

GREATER PHILADELPHIA RHODO GRAVURE

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



They channeled the Escambia River

... into the Pennsylvania Convention Center for the Philadelphia Flower Show. From left: Gary Ammon, Joan Roberts, Toby Roberts, Michele Hawk, Bill Halberstadt, Michael Martin Mills, Linda Harnett, Karel Bernady. Not pictured: Victoria Buckley, Tom Lloyd. See article on Page 2.

Karel Bernady photo

Banqueting with a diva

Maria Callas was unquestionably a diva. These days, we think of Renée Fleming as a reigning diva.

The word “diva” originated in the world of opera (it derives from the Latin for divine), but now there are divas in so many realms of endeavor. The online *Urban Dictionary*, though grammatically flawed, offers this: “a person who exudes great style and personality with confidence and expresses their own style and not letting others influence who they are or want to be.”

So who could pass up dinner with such a divine person, especially if her specialty is gardening?

Please join the Greater Philadelphia Chapter on Saturday, April 14, for a presentation by Stephanie Cohen, the Perennial Diva, at the Annual Banquet. Ms. Cohen is the author of three garden-

ing books and has been booked for speaking engagements from one side of the country to the other. But because she is from here, and not a locale with a lovelier climate, this diva knows what grows here and how to grow it better.

Time is short. Please contact Linda Harnett by email (lindaharnett@gmail.com) to reserve a seat at the banquet (and select among filet mignon, seared ahi tuna, or vegetarian pasta primavera), with payment to be made by check at the door.

Due to renovations underway at our typical banquet site, this year the



Stephanie Cohen, with agave

event is at Sunnybrook Golf Club, 398 Stenton Ave., Plymouth Meeting, Pa. 19462. (The closest Pennsylvania Turnpike exit is Exit 333. If lost en route, call the club at 610-828-9617 for directions.)

We gather at 6 p.m. for cocktails and hors d’oeuvres, with dinner and program at 7. We will conclude with the popular plant exchange we call Rhododendron Roulette. For each reservation, please bring a rhododendron or companion plant.

There will be a random distribution, and you’ll go home with something surprising – plus a rooted cutting propagated by the chapter.

Greater Philadelphia Chapter
American Rhododendron Society
www.GPChapterARS.org

President: Craig Conover (2017-19) 215-901-1034;
sterling@sterlingfinishing.com
Vice President: Ron Rabideau (2017-19) 856-465-2344;
rhodyrex@verizon.net
Treasurer: Myo Myint (2016-18) 610-525-0599; myintm933@verizon.net
Secretary: Michael Martin Mills (2016-18) 215-844-6253; mmm19119@gmail.com
Past President: Kim Kopple (2017-19) 215-242-0391; kkopple@vet.upenn.edu
Director: Gary Ammon (2016-18) 215-988-2981; gary.ammon@dbr.com
Director: Karel Bernady (2017-19) 610-827-0113; bernadk@verizon.net
Director: Kate Deregibus (2017-19) 215-247-5777;
kderegib@exchange.upenn.edu
Director: Linda Hartnett (2017-18) 610-940-9478; lindahartnett@gmail.com
Director: Maris Ogg (2017-18) 215-836-0637;
mogg@towerbridgeadvisors.com

Newsletter: Michael Martin Mills 215-844-6253; mmm19119@gmail.com
Plants and Propagation: Karel Bernady & 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 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, and January at Morris Arboretum. February through August we are mobile, with a banquet, plant sale and picnic at various sites. Latest meeting information may be found at www.GPChapterARS.org.

Dues are \$40 per year, for chapter and national membership and a subscription to the *Journal*. Contact the president or treasurer (see above) for a form or go to www.GPChapterARS.org; click on “Join us.”

Two events of note

Yes, it's very short notice. Sunday, April 8, a hybridizer workshop is being held at Mercer County Community College.

The event has again been organized by Ron Rabideau. It begins at 10 a.m. and will run into the afternoon. It takes place at the college's Student Center Building, (Room 104), 1200 Old Trenton RD, West Windsor, N.J. 08550. The building is labeled “SC” on this map: www.mccc.edu/welcome_directions_wvcampusmap.shtml. Contact Ron for more information: myricaria@gmail.com or 856-465-2344.

