

October 1, 2024



The Hybridizer Test Garden has been a project long in the making and starting this week, I have begun laying the groundwork for what will be the newest garden in Tyler Arboretum!

The Hybridizer Test Garden is a joint project between members of the American Rhododendron Society (the Founding Task Force) and Tyler Arboretum. The garden will showcase and test new varieties of rhododendron that have been hybridized by American Rhododendron

Society members within 150 miles of Tyler. These new varieties have been chosen because of their superior flowers, hardiness, and overall good performance specific to the Mid-Atlantic region.



I inherited this project when I came to Tyler in mid-August. Much of the work had already begun: laying out the pathway and organizing where the rhododendrons will go. We are on track for planting in spring of 2025. However, in order to make sure the garden is ready, much work remains! With the help of some amazing Tyler volunteers, we have already raked, cleared and mowed in preparation for some very important compost.

This week, we spread a compost comprised of mostly decomposed leaves and mushroom soil. Together these create a very light, nutrient-dense carpet capable of producing many of the important organic acids preferred by the rhododendrons. We have laid down a layer of about two inches across, with intentions to do another 2- or 3-inch layer next week. This



layer will remain until the late winter or early spring when we lay mulch on top. In the coming weeks, I will be seeding a new pathway with grass. Hopefully, we'll get enough rain to ensure a good germination and survival of that grass.

Please be sure to visit often and watch as this new garden comes to life, and feel free to stop and chat if you see me on the paths!

**Rowan Saroka**, Wister Rhododendron Gardener