

September 2008



# The Azalea Clipper

Northern Virginia Chapter, Azalea Society of America

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## Integrated Pest Management, *Amol Kaikini*

**O**ur speaker this month will be Amol Kaikini from the Fairfax County Master Gardeners Association. He will be giving a talk on IPM - Integrated Pest Management - for azaleas and rhododendrons. He is a highly experienced master gardener who has extensive knowledge of organic gardening practices. He also manages the FCMA website.

There will be a business meeting for the chapter and also for the 2009 Convention committee members.

Refreshments will be available—please refer to the Refreshment Duty box below to see if you need to bring something.

### Refreshment Duty—

For this meeting, the duty falls to those whose last names begin with the letters-

**K through P**



## From the President *Eve Harrison*

Dear Friends:

**T**he summer has flown by since the Asheville convention, probably because many of us have seen each other here at the cutting exchange and again at the auction at Merrifield, but also because we've had our share of challenges in our gardens.

My spring garden was again visited by a number of azalea bud larvae which I found difficult to attack because of the bees' arrival. With the arrival of so much rain (until August) I was kept really busy trying to keep up with the invasion of old weeds and new ones too, followed by gobs and gobs of mulching. In August I brushed by two deciduous azaleas and looked down to

*(Continued on page 2)*

*Meeting on  
September  
28th at the  
George Mason  
District  
Library in  
Annandale,  
VA  
1:30 PM  
Directions on  
page four*

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see whole branches lying on the ground, this time invaded by the Azalea Stem Borer. It also caused a large branch on a gorgeous rhododendron to drop off at my touch! As I read about it in Galle, I discovered that the occasional death of tips of azaleas was indeed the stem borer working his way down, chewing out the middle of the stems. Good grief! And don't leave out that little caterpillar that hangs from oak trees and munches on the beautiful fresh rhododendron leaves. Did I say *challenges*?

It's a mighty good thing that Rick Bauer rustled around and found a great qualified speaker on Pest Management in the garden for our meeting September 28, right? I, for one, am *all ears*!

We were all thrilled at the number of attendees and bidders at the auction August 24. I've never seen so many people actively involved in the success of an endeavor primarily aimed at making ASA more visible and enticing to the public! So many people gave of their time and plants that with the help of healthy bids everyone left with lots of planting to do. We even had a good group of returning bidders from last year! I'd like to thank Dan Krabill for donating a large number of landscape azaleas from his garden and graciously giving each person from the public who bought plants their choice from his offerings. Merrifield generously announced our event on their

TV show and we had some folks tell us that's why they came! Merrifield also donated 15% off discount coupons for folks who bought azaleas and I think we all took advantage of that!

At the ASA Board meeting in May we were encouraged to establish Membership Committees within each chapter to begin making for concerted efforts to educate the public about ASA and azaleas in general. Even though, as a chapter we have certainly worked toward that end with our sales and auction, I'm sure there's more that could be done to welcome people into the membership. Will you please give the concept some thought and come to the meeting considering being on such a committee? In this email age, a lot of work seems to get done over the internet so that actual physical meetings aren't as necessary as in the "old days". We just need to form a group willing to brainstorm ideas that the rest of us can help carry out. Think about it. Please. Keep in mind, too that gift memberships to ASA-NV make wonderful gifts for gardeners, no matter *where* they live. (That's how I joined!)

Before I forget it, I get a fair amount of information that comes in the form of a spreadsheet from committee members. After not being able to access the things, I've been told that I need to request them in pdf form. Take note please.

Another tidbit I've discovered the "hard way" is that fawns apparently can't smell or

taste Liquid Fence as well as their elders so if you see something nibbled on, it's most likely been a fawn. I have to keep a daily watch over these "cute" little invaders and chase them off at every turn. They now know they're not welcome here so they only come at night. Don't tell me they're not smart!!!

Thought, too, you might be interested to know that with Don Hyatt's encouragement, I tried the ARS seed exchange opportunity this year and am astounded that it's not so hard to get tiny little future azaleas and rhodos. to come up from seed! Most of my "work" is in deciduous azaleas. Now what to do with so many little successes? It is rewarding, though, and something critters can't get at, for a change. You might want to give it a try for a new and fun aspect of our mutual love of growing azaleas and rhodos.

I hope to see everyone the 28th!

Eve

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NEXT CHAPTER MEETING IS  
ON NOVEMBER 16TH AT  
THE GEORGE MASON  
LIBRARY IN ANNANDALE  
PLEASE MARK THIS DATE.  
PROGRAM TO BE  
ANNOUNCED

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## Importance of pH

**H**ave you fertilized your azaleas well, but they still look anemic and stagnant in growth? The problem could be the pH of the soil. If the pH is not right for the plant, the plant cannot get its ingredients.

How many of us know what the meaning of pH is? We all recognize it is a measure of the acidity of soil or water, and that's it. The actual definition of pH is a count of the hydrogen ions in gram equivalents per liter, which identifies the acidity of the medium. (*Please don't stop reading now, it gets better.*) The "p" does not represent percentage, as might be imagined, but it is the mathematical symbol denoting the negative logarithm exponent of the concentration. (*Keep reading*) Pure water has a hydrogen ion concentration of 0.0000001 per liter, which can also be expressed as  $1 \times 10^{-7}$ . The logarithm of this number is the exponent of 10, which is -7. This gives a pH of 7 (the negative exponent) and the acidity is defined as neutral (neither acid nor alkaline). A concentration of hydrogen ions greater than  $10^{-7}$  is acidic, and a concentration

of less than  $10^{-7}$  is alkaline. Each change in pH by a whole number represents a change in concentration by a factor of 10. For example, a pH of 6.0 means the concentration is 0.000001 (per liter) or 10 times as many hydrogen ions as for a pH of 7.0. Lower pH numbers mean greater concentrations, and higher numbers mean lower concentrations of hydrogen ions. Now, got it?

We are familiar with the fact that the pH of the soil determines the availability of proper nutrients for plant growth. For example, azaleas and rhododendrons need a pH of 4.5 to 5.5, the range where soluble iron is best available for the plants. The availability of soluble iron falls off rapidly with a pH above 5.5, which is not good for these plants. Insufficient chlorophyll is generated, the plants appear anemic, and growth ceases. Different plants have varying needs for nutrients, and thus need soil with the appropriate pH. A good pH meter can be used to indicate the pH of the soil; don't rely on inexpensive models. The best method is to obtain a good soil testing kit, or take a sample to the local extension office.

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## ASA 2009 Convention Planning

**P**lease keep in mind that **this chapter** is sponsoring the Azalea Society of America (ASA) National Convention in 2009. The location is the Crown Plaza Hotel in Herndon, VA, and the date is **May 1-3, 2009**.

My report last month identified the speakers and the garden tours that have been planned. The current emphasis is on the preparation of the article for the winter copy of the Azalean magazine announcing the convention.

Jim Cotter is composing the article, to include descriptions of the gardens on tour and information on the speakers and their subjects. The registration form has been designed for inclusion with this article by Virginia Burd. Several details are yet to be refined, but we must send this article to the Azalean editors next month.

Don Hyatt is in the process of developing

the convention website which will contain the details of the convention as they are developed. He has the basic structure done now without a link to the ASA website. Work on this continues.

Our planning committee meetings will resume in October and meet monthly through the remaining time before the convention to define the tasks and schedules leading up to the date of the convention. We will need help from many chapter members to carry out this convention. Please be ready to volunteer your help in making this convention as good as we can.

*Phil Louer,  
Convention Chair*

## Directions to George Mason Branch Library

The George Mason Branch Library is located at 7001 Little River Turnpike (Route 236) in Annandale, VA. It is on the south side of Little River Turnpike at the intersection of **Hillbrook Dr.** to the south and **Evergreen Lane** to the north — between the Capital Beltway, I-495, and the Shirley Highway, I-395.

- ◆ **From the Beltway I-495:** go east on Route 236 about 1.70 miles to Hillbrook; the library is on the right at the corner.
- ◆ **From Shirley Hwy. I-395:** go west about 2.75 miles to Hillbrook. Turn left to the library on the corner.

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