Rhododendrons. In the Arboretum June is Rhododendron time and by “Rhododendron” is meant the familiar group with large evergreen foliage. A few early sorts blossom in late May but from the beginning until mid-June is their real season in this part of the world. With their bold evergreen foliage and large clusters of handsome flowers Rhododendrons rank among the noblest plants found in the north temperate regions. In Bulletins of previous years much space has been given to discussing them. Unfortunately only a few species and a limited number of garden hybrids can be successfully grown in the Arboretum. In this connection it should be remembered that the latitude of Boston is about the same as that of Rome, Italy. The climate of the two places, however, is very, very different, yet it must be remembered that at the spring solstice the sun is equally high in the heavens in both places and its direct warmth equally great. Usually the ground hereabouts is firmly frozen until April and in consequence the roots of plants are unable to function. The sun’s rays cause excessive loss of water from the leaves by transpiration and, since the roots are unable to draw moisture from the earth, the inner tissues of the leaf collapse and death ensues. The fact that New England has virtually no native broad-leaved evergreens indicates clearly that the climate is unsuited to the growth of such plants. Its unsuitability is further emphasized by the fact that, although the northern parts of the world have been ransacked in quest of plant material, very few broad-leaved evergreens have been found that are able to withstand the severe climatic conditions.

Situation. Bearing in mind the latitude and the strength of the sun’s rays in March it should be obvious to thoughtful people that if they are to have any success with broad-leaved evergreens, and with Rhododendrons in particular, they must be planted in a situation protected from the morning sun; in other words a northerly or westerly slope should be chosen. In the Arboretum they are planted under the lee of Hemlock Hill, but even in this favorable position they suffer more or less every season. A cool acid or neutral soil rich in humus is demanded, and a mulch of Oak leaves is necessary throughout the winter. But the practice of heaping mulch upon mulch over a period