
Correction of the Official Description of 'Furbelow', A Glenn Dale Azalea

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An examination of records from the U.S.D.A. Plant Introduction Station at Glenn Dale, Maryland, has revealed that the official flower description given for 'Furbelow' in U.S.D.A. Monograph 20, *The Glenn Dale Azaleas*, is in error. The correct description is:

Furbelow (PI 163970)

2-1/2 to 3 inches, Viridine yellow blotch (greenish). Mid- to late May.

We have found that the description given in Monograph 20, "Flowers 2 to 4 in head; 2 inches across, white, heavily sanded, flaked and with a few stripes of Nopal Red, anthers blackish. Cut out any branch showing red flowers..." was meant for 'Pinocchio'.

Among the working documents from the Plant Introduction Station at Glenn Dale, Maryland, are various selection and description lists from the Glenn Dale azalea hybridizing and propagation program [1]. One paper, entitled "National Arboretum, Azalea Selections, Spring 1947," is a list of hybrids selected at that time for further consideration as Glenn Dale azaleas [2]. When the plants were selected, they were assigned a Bell number, which was a working number given to a particular plant for individual identification before naming and introduction. From the cross of ('Vittata Fortunei' x 'Indica Alba') x 'Shinnyo-notsuki', four plants were selected and assigned Bell numbers: 39525 ('Helen Gunning'), 39526 ('Lillie Maude'), 39527 ('Louise Dowdle'), and 39528 ('Furbelow') [3]. The next selections, made from another cross, were assigned Bell numbers in the continuing sequence; they were 39529 ('Pinocchio'), 39530 ('Puck'), 39531 ('Madcap'), and 39532 ('Goblin').

Another paper accompanied the selection list and was entitled, "Description of selections made in 1947 of the material hybridized in 1939." The listing begins with the statement, "The descriptions that follow were taken on May 11, 1948 by Albert Close (color) and B. Y. Morrison (text and color check)." The lists are in Bell-number order with text next to each number, and the part of interest here reads:

39527 - Modified mucronatum. 3" Tyrian Pink, Tyrian Rose blotch. Late.

39528 - Modified mucronatum. 2-1/2 - 3" white, Viridine yellow blotch (greenish). Late. [4]

39529 - Modified mucronatum. 2" heavily sanded, flaked, few stripes of Nopal Red. Anthers blackish. Throw out red selfs.

These descriptive lists may have been used in the process of assigning Plant Introduction (PI) numbers as well as being used in the development of full descriptions for each selection, such as would be needed for publication. Sometime after these lists were typewritten, someone identified each Bell-numbered selection with its assigned PI number (which were also in sequence) by writing the numbers in ink next to the Bell numbers, and that is when a mistake in numbering was made. The PI number for 'Louise Dowdle' was written next to the Bell number and text for 'Louise Dowdle' and again next to the following number and text which was for 'Furbelow'. This gave 'Louise Dowdle' two descriptions, and the 'Furbelow' PI number was assigned to the next Bell number and text on

the list, the one for 'Pinocchio'. [Who knows why this happened; maybe the PI assignor got distracted for a moment?]

We speculate that this particular document was directly used in the production of the manuscript for Monograph 20, and that it is the source of the mistake. We guess that someone started transcribing the descriptions for each PI number and when they got to 'Louise Dowdle's' number they took the first and correct description (working down the page). What happened next is a mystery: they either did not catch the repeat, or skipped it for whatever reason. They continued transcribing, and for the next one, PI 163970 (for 'Furbelow'), they copied the adjacent text which was for 'Pinocchio'. This PI numbering error continued for two more listings to the bottom of the page, but seems to have been caught. The list shows that the incorrect PI sequence was written over and corrected. The document does have pencil markings next to these entries: a question mark next to the 'Furbelow' Bell number and text; and "OK" next to the Bell numbers near it, but there is nothing next to the 'Pinocchio' Bell number and text. It is impossible to know whether these pencil markings were made at the time of the error for purposes of checking and correction, or at a later time for some other reason.

The damage had been done, however: although the PI numbering order was corrected, somehow 'Furbelow' retained the 'Pinocchio' description, and 'Furbelow's' correct description was lost. The error was never discovered, and Monograph 20 was printed with the wrong text.

It is important to state at this point our belief that the mistake with the 'Furbelow' description is a singular transcribing error. Our examination of the descriptions for the other Glenn Dale cultivars numerically near 'Furbelow' as well as others on these listings prove them to be entirely consistent.

In fact, the Bell list text became the flower descriptions used in Monograph 20 with little change. The exception is the text for 'Pinocchio' which is entirely different: "2 to 2-1/2 inches, size somewhat dependent on the number of flowers and moisture, white with stripes of Scarlet-Red. Cut out any branches producing self-red flowers. Early to mid-May." It had to be different, of course, because the original text was with 'Furbelow', and no Bell text existed for 'Pinocchio'. Someone had to write a new description.

It is interesting to note the difference in the two 'Pinocchio' texts. The original Bell-number list text mentioned flakes and sanding, and blackish anthers. The Monograph 20 text has the curious statement that flower size depends on the total number of

flowers and the amount of moisture, but the exact relationship isn't specified. Furthermore, the statement implies that 'Pinocchio' is unique by having its flower's size so affected. As to color, Nopal Red is slightly less orange, darker, and less saturated than Scarlet-Red.

On a personal note, the discovery of this error is timely for us and welcomed because we have been trying to understand what happened to the red in a forty-year old 'Furbelow' plant with an original tag found at the Ten Oaks Nursery. We discovered that others over the years had the same problem with 'Furbelow', but there was no acceptable explanation until now. The observed flowering on the old Ten Oaks 'Furbelow' matches the "lost," correct description exactly.

Comments

[1.] Copies of these working documents are in the possession of William C. Miller III.

[2.] Some of the Glenn Dale hybrid seedlings were grown in test beds at the U.S. National Arboretum.

[3.] In Monograph 20, "mucronatum" was used, but the selection lists and other records tend to be more detailed and specify 'Indica Alba' (see page 5, B. Y. Morrison, The Glenn Dale Azaleas, U.S.D.A. Agricultural Monograph No. 20, 1953, for a further explanation).

[4.] "Late" was defined as having only five or less flowers open at the time of taking the description on May 11. The phrase, "Modified mucronatum", referred to the growth habit of the seedling. □

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As you know, dues are essential to our Society's functioning. The by-laws state that annual dues are due and payable by 1 January of each year. We allow a grace period (members not renewing are dropped as of 1 March), but strongly urge members not to abuse the privilege.

As with chapter operations, our bookkeeping and membership-record maintenance is done by volunteers. Timely renewal and adherence to procedure greatly reduce the considerable burden of dues collection on these individuals.

By mid-November, annual members should receive a dues-payment envelope. The member should enclose a check and mail the pre-printed envelope to the Society's post office box. Use of the envelope supplied is important: the member's address label on that envelope contains the data-base record number for the member. This greatly reduces the time and effort required to post renewals. Also, the member may indicate change of address at this time by correcting the information on the label.

When dues are posted for chapter members, a list is prepared to accompany the check for transmittal to the chapter. Our hope is that, with cooperation of the membership in remitting dues on time, the procedure would have to be repeated only a few times each year. In fact, it had to be done 23 times in 1991. As you can understand, this is a real nuisance.

The first dues notice is sent via low-cost bulk mail; in January a second is sent by first-class mail. Prompt payment not only helps us but also reduces the considerable cost of this extra postage. □