

Planning and building gardens have been my passion for 45 years. Since I purchased land with tall oak trees, the plant that peaked my interest was azaleas. Soon I had 265 varieties in the early 70's of azaleas of all colors. I decided to join the ARS at the young age of 32. We had heard about rhododendrons growing in a park in Portland, Oregon. I had purchased and read Ted Van Veen's book on rhododendrons, so we packed up our two young children and drove to Crystal Springs Park, Portland Oregon. A three day drive to an area that we had never seen. We arrived at noon on Mother's Day, and stepped out to see hundreds of people looking at the beautiful flowering rhododendrons. I spotted Ted among the crowd and recognized him from his picture in his book. He was shocked and amused to meet a family that had driven all the way from Oklahoma to see what was really his park.

I remain fascinated with the genus for 45 years, plowing my efforts and finances into a pursuit of growing rhododendrons in my gardens in Oklahoma. We planned other trips to see flowering rhododendrons and azaleas. Our next trip was to Calloway Gardens to view their native azaleas. It was there in the large leaf rhododendron garden that I saw a twelve foot rhododendron growing in the South. I stood there in front of this huge plant and decided to try to grow rhododendrons in Oklahoma. I must admit, I wanted to grow a twelve foot one.

I begin to attend ARS conventions, where I was inspired by guys like Dick Brooks and Richard Murcott. I have often said "that the reason Murcott was so enthusiastic about rhododendrons is that he had seen his plants bloom". Betty Spady heard about my efforts and she ask me to speak at a regional conference in Oregon. On Friday night a speaker said dairy manure was the best additive to the soil for rhododendrons. I spoke Saturday night and told the crowd that all research at Oklahoma State University showed that it was really bull manure that was the best. That was the end of a great debate.

I wanted to establish a chapter in my area, so we put together 12 members and formed the Ozark Chapter. Most members live 300 miles apart and thus we meet just twice per year. For years we have been like Johnny Appleseed, giving rhododendron collections to botanical gardens that we visit.

In 1995, I built a botanical garden(londonwoodgarden.com) called Lendonwood Gardens. It is 8 acres, with 6 acres of irrigated gardens. In 1997, I gave it to a 503 nonprofit corporation. It has 6 theme gardens and 7 collections of plants, one of the plants are rhododendrons. I purchased named commercial rhododendrons and named varieties from John Thornton of Franklinton, La.. John's hyperythrum hybrids grew so well that I traveled to his nursery and purchased 60 seedlings from a number of crosses he had made. I planted the seedling along a path and called it the John Thornton Walk. Some of these plants have become commercial plants because of their disease resistant and attractive flowers. R. 'Peppermint Twist' was the first to attract West Coast nurseries, because its three color flowers and the potential of increasing areas that rhododendron could be sold and successfully grown. 'Breezy' was the second plant introduced because it's large 3 1/2 inch pink fading to white flowers. The third plant, now being sold is 'Dandy Man Pink'. It has similar flowers as 'Peppermint Twist', but with more typical hyperythrum foliage, growing more compact and is hardier. It was the only rhododendron to bloom at Lendonwood after a winter that had it's lowest temperature every recorded here in Grove, minus 20. It regularly survives 100-105 degree summers. The plant is being produced in tissue culture and sold by Spring Meadows Nursery. They have touted it as the first rhododendron to be selected as a 'Proven Winner'.

In 2000, We moved from Lendonwood to a 19 acre place, 12 miles east of Grove. I retired from Lendonwood and begin to build a new garden called Elk Ridge Garden. It is my last effort to raise rhododendrons. It was a new garden when it was on tour of the ARS convention held in Tulsa, Ok. In 2008. Cuttings from Lendonwood was taken in 2005 and sold at the convention. I purchased 50 of these plants. Hundreds of rhododendrons have been planted at Elk Ridge and they have grown better than at Lendonwood. It is several degrees cooler at Elk Ridge than in Grove. Other cuttings of John Thornton's plants were also planted here that were available at the Tulsa convention. These were planted in 2008 to make a garden largely of hyperythrum hybrids. Many Yak crosses have grow well here at Elk Ridge(Elkridgegarden.com). Presently, there are three hundred rhododendrons growing here. I planted 650 different woody plants and hundreds of perennials. About 50 evergreen and deciduous azaleas were planted but plants must be covered to prevent deer damage. Some native perennials and other perennials have thrived with daily watering. I did a research project to determine if you could grow rhododendrons on a commercial basis here in Oklahoma. Please read the results at Elkridgegarden.com, select Research .

