

GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODO GRAVURE

Newsletter of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter, American Rhododendron Society :::::::::: Autumn 2018

Tool talk at brunch

Inanities from the Sweetman collection will be featured at October meeting

The chapter had so much fun last October that it's once again time to do brunch. The Oct. 14 meeting (Sunday, 1 p.m., at Morris Arboretum) will be a yummy potluck affair.

The chapter will provide wine, coffee and other beverages. Attendees are asked to bring a brunch-appropriate dish to share, such as a breakfast casserole, or fruit salad, or cinnamon buns. Last year's serendipitous array of food was once again proof that rhododendron people know how to cook and eat.

Noshing is not the only thing on the agenda. The Greater Philadelphia Chapter is pleased to present Harold Sweetman, director of Jenkins Arboretum. Not unlike Cher, Dr. Sweetman has begun his farewell tour, for he recently announced his forthcoming retirement after 33 years in charge of Jenkins.

One of Harold's specialties, in addition to the genus *Rhododendron*, is goofy old garden tools. He's been collecting them for years, and he'll be bringing a passel of them to Morris Arboretum to display and elicit chuckles. Among them are the Speedy Weedy and the Edge-O-Matic, whose names may have been more effective (at selling) than the tools themselves were (at weeding and edging).

As Harold has said, "There are no new ideas, just new products. And new doesn't necessarily mean better." Which means some old tools are still superior – if you keep them in good condition. *Voilà*: Harold will also show us how to sharpen pruners, shovels, hoes, and the like.

If you have a wacky or wonderful old tool in your garden shed, bring it along to add to the amusement. (Please, wrap it separately from your lobster salad.)

The National Football League has for the second year graciously given the Philadelphia Eagles this Sunday off, so there is neither game nor tailgating to keep you away from this get-together.

Note that we commence at promptly at 1 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 14. There is a wedding later in the afternoon, and the Rhododendron Society ever strives to get out of Dodge well before the mistress of the robes comes knocking at the door.

As always, we have free admittance to Morris – just say "rhododendron meeting" at the entry kiosk. (After the meeting, all of the arboretum is yours for strolling; since the Morris admittance fee is \$19, this makes your ARS dues a bargain.) Remember that Sundays at the arboretum can mean a backup at the entrance – the better the weather, the more time you should allow.



Andrew Gilbert via Pinterest

Harold Sweetman has tools to rival these. To see a selection, don't miss the October 14 brunch meeting.

All hands on deck!

Hundreds of rhododendron enthusiasts will soon begin making reservations to come to Philadelphia all at once, and that means scores of ARS members in District 8 are needed to fill volunteer positions.

At the September Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge joint meeting, one chapter board member announced that a doctor's note would be required to get out of convention duty. The RhodoGravure is confident that this was hyperbole, but the sentiment behind it is true.

The convention – *The Philadelphia Story: Rhododendrons in America's Garden Capital* – will be based at the Desmond Hotel in Malvern, Pa., and begins with a "pre-convention" tour on Wednesday, May 16. More tours will be conducted Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Among the institutional gardens to be visited at Longwood Gardens, Winterthur, Mount Cuba, Chanticleer, Stoneleigh, and Tyler, Jenkins and Morris Arboreta.

Evenings at the convention will be special as well. Thursday night, it's strolling from azalea cluster to hors d'oeuvres buffet to wine bar to rhododendron hillside at Jenkins Arboretum.

Friday evening, Richard Murcott of the New York Chapter will speak on the role of the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 in introducing hybrid rhododendrons to the United States. This dinner will be at special venue, the American Helicopter Museum, not far from the convention hotel. The traditional banquet on Saturday – at the Des-

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Plants and Propagation: Karel Bernady & Linda Hartnett
Truss Show: Michael Martin Mills; Philadelphia. Flower Show: Linda Hartnett

The American Rhododendron Society is a horticultural organization devoted to the genus *Rhododendron* – which includes azaleas. At the national level, the society holds annual conferences, publishes the excellent, full-color quarterly *Journal of the ARS*, and fosters plant research and conservation. Its website, www.rhododendron.org, is a trove.

