

# The Blue Ridge Review

The Newsletter for the



SOUTHEASTERN CHAPTER  
The American Rhododendron Society  
Hendersonville, North Carolina



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July 2004

## The Traditional Summer Picnic at the Bell's Estate

Ross Lockridge's classic romance "*Raintree County*" sets the mood: "The clock in the Court House Tower on page five of the *Raintree County Atlas* is always fixed at nine o'clock, and it is summer and the days are long." I feel I have walked into that old *Atlas* when I attend a picnic with friends at a great Southern garden on a summer day, with the thunderheads building in the west and the modern world faded away.

As in years gone by, Melody and Doley Bell once again invite us to their estate for our annual Plant Auction, Covered Dish Luncheon and Cutting Exchange on Sunday, July 18<sup>th</sup>. The official starting time is 2 PM, but come early to see the garden and plant propagation area. The Chapter will furnish ice, cups, some drinks and eating utensils. Members are asked to bring chairs and your food of choice AND, very important to our future, bring **GUESTS**. The food has always been great without any need to assign quotas, so for all coming for the first time, finger foods, salads, desserts and snacks are appropriate. If you have a special drink you like, bring enough to share.

We had hardly anything left from a very successful Plant Sale at the Arboretum again this year so we need your help to produce a lively auction. Bring those plants you don't have room for any more since everything grew. Too many tissue culture azaleas? An "offset" from a \$45 Hosta? A Plants For Members baby that doubled in size and you want to take credit for growing? Rare hollies or dwarf conifers? Maybe a trough to set beside a rhodie?

Watching our Prez and Chief Auctioneer John Brown (and his skills) work the crowd—he sometimes gets people to bid against themselves—is pure pleasure and I hope someone videotapes it this year. Bring plenty of cash; you'll have to compete against a certain unnamed lady from a Farm. (I've decided not to buy any more plants so you don't have to worry about me.)

There will be a Cutting Exchange. As I am getting along in years, I think this is my best chance to get a rare plant up and blooming before I have to report to the Home. I'm going to bring some so I can participate; maybe this year I'll get lucky and get one through the winter. After all, if Kathy Van Veen can do it, why can't we? Bring the beautiful and the unusual, even if you can only take one cutting.

We have had another wet spring so it won't hurt to cut away some of that lush green foliage. (I had forgotten that rhododendrons grow after being planted.) Take up to 6 cuttings from a plant—that morning if possible—wrap them in a damp paper towel, put them in a zip-lock refrigerator bag, and put the whole thing in your lunch cooler. Include a name tag or write on the baggie. Store your precious acquisitions in the cooler until you can get home and put them in the refrigerator. Stick them when it's convenient in the next week or so, remembering what you saw at our June meeting about growing cuttings.

By Billy Joyner

### Driving directions to the Bell's Home

**From Asheville:** Go south on 191 and 280 to Mills River and turn left staying on 191. Drive 2 and 9/10ths miles to a stop light at S. Rugby Road. Turn right and go up the hill to Lands End Drive. Turn to your right on Lands End and stop at #64.

**From Hendersonville:** Go north on 191 until pass Blythe at the Triangle Stop and stop light. Proceed on 191 for 2 and 8/10ths miles until you pass Rugby Middle School on your left. Proceed on 191 for another 9/10ths of a mile until you reach the stop light at S. Rugby Road and turn left onto S. Rugby. Proceed up the hill to Lands End Drive and turn right and continue to #64.

**From Brevard:** Go east on Highway 64 and turn left on S. Rugby Road and left on Lands End to #64.

As parking is limited, please park along the road, leaving room for residents to get through

## Digging for Diamonds - 2004 SE-ARS Scholarships

**By nature**, we gardeners are an optimistic lot. We plant bulbs deep in the black soil in anticipation of a spring day filled with bright nodding daffodils. We heave the maddock and chisel mighty holes in the rocky earth to plant trees that may mature and bear a crop after we are no longer on the scene. We look far into the distance dreaming of a future time. We invest gladly now with the hope of nuts, or fruits, or blooms being sufficient to entice us happily through today. Such is our nature, the spirit of the sower, the joy of the grower.

The Southeastern Chapter is doing a little planting on its own, not with spades and diggers, not with bulbs and shrubs, but rather with books and labs. We are planting for the future by investing in two bright enthusiastic horticulture students.

The Southeastern Chapter has funded two scholarships for the 2004 – 2005 academic year.

The Chapter's original plan was to fund a single scholarship. But two motivated and qualified candidates were presented for consideration. It seemed *right and proper* to fund a scholarship for each student.

