

The Blue Ridge Review

The Newsletter for the



SOUTHEASTERN CHAPTER
The American Rhododendron Society
Hendersonville, North Carolina



November 2003

THE BEST OF THE BEST: IN SEARCH OF NATIVE AZALEAS

NOVEMBER 9TH, 2 PM AT THE NORTH CAROLINA ARBORETUM. GUEST SPEAKER: DON HYATT.

The East Coast of the US is blessed with a rich heritage of fifteen native azalea species. They are truly among our most charming native wildflowers. Some of the species are quite rare, and yet others that were once widespread are now becoming threatened too. While showing slides of native azaleas in their natural habitats, Don Hyatt will first discuss some of the techniques he uses to *distinguish among the various species*. Then Don will try to show the diversity within various species groups as he emphasizes the need to preserve, protect, and evaluate that which still remains in the wild. He will discuss some existing preservation efforts and the need to expand public programs such as the National Native Azalea Repository at the Arboretum. As he continues his quest to document the very finest forms of our native azaleas in the wild, Don hopes to share his appreciation of these incredibly beautiful native plants and the need to protect their habitats.

Don Hyatt is truly a Renaissance Man. He is an expert in computer science, horticulture, biochemistry and landscape design. He is also a talented artist. He is President of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the ARS, and is active in the Azalea Society of America. He has received many awards, including both the ARS Bronze and Silver medals. As a computer science teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, he has inspired his students to win numerous awards in national and international computer science contests. In 1988 a team of his students won the largest prize ever awarded in an educational contest,

a million dollar supercomputer. Please go to <http://www.tjhsst.edu/~dhyatt/gardencenter.html>. or visit his other web site at www.donaldhyatt.com. You will find a treasure of pictures, articles and paintings, which thanks to the magic of the Internet, we can all share.

By Billy Joyner

Native Azaleas

Deciduous native azaleas are found throughout N.C. along the coast to the Appalachian range. Native azaleas would include the Florida azalea (*R. austrinum*), Cumberland azalea (*R. bakeri*), Flame azalea (*R. calendulaceum*), Plum leaf azalea (*R. prunifolium*). Those native species generally have orange or red flowers.

Native Pink Azaleas would include the Florida Pinxter Azalea (*R. canescens*), Pinxterbloom Azalea (*R. nudiflorum*), Roseshell Azalea (*R. roseum*), and Pinkshell Azalea (*R. vaseyi*).

White flowering azaleas would include the Sweet Azalea (*R. aborescens*), Texas Azalea (*R. oblongifolium*), the Swamp Azalea (*R. viscosum*), and Dwarf Azalea (*R. atlanticum*). Several hybrid azaleas were developed from crosses between 2 or more of the deciduous native species, the most popular being the Ghent hybrids (1830) and the Mollis hybrids (1870).

(LEAFLET NO: 629) North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service

"SEPTEMBER WINNERS"

September was the first month that we started having door prizes on a regular basis. You must sign in, be a member and also be wearing a name tag to be eligible for the outstanding plants being offered as door prizes. Don't miss out on winning one of these instant landscape size plants that will be offered. Ed Collins searches and finds only the best for the door prizes. Everyone who knows Ed also knows he does choose wonderful plants. Just remember his advice, if you are the lucky winner of one of these beautiful plants be sure and plant **"Green Side Up"**.



**DOROTHY ALKIRE AND
BILLY JOYNER ARE WINNERS!**



LEAF EATERS

By Doley Bell

This rainy season has been wonderful for weeds and desirable plant growth, but it seems to me that the leaf eating pests are also having a happy year.

While walking the garden a couple of weeks ago, I noticed a deciduous azalea that at least a third of the plant had been eaten to the ribs! Not a pretty site. With closer examination I noticed small green caterpillars that were $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long with maybe 15 on the plant. My size 11 shoe quickly took care of the problem.

A couple of weeks later a friend from the state of Washington was visiting the garden and we were discussing various problems with leaf eaters. He recommended that I obtain a copy of a publication entitled "How to Identify Rhododendron and Azalea Problems" that is published by the cooperative extension of Washington State University. I ordered my copy from <http://caheinfo.wsu.ed> for \$6.00 and I think members would find the 28-page bulletin very informative.

