RHODODENDRON
SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

WINTER NEWSLETTER

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P2 INSIDE THIS ISSUE
P3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT
P5 BLUE POPPY MEADOW RENOVATION
P6 FALL FOLIAGE FESTIVAL
P7 EXPLORING SHIKOKU AND KYUSHU
P8 UPCOMING EVENTS
P9 VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT
P11 WELCOME NEW MEMBERS
P12 DONOR ACKNOWLEDGMENT
P13 RSF BOARD & RSBG STAFF

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden Exclusive Members Only Spring Newsletter

Executive Director's Report
Updates on the names of some recent collections
Blue Poppy Meadow Renovation
Blue Poppy Meadow gets a fresh start
Fall Foliage Festival
Bright colors, familiar faces, and new friends
Exploring Shikoku and Kyushu
The 2026 Expedition to Japan
Upcoming Events
Double Discount Weekend & Holiday Market Pop-Up
Volunteer Spotlight
Meet RSBG Volunteer: Trina Colburn
Welcome New Members
Thank you for supporting the Garden's mission.
Donor Acknowledgment
Thanking the donors who help our mission thrive.
RSF Board and RSBG Staff
Meet the leadership guiding the Garden.



Fall color in the garden

Executive Director's Report

by Steve Hootman

If you have ever grown plants from seed, you have probably found that sometimes the resulting plants do not match the name on the seed packet. There are many reasons for this of course – simple human error probably being the most common. Occasionally however, it is simply a matter of the wrong plant name being applied to that particular batch of seeds – a mistaken identity of the plant from whence the seed was collected for example. This can be especially true in a large and difficult genus such as *Rhododendron*. For the sake of brevity, I am not going to discuss the myriad of issues arising from seed collected from plants grown in a garden setting, things become even more complicated at that point.

Occasionally, when we are collecting *Rhododendron* seeds in the wild, we may identify a plant as a certain species only to later discover that it was actually a similar or a closely related species. Perhaps there was not enough material to properly key out the correct identity, etc. etc. Or perhaps something was collected and described as *species xxxx* affinity because it was obviously very similar to or even closely related to *species xxxx* but was just a bit "off" morphologically and/or the botanical descriptions did not quite match up. These are situations when you apply the term "affinity" to that particular collection so that we at least have an idea of what we are working with (versus "unknown species" or the like which is very unhelpful). Sometimes these "affinity" collections turn out to be simply a different form of the species it had been aligned with – and sometimes these turn out to be completely new species which is why they did not sort out in the key and did not accurately match any known description.

For the sake of accuracy for those of you who are collectors of our plants, I am going to provide a few updates on the names of some recent collections so that you can correct your labels and update your records.

NOTE: The name that was used when we distributed each collection is the first name provided in the following text (i.e. what it was sold as). REMEMBER that you should use the collector's number - for example "SEH#18038" as the ultimate reference to any of our plants because the name of a plant can change (sometimes more than once) as we gain knowledge, especially if it is something new to science/cultivation.



Rhododendron viallii NV#078



Rhododendron yuanbaoshanense YuGu#084

R. *ovatum* NV#078 – this has changed to ***R. viallii***, a much rarer species in cultivation and one which looks very similar to the closely related and variable *R. ovatum* – at least in foliage. This is actually a very exciting update as *viallii* has only been introduced once or twice in the past and it features pendant, dark red, bell-like flowers – stunning!

R. *yuefengense* affinity YUGU#084 – this has changed to ***R. yuanbaoshanense***. When this was first collected it appeared to be very closely related to *R. yuefengense*, occurring in the same habitat and elevation but on a separate, distant mountain. However, this new population had a much more upright growth habit, and the leaves were a bit different in shape, color and texture so we applied affinity to the name. Not long after we introduced this new collection into cultivation, it was named as a new species by Chinese botanists who found it while exploring the same mountain we had first visited a few years earlier.