Our weather makes it difficult to grow rhododendrons and azaleas. I have planted thousands of rhododendrons and azaleas in my 45 years of gardening. Extreme weather have consumed most of them. Minus 14 F killed hundreds of my azaleas. Drought has taken it's toll; 'Don't plant beyond your garden hose'. Even the great nurseryman, Joe Gable lost many great plants. John Thornton has lost many of his

plants from drought and hurricanes. In nature, rhododendrons live in moist conditions, with rain every day. I have abundance of water from the lake. Here is a list of plants that I am growing. I have several of the same varieties totaling 300 rhododendrons. * Aster marks hyperythrum hybrids. Number indicates age in years in the garden.

ELK RIDGE GARDEN(300 R.)

Rabatz 6
Astrid 6
Michelle Smith * 6
Dandy Man Pink(Honey Creek) * 6
Cowboys * 6
Holden 7
PJM K 7
Peppermint Twist * 9
Voluptuous 6
Janet Blair 12
Todmorden 6
Mission Bells 8
Cadis 8
Jim Lynch * 6
Charles Loomis * 6
Hyperythrum x Boule de Neige * 5
Breezy * 8
Ingrid Melquest 6
Cynosure 7
Makinoi Caperci 10
Freedom Song 8
Ken Janeck 8
Ruth Davis 8
Senator Jackson 8
Polaris 7
English Roseum 7
Red Max 6
Hyperythrum x Maximum * 7
Aglo 6
Yak FCC x Makinoi 10
Tyler Morris * 7
Hank's Yak Seedling 7
Red Cadis 7
Hyperythrum #90-451rsf 7
Fortune Cookie 6
Metternichii x Hyperythrum *8
Yaku Angel 9
Mist Maiden 9
Dark Throat 11
Consolini's Windmill 7
Brown Eyes 7
Queen Anne's 7
Lucky Star 8
Apple Blossom 13
Nova Zemle 13
Roseum Two 6
Zeb's Smirnowii 7
Solidarity 8
Golfer 9
Mrs. W. R. Coe 6
Cynthia 6

Dexter's Harlequin 7
Pseudo Pseudo 9
Smirnowii 7
Charleston 9
Red River 9
Ruby McGee * 9
Anna X Yak(West Coast) 9
Smirnowii X Yak Partain 9
Lendonwood *7
Gloxineum 6
Hallelujah 6
Aberconwayi 8
Degronianum 8
Metternichii 8
Dorothy Amateis 6
Land Mark 9
Degronianum 'Ly-Ho'
Helen Everitt 9
Babylon 9
Maximum X Caloptum 9
Degronianum Exbury X Degronianum FCC
White River * 6
Pam Morris * 6
Lisetta 3
Prides's Early Red 5
Gloxineum 7
Smirnowii Narrow Leaf 9
Brikklyn * 6
Boomer * 6
Aileen Burris * 6
Hannah Reed * 6
Janet Miller * 6
Blue Ensign x Simiarum X Ponticum 6
John Creech * 6
Hot Dawn 4
Maud Corning 4
Rimini 4
Spring Fragrance 4
Florence Parks 4
Winter Spice 4
Tiana 8
Dexter's Harlequin 8
Sooner * 6
Brandi * 5
Lisenne Rockefeller * 7
Yaku Prince 7
City Park * 7
Cool Cotton * 7
Braxton * 7

LONDONWOOD GARDENS RHODODENDRONS

Charles Loomis * 17
Elizabeth Ard * 17

Cool Cotton * 16
Braxton * 16
Crest x Hyper thrum * 16
Anna Marie * 16
Michelle Smith * 17
City Park * 17
Cowboys * 16
Great Eastern x Adenopodum 16
Grand Lake * 16
Brikklyn * 16
Brown Eyes 15
White River * 17
Blinklight 15
Anita Gehnrich 15
Yaku Angel 15
Dexter's Peppermint 15
Babylon 15
Janet Blair 33
Catawbiense Album 32
Gordon Jones 15
Hendricks Park 14
Wellsheimer 14
Bousault 5
Vernus 16
Kathryna 16
Cinimon Bear 15
Tanysho 15
Polaris 15
Tiana 15
Mardi Gras 15
Lavender Queen 14
Pjm Regal 4
Dolly Madison 10
Solidarty 10
Summer's Summit 16
Peppermint Twist * 16
Tiawan Mountain * 16
Gomer Waterer 17
Caroline 15
Pink Parasol 15
Very Berry 14