
"My Favorite Azalea(s)"

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"What is your favorite azalea?"—I could ask you that. I would say it's that one right over there on my table. That is 'George Lindley Taber'. They don't get really any better. That's the way I feel about azaleas. It's not picking only one, but it's the one I have right in front of me at the time. So that's the approach I'm taking. I think you would have the same response because many plants are a gift you've gotten from somebody or they're plants you've gotten at a meeting and so that every time you go out and see that plant, it brings back memories. It may even tie you to a friend that may no longer be on this earth. It also means you've had some neat associations. I've had many neat associations in my time and my yard is made up that way. Now I also have a lot of plants in my yard now that are UK's (unknowns), if you know what that means. I know a lot of people don't have that kind of problem, but I've made a point of trying to label everything. I have learned that deer like some labels—do you know that? It's horrible, and I blame it on rabbits when the label is lower down, but when they take a label off six feet high, I know rabbits can't climb that high.

I would like to start out and give you a random kind of approach of some of the azaleas that sort of enlighten me or remind me of friends or other things and we'll just go from there.

The first slide is of an azalea given to me by a friend, Mr. Potter, who is living up in the northern part of New York State. He said he had a cold hardy azalea that he'd got from seed from Japan and later identified as *R. nupides*. It's one of the first plants that flowers in my garden in the spring. Some years it is killed by a late freeze; this year it was in full flower and then of course we had some cool weather which damaged it, but it's very cold hardy to 40 below zero in northern New York. I didn't expect it to even live in Georgia where we never get near that kind of temperature, but it is a beautiful deciduous azalea.

Next is some I had a hand in planting—*R. canescens*. You know we dug them literally by the thousands and then replanted them at Callaway Gardens all over the place. Some are big bushes, 18 feet high in some places and are really quite nice. Some are pure white. We even had a double flowering form that was found in the wild. This also reminds me, some time back I had a lady walk up to me and say "You know, you are the luckiest guy in the world, you have all these azaleas right here and you claim you had something to do with them". I said, "Yes ma'am, we are sure lucky". She just wouldn't accept the fact that they had been moved from the wild.

Let's take a look at *R. austrinum*. Not many of you have had the opportunity to just smell hundreds of these. Their fragrance is breath-taking. Going by a trail you don't even have to see them in flower—the aroma from these natives is breath-taking. This is a controlled cross of *R. canescens* x *austrinum*. It's very pale yellow or soft yellow.

You've got to get some of your friends' plants. This one Mr. MacDonald found and named for his wife 'Millie Mac'. That is a handsome azalea. This one has never flowered for me but I can still see Millie, and I can see MacDonald and remember the story that he found this plant in the wild and named it for his wife.

Next is *R. reticulatum*, a more common flower form of this and I still remember seeing this in Japan. I'd seen it in some gardens, but not to the extent you get a chance to see it in Japan.

Well, now let's start on some of the evergreens. Of course, it was fun but a challenge to work at Callaway; it's not fun to go back and see that some plants that you thought were quite fancy are no longer there. You get all kinds of answers as to why they died. I have seen deer eat an azalea but not completely destroy it, but that's one of the claims. I've also heard that we had too much shade which killed the plants. My garden has shade and you've got gardens with shade that have azaleas, and it's never killed them. 'Pink Pearl' is one of my favorites and I think it's one of the favorites in Japan, and it's neat to know that it's one of the basic parents of many of the old Kurume azaleas that came into this country. 'Debutante' is another one of those neat ones, always making a good display. This is 'Peach Blow' and that is another very good one. I like this because you can work it in with many other colors, including the lavenders, you can put it in with the strong reds or whites; it's a handsome azalea. 'Old Ivory' is another one that I like. This year it had more of the yellowish tones due to the cooler weather. 'Kintaiyo' is one of the old ones from Wada's Nursery in Mobile. 'Kintaiyo' is one of the first two-tones developed in this country instead of coming from Japan. 'Senka' is another one of the old Stevenson hybrids of Kurumes that were brought in, and you begin to wonder why more of his collection was never really distributed. It went to the Glenn Dale Station and just sat there until someone picked it out. A number of these azaleas have been lost, as you all know. I like this one, 'Ruth May'. I remember, going back 15 years or more, that this elegant couple came up and asked about the azaleas, and they said "Do you have 'Ruth May'?" I said that I did and that it was a great plant. "Well, son, I'd like to have you meet Ruth May". I've forgotten the man's name, but he owned a nursery up in Connecticut and he named a beautiful azalea 'Ruth May'. There they were standing right in the garden. Then we had to go and see 'Ruth May' and then visit the other

