

The Rootball News

NEWSLETTER OF THE MIDWEST CHAPTER — THE AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



Plant Sale and Truss Show at Morton Arboretum



The Midwest Chapter's annual Plant Sale and Truss Show will be held at The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois on Saturday, May 20 and Sunday, May 21. Hours will be from 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM.

The major construction at The Chicago Botanic Garden, where we normally hold our event, forced us to find a new location this year.

The Arboretum has been most cooperative and has graciously offered us use of their facilities for the weekend. We held our recent winter meeting there and everyone we dealt with was extremely helpful.

Since we are uncertain of how many visitors to expect, we scaled back somewhat on the number of plants we ordered for the sale. This year we have ordered 150 rhododendrons and John Migas plans to bring approximately 15 evergreen azaleas as well. A list of the varieties on order is included below.

In addition to the plant sale and truss show, we plan to conduct planting demonstrations on Saturday - at least one in the morning and one in the afternoon. We also plan to conduct tours of the rhododendron garden we planted in 2001, which incidentally, is doing very well. This garden tour will provide visitors with an opportunity to see how rhododendrons can enhance the landscape and hopefully create additional interest for our sale.

So all of this will take volunteers. We have already received commitments

for a core group but can always use more help, particularly if the planting demonstration and garden tours are in demand. If you are available to help out, please notify Tony Greco at aggreco@sbcglobal.net. We are in particular need for volunteers on Sunday to help close down the show.

On Friday, John Migas, Tad Daukesz, Dave Hinde and Jack Strom have volunteered to set up the plant sale and truss show tables. On Saturday, Tony Greco, Roger Dunlap, Tad Daukesz, Gerry Firak and Jack Strom will oversee the plant sale and truss show. On Sunday, Roger Dunlap (possibly), John Honkisz and Nancy Smith will be on hand. We're hoping all of the plants will be sold but if not, we plan to contribute what's left over to the arboretum.

Since we will have fewer plants than we usually offer, we urge people to come early on Saturday to not be disappointed.

If you haven't been to The Morton Arboretum for some time, you will really enjoy some of the new gardens that have recently been constructed...and don't forget to check out the rhododendron garden our chapter planted. It is just a short walk from the plant sale.



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Plant Sale Varieties

The following varieties have been ordered for our sale and are always subject to availability. Photos of many of the varieties are posted on our website.

Rhododendrons

Balta	Connecticut Yankee	Pearce's American Beauty
Besse Howells	English Roseum	Pink Pixie
Big Deal	Fasia	Scarlet Romance
Boule de Neige	Haaga	Wojnar's Purple
Calsap	Janet Blair	Yaku Pana
Capistrano	Marjie Kay Hinerman	Yaku Today and Tomorrow

Evergreen Azaleas

Boudoir
Delaware Valley White
Herbert
Karens
Mildred Mae

Letter

from the president



john migas

spring • 2006



Greetings once again from Michigan.

Easter has now passed and our bloom is right on course. The magnolia trees are beautiful along with the daffodils. Azaleas and rhododendrons are showing a lot of swelling. The days have been mostly sunny with temperatures in the 60's. Evenings get cool with the lows still in the 30's. Perfect!...about normal for this time of year.

Hopefully everyone is enjoying the spring. The anticipation of our blooms, fresh mulch, well-pruned shrubs and trees and a visitor's knock on the door are all most welcome.

But, then we have the weeds...well nothing is perfect!

The Midwest Chapter, along with its officers, has been busy creating exciting activities such as our spring trip to Evansville, Indiana and our annual Plant Sale and Truss Show at a new location, The Morton Arboretum. Volunteers are always needed so please contact an officer if you can assist in any way.

We have had discussions for a future district meeting, along with future trips. Please take part. They're fun and a great opportunity to meet new friends.

For members with camera skills, take photos of your spring blooms and submit them for our website.

Have fun and a good bloomin' to all...

