MISSISSIPPI NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY JUNE 1983

GROW NATIVE AZALEAS FROM SEED

Our native azaleas make beautiful garden plants when placed in an environment favorable to their growth. As a matter of fact, these lovely plants are so attractive they have been almost eliminated from woodlands in parts of our state by digging gardeners.

Unfortunately, most of the native azaleas are difficult to propagate vegetatively. They are not difficult to grow from seed. By growing them from seed, we can leave the parent plants in their native habitat for others to enjoy and have their seedlings in our gardens.

Seed of azaleas are so small they are like dust. The fruits from which they come are woody capsules which open at maturity into five valves. To collect seed for planting, harvest fruits when they begin to turn brown or as the valves first begin to separate at the tips. This will be in September through mid November.

Place fruits in an open vessel such as a cup or small dish. When they have dried and opened, tap them to loosen the seed. Pulling the valves apart will usually yield a few more seed.

A one pint plastic freezer box with lid makes an excellent container for starting azalea seedlings. Sterilize the box with a solution of laundry bleach and rinse with tap water.

Fill the box to within one inch of the top with moist peat. To moisten peat well, the process should be started two or three days before use. Place peat in a plastic bag and stir it by shaking the bag.

Firm peat in the freezer box with a clean bottle or small drinking glass. Touching peat with the hands introduces molds.

Sprinkle seed on the surface of the peat, put the lid on the box and place in the light but out of direct sun. A north or east facing window is ideal. At room temperature seed should germinate within three weeks. As soon as germination is well started, remove the lid from the box and keep it off.

As seedlings grow additional water will need to be added to the medium. Pour water down the inside walls of the box and on areas on the peat where there are no seedlings. The medium should be kept moist but not saturated.

Seedlings are ready to transplant when they have their first true leaves. However, the plants will live in pure peat for as long as two years with no nutrients added. A satisfactory schedule is to plant seed in December or January. By May the seedlings are large enough to be easily handled and will be ready to place in pots.

A potting medium of one part sand and one part moist peat is satisfactory. Some growers prefer equal parts of peat and perlite. The purpose is to have material which is high in organic matter, which drains well and is acid. Pots should be at least three inches. Fill and water pots.

To remove seedlings for potting, moisten the peat in the box, turn the box upside down and the whole mass should come out. Place

the square of peat and seedlings in a shallow pan with a little water in the bottom. Carefully pull the seedlings apart by holding the lower leaves. If a leaf breaks off nothing is lost but if the stem is broken the plant is lost. Make holes in the filled pots with a pencil or dibble and insert roots.

When all pots have been planted add water to settle the medium around the roots. Carefully pour water on the medium--not on the seedling.

After about one week a liquid nutrient solution should be applied. These materials are available at garden centers. Repeated applications of nutrients will need to be made during the growing season.

As winter comes and the plants lose their leaves they will need to be protected from severe freezing. A cold frame or thick layer of pine straw will usually be satisfactory. Do not let the roots dry out during winter.

The following spring the plants can be moved up to gallon pots and held for one more year or planted out. They should bloom in two to three years.

GOOD LUCK!

- by William L. Giles

FIELD TRIPS - PAST AND FUTURE

Sidney McDaniel

The MNPS has had three field trips so far this year with varying degrees of success. The first on March 19 was at the Gloster Arboretum outside Gloster in southwest MS. Over thirty participated in the event with Mrs. Gladney personally conducting the tour through the arboretum. Highlights of the trip were the many species and cultivars of Magnolia and the early spring flowers such as Trillium. Although everyone enjoyed the excursion, it was a little disappointing since many plants which normally would be in evidence were not out.

The second trip of the MNPS for 1983 was planned to the Delta National Forest on April 23. In spite of the very heavy rains which occurred just prior, approximately 8 people were brave enough to make an effort to get there. Then the problems arose. Only 2 of the at least 5 cars managed to get together. Others arrived without meeting anyone. Perhaps we should try to get up another trip to the area?