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Mark your calendar for June 17, when the Greater Philadelphia and Valley Forge Chapters will jointly hold their annual picnic(s) at the Henry Foundation for Botanical Research in Gladwyne.

Trophies from the May flower competition at Morris Arboretum will be presented, and each chapter will hold its election of officers and board members. And yummy food will be devoured. More information on this hidden gem and the picnic will be circulated closer to the date of the picnic.

Midstorm fragrance

A look back at the Flower Show

The theme was “The Wonders of Water.” Yeah, right, the “wonder” of water that comes down out of the sky in frozen form.

Twice during the 10-day run of the Philadelphia Flower Show there were significant snow events. The first was on opening day, Friday, March 2 – the howling storm that brought down trees and knocked out power for thousands of people in the area. Five days later, more than 6 inches fell.

Where was the Rhododendron Society for all this atmospheric mayhem? Happily inside the Pennsylvania Convention Center, with the blossoms of *R. ‘My Mary’* and other delightful deciduous azaleas coming into full bloom and perfuming the area. Understandably, a couple of docent shifts were unstaffed, but that didn't stop visitors from admiring and sniffing our exhibit.

The design team was certainly not thinking snow when it used the water theme to conjure up a lovely naturalistic Florida scene.

What!? Everybody knows Florida is the land of orange groves, billowing bougainvilleas, and alligators, not rhododendrons.

Not so fast, Bucky.

In the far western panhandle, tucked under Alabama, is the southern extreme of the Appalachian woodland ecosystem, and there along the Escambia River one finds our favorite genus, in the form of wild deciduous azalea species. Add some companion plants, a ribbon of water to play the role of the Escambia, and – *voilà* – a wonder of water.

Numerous members made the exhibit possible, with Linda Hartnett leading the way. Barbara Olejnik and Karel Bernady were key planners as well. The setup crew numbered



11, with Bill Halberstadt doing double duty. Roughly 40 members of multiple chapters signed up for docent gigs, answering questions and selling booklets. Michele Hawk gets a giant shout-out for her work on installation and three different docent shifts.

The chapter also thanks and salutes John Bartlett of Gettysburg Gardens for donating the wildflowers that were forced for the exhibit.

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society has already announced the theme for next year's flower show: “Flower Power.” Yeah, man, it'll be the 50th anniversary of Woodstock – whose attendees of course included Linda Hartnett, Craig Conover and the late Randy Dalton.

Two fragments of lyrics to get you in the groove:

“I thought I glimpsed a path that led through rhododendron days and fuchsia nights to the boat-shed in which we two once lay.” – Warren Zevon

“Look on yonder misty mountain, see the young monk meditating, rhododendron forest. Over dusty years, I ask you, What's it been like being you?” – Donovan

Assessing drainage

A test for the home gardener

Editor's note: Don Wallace hybridizes rhododendrons and operates Singing Tree Nursery in Humboldt County, Calif. While growing conditions there are markedly different from prevailing East Coast situations, drainage issues are the same around the world. As originally published in the Eureka Chapter newsletter, here is his simple-to-execute test for drainage.



By Don Wallace

Understanding the requirements of specific plants is necessary before planting can be done properly. For example, most rhododendrons require good drainage to prevent root rot, while other plants like iris, willow, or gunnera either tolerate or like wet soils. So, do some research and find out what your plants like or need before planting and you will increase your success dramatically.

If you don't know what kind of drainage you have, you might want to try the drainage test.

Step 1

Start by digging a hole 6 inches in diameter and 1 foot deep in your garden (preferably somewhere you suspect the drainage to be questionable, like at the bottom of a slope, or where plants have died more often than thrived). Use a post hole digger if you have one, as this makes the perfect size hole.

Step 2

Fill the hole completely to the top with water. Wait until the water has completely drained out, then refill.

Step 3

If your hole takes less than three hours to drain out, you have adequate drainage for plants to thrive. If the hole takes more than four hours to completely drain out, you have poor drainage and will have to rely on other methods to obtain better drainage, such as planting above grade.



Don Wallace Photos

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.

April 8, Sunday, 10 a.m. Hybridizer workshop, Mercer County Community College, West Windsor, N.J. See notice on Page 2.