John Migas

Evergreen Eden in the Northwoods

by Michael Heim

After a long intense day of teaching and dealing with people, I find it soothing to come home and let my introverted side come out by quietly taking in a woods filled with exotic evergreens. The leaf shapes and textures and their palette of green are a visual smorgasbord. Although southern magnolias aren't reliably hardy in our Wisconsin northwoods (believe me, I've tried), other foliage makes a fairly decent substitute. Specifically, of course, that of rhododendrons. Even though I find the whole gamut of rhodie leaves lovely, from the massive bright green ovals of *R. brachycarpum* *tigerstedtii* to the dense dark glossies of *R. bureavii*, by far the most exotic are the huge straps of *R. maximum*. Its intraspecific variation is also quite interesting. Plants from a disjunct population in central Vermont carry uniformly smaller, lighter leaves than those originating farther south. Some will bloom for the first time in 2006, so I'm curious to see whether flower color correlates with foliar characteristics.

► (see "EVERGREEN", page 3)



R. yak. 'Angel'

Another favorite, whose foliage reminds me of a tropical rain forest, is mountain-laurel. Unlike the rhodies, it can be enjoyed even in the coldest winter weather since its foliage doesn't curl up tightly. One seedling which I collected from a New Hampshire population develops excellent red new growth much like *Pieris japonica*. Once it gets larger I hope to propagate it from cuttings. Numerous companion plants thrive in this hilly woodland. These include *Thujopsis*, *Cephalotaxus*, four species of yew, three of cypress, two of beargrass, two of *Leucothoe*, several low hollies, numerous exotic evergreen ferns, box huckleberry, and sundry forms of *Pachistima myrsinites* and grape-hollies collected as cuttings in the northern Rockies.

Fondness for our native evergreens causes me to always be on the lookout for outstanding forms. Several attractive clones of trailing arbutus, one with large uniform leaves and another with bright green wavy leaves, were grown from cuttings collected in northern New England. Robust forms such as these can exist there because of effective deer population management. Over the years I've sadly watched the decimation of our native evergreen groundcovers. Thus, the woodland where I'm growing the aforementioned evergreens is by necessity surrounded by a five-foot tall chicken wire fence. At a distance it blends in so well that it's virtually invisible and it is quite effective in keeping deer out. Apparently they have difficulty judging its height. The forest enclosure also contains an assortment of partridgeberry forms possessing larger than average foliage. Of these diminutive coffee relatives, the most robust in both leaf size (nickel) and height (five inches) hails from a "lost world" in the Blue Hills of northern Wisconsin where it is surrounded by bare, quartzite boulder-strewn slopes, sheltered from both fire and deer and not reached by the last glacial advance. Springs and cold air flow from the base of the talus year round, even in the hottest, driest weather. Nearby I found another outstanding partridgeberry with beautiful glossy yellow-veined leaves, along with a foot-tall clubmoss having thick foliage. The latter was easily propagated via root cuttings. As an experiment to compare cold-hardiness, other partridgeberry cuttings in the enclosure were collected in southern Louisiana on the last solid ground before salt marsh. All but one perished their second winter when the temperature dropped to -28F early on without the benefit of thick snowcover.

On the other hand, some exotic plants do surprisingly well with the rhodies if grown quite low and given minimal snowcover in the coldest weather. Among these are *Skimmia japonica repens*, several *Prunus laurocerasus* (especially 'Zabeliana'), *Osmanthus decorus*, *Sarcococca hookeriana humilis*, *Cryptomeria*, coast redwoods, *Podocarpus lawrencii* (from Australia!), *Daphne retusa*, *Haberlea* (a hardy gesneriad), and the strap-leaved evergreen Nippon lily (*Rohdea japonica*). Camellias are a favorite of mine and I've tried them time and time again with apparent success, only to have them all die some winter for no obvious reason. Their foliage remains fine, so the problem may lie with the roots.

Not all of my rhododendrons are growing in, or even prefer, a sheltered woodland site. The P. J. Mezitt hybrids for instance thrive with low manzanitas on a hot and frequently bone-dry ridge behind a cactus and yucca bed. At the opposite end of the spectrum (and yard) is a mossy bed where *R. forrestii repens* creeps along the side of an old stump. Some of its companions are devil's-club, Hartford fern, blue poppies, *Selaginella douglasii*, sword ferns, *Tanakaea*, *Stewartia*, *Soldanella*,



Leiphysllum

Leucothoe



Kalmia latifolia 'Sarah'



Evergreen Bed

and tall gentians. An evergreen bed accents the center of our front yard with tall *R. catawbiense* (a TN cutting) and Finnish hybrids, along with *R. 'Anna H. Hall'*, *R. 'Balta'*, *R. 'April Reign'*, *R. yak. 'Angel'*, mountain-laurels, and *Leucothoe*. Beneath them grow mats of lingonberry, *Pieris (Arcteria) nana*, *Pyracantha*, and especially *Andromeda polifolia 'Macrophylla'*, its dense glossy reticulated foliage covered with pink bells in spring. Most folks don't believe that rhododendrons can be grown in Zone 3, so it's always a pleasure to observe visitors' reactions when they pull up by this thriving evergreen thicket.

One other planting deserves mention. In the sunniest part of the front yard is our sandy heath bed, filled with low ericaceous and other exposure-loving plants such as brooms. Originally it held a collection of heaths and heathers, but most of these suffocated one winter when the snowplow pushed deep compacted snow over them. Now manzanitas and bearberry dominate, with sheep-laurel and sandmyrtle rising above them. At the foot of the sandmyrtle grow two rhodies with flowers all out of proportion to their dwarf stature: *R. calostrotum keleticum* with purple flowers and *R. 'Wren'* with yellow. Around and amongst them creeps a pink-flowered trailing arbutus that I collected not in some distant locale, but just down the road.

All of the aforementioned plants survived our 2002-2003 "winter from hell" (barely a dusting of snow, much wind, and temperatures holding well below zero for weeks on end). By mid-February the ground in the woods was frozen seven feet deep. I lost many of my favorite plants that winter, including numerous *Magnolia grandiflora* seedlings, "hardy" cedar-of-Lebanon, dawn redwoods, *Cuninghamia*, most Southern Hemisphere conifers, snow gum, *Trachycarpus* palms, *Erica tetralix*, *Ilex crenata* and *I. glabra 'Chamzin'* ('Nordic'), plus a four-foot tall giant sequoia which I had grown from seed. Even so, I'm amazed that so many different plants survived these punishing conditions. For instance, the bright-red flowered *Kalmia latifolia 'Sarah'* came through unscathed out in the open. That's what makes testing these plants so exciting. It seems almost like a miracle, seeing them in all their green glory, withstanding the bitter-cold North.

ARS Updates

Officer Slate

At the winter meeting, it was decided to stagger the election of new officers to avoid electing the entire board at one time. The following candidates were nominated at the winter meeting and subsequently elected to one and two year terms:

1-YEAR TERM

President

John Migas

VP Administration

Roger Dunlap

Secretary/Communications

Anthony P. Greco

2-YEAR TERM

Membership

Tad Dauksza

VP Programs

Fred Stanton

Treasurer

Dave Hinde

Website Administrator

Jack Strom

Chapter Member Garden Tours

It has been brought to the editor's attention some members would like to open up their gardens for tours. If interested, please provide pertinent information to Tony Greco, either directly <apgreco@sbcglobal.net> or on our web site <midwestars.org>. We will then post it on the chapter web site.

THE AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY MIDWEST CHAPTER



Purpose

A non-profit organization whose aim is to promote in the Midwest region the objectives of The American Rhododendron Society, which are to encourage interest in and to disseminate knowledge about rhododendrons and azaleas. To provide a medium through which all persons interested in rhododendrons and azaleas may communicate and cooperate with others through education, meetings, publications, scientific studies, research and other similar activities.

Meetings

Meetings are held 4 times a year, generally in March, May, August and October. Members are encouraged to attend and participate in the transaction of business at these meetings and to profit by the knowledge gained from our knowledgeable members and Guest Speakers. *Visitors are always welcome!*

Membership

Membership is open to all persons interested in the growth and culture of rhododendrons and azaleas as provided by the Chapter By-Laws. Membership includes one year (4 quarterly issues) of the ARS Journal and affiliation with the chapter of your choice. Annual membership dues for an individual is \$35.00. Anyone interested in becoming a member should contact the Membership Chairperson whose name and address appears below.

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Anniversaries

The following members have reached milestone anniversaries in 2006:

30
YEARS

Philip Diggs
John Heinze
Linda Charvat
Susan Boatman Garland

25
YEARS

George Gray
John Golab
Anthony Greco
Kay Moats

20
YEARS

William Dietrich
Barbara Wetzel

15
YEARS

Ann Cohrs

10
YEARS

Daniel Kunst

5
YEARS

David Steen
Jane High
Patti Swets
Marty Anderson
Ross Iverson



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