

RHODODENDRON TOUR

The Water Music Festival presents a colorful history of flowers on the Long Beach Peninsula May 2



Bonnie Klein, left, and Michael Watts, right, stand in their backyard garden in Nahcotta, Washington.

The first garden tour on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula for the 2015 season belongs to the multi-faceted peninsula-based Water Music Festival. Adding to its roster of July's Music in the Garden; August's double whammy of the Edible Garden Tour and the Jazz and Oysters festival; and its namesake Water Music Festival in October, the Water Music Festival group — never short on creativity — will share an eye-popping explosion of color on Saturday, May 2 with the group's first seasonally inspired Rhododendron Tour.

The Long Beach Peninsula, well known this time of year for its multitude of bountifully blooming rhodies, begins the day with a 10 a.m. tour-related breakfast and history lesson on local rhody origins and an ongoing love of all things rhododendron. The breakfast and lecture fittingly take place at the historic Shelburne Inn in Seaview, Washington. Steve McCormick, John Stephens and Steve Clarke, grandson of rhody legend and founder of the Clarke Nursery, J. Harold Clarke, will trace the heritage of hybrid rhododendrons on the peninsula. Seating is limited for the breakfast and lecture. Early ticket purchase for the \$15 event is recommended.

As an overview to whet your curiosity: In 1946, J. Harold Clarke, a Purdue graduate, was recruited to the Long Beach Peninsula by Cranguyma Farms, which had been established six years ear-

lier by New York businessman and entrepreneur Guy C. Meyers. "Cranguyma" is a combination of "cranberries," "Guy" and his wife's name, "Amy," spelled backward. In 1946, Cranguyma was the largest cranberry farm west of the Mississippi, and it was interested in experimenting with new breeds of cranberries and strawberries. Clarke, a professor of plant science specializing in small fruit production at Rutgers for 23 years, was a perfect fit.

After 10 years at Cranguyma, Clarke left to start the Clarke Nursery in 1956. At its peak, a generation or so later, the nursery was shipping 100,000 rhodies throughout the world, according to McCormick and Stevens, information provided by the Long Beach Peninsula Visitor's Bureau and the Cranguyma Farms website. "Here's a guy who within a few

years creates the largest rhodie nursery in the Pacific Northwest," says McCormick about Clarke.

Following the lecture, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., the rhododendron tour will take place. Four of the five tour stops stretch along Long Beach's Sandridge Road. The fifth garden is centered in Long Beach. Distances between the gardens require a car. Tickets for the tour are \$10.

"You'll see many historic species and hybrid rhododendrons along with newer specimens displayed in handsome residential garden settings," promises McCormick, one of the private garden tour hosts. McCormick and Stevens, even though they deny it, must work from morning to night in their extensive five acres of garden — formerly part of the Clarke Nursery. Their labor of rhody-love shines.

Next door to McCormick's garden sits another of the tour's sites. It's also a part of the original Clarke Nursery, five acres of beautifully tended grounds showing off with rhodies.

And though not a garden tour site per se, if you're interested in colors, sizes, premium temperatures and blooming schedules along with pictures of all kinds of rhodies, pull into Peninsula Landscape Supply and ask for owner Colleen Frer-



John Stephens, left, and Steve McCormick, right, stand under a towering rhododendron loderi venus plant on their property along Sandridge Road. They found the rhododendron loderi venus when clearing the property in 2007 and since then the plant has flourished.

Water Music Festival Rhododendron Tour

BREAKFAST AND LECTURE

10 a.m. Saturday, May 2

Shelburne Inn, 4415 Pacific Way,
Seaview, Washington

\$15, tickets are available only at
watermusicfestival.com

RHODODENDRON TOUR

11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 2

Self-guided with map

A car is needed for distances between gardens.

\$10, tickets and maps available at the English
Nursery and Bay Avenue Gallery

Rhododendron Fun Facts

- The name comes from *rhodo*, Greek for rose, and *dendron*, meaning tree.
- The rhododendron is the Washington state flower
- The rhododendron genus, among others, includes heathers, mountain laurels, blueberries, cranberries, huckleberries and azaleas
- Rhododendrons can grow up to 80 feet high or be as short as 8 inches.

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Story by MARILYN GILBAUGH

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