

Azalea Blooms

President's Column

By Hugh Denny, Chapter President

First, the good news: If you compare our new 2012 Membership Roster with the 2011 roster, you will notice that we have grown! This is a direct reflection of the excellent work of the Chapter's Board of Directors and the terrific work of our membership, in general.

I'm sure you have noticed that our Newsletter has grown in size with added emphasis on color photographs. Many thanks to Ken Gohring for his efforts.

Charlie Andrews has laid out a series of very interesting programs for 2012. The January meeting was well attended to hear Jim Pruckler's most enjoyable presentation on camellias, with particular emphasis on cultivars which perform well in the North Georgia climate and soil. The February meeting will be a practical, hands-on discussion on photographic techniques for capturing the full glory and nuances of your azalea and rhododendron blooms.

Paul Norfleet is busily selecting and ordering an impressive selection of azaleas, both deciduous and evergreen, and rhododendrons for sale at our Plant Sale on April 21. Currently, we expect to have close to 1,000 plants available for you to select. Be sure to tell all your friends and neighbors of the excellent selection and good prices we will have for the plant sale.

A reminder: Again, our February meeting will be at the Sandy Springs Branch of the Fulton County Library. Plan to be there when the doors open for we will need to be out of the room by 4 p.m. to make room for the subsequent group.

The National Convention of the American Rhododendron Society will be in Ashville, NC in early May. They have planned several excellent garden tours during what is expected to be their peak bloom season. Of course, they will have many plants for sale. So be making your plans to attend this excellent event since it is not too far away.



The mission of the **Azalea Chapter of ARS** is to promote the awareness, the conservation and the utilization of evergreen, as well as deciduous native azalea plants and habitats of the Southeast through community outreach, education and example.

Web Site: www.azaleachapter.com

Upcoming Events

Saturday, February 18, 2012, 2:00 PM
Sandy Springs Library, 395 Mt Vernon Hwy,
Atlanta, GA 30328

A program on how to photograph plants

See Page 2

Saturday, March 17, 2012, 2:00 PM
Sandy Springs Library, 395 Mt Vernon
Hwy, Atlanta, GA 30328

Scott Ranger will present a program where he shares his experience with Nature and knowledge of native plants. For more information see page 7.

April. Field trip to *see R. alabamense* in south Alabama. Details to be announced

May. Field trip to see *R. colemanii* in south Alabama. Details to be announced

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January Program - Jim Pruckler

Members enjoyed an informative program on camellias that do well in the Atlanta area. Jim illustrated his program with numerous blooms from his greenhouse and garden. His program included discussion of some 84 cultivars that are grown in the Atlanta area. He indicated that he was not successful with some of these but they can be found in other Atlanta gardens. He concluded his discussion with a demonstration of grafting techniques, something that he uses to produce mature plants more rapidly than cuttings. He offered to demonstrate air layering techniques in his garden later in the year, likely March. If members are interested in the air layering demonstration they should contact Hugh, contact information in the Chapter Officer's listing. See page 3 for pictures taken at the meeting.

The February Program

The February program will be on plant photography. In your yard or along a trail, taking pictures of plants and the landscape can increase your pleasure of plants. This will be a program for us amateurs on how to take great pictures with simple digital cameras. We will look at photo shots and discuss sunlight, wind, close-ups, and other useful hints and advice for producing quality pictures. John Kohli, Joe Coleman, and Charlie Andrews will lead the discussion.

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Term Ending 6/2012

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For comments or submissions for the Newsletter contact Ken Gohring

Francis Stewart 1923 - 2012

The Chapter lost one of its senior members on January 16 when Francis Stewart passed after a period of illness. Francis was born in Iowa and moved to Georgia when he was 12 years old. Growing up in the depression, he faced difficult times and worked hard to help his family. He operated a filling station when 16 and sold Bibles to help pay for college. After graduating from Acworth High School he attended the University of Georgia for a year before enlisting in the US Army Air Force. He served in North Africa and Italy and at the war's end, influenced by his war experiences, proceeded to study for the Christian ministry. He graduated from Mercer University and Crozer Theological Seminary. He served as pastor of Monticello Baptist Church for several years before changing professions. He worked as a Senior Policy Analyst in the Governor's Office of Planning for 4 Georgia governors. He retired to Jasper in Pickens County in 1990.

He was actively involved as a master gardener, member of the Georgia Native Plant Society, our society and the Habitat for Humanity. He is survived by his wife, Clarice, three children, several grandchildren and three sisters. A memorial in his honor, celebrating his life, will be held this Spring.

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Scenes from the January Meeting



President Hugh Denny introduces Jim Pruckler



This lovely camellia was passed around for the attendees' close up inspection.