**"Hence"**, the SE Chapter is presenting a \$1,000.00 scholarship to Alana Weintraub, a rising junior at Warren Wilson College. Alana is a top scholar, maintaining an A average. She is pursuing a double major in biology and environmental studiers, with a concentration in conservation biology. Alana discovered her love of plants and flowers while working in Portland Oregon as a floral designer and growing flowers for sale. While working in the floral industry, Alana determined that there must be a more sustainable way, a more earth-friendly way to grow flowers.

Because Alana was already well experienced with plants before arriving at Warren Wilson, she is now serving as an assistant to Dr. Amy Boyd, who teaches plant taxonomy. Alana spends several hours each week working in one of Warren Wilson's greenhouses as part of her participation in the college work program. Alana plans to pursue post-graduate studies in botany. After completing her education, Alana looks forward to owning and operating her own greenhouses, growing ornamental, edible, and medicinal plants for both sale and personal use.

**"Double Hence"** – Additionally the SE Chapter is presenting a \$1,000 scholarship to Ryan A. Walker, a rising sophomore at Haywood Community College. Ryan considers himself a "non-traditional student" as he worked for many years before beginning his college education. It was during this period that Ryan discovered his love and enthusiasm for plants. As a teenager, Ryan's first real job was in a retail nursery working outdoors doing routine heavy jobs. Ryan now looks back and realizes how fortunate he was that the owner of this nursery encouraged him to learn and explore the world of plants.

Ryan recalls his sense of wonder the first time he observed a red Japanese maple being grafted onto the root stock of a green Japanese maple. Watching this tree survive and grow was "fuel enough" to propel Ryan into the studies he is enjoying today. Ryan admits modestly that he has surprised himself (pleasantly) by maintaining almost an A average in college. Ryan feels this is an indicator of how thoroughly the subject matter has captured his interest. Ryan believes those years of manual labor and real world experiences have enabled him to fully appreciate the value of his education.

Ultimately Ryan hopes to have his own nursery, but before this, he would like to privilege of working under an experienced large-scale grower. Ryan has a strong interest in grafting specialty ornamentals trees and would love an opportunity to increase his skill and knowledge in this area.

Ryan was raised in Greenville, North Carolina, located in Pitt County. Ryan currently lives in Asheville.

The SE-ARS is hopeful that Ryan and Alana will join us at some of our chapter meetings.

**"Sow"**, when you admire a rare specimen at the SE-ARS plant auction in July, or are drawn to a fine bloom at the SE-ARS plant sale at the spring flower show, be eager and quick to pop out your purse. Your green stuff is an investment in our future.

The SE-ARS applauds the ambitions of these fine students.

*By The Busy Shovel*



# The Summer Blues

## Endless Summer Hydrangea

*Until the rhododendron hybridizers can come up with a summer blooming blue rhododendron, 'Endless Summer' might just be the answer to your summer blues.*

Endless Summer Hydrangea is a *Hydrangea macrophylla* that was discovered by Vern Black of Bailey Nurseries in 1983. Vern was impressed with the amount of bloom and hardiness of plant in a Zone 4 climate where *H. macrophylla* generally performs poorly as the buds set the previous year are typically killed in most winters.

In 1988, plants of Endless Summer were observed by Dr. Mike Dirr, who took cuttings back to the University of Georgia's Center for Applied Nursery Research for further testing. Dr. Dirr is quite impressed with Endless Summer, particularly because of its ability to consistently bloom on new wood. It was his encouragement that led Bailey Nurseries to take this plant quite seriously in terms of introduction. He currently has a number of studies in progress with Endless Summer that will help us further define its attributes and production.

Characteristics based on current results/experience: Endless Summer is a mop-head type with clear pink blooms in soils with poor aluminum uptake typically alkaline soils, and blue flowers in acidic soils with sufficient aluminum. Blue flowers can be achieved in alkaline soils by adding aluminum sulphate\* to the soil to change the soil PH. Flower size is 4 to 6 inches across under garden conditions, and up to 8" in diameter on vigorous container plants.

The most unique characteristic of Endless Summer is its ability to bloom on new wood. If the new emerging growth is cut back to half, the amount of bloom is significantly increased. In addition, removal of spent blooms results in repeat bloom. If spent blooms are removed, one can have bloom from June until frost in Minnesota, and from June until November or frost in Georgia.

Endless Summer has performed well in Zone 4, although it is not as stem hardy as Nikko Blue. Its ability to bloom on new growth has resulted in dependable bloom, thereby extending the range for successful bloom with *Hydrangea macrophylla*.

Endless Summer has good foliage, medium to deep green with good substance, and is mildew resistant. In comparison to some cultivars, resistance is definitely better than Nikko Blue.

Endless Summer appears to have potential as a potted plant as it has the ability to set flower buds on new growth without a cold treatment. Studies are currently underway by Dr. Neil Anderson at the University of Minnesota to more clearly define potted plant production.

