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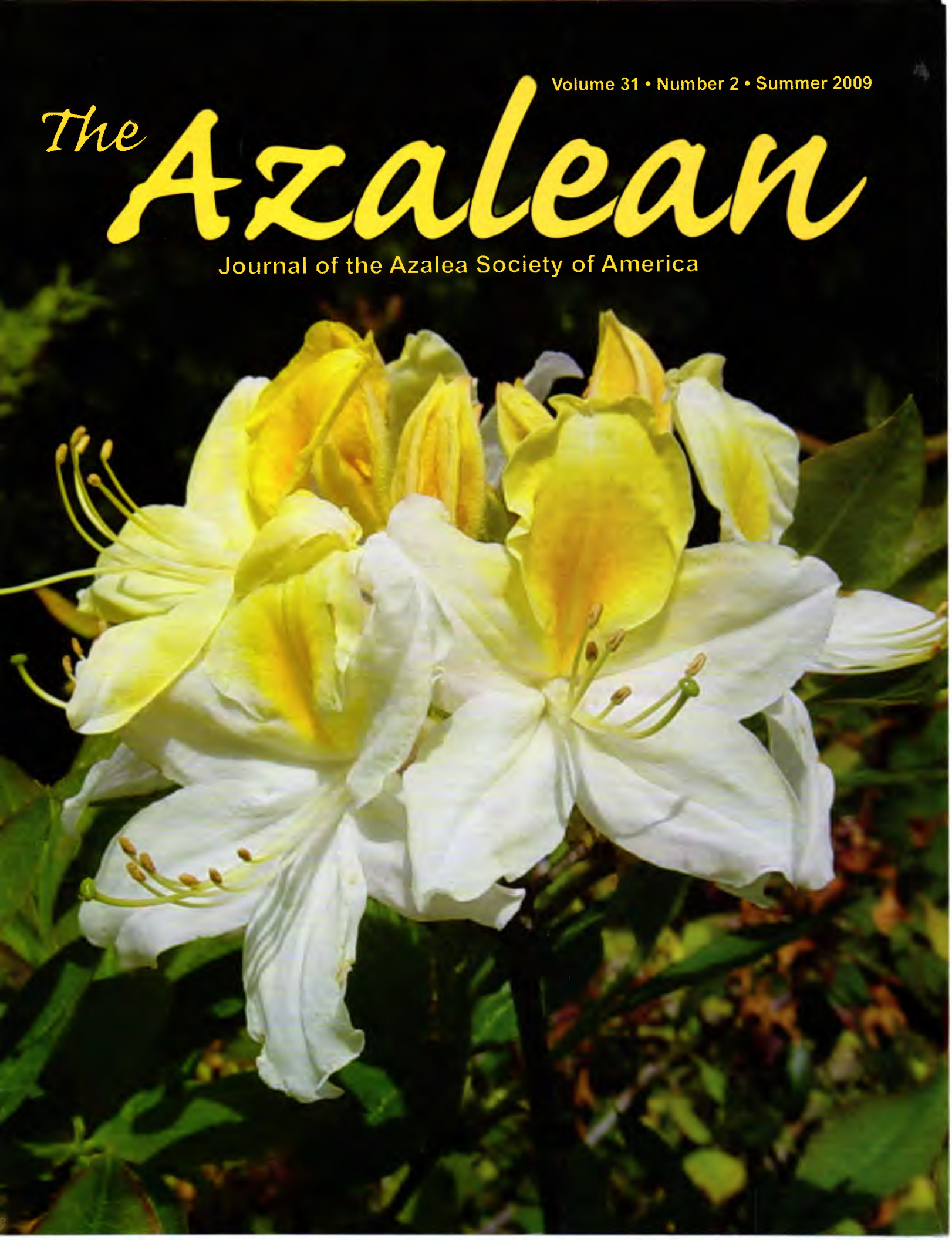
The Azalean

Journal of the Azalea Society of America



President's Letter

Aaron Cook — Valdese, North Carolina

Fellow Azalea Society members, as I assume the responsibilities of President it is with a sense of trepidation and confidence. That probably sounds odd, but let me explain. My fear and anxiety are on a personal level. I am faced with the daunting challenge of following in the footsteps of John Brown, Buddy Lee, Joe Schild, and Bill Bode, who have so successfully guided this Society during the past decade. They leave large shoes to fill, and I am humbled by the tasks that lie ahead.

My confidence stems from you, the members, who always rise to the challenge. I know that with your support the Society will continue to grow and fulfill its goals. These goals are to promote knowledge of and interest in azaleas; provide forums for sharing knowledge of hybridizing, propagation, and culture of azaleas; and my personal favorite, bring together those whose appreciation of azaleas forms a bond of friendship.

One of the primary ways we accomplish this last goal is our annual convention or family reunion. This year's reunion was hosted by the Northern Virginia Chapter, and it was spectacular. There were many highlights, but one of my best memories was eating lunch in the library of the Green Spring Farm Garden with Jane Newman. The stories she told were priceless.

Even though it was 12:30 a.m. Monday night (or Tuesday morning) when I got home from the convention, I had to dig out one of my old issues of ***The Azalean*** to read the article about Sue and George Switzer. In that same issue I discovered the registration form for the 2001 Asheville convention. This opened a flood gate of memories, and I realized that I began taking the first tentative steps toward this office by volunteering to lead the Copper Bald field trips at that convention. On those field trips, bonds of friendship developed that have remained strong ever since. On the Friday trip were **Donna** and **Joe Coleman**, **Mary** and **Bill McDavit**, **Tom Milner**, **Saleta Compton**, and **Jean Minch**. Those attending Saturday's trip included **Barbara Bullock**, **J Jackson**, **Lindy Johnson**, **Will Ferrell**, and **Debby** and **David Sauer**.

I sincerely believe that if every member of the Society could experience just a little bit of what we shared that day on Copper Bald they would be hooked for life. I have told many people in the ensuing years that I joined the Society for the plants, but I have stayed for the people.

Every time I think of an Azalea Society convention, I am reminded of an old quote: "Joy shared is joy doubled and sorrow shared is sorrow halved." This past year has seen some of both. Successful conventions, chapter meetings, field trips, flower shows, and good fellowship have taken place. However, the highs have been balanced by health problems and the loss of good friends. The Society lost three of our most devoted members this past year: **Mal Clark**, **Deni Stelloh**, and **David Sauer.** They were all pillars of the society and it now falls on all of us to further the society goals by following their examples.

How do we begin this task? Let's start small. If you are a member who has never gone to a chapter meeting, make it your goal to attend one meeting this coming year. If you are active in the chapter, invite someone you know to become a member, or make it your goal to attend the next convention. You won't be sorry. If you are active on the national level, take photos, write articles for ***The Azalean***; send seed into the seed exchange; volunteer to serve on the board; or convince your chapter to host the next convention. If everyone does just a little bit more, we will all reap the benefits.

In closing, I would like to say how honored I am to serve as your president for the next two years. I know with your guidance and support we will continue to grow and develop as a society.

In the end we can either accept things as they are
or accept responsibility for changing them. There really is no alternative.

Azalea Society of America

The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family *(Ericaceae)*.

Regular membership is open to all interested parties for an annual amount of $25; life-membership for one or two persons at the same address is $500. Members receive ***The Azalean*** and are eligible for participation in all activities of the Society including those of the chapter with which the member affiliates. For information and a membership application, write to Carol Flowers, Secretary, 700 New Hampshire NW, Apt. 1011, Washington, DC 20037 or visit **www.azaleas.org**.

The Azalean
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Address editorial and business correspondence to:
Editor, ***The Azalean***
P.O. Box 632537
Nacogdoches, TX 75963
E-mail: theazalean@gmail.com

Society Web site: **www.azaleas.org**
Mail list: **azaleas@yahoogroups.com**

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VOLUME 31 NUMBER 2 SUMMER 2009

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On the Cover

Introduced in 1994, 'Northern Hi-Lights' is a hybrid of *R. atlanticum* hybrid x unidentified Exbury seedling. It has the same parents as 'Golden Lights'. The flowers are creamy white with a bright yellow upper petal. It has a cold hardiness rating of -30° F. Plants grow relatively slowly to a height of four feet and a spread of four to five feet. The dark green foliage has some resistance to mildew.

