Hybridizing for the Red Maximum Effect

The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden invites you to our next webinar on

November 19, 2026, at 5 p.m. PST with Joe Bruso, hybridizer, propagator, and grower of rhododendron species and hybrids.

Join us for a look at more than two decades of hybridizing efforts focused on expressing what Joe calls the "**Red Max Effect**" in hybrids between *Rhododendron maximum* and other species and hybrids.

Many rhododendron enthusiasts are familiar with forms of *Rhododendron maximum* that exhibit unusual amounts of reddish pigment in their flowers, foliage, stems, and/or sap. Known as "red maximum" or "Red Max," these plants have a fascinating history dating back to the 1930s, when an unusual plant was discovered by an engineer working on construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway.

During this webinar, Joe will share the results of more than 25 years of hybridizing using a *R. maximum* seedling known as "maximum RP," which he obtained from the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden. The plant originated from the Garden's accession 75/137, described as a *R. maximum* 'Mt. Mitchell' form, selfed, with erratic marbling and red pigment in the leaves and flowers.

Joe has made hundreds of crosses using *maximum* RP as the seed parent, with pollen from hardy and tender species as well as numerous hybrids. A small percentage of the resulting seedlings have exhibited the Red Max Effect, with considerable variation in how the red pigmentation appears and how intensely it is expressed.

Joe will discuss his observations from these crosses, including examples where the effect appears in flowers, foliage, stems, sap, and other parts of the plant. He will also explore the variability and unpredictability of the trait, including why some seedlings express the effect while others do not and why its expression can change over time.

One particularly notable cross, maximum RP × *Rhododendron elegantulum*, produced the Red Max Effect in all seven plants Joe retained through flowering. The resulting plants show considerable variation, ranging from plants with predominantly red trusses to others with a mixture of red, bicolor, and pink flowers.

The presentation follows Joe's article, "**The Red Maximum Effect**," published in the most recent *Journal of the American Rhododendron Society*.

Whether you are interested in rhododendron hybridizing, unusual forms of *R. maximum*, plant propagation, or breeding for distinctive foliage and flowers, this webinar offers a fascinating look at more than two decades of experimentation with one of rhododendron's most intriguing traits.

About the Speaker

Joe Bruso is a hybridizer, propagator, and grower of rhododendron species and hybrids, with a focus on attractive foliage as well as flowers. He maintains a five-acre woodland display garden in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and is the current president of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. Joe also serves as a Member at Large on the Rhododendron Species Foundation Board.

Price: $15 for RSBG members | $25 for non-members + tax
Registration closes on Tuesday, November 17, 2026, at 11:59 PM Pacific Time

NEW! Group rate available for Associate Members: $250
To register at the group rate, please contact the RSBG office at info@rhodygarden.org or 253-345-2517.