large part of the rhododendron chapter in the Auburn-Opelika area and the Alabama Wildflower Society for 50 years. After seeing her collection of native azaleas in bloom in April, 1998, I changed the way that I was gardening. Before that, I never knew that native plants could be so spectacular and carefree."

**Katherine Gorrell Williams**, 92, died in late August, 2015. after a brief illness. She and CD joined SE-ARS in 1982. She was a member and held many offices in the Daughter of the American Revolution, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Colonial Dames, and the Daughters of the Colonists. She has helped many people in Western North Carolina trace their genealogies.



Lindy Johnson and J. Jackson



Lindy's seed pod container



Press lightly to embed the seeds.



Ready to transplant.



Lindy and J. win Augie Kehr Award

**Southeastern Chapter of  
American Rhododendron Society  
Flat Rock, NC 28731**

## ENCOURAGEMENT OF RHODODENDRONS

### **Officers and Directors**

**President:** Ray Head

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**Treasurer:** Jackson McCarter

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Sanborn, Byron Richards and Chuck  
Van Rens

**Directors until 2017**—Wayne  
Hutchins, Audrey Stelloh, and  
Chris Wetmore

**Editor:** Judy Van Rens

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### **Mark your Calendar**

**Feb. 28, Sunday at 2 pm at Bullington**

**Vaseyi invites SE-ARS**

**Speaker—Alan Mizeras on Rescued Native Plants**

**March 20, Sunday at 2pm, St. John in Wilderness**

**Speaker—Hale Booth on Broadleaf Evergreens**

**April Garden Visits—Watch the newsletter!**

**April 20-24 — Joint ARS/ASA Convention**

**Williamsburg, VA**

**April 30—May 1 — SE-ARS Flower Show**

**North Carolina Arboretum**

**May 7, Saturday, 2-4 pm — Visit Doley Bell's Garden**

**July 17, Sunday — SE-ARS Annual Picnic and**

**Plants for Members — Richards Garden**

**Sept. 11, Sunday at 2pm, St. John in the Wilderness**

**Speaker — Dr. Larry Mellichamp**

**Native Plants as Companions to Rhododendrons**

**Oct. 16, Sunday at 2pm, St. John in the Wilderness**

**Plant Auction for SE-ARS and Vaseyi**

### **Rescued Native Plants**

Vaseyi / ASA invites SE-ARS and any wildflower loving friends to join them for a beautiful presentation on "Rescued Native Plants" by Alan Mizeras. Alan is a biologist by training and has an extensive collection of rescued native plants. His presentation will show wonderful pictures of native plants in order of bloom time, starting in very early Spring. Join Vaseyi / ASA at Bullington Gardens on February 28th at 2 pm.

### **Deadline**

Submit articles for the next newsletter by March 30.