Photo Tadeusz Dauksza

One Method for Growing Rhododendron and Azaleas from Seed, USDA Zone 6a

Bruce Clyburn—New Waterford, N.S., Canada

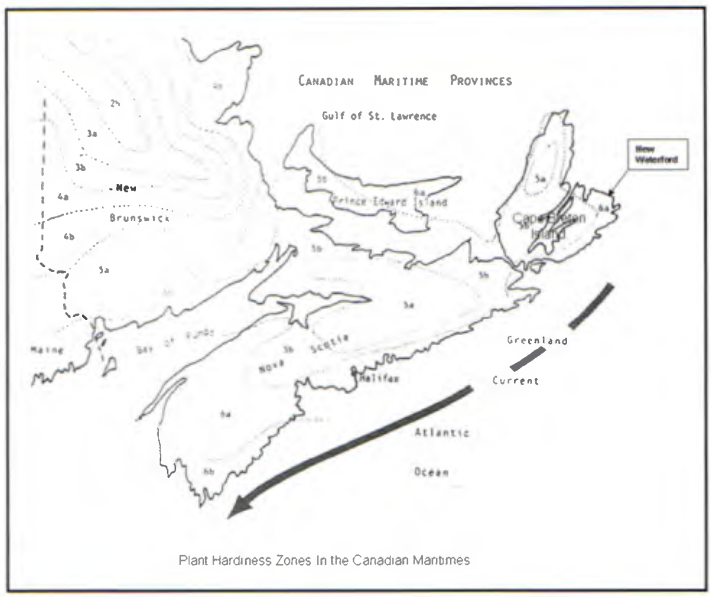
Nova Scotia is a peninsula about 500 km (300 miles) long, lying between latitudes 43° and 47° N. Cape Breton is an island on the extreme northern end of the province; the town of New Waterford is located on the eastern shore of Cape Breton.

The climate is strongly influenced by the water masses which locally modify the effects of the general tendency for weather systems to move from the west. Surrounded by water, Cape Breton is bounded by the Gulf of St Lawrence on the west and the Atlantic Ocean on the east. The Greenland Current—a mass of cool water flowing south—is not far from shore; it's one of the water returns of the Gulf Stream.

The Greenland current is both a curse and blessing. Being colder in the summer than the air temperature, it creates fog on the coast in spring and early summer thereby reducing the hours of sunshine. At the same time, it lessens the length and intensity of frost. The current prevents the sea from freezing in the winter, hence moderates the winter temperature along the coast where the sea is often much warmer than the air at that season. Annual precipitation is 1575 mm (62 inches). The lowest temperature experienced in the garden was -28° C (-18° F) in January 1994. In summer, there are usually two or three days of temperatures at 30° C (86° F).

We planted our first azaleas in 1989. Evergreen types are not hardy enough to succeed here except a few of the very hardiest type. The North American deciduous species and hybrids flourish; there are several large beds of Exbury, Knaphill, and Northern Lights series also. In the cool summers, mildew has never been a problem. A favorite pastime during the winter months is propagating new garden accessions from seed. It is an easy and profitable means of obtaining plants that are not commercially available in Nova Scotia (or anywhere else in some cases).

There are many methods of growing rhododendrons from seed. Here is the one I have been following for the last few years.



Plant Hardiness Zones In the Canadian Maritimes

First Year—November to November

Seed Sources

The seeds I look for are from hardy species, or if a hybrid, have one or both parents of reasonable hardiness. I look for seeds that suggest the mature plants might have fragrant flowers (*Rhododendron aborescens*, *R. prinophyllum*, *R. luteum* or crosses with these). Another objective is to look for a background offering diverse blooming times (early, mid, late).

I purchase seed from the ASA, ARS, and the local ARS chapter seed exchanges but this sometimes arrives too late in the spring for planting. So I store them in the refrigerator until the next fall. Storage is as simple as putting the paper or glassine packets in an airtight food storage container or glass jar with twist off top with some silica gel crystals on the bottom and a piece of cotton batting over the crystals.

In November, I plant the purchased seeds along with some other seeds from my own crosses which I collected the previous year. Many years ago I read in *Rhododendrons of the World*, written by David G. Leach (1), that he started his rhododendron seed in mid-late November. This works just fine for me, getting the plants to a size where they can overwinter in a cold frame one year later from the time of sowing. On the other hand, the deciduous azaleas tend to grow more rapidly and, if started that early, could become tall and leggy too quickly. I prefer to plant these in mid-January. By the way, did you know that leggy azaleas can be cut back and the juvenile tips rooted very easily?

Starting Seed

I fill 3-inch plastic pots to within 3/4 inch of the tops with a mix of moistened media (1/3 perlite, 2/3 peat). It's best to add hot water and just enough so that squeezing a ball of the mix in your hand will release only a small amount of surplus water. I prefer to top this with 1/2 inch of live sphagnum moss (2) collected locally and chopped with scissors.

Sphagnum moss and peat moss are not the same product. Sphagnum moss is used in the floral industry to line wire baskets and make wreaths. It is the "living" moss that grows on top of a sphagnum bog. Peat moss is used as a soil conditioner by gardeners. It is the dead material that accu-

Photo Bruce Clyburn

▲ Indoor light garden

Photo Bruce Clyburn

▲ Seedlings in early March

mulates in the lower levels of a sphagnum bog. Harvesters of the horticultural peat moss remove the top few inches of the live sphagnum moss before harvesting the peat below. If you can't locate sphagnum, don't panic; you will still get fair germination without it.

The seed is sprinkled lightly and left on top of the surface, do not cover with media. I use a small spray bottle with weak liquid fertilizer to settle the seed in. Next, insert a label and put the pots inside a fold-lock sandwich bag and lock underneath. The seed begins to germinate in 10 to 14 days and needs no light until then.

At the first sign of the seed splitting (some white/yellow embryo tissue showing is the signal), I place the seeds under fluorescent lights to promote strong, continuous growth. My light benches are in a section of a basement room which is usually 70° F. If cooler, it will take longer to germinate. The lights are activated and run on a timer from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Leave the pots in the plastic bags, lifting each seedling once a week to check on conditions and spritz with a solution of liquid fertilizer. I use Schultz® brand (10-15-10) at seven drops per liter.

Around late February to early March, I thin the seed and move nine robust seedlings into a fresh 3-inch pot with a mix of moistened media (1/4 perlite, 1/4 peat, 1/2 pine bark). No live sphagnum is needed.

By early April most need to be moved again into a single 3-inch pot for each seedling. When I re-pot this time, the plastic sandwich bag is not used. Instead the pots are positioned in a wardian case under the lights. This is simply a square, wooden box made from 7-inch pine with a plywood bottom. All seams are silicone caulked and a Plexiglas removable cover goes on top. Never allow the seedling medium to dry out.

Watering/Fertilizing

I water from the top, using three separate applicators for different stages of development. Watering includes the water soluble fertilizer as well. I water until a small pool first accumulates on the surface of the pot:

- The first stage begins when the seed is sown up to the point germination is mostly complete (one month). The 3-inch plastic pot enclosed in a plastic sandwich bag results in little moisture loss. Freshly distributed seed is settled by spritzing the seedling 5 to 10 times weekly using a good quality spray bottle.

- At the end of the first month, bags are removed and pots are lined out in a wardian case. (Some folks use a plastic dome cover.) While this limits moisture loss, it is still necessary to add more volume at each watering. I substitute a laboratory wash bottle for the spray bottle. A wash bottle is a squeeze bottle with a nozzle, usually used to rinse various pieces of laboratory glassware, such as test tubes and round bottom flasks. Most wash bottles are made of polyethylene. When pressure is applied to the bottle, the water inside becomes pressurized and is forced out the nozzle into a narrow, easy to direct stream of liquid. This permits a good volume of water to be applied in a targeted area so the seedlings are not flattened over. As long as the seedlings are in a communal pot, the wash bottle is used.

- At some point, usually 5 months after sowing, each seedling is moved to its own 3-inch pot. Seedlings are now about 1-inch tall and pretty sturdy. It is possible to use a conventional plastic watering can at this stage

Moving Out

When all risk of frost is gone (June 15 here), it's time to move the plants outside. About a week or so before, begin the first step in hardening the plants by opening the Plexiglas cover slowly. Gradually open it a bit more each day until finally removing it. Before moving the plants outside, re-pot each seedling in a 6-inch pot using a medium of three parts pine mulch, two parts peat and one part perlite. Add water until a small amount leaks from the drain holes in the bottom.

Photo Bruce Clyburn

▲ ▼ Summer shading

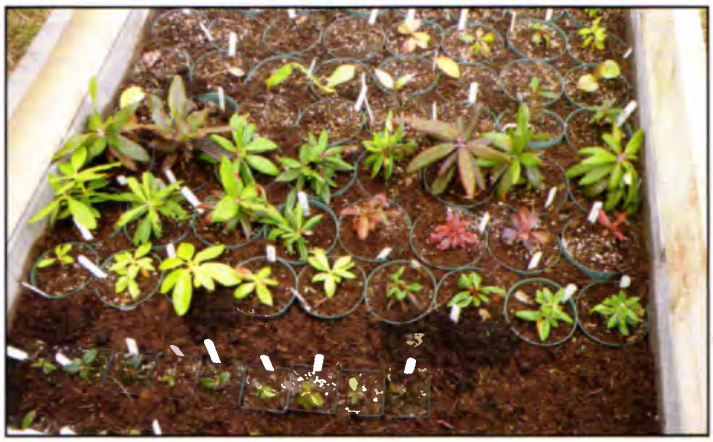


Photo Bruce Clyburn

▲ ▼ Winter cold frame

Photo Bruce Clyburn

Photo Bruce Clyburn

The plants cannot be put in direct sun. I have a number of benches and tables on my deck from which I suspend a burlap shade cloth, placing the tender plants from inside into the shaded area. On top of the bench, I place plants that have wintered outside in a cold frame.

