

The ARS 2018 Convention Post-tour of Gardens in Finland

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The Finnish Rhododendron Society and the Finnish Chapter are both participating in the organisation of a three-day post convention tour after the ARS Convention in Bremen, Germany in May 2018 and are inviting ARS members to visit Finnish gardens, parks and arboreta. Finland is one of the northernmost countries in Europe, situated between latitudes 60° and 70° N, corresponding in latitude in Alaska from Anchorage to Prudhoe Bay. However, the climate in Finland is distinctly warmer and more favorable for the growing rhododendrons than is northern Alaska.

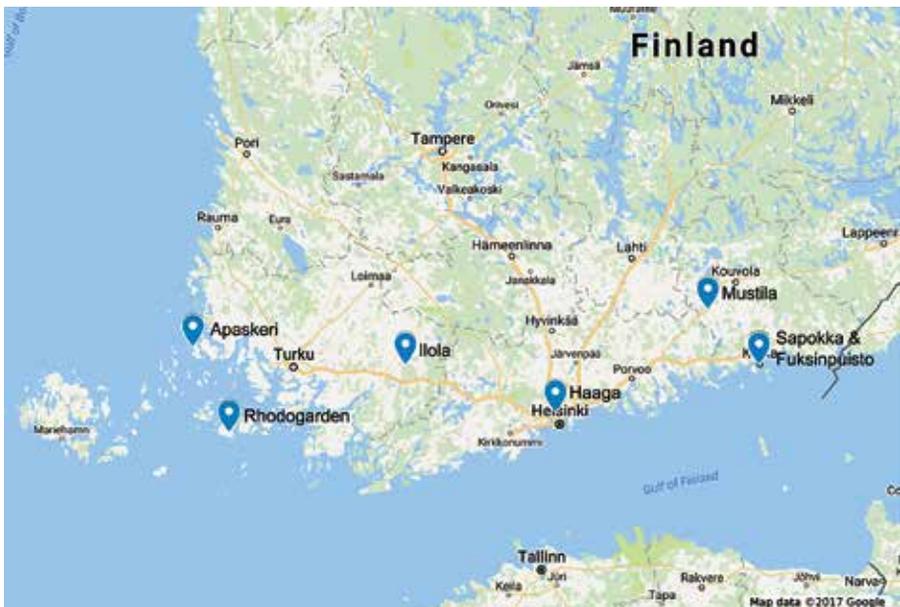


Fig. 1. Locations of post-tour Finnish gardens.



Azaleas in Haaga Rhododendron Park, Helsinki. Photo by Satu Tegel.

Growing rhododendrons and azaleas in Finland has increased significantly over recent decades. Development of hardy Finnish rhododendron cultivars, free trade within the European Union and the large number of garden centers with a good plant assortment have given gardeners many options to create beautiful gardens with rhododendrons and azaleas. The Finnish Rhododendron Society, with close to 300 members, has played an important role in educating the public about the genus *Rhododendron*.

The most famous place to admire rhododendrons and azaleas in Finland is at the Arboretum Mustila in Elimäki. Other great places to enjoy rhododendrons or azaleas are the Haaga Rhododendron Park in Helsinki, the Sapokka Water Garden and Fuksinpuisto Park in Kotka, the Arboretum Yltöinen in Piiikkiö and the Raisio Rhododendron Park in Raisio. A full list and map of public rhododendron and azalea collections in Finland is available at <http://tinyurl.com/htj98x5> (in Finnish). There are also many great private gardens and arboreta established by members of the Finnish Rhododendron Society.

The Haaga Rhododendron Park, Helsinki

The Haaga Rhododendron Park is a unique city park in which to admire huge rhododendrons and beautiful azaleas. Its grounds serve as both a public park and a university research garden and consist of two parts: evergreen rhododendrons grow in the southern section, while azaleas grow in the northern section. The oldest rhododendrons were planted in 1975, when a research garden for the University of Helsinki's plant breeding program was established. The grounds are on a natural bog



Platform in Haaga Rhododendron Park, Helsinki. Photo by Vladimir Pohtokari.

with an acidic soil that is ideal for rhododendrons. *Rhododendron tomentosum* grows naturally along the edges of the Rhododendron Park.

