

To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
 American poet, essayist, and philosopher, 1803–1883

NATIVE AZALEAS

ALL AZALEAS THAT ARE NATIVE TO NORTH AMERICA ARE DECIDUOUS—they lose their leaves in the winter. The evergreen azaleas (discussed in the accompanying article) are typically native to Japan. Native azaleas have many attributes that distinguish them from their evergreen counterparts. In addition to the obvious difference in appearance in the winter when their bare branches grace the landscape, the natives' summer leaves are larger than those on the evergreens. The flower colors of the native azaleas do not cover quite as large a spectrum as those of the evergreens, but the palette does include yellow, a color not seen in the evergreen clan.



Although they like the shade, deciduous azaleas will tolerate full sun. Blooms won't last as long as those grown in shade, however.

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WHICH AZALEA DO I PICK?

EVERGREEN AZALEAS ARE ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR and common sights in our southern landscape—they have become synonymous with our spring fling.

Azaleas offer far more than a colorful spring. Properly selected and placed, they can be a vital component of your garden year-round. But you should familiarize yourself with the plant characteristics and plan your landscape for the best results.

To take advantage of their perennial appeal, consider several elements when selecting your azaleas: size, shape, flower color, winter foliage color, texture, bloom time, compatibility with other plants in your landscape, and cultural requirements.

Size and Shape: Fred C. Galle, former Director of Horticulture at Callaway Gardens, referred to the mature height of an azalea in ten years: low means up to 3 feet (Satsuki varieties); medium means 3–6 feet (Kurume varieties); and large means over 6 feet (Southern Indian, Kaempferi, and Glenn Dale varieties). The ultimate size of your azalea will depend not only upon its natural habit and age but also upon the care you give it and its location.

Azaleas may be upright (erect and taller than broad), spreading (erect and broader than tall), or compact (small, dense, and twiggy). Their shape may change as they mature, and location influences their growth. Furthermore, the blooms themselves vary in size and shape. There are singles, doubles, semidoubles, and hose-in-hose blooms in all sizes.

Blooming Period: In our area, the bloom time for azalea varieties

spreads from March through June, with the new Bloom 'N Again® varieties blooming a second time during the fall months. Most azalea blooms last one to two weeks. By selecting several varieties, you can have uninterrupted color for months.

Colors: Because there are so many azalea colors, there is a standardized color classification scheme used to describe each tone. Whenever possible, Galle used the National Bureau of Standards (N.B.S.) Special Publication 440, Color Universal Language and Dictionary. He also referred to the Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart (R.H.S.) when available.

Flower color will be affected by altitude, temperature, light, soil chemistry, and abnormal growing conditions such as drought. Color intensity in any one azalea may vary

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Spring/Summer

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from year to year depending upon climatic or environmental factors.

Be sure your azalea will grow in the location you have selected. Generally, is it suitable to this hardiness zone (Zone 7)? And, more specifically, does the selected site have proper sun/shade and soil requirements? Furthermore, will the mature size and growth habit of your selection fit the area and design you have in mind? Will your selection outgrow its site?

Azaleas are shade tolerant. But constant, heavy shade or a north side location may be too extreme. More than four hours of sun each day is probably too much. And direct midday or late afternoon sun should be avoided. Tender varieties require some protection and should not be placed on windy corners; "frost pockets" should be avoided. Good air circulation and drainage is necessary for good health.

Evergreen azaleas like acidic soil, with a pH of 4.5 to 6.0. The best soil



for these plants has sufficient amounts of organic matter and is loose and crumbly. Because this type of soil is rarely found around houses or in developed areas, you will probably have to improve your soil. Add organic matter such as leaf mold, pine bark, compost, or well-rotted leaves. (Peat moss should not be used in our clay soil since it retains water and causes

clumping, the very problems we try to cure with amendments.) Mix the amendment with the loosened and chopped clay six inches or more deep and let the mixture settle for a week or more before planting. If you have very little or no topsoil, you will need quite a bit of organic matter. Similarly, you will need to improve the soil if trash, mortar, or free lime was left around your house when it was built.