It can take three to four weeks before its safe to expose the seedlings to direct sun. I simply lift the shade cloth for longer and longer periods of time each day until they are receiving eight hours or more of sun. Plants are also fertilized with Miracle Gro® (15-30-15) (1 tbsp/gallon) every other week until late June.

Preparing for the First Winter Outdoors

In mid-November when the plants are one-year-old they must be prepared with heavy protection for the four months of winter (December to March). The pots are moved to a cold frame and the interstices between pots are packed with peat or sawdust/woodchips. A woven plastic tarpaulin is secured over the top and sides of the frame with staples. This translucent blue tarp does not allow too much heat to build up from winter sun. Never use clear plastic.

Second Year—November to June

Very little happens, the plants are dormant. No feeding or watering is needed. The cold frames are vented in early April first by sliding the cover over so that 6 to 8 inches of one end is open and by mid-April the covers are removed completely. There is no need to close it ar night the plants are already acclimatized to the ambient air temperatures.

June to November

In June the pots are moved to a central location on benches where they are watered and fertilized (Miracle Grow® liquid) all summer. By September to November the plants are about 12 to 16 inches tall and are ready to be planted in the garden.

I find growing azaleas from seed an interesting and rewarding pastime during the long, cold winter days here in Cape Breton. There is a huge reward in seeing a small plant you've nurtured from a tiny insignificant seed bloom for the first time. This is increased several fold if that plant is from a cross of two plants you've carried out yourself. To view a new color arrangement or smell an intoxicating fragrance are just more reasons for fellow azaleaphiles to try a hand at this gratifying leisure pursuit.

Bruce Clyburn *recently retired after 35 years in the Cape Breton coal industry. He can be reached by e-mail at bclyburn@ns.sympatico.ca.*

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(2) Konrad, Mark G. "The Value of Ground Mosses with Seedling Culture," *JARS* Vol. 53 Number 3.
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Northern Lights Azaleas

Tadeusz Dauksza—Orland Park, Illinois

"So much owed by so many to so few."

—Winston Churchill
August 20, 1940

Maybe this phrase can also be used in directing a special gratitude to those before us who introduced the world of azaleas to us. So few like the Army bookkeepers in 1915-1920 who entered "GI" when entering articles into their log books. (The term stood for "Galvanized Iron" and the letters were originally stamped on U.S. Army metal trash cans. Later, the assumed abbreviation was "Government Issue" and it was stamped on all articles issued. Eventually the term evolved to describe the soldiers themselves.)

So few like the American Legion (a veterans group) who is responsible for many of the provisions of the Service Readjustment Act of 1944 (better known today as the GI Bill) signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

So few like Al Johnson and Leon Snyder (professors and researchers) who had the vision, foresight, and dedication to pour their hearts and souls into creating a place where "Northern" gardeners could learn and enjoy the beauty of hardy ornamentals.

You might be wondering what this has to do with the Northern Lights series of azaleas. Let's continue for a moment.

One of the greatest surges of interest in home landscaping and the use of ornamentals followed the post World War II housing boom. Young GIs returning from overseas turned their attention to education, careers, families, and homes. Thanks to President Roosevelt's GI Bill, these dreams were made possible through free education and guaranteed home loans. (An important provision of the bill was the availability of a low interest, zero down payment home loan for servicemen.) This enabled millions of American families to move out of urban apartments into suburban homes.

Prior to the war, primarily wealthy and upper-class families lived in the suburbs. However, the GI Bill democratized the "American Dream." It was one of the most significant pieces of legislation of the 20th century.

Within a few years, the suburbs were filled with newly constructed homes on barren, muddy lots. The sense of a victorious period which filled Americans during the economically strong, post-war period inspired homeowners to turn their new homes into comfortable, attractive showplaces. Plus, the babies being born at record pace needed a place to play. The American love affair with the lawn began.

In her entertaining, enlightening, and nostalgic book, *Minnesota Gardens*, Susan Davis Price writes: "Generous weed-free lawns typified the post-war years. A well groomed carpet of grass outdoors was an extension of the plush, indoor wall-to-wall carpeting in newly built ranch-style homes."

Photo Tadeusz Dauksza

▲ 'Tri- Lights'

▼ 'White Lights'

Photo Tadeusz Dauksza

Not only did grass feel good under the feet, it looked good and solved the problem of what to do with all the space around the house. It also gave the kids a soft landing when they played.

Condensed from a University of Minnesota Extension publication and featured in the April 1953 *Minnesota Horticulturist* (now *Northern Gardener*), Leon Snyder proclaimed: "A good lawn is the most important single feature of any home landscape. It's like the canvas on which an artist

Photo Tadeusz Daukszа

▲ 'Mandarin Lights'

▼ Lilac Lights™ ('UMinn's Lilac Lights')

Photo Tadeusz Daukszа

paints his picture—a pleasant background for the flower and shrub border and the cool shade of the lawn trees."

What were homeowners covering their blank canvases with?

In most cases, annual flowers accented with a few shrubs and evergreens were planted to relieve the appearance of the house and its landscape from bareness. Some of the favorite colorful annuals included zinnias, marigolds, petunias, asters (all colors, but most notably yellow), ageratum, pansies, violas, phlox, salvia, and verbenas.

Color ruled as homeowners began to concern themselves with how the landscape appeared from the inside as well as to the passerby. The colorful annuals were grouped in masses and arranged in harmony, providing a pleasing decoration for the house.

So, were people planting anything but annuals in Minnesota and the Midwest? You bet they were. Daylilies, iris, mums, and peonies were the frequently reported perennials with a particular emphasis on roses. (My mother introduced me to the propagation of roses using clear jars as a means to duplicate some of her favorite beauties.) Flowering shrubs such as lilacs, mock orange, honeysuckle, and spireas led the pack of woody plants.

Minnesota Landscape Arboretum Project

It's easy to see why nearly every pre-1970s yard has a trio of bridal wreath spirea, lilacs, and peonies. The tree with the most buzz appeared to be the "Radiant" flowering crab introduced by the University of Minnesota in 1958. It was described as "compact and upright in growth habit with sturdy, wide angled crotches. This form makes the variety ideally suited for landscape purposes on smaller properties." The foliage had a reddish cast, the flowers a deep pink, and the fruits stayed on the tree to feed the birds in the wintertime.

The executive committee of Minnesota State Horticultural Society (MSHS), prompted by the Men's Garden Club of Minneapolis (an affiliated garden club of MSHS), recognized the ever-growing interest in hardy ornamentals. Together they determined there was a fervent need for further research and development, as well as a place where northern gardeners could observe these plants in their ideal settings. The committee passed a resolution in 1955 to sponsor the Landscape Arboretum Project.

The project had five objectives: (1) to intensify research for hardy ornamentals; (2) to create interest in existing and new plant materials; (3) to provide a living library for study of ornamental plants; (4) to demonstrate proper utilization of Minnesota ornamentals; and (5) to promote further testing and use in all areas of the state.

Major fundraising to make the arboretum a reality was soon underway. With numerous private donations and a large sum raised by the Lake Minnetonka Garden Club (an affiliated garden club of MSHS), the society purchased 160 acres of land across from the University of Minnesota Fruit Breeding Farm in Chanhassen, Minnesota. A year later it turned

the deed over to the university with the understanding that the objectives set forth by the society would be carried out. The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum was born.

Dr. Leon Snyder was named the arboretum's first Executive Director. In 1958, it was a little-known horticultural research station sitting on 160 acres of marshland. Fifty years later, the arboretum (http://www.arboretum.umn.edu) has blossomed into an international research center and cultural destination that contributes to the horticultural, economic, and intellectual lives of people all around the world.

The arboretum boasts 16,500 members, 1,400 volunteers, and nearly half a million visitors each year. With more than 1,000 acres, 32 display and specialty gardens, 48 general plant collections, and more than 5,000 plant species and varieties, the arboretum is one of the premier horticultural field laboratories and public display areas in the Midwest.

In 2004, the Woody Landscape Plant Breeding Project at the University of Minnesota celebrated 50 years of active breeding and development of cold-hardy woody landscape plants. Initiated in 1954, the project is a latecomer relative to other horticultural plant breeding efforts at the University of Minnesota (fruit breeding beginning in 1888, vegetable breeding in 1901, and flower breeding in the 1930s). Like all of the horticultural breeding efforts at the university, the Woody Landscape Plant Breeding Project was initiated to breed and develop woody landscape plants capable of thriving in Minnesota's harsh winter climates, which range from USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 4B in the south to Zone 2B in certain locations in the north. The project has been responsible for the release of more than 40 plant cultivars and has contributed to the development of the state's $2.1 billion nursery.

Evaluations and selection for cold hardy, adapted landscape plant materials has been ongoing at the University of Minnesota since 1888. That year Professor Samuel B. Green was hired as the head of the Department of Horticulture. He planted trees and shrubs on the university's St. Paul campus to evaluate cold hardiness and landscape quality.

The first directed breeding work on woody landscape plants dates back to 1942 when Dr. Louis E. Longley started the chrysanthemum breeding project. He also began making crab apple and rose crosses. Longley is credited with releasing four roses: 'Pink Rocket', 'Red Rocket', 'L.E. Longley', and 'White Dawn'. He also developed the 'Radiant' crab apple. After Longley's retirement in 1949, Robert A. Phillips continued making rose hybridizations. Two additional cultivars, 'Prairie Fire' and 'Viking Queen', are attributed to Phillips.