The University of Helsinki and the City of Helsinki originally planted 3000 rhododendron hybrids for research purposes. The plants were from a hybridizing program titled “Breeding of Winter Hardy Rhododendrons,” which was started in 1973 by Peter M.A. Tigerstedt. Eight of the original hardy Finnish cultivars still grow in the park: ‘Haaga’, ‘Helsinki University’, ‘St. Michel’, ‘P.M.A. Tigerstedt’, ‘Axel Tigerstedt’, ‘Pekka’, ‘Eino’ and ‘Mauritz’.

In 1996, the plantings were expanded by thousands of rhododendrons and azaleas, with the azaleas from the hybridizing program titled “Breeding of Winter Hardy Deciduous Azaleas.” About 1500 azaleas now grow in the azalea section and since 2009, four hardy azalea cultivars from this program have been named and released for production: ‘Adalmina’, ‘Illusia’, ‘Onnimanni’ and ‘Tarleena’.

The peak blooming period in the park for both Finnish rhododendrons and azaleas is from late May to mid June. Pine trees create an overhead canopy, there are wide paths and boardwalks that are fully accessible by wheelchair, and two viewing platforms make it possible to admire the view out over the rhododendrons and azaleas. Thousands of Helsinki residents and gardening enthusiasts visit the park each year to witness this great spectacle.

The Arboretum Mustila, Elimäki

The Arboretum Mustila, located in southeastern Finland, is the oldest and largest true arboretum in Finland, being established in 1902 by A.F. Tigerstedt, the then owner of the Mustila Manor and estate. Instead of an ordinary manor-house park, he created an arboretum on the hill of Kotikunnas west of the manor house “to get variation pleasing for the eyes and to do something perhaps useful.” Tigerstedt’s main interest was in establishing a large-scale conifer plantation of known provenance from climates similar to that of southern Finland. His aim was not only to grow ornamental trees but also to evaluate the survival and growth of both exotics and native trees in order to find potential new forestry species. His early understanding of the importance of provenance in extreme climates was the key for success, and many of the early forest plantations still remain in excellent condition, e.g., Pacific silver fir (*Abies amabilis*), balsam fir (*A. balsamea*), Siberian fir (*A. sibirica*), Sakhalin fir (*A. sachalinensis*), Yeddo spruce (*Picea jezoënsis*), Serbian spruce (*P. omorica*), Macedonian pine (*Pinus peuce*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). The large scale and woodland character of these plantations gives Mustila its peculiar character, and the visitor will not find himself in a neatly trimmed park but in woodlands of mature trees in a semi-natural condition.

Most of the soil in the arboretum is glacial moraine with little organic material. This



Azaleas in the Arboretum Mustila, Elimäki. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.



Cafeteria at the Arboretum Mustila, Elimäki. Photo by Jukka Reinikainen

was another reason for placing emphasis on conifers. However there are also favorable valleys and slopes with richer and moister soil, able to support more demanding broad-leaved trees. C.G. Tigerstedt, who from early on helped his father and later continued his work, gave more emphasis to horticulture. In his experimental woodland garden areas, exotic trees, shrubs and perennials grow side by side with their native Finnish counterparts. Through his close collaboration with the newly established Finnish Forest Research Institute, he came to acquire fine Japanese and Korean plants that were newly introduced in the early 1930s, i.e., Korean fir (*A. koreana*), Kuriles larch (*Larix gmelinii* var. *japonica*), Japanese hemlock (*Tsuga diversifolia*), Ussurian maple (*Acer barbinerve*), Korean maple (*A. pseudosieboldianum*), three-flowered maple (*A. triflorum*) and Korean arborvitae (*Thuja koraiensis*).

The granite-based soil of Kotikunnas, enriched with peat, suits ericaceous plants well. The first rhododendron plantations of Mustila were already well established by 1917 and in the famous Rhododendron Valley, originally planted in the 1920s and 1930s, hundreds of rhododendrons flourish under a canopy of spectacular 150–200 year old native Scots Pines (*Pinus sylvestris*). The climate places severe limitations for the selection of rhododendrons applicable for Mustila. The following evergreen species have proven to be fully hardy in Mustila: *R. brachycarpum*, *R. catawbiense*, *R. dauricum*, *R. degronianum*, *R. ferrugineum*, *R. rufum* and *R. smirnowii*, and these species have been involved in nearly all of the diverse hybrids now grown in Mustila.