plants in the garden too. This is a beautiful Kurume hybrid. It's got some *kaempferi* in it but it's really neat and I like it. You have a much better display of flowers on 'Koromo Shikibu' here than we do in Georgia. But I can still remember the lady who walked up after seeing it and said, "Son, you can't tell me that's labelled right, because an azalea doesn't have that kind of petal, they all have a trumpet-like kind". "Ma'am, I'm sorry. We made the label but maybe we mislabelled it." That's what you have to explain to some of these people when they don't want to accept your labels. It's neat to know now that there are other color forms. Nuccio's has gotten seedlings of 'Koromo Shikibu' in lighter shades, and then there's a white form reported in Japan. 'Primitive White' is one of Tom Dodd's seedlings. This is another one of my little favorites. Most of you probably have *R. serpyllifolium* var. *alba* but this is the species of *R. serpyllifolium*, a little soft, very delicate pink. My plants now are probably getting close to four feet in height and I wish they would slow down so they could get even more flowers. They put on such a tremendous amount of growth late in the summer that it hides a lot of flowers. It doesn't in this is a picture I took in Seattle some years ago. It's really beautiful in a bonsai if you really want to try something challenging. I have a friend in Atlanta who has a bonsai of the plant that stands about eight inches high. He uses a magnifier on top of his glasses and gets in there to trim it inside as well as outside. 'Duchess of Cypress' is one of the very few Southern Indians developed in the South. As you know, most of the Southern Indians (originally from Belgium) came down from New York and then into Philadelphia and then finally down into the South. This one was a seedling sport growing in Cypress Gardens. And of course there is the old Southern Indian, 'William Bull'. It is very seldom seen in Atlanta. It's a prize when you can say you have this; it's just a beautiful old variety that should be used more.

I got to know Bob Pryor when he was working at Beltsville developing the Beltsville series. Fortunately he saved many of the dwarfs, now the Beltsville Dwarfs. This is 'White Nymph', and 'Pink Elf' is next—neat little plants. We have some now that are five to six feet high after 40 years, and people say, "Son, you've got those labelled wrong". Well, you know after 40 years it should get a little beyond two or three feet even if we say they are "dwarf". It just means they continue to grow for a long time.

This of course is a good old standard in anybody's garden and good in the South—'Delaware Valley White'. I always enjoy it because it's a good handsome plant, full of flowers, and makes a good show.

When I see this, I think of our friend Augie Kehr. Of course this is 'Anna Kehr'. He named this for his mother. It's a beautiful plant; he has also hybridized 'Great Expectations' and others. Augie is always in my garden when I see this plant in my garden. I hope that you have that same kind of reaction to a lot of plants in yours.

'Silver Sword' is one of the things I like. I was called by Wight Nursery some years back to see a special azalea that one of the growers had found. It was the grower that called me. When I got there we went out and he said "It's right on the edge of the path in that bed". We got there and the paths were all cleaned up, and that plant had gotten picked up and thrown out. It was variegated, which would have been a better color form than 'Silver Sword'. It was a variegated azalea right in their nursery, and before we ever got there that day it got dumped. We tried to find it in the trash, but it never did show up. They had been paying a royalty for growing 'Silver Sword' and they had their own that was destroyed. I like this in the fall and winter months. I enjoy the pink edge of the green leaf and the way it shows up in winter months. A lot of other variegated azaleas don't do this.

Well, going into the Glenn Dales; I'm not going to name all the ones that I think are my favorites, but I like the ones that sort of get happy and do their own thing like 'Cinderella'. It's one of those interesting plants. It's not often that you get three or four different colors form on one plant but it does happen, and it's neat to see. One that is just gorgeous is one of the best named plants I think of all the Glenn Dales and that is 'Gorgeous'. Every time I see it, I think there's just no other way to describe it; it just fits the name better than any of the others I know. Of course, this being 'Ben Morrison' (not named by Ben), it is nice to remember him and the problems that he had developing these plants. He was just a delightful man to me, and I enjoyed every minute I ever spent with him. It's again a reminder of a friendship we had that goes back many years. Also one of the seedlings of the Glenn Dales. Here's one of the Greenwood hybrids, 'Genie Magic', that came out of the Portland area. I had almost a whole set of them. I like this and 'Marianne' and many of the other dwarf-like plants that Bill Guttormsen selected.