The color photos are great and the table of contents list categories like "missing portions of Leaves", "spotting discoloration or dead areas", "Powdery, granular on leaves", "Dieback", and the appendix list both rhododendron species and hybrids that are resistant to weevils.

The web site has many publications but I only ordered "Leaf Scorch of Rhododendron" and "Propagating Deciduous and Evergreen Shrubs from Stem Cuttings". These publications are \$1.00 or \$2.00.

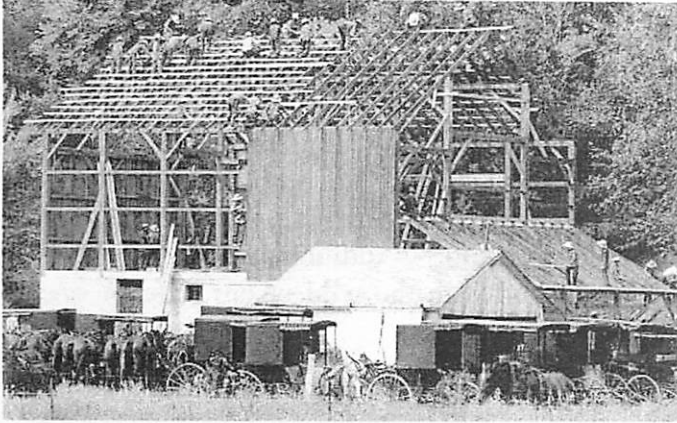
It seems that my little critter is probably a Sawfly larvae. Check the site. I believe you will make an order.



BARN RAISING (OR "HOW IS A POTTING EVENT LIKE FEEDING THRASHERS?")

BY THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

The American pioneer life demanded crafty resourcefulness just to survive. Upon arrival in Nappanee Indiana, my Mennonite ancestors had to raise crops and have substantial shelter completed before the first bitter winds of winter blasted in.



The first structure to build on that prairie homestead was the barn. Many families worked together to complete this gigantic task. I imagine that the older children fetched and ran chores. The ladies toiled over wood stoves to cook bountiful meals to fuel hard-working men. Timbers were raised. Younger children fanned the flies off the food spread out on makeshift plank tables. Like a finely orchestrated symphony, folks worked together in harmony. In just a few days, a snug sturdy barn was completed. It was grueling work, but it was also a time of singing, socializing, getting to know each other better.

Years later, in 1909 my grandparents homesteaded on 480 acres in the sand hills of Nebraska. The US Government gave the young couple this kinkaid of land in exchange for a filing fee of \$7.00. That fall when the wheat was white for harvesting, the community came together to feed the thrashers' legendary appetites. This utilized the same concept as the barn raising, many working together. It was a time of sweat and of socializing. Of singing and shouting. I can still hear my Grandmother Effie's voice telling us about it, "Many hands make light work."

In our maddenly modern society, we are oft isolated from our neighbors' lives and needs. Air conditioning and over busyness have enticed us in from the front porch swing. Oh, I long to thread up

my trusty needle for a quilting bee, to lend a hand at a barn raising or wheat thrashing. Deep in all our bones, we yearn for the connected-ness of that type of celebration of that type of community.

Last Saturday I was one cog in a community barn-raising-type event...not a geographic community, but a SE Chapter rhododendron community, with participates convening on Ray Head's yard from three states. Happy voices buzzed, suggestions and requests were bantered about, Dixie (the resident dog) made periodic quality-assurance patrols, potting mix and plant materials were flying through the air, and woe unto anyone who got in the way of the busy mixing shovel of Frank Mitchell. For the Plants-4-Members Potting Event, Randy and I arrived unfashionably late, a horrific two hours and twenty minutes late. Close inspection was not necessary to note that I was flustered, teary-eyed, all visible seams unglued, all over delays in the Delta air freight process. Tami Wagner bolstered my spirits with a girl-friend squeeze, and then many hands whisked 340 pounds of boxes out of my Subaru wagon. For the little rhodies, the leg of the journey from Van Veen Nursery (Portland, Oregon) to the Carolinas was complete.



The potting team members had prepped for our arrival. Labels for 661 rhodos were already lettered and rubber banded together by cultivar. One-gallon pots were rowed out and half filled with our secret blend of herbs and spices, I mean... potting mix. Then the cartons were popped opened, plants checked off the list under the ever watchful Jean Pace, labels matched to cultivars, and... *voila*... potting occurred. A mere blink of an eye would have meant missing something. Mathematicians calculated that one plant was potted every 5.5 seconds. In just sixty minutes, 661 plants were potted and grouped neatly by cultivar. Yeah, we were an aromatic sweat-soaked group of seventeen. We were proud of the accomplishments of our dirty hands. A tentative smile played across my lips as I accepted that good things do happen in spite of bad air freight experiences. Yes, life is good.