The factors to consider when selecting your azaleas are no different than those for other plants you plan to add to your landscape. It's just important that you remember that the decision is not simply whether you want an azalea (or holly, or some other shrub). The decision includes which azalea. To answer this question, you will have to look at the special characteristics of each variety you are considering, looking for compatibility with the rest of your landscape and surrounding architectural features, as well as compatibility with your needs and tastes.

Consulting a book that lists varieties and their characteristics may be helpful when selecting your azaleas. An excellent source is *Azaleas* by Fred C. Galle (revised and enlarged edition, 1987, Timber Press). But it is dated and does not include the newer varieties, many of which deserve attention. Plant tags at the nursery are also helpful. Try not to get stuck into the comfort of the azaleas whose names you know. Stretch out and try something new.

Nature Notes

NATURE IS THE GREAT EMPTINESS, the source, out of which our culture and all its flowering comes, and in order not to lose sight of this, not to become orphans lost in the minutiae of our daily lives and, like the rich man's sons starving outside his father's gate, to forget who we are, it is vital that wildness be preserved for its own sake, which is to say, for our sake.

DAN GERBER
"WALKING IN TIERRA DEL FUEGO"
FROM *SACRED TRUSTS*

Be sure to prepare your beds properly when planting this spring. Find out how by visiting our nursery or Web site.

John Thinks

...sometimes

- ☛ **Do not plant azaleas and cherry trees in the same spot.** Yes, they look great together, but they are not compatible otherwise. The azaleas require an acid soil while the cherries require a sweeter soil.
- ☛ **Don't prune your azaleas too much.** Use pruning to remove deadwood, shape the plant, and to develop compact plants. Prune after flowering and before flower buds are formed in midsummer.
- ☛ **You can rejuvenate old azaleas by cutting back the heavy canes that are within the body of the plant.** You can also cut the entire plant to within 6 to 8 inches from the ground. You may need to pinch the new shoots to induce additional branching.
- ☛ **Fertilize your azaleas twice.** Just after the blossoms fade, use a balanced nursery special fertilizer (available for sale at Pinebush). During the summer, to keep your azalea leaves dark green, use a high iron fertilizer or chelated iron. We use Milorganite in the nursery and have some available for sale. DO NOT fertilize azaleas before they bloom. They will have no blooms or bloom time will be substantially decreased.

The Leaflet™

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Patricia G. Dunleavy
Creator, Writer, & Publisher

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John J. Dunleavy, Jr., President
Patricia G. Dunleavy, Vice-President

706-789-2344

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 390 • Ila, GA 30647

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... the setting sun as a traveller glad to rest was leaning his enlarged rim on the earth like a table of fire ...
John Clare, English poet (1793–1864)

Planting Rhododendrons and Other Ericaceous Plants

Native and evergreen azaleas are of the genus *Rhododendron*. So are the plants that we commonly call rhododendrons—the evergreen, large-leaved, crooked limbed, huge shrub/trees with balls of flowers. Like the azaleas, as well as pieris, sourwood, and leucothoe, rhododendrons are of the Ericaceae family and native to the hills and mountains of the Southeast. Some grow in swamps, but most prefer moist, well-drained, acid soils.

The key to successfully growing ericaceous plants starts with duplicating, as much as possible, the growing conditions of the plants in their native environment. For most of these plants, including rhododendrons, azaleas, mountain laurel, and pieris, successful cultivation means having or creating part shade to shaded beds with low pH soil that is high in organic matter and well-drained. These plants need moisture but should not be planted in constantly wet soil.

Dig a hole and fill it back up to the top with 50% soil and 50% bark or other organic material. Place the plant on top of the fill. Add more bark to some of the remaining soil and continue building a raised mound with a flat top around the root ball until the top surface is 100% bark.

Water thoroughly after planting and then periodically as needed. Fertilize in the spring or early summer after blooming has ended.

Visit www.rhododendron.org.

Kid's ^{of all ages} Kolumn

Having the right tool for the job—that's the mark of a professional and the smart amateur alike. There are all types of gardening tools—from shovels, to pruners, to hoses and wheelbarrows. The quality varies immensely and is virtually always reflected in the price. But, like most everything, if you pay for and get good quality the first time, you won't be replacing tools and ultimately spending more money. In fact, most high-end tools have 5- to 10-year or lifetime warranties with full replacement at no cost. Now you do the math.

Kid's Kolumn Kicks

- 1) Small and sharp, I am used to do light pruning of woody stems.
- 2) I am used to cut branches that are too large for my smaller cousin but too small to warrant the use of a saw.
- 3) I behave like scissors and, when sharpened, shear hedges.
- 4) You use me with your foot to dig.
- 5) You use me with your hands to dig.
- 6) You use me to cut your grass. I can be noisy or not.
- 7) You use me to create a sharp edge around your grassed areas.
- 8) I make a terrible, high-pitched whir/weeze noise and whack down those plants you don't find desirable.
- 9) I create holes in your lawn to allow oxygenation.
- 10) My tines help you gather leaves, mulch, or debris for removal.
- 11) My straw bristles help you do the same as my metal cousin in number 10.
- 12) I carry water and make a great totter of weeds, seeds, hand tools, gloves, or bulbs.
- 13) I carry water wherever you drag me.
- 14) I protect the most important tool of all.
- 15) I am the most important tool of all, without which all others probably won't work for you.



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HOURS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

not to scale

Native Azaleas *continued from page 1*

Most pleasingly, native azaleas are more fragrant than the evergreen varieties.

Three general groups of native azaleas, based upon their flower color, are the “white group,” the “pink group,” and the “orange group.” Bloom time and other characteristics distinguish the various plants within these basic groups. Visit www.tjhsst.edu/~dhyatt/azaleas/ for a fun exploration of the various native azaleas and how to identify them. Another site specific to Georgia native azaleas is www.mindspring.com/~earlsommerville/home.htm.

There are sixteen azalea species that are native to the United States, fourteen to the Southeast. They are listed, with bloom times and colors, at The Azalea Society of America’s Web site: www.azaleas.org/index.pl/aznatives.html.

Two series of native azalea cultivars being produced that we find exciting are

Maid in the Shade series: These native azalea cultivars, cultivated by some Georgia plantsmen, represent several different species. Some of the varieties are

‘Camilla’s Blush’—Ball-shaped trusses. Soft pink blossoms. Fragrant. Early bloomer. 8-feet.

‘Lisa’s Gold’—Bright gold flowers. Early bloomer. Fragrant. 10–12 feet.

‘My Mary’—Large, pure yellow flowers. Thick, dark green foliage. Early bloomer. 8-feet.

‘Nacoochee Princess’—Large, slender white flowers with slight tinge of pink with blue undertones. Very fragrant.

Confederate Series: These native azalea cultivars have been cultivated by some Alabama plantsmen. Heat and cold tolerant, the plants are pleasantly fragrant. Some of the varieties are

‘Admiral Semmes’—Large inflorescences (flower grouping) with big, yellow flowers.

‘Col. Mosby’—Large, fragrant flowers in big inflorescences. Start deep pink and fade to lighter pink with yellow blotch.

‘Robert E. Lee’—Red flowers in spring. Fragrant.

‘Stonewall Jackson’—Orange flowers in spring. Fragrant.

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Did You Know?

Folks often use a common name when referring to a plant. Azaleas are sometimes called Wild Honey-suckle, resulting in confusion with the sugary-sweet-smell-of-summer honeysuckle vine.



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Some Favorite Azaleas

Although there are thousands and thousands of azalea varieties, folks tend to select the standards year after year. We would like to encourage you to branch out and try other varieties, especially the native varieties. But following are some favorite evergreen varieties:

‘Hilda Niblett’—Robin Hill evergreen variety. One-foot or less, turtle-shaped habit. Flowers late season; soft pink, marked with deeper rose-pink. 4-inch. Vigorous growth.

‘Midnight Flare’—Evergreen, midseason bloom. 3 feet. Flowers very dark red. 3-inch. Dark red leaves in autumn/winter.

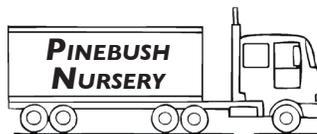
‘George Lindley Tabor’—Southern Indian hybrid. Evergreen. 5–6 feet. Flowers white to pink with purple blotch. 3–4 inches. Midsummer blooming, after Kurumes.

‘Fashion’—Glenn Dale hybrid. Evergreen. 6-feet. Flowers orange-red, hose-in-hose. Midseason bloomer.



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