'Sweetheart Supreme' is another one of those neat names and it could be your wife or sweetheart from a way back or whatever, but it is a well-named plant and a beautiful azalea. This is *R. yed.* var. *poukhanense* in the Botanic Garden in Nashville, Tennessee. Beautiful dogwoods are right behind it and it worked out very fine. Here's one of the very soft green variegated dogwoods which brought out the color combination. *R. macro.* 'Linearifolium', if you want to call it 'Seigai' but as you know now they are all one and the same. Again, you get a better show of flowers here and I can still see the plant in my own yard, and say well, maybe it will need to do better, or we'll take it down because it flowers and responds much better up in your cooler area than it does South, but it's still good to see it up here and my own garden too.

We're going to change now and see more deciduous azaleas. This is *R. alabamense*, a good fragrant azalea, more so than even *R. canescens* and *R. austrinum*, a lemony spice fragrance. The pure white form is typical. This one is a good light pink form. The lighter pink shades have some *canescens* in them. We don't need to go back and figure what has happened to them. Just accept the fact that they integrate and cross-pollinate, and we get these neat forms and they are all very nice. This is one I have by my door, going into my home. It's a cross of 'White Cap' x *R. alabamense*, has a beautiful fragrance, not quite the size of 'White Cap'; but 'White Cap' has already passed on many years ago, and this one stood about ten feet high until I brought it down just after it finished flowering this past week. The fragrance just walking into the home, is something to get excited about. Not many azaleas are that fragrant.

And then of course there are the *R. kiusianums*, I love those little plants. Not all of them are fully evergreen as you probably realize in your garden and in other gardens. This is the old fashioned 'Benichidori'. This is one of the neat ones that have yet to come in flower, it's later than many of the *kiusianums*, but it's good. I like this one, 'Komo Kulsham' with that white throat. Again, many of the newer *kiusianums* hybrids are not fully evergreen but a lot of them are much more cold hardy than we first thought. This little double hose-in-hose is 'Kokonoe'. I was real happy some years ago to meet with Julius Nuccio. I was going to surprise him and give him a plant, but he had already been over to Japan that same spring and brought one back too. You can't keep ahead of some of these guys, you know how it is. I've given up on ever trying to do that because they will say to me, "I've got this good one". "Oh," I say, "that's great, isn't it great!" And then someone will say "I've got 475 azaleas in my yard. How many do you have?" I don't worry about keeping count or keeping up with my neighbors, I just like their looks and grow the ones I

enjoy. Unfortunately, I don't even have 'Kokonoe' now. I made so many cuttings I lost the whole plant. This is a nice azalea too, 'Mayo's Magic Lily'. It's from the old Mayo's Nursery in Augusta, Georgia. It's now a big sub-division. This is one of their old azaleas 'Mayo's Magic Lily' and you can see it has more of a shape like a Rhododendron than many of our evergreen azaleas.

I have several 'Mount Seven Star' covered with flowers along my path coming up to the house. It's fun if you know Polly Hill and of her growing plants from seed; it just brings memories back of Polly. It is one of the dwarf azaleas that would be good as a bonsai or a pot plant. 'Janet Rhea' is one of my favorites and a favorite of Al Reid. This is 'Easter Parade' and there's nothing better. 'Easter Bonnet' is very similar, it's just a beautiful plant to have. You can just see some little girl in a pretty little soft hat she has for Easter. A beautiful plant and thank God it's hardy in most of our areas. 'Gay Par-ee' is one of those neat azaleas that came from California. It's borderline hardy; if we get a mild winter, it's always neat to know I'm going to have some flowers like that in my own garden, and it's also fun to know it came from California. I still remember my younger days when I was in the service, visiting Paris after the war seeing the can-can girls, and I was happy to be alive so it was a 'Gay Par-ee' time. This is another from the West Coast, 'Starlight'. I have trouble growing this but I can still remember the young couple in California that had this big plant, right by their steps going into the house. It was in a huge tub and a spectacular plant. God couldn't have made a better plant than that, neat flower, very soft pink color, it's just handsome.