Rhododendron Valley at the Arboretum Mustila, Elimäki. Photo by Jukka Reinikainen.

Conspicuous in the landscape of the Rhododendron Valley are the large plants of Korean *R. brachycarpum* introduced in 1931 from seeds collected in the previous autumn in Hozan (now Pungsan, North Korea). C.G. Tigerstedt early on noticed these Korean *R. brachycarpum* were larger in all aspects than the ones the Japanese had been cultivating, and extremely cold tolerant. In 1970 it was formally described as *R. brachycarpum* subsp. *tigerstedtii* by the Swedish botanist Tor Nitzelius. The subspecies status was discarded by Chamberlain in his 1982 revision. Nevertheless, it is this very accession from Korea that became the cornerstone in the hybridizing of cold-hardy rhododendrons in Finland.

Mustila also possesses a variable collection of Korean *R. schlippenbachii* from the Nordic Arboretum Committee's 1976 expedition to South Korea. Other azalea species hardy in Mustila include *R. albrechtii*, *R. canadense*, *R. molle* subsp. *japonicum*, *R. luteum*, *R. prinophyllum* and *R. vaseyi*. Most of the azaleas grown in Mustila's Azalea Slope are hybrids planted in the early 1990s when selection of cold-hardy cultivars began.

The arboretum currently consists of 120 hectares (300 acres), approximately half of which is planted with exotic species. The rest of the area remains dominated by native Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Norway spruce (*Picea abies*). Since 1984, the arboretum has been maintained by the Arboretum Mustila Foundation, a non-profit organization established both to preserve and develop the arboretum and to promote dendrological

research and education. Seed collecting from cold regions of the world still remains the leading plant source in the introduction of new plants to the arboretum.

Arboretum Mustila is open to the public throughout the year, and attracts about 20,000 visitors annually. Most of the Finnish visitors are drawn to the peak flowering period of rhododendrons in early June. Visitors in May are sparse, but they will be delighted by the colors of other spring plants, including the earliest rhododendrons. Internationally, Mustila is still best known for its conifers, which include the tallest and thickest measured examples of Pacific silver fir (*Abies amabilis* 34 m (112 ft)), balsam fir (*A. balsamea*, 33 m (108 ft)) and Korean fir (*A. koreana*, 27 m (89 ft)) in Europe. A native silver birch (*Betula pendula*) ranks third in size in the same list, with a height of 35.5 m (116 ft).



Azaleas at Fuksinpuisto Park, Kotka. Photo by Anne Vilkki-Lanu.



Azaleas at Fuksinpuisto Park, Kotka. Photo by Anne Vilkki-Lanu.

The Sapokka Water Garden and Fuksinpuisto Park, Kotka

The City of Kotka is located on the coast of the Gulf of Finland about 130 km (80 miles) east of Helsinki. There are several beautiful parks created by the city's gardener Heikki Laaksonen, and the most interesting for us rhododendron and azalea lovers are the Sapokka Water Garden and Fuksinpuisto Park.

In the 1980s, the Sapokanlahti Bay had become fouled with sludge, was badly polluted, and had occasional odour problems. Although it was even proposed that the bay should be filled in, a decision was made instead to thoroughly clean it and restore



Azaleas at Sapokka Water Garden, Kotka. Photo by Anne Vilkkilä-Lanu.

it to an ecologically sustainable level. Renovation of the area commenced in 1990, and a result was the Sapokka Water Garden, largely completed within four years. The Sapokka Water Garden has now become a significant tourist attraction, whilst also inspiring garden professionals and enthusiasts. Vegetation, water, rock and lighting are the primary elements of the park, and the park has been awarded several design awards. The objective was to create interesting features and varying viewsapes that would attract people over and over again. In terms of vegetation and structures, the park varies considerably, but even with variety, a harmonious overall impression has been created.

Rhododendrons and azaleas form a small but important element in the vegetation of the Sapokka Water Garden. The rhododendrons consist mostly of named Finnish cultivars and the azaleas are cultivars from the azalea hybridizing program at the University of Helsinki, including the four above-named Finnish cultivars.