The Greater Philadelphia Chapter gathers eight times a year. Sunday afternoon meetings are held September, October, November and January at Morris Arboretum. February through August we are more mobile, with a banquet, plant sale and picnic at various sites. The latest meeting information may be found at www.GPChapterARS.org.

Not already a member? Dues are \$40 per year, which includes chapter and national membership and a subscription to the *Journal*. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a member form or go to www.GPChapterARS.org; click on “Join us.”

Convention tasks

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mond Hotel *with an open bar* – will feature Jenny Rose Carey, noted garden author and shade gardener.

And then there’s the plant sale. Karel Barnady and crew have been preparing for this for several years, propagating sumptuous choices. Several vendors with companion plants will also be part of the sale.

All of this takes work. The convention committee – co-chaired by Steve Henning and Karel Bernady – has been meeting regularly for more than a year. Now things are moving into higher gear. Registration will begin in November. The crunch will be in May. Among the slots are plant sale set-up; plant sale attendants/cashiers; truss show and photo show set-up; tour bus captain; registration desk. A separate emailing on volunteering will be circulated shortly. To sign up now, contact co-chairs Bernady (bernadk@verizon.net) or Henning (rhodyman@earthlink.net).

A matter of class

Or family. Or, egad, phylum.

Just about everyone in the Rhododendron Society knows that the genus of our affection is *Rhododendron*. And that, in the scientific organization of living things, under genus is species, as in *degro-nianum* or *strigilosum* or *nudiflorum* – er, make that *per-iclymenoides*.

But what’s above genus? You can get into class warfare and family feuds if you’re not careful. With the help of an online search engine, here is a mnemonic device to help you get it all properly arranged:

King Philip Came Over From Great Spain.

While this sounds like a stilted reference to the Spanish Armada’s attack on England in 1588, use the initials and it helps one remember:

Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species.
Clever, eh?

But just to have more fun (the Armada is *so dated*), con-sider:

Kangaroos Play Cellos, Orangutans Fiddle, Gorillas Sing
Kids Playing Chicken On Freeways Get Smashed
Kevin’s Poor Cow Only Feels Good Sometimes
Kids Prefer Cheese Over Fried Green Spinach
Keep Pots Clean Or Family Gets Sick

Using this classification system, here’s the full shakeout for rhododendrons:

Kingdom: Plants
Phylum: Angiosperms/anthophyta/magnoliophyta = flowering plants
Class: Dicotyledoneae = dicots
Order: Ericales
Family: Ericaceae
Genus: *Rhododendron*
Species: [oodles]

Except that, in accord with modern science, King Philip and the kangaroos have a lot more rooms in the hotel of life. There are now subkingdoms and superphyla, numerous clades, plus domains and divisions. Searching online reveals that modern scientists are not of one accord, so the categories can vary. This is what the U.S. Department of Agriculture offers:

Kingdom: Plantae (plants)
Subkingdom: Tracheobionta (vascular plants)
Superdivision: Spermatophyta (seed plants)
Division: Magnoliophyta (flowering plants)
Class: Magnoliopsida (dicots)
Subclass: Dilleniidae
Order: Ericales
Family: Ericaceae (heath family)
Genus: *Rhododendron*
Hemidemisemigroup: Is this all nuts or what?

Oops, sorry, the RhodoGravure got carried away. Delete the previous line and send in the kangaroo clowns.

Where is everyone?

By Richard Murcott

ARS New York Chapter

In 1962 I started to get involved in what I call “organized horticulture.” At that time there were many civic, religious and horticultural organizations. There were Masons, Elks, Moose, Odd Fellows. Societies existed for chrysanthemums, rhododendrons, African violets, roses, orchids, and others that I can’t remember. Many localities had a garden club, probably 30 or so in my home county alone.