The Woody Landscape Plant Breeding Project's original leader was Dr. Leon C. Snyder, who cites the formal initiation of the project as occurring in 1954. Snyder was the driving force behind the early efforts in the project. Thus his legendary interest in evaluating plants for potential use in the Minnesota landscape led to an explosion of plant breeding which continues to this day. Dr Snyder retired in 1976.

At the formal inception of the Woody Landscape Plant Breeding Project, Snyder was head of the university's Horticultural Science Department. Given his administrative duties, Snyder certainly had to delegate much of the responsibility for day-to-day breeding and evaluation activities.

Richard Stadther was hired by the university in 1954 as an instructor in ornamentals and was cited as working for the Woody Landscape Plant Breeding Project until he left the University in 1961. Dr. Robert Mullin was hired in 1963 to replace Stadther, and is credited by Dr. Leon Snyder as working on the project in the early years. Like Stadther, Dr. Mullin was stationed on the St. Paul campus and thus physically removed from the day-to-day breeding and evaluation work which has always been carried out at the Horticultural Research Center in Excelsior, Minnesota.

In 1957, Albert Johnson was hired to work on the breeding project at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Until his untimely death in 1977, Johnson carried on the day-to-day activities of the project. In 1957, Johnson made the first crosses that signaled the beginning of an effort that largely defines the project to this day, the Lights azaleas.

Johnson's activities extended far beyond the arboretum as he scoured the state and region in search of new, unique woody plant materials. Many of these "hunting" trips were done in collaboration with extension agents Mike Zins and Mervin Eisel who spotted much of the plant material in their extension travels. To this day, the project continues to evaluate plant materials collected by this enterprising group of "plant hounds," including a columnar form of bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) and a hardy Kentucky wisteria (*Wisteria macrostachys*).

Gardeners, nurserymen, and the landscape industry throughout Minnesota owe much to these largely unheralded individuals and their ceaseless effort to being new plants into commerce.

In 1978, Dr. Harold Pellett assumed leadership of the Woody Landscape Plant Breeding Project. Pellett had been on the faculty since 1967 working in the area of nursery production and whole plant physiology. Under his leadership the project truly blossomed with more than 30 woody landscape plants being named and released as cultivars.

In addition to productive efforts in cultivar development, Pellett also collaborated in some pioneering research regarding woody plant cold hardiness. Dr. Pellett retired from the University in 2001 and Dr. Stan Hokanson was hired to take over leadership of the project.

More than 40 cultivars have been released by the university and Woody Landscape Plant Breeding Project. The list includes several flowering crab apples, apricots, and plums released in the 1920's, 30's and 40's, predating any directed efforts at woody landscape plant breeding or selection. These early releases were by-products of the fruit breeding program which was initiated in 1888.

The woody landscape plants released by the project can be categorized into five groups: large trees, small flowering trees, shrubs, deciduous azaleas, and roses. The diversity of cultivars released from the project reflect early efforts to

identify woody plants with meritorious landscape characteristics and the capacity to survive Minnesota winters. Simply stated, the objective was to expand the palette of landscape plant offerings for the state and environments. Early efforts largely involved evaluation of vegetatively propagated genotypes and seedling populations arising from plant taxa, genotypes, and/or populations of interest.

Aside from the short-lived rose and crab apple breeding programs of the 1940's, no purposeful hybridization programs were undertaken with woody landscape plants until the onset of the formal breeding program in 1954. The aim of the program was devoted to breeding or developing cold hardy deciduous azaleas and shrubs for Minnesota and other regions with cold winter climates. Previous to the initiation of the project, there were few azalea cultivars with a wide selection of colors available which bloomed reliably in the Midwest area, especially Minnesota.

Cold Hardiness

Cold hardiness was not a simple characteristic for which to breed. Genetic and environmental factors interact to determine the cold hardiness of a plant at any particular time. As natural daylight decreases in late summer and autumn, a particular day length (or photoperiod) is reached to which plants respond by cessation of growth and development of increased ability to tolerate temperatures slightly below freezing. Thus begins the first stage of cold acclimation.

The critical photoperiod is genetically determined for each plant and is related to the latitude of the plant's native area of origin. In general, woody plants from northern latitudes or higher elevations cease growth at longer day lengths, which means they start acclimating earlier in the summer than woody plants from more southern latitudes which respond to shorter day lengths and therefore cease growth later in the year. In summertime in Northern Minnesota, the sun is still visible at 9 p.m.

The second stage of cold acclimation is induced by decreasing temperatures and is often triggered by frost. This stage is characterized by rapid acclimation which enables plants to tolerate low winter temperatures. Again genetic control plays a big part. Generally, plants native to cold climates are capable of tolerating lower temperatures than plants native to warmer areas.

Cold de-acclimation may be another factor influencing the cold hardiness of azaleas. De-acclimation occurs if plants are exposed to warm temperatures. Injury to the plant may result if it subsequently experiences very low temperatures. Results from cold hardiness research done at the University of Minnesota indicates that azalea buds de-acclimate rapidly at room temperature and can lose several degrees of hardiness in as short of time as one hour (1).

Cold hardiness also varies in different tissues within an individual plant. In most woody plants, root tissue is the least cold hardy. However, since root tissue is protected by the latent heat of the earth, it is not often exposed to killing temperatures.

Northern Lights' Azalea Breeding Program

Of most concern in deciduous azaleas is the cold hardiness of the flowers, since they are the least cold hardy exposed plant tissue and floral display is the primary reason for growing azaleas. Thus the first step of the breeding program was to identify desirable parental material which had the ability to contribute cold hardiness to its offspring. Most of the cold hardy material was selected from the more northern part of the species range or from hardier strains. Some of the plants identified as cold hardy included individuals from the following species: *Rhododendron prinophyllum, R. vaseyi, R. canadense, R. viscosum, R. arborescens, and R. x kosterianum.*

Other materials included in the breeding program were chosen for cold hardiness and desirable characteristics such as color and floriferousness. These included: Knaphill hybrids, Exbury hybrids, *R. calendulaceum, R. japonicum,* and *R. luteum.*

In 1957, Albert Johnson crossed *Rhododendron* x *kosterianum* (Mollis azaleas – Galle page 84) with *R. prinophyllum* (Roseshell azalea), initiating the most well-known work of the project—development of the Lights series of deciduous azaleas. The resulting seedlings of the controlled crosses were sold under the name Northern Lights F1 hybrids. They were quite uniform in size and form. The flower bud hardiness was consistent at -45° F and the flower color ranged from light pink to dark pink. Most of these hybrids were sterile.

The first plants of the Northern Lights Group were released in 1978. The Northern Lights series of azaleas bud cold hardiness was tested and confirmed in a laboratory environment. Laboratory tests confirmed the flower bud hardiness of the selection and determined the lowest temperatures the buds could withstand.

To date, 14 named cultivars have been released by the project. The overriding objective of the azalea breeding program has been development of USDA Zone 4 hardy azaleas in a range of colors. Although nearly commonplace in Minnesota and Midwest landscapes today, the range of colors and flower forms represented by the Lights azaleas were unknown as recently as the mid 1980's when some of the richer yellow, orange, and multi-hued cultivar began to find their way into the landscape. It would be an understatement to say the program has been a success.

'Pink Lights'

'Pink Lights' was introduced in 1984. It is a clonal selection from *R.* x *kosterianum* x *R. prinophyllum*. It is an extremely floriferous plant with mature height of six to eight feet in 24 years. Flowers are pale pink with darker pink blotch. The flower buds are hardy in mid-winter to -45° F with no injury. Crossed (1957), raised, and introduced by Dr. Harold Pellett, University of Minnesota, Landscape Aroretum, Chaska, MN.

'Rosy Lights'

'Rosy Lights' azalea is a dark pink clonal selection from *R.* x *kosterianum* x *R. prinophyllum*. It also has mature height and spread of six to eight feet. Flowers are sterile. It was introduced in 1984. It blooms in late May. Hardy to at least -40° F. Crossed (1957), raised, and introduced by Dr. Harold Pellett, University of Minnesota, Landscape Arboretum, Chaska, MN.

'White Lights'

'White Lights' azalea is a clonal selection from seedlings having *R. prinophyllum* and some white Exbury in the background. Flower buds of 'White Lights' are a pale, delicate pink in the balloon stage. Upon initial opening, the flowers have a faint pink tinge which fades at full bloom to give virtually a white appearance in the landscape. Flower buds are hardy to -35° F. 'White Lights' has a spread of four to five feet. The flowers are sterile. It was introduced in 1984. Crossed (1969), raised, and introduced by Dr. Harold Pellett, University of Minnesota, Landscape Arboretum, Chaska, MN.

'Orchid Lights'

'Orchid Lights' azalea was introduced in 1984. It was selected from cross of *R. canadense* x *R.* x *kosterianum*. It has smaller, moderate purplish pink colored flowers blooming mid-May on a compact dense shrub reaching three to four feet in height and spread. Flower shape is unique as it is intermediate between the two parents.