(Continued on page 5)

What is a Rhododendron Species?

There are many rhododendrons that grow in the wild around the world. These wild types are called species. There are more than 850 species in the Genus (group) *Rhododendron* and they are native to the temperate regions of North America, Europe, Asia, as well as the tropical regions of southeast Asia and northern Australia. None are indigenous to Africa or South America. There is an enormous diversity of size and shape in this group of plants from prostrate groundcovers growing no more than a few inches high to trees more than 100 feet tall. The wild rhododendrons are found from sea level to 19,000 feet in elevation where they occur in a variety of habitats including alpine regions, coniferous and broadleaved woodlands, temperate rain forests, and even the tropics. Leaf size ranges from less than 1/4 inch to over three feet long; there is also a wide variety of leaf shapes including very rounded, lance-shaped, and elliptical. The flowers may be pink, white, red, purple, yellow, orange, or various shades of each.

Most of the rhododendrons people grow are hybrids which are not the same as species. As stated above, a species *Rhododendron* is a plant that is found in the wild. The individual plants of each species of rhododendron grow, flower, are pollinated, and set seed. The seedlings generally look similar to the parent plants and thus remain the same species. For example, a plant belonging to the species *Rhododendron macrophyllum* is pollinated by another plant of *Rhododendron macrophyllum* and the resulting offspring are also *Rhododendron macrophyllum*.

Hybrid rhododendrons, on the other hand, are plants resulting from the cross-pollination of one species by a different species and the offspring may look

quite different than either parent. For example, when a person takes pollen from a *Rhododendron macrophyllum* (Pacific rhododendron) and hand pollinates another species of rhododendron such as *Rhododendron catawbiense*, the Catawba rhododendron native to the east coast of the United States, the seedlings will have characteristics of both parents mixed together. People have been artificially creating hybrids for many years and there are now tens of thousands of hybrid rhododendrons. Some familiar names of hybrids may include, 'The Honorable Jean Marie de Montague,' 'Pink Pearl,' 'Cynthia,' 'Unique,' and 'Purple Splendor.' Additionally, there are some natural hybrids in the wild where different species grow together.

The group of plants commonly called azaleas are actually classified by botanists as belonging to the Genus *Rhododendron* and the name for each type of azalea has both the word "Rhododendron" and the species name. For example, the common flame azalea of the eastern United States is botanically called *Rhododendron calendulaceum*. The azaleas are of 2 types: deciduous, or those that lose their leaves in the autumn, and evergreen or semi-evergreen, which lose some but retain most of their leaves throughout the winter. The deciduous azaleas are native the eastern and western areas of the United States and Canada, Japan, China, and scattered locations across eastern Europe. Evergreen azaleas are found only in central-eastern and southeastern Asia. Hybridizers have made innumerable crosses among the azaleas and there are thousands of hybrids including the deciduous 'George Reynolds,' 'Homebush,' and 'Irene Koster' and the evergreen 'Everest,' 'Pink Rosebud,' and 'Hino Crimson.'

Check their site at <http://www.rhodygarden.org> The mission of the **Rhododendron Species Foundation** is the conservation, research, acquisition, evaluation, cultivation, public display, and distribution of *Rhododendron* species; providing education relating to the Genus; and serving as a unique resource to scientific, horticultural, and educational communities worldwide.

After the work was done, we chilled in the shade of the garage. Mary Ann Head plied us with yummy substances. Cheeses, apple nibbles, grapes in diverse colors and shapes, assorted crackers, and a huge ice chest of frosty liquids. Hmmm. Mary Ann was more than a little nervous that we were going to leave all 661 rhodos with her. After these refreshments/reinforcements, we loaded the plants into our vehicles. Miraculously, all the plants were tucked into a Voyager, several pick ups, an Outback and several SUV's. All nooks and crannies were utilized. Mary Ann seemed to relax as the pots disappeared from her driveway.



Having fun playing in the dirt?