All of these organizations were vibrant, active, energetic groups. The Long Island Chrysanthemum Society had a waiting list to join. The New York Chapter of the ARS met at a Schraft’s Restaurant on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan and would attract at least 100 people. At one time the chapter had 450 members. One year we took in 150 new members from our information booth at the New York Flower Show.

A look now at these organizations is a sobering experience. There are still Masons, but the Moose and Odd Fellows are basically gone. All of the other groups, if they still exist, are down to 10 to 15 percent of what they used to be. Leaders report a general lack of “spark plug” members, those who are ready to do or help on any project. Most of the members are longtimers who feel that they have done their share and now want to relax and let the younger members do the work.

The problem is that there are no new members.

Where has everyone gone? Why are all these organizations not attracting new, young members?

There are several reasons. The first is competition from television, now a remarkable entertainment medium. The old expression “watching the boob tube” is not true anymore. There is an infinite amount of very interesting programming. If that competition is not enough we have the Internet. Everything is available, from information on any subject and correspondence with people to infinite entertainment options.

We also have the new lifestyle of young people. With most couples, both partners must work, and usually work long hours. Getting home at 6:30 or 7 to prepare and eat dinner really kills the idea of then driving to a rhododendron, chrysanthemum, church or whatever society meeting. Most of these people are simply overworked and have very little spare time for outside activities.

Last, we have the feeling on the part of young people that horticulture is “so 1930” and uncool. Any gardening work is to be done by hired workers.

Sounds dismal and hopeless, doesn’t it? Well it’s not. We have something to offer these people that is not found elsewhere. People. You. What we must show potential members is that rhododendrons are fun, interesting, exciting and most important they can get to develop a whole new circle of friends from all walks of life.

I recommend running free information sessions about rhododendron culture, perhaps at local libraries. Each attendee would be invited to the next chapter meeting at which he or she would be given a small rhododendron, definitely a cultivar not to be found at Home Depot. If these folks don’t come to the next meeting, keep inviting them to subsequent ones.

When visitors attend, engage them in conversation, introduce them to veteran members (who have been prepped to stick with the visitor and continue in conversation). Ask if they have any rhododendron problems and offer to have rhododendron veterans visit their gardens to give suggestions.

Visitors should be introduced and offered the chance to say something about themselves and their plant interests. That way, members can better start conversation with the visitors. All of this gives the visitor a sense that everyone is actually interested in them. Very important.

We should also consider having a half-hour beginner’s session before or as part of the regular meeting. Such a session would go over what should be done for rhododendrons during the coming month(s).

We must become new member focused; after all they are the future.

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Reprinted with permission from www.richardmurcottgarden.com. Richard Murcott will be a speaker at the May 2019 ARS national conference in Malvern, Pa.

Calendar

Important: If you do not receive this newsletter electronically, you will not receive email reminders a week before events. Please use this calendar to mark your own.

October 9, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Craig Conover.

October 14, Sunday, 1 p.m. NOTE TIME! ARS Chapter meeting with potluck brunch. Morris Arboretum. See article on Page 1

October 18, Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Valley Forge Chapter meeting. Speaker: Cricket O’Brien of Tyler Arboretum. Jenkins Arboretum.

November 11, Sunday, 11:30 a.m. NOTE TIME! Valley Forge Chapter Annual Banquet/Greater Philadelphia meeting. St. David’s Country Club. Speaker: Linda Eirhard of Winterthur. Reservation forms will be sent soon.

December 11, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Craig Conover.

January 13, 2019, Sunday, 1 p.m. ARS Chapter meeting. Morris Arboretum.

February 17, Sunday. Joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge meeting. Speaker: Virginia azalea hybridizer Joseph Klimavicz. Uwchlan Meeting House, Lionville, Pa.

February 26, Tuesday Flower Show exhibit set-up

March 2-10 Philadelphia Flower Show

April 13, Saturday Annual Banquet, Sunnybrook Golf Club. Presentation by photographer Karl Garcens III

May 16-19, 2019 ARS Annual Convention, Desmond Hotel, Malvern, Pa.

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