Gardens and Lectures of the 2018 ARS Convention in Northwestern Germany

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Bremen, Germany

For the second time in the history of the ARS, the annual convention will be held across the Atlantic in Europe. In May 1996, the first ARS convention outside the US and Canada was in Oban in western Scotland, where famous Scottish rhododendron gardens were visited and an impressive list of international speakers was presented. Twenty-two years later in May 2018, Bremen in northwestern Germany will host the second overseas annual convention.

The German Rhododendron Society (DRG) is using its own regular annual meeting to organize a combined ARS/DRG conference with garden visits, lectures, social events and sightseeing. The overall program is voluminous (and complex), and is being complemented with three pre-excursions and one post-excursion. The result is that rhododendron aficionados if they so desire can easily spent more than three full weeks in Europe visiting some of the best public and private gardens in mainland Europe and Scandinavia. The ARS chapters in The Netherlands, Denmark, South-Sweden and Finland are working closely together with the ARS organizing team in North America and the German Rhododendron Society to present the ARS members worldwide a once-in-the-lifetime-chance.

From May 20 to May 26, 2018, Bremen will be the venue for the central part of the overall program. A few days earlier, a pre-conference German tour from May 13-14 has its starting point also in Bremen. This old Hanseatic City on the shores of the Weser River is the hometown of a huge and very diverse rhododendron collection. A whole day in the Bremen Rhododendron-Park and Botanic Garden and several visits to nurseries and gardens in the nearby County Ammerland, the world’s largest rhododendron producing area, will provide an intense insight into German rhododendron cultivation.
Some of the most spectacular displays of cultivated rhododendrons in the world are those in northern Germany in May. A series of talks given by an array of international speakers during the two conference lecture-days are themed “From the wild...” and “...into your life.” The talks will be presenting not only explorations for and gardening of rhododendrons, but also the introduction and usage of rhododendrons in medicine, daily life and the arts.

Reporting about rhododendron surveys in the wild is a classic and enjoyable part of any meeting. Hartwig Schepker from Bremen will give an introduction into rhododendron expeditions of the past and today, and Rama Lopez-Rivera from England will talk on his travels in Taiwan, Korea and Japan, where he visited fantastic populations of *Rhododendron pachysanthum* and *R. degronianum* subsp. *yakushimanum*. Steve Hootman, Director of the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden in Federal Way, WA (USA), will describe his sensational new finds of rhododendron species in the central areas of China. Ulrich Pietzarka, Curator of the Forest Botanic Garden
in Tharandt, Germany, will lead the audience to the Far East of Russia into amazing rhododendron landscapes and a different culture. Ole Jonny Larsen from Norway, head of the Norwegian Rhododendron Society, will talk about both Lapponicas and lamas that he encountered during his travels in Sichuan, China. Last but not least, Seamus O’Brien from Ireland, manager of the Kilmacurragh Arboretum, travelled in the footsteps of both Augustine Henry in China and J.D. Hooker in Sikkim. Descriptions of his research journeys and the impacts of Henry’s and Hooker’s plants on Irish gardens will link the first day of talks with the second, which will have “how to best use rhododendrons” as the theme.

It will start with Jürgen Schlenz, Managing Director of a horticultural consultancy company in Westerde, Germany, who will give an overview of the hundreds of nurseries in the Ammerland area producing every second rhododendron plant sold in European garden centers. Ken Cox from Glendoick, Scotland, will speak on woodland gardening with rhododendrons, surely an informative presentation peppered with many garden maintenance details. Nils Blatt, a garden architect from Bremen, will consider how rhododendrons are being incorporated into contemporary gardening in Germany. Matthias Ulrich, a professor at Jacobs University in Bremen, will report on his current research to find new antibiotics in rhododendrons, followed by Ken Cox, who will discuss how rhododendrons have been utilised in art, music, and daily life. The banquet speaker will be Don Hyatt, a well-known storyteller from the Washington, DC, area, who will give an entertaining multimedia program called “The Crazy World of Rhododendrons.” Be surprised! More details about the program available at www.ars2018.org

Descriptions of the gardens that will be visited during the main part of the convention are the following:

**Rhododendron-Park and Botanic Garden, Bremen**

The Bremen Rhododendron-Park began in the late 1930s at the initiative of the German Rhododendron Society. In 1937, it started as a test and display garden on just 2 ha (4.9 acres), and today it compromises 46 ha (114 acres), consisting of a broad range of garden sections, including a large conservatory containing non-hardy rhododendrons. The garden holds the world’s second largest collection of rhododendrons and azaleas with about 600 species and subspecies (including vireyas) and more than 3300 cultivars, and all of them are labelled. The older part of the garden is a well-maintained park in the style of a woodland garden, with old oaks, pines, beeches and ashes. Long vistas and large lawns alternate with intensive rhododendron beds planted along ponds and streams. Hundreds of different Mollis, Knap-Hill, Gent and Rustica azaleas are coordinated either by color or historical background.

*R. williamsianum-, wardi-, insigne- and repens*-hybrids are grouped together, as are more special plantings with American, Czech or German hybrids. The garden also
Rhododendron-Park, Bremen. Photo by Axel Oehler.