Two trays of blooms used by Jim to illustrate his talk



One part of the program featured Joe Coleman extending his remarks on propagating azaleas. Joe filled in at our November meeting when the scheduled speaker failed to show. Joe brought a package of Larry Adam's *R. flammeum* seeds, still in their hulls. He proceeded to demonstrate the proper methods of extracting the seeds and sowing them. Joe has provided significant information, including pictures of his methods. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient room in the newsletter to include all of the material. We hope to be able to post the material when the chapter webpage is revised. The next page, which Joe wrote for a friend in Virginia, summarizes his technique.

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Joe's azalea seed sowing methods.

1. Collect seed pods, I use old paper envelopes from the office so they will dry out....wet seed pods are impossibly difficult!
2. After the pods are good and dry, about 10-14 days, they are ready to be cleaned
3. Materials I use:
 - A. A folded section of the newspaper....protects the kitchen counter and helps protect the ziplock bag which is between the two layers of paper
 - B. A freezer zip-lock bag....tough and can take the abuse of being pounded a number of times
 - C. A rubber mallet with a large striking surface....a hammer will do though small and a rolling pin will not crush the pods
 - D. A nearby trash can to dump the debris in with each sifting
 - E. Several mesh strainers of different sizes to remove debris, found at any local grocery store....professional set ups are available, but expensive
 - F. Clean coin envelopes or containers for seed storage....must be able to label individually
 - G. Two white pieces of paper to work on...you see seed better on white...at least I can
 - H. A sense of real aggression...to crush seed pods takes force, no little tapping, after the first session of pounding; agitate the zip-lock and pound again
4. Empty the seed pods into the thick zip-lock, place between inside the fold of newspaper and pound away several times until the pods are all crushed and no pod is evident when you open it up
5. Place your widest screen....mine is nothing more than window screen on a frame made by a member 25 years ago...over a piece of white paper and dump the contents of the zip-lock on the screen
6. Agitate the screen; the seed will fall through leaving the chaff, which is dumped, into the waste basket at your feet
7. Repeat several times to get rid of the obvious chaff
8. There is still a lot of dust in the mix, so go to the smallest screen and shake all the dust through the seed onto white paper...at this stage, all the seed will remain in the strainer
9. Pour the seed into labeled envelopes and seal...unless you are going to sow shortly

Sowing Seed:

1. Prepare seed boxes a few days before sowing to allow moisture to settle in...I use clear bakery containers from the grocery store...they seal very tight to retain moisture and are free! Hit on the bakery early when they are baking, if you ask nicely, they may even give you a clean container or two
2. Fill the bottom half with a mixture of perlite and bark with a light covering of screened sphagnum moss...naturally fungicidal and moisture retentive -
you can also just use regular sphagnum, but the surface is irregular...I like roots to go down into the perlite and bark...any moisture substitute should work...like coconut coir
3. The box should be moist, not standing in water...sprinkle the seed on the surface
4. Put a label in...It is always nice to know as much information as you have on the seed...type, source, location, cross, etc
5. Just before closure...a last mist....I use a mist of Consan 20, which is a fungicidal soap that prevents the black mold growth that can take out an entire box quickly...any good fungicide should do the job ...I ordered Consan 20 from a place in IL...it is hard to find, it has gone out of fashion!
6. Place the sealed box under fluorescent lights, 10" above or more...mine are in an unheated basement, but the furnace keeps the area in the 50's to 60's....faster growth would occur at about 70 degrees...just remember, plants do quite well in the spring and the fall in moderate temperatures, so will seedlings
7. After the green leaves are up and hitting the lid, simply cut off the lid and with an ice pick, I punch several drainage holes in the bottom and begin misting the boxes with the rest of the plants on the plant cart once a day
8. After the seedlings are established and comfortable with the humidity in the basement, I can then fertilize with half strength or less liquid fertilizer...anything mild will do...plants do not read or appreciate attractive pictures on fertilizer containers
9. Once the seedlings are growing, healthy, and coming out of the box...the time has come to up pot to a tray...I use 36 cell trays with bark and perlite - trays are also under lights till they are growing well and then can be moved outside under protection - sometimes, they are on the light cart so long, I have to up pot to a quart container when I put them outside....a few had to go into gallon pots they had gotten so big!

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An Unusual Spring

Spring 2011 did not fit the norm. December had 21 days with below freezing temperatures. On December 14, the temperature dropped to 14 degrees. We had a white Christmas; over an inch of snow fell that day. January brought us 4 more inches of snow. Seventeen days in January had freezing temperatures, and two days the high was below 32 degrees. January 9 went down to 19 degrees. We also officially had 4.4 inches of snow in January. February was quite cool, with ten days below 32 degrees. The lowest was February 9 at 26 degrees. Some of us wondered if the cold weather might slow or even hurt the spring bloom.

by Charles Andrews



Ilex verticillata 26 Dec 2010

Then along came March, wet and mild. Not one day of freezing weather. March 7 had the lowest temperature at 35 degrees. Two days reached 82 degrees. Over 9 inches of rain fell in March, 4.25 inches in February, and over 2.5 in January. April was also frost free. All these statistics are courtesy of the National Weather Service for Atlanta. Your local conditions may vary.