Fuksinpuisto Park was established in 1995 as a test planting area for azaleas from the Finnish azalea hybridizing program. Later the plantings were diversified with other plants. The park contains many groundcover plants; berry bushes; apple, pear, cherry and plum trees; and numerous varieties of clematis. The groups of plants are provided with name labels and include perennials such as irises, cranesbills (*Geranium*), daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), peonies, hostas, leopard plants (*Ligularia*), and perennial climbing plants. The park is exceptionally beautiful in the beginning of the summer when the azaleas bloom.



Conifers at Sapokka Water Garden, Kotka. Photo by Anne Vilkki-Lanu.



Roses at Sapokka Water Garden, Kotka. Photo by Leena Härkönen.

Ilola Arboretum, Salo

The private Ilola Arboretum in the countryside of Salo demonstrates the ultimate in landscaping design, enhancing the diversified natural Finnish landscape in an extraordinary arboretum. Development of the arboretum has been a one man's project, and it still continues. The gardener Ari Laakso sowed the first rhododendron seeds and other woody plants in 1989, and by 1993, he had 500 rhododendrons to plant. The seed source was open-pollinated seeds from Arboretum Mustila and presently, only about 20 of the estimated 2000 rhododendrons and azaleas in the arboretum are named cultivars. Ari is by nature more a landscape architect than a plantsman, and he does not have a name list for his thousands of plants, but all his plantings are done with care and attention.

Ari began to add ponds to his property in 1997, as about half of his ten hectares (25 acres) was peat bog. A large pond was dug in the bog, where peat had been harvested 60 years earlier, and since few plants grow in a wet bog, he added a one meter (three feet) layer of sand in areas he wanted to plant.

The arboretum now consists of several "rooms," including a one hectare (2.5 acre) rock garden, separated with natural pine forest. The pathways are generous and well manicured for easy access and movement. Ari keeps on expanding the arboretum and future plans include a wider variety of plants. He has a small nursery and 95% of the plants in the arboretum are from his own propagation.



Conical conifers at Ilola Arboretum, Salo. Photo by Kajo Haapalainen.



Winding paths at Ilola Arboretum, Salo. Photo by Kajo Haapalainen.

In Salo, the winter temperature commonly drops below -30°C (-22°F), and the region does not get much snow, so the plants have poor snow cover. There are often heavy rains in January, followed by a -20°C (-4°F) freeze on bare soil, which can be quite destructive for nursery plants. However, these problems are forgotten when spring and summer comes and people enjoy walking in this magnificent arboretum.

Arboretum Apaskeri, Kustavi

Osmo Jussila, the founding member of the Finnish Rhododendron Society in 1995, has been one of the most distinguished persons over the latest 20 years in promoting the culture of *Rhododendron* in Finland and was a co-writer with Anu Väinölä in writing the book “Alppiruusut” (“Rhododendrons” in Finnish) in 2002. Osmo has a spectacular garden at his home in Naantali but after years of gardening, his home garden has become overcrowded with rhododendrons and other plants. After acquiring a partnership in 2003 in an old fisherman’s estate located in the municipality of Kustavi in a southwestern Finnish archipelago (there are over 2,000 isles within the municipal area), he built a summer home and began to transfer his plants to the beautiful surroundings of Arboretum Apaskeri. The property is pine forest with rocky shores overlooking a gleaming sea, with flourishing copses of hazel and other deciduous trees. Being a private arboretum, visits are only possible by appointment.



Rhododendrons and conifers at the Arboretum Apaskeri, Kustavi. Photo by Osmo Jussila.

Osmo has planted hundreds of rhododendrons and other trees and shrubs in the forest and along the shores of Arboretum Apaskeri. Its ten hectares (25 acres) include rhododendron species and cultivars, but also many of Osmo's own hybrids. He has been hybridizing rhododendrons since 1994 and he has made about 200 elepidote crosses, mainly with the hardy species *R. brachycarpum* and *R. smirnowii* and some hardy cultivars. Many of Osmo's hybrids are now coming to an age of first flowering and we hope to see some new exciting combinations of colors on hardy hybrids.

The relatively favorable maritime climate of Arboretum Apaskeri in Kustavi enables the growing of many deciduous trees and bushes that are too tender for the Finnish mainland. Winter temperatures rarely go below -20°C (-4°F) but summers tend to be cool and short, with the highest temperature usually below 25°C (77°F). This Arboretum's climate is thus Finnish Zone 1a, which is roughly equivalent with USDA Zones 5B or 6A.



