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Newsletter of the ARSV



ARSV Annual Membership Renewals 2022-2023

Richard Florey, Membership Manager



For paid memberships, it is that time of year again for annual membership renewals. The ARSV membership form is included with this newsletter edition. The ARSV communicate to members via the website, social media and hard copy publications. Please let us know your preferred method of receiving information whether via post or email.

The ARSV Newsletter is published bi-monthly with news and activities, items of local interest and the calendar of forthcoming activities. Event dates are on the website as well as in the newsletter.

The ARS national journal, *The Rhododendron*, is published yearly as a high-quality colour publication featuring articles on the genus from contributors throughout Australia and overseas. It is sent to members and released at a later date on the website.

ARSV Plant Sale 10am-4pm Saturday 17th September 2022 at the DRBG



With continued interest in our rhododendrons and vireyas at past bi-annual plant sales at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Garden (DRBG), ARSV are again excited to hold its next sale. The sale will comprise a vast range of hard to get rhododendron species hybrids and vireyas. ARSV staff will be on hand to provide specialist plant knowledge and advice. If you are searching for a particular rhododendron or vireya contact Michael Hare on 0405 403 607 or vicrhodo@gmail.com to discuss your needs. The DRBG is located at The Georgian Road in Olinda.



7th Global Botanic Gardens Congress – 25th-29th September 2022

By Andrew Rouse, Vice President

The Australian Tropical Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne, Australian Rhododendron Society and other partners will give a presentation on the Tropical Mountain Plant Science Project at the 7th Global Botanic Gardens Congress which is being held in Melbourne 25-29 September this year. I will present on behalf of the Australian Rhododendron Society and will talk about the Society's role in the establishing the project, the important reference collection of *R. viriosum* and *R. lochiaie* we look after at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens, and the plans for a Cloud Forest Garden at the gardens to showcase our native rhododendrons and the other endemic plants of the tropical Queensland mountain-tops collected by the project partners.

For more information on the Global Botanic Gardens Congress, see <https://www.7gbgc.org/>

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ARSV 'gardens visit day' – Saturday 8th October 2022

By John O'Hara, President

A 'gardens visit day' is set for Saturday 8th of October and will consist of two gardens in the Dandenong Ranges south east of Melbourne. The second is Prue Crome's garden, which we visited a few years back but it has developed beautifully and members will be interested to see the growth and change and in October it will be a great mass of flowers. We will be having a sausage sizzle as a light lunch with members to just bring their own drinks. The first garden and start time will be finalised and advised in the October newsletter.

Prue has kindly provided some photos to inspire you to come along.



When is a rhododendron an azalea?

By Peter Valder (original ARSV Journal contribution)

This article was first published a number of years ago and later contributed to an ARSV Journal by Peter Valder. As it was published prior to many of our newer members joining ARSV, we thought it a good idea to share it once again as it is an interesting topic about a common question. The author has updated it to incorporate a table relating the names assigned by Linnaeus to plants mentioned in the text to their modern names. We feel that it could be of interest to many readers who won't have seen it previously.

Look at that lovely blue azalea", they say, "I've never seen one that colour before". How on earth can one begin to explain that *Rhododendron augustinii*, or 'Blue Diamond', or another blue variety, isn't an azalea. It certainly, looks like one and bears little resemblance to most people's concept of a rhododendron. Anyway, what is an azalea? After all, the deciduous and evergreen azaleas look as different from one another as they do from most rhododendrons. Unfortunately, there isn't an easy answer, so you must either stop reading now or be prepared to put up with a bit of botanical history.

In the 18th century the Swedish botanist Linnaeus devised a system of classification of plants based on, among other things, the number of stamens. This system of classification, which turned out not to be a good one, was known, rather awkwardly, as Linnaeus's Sexual System. Following this system, he divided the rhododendrons known to him between two genera. In his genus *Rhododendron*, he placed the species with ten stamens (*R. ferrugineum*, *R. hirsutum*, *R. dauricum* and *R. maximum*). In the genus *Azalea* he placed those with five stamens (*A. indica*, *A. pontica*, *A. viscosa*, *A. lutea*, *A. lapponia*, and *A. procumbens*). Their modern names are:

Linnaeus's names modern names

A. indica *R. indicum*, *A. pontica* *R. luteum*, *A. viscosa* *R. viscosum*, *A. lutea* split between *R. calendulaceum* and *R. periclymoides*, *A. lapponia* *R. lapponicum* and *A. procumbens* *Loiseleuria procumbens*.