After a little personal grooming, a *very little* in some instances, the crew took off for dinner at the Hickory Log, purveyors of fine North Carolina BBQ. It was suggested that some potters sit down first so that others would then know how to sit up wind from them. We ordered. BBQ, red slaw, hush puppies and iced tea just kept coming from the kitchen. The waitress did not throw us out. Nor were there any disparaging comments about our "fragrances". We got to know each other a little better, laughed a lot, marveled at how much we had done. It was a satisfying conclusion to an incredibly productive day.

Right there at the Hickory Log in Forest City, North Carolina, I felt a tug from a long-ago era. Somehow it seemed I was standing with my Mennonite ancestors on that grassy prairie in Nappanee, Indiana. Around my neck was a gingham sun bonnet like Grandmother's. In the wind, the tall prairie grasses undulated before us like green ocean waves. It was as if I had been to a barn raising.

JAPANESE MAPLES THIRD EDITION



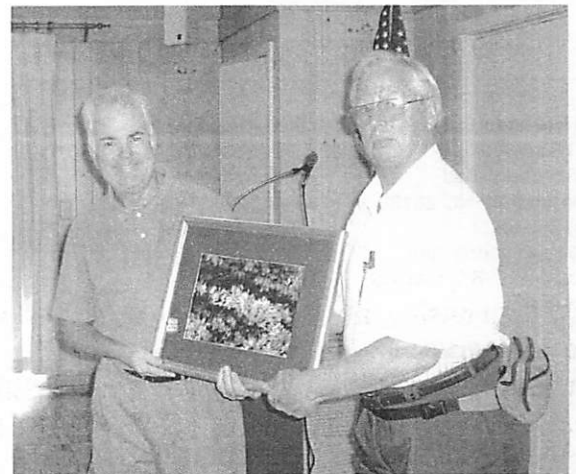
by J.D. Vertrees

This classic book on Japanese maples, recently revised and expanded, contains detailed descriptions of some 100 new cultivars and other species. This brings the number of cultivars discussed to about 400 total. Cultivar names and their English translations are included, as well as recent name changes. There are chapters on the culture of and use of these trees in the landscape. Pests, diseases, and propagation are also discussed. This book is filled with beautiful photographs of most of the maples and should be of use to anyone trying to decide on which of these lovely trees to plant. If you weren't very enthusiastic about growing Japanese maples before, you surely will be after reading this book. As always, this book is available through the chapter at a discount for \$40. *Book review by April Sanborn*

If you are interested in ordering a book to give as a Christmas present for a plant loving friend or just to treat yourself, please contact April so that she can get your order in time for the holidays. 828 586-2496 or asanborna@aol.com

SEPTEMBER'S GUEST SPEAKER

Joe Coleman gave an excellent presentation on native azaleas. All attendees enjoyed the slides and his description of the beautiful plants. Thanks, Joe!



President John Brown presents Joe Coleman with a lovely framed picture of azaleas at our September meeting.

YOU HAVE BEEN OBSERVED

You have been observed at Spring Plant Sales, sloshing around in deep puddles while your fingers took on a blue tinge from the chill, yet a couple of hours later you're peeling off layers of clothing while your face glisten with the warmth of the sun...you have been seen on Garden Tours puffing your way up and down the inclines...you have been noticed braving snow and sleet to attend a winter meeting...**nothing stops you!** Your stamina and devotion to the genus rhododendron is praiseworthy and consequently you have all been awarded a hardiness rating of H-1 (-25')

Reprinted from the New York Chapter Newsletter

UPCOMING PROGRAMS FOR 2003

NOVEMBER 9TH DON HYATT "*The Best of the Best: In Search of Native Azaleas*" 2:00 P.M. at THE NORTH CAROLINA ARBORETUM* 100 Frederick Law Olmsted Way Asheville, NC 28806-9315 or for directions go to their web site at:

<http://www.ncarboretum.org/PublicPrograms/visitor.htm#Directions>

DECEMBER 7TH CHRISTMAS PARTY*

JANUARY 2004 NO MEETING

*Please note the date and/or place for the upcoming programs.

A professor who tried to teach me horticulture more than a few years ago made the statement that rhododendrons were the kings and azaleas the queens of the plant world. This is undoubtedly correct, although there are still some misguided plant enthusiasts who will expound the virtues of roses, hemerocallis, etc. *Russ Davis Jr. Wayne, PA.*

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