'Orchid Lights' is extremely hardy and flower buds can withstand -45° F without injury. It is sterile, setting no seed pods even though stamens and pistil are present. Flowers are somewhat obscured by new foliage, and it has a little bit of "skunky" odor. Crossed (1962), raised, and introduced (1984) by Dr. Harold Pellett, University of Minnesota, Landscape Arboretum, Chaska, MN.

'Golden Lights'

'Golden Lights' is a clonal selection from seedlings having *R. atlanticum* and Exbury azaleas in its background. The cross was made in 1975, introduced in 1985, and named by Dr. Harold Pellet and Susan Moe. The plant matures at five to six feet in height and spread. It produces a floral display of golden-colored flowers in May. 'Golden Lights' flowers are fertile and fragrant.

'Apricot Surprise'

A deciduous azalea, parentage uncertain but probably *R. calendulaceum* open pollinated. Hybridized (c. 1958), raised, introduced (1987) and registered (1991) by University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. Named by Dr. Harold Pellettt.

Flowers are moderately fragrant, widely funnel shaped with narrow tube, the corolla is vivid yellow, with vivid orange-yellow markings covering most of upper petal. The shrub is moderately floriferous four to five feet high and five to six feet wide in 30 years. It has an upright growth habit, and it is bud hardy to at least -25° F.

'Spicy Lights'

'Spicy Lights' is a cross of *R. prinophyllum* x unknown. The cross was made in 1963, and it was raised and introduced in 1983. It was named by Dr. Harold Pellett and Susan Moe. It feature salmon orange flowers, and it is fragrant. Leaves in the fall have slight "purpling." Grows to five to six feet tall in 20 years.

'Northern Hi-Lights'

Introduced in 1994, 'Northern Hi-Lights' is a (1978) hybrid of *R. atlanticum* hybrid x unidentified Exbury seedling. It has the same parents as 'Golden Lights'. The flowers are creamy white with a bright yellow upper petal. It has a cold hardiness rating of -30° F. Plants grow relatively slowly to a height of four feet and a spread of four to five feet. The dark green foliage has some resistance to mildew.

'Mandarin Lights'

Blooming in early spring, its flowers are bright orange red with a light fragrance. Narrow tubular funnel-shaped blooms with wavy edged lobes. The upper lobe is more ruffled than others. Parents are *R. calendulaceum* x 'Orangeade'. It was hybridized in 1967 and registered in 1994. Developed at the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen.

'Lemon Lights'

Introduced 1996, 'Lemon Lights' is a 1978 hybrid of an unnamed cross between an Exbury hybrid seedling and another hybrid with *R. atlanticum* heritage. It has wavy edged lobes and brilliant yellow color with a vivid orange-yellow blotch on upper petal. Slight scent and very floriferous. It was registered in 1995.

'Tri-Lights'

A 2004 addition in the Northern Lights Series, it is a hybrid of a *R. atlanticum* selection by an unnamed red-flowered Exbury azalea. At maturity, it is approximately five feet tall and six and one half feet wide. The tri-colored flowers have marbled pink and white petals with orange-yellow speckles in the throats. Leaves are dark green and resistant to powdery mildew. The vegetative tissues of 'Tri-Lights' are hardy to -30° F, while the flower buds are hardy to about -25° F. Hybridized in 1978, it was grown, named, and registered in 2000.

Lilac Lights™ ('UMinn's Lilac Lights')

A new addition to the Lights Series of hardy deciduous azaleas, Lilac Lights™ was introduced in 2005. It is an improved version of 'Orchid Lights' resulting from a controlled cross of *R. canadense* x (*R.* x *kosteranum* x *R. prinophyllum).*

In 10 years, it matures to approximately five and one

half feet tall and four to five feet wide. Blooming in mid to late May, it has numerous lax trusses, each holding eight to 10 flowers. The corolla is five-lobed. Lower lobes are narrow and deeply divided, while the upper three lobes are less deeply divided. Flower color is medium pinkish purple with darker speckles on upper lobes. Flowers are not fragrant. Foliage is medium green.

Candy Lights™ ('UMinn's Candy Lights')

This new cultivar restores pink to the color palette of the Lights Series of hardy deciduous azaleas. An earlier cultivar, 'Pink Lights', has been too difficult to propagate in commercial quantities and has therefore become unavailable in the trade. Candy Lights™ results from a controlled 1989 cross of *R. atlanticum* and a red-flowered *R.* x *kosterianum*.

Candy Lights™ is a medium sized shrub, growing five to six feet tall and wide. It blooms in mid to late May with many dome-shaped flower trusses, each holding eight to 10 flowers. Flower color is a clear light pink with pale yellow streaks on the upper corolla lobe. Flowers have heavy substance and are strongly fragrant. Foliage is medium to dark green.

'Western Lights'

'Western Lights' is a polyploid form of the tried-and-true standard 'Orchid Lights'. It boasts thicker, more lush foliage with a slightly glaucous tone and larger flowers. The good, deep purplish pink coloring is still present, but the entire plant is a lot showier from bud to foliage.

It was introduced by Briggs Nurseries and it was their 2001 Plant of the Year. Parentage is (*R. canadense* x *R.* x *kosterianum*). The one and a half inch orchid-colored flowers are sterile.

Work on the hardy deciduous azaleas continues. One color that's missing from the Lights Series so far is red, and they are looking at several good red-flowering azaleas for introduction in the near future. Project leader Dr. Stan Hokanson likes one of the advanced selection azaleas that has double flowers in a pink-coral shade, so there may be a 'Double Lights' down the road a bit as well.

Another new project effort is directed toward the development of powdery mildew resistant deciduous azaleas. As an initial step in the process, the screening of 41 deciduous azalea cultivars is being done in replicated field plots in Minnesota and Ohio to identify mildew tolerant or resistant cultivars for use in future breeding efforts.

Liner-sized plants of most of the cultivars being screened in the field are also being screened in growth chamber experiments. They want to determine whether the same resistance/susceptibility reactions occur in the growth chamber as are observed in field experiments. If this is the case, they can accomplish powdery mildew screening on a smaller scale, in the off-season, at a cost savings to the breeding project.

Future work will involve screening seedlings collected from populations of 16 species of deciduous azaleas native to the Appalachian Mountains of Eastern United States.

For those fortunate to visit the Twin Cities, do stop at the tiny town of Buffalo where Erva Hance (daughter of the late Horticulture professor Leon Snyder) has close to 1,000 iridescent Northern Lights azaleas that stop the rural traffic once they are abloom.

To obtain some of these Northern Lights series of azaleas visit these nurseries which have mail-order operations. Or, for further information feel free to write or call the author .

Greer Gardens Nursery	www.greergardens.com
Rare Find Nursery	www.rarefindnursery.com
Song Sparrow Nursery	www.songsparrow.com

Tadeusz Dauksza *is a member ASA Lake Michigan Chapter. His e-mail address is iltkyao@sbcglobal.net.*

References

(1) Pellet, H., S. Moe, and W. Mezitt. "Flower Bud Hardiness of Rhododendron Taxa," *JARS*, Vol. 40, Fall 1986, pp 203-205

UPDATE: Hybridizers—Leave your Legacy

James Thornton—Conyers, Georgia

In the spring issue of ***The Azalean*** (Vol. 30, No. 1), I penned an article ***"Hybridizers: Leave your Legacy."*** If you recall, it was a request for hybridizers to help build a data base of the specifics of their hybrid plants. This data base would create a library of sorts, for all azaleaphiles, present and future—of information concerning the creation of their azaleas.

The article even included a form to use to submit data. It seemed simple enough, even though I was forewarned by Galle that in his quest for data it was "difficult, sometimes hopeless, an enormous task" and often "frustrating." Boy, these were understatements if there ever were ones. I was so optimistic!

Later in the fall issue (Vol. 30, No. 3) I gave a status report. Other than **David Purdys**' input, there was nothing to report! In that article, I went into a tirade as to why there where no responses, accusing our hybridizers of many things, including "plain old apathy." I went on to say that I would still be around as along as my patience held out.

I have to admit my patience was wearing thin when along came plant data from hybridizer **Joe Klimavicz**. I know all of us are aware of his work and those who attended this year's convention eagerly sought after his plants. Some, however, went away empty handed, including myself!

Anyway, thanks to Joe and David, maybe just maybe, this will prompt others to share their plant data, and it will not fade into the world of "never, never land." Like the motel ad says, "I'll leave the light on for you!"

Elliottia racemosa— an Azalea Companion Plant

William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

Last fall, I bought a small specimen of *Elliottia racemosa* or Georgia plume. At the time, someone commented that it was a small deciduous tree, but I basically knew nothing about it, the foliage looked attractive, and it was going to be a grand experiment. After I got home, a few minutes on the Internet revealed that it is ericaceous, was thought to be extinct, but is now listed as a threatened species.

This native of the Georgia coastal plain derives its name from the foot long, plume-like spikes of fragrant white flowers that are produced in the early summer. The leaves are native azalea-like and reportedly turn red in the fall — a feature that escaped me last fall. The literature noted that it had been successfully grown in Zone 6, so I concluded that I had a chance in my Bethesda, Maryland (Zone 7) garden. During the winter, the small specimen of Georgia plume was subjected to 3° F with no obvious problem, as it leafed out as expected. That's the good news.