Sea view at the Arboretum Apaskeri, Kustavi. Photo by Osmo Jussila.



R. dauricum at the Arboretum Apaskeri, Kustavi. Photo by Osmo Jussila.

Rhodogarden, Parainen

About 30 years ago, Kristian Theqvist was walking with his wife among shoreline forests on an island in the Turku Archipelago off Finland's southwest coast seeking a place for a summer home. They were amazed to find in the woods a huge blooming rhododendron, a very old 'Catawbiense Grandiflorum.' Kristian's grandmother, who lived on the island, told him that they had found the old summer place of Nobel Prize winner Ragnar Granit. Granit's mother (born 1878) had been a keen gardener and had ordered plants from both the UK and Germany in the early 1900s. There were no signs left of the old garden in the forest except the one huge rhododendron that had flourished! That was the inspiration for Kristian to start growing rhododendrons on another property that they later bought on the same island.

Kristian started to plant his rhodo-dendrons and azaleas in great numbers in his arboretum Rhodogarden in valleys surrounded by high rocks that are close to a hidden bay. Water flowed from the rocks and neighboring marshes to the valley, and the most common plant on the edges of marshes and on bogs was *R. tomentosum*! The soil was black peat with a pH close to 5.5, perfect for rhododendrons. The microclimate was almost windless as the surrounding high rocks shielded the garden from storms and the rocks radiated heat stored from sunshine. This was a paradise for his family and his rhododendrons!



Azaleas and boardwalk at the Rhodogarden, Parainen. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.



Azaleas and log gazebo at the Rhodogarden, Parainen. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.



Rhododendrons and bridge at the Rhodogarden, Parainen. Photo by Kristian Theqvist.

Rhodogarden consists of two properties, Juniper Slope and Dendro Valley, totaling 3.6 hectares (8.9 acres), and there are over 1000 rhododendrons and azaleas now planted below a canopy of pines. The garden is divided in sections, a display garden with well blooming rhododendron cultivars, azaleas along the boardwalks, the new slope garden with rhododendrons and azaleas, and a species garden showing beautiful

leaves but less spectacular flowers. Kristian has also planted rhododendrons on the rock slopes by making small garden water beds with peat blocks, a log and a piece of plastic where there previously was not naturally much soil.

Kristian is a keen hybridizer and since 2002 has made over 500 crosses. The seedlings spend their first winter in cold frames, are then put in plant boxes in the woods and finally, are planted in rows in fields. Finally the plants are either scrapped, given to friends or planted in test areas in the arboretum for further evaluation. The best ones go into micropropagation, get their names registered and hopefully find their way into further propagation and into commercial production.

As an arboretum, Rhodogarden has hundreds of planted trees and shrubs that have either been acquired from nurseries or grown from seed. Growing trees from seed takes years and the arboretum is still too young to have achieved its full potential. Several years ago moose and deer caused substantial damage to the trees and shrubs and many years of growth was lost. Now Rhodogarden is surrounded by a fence and the only small problem is caused by mountain hares (*Lepus timidus*) that get through the fence. Growing rhododendrons has been Kristian's hobby, but now retired, he is able to concentrate totally on rhododendrons, other plants and gardening. Rhodogarden is a private garden that is normally closed to visitors, but it will be opened for the ARS 2018 Convention post-tour.

References:

- Chamberlain, D.F. 1982: A revision of *Rhododendron*. II Subgenus Hymenanthes. *Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh*, 39(2), 209–486.
- Nitzelius, T. 1970: *Rhododendron brachycarpum* D. Don ex Don ssp. *tigerstedtii* eine neue Unterart. *Deutsche Baumschule* 22(7): 207–212.

Web sites for more information

- Haaga Rhododendron Park: <http://www.vihreatsylit.fi/en/?p=930>
- Arboretum Mustila: www.mustila.fi/en
- Sapokka Water Garden: <http://tinyurl.com/j8d2oab>
- Fuksinpuisto Park: <http://tinyurl.com/h89q62j>
- Ilola Arboretum: <https://www.facebook.com/Ilolanarboretum>
- Arboretum Kustavi: <http://tinyurl.com/hg9ywgs>

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