

ARNOLD ARBORETUM
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



BULLETIN
OF POPULAR INFORMATION

SERIES 4. VOL. V

MAY 14, 1937

NUMBER 4

TWO MONTHS OF AZALEA BLOOM

AZALEAS form a most colorful display of bloom in the springtime, and if care is taken in selecting certain species it is possible to obtain a flowering sequence for a period of over two months. Many azaleas commonly grown in the south are not hardy in the northeastern United States, but all are valued for their bright flowers and some for their fragrance. The foliage of some deciduous azaleas turns a brilliant red in the fall, and such forms certainly warrant more extensive use. The more plants of twofold interest that we can use in our gardens, the longer our gardens will be enjoyed.

What are the differences between rhododendrons and azaleas?

Now that azaleas are classed in the genus *Rhododendron*, this forms a perplexing problem to many, but is well clarified by a recent statement made by Professor Alfred Rehder: "There are no clear cut characters between rhododendrons and azaleas; they can only be separated by a combination of characters. Rhododendrons are all evergreen except *R. mucronulatum* and *R. dauricum* but there is an evergreen variety of the latter: they have mostly ten or sometimes more stamens, and the leaves are often scaly or lepidote; azaleas are mostly deciduous; they have mostly five stamens, the leaves are never dotted with scales and are often strigose. The two deciduous rhododendrons are distinguished from all azaleas by the leaves being dotted beneath with minute scales and also from most of them by the ten stamens."

As with rhododendrons, all azaleas need acid soil. This is not the only soil requirement, for it is usually best to keep their roots cool and moist all the time. This is best done by applying a good mulch, such as well-rotted oak leaves, pine needles, or acid peat moss.

Although there are a large number of excellent hybrid azaleas a-

available in the trade today, it is the object in this bulletin to discuss briefly only certain species which are known to bloom in sequence, so that by selecting plants from this list it may be possible to have azalea flowers in the garden for eight or ten weeks.

ORDER OF BLOOM

Late April

Rhododendron mucronulatum	Korean Rhododendron
---------------------------	---------------------

Early May

Rhododendron obtusum amoenum	Amoena Azalea
Rhododendron obtusum arnoldianum	
Rhododendron obtusum "Hinodegiri"	Hinodegiri Azalea
Rhododendron mucronatum	Snow Azalea

Mid May

Rhododendron canadense	Rhodora
Rhododendron obtusum Kaempferi	Torch Azalea
Rhododendron yedoense poukhanense	Korean Azalea
Rhododendron Schlippenbachii	Royal Azalea
Rhododendron Vaseyi	Pinkshell Azalea

Late May

Rhododendron atlanticum	Coast Azalea
Rhododendron japonicum	Japanese Azalea
Rhododendron nudiflorum	Pinxterbloom
Rhododendron roseum	Downy Pinxterbloom

Early June

Rhododendron calendulaceum	Flame Azalea
----------------------------	--------------

Late June

Rhododendron arborescens	Sweet Azalea
--------------------------	--------------

Early June

Rhododendron viscosum	Swamp Azalea
-----------------------	--------------

Rhododendron mucronulatum (sometimes incorrectly called *Azalea mucronulata*): This was originally introduced into America by the Arnold Arboretum in 1882 and blooms before any of the azaleas. It is the only true rhododendron discussed in this Bulletin and is one of the two deciduous rhododendrons. The flowers are large and rosy purple. If the weather remains cool, it may hold its beautiful flowers for about two weeks. Sometimes late frosts kill the flowers after they have opened, but if it is planted in the shade and protected from the morning sun the chances are increased for its remaining in good condition for some time. Most of the early blooming shrubs have yellow flowers in the early spring, but here is one with a rosy purple color