R. austrinum 12 Apr 2011



R. flammeum hybrid 12 Apr 2011

The experts tell us that the normal sequence of bloom times for native azaleas begins with *canescens* and *austrinum*, then soon followed by *periclymenoides*, *vaseyi*, *atlanticum*, and *alabamense*. *Flammeum* tends to follow these. Of course, the bloom of all these species mentioned above can overlap. In the Atlanta area, these species normally begin bloom in early April, with *flammeum* kicking in about the third or fourth week. In my garden north of Atlanta in Forsyth County, the peak normally occurs about April 27.

At the very end of April or the first days of May, early forms of *calendulaceum* normally begin to bloom. One indicator to distinguish *calendulaceum* from *flammeum* is bloom time: *flammeum* April; *calendulaceum* May to early June.

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The earlier cold weather this year may have had some effect on these first native azaleas to bloom. I noticed many of the early flower blossoms seemed to be slightly deformed and perhaps were a little smaller than usual. Blossoms opening later did not appear to have this problem.

Then, the warm spring sped up some of the bloom and changed the normal bloom sequence. *Calendulaceum* originally from Lumpkin County bloomed in my garden April 18. Some *flammeum* and *flammeum* hybrids from Cherokee County were already beginning to fade by that date, but others were only in open bud April 21. A few *alabamense* and *canescens* were not quite open by April 21, but a hybrid from Gregory Bald was.



R. calendulaceum 19 Apr 2011



R. calendulaceum 19 Apr 2011



R. canescens 19 Apr 2011



R. flammeum 19 Apr 2011

In Lumpkin County where *calendulaceum* are normally found in bloom the first week in May, the plants were already opening April 20. Such weather patterns give opportunities for the pollen from tetraploid *calendulaceum* to be naturally applied to diploid *canescens* and *periclymenoides*. The resultant hybrids, which are probably triploids, can be spectacular.



R. calendulaceum hybrid in Lumpkin County 20 Apr 2011
photo by Joe Coleman

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R. cumberlandense on Mt. Cheaha in Alabama on 18 May 2011

Continuing throughout the bloom season, flowering reached peak bloom ten days to two weeks earlier in 2011. We saw wonderful *cumberlandense* on Cheaha Mountain in Alabama on May 18. These are normally late May to June plants. Joe Coleman found Gregory Bald in full bloom on June 13 this year. It was perfect on June 22 in 2010. At Providence Canyon, peak bloom of *prunifolium* is usually around July 31. This year we went on July 23, and peak bloom had past.

So far, in preparation for the new year, December had a few cold days. After both cool and warm days with lots of good rain in January, but nothing extremely cold or snowy, Kirk Melish, the longtime WSB Radio meteorologist, who developed the simple Melish meter to explain how nice or foul today's weather will be, now says that February and March 2012 may see some cold weather. If plants stay dormant into March, we may have a more normal spring for 2012, with *R. austrinum*, *canescens*, and *vaseyi* holding off in my garden until the second or third week in April before blooms open and *calendulaceum* waiting until early May. We will soon know.

Photographs by the author except where noted.

March Program

Scott Ranger works as a Naturalist in Alaska six months of the year. He is a respected authority and long time member of the Georgia Botanical Society. The following excerpt from his web site www.scottranger.com summarizes his outlook.

"I look at the landscape and wonder just how it came to be: what forces created it; what organisms first colonized and developed, flourished, persisted or adapted and evolved to create the biosphere there today."

He is an entertaining speaker and illustrates his presentations with excellent photographs.

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Azalea Chapter, ARS Operating Statement for Year January 1 to December 31, 2011

Revenue		Expenses	
Memberships	2,290.00	ARS Dues	1,746.00
Donations to General Fund	825.00	Newsletter	536.20
Plant Sales	5,866.50	WEB Site	179.40
		Meeting Expenses	370.00
		Plant Sale	5,328.75
		Printing	816.61
		Liability Insurance	456.15
		Misc/Edith Davis	242.17
		Memorial	-
Total Income	8,981.50	Total Expenses	9,675.28

Net Income from Dues	544.00	Net Income	(694.78)
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Total Assets as of 12/30/11

Cash (checking)	\$ 4,007.71
CD (Apr 4 % Fixed)	13,958.16
Money Market Balance	<u>7,428.63</u>
Total	\$ 25,394.50

**Submitted by Chapter Treasurer
Larry Adams**

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To: