

MID-ATLANTIC RHODODENDRON NEWS AND NOTES

A Publication of the Middle Atlantic Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society

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February 2020

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

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| May 8-10, 2020 | Roslyn Retreat, Henrico, VA |
| April 29-May 3, 2020 | ARS Convention, Vancouver, WA |
| American Rhododendron Society | http://www.rhododendron.org/ |
| ARS Store Order from Amazon thru this site | http://arsstore.org/ |
| MAC Website (UPDATED REGULARLY) | http://www.macars.org/ |
| UVA Special Collections | http://www.lib.virginia.edu/small/ |
| Old Quarterly Bulletins & JARS | http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/ |
| Rhododendron Blog | www.rhododendron.org/blog/ |

SPRING MEETING

The MAC Spring Meeting is scheduled to be held at Roslyn Retreat beginning on Friday afternoon, May 8 and ending May 10 after breakfast. Roslyn Retreat has rooms available at a reasonable price for us. You will be receiving a more detailed account of information about the meeting later. We will be visiting gardens at Maymont, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, and most likely also the Cosby Nature Reserve. A bus is planned for the garden tours. Speakers have not been announced yet.

UPDATE FROM FEB 8th MAC BOARD MEETING AND RICHARD MOHR'S DISTRICT DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Bill Meyers is now the Eastern Vice President after the resignation of Steve Krebs. Richard Mohr is now District 9 Director and our own Lloyd Willis is now the Alternate District 9 Director.

Sharon Horn said the arboretum at JMU was moving forward with GPS locations for the plants there. They did have to replace two large plants and still need to get one more large plant.

A memorial dedication was held for the late Gray Carter at London Towne Gardens.

The selection of Rhododendron and Azalea plants of the year 2020 for the Middle Atlantic Region was announced. 'Bea McDonald' (a Dexter/Cowles hybrid) was the elepidote choice; *R. keiskei*, was the lepidote choice; 'Wagner's White Spider' (a strap-petaled white developed by Dave Wagner) was the evergreen azalea choice; and *R.*

periclymenoides (a native azalea) was the deciduous azalea choice.

DEATHS

Virginia Banks

Virginia Banks died suddenly on November 27, 2019 after an unexpected cardiac arrest. She is survived by her husband David Banks and son Larry Banks of Vienna, VA.

Virginia was born and raised in Portland, OR and graduated from Reed College in Portland. She and Dave met in college almost sixty years ago and she died two days before their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

She obtained a Masters degree in Library Science from the University of California at Los Angeles and worked for some years as a cataloguer at the Library of Congress. Virginia and Dave lived in Vienna, VA; Frankfurt, Germany; Rome, Italy; and, The Hague, Netherlands before retiring to Williamsburg in 2003.

Virginia was an avid plant person, especially interested in rhododendrons and azaleas. She was a long-time member of both the Azalea Society of America



Dave and Virginia Banks in 2015. Photo S. McDonald.

(Northern Virginia Chapter) and the American Rhododendron Society (sequentially members of the Potomac Valley Chapter, the Dutch Chapter, and the Middle Atlantic Chapter). Virginia was also an accomplished quilter.

Joanne Bartlett

George McLellen's sister, Joanne Bartlett, passed away on December 23, 2019. She was also a gardener and lived next door to George in Gloucester. Our deepest sympathy is extended to George.

AMERICAN SMOKE TREE by Bill Bedwell

Don Hyatt and I had an email discussion about smoke tree after I saw one of his close-up photos of



Colorful fall foliage on young Smoke Trees. Photo by Don Hyatt.

a group of potted American smoke tree plants. The photo probably included the smoke tree I bought when Billy Constable gave some MAC members a tour of what I think was Grelen Nurseries, Inc., out from Charlottesville. I was struck by the variety of autumn colors on those potted plants that beautiful sunny morning. My smoke tree has mostly yellow foliage in the fall but I needed that yellow in my landscape to offset the *Euonymus alatus* 'Compactus' with the brilliant red foliage. Unfortunately, the *Euonymus* changes to its brilliant autumn colors at variable times in the fall, sometimes early and sometimes late, as happened this past year. My smoke tree usually gets its autumn colors fairly early in the progression of fall color so it had about finished when the *Euonymus* was just getting started in the autumn of 2019. The two are at opposite corners of my front, or middle lawn.