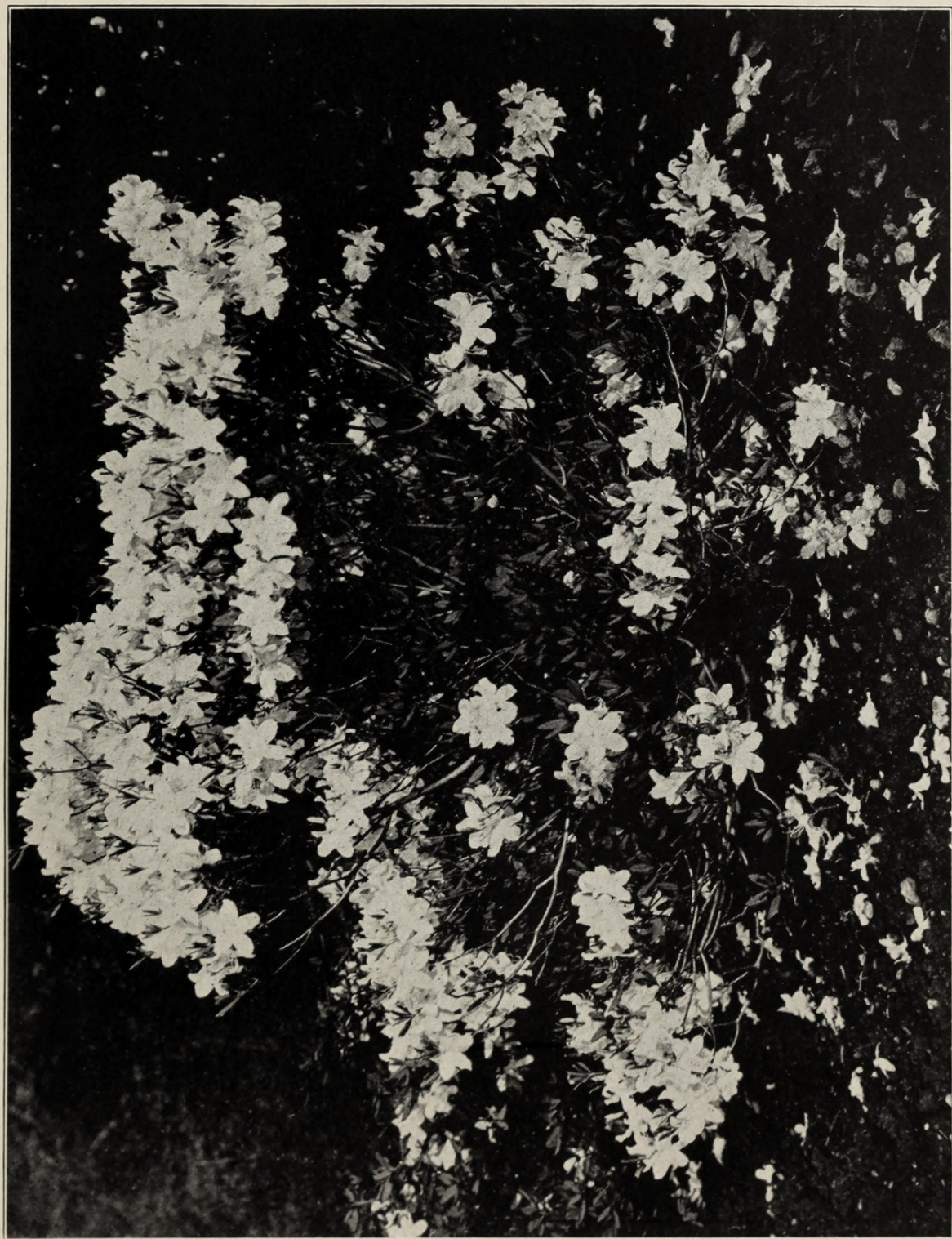


PLATE IV

Pink-flowered *Rhododendron Schlippenbachii*

which makes it very conspicuous.

Rhododendron canadense (*Rhodora canadensis*): The *Rhodora* grows all over New England and southeastern Canada where it covers large areas of many acres. It has small flowers of magenta-rose or lilac to nearly white in color. It likes moist swampy areas where it is perfectly at home. It grows about 1 to 3 feet tall and is perhaps the least ornamental of all North American azaleas although it is admired by many and used considerably in naturalistic plantings.

Rhododendron mucronatum (*Azalea mucronata*, *A. ledifolia alba*, *A. indica alba*): Unfortunately, this lovely white flowering azalea, although perfectly hardy from Long Island southward, is not completely hardy in New England gardens. Still it can be grown in shaded and protected situations. There are excellent plants doing well in gardens on Cape Cod. This lovely plant, so highly valued for its white flowers, has been in this country for almost one hundred years. It is one of the best azaleas for pure white flowers, it roots readily from cuttings, and forms a dense flat-topped mass of foliage that faces to the ground on all sides. Where it can be well grown, it is an excellent plant to use in combination with such bright colored species as *R. obtusum Kaempferi*, for although it blooms slightly earlier, the flowers remain on the plant long enough to make a striking color combination with the later blooming torch azalea.

Rhododendron obtusum: Neither *R. obtusum amoenum* (*Azalea amoena*) nor *R. obtusum "Hinodegiri"* (*A. Hinodegiri*) are completely hardy in Boston. The former is probably hardier than any other evergreen azalea, but its flowers are a very poor magenta color that is extremely hard to use in combination with any other color. On the other hand, *R. obtusum "Hinodegiri"* has decidedly better flowers and foliage, but it is not quite as hardy. The foliage of both of these plants is superior to that of *R. mucronatum*. In some places *R. obtusum amoenum* is used as a clipped hedge, because of its very small leaves and also because it stands clipping very well. *Rhododendron obtusum arnoldianum* (var. *amoenum* × var. *Kaempferi*) is similar to var. *amoenum*, except that it grows taller and is hardier, being hardy in the Arboretum, and the flowers are a deep rosy mauve to red. It originated in the Arboretum as a seedling in 1910, and can be substituted for var. *amoenum* where this is not hardy. *Rhododendron obtusum Kaempferi*, the torch azalea, is the common mountain azalea of Japan. Although it had been known for a very long time, it first appeared in the United States when Professor Sargent brought seeds to the Arnold Arboretum in 1892. Since that time it has grown splendidly and has proved to be the best bright



PLATE V

Rhododendron yedoense poukhanense

Raised in the Arnold Arboretum from seed collected on Poukhan, Korea, in 1905 by J. G. Jack. (*Drawing by Blanche Ames Ames*)

red azalea for northern gardens. The Arnold Arboretum now has hundreds of these plants on its hillsides, and when they are in bloom they make a better display than any other azalea. In places the woods look almost as if they were afire, the color is so vivid. Because the flowers may be injured by the hot sun, it is advisable to plant them in shaded places, and they do well even in complete shade. In the Arboretum some of the plants are considerably over 5 feet tall, and they may eventually attain a height of 10 to 12 feet, with a correspondingly broad spread.

In Massachusetts the plants are partly deciduous, but further south the leaves of *R. obtusum* varieties (except var. *Kaempferi* which is wholly deciduous) are retained throughout the winter. The flowers of var. *Kaempferi* range in color from salmon to a brick red. When the plants are massed together, as is often best in order to afford some protection to the roots, they make a dense mass of foliage and flowers and form one of the best displays of Japanese plants growing in the Arboretum.

Rhododendron yedoense poukhanense (*A. poukhanense*): Originally named by a French botanist from Mt. Poukhan in Korea, where the plant was discovered for the first time by a French missionary, this plant was introduced into this country by Professor J.G. Jack of the Arnold Arboretum in 1905. The flowers are a pale lilac-purple and are usually borne in great profusion. The plant itself rarely grows taller than about 3 feet and is thus well suited for rock gardens and small borders. The branches grow close to the ground making a dense mass. In using it in combination with other flowering plants, its color should always be kept in mind for this proves rather difficult to combine well with red. There is a double-flowered variety available called "Yodogawa," but it is more tender.

Rhododendron Schlippenbachii (*A. Schlippenbachii*): This is another Korean plant much used in that country, introduced by the Arnold Arboretum from seed sent by Professor Jack. The flowers are very large, sometimes as much as 3 inches in diameter, and a pale to rosy pink. Apparently perfectly hardy under New England conditions, this plant may grow to be 15 feet tall. One of its valued characteristics is the fact that in the fall the leaves turn from yellow to orange crimson, thus enabling landscape gardeners to utilize it for autumn as well as spring color.

Rhododendron Vaseyi (*A. Vaseyi*): This is the second of the native American azaleas to bloom in the spring. It is found in a few valleys of the southern Appalachian mountains, chiefly in South Carolina

where it grows to be 15 feet tall. The flowers appear before the leaves and are a good pink color. It is perfectly hardy in Boston and is highly valued for its delicate flowers, which are very conspicuous because they appear before the leaves.

Rhododendron japonicum (*A. japonica*): The large orange-red flowers of the Japanese azalea are particularly outstanding, but unfortunately they have a most disagreeable odor. The plant is valued for its large flowers and its hardiness. Because it is perfectly hardy under New England conditions, it is used considerably in breeding work. During late May, there are a large number of multi-colored azaleas that bloom in great profusion, and many of these are hybrids of this Japanese azalea. Of these hybrids there are two general groups:

1. *Rhododendron gandavense*: The Ghent azaleas are very popular and many interesting forms are available. These result from crosses between the tender, fragrant, yellow-flowered *R. luteum* (*A. pontica*) the American *R. calendulaceum*, and *R. nudiflorum*. The colors in these hybrids are all shades and combinations of those of the parent plants.

2. *Rhododendron Kosterianum*: The "Mollis" hybrids are the result of a cross between *R. molle*, which is tender here in the north, and *R. japonicum*. Mr. T. D. Hatfield's original hybrid named "Miss Louisa Hunnewell" is an outstanding example of this group.

Rhododendron nudiflorum (*A. nudiflorum*): All the azaleas blooming after June first are natives of this country. The common pinxter-bloom is a familiar sight everywhere, for it is native over wide areas of the eastern United States.

Rhododendron roseum (*A. rosea*, *A. nudiflora rosea*): Another New England plant, this is probably the best of the azaleas native to this general region. Its flowers are a deep rosy pink, and most fragrant.

Rhododendron atlanticum (*Azalea atlantica*): This little azalea is native on the Coastal Plain from southern Pennsylvania to South Carolina. It seldom gets over 18 inches tall and can be considered the smallest of all the azaleas here mentioned. Its flowers normally are white (there are pink forms) fragrant and about the size of the flowers of *Rhododendron nudiflorum*. It is considered as hardy as *R. obtusum* *Kaempferi*, does well in the Arboretum and is an excellent little plant to use, particularly in small scale plantings. It does equally well in both sun and shade, and is good for filling in around the bases of taller growing azaleas when this is necessary.

Rhododendron calendulaceum (*A. calendulacea*): The flowers of the flame azalea are usually a brilliant orange red, but lack the fragrance of the two preceding species. It occurs in the mountains from Penn-



Wyman, Donald. 1937. "Two Months of Azalea Bloom." *Bulletin of popular information - Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University* 5(4), 17–24.

<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.250066>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/216898>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.250066>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/250066>

Holding Institution

Harvard University Botany Libraries

Sponsored by

BHL-SIL-FEDLINK

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <https://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.