

Assault Charges Filed at Southern Highlands Reserve

By John Turner,
special report to *The Tatler*

In early June of this year, the NC Department of Environmental Excess announced that assault charges have been filed against the large Ericaceae family and several other smaller groups of rouge offenders for assault on the sensibilities at the Southern Highlands Reserve. Most of the charges are based on an exhibition of over-abundant inflorescence that occurred in May of this year. Additional minor charges were filed against the Viscosum gang for olfactory violations.

Although the tentacles of the Ericaceae family reach almost all corners of the earth, one branch, the Rhododendron (aka: rhodos) group, has achieved a significant foothold in the southern Appalachian mountains. It was here this spring that almost all of the family's violations took place. While the attacks occurred mostly in May, most experts agree that the preparation for this spring's color explosion began long before the incident materialized. As long as a year ago, probably spurred on by last summer's drought conditions, the Rhodo gang began a coordinated effort in seed production that culminated in this spring's riot of color. (Riot charges were initially considered by the NCDEE but dropped because of a lack of evidence. Inflorescence collection for evidence was hampered by an untimely thunder storm. The wet flower petals soon turned to an ugly brown and NCDEE officials determined they would not hold up in court).

One local resident exclaimed, "I just cannot stand anymore of this pink and white!"

Others, however, appeared to relish the color and declared it to be 'the most magnificent flower display' they had ever seen.



Vaseyi azalea gang stages first attack in NC Mountains

The Vaseyi branch of the Rhodo gang (aka: pinkshell azalea) began this year's flower outburst with an amazing display of pink. Coming before the leaves appear in late April, the Vaseyi flowers are usually a welcome sight, announcing the loosening of winter's grip on the mountain landscape. But, this year, probably because of the foothold they have gained on Toxaway Mountain (some experts say this is the largest natural stand of *R. Vaseyi* in the world) they managed to achieve notoriety in their display.

In a related matter, charges were considered but not pursued, when several residents complained of 'pink-eye'. It was later determined that these were mostly punsters gone awry.

Quick on the heels of the Vaseyi hooligans came the Catawbas with their pink and lavender colors. The pure-breed Catawbas of the northern North Carolina mountains were somewhat restrained in their color display and avoided charges but their half-breed cousins, who have adopted pretentious names such as Roseum, Grandiflorum and even the notorious Maxecat, were completely unrestrained as usual. The uninhibited Maxecat presented such a profuse inflorescence display that its post-bloom appearance has left some won-



R. catawbiense maxecat



Lattie Kalmia



A member of the Flame Gang deriding about its potential for survival.

The garden staff at the Southern Highlands Reserve, hoping for a respite from this never ending wealth of color, were completely taken aback



The well-behaved Viscosum

with the arrival of Lattie Kalmia (aka:Latifolia), one of the Ericaceae relations most notable for outlandish displays of color. This year proved to be no exception to the Kalmia's rule of pink/white with more pink/white.

One Ericaceae family member that managed to avoid charges amid this teeming display of blossoms was the Calendulaceum clan (aka:Flame Azalea). Some have speculated that simply because the Flame Gangs blossoms were orange and yellow, a welcome respite from the pink and white attack, they were considered less threatening.

A regrettable and unfortunate result of the NCDEE investigation was the olfactory offense charges that were filed against the Viscosum group. Always restrained in bloom compared to some of the more notorious members of the Ericaceaes, the Viscosums, however, are generous in their sweet smells that perfume the air at the Southern Highlands Reserve during their bloom time. Garden staff members were perplexed when investigators insisted on filing these lamentable charges against one of the most cherished members of the Ericaceae family. Guilt by association was probably responsible for the deplorable situation that befell the Viscosums.

The Ericaceae mob had the run of the place this spring and finished off with a virtuoso performance by Eric R. Max. Always known for an elegant and restrained display, Rhodo maximum avoided the fate of some of his more uninhibited relations and ended the Ericaceae reign this spring with aplomb and beauty.

Although Eric R. Max and the Flame



Eric R. Max, always a gentleman

Gang managed to avoid charges, NCDEE investigators warn that most members of this notorious family are unrepentant and are probably planning a repeat performance next year. Although this news was greeted with trepidation by some, most residents and staff members, grown accustomed to being stormed by the Ericaceaes on an annual basis are resigned to a profusion of beauty each year about the same time. "It's something you just learn to live with," said one.

A special commendation was awarded by NCDEE officials to the Galax aphylla gang for their grace under fire from the Ericaceae crowd. They were commended for restraining their inflorescence display until the last minute and providing an exciting but graceful display of white candles in perfect coordination with the elegant and refined Eric R. Max.

Coming soon in a Tatler special report: First Aid for unexpected flower attacks

The Galax group received a special commendation from NCDEE for restraint.