Rhododendron-Park, Bremen. Photo by Hartwig Schepker.
holds one of the largest collections of the historic Seidel hybrids which were bred in the late 19th century mainly for cold hardiness.

In recent years, almost a hundred hydrangea cultivars have been added to create more color during the summer time in the otherwise mostly green surrounding.

The newer part of the park, opened to the public in 2002, contains modern rhododendron hybrids from the last 30-40 years. They are either grouped together by the leading species in the parentage or by color. In the “Yakushimanum Valley,” more than 100 German Yakushimanum cultivars are combined to produce a massive pink to white blooming experience in May. In the “Hedge Garden,” modern elepidotes are organized in red, pink, violet and yellow-orange groups. A “Novelty Garden,” renewed every four years (the next time in Spring 2018), contains the newest German cultivars that are combined with many different shrubs, grasses and perennials. This latter garden is both a test and display garden at the same time, introducing new hybrids and giving inspiration for gardeners. A German novelty is the planting of rhododendrons in an alphabet sequence, with more than 300 Japanese azaleas and almost 1000 elepidotes hybrids planted from A to Z, an easy way to find certain cultivars.

Hybrids play an important role in the Bremen collection, but the species assortment is similarly extensive. The non-hardy species like the vireyas, the Maddenia, etc., are shown in the botanika greenhouses, the only part of the garden which is not entrance
free. Here, simulated natural conditions with artificial rocks, waterfalls and large companion trees and shrubs have been created for Himalayan or Bornean growing conditions. Many of the smaller growing lepidote species grow in the “Rhododendron Rock Garden” with its peak bloom in late April and early May. One of the newest additions is the “Species Garden.” One hectare (2.5 acres) has been set aside since 2012 to showcase around 200 hardy rhododendron species, from big-leaf species like *R. sinofalconeri* and *preptum* to the colorful members of the Triflora section and the newest finds from China like *R. yuefengense* and *magniflorum*.

The newest specialty collection is the “foliage rhododendrons,” descendants of *R. pachysanthum*, *bureavii*, *makinoi*, *degronianum* subsp. *yakushimanum* and others, which are combined to create a “second bloom.” Flowers are welcome, but the focus there lies clearly on the beauty of the new foliage in the summer.

The tour program in the Bremen Rhododendron-Park concludes with a vespertine buffet dinner in the greenhouse.

www.rhododendronparkbremen.de.

**Park der Gärten (Park of Gardens), Bad Zwischenahn**

The central exhibition area of the Park of Gardens measures roughly 14 ha (35 acres) and was created in 2002 as the first Lower Saxonian horticultural exhibition. Today
it consists of more than 90 theme gardens, plant collections and other contributions with thousands and thousands of spring and summer flowers that offer a range of stimuli and information which provide fascinating insights into the world of gardens. Everywhere in the park you will find areas reserved for special plant communities arranged according to their origin or their habitat needs, ranging from the “Alpinum” with its alpine plants, to an extensive collection of bamboos to the “Arboretum,” the recently created area of ornamental coppice.

The rhododendron park presents a collection of more than 2000 cultivars and species of rhododendrons and azaleas, forming together with the Bremen Rhododendron-Park and the large collection at the Schröder Nursery the backbone of the “German Genebank Rhododendron,” a network of more than 50 partners that have joined to conserve rhododendrons in Germany. The hybrid collection goes back to the late Walter Schmalscheidt, Germany’s foremost expert on cultivars, who collected for many decades even the rarest hybrids. In May it is a burst of color with old, several meters (yards)-high deciduous azaleas and a broad range of evergreen cultivars from historic to modern.

The Park of Gardens is the horticultural centre of Lower Saxony and the showcase of Lower Saxonian horticulture, but also an extracurricular place of studying, where groups of children and school classes of all ages can choose from about 30 different educational programs and where in-service programs for teachers can be held.

www.park-der-gaerten.de
Schröder Nursery, Wiefelstede

The Schröder Nursery in Wiefelstede near Oldenburg, today owned by Timo Schröder, the son of its founder Fredo Schröder, specializes in producing young plants of rhododendrons and azaleas. Every year, 1.5 million plants are raised for further cultivation on a seven hectare (17.3 acre) production area. A specialty of the nursery is the propagation of large-flowered, eulpidote hybrids by grafting scions on unrooted cuttings of ‘Cunningham’s White’. The graft union and the rooting process happen simultaneously. Grafting gives the cultivars a stronger root system, making them less prone to diseases on less optimal soil conditions. Grafts and cuttings are grown in endless rows of tunnels and in large greenhouses, before they are potted and moved on to the container fields.

The highlights of every visit in May to Schröder are the stock plant displays. The flowering of hectares of square blocks of color is simply spectacular. Around 2000 different cultivars and species are grown to satisfy the demand of the small plant trade for well-tried, rare or modern varieties. Well-known cultivars are grown as thousands of mother plants, the culture areas of some hybrids extending up to a hectare (2.5 acres).