The bad news: I observed lesions on the leaves, took photographs, and submitted a specimen to the University of Maryland for examination. Dr. Karen Rane, the head of the plant pathology laboratory at the University of Maryland, found nothing infectious and characterized the condition as abiotic. In other words, there was no evidence of a bug, fungus, virus, or bacterium.

One of the questions that I was asked was — "Had it been sprayed with anything?" It had not been sprayed with anything, and the plant is so isolated that it was not a drift candidate. It is protected above by tall white pines and surrounded by eight to ten foot azaleas. I continued to observe the problem and noted that the lesions gradually coalesced and the leaves eventually wasted away (turned brown and crumbled).

Returning to the Internet, I found a report describing research on stimulating Georgia plume seed germination that had been published in 2002 by the State Botanical Garden of Georgia. It is my expectation that someone more familiar with the Georgia plume, in general, may be able to explain the lesions. I located the e-mail address of the "contact author," and recently sent an e-mail supported by three jpg images. As of this date, I have not heard back.

Photo William C. Miller III

▲ Gross view of the leaf lesions.

▼ Through-a-scope view of a leaf lesion.

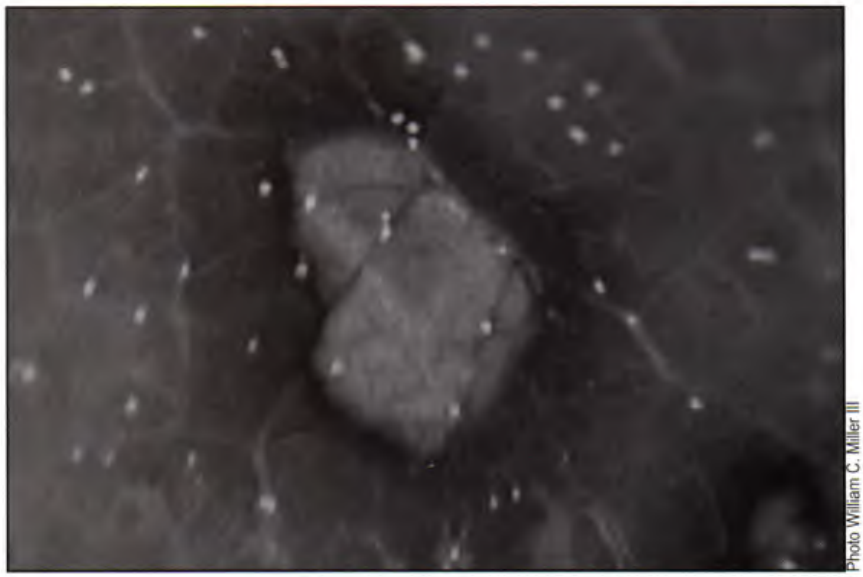

Photo William C. Miller III

William C. Miller III *is a recipient of the Society's Distinguished Service Award and the Brookside Gardens Chapter's Frederic P. Lee Commendation. He is president of the Brookside Gardens Chapter, a member of the ASA board of directors, a former vice president of the Society, past co-chairman of the ASA's membership committee, past chairman of the public information committee, a long-time ASA member, and a frequent contributor to* **The Azalean**.

Society News

In the Beginning

Jim Thorton, ARF Chairman

Congratulations to the Azalea Society of America! Why shouldn't we pat ourselves on the back for establishing a research foundation? Be it ever so late?

That's right! It's true! The Board of Directors approved the formation of the Azalea Research Foundation (ARF) during the 2009 annual convention. I was appointed chairman with members **Hale Booth, John Brown, John Migas** and **Bob Stelloh** joining me to get the foundation up and running. Members joining us on our Advisory Board are **Dan Krabill**, finance, and **Carol Flowers**, promotions. We still have some positions open like in a tax consultant and a horticultural expert.

Wait! Maybe you haven't kept up with this endeavor over the years so let me try to bring you up to date. I guess it all started back with the folks who formed the Society back in 1977 when they developed the goals and objectives of the Azalea Society.

Well, some things lie dormant, occasionally rising to the surface, like when the late **Mal Clark** donated $10,000 for research. Then we had the late **Dr. August Kehr** who made a case for research that would't go away but didn't take wings to fly. It took the perseverance of members like **Bob Stelloh** and others to keep it alive.

At the 2008 convention, President **John Brown** made a plea to the ASA Board of Directors to approve a study group to see what the Society should do about creating a research foundation. Volunteers **Hale Booth, John Migas, Buddy Lee, John Brown, Bob Stelloh,** and I signed up.

On January 1, 2009, the study group presented a proposal for the Board of Directors to consider. It was decision-making time! The proposal was approved via e-mail and later at the annual convention in Herndon, Virginia. On May 1, 2009, we became a standing committee within the Azalea Society of America and history was made!

Well, the drums are silent now and the work is just beginning as we proceed into the complex world of fund raising and applying for grants. Our mission mirrors that of the ASA and our goals reach deep into the areas of concern the original founders laid out for us to follow—classification, hybridization, culture, and education/promotion.

It won't be easy and we'll need your support to succeed. Support by standing behind us, promoting us, and helping fund us with your donations.

You can give a little, or you can give a lot. Just make sure it's something you feel right about doing. You can contribute with a personal check, by part of your RMD (required minimum distribution), stock, or any tangible property. And please consider the Azalea Research Foundation in your will. While all contributions to a registered charity are tax deductible, some can be better than others, so it's best to talk to your tax advisor first to maximize your tax benefits.

For example, if you contribute shares of stock worth more than you paid for it, you can deduct the full value of the stock and you won't have to pay tax on the appreciation. That's good for us and even better for you!

The attached envelope in this issue of ***The Azalean*** is provided for your convenience. So, be the first to donate!

Got any comments? You can reach us at: azalearesearch@yahoogroups.com or call or write me at:

Jim Thornton
884 June Dr.
Conyers, Ga. 30094-5016
Phone: 770-483-1593

Online Discussion Board

Below is a selection of questions and answers from the ASA's online discussion board. Anyone can submit a question by emailing azaleas@yahoogroups.com. To get replies, be sure to make the first line of your e-mail read: this is from the ASK US page, so please send me a CC.

Subscribing to the azaleas e-mail discussion group lets you join in the fun directly. It's free, and you can unsubscribe whenever you want. To subscribe, send an e-mail to azaleas-subscribe@yahoogroups.com (expect to receive between 1 and 10 e-mails per day). Or, if you prefer, you can subscribe to a daily digest of the day's discussion by e-mailing azaleas-digest-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Q I live in zone 7b. Our azaleas are plain old Formosas; very nice and bloomed beautifully this year. But one or two of them are covered with lichen. What does this indicate? They get plenty of water and sun. Not all in same area have the problem. Should we just dig them out? Will the lichen kill the plants?

Rose Ann Pistole
Aiken, South Carolina

A The lichen does no harm to the plant . It takes moisture and nourishment from the air and rain, not the plant. Lichen can grow on rock. You may not like its looks but that is another issue. Because it is so slow growing, it is only found on surfaces that have been stable for a long time, hence older plants.

Tom Schuetz
Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania

Q My grandma has an azalea bush that wasn't trimmed the past two years and should have

been. I recently trimmed it just after the blossoms all died - which I had read was a good time.

But there seems to be a bright greenish mold—kinda emerald colored—on the branches. Part of the tree had died away but I don't know if it was the mold or not.

Please let me know if this moldy green residue should be treated!

Ukky
Armstrong County, Pennsylvannia

A I would bet that the greenish mold is actually a harmless lichen growth. Lichens will grow anywhere, even on rocks. They don't cause any harm. In New Zealand, they delight in getting lichens to grow on everything.

Trimmed azaleas tend to be dense without much air circulation and more prone to dieback. Also, drought contributes to dieback. When pruning, try to cut out inside branches and branches that cross each other. Try to leave the plant with some openness so that air can circulate.

Steve

Q The leaves on my azalea are turning yellow what can be done to get them to green up?

Terry

A Your first step should be to determine why your leaves are turning yellow. You didn't indicate whether these azaleas were newly planted or whether they had been in place for many years. Yellowing of the leaves could be caused by several situations. If you have your azalea planted in the wrong location—or you planted it improperly—then the yellow leaves might be symptomatic of a root problem in which case adding a touch of fertilizer isn't gong to resolve the problem.

Having said that, I'm going to suggest that you try a dilute solution of a water soluble form of fertilizer like Miracid® or Miracle Gro® for Azaleas, Rhododendron, and Camellias. Of course, any water soluble fertilizer for acid loving plants will do. Mix up a half strength solution and apply it as a drench. Just pour it all over the top of the plant. The leaves will absorb (foliar feeding) some of the fertilizer solution and the balance will be readily available to the roots immediately.

If after about two weeks, the yellow doesn't improve, then the poor color of the leaves was symptomatic of one of the other problems mentioned above.