R. glanduliferum* CDHM#14658** – this has changed to ***R. leigongshanense. This was found just south of the known range of *R. glanduliferum* and was very similar in appearance, habitat, etc. At the time, I assumed it was an outlying population of that species which had been collected only two times in the past and which I had previously surmised might be found in new and different locations. A few years after making this collection, I read a scientific publication naming this new population as an entirely new species based upon the long glandular hairs on the lower surface of the leaves. These distinctive hairs are lacking in the species *R. glanduliferum.*

***R. species nova*? (subsection Argyrophylla) SEH#18034 & SEH#18037** – this has changed to ***R. ririei* affinity**. I was stumped when I found this in the wild in Guangxi Province, China. It did not key to anything (I had no flowers to work with) but was obviously a member of subsection Argyrophylla. What was most confusing was that the plants lacked the indumentum on the lower leaf surface which is commonly found in this group and we were far to the south of the ranges of most of the rest of the subsection. Jens Nielsen visited the same mountain a year after I was there and commented that it had to be a new species but that it was probably most closely related to *R. ririei*. This well-known species, however, was known only from Sichuan Province, far to the north, and had a dense whitish indumentum on the lower leaf surface. Then, just last year, I received an e-mail from a member who mentioned that he had "one of my species nova plants in flower, did I want to see a photo?". Of course I did, and lo and behold, the purple flowers were a perfect match for those of *R. ririei* with the same distinctive deeply colored nectar pouches, a feature not found in the other members of this subsection. The lack of an obvious leaf indumentum, the incredible disjunction in the known populations, and the tremendous disparity in bloom times (*ririei* from Sichuan flowers for us in February, this new southern population flowered in late April) are the reasons why I currently label this as affinity.



R. leigongshanense, Guizhou, China

Executive Director's Report (cont.) by Steve Hootman

R. polytrichum* SEH#18038** – oh boy, this was a long and difficult process. I will skip most of the confusing ins and outs of sorting out the correct name of this species but it is now ***R. chihsinianum. The species *R. polytrichum* was first introduced into cultivation in 2012 by Jens Nielsen (JN#12380) and had been placed in subsection Maculifera by botanists due to the incredible hairiness of the stems and foliage. We flowered it here for the first time a few years later and it was obviously a member of subsection Fortunea with large and fragrant white flowers. Fast forward to 2018 and I was on a mountain just south of where Jens had found *polytrichum*. Near the top of this mountain, we found several large plants of what seemed to be *R. polytrichum* with very similar foliage and growth habit, etc. and we collected seed and grew them on for the garden, selling many of the remainders. Since then, based upon quite a bit of sleuthing, we now realize that the collection we had made in 2018 of "*polytrichum*" is actually the rare and long sought after *R. chihsinianum*, a supposed relative of *R. auriculatum* but with pink flowers and botanical differences in leaf shape, pubescence, etc. In addition, now that we have seen it in flower in England, we realize that it is not in the summer-blooming *auriculatum* complex but more closely aligned with *polytrichum*, *fortunei*, etc. which all flower in the spring.

I hope you enjoy these plants – no matter what they are named!

Blue Poppy Meadow Renovation by Will Clausen

Eighteen years after its creation, the Blue Poppy Meadow was ready for a fresh start. Once one of the Garden's most celebrated features, the meadow's iconic *Meconopsis* 'Lingholm' blue poppies had gradually declined as soil nutrients depleted, drainage deteriorated, and aggressive groundcovers competed with the plants. This fall, the Garden undertook a major renovation to restore the meadow and create the conditions these remarkable, yet notoriously finicky, plants need to thrive.

The renovation included enriching the soil, improving drainage, removing invasive root competition, and creating a new visitor path to protect the planting while offering better views. Mature poppies were carefully salvaged and replanted, joined by hundreds of young nursery-grown plants and select companion plants. With these improvements, we look forward to seeing the Blue Poppy Meadow return to its former glory and welcoming visitors back to enjoy its spectacular blue blooms next May.

Watch for our January blog for a more in-depth look at the renovation and the work behind bringing this beloved Garden feature back to life.



Replanting the blue poppies during meadow renovation



Blue poppy meadow in full glory

Fall Foliage Festival

by Harriet Newhouse

What a weekend! Our Fall Foliage Festival, held November 7–8, brought beautiful weather, spectacular fall color, and more than 1,000 guests to the Garden. It was our most successful festival yet!

Our mild summer and fall brought an especially beautiful display of autumn color throughout the Garden, with brilliant foliage and even a few unexpected reblooming surprises along the way. It was a wonderful reminder that there is always something new to discover, no matter the season.