On the contrary, new cultivars or unnamed test-plants are evaluated from at least 20-40 plants. A ride through 12 ha (30 acres) of mother plants on trailers while sitting on bales is an unforgettable experience.

www.schroeder-rhododendron.de
Schröder Nursery. Photo by Hartwig Schepker.

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Over the past 140 years, the family business “BRUNS Pflanzen” has developed from a market gardening firm to one of Europe’s leading tree nurseries for the landscape trade and garden centres throughout the continent. A team of more than 300 trained staff cultivate more than 4000 plant species and cultivars on 500 ha (1.9 miles²). Their specimen trees and topiary displayed in perfect lines are an amazing sight to see and are worth a tractor tour ride. Well-pruned *Ilex* and conifers from Japan are potted in wooden boxes, while large trees are containerized in SpringRing® container [in a SpringRing® container, roots are directed into outwardly pointed open ended cusps, preventing spiraling and air pruning the tip of the root. The response of the plant to the air pruning is to send out more roots to compensate for the loss, leading to the build up of a dense, fibrous, outwardly pointing root system], making them available for planting even in the summer. The state of horticultural art in this nursery is outstanding.

The systematic planting of the 25 ha (62 acre) Rhododendron Park in the shelter of tall pines was started by Erich and Wilhelm Bruns in 1950. Today, you can still find specimens imported from England that have grown into 7-8 m (23-26 ft) high bushes. The collection comprises more than 1000 different rhododendron species and cultivars, most of them clearly labeled, as well as deciduous and Japanese azaleas. The park also serves as a show garden of cultivars, and to date, about 200 cultivars have been bred by Bruns over the last six decades. A special group of Bruns rhododendrons are the

Schröder Nursery. Photo by Hartwig Schepker.
cultivars named after the wives of German presidents—the naming procedure always creating a big public response! Fortunately, hybridizing at Bruns is still going on and will result into promising new cultivars in the coming years, facing challenges like increasing resistance to powdery mildew and trying to achieve superior foliage.

Since 1985 a new garden with a large pond and great vistas has been added, which is surrounded by Japanese maples, dogwoods, magnolias and many other solitary trees, which offer interesting focal points amidst the fascinating rhododendron collection. The pavilion, opened in 2009, will be the venue for the final social event during the conference, a big garden party in a wonderful surrounding. www.bruns.de
Van der Berk Nursery. Photo courtesy Van der Berk Nursery.

Van der Berk Nursery. Photo by Hartwig Schepker.
**Van den Berk Rhododendron, Rastede**

Van den Berk Rhododendron GmbH, a subsidiary of Van den Berk Nurseries in Holland since 2006, is located in Ipwegermoor near Rastede, Northern Germany. Rhododendrons and azaleas of exceptional quality are produced here on the 50 ha (124 acre) site of drained moorland. Even outside the flowering season, the sight of hundreds of meters (yards) of rhododendrons fields in an otherwise almost treeless surrounding is impressive. The plant assortment offered by the Van den Berk rhododendron nursery includes over 160 species of large-flowered rhododendrons, Yakushimanum Hybrids and azaleas. The plant sizes vary in height and width from 70 cm to 4 meters (2.3 to 14 ft). Van den Berk is one of the leading rhododendron nurseries in Europe with regard to quality, size and range of species offered. Large consignments for the planting of large surface areas or eye-catching solitary plants are both available in large quantities. Specialties are old rhododendron plants that have been limbed up to create umbrella-like sculptures—a fashion which seems to be more and more popular.

www.vdberk-rhododendron.com

**zu Jeddeloh Pflanzen Nursery, Jeddeloh**

The zu Jeddeloh family has been cultivating the land in the town of Jeddeloh near Oldenburg for 15 generations. zu Jeddeloh Pflanzen was founded 85 years ago.
ago (in 1932) by Johann-Diedrich zu Jeddeloh, one of the world’s most respected conifer specialist and collector. The nursery is a pioneer in container cultivation. The son of the company founder, Jan-Dieter zu Jeddeloh, started this business in 1978 after studying this new method of cultivation during his time at university and in countries such as The Netherlands, France and the USA. Today, zu Jeddeloh Pflanzen is one of Germany’s leading nurseries with some 150 employees, and the license holder of the American hydrangea brand “Endless Summer”® and the berry brand “BrazelBerry”®.

Surrounding the old and beautiful Ammerland style house of the zu Jeddeloh family is a spacious, park-like estate that has grown over the years to cover some two hectares (five acres). It is lovingly tended and constantly expanded by Sabine zu Jeddeloh and her team. Together with the English garden expert and author Adrian Bloom, they have created five themed gardens over the last ten years: the unique “Blooms Hills” with the impressive Rozanne River from Rozanne® geraniums; the year-round garden with lots of grasses, a pond and a gazebo; the Alpinum with a small viewing platform; the hedge garden which forms the heart of the conifer collection; and the new walled garden with conifers and perennials arranged according to their geographical origins. Sabine is also the vice-president of the German Rhododendron Society and is happy to welcome conference participants to tea and coffee in her garden.

www.jeddeloh.de