William C. Miller III
Bethesda, Maryland

New Members

At Large
John Bartlett
381 Long Rd.
Gettysburg, PA 17325-8608

David E. Doherty
14823 16th Ave. SE
Mill Creek, WA 98012
206-931-3146

Zaib Iqditar
4019 Galena Hills Drive
Round Rock, TX 78681
zhusainlhr@gmail.com

Brookside Gardens
Donn & Louise Teubner
5 Orchard Road
Towson, MD 21204
410-823-4243

Lake Michigan
Bruce Clyburn
2756 Roaches Rd
New Waterford, Nova Scotia
B1H1N2
bclyburn@ns.sympatico.ca

Northern Virginia
Rod and Mary Hoioos
573 Marlborough Point Rd.
Stafford, VA 22554
540-659-5854
hoioos@aol.com

Richard and Nancy Lear
247 Burruss Mill Rd
Bumpass, VA 23024-4939
540-894-9919
rblear@hughes.net

John Metzler
1609 Mary Ellen Ct.
McLean, VA 22101-5023
571-850-9439
j.e.metzler@cox.net

Bonnie & Frank Pattie
583 Marlborough Point Road
Stafford, VA 22554

Stella Southall
6301 Stevenson Avenue, #409
Alexandria, VA 22304
703-751-4524
southaBC@aol.com

Nicholas Yarmoshuk
57 Highland Avenue
St. Catharines, Ontario
L2R4H9
905-684-4703
rhodosrs@gmail.com

Southern California
Sonja Nelson
12781 Josh Wilson Rd.
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
360-757-6957
sonjan@wavecable.com

Tri-State
Jack and Susie Brown
10250 Posy Co. Line Rd. W
Cynthiana, IN 47612
812-845-2837
jbillybobbrown@hotmail.com

James & Andra DeHaven
1477 N County Rd 825 W
Hazleton, IN 47640-9508
812-354-6007

Tim Dodd
813 SE First St.
Evansville, IN 47713

Jenny Harris
5368 S County Rd 50 E
Winslow, IN 47598-8875
812-354-8155

Gloria and Jerry Leach
635 Greendale Ct.
Evansville, IN 47711
812-204-2821
gloria14158@yahoo.com

Larry and Rita McCoy
1370 N. County Rd. 825W
Hazleton, IN 47640
812-385-5960

Vaseyi
George Brubaker
476 Haddington Way
Aiken, SC 29803

Tamara McNaughton
1967 Jenkins Hollow Rd.
Mountain City, TN 37683
423-727-2791
tammcn@gmail.com

Chapter News

Lake Michigan

John Migas, Treasurer

The results of the Lake Michigan chapter's election for officers are as follow: **Phil Lanning**, president; **Rocky Voci**, vice president; **Barbara Wetzel**, Secretary; **John Migas**, treasurer; and **Dan Kunst**, director. The new terms will begin on May 1, 2009.

The chapter hosted a plant sale over Mothers Day weekend at Fernwood Botanical Garden in Niles, Michigan. The chapter is planning on creating a garden with Fernwood staff for this year.

The chapter's spring meeting was held in late May at the home of John Migas. Members visited various neighborhing gardens.

Louisiana

Allen Owings, President

The Louisiana Chapter held its spring meeting on March 12 at the LSU AgCenter's Hammond Research Station. A nice group of folks showed up to eat boiled shrimp prepared by Horticulture Professor Ed Bush.

We were honored to have Mark Windham, plant pathologist at the University of Tennessee, as our guest speaker. Dr. Windham discussed ornamental plant pathology efforts currently on-going in Knoxville. He discussed several azalea issues in addition to providing information on the dogwood program at the University of Tennessee and rose trials.

Regina Bracy, chapter secretary, gave a ASA 2010 convention committee report. The dates of the convention are March 14 - 18, 2010 in New Orleans.

Severals members attended the azalea stroll held at Burden Center's Windrush Gardens in Baton Rouge on Sunday, March 15. The garden is currently recovering from damage due to Hurricane Gustav. A nice collection of azaleas is located there—with some of the old Carla series being of particular interest to local chapter members.

Northern Virginia

Eve Harrison, President

At the chapter's January meeting, **Bob McWhorter** presented an excellent program on a threatening new insect pest in the region, the Asian Ambrosia Beetle, *Xylosandrus crassiusculus*. Although the insect itself is very tiny and doesn't look like it should do much damage, when the adults emerge in early spring they bore small holes in a variety of host plants to lay their eggs.

The hole the insect bores is only 2 mm across, and there is usually some delicate toothpick-like frass exuding from the opening. That hole shouldn't cause much damage to the plant, but at the same time the insect also infects the host plant with a fungus and that causes a problem, since it will kill the plant. There is no known cure for the fungus, and insecticides cannot kill the larva inside either.

Chapter members were encouraged to monitor their garden by building Ambrosia Beetle traps. The traps are set out in March, a few days before temperatures are likely to hit 70° F. The first flight of these destructive insects is typically between March 11 and April 10 in the region.

If insects are found, there are some rather poisonous sprays that can be applied to the bark of susceptible trees and shrubs to kill the adults before they bore through the bark. After they are inside, there is little that can be done to kill them.

Oconee

Ruth Mellon, Secretary

The chapter's fall meeting was held at the Rockdale County Extension office in Conyers, Georgia. It was a joint meeting with the ARS with 13 members from the two clubs attending. The business portion of the meeting consisted of **Ken Goring's** account of ARS activities. Chapter President **Ed Mellon** suggested having two joint meetings a year. It was announced that **Frank Bryan** was retiring as newsletter editor and a request was made for a replacement.

Joe Coleman presented the program. He gave a power point presentation of pictures shown at the nation convention held in Asheville, North Carolina, in May 2008. There were many beautiful azaleas and information was given on their blooming season.

The Oconee Chapter participated in the third annual Rockdale Master Gardeners' Plant Sale held in September. Some members of the chapter staffed a booth at the sale, providing information on care, diseases, and general tips for growing azaleas. Members also sold lots of azaleas, including several natives, donated by members and the Riverside Azalea Farm.

Jim and **Patsy Thornton** were guests at the Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, South Carolina, during its Winter Garden Festival in January. Jim presented the CD, "Selecting and Growing Azaleas," developed by the Oconee Capter and the University of Georgia.

Call for Articles

The Azalean needs articles about azaleas, their care, and their use in the landscape. Articles should be submitted as Microsoft Word documents. Illustrations are highly encouraged.

Submission deadlines are: January 1 (Spring issue); April 1 (Summer issue); July 1 (Fall issue); and October 1 (Winter issue).

Submit articles to: Pam Fitch, Editor, ***The Azalean***, P.O. Box 632537, Nacogdoches, TX 75963 or e-mail theazalean@gmail.com.

Azalea City News

Tyler celebrates annual azalea trail

By JoAnn Smith

Tyler celebrated 50 years of Blooms and Belles with "Behind the Garden Gate" tour of seven gardens March 28.

The tour, opened to the public for the first time, included private gardens displaying azaleas of the major hybrid groups.

Feature lecturer **Buddy Lee**, past president of the Azalea Society of America (ASA) and a noted azalea expert, said "Tyler has lots of petal power with extremely brilliant azalea colors. The dogwood trees, in combination with azaleas, made a spectacular show, and the gardens were well-designed and manicured.

"The Southern Belles (Tyler Junior College group) along with area garden club docents and the hospitality made the entire tour attactive."

Lee presented a historical lecture entitled "Azaleas: Their Journey to East Texas." Other activities included a tour of the Ina Brundrett Azalea Garden on the Tyler Junior College campus and a reception hosted by Mitch Andrews of the ASA Texas Chapter.

Justin Turner, vice-president of the Tyler Convention Visitor Bureau, said approximately 1,500 tickets were issued for the tour.

▼ Home of Sheryl Rogers Palmer, Tyler, Texas

Photo Tyler Convention & Visitors Bureau

How to be recognized as an Azalea City

One of the principal goals of the Azalea Society of America is to promote the appreciation of azaleas in public and private landscapes. To help achieve that goal, we put an Azalea City program into place in early 2004 to find, recognize, and certify those municipalities that promote and display azaleas as Azalea Society of America Azalea Cities.

We invite you to explore the requirements to be recognized and certified as an official Azalea City. In general, successful applicants for Azalea City status will have shown a dedication to highlighting azaleas through proclamations for an Azalea Week, festivals, tours, and the prominent display of azaleas in public gardens and landscapes.

When you become certified as an Azalea City:

- we will provide you with a news release package appropriate for local media;
- an Azalea Society member will present your representatives with an official certificate suitable for hanging in a prominent location; and
- we will document your certification as an Azalea City in our quarterly journal, ***The Azalean***.

You could reasonably expect the certification and accompanying publicity to result in increased tourism. The certification period is for five years, contingent upon a continuing azalea emphasis in your municipality. At this time, there is no fee for application and certification as an Azalea City.

The ASA welcomes all municipalities to apply for official designation as an Azalea City. To aid your municipality with the application, please carefully read the guidelines before filling out the application. While we do want you to receive our official designation as an Azalea City, we have certain requirements to qualify. Since we wish any municipality receiving our Azalea City designation to consider it a distinct honor and recognition by a national association, we bestow that designation only after careful consideration of your application.