Of these the first is an evergreen azalea, the next three are deciduous azaleas, the fifth is a scaly rhododendron that happens to have only five stamens, and the last is a prostrate shrub from Lapland, which is now not included in *Rhododendron* at all and is called *Loiseleuria procumbens*. This is ironic because Linnaeus based the genus on this last plant, deriving the name *Azalea* from the Greek word 'azaleos', meaning 'dry', in allusion to its occurrence in dry places. In spite of the fact that botanists have transferred Linnaeus's species of *Azalea* (other than *A. procumbens*) to the genus *Rhododendron*, where they properly belong, the name has stuck. As a result, this distinctive group of rhododendrons are kept apart by gardeners and often by nurserymen.

Unfortunately, this is a little awkward since there are other equally distinctive groups. However, what it amounts to is that all azaleas are rhododendrons but only some rhododendrons are azaleas.

Well then, I can hear you asking, how do you decide which is which? The number of stamens certainly isn't a reliable guide. In fact, telling the difference isn't at all easy.

First of all, you should look at the leaves, particularly the under-surfaces, with a microscope or magnifying glass and see whether or not scales are present. If they are present then it is not an azalea but one of the 600 or so scaly rhododendron species, none of which fits the popular concept of a rhododendron either. *R. augustinii* and most other azalea-like rhododendrons have scales. If scales are absent then it is either an azalea or an 'ordinary' rhododendron. From this point on you can usually tell the difference by using common sense. But, if you really want to go all botanical, then you'll need a microscope to look at the hairs these plants usually bear. The 'ordinary' rhododendrons produce some hairs which branch, the azaleas never do.

Whereas most of the 'ordinary' rhododendrons bear a considerable similarity to one another, this is not true of the azaleas, a group into which have been placed unrelated types. The deciduous azaleas seem very distinct from the evergreen azaleas, for instance. And there are some odd subtropical rhododendrons which seem more closely related to the azaleas than to other types of rhododendrons. It will be some time before the botanists get the whole thing sorted out.

In the meantime, you won't be far wrong if you recognise four main groups within the genus *Rhododendron* – ordinary, non-scaly rhododendrons (e.g., *R. ponticum*, and the hybrid 'Pink Pearl', etc.); tropical scaly rhododendrons (the vireyas, e.g., *R. lochiae*); 'ordinary' scaly rhododendrons (e.g., *R. augustinii*, *R. nuttallii*); and the azaleas. And if you are a hybridist you will find that, while crosses between species within each of these groups are often successful, crosses between species from different groups rarely are. So, it will probably be some time yet before we see a real azalea which is blue.

Within the azaleas themselves, crosses between distinct types are rarely successful either. As a result, breeders aiming to produce yellow evergreen azaleas have been making slow progress too. Even so there have been crosses between deciduous azaleas and 'ordinary' rhododendrons which have produced useful garden plants. These are the so-called 'azaleodendrons', of which 'Broughtonii aureum' is a well-known example. These, however, seem to be sterile, and thus have not been used in further breeding.

Member's garden – Ian Chalk from Sulphur Creek, Tasmania

By Richard Florey, Newsletter Editor

Ian Chalk has previously contributed to the newsletter and again has provided more photos to share with fellow members. Ian lives on the northwest coast of Tasmania off Bass Strait where his now four year old garden is planted with around 80 vireyas.



Rhododendron 'Burnie Shines'



Rhododendron 'Haleod Gold'



Rhododendron 'Barbara Crouch'



Rhododendron 'Big Pink No.1'



Rhododendron 'Bold Janus'



Rhododendron 'Bronze Warrior'



Rhododendron 'Candle Power'



Rhododendron 'Choc Orange'



Rhododendron 'Cinnamon Pink'