I have a large crepe myrtle 'Natchez' not far from the *Euonymus* and it usually has yellow foliage in the fall. In last autumn the foliage was frozen just as it began to change colors and now remains brown and clinging on. Had the foliage not frozen, I think it too would have dropped its yellow leaves before the *Euonymus* turned into the burning bush that it was on November 24, 2019.



Bill Bedwell's colorful foliage: left to right *Euonymus alatus* , 'Compactus', Pomegranate shrub in center with Crepe myrtle 'Miami' behind it. Barberry 'Rose Glow' is in front. Boxwoods are the dark green. Photo by Bill Bedwell.

The *Euonymus* foliage did not freeze. I hate that the crepe myrtle retains those ugly brown leaves all winter, which happens when they are frozen before they drop off naturally. You can tell that I like fall foliage colors and I have selected trees and shrubs to provide that so I do not have to travel anywhere to enjoy the colors. I liked to look out the window and see the low branch of the Japanese maple outside with red, yellow, and bronze leaves that were covered with lingering rain drops that glistened in the bright morning sun.

My smoke tree has become one of the most interesting plants in my landscape with its ever changing parade of colors and beauty from spring to autumn leaf drop. But I especially like the bluish foliage in summer with occasional multicolors on new growth as summer progresses, plus the tasteful plumes of grayish, light pink colors, that represent smoke. It is not as colorful as the purple foliage of the English smoke tree but I like it better, and it forms a tree with a much more attractive shape even without pruning and shaping they say is needed with the Eurasian species. Without pruning, my American smoke tree has formed a beautiful vase shaped tree with about 8 trunks and it is about 15 feet tall in 15 years or so. Michael Dirr was right, the native

American smoke tree should become much better known by landscapers. That may be why that nursery had some in their stock when Billy Constable gave us the nursery tour on Sunday after the October 2004 MAC meeting in Charlottesville.

When I bought that tree, I did not know where I would plant it so it stayed in the pot all summer. Nor did I know much about it. I like experimenting with new plants. As fall approached, I was afraid it might die if it remained in the pot, so I planted it in what I thought would be a temporary spot where an azalea died. It thrived and was never moved. It is right by my route to the newspaper box so I get to enjoy it often. In the summer I can look down on the bluish foliage from my upstairs bathroom window. I notice that I must remove two or three of the lower leaning trunks because they are getting too close to the driveway but the remaining 6 trunks will retain the attractive vase shape of the tree.

I am sorry I have forgotten the botanical name but I think Jay Gillenwater bought a smoke tree too because I recall asking if he remembered the name. He had written it down and showed it to me. I think the last part was “oblongifolia”, or something like that, referring to the shape of the leaves. So I just decided to stop being so lazy and looked it up in Wikipedia. The American smoke tree is *Cotinus obovatus*, I am glad I got that corrected in my mind and in this email. Wikipedia also said the Eurasian species is *C. coggygria* and the popular selection, "Royal Purple", has the deep purple foliage. It also said that the Eurasian species, *C. coggygria*, has fall foliage that is not as bright as *Cotinus obovatus*, the American species. It said *Cotinus coggygria* has many more plumes that appear to swallow the plant as opposed to the American species. I think the American species has its plumes more attractively arranged here and there among the bluish foliage, just like a perfect uncrowded, tasteful arrangement of flowers and foliage instead of being jammed up and covering the plant like the Eurasian species.

As they say on PBS News Hour, that was my brief but spectacular take on the enjoyment I have gotten from my American smoke tree.

IN THE CROZET GARDEN by Lloyd Willis

It is January 30, 2020 as I sit down to write this article. At 7:45 a.m. the outside temperature is 30°F and it looks like snow. Shortly Mrs. Willis and I will be going for a thirty minute walk in the garden.

What will we see on this walk in the winter garden? We still enjoy looking at the dead, beige colored leaves clinging to the Japanese maples when seen against the green of rhododendrons or boxwoods. One Japanese maple leaf blown by the wind into the deadhead of



a rhodo made a nice mini-sculpture. We still enjoy the Autumn ferns although they are looking a bit beat up. We do not enjoy seeing the evergreen honeysuckle that is now very obvious in the bank of azaleas by the driveway as well as in some other azaleas and rhodos. Ditto for the green briar. There was a pause in the walk to pull out the honeysuckle. Green briar is saved for another day. The two inch squares of dwarf Mondo grass by the brick walkway are looking good.



Dead Japanese maple leaf with *Rhododendron* seed capsules. Photo by Margaret Willis.

The large flower buds on some six foot tall deciduous azaleas are looking quite nice. That should be a good bloom if the weather cooperates. Also, the red flower buds on a large rhodo contrasted nicely with its drooping green leaves. On another day with low fog, we saw some of the azaleas frosted because of the hairs on their stems and leaves.



Promising bud with reddish scales. Photo M. Willis.

On this walk we see two new lawn ornaments in one of the flat areas of the garden. These lawn ornaments are two Christmas trees—one from our house and one from the older daughter’s house. They have been in that location for at least two days. In early January, Grandson Silas (aged 12) requested that the two trees be given to him. He has been using them as moveable hurdles since he is considering going to the Olympics as a hurdler in a few years.

So is there more humor in this article? Yes. One of our garden helpers returned. Grandson Michael (age 15) is back after a five year break in his employment with us. On Monday we did a 9 to 11 a.m. work session together.



Frosted leaf hairs and stems on azaleas. Photo by M. Willis.

He and I started by pulling a garden cart full of limbs to the limb pile at the bottom of the hill. Michael pulled the cart back up the hill by himself. On the way uphill, I got tired and asked Michael to stop and help me groom a single weeping Japanese maple. It took about 30 minutes to remove the dead twigs and leaves. We then took another 30 minutes to groom a second Japanese maple. For one hour while we groomed the trees, we had a Japanese maple beginner's seminar. Michael asked me one question about Japanese maples which led to another 15-20 questions by Michael. All the questions were answered as if I were teaching a college class on botany without pictures or a white board. At the end of the hour, I was talked out. (Mrs. Willis does not believe that is possible.) The next day we get a call from Michael's mother. She wanted to share Michael's comment about his two hour work session with me. She said that he only had one statement, "Grand Dad sure likes to talk about Japanese maples."

WINDBEAM WAY WANDERINGS, February 2020 by Doug Jolley

Mid-winter has arrived here in central West Virginia, but winter has not arrived. Only twice has visible snow lightly coated the grass. We have had very few nighttime temperatures dip below



Witchhazel 'Magic Fire'. Photo by Doug Jolley.



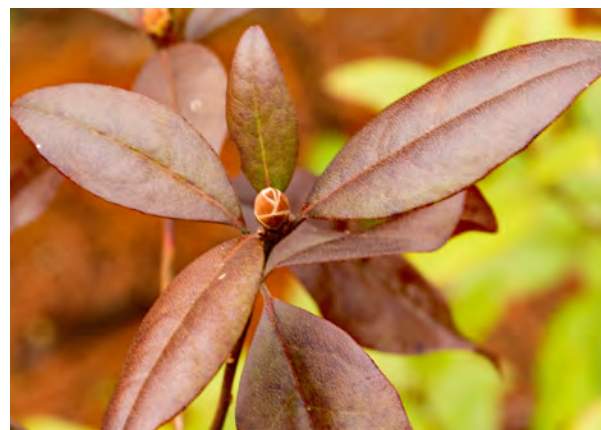
Cornus Officinalis. Photo by Doug Jolley.

20 degrees. The garden is already blooming. Hellebores are moving past the bud stage and beginning to blossom. Our 'Magic Fire' witch-hazel has been in full bloom since late January and a dozen more varieties are "waking up" as well. *Cornus officinalis*, the Japanese Cornelian Dogwood is in full bloom and its myriad of bright yellow flowers complements the reds,



Viburnum bodnantense. Photo D. Jolley.

oranges, and yellows of the witch-hazels. *Viburnum 'Bodnantense'* is beginning to bloom. Its sweet fragrance on the warm sunny side and the muskier



Hyatt seed exchange seedling. Photo D. Jolley.

fragrances of the witch-hazels actually make February and March one of the most fragrant times of year. There really are many bright spots throughout the garden that will shine on sunny days. Actually “hopefully” sunny days; we have had very few truly sunny days here for months.

Barring a tragic late April or early May frost, we should experience another wonderful blooming season. Rhododendrons, Mountain Laurel, *Leucothoe*, *Pieris* and all the ericaceous plants are beautifully budded. One of the premier foliage standouts is a seedling from one of Don Hyatt’s seed exchange selections from years ago. It is deep maroon, and the golf ball sized trusses open to a blue-tinged white.

We have found a new resident in our garden plantings. This fall the leaf of the native Puttyroot Orchid appeared in the pine needle mulch.



Puttyroot Orchid. Photo D. Jolley.

Aplectrum hyemale (hyemale referring to the prominent evergreen leaf which lasts through winter) naturally grows in our immediate area and hopefully this plant will bloom in late May. The leaf disappears through the warm months. Its corm can be smashed, and it will release a very gelatinous and sticky substance.

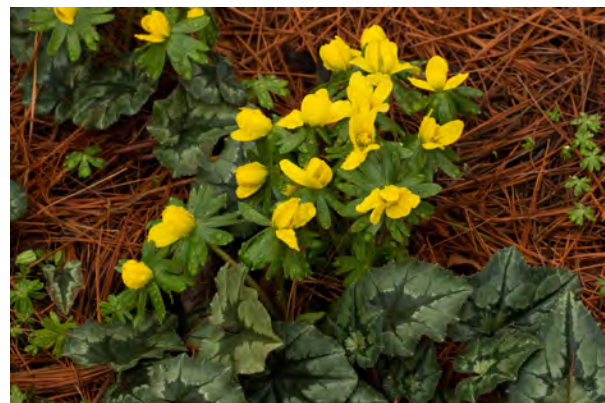


Sarracenia purpurea Pitcher Plant. Photo D. Jolley.

Our few cranberry plants are finally becoming more robust in the bog gardens. Maybe they will soon begin producing a berry or two. The age-old question of what to do with excess seedlings is familiar to many ARS members. Well, this fall in



Red bellied woodpecker and *R. ‘Catawbiense Album’*.



Winter Aconite and Cyclamen. Photo D. Jolley.

tidying up pitcher plants and such, a wealth of new pitcher plants has germinated. As with most infants they are cute. Now What ?

Winter aconite is blooming in large patches, and snow drops and very early daffodils will soon follow. Some of our resident songbirds are beginning to sing more than visit the feeders. With the official announcement of an early spring coming from our woolly friend up in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania Spring is on its way !



Remember all photos can be seen in color and ENLARGED at MACARS.ORG. Click on Newsletter on left panel.

Memberships and renewals should be sent to our Membership Chairman Jeanne Hammer at 231 N Robinson Dr, Macon, NC 27551.

Annual membership dues are \$40 per year.

Miscellaneous inquiries may be sent to the editor (address below) for forwarding to proper individual.

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