Rhododendrons of Rhododendron Dell

The domed mass of rhododendron flowers is called a truss. Look closely at one flower from a truss to see the parts:

- stamen (usually 10)
- pistil
- petal (usually 5 to 7; a group of petals is called a corolla)

A Special Collection

Broad-leaved evergreen rhododendrons (Rhododendron spp.) with their domed flower masses, called trusses, are extraordinarily popular in American gardens. Their popularity in New England was made possible by hardiness testing at the Arboretum beginning in 1886. Arboretum staff systematically evaluated new plants and published information on their ability to survive our harsh winters. The best of these trial plants were nicknamed ironclads by E. H. Wilson in 1917.

Groups of evergreen rhododendron are sited in several locations throughout the Arboretum landscape. The most stunning floral display extends along both sides of Bussey Brook at the base of Hemlock Hill in the area called Rhododendron Dell. Today, Rhododendron Dell showcases historical and modern cultivars from primarily English and Northeast American hybridizers. This sheltered two-acre site provides ideal growing conditions. Mass plantings along Hemlock Hill Road of mountain laurel (Kalmia latifolia), another member of the Ericaceae (heath family), extend the beauty of this area later in June.
Did you know?

Nectar Guides
The colorful blotches on rhododendron petals are like an airport runway for pollinators in search of nectar. Many bees seek sugary nectar to fuel their flight. As they fly from flower to flower sipping nectar, they also move pollen from a stamen to a pistil, achieving pollination. Rhododendron nectar is harmful if eaten by humans but causes no harm to bees!

Can you find nectar guides on rhododendrons? How about other flowers?

Rhododendrons at the Arboretum
Today Rhododendron Dell includes 280 rhododendrons representing 132 taxa (kinds).

Both native and non-native rhododendrons can be found in Rhododendron Dell. Several to see are below:

*Rhododendron fortunei* is native to China and was introduced to the West by British plant explorer Robert Fortune. This species and its multitude of crosses have large, heady-fragranced flowers in a range of colors. While most rhododendrons have five petals, this species typically has seven.

*Rhododendron ‘Duke of York’* (a cross of *R. fortunei*) is one of the tallest rhododendrons in the collection and typically flowers in profusion over several weeks beginning in mid May. This triple-leadered specimen is 20 feet tall with an equal spread. To find ‘Duke of York’ look for the tree-like rhododendron with 3 trunks.

A native of North America, *Rhododendron catawbiense* (Catawba rosebay) has purple to lavender-pink flowers with a yellow-brown blotch. The epithet *catawbiense* is derived from the Catawba River of North Carolina and South Carolina.