For complete guidelines, including an application form, visit the ASA web site at: www.azaleas.org.

Certified Azalea Cities

Nacogdoches, Texas	September 23, 2004
McComb, Mississippi	March 28, 2005
South Gate, California	October 26, 2006
Tyler, Texas	December 10, 2006
Palatka, Florida	December 11, 2006
Houston, Texas	December 12, 2006
Valdosta, Georgia	March 10, 2007

Magnolia Gardens, the GGAPA, ASA & You!

James Thornton—Conyers, Georgia

Take a long look at the sunrise photo. Close your eyes and imagine you are alongside Thomas Drayton and his wife, Ann, as they venture up the Ashley River into the swamp or rather jungle-like terrain. You witness the beginning of Magnolia Plantation. The year is 1676.

Photo Jim Thornton

▲ Daybreak at Magnolia 2009

▼ Artist's rendering 1907

Photo Magnolia Collection

Fast forward through the centuries. You watch the establishment of Magnolia Gardens in the late 17th century, the explosion of beauty and expansion through the 18th century. Then in the 19th century its continued development on a grand scale vaulted the gardens into one of the greatest public gardens in America. Amazingly, this national treasure is still under the Drayton family ownership.

Photo Magnolia Collection

▲ The gardens 1907

▼ The gardens 2009

Photo Jane Knight

Follow the images from 1907 to 2009 as the beauty of the gardens continues to grow. But not all is well. Close your eyes again. You are now in the 21st century and have been invited by Tom Johnson, director of gardens, along with representatives from 10 public gardens to form an alliance to locate, collect, promote, and defend ancient azaleas and camellias from extinction. The plants are endangered due to the commercial development of private and public gardens as well as a general lack of value by the public.

The outcome is the formation of the Great Gardens of America Preservation Alliance (GGAPA). Miles Beach, director of camellia collections, is president of the Alliance.

Ok, so what? Seems like a really worthwhile endeavor but what will it do for me?

Well, you see, over the years a lot of these ancient plants have gone missing for one reason or another and these gardens need replacements to maintain their heritage. As an azaleaphile, this is a project that will ultimately benefit you, me, and generations to come. This is where the Azalea Society of America (ASA) can play a part. Read on!

The ASA has formed an alliance committee to interact with the GGAPA. It's headed up by **Maarten van der Giessen** with **John Brown**, **Bob Stelloh**, **Jim Thornton**, **Buddy Lee**, **Tom Johnson,** and **Bart Brechter**. These folks are attacking major problems, like developing a "list" of ancient azaleas, which is being handled by **Bob Stelloh**. This list will provide the names and descriptions of the azaleas that were planted at Magnolia during the 1700s.

We have some help from Galle in his book, ***Azaleas,*** and better yet, records of plants provided by Taylor Drayton Nelson. The records were handed down to Taylor from his grandfather. Plants that were known as 'Beauty of Reigate', 'Charles Encke', 'Diadem de Spa', 'Imbricatum', and 'Madam Iris LeFebure' are just a few of the hundreds listed. By the way, the log was transcribed by B.Y. Morrison in 1949, and thanks to Taylor we now have it to use as our base inventory.

All this leads to another, even greater problem—finding these plants! And that's where "you" come in.

Hopefully, some plants may still be on the market, like 'Formosum', 'Glory of Sunninghill', and 'Fielder's White'. But we're looking for the more "ancient" plants like the ones above. We might find these plants in somebody's yard, in an old cemetery plot, or a little known public garden. We need to locate the plants that are available to us for taking cuttings. Or, better yet, a place where we can obtain the whole plant. Whatever! Wherever! We have to try!

Sadly, all the while, we have to realize, some of these plants may be gone forever. 'Tis a pity, let's not allow other azaleas to follow the same path to extinction. You can help prevent this. Any information, including pictures, you have would be greatly appreciated. Contact the Azalea Camellia Alliance at: ACAalliance@yahoogroups.com or for information concerning Magnolia Gardens visit www.magnoliaplantation.com. To view the list of ancient azaleas, go to: www.greatamericangardensalliance.org/Magnolia.htm.

Jim Thornton *is a co-founder and the first president of the Oconee Chapter. He has served as a director, vice president, and president of the Azalea Society of America.*

Special thanks to Magnolia Gardens staff Taylor Drayton Nelson, Tom Johnson, Richard Ketcham, and Jane Knight as well as ASA member Bob Stelloh.

Releasing the Balds

John Brown—Cleveland, South Carolina

A recent development in the relationship between our plant societies and the management of the Balds (National Park Service and United States Forest Service) is already producing benefits and promises even more. Heretofore, any contact between plant seekers and the rangers was very likely to produce negative results ranging from lectures to outright arrest. This relationship is changing rapidly for the better.

Recognizing that places like Gregory Bald were in danger of being overrun by encroaching plants, a plan to bring a heavy-duty mower to the top of Gregory was put forth to the Park Service administration by the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. Prior to this time, Park Service employees spent three weeks per summer on the bald with weed eaters fighting a losing battle as the size of the bald was gradually reduced to 12 acres.

After the mower was driven up the Appalachian Trail, the trend was reversed and the open area is back to 20 acres and growing. The mower remains available to the work crews on the bald.

The donation of the mower was a significant event and shows evidence of intent on our part. Park Service and USFS personnel have responded by working with us and approving multiple plans for improvement of the balds.

Spearheaded by **Jim Brant**, president of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the ARS (and ASA member), a new program under the guidance of the Nantahala Forest Botanist (USFS) is in play. Jim wrote in a recent plea for volunteers:

> "Like many of the open balds in the Southern Appalachians, Hooper Bald is getting overgrown. Rather than staying an open meadow, the area is filling up with succession trees and shrubs which crowd out the native meadow wildflower, azalea and rhododendron populations. Without intervention, the top of the mountain will no longer be an open meadow bald, but will become pine and hardwood forestland. This invasive regression is threatening many native wildflowers, and especially the exceptional forms of the Flame Azalea (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) which have been identified on Hooper Bald. One of those exceptional plants has been informally named 'Hooper's Copper' and is a bright, coppery orange Flame Azalea that has some of the largest flowers we have seen on this species with blossoms of more than three inches across."

In November 2008, the Species Study Group of the ARS Mid-Atlantic Chapter began discussions about this project with Forest Service officials in the region. Working in coordination with USFS administration, a restoration clean-up of Hooper Bald took place during the weekend of April 3-5, 2009. Volunteers were recruited from all over the Southeast to participate in this preservation of the important plant communities of the Bald.

Photo Jim Brant, George McLellan, and Don Hyatt

▲ The work crew clearing brush from Hooper Bald included George McLellan, Jim Brant, Ken Gohring, John Brown, Bob Stelloh, and Dirk Rankin (USFS).

▼ *R. calendulaceum* at Hooper Bald are in danger of being lost due to overgrowth of trees and shrubs.

Photo Buddy Lee

Under Jim's leadership and accompanied by USFS Botanist Dirk Rankin, a rowdy, a rowdy bunch including **George McLellan**, **Ken Gohring**, **Bob Stelloh,** and **John Brown** attacked the invading swarm of blueberry plants and tree saplings. The day's effort resulted in the release of one arm of the bald. Estimates range, but we think we effectively completed at least 10 percent of the first round of work.

Another attack on Hooper Bald is planned for June 21, 2009 as part of visits to a number of balds (Copper, Wayah,

Photo Buddy Lee

▲ *R. calendulaceum* at Hooper Bald are in danger of being lost due to overgrowth of trees and shrubs.

▼ Dr. Andy Whipple and John Brown discuss Hooper Bald.

Photo Buddy Lee

Gregory, Pace, and Wine Springs). We have permission to bring heavy-duty weedeaters, hand saws, and a mower to the bald area. Volunteers are needed and appreciated.

A third round of effort is scheduled for the weekend after Easter in 2010 (April 10th and 11th).

Discussions currently under way involve establishing plant material from Hooper Bald (*R. calendulaceum*) on other open balds in the immediate area. Details still to be determined include limits on species introduction and propagation methods. Volunteers from the ASA and ARS will be working together with the USFS to ensure a successful project.

The history and origin of the balds is not firmly known but evidence indicates that they may have existed as balds as much as 4,000 years ago Charcoal residue discovered on the balds gives rise to the idea that lightning-caused fires, or deliberate burning by the indigenous people (to provide better hunting) created the balds. They remained open as the European settlers started using the balds for grazing their livestock. The size reduction of open area has occurred only since animals were removed from the area.

If you have an interest in the project, contact Jim Brant at jandpbrant@verizon.com or the author at azaleabits@yahoo.com .

Hooper Bald is located on the Cherohala Skyway near the entrance to the Joyce Kilmer Forest in Western North Carolina north of Robbinsville. Access to the bald area from the paved parking lot (with facilities) is along a quarter mile long graveled trail with little change in elevation so that most of your energy is saved for activities on the bald itself.

Currently, Forest Service personnel are able to mow several acres of the bald area. The planned expansion is not large in size but does include most of the area significantly occupied by native azaleas.

John Brown *is Immediate Past President of the ASA.*