April 10, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Craig Conover.

April 14, Saturday, 6 p.m. Annual Chapter Banquet. Speaker: Stephanie Cohen, "The Plant Diva." **New location:** Sunnybrook Golf Club, Plymouth Meeting, Pa. See article on Page 1.

May 11-12, Friday-Saturday Plant sale. Morris Arboretum.

May 12, Saturday Joint Greater Philadelphia-Valley Forge Flower Competition (truss show). Morris Arboretum.

May 21-26, 2018 ARS Annual Convention, Bremen, Germany.

June 12, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Craig Conover.

June 17, Sunday Picnic and chapter Annual Meeting. Henry Foundation for Botanical Research, Gladwyne, Pa.

August 14, Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Board of Directors meeting. Home of Craig Conover.

August 19, Sunday District 8 Cutting Exchange and Plant Auction.

October 19-20 ARS Eastern Fall Conference, Chattanooga, Tenn.

November 3-6 New Zealand Rhododendron Association annual conference, Nelson, South Island, New Zealand.

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

Get ready: Plant sale is nigh

There is a hyper-major, super-big-deal Red Letter Day coming soon to an ecosystem near you. It goes without saying that to miss this juncture of horticulture and commerce is anathema.

May 11 and 12 are the dates of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter's rhododendron and azalea sale in conjunction with Morris Arboretum's super plant sale.

What's particularly important to keep in mind (and in your calendar) is that Friday, May 11, is *members-only day* at the sale (member of the ARS or of Morris), and members get 10 percent off on all purchases. On Saturday, the rest of the world can shop at this sale.

Over recent years, the selection of rhododendrons has gotten ever-more specialized. More of the elepidote stock for sale is chapter-propagated, as opposed to acquired from a wholesale nursery. Since the chapter's propagation program focuses in large part on uncommon, choice varieties, that's what ends up

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Plant sale

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being for sale.

A tip to the connoisseur: get there early for the best choices. The fact is, the chapter isn't a big nursery operation with dozens of plants of a given cultivar.

One happy exception is the evergreen azalea 'Betty Layman', named for the late Mary "Betts" Layman. There will be a good supply of this variety, which has large salmon flowers, typically grows wider than tall, and blooms a bit later than most evergreen azaleas.

Think of this sale as being like an art gallery, where each painting is one of a kind, with a few lithographic prints in the back. Given how choice these plants are, your garden can look like an art gallery, but only if you come to the sale: Friday, May 11, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Saturday, May 12, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

ARS members are needed to set up the sale earlier in the week and to be saleswomen and -men. Please contact Linda Hartnett if you are interested (lindahartnett@gmail.com).

New list for truss show

In his many years of organizing the Greater Philadelphia Chapter's annual floral competition (known to the cognoscenti as the truss show), Michael Martin Mills has heard a lot of responses to

whacky weather. One year a member worried that the only thing he was going to have in bloom was 'David Gable', a definite early bloomer. Another year, the lament was that there would be nothing left but *R. maximum*, which typically blooms in June.

The weather is a fickle thing, and what took a trophy one year may not be showing color the next year. But the field stays level – everyone has to deal with the same weather.

And this year, whatever the weather produces, ARS members will be bringing trusses and azalea sprays to Morris Arboretum on Saturday, May 12. The show coincides with the plant sale at Morris Arboretum, in a tent in the midst of the sale.

Deadline for entries is 8:45 a.m. That's well before the sale opens at 10 a.m., so exhibitors will be able to drive close to the show tent to unload their entries. When the show opens to the public after judging is complete, there will be a good audience of plant sale folks to come ooh-and-ah over the flowers.

This year, Joan Warren and Michael worked to consolidate the catalogues of previous entries from the Greater Philadelphia and the Valley Forge versions of the competition. Anyone entering the 2018 show must use the catalogue labeled "2018," which will be available on the chapter websites roughly a week before the show.

Entry tags will be available at the April 14 Greater Philadelphia Annual Banquet, or contact Michael at mmm19119@gmail.com or 215-844-6253 and he'll mail them to you. Note that Valley Forge tags may also be used.

Trophies will be presented at the picnic in June.