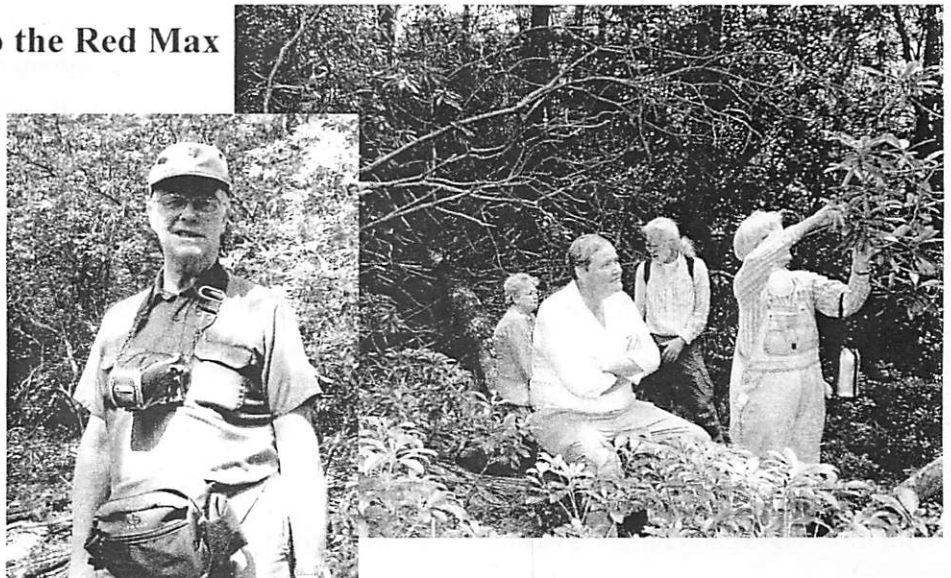
Mature plant size is 3 to 5 feet in width and height.

Article courtesy of Bailey Nurseries

## July 4, 2003 A Trip to the Red Max

Our trail leader Collins led a group of Rhodie enthusiasts on an excursion to view the Red Max. The bloom was not fully opened on Independence Day so a return vist was scheduled for the following week. The vivid red veins were clearly visible in the bright July afternoon. Ed just might be making the trip again this year!

(right> Trail Leader Collins and the gang> far right)





## Conventions May 2004 *by Bob Stelloh*

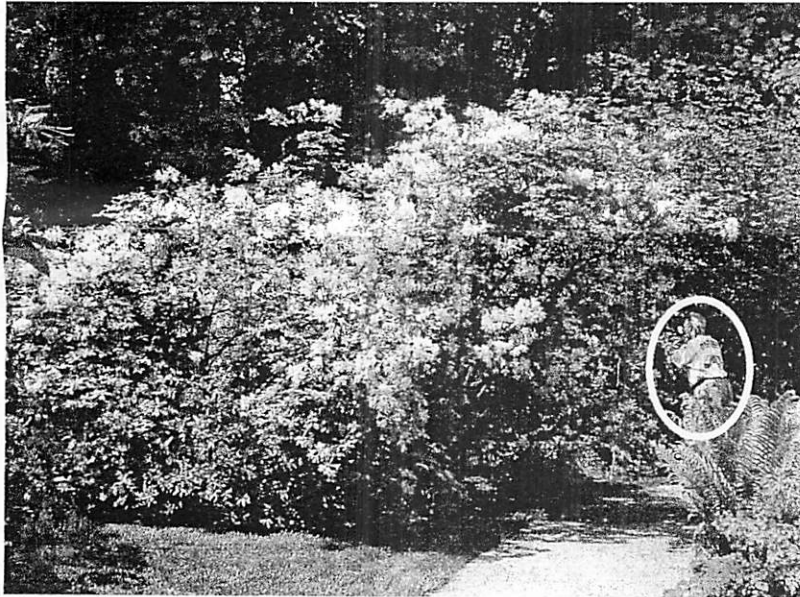
### A good time was had by all!

John Brown, Denise and I went to the ASA and ARS conventions, and had a grand time. It started with a visit to Paul James' garden on the way to Bowie, Maryland. What a garden! Even though Paul was despondent about severe deer damage, the garden is magnificent! Then we saw the George Harding Memorial Garden in Alexandria VA, which Denise and I had helped to plan and build 10 years ago.

The ASA convention was well planned and executed, with good gardens, good weather, good food, good talks and



Above: Denise Stelloh admiring an Amonenum Azalea.



Left: John Brown (circled) studying a **very** large Rhododendron 'Buzzard' at the Jenkins Arboretum.

good plants to buy, all as advertised. We thoroughly enjoyed all the beautiful gardens, and particularly the magnificent azalea collection at the US National Arboretum.

