ARNOLD ARBORETUM
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BULLETIN
OF
POPULAR INFORMATION

JAMAICA PLAIN, MASS.

JUNE 18, 1924

Evergreen Rhododendrons. The plants called Rhododendrons which have been chiefly cultivated in Massachusetts during the past fifty or sixty years have been imported from England, where they have been immensely popular, and are usually called "Catawbiense Hybrids." They are hybrids of the Appalachian *R. catawbiense* which is perfectly hardy in New England, with handsome foliage and rather unattractive pale purple flowers, and primarily with the scarlet-flowered Himalayan *R. arborescens*. Hundreds at least of these hybrids and varieties have been raised in Europe and many can be grown in this region. They require, however, specially prepared soil, frequent and copious watering, mulching with leaves, and spraying to protect them from the attacks of the lace-leaf fly which left to itself turns the leaves brown and finally kills them. The plants are all grafted, and the only Rhododendron which has yet been successfully tried for this purpose is *R. ponticum* of the Black Sea region which is not hardy in New England. The wood of the two large-growing eastern American species which should be the natural stock for these hybrids is not available for this purpose as it is too hard. Some of these hybrids if well taken care of here live for many years, but die sooner or later owing, it is now believed, to the tenderness of the stock on which they have been grafted. It looks now as if plants obtained by layering branches of the plants grafted on *R. ponticum* would be the only way to secure permanent plants of the Catawbiense Hybrids. As it is there are no shrubs on which so much money has been spent in New England with such meagre and unsatisfactory results. The handsomest species of Rhododendron flowering in the Arboretum is the Caucasian *R. Smirnowii*,

which is now covered with large clusters of pink flowers. It is a large vigorous shrub which has been growing here for several years and has never suffered from cold nor failed to bloom. When the plant is fully exposed to the sun, however, the leaves often drop and their edges in-fold, and it does better in partial shade. The leaves are pale grayish green above, and below are thickly covered with pale felt which successfully protects them from the attacks of the lace-wing fly. The flowers are of good size and of pleasant shades of pink, and are borne in large clusters. As compared with the dark green leaves of *R. catawbiense* those of this species are less attractive. Several hybrids of *R. Smirnowii* with varieties of *R. catawbiense* have been raised in Europe, and there are a few of these in the Arboretum collection. They have proved to be good garden plants here, flowering rather earlier than *R. Smirnowii* itself and producing larger pink flowers; they have never been injured in the Arboretum, but as there is only a trace of the felt left on their leaves they will probably suffer from the attacks of the lace-wing fly.

The four species of eastern North America, *R. minus*, *R. punctatum*, *R. catawbiense* and *R. maximum* are perfectly hardy. The first is a dwarf plant from the high Appalachian Mountains with rose-pink flowers, and one of the handsomest of the dwarf Rhododendrons which can be grown in this climate. It has only been recognized in recent years but is becoming popular and can now be found in large quantities in several North American nurseries. There is a white variety which is a much less attractive plant. *R. punctatum* blooms later than the so-called Catawbiense Hybrids, and although a larger plant than *R. carolinianum* with slightly larger pink flowers is not as good a garden plant for the flowers, like those of *R. maximum*, are hidden by the shoots of the year which rise above them. Comparatively few seedlings of *R. carolinianum* have ever been raised and apparently not much attention has been paid to selecting from the plants growing on the high Appalachian peaks individuals with flowers of unusual colors. It is perhaps the hardiest of all Rhododendrons; the habit is excellent, and the leaves are handsomer than those of the other hardy species. Improvement in the color of the flower is all that is needed to make it a first-rate plant for this climate. Experiments with seedling plants of this species are certainly worth making. *Rhododendron maximum* is the most northern of the eastern North American Rhododendrons and is not rare in some parts of New England. In the valleys of the southern mountains it is sometimes a bushy tree up to forty feet in height, but in the north it is much smaller, and is distributed in isolated stations from Nova Scotia through New England and eastern New York to Pennsylvania; from Pennsylvania southward along the Appalachian Mountains it is very abundant at low altitudes, often covering the slopes of narrow valleys with impenetrable thickets. The flowers are white or pale rose color and produced in rather compact clusters which as the flowers do not open until late in June or early in July are a good deal hidden by the branches of the year which rise above them. The long comparative narrow leaves sometimes a foot in length make this Rhododendron valuable in a climate in which few broad-leaved evergreen plants can be successfully grown.

1924. "Evergreen Rhododendrons." *Bulletin of popular information - Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University* 10(8), 29–30. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.321461>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/216912>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.321461>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/321461>

Holding Institution

Harvard University Botany Libraries

Sponsored by

BHL-SIL-FEDLINK

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

Rights Holder: Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.