The May 7 trip jointly sponsored by the Crosby Arboretum was in terms of plants seen one of the best ever. However, attendance (10) was disappointing. Highlights of the trip were comparison of burned and unburned areas on the Crosby Arboretum, a spectacular pitcher-plant area, and a savanna north of Picayune. The pitcher-plant area in Hancock Co. was extremely diverse with among many others orchids (Calopogon, Spiranthes), ladies hat-pins (Eriocaulon, Lachnocaulon) Utricularia and many shrubs such as Cliftonia and odorless wax-myrtle (Myrica inodora). All agreed it was one of the best areas they had ever seen in MS.

We hope the next field trip to the Strong River near Pinola will be a success. Response at this time has been limited. I assume that many people will bring their own canoes. We have five canoes reserved at present. Plans are to meet at 9 a.m. at Sullivan's Big Star at the junction of old Highway 49 and 43/13 south of Mendenhall. We will depart from there to the Strong River at Merit. The canoeing part of the trip will last approximately three hours. After that we hope to visit on foot or by car some additional areas. The total trip should be over by around 2 p.m. Be sure to bring a lunch. If you need a canoe, the charge is $15/canoe.

On August 20 in cooperation with the Crosby Arboretum and the Louisiana Native Plant Society (NOLA) we will again have a field trip in the Picayune area. As before we will meet at 10 a.m. at the Visitor's Center south of Picayune on I-59.

S.M.

SHORT COURSE ON WOODY PLANT IDENTIFICATION

The Crosby Arboretum will sponsor a three weekend course on woody plant identification beginning June 25 at the Crosby Arboretum site. The course will consist of a copy of the checklist, a course outline, slide presentations, field trips and exam. Participants can expect to learn to identify a minimum of 60 native species. A charge of $20 will be made to cover expenses.

The course will be taught by Sidney McDaniel. For further information, please write the Crosby Arboretum, 3702 Hardy Street, Hattiesburg, MS 39401.

your 1983 officers

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Notes from Joan -

We need more input from members. We are planning a field trip later in the fall where we hope everyone will try to attend. Officers will be approved at this meeting for 1984 most probably. Send your suggestions for officers to Wilma Mitchell no later than Oct. 1. More about this in next newsletter.

Notes from the editors -

Deadline for material for next two newsletters will be Sept. 2 and Dec. 2. Please get your material to Faye or Will by these dates.

Notes from Travis -

Travis indicates he has ordered some extra copies of "North Carolina Native Plant Propagation Handbook" by the N.C. Wild Flower Preservation Society. He will have these at the June 18 field trip or you can write him. Cost $5.

Plant Distribution Program is slowly but surely getting off the "ground". Each member could bring a plant or two to each field trip to swap or donate to MNPS and that would give a wide variety of plants available. Plants wanted are: Buckeye, Water chestnut, ferns, violets, native orchids and bog plants.

Nominating committee:
Dr. Wilma Mitchell, Sherwood Gardens Apt. 215, Vicksburg, MS 39180 (Ch.).
Ms. Beth Brash, P. O. Box 146, Gulfport, MS 39501.
Ms. Jeanne Harsch, 1315 W. Capitol #0-4, Jackson, MS 39203.

about membership

Membership Application and Dues Notice - 1983

_____Renewal _____New

Please indicate the class of membership desired and enclose the appropriate dues.

____Regular $5.00 ____Student $2.50
____Family $7.50 ____Sustaining $10.00
____Associate (Out of State) $5.00
____Contributing $25.00 ____Life $75.00

All classes of membership receive the Newsletter. Please make checks payable to Mississippi Native Plant Society. Return this form with payment to the Secretary-Treasurer at the following address: Mr. Travis Salley, 202 North Andrews Avenue, Cleveland, MS 38732.

Be sure to include the following information with your payment:

Name(s)_____
Mailing Address_____
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Telephone (not essential)_____

The Mississippi Native Plant Society--a society for anyone interested in the native and naturalized plants occurring in the State of Mississippi.

MISSISSIPPI NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY
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FIRST CLASS