After the convention, we toured McCrillis Garden and Brookside Gardens in Bethesda, and then drove up to Chadds Ford PA. From there we spent a few days touring public gardens in the Philadelphia area, including Longwood Gardens, Wintherthur, Tyler Arboretum, and my personal favorite, Jenkins Arboretum.

Then we went on to the ARS convention at Valley Forge PA, for more good gardens, good weather, good food, good

talks and good plants to buy—a real treat! The plant sale was fantastic. The 100 or so people who queued up for 15 minutes waiting for the doors to open were treated by thousands of rhododendrons, azaleas and companion plants. The plants were arranged alphabetically so there was some hope of finding the favorites you had circled on your copy of the plant list—until you had your plant list in one hand, a couple of pots in the other hand, and no hands left to look at the plant tags on the tables. But we eventually found enough plants to fill up John's van and quit.

On the way home, we stayed overnight in Raleigh, and saw our final garden, the J.C. Raulston Arboretum. It seemed like the trip should have been relaxing, since we were riding around in buses and walking in beautiful gardens most of the time, so I was surprised to be so tired when we returned.

#### *Editor's note:*

*Unfortunately we are unable to print the pictures in the beautiful colors the photographer Bob Stelloh captured.*

# Beginner's Corner

## Summer care for Rhododendrons

By now rhododendrons and azaleas have subsided into green quietude where they will remain for the rest of the year. Broadleaf evergreens, these shrubs that offer year-round interest in our gardens, need some care now.

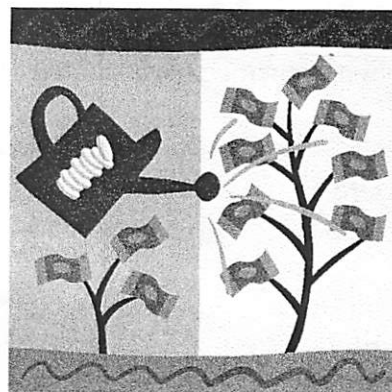
Water is the primary need for rhododendrons and azaleas in July and August. If we experience a few weeks of summer dry weather, these plants show stress. Many of our rhododendrons are native to regions such as the foggy lower slopes of the Himalayas or the eastern U.S. Smoky Mountains, where summer rain falls frequently and copiously. Rhododendrons have fine roots that grow very close to the soil surface. They can dry out fast under adverse conditions.

Use soaker hoses or in-ground drip systems if possible for watering. Rhododendrons and azaleas require deep, slow soaking that penetrates through the entire root ball. A wave of the hose for a minute or two won't do it, even if the surface of the soil looks satisfactorily damp. Take a trowel and check gently around the root ball to see how far the water has penetrated. Gardeners are constantly advised to "water deeply and slowly" but this isn't a simple skill. Check your results and use those slow-delivery systems.

Lack of water can be a contributor to leaf yellowing, because the nutrients that enter roots must be in water to move into the plant. A dry, stressed plant is a plant with nutrition problems as well as its other difficulties.

Another reason for observing and assisting with extra water this month is that the rhododendrons and azaleas are setting flower buds for next spring's bloom, and they require water to form healthy buds. Rhododendrons neglected in July and August will disappoint observers looking for bloom next April, May, and June. Taper off the watering in September to allow the plants to move into dormancy.

Some symptoms of foliage stress can be relieved in some plants by using one of the chelated iron products formulated for broadleaf evergreens. Never apply this to a dry plant! In general, all fertilizers and minerals should be applied when water is available, either through rain or supplementary water.



August isn't the month to do a general fertilizing of rhododendrons and azaleas, however. They are usually fertilized once early in spring, and once immediately after bloom, and in all cases by the end of June.

In August the plants are slowing their growth in preparation for dormancy and should not be shocked into excess soft growth by fertilization. (This is true for all trees and shrubs, not just for rhododendrons.) If the rhododendron has been neglected and not fertilized during this growing season, it's better to fertilize it in the mid-winter than to cause too much soft growth now. Some growers start their spring fertilization in late January, repeat once during bloom, and give a final application by the end of June when bloom has stopped.

Mulch, if not previously applied to the plants, can help to retain moisture and keep the surface roots cooler. Don't dump mulch at this time of year over a dry root ball — water it well first. A layer of mulch that's appropriate for these plants will be no more than 2-3 inches deep, and very porous to allow oxygen to be available to the roots. Bark chips, coarse compost (not hot, unfinished compost), and chipped yard trimmings all make excellent rhododendron mulches. Don't pile it against the trunk or place it too deeply over the roots. Roots need air!

Simple, basic care can keep rhododendrons and azaleas giving results as year-round garden assets. Remember, they are garden features during the 11 months of the gardening year when they are not in bloom.

*This article has been adapted from an article written by Washington State University area extension agent Mary Robson.*