Visitors enjoyed exploring the Garden, shopping with our art and plant vendors, grabbing a bite from our food trucks, and taking part in seasonal activities. Color tours, scavenger hunts, and Storytime in the Garden gave everyone something to enjoy, whether they were visiting for the first time or returning to a favorite fall tradition.

The Garden was filled with bright colors, familiar faces, and new friends, making it a wonderful weekend to celebrate the season together.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and helped make this festival such a success. We are grateful for your support and look forward to welcoming you back to the Garden soon!



Japanese Maples in the garden



Kid's Garden Corner with scavenger hunts and prizes



Vendors and guests on the Rutherford Conservatory Terrace



Fall color in the meadow

Exploring Shikoku and Kyushu

by Atsuko Gibson

Our Second Expedition to Japan

Steve Hootman and I have just returned from our second expedition to Japan, this time exploring the islands of Shikoku and Kyushu. This was a joint expedition between the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden (RSBG) and the Far Reaches Botanical Conservancy. Five of us spent 11 days exploring the mountains and forests of southern Japan, searching for plants that would fill gaps in our living collections.

No two days in the field were alike. Each brought new landscapes, exciting discoveries, and the anticipation of finding something unexpected. Among our highlights were *Litsea coreana*, *Pyrrosia hastata*, *Rhododendron pentaphyllum*, *Enkianthus cernuus*, and *Hydrangea sikokiana.*



Atsuko & Steve with Kelly, Silas, and Sue from Far Reaches Botanical Conservancy

Between the two organizations, we ended with just shy of 100 seed collections. As I write this, the seeds are undergoing USDA inspection before they can enter the country. We plan to sow them this winter and, as the plants grow, we will share these materials with other botanical institutions.

This expedition would not have been possible without the generous support of the RSBG Exploration Endowment. Thank you to all the donors who make these botanical explorations possible. This was truly a memorable expedition, filled with discoveries, challenging hikes, and wonderful collaboration.

Stay tuned for more photographs and stories from the expedition in future lectures and articles!



A challenging hike to see *R. pentaphyllum* in the wild



Steve with *Litsea coreana*

Upcoming Events

STORYTIME IN THE GARDEN

Wednesdays | 10:30 - 11 am

A nature-focused storytime for preschool-aged children and their caregivers, featuring stories, songs, movement, and simple nature exploration in the Garden.





MEMBER PERKS WEEKEND

Saturday - Sunday | Dec. 5-6 | 10 am - 4 pm

Members get double discounts on all regular priced plants in the RSBG nursery.

HOLIDAY MARKET POP-UP

Sunday | Dec. 6 | 10 am - 4 pm

Shop seasonal plants, poinsettias, holiday cactus, wreaths, evergreen containers, handmade ceramics, and unique gifts. Find something special for the season while supporting local makers and the Garden.



Upcoming Webinars

HYBRIDIZING FOR THE RED MAXIMUM EFFECT

Thursday | Nov. 19 | 5 - 6 pm

Join us on November 19th at 5pm Pacific to explore Joe Bruso's efforts to express the Red Max Effect through hybridizing *Rhododendron maximum* with other species and hybrids.

FROM WEST TO EAST: THE RHODODENDRONS OF EUROPE AND RUSSIA

Thursday | Dec 10 | 10 - 11 am

Explore the rhododendrons of Europe and Russia in our December webinar with Dr. Hartwig Schepker, Director of the Botanic Garden and Rhododendron-Park Bremen.

Volunteer Spotlight: Trina Colburn by Harriet Newhouse

For nearly two years, Trina Colburn has been a familiar face in the RSBG nursery, helping with propagation and potting while becoming part of the Garden community. In 2025, Trina logged more volunteer hours than any other volunteer (over 250 hours total), a remarkable contribution to the Garden and its nursery program.

Trina first discovered the Garden nearly 20 years ago as a visitor and has been an RSBG member for about 10 years. As an avid gardener living in the South Sound and a native of the Pacific Northwest, she has long appreciated the Garden as a unique resource and an example of how exotic plants can be blended with our local ecology.

She began volunteering in fall 2024 after seeing a posting for help at the potting bench. With some physical limitations from past injuries, she was looking for a way to spend time with plants without the heavy lifting. It turned out to be a perfect fit.

Today, Trina works with Atsuko Gibson and the nursery team to propagate rhododendrons and companion plants. Her work ranges from caring for tiny seedlings and cuttings in the greenhouse to cleaning and potting plants as they grow and are prepared for sale.

"I knew I would love working with the plants and being outdoors."



Trina with her dog Cody

Trina shares. "But did not anticipate all of the great people I would meet here. It's so nice to be surrounded by others who love and appreciate nature as much as I do!"

For Trina, volunteering has also become about being part of the broader Garden community. She appreciates the opportunities volunteers have to participate in events and activities beyond their regular shifts, from summer barbecues and the Holiday Party to lunches with staff.

"They really make you feel like a valued member of the team," she says when asked about working with the RSBG staff.

Her time in the nursery has even changed the way she gardens at home. "Working here has made me a better gardener because it has allowed me to learn that it's okay to fail!" she says. "Not every seedling or cutting makes it, even with ideal conditions and specialized care, and that has become part of the learning process."

Volunteer Spotlight: Trina Colburn (cont.)

Trina also understands the important role volunteers play beyond the work they accomplish in the Garden. Volunteers help support work that might otherwise be limited by funding, while also serving as ambassadors for RSBG in their communities. "So many people still don't know about the garden," she says. "When I share my volunteer experience I can also let them know about all the great things they can see at different times throughout the year. It's not just rhodies!"

And when she isn't at the Garden, Trina has another rather impressive relationship with the Pacific Northwest outdoors. Twice a week, year-round, she takes a 10- to 20-minute swim in Puget Sound, where water temperatures range from 45 to 58 degrees.

We are grateful for the time, enthusiasm, and expertise Trina brings to RSBG. Her dedication is a wonderful example of the many ways volunteers help the Garden grow.



Rhododendron elliottii with Japanese maple leaves

Welcome New Members

The garden is grateful to all its members, whether you have been with us since the beginning, a loyal member who renews each year, or a brand new addition to the RSBG family. Thank you! Your support helps ensure that we can continue fulfilling our mission of conservation, research, acquisition, evaluation, cultivation, public display, and distribution of *Rhododendron* species.

FAMILY MEMBERS

Christopher & Erin Hanson
Natalie Uy

DUAL MEMBERS

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David Cho
Shahriar Ferdous
Hannah Fishman
Jaret & Kerrie Hauge
Ben Lattes
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Brandon Bierlein
Clayton Smith
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Vishal Yadav
Greg Stropko

Donor Acknowledgement August 1-November 1, 2026

Thank you for your generosity and for being part of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden community. We are grateful for your support and for the many ways you help make the Garden a special place for all who visit and enjoy it.

GENERAL OPERATIONS

Cash Contributions

ARS Juan de Fuca
Annette Kessler
Dorothy Robbins
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Jeannie Falls
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Shuichi Niihara
Ron Parsons
Rex and Jeanine Smith
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Greg and Gloria Winters
Jeff Wagner
June Walsh
Florence Williams

GENERAL OPERATIONS

Extraordinary Gift

Fred and Ann Whitney



Celebrate the Season with a Gift That Lasts

The holiday season is a time for giving, celebrating, and honoring the people who matter most.

A gift to RSBG in someone's name is a meaningful way to celebrate the season while supporting the Garden's mission.

For those looking to create a lasting legacy, a planned gift helps ensure that RSBG continues to preserve extraordinary plant collections, advance conservation, and inspire future generations.

Whether you're honoring a loved one with a holiday gift or planning for the future, your generosity helps the Garden grow for generations to come.

Visit our **Donation Page** to learn more about giving and planned gifts:
https://shop.rhodygarden.org/pages/donations



RSF Board & RSBG Staff

RSBG STAFF

Executive Director of Horticulture & Curator	Steve Hootman
Executive Director of Business Operations	Grace Pham
Nursery Manager and Assistant Curator	Atsuko Gibson
Marketing and Outreach Manager	Harriet Newhouse
Horticulturist & Assistant Curator	Will Clausen
Assistant Nursery Manager & Retail Sales Manager	Emily Joseph
Administrative Assistant	Janey O'Neil
Visitor Services Representative	Maddie Van Buskirk
Rutherford Conservatory Horticulturist	Kim Farmer
Assistant Horticulturist	Marissa Swindler

RHODODENDRON
SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN

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