This is 'Elise Norfleet', one of the Back Acres. There are many Back Acres that are my favorites but Elise was not flowering well this year so I have to look at some of the others. Another seedling hybrid similar to the Back Acres—'Maggie Powell',

that came from Alabama. The azalea grower down in that area had the seedlings and he got the sport of the other one and it's 'Elise Norfleet'. They look identical but they flower in different seasons. 'Debonaire' has been one of my favorites, just a neat soft pink plant. Fortunately, this year the deer ignored it, I can't understand why, but I'm very happy that they didn't do an early pruning and let me do the pruning a little later. This is 'Red Slipper' and of course is one of the many Back Acres I have and love. It is a reminder of past friendships and memories of B. Y. Morrison.

This is 'Watchet'. I like all of the Robin Hills, but this is my favorite of the whole group. This is 'Fascination' and of course if you ever met James Harris you wonder how he ever had the appreciation working with machinery and motors all his life to get into the nursery business and then to grow some of the most beautiful azaleas. This 'Pink Cascade' is grown all over the world. We just have to keep reminding ourselves that Jim had his hands in a lot of things.

Coming out of Indiana this is 'Mrs. Henry Schroeder'. If you knew Doc Schroeder you know the fine gentleman he was and how his life was cut short by a tractor accident. At the time he was working on his azaleas and they were named later. He had this one he had planned on naming after his wife, and finally after he died it was his son who named it, 'Mrs. Henry Schroeder'. There are many others that they have hybridized for cold hardiness. They go along with the Girards and the Kaempferis. There is a good number of them; again, maybe they introduced too many but 30 of theirs make it quite well. This is one I have in my own garden. This is 'Carrie Amanda', another one of their hybrids.

Dropping back to some of the deciduous azaleas again, going to *R. flammeum* or as it used to be called the Oconee azalea or *R. speciosum*, and with us it is one of the most exciting natives because it integrates

with a great many other species. You find this in the wild, but you have all these various color forms. It's not fragrant until it gets mixed up with *canescens* or *alabamense*. But we'll show you some of the variations, like this or the next. This is an *R. speciosum* hybrid but some people would argue and say that it looks more like *R. canescens*, but again if you know the flowerbud conditions on it and the winter pubescent flowerbuds, it definitely has to be a hybrid. There it is close up. It flowers after *R. canescens* and when *R. flammeum* is just coming in now. This one being a hybrid is fragrant where *speciosum* is not fragrant. The next one I have given the temporary name of 'Stop Light'. This was found in the wild in a group of *speciosum*. We just sometimes brag about what we have done and fail to give thanks to the MAN that brought in all of this. This is just a natural hybrid that turned out important. I didn't even collect this. When I got it I hadn't even seen the flowers. The gentleman who collected it was a representative of the Red Cross and he travelled and collected over the entire South. This definitely is an *R. speciosum* hybrid and is a striking color combination.

Going back to some of the evergreens—"Rosebud". I was fortunate to meet Joe Gable; this is his 'Rosebud' and not a Rosebud named by others. I can still remember sitting with him in his living room and some of us were asking questions. Someone said (and this is the kind of answer you get from Joe Gable) "What do you think of the Glenn Dale azaleas?" And ole Joe, didn't have his red hat on which he'd normally had in the yard, but he said "Well, they wasted a lot of good names". We've got to remember that because we often want to name every one of our own little seedlings, and we could waste a good name by doing it. So stop and really look at it pretty hard before you name a seedling. Joe wore that red hat because he was nearly blind, and he would get out wandering around and couldn't

even see his house, but when they would call for him, he'd take his hat off and wave it up in the air so that they would know what direction to go to bring him back.

This is another one of those from the West Coast, but when you see it, it just tickles you to death. That's well named, because the name of it is 'Tickled Pink', and it's a neat little color combination and almost fully double. 'Keisetsu' is really nice, I like the blotchy kind of leaves much better than some of the other variegated forms. And of course it is nice with the picotee color combination, it's just excellent. It's early when compared to the other Satsukis, but it would be beautiful even if it weren't early. This is one that came from England, 'Vida Brown'—we had it at the gardens, and they were going to throw it out because it was too slow, so I took it home, and that plant is now 15 years of age. It's roughly about two feet across and about 12 inches high. It just stays small and compact. It's an unknown hybrid, but I'm sure because of its flower sequence and foliage, it belongs in the Satsukis. This is 'Gorin Nishiki' and this is one that's extremely variable. Again, it's one that causes a lot of conversation with less knowledgeable azalea people. We know that this can happen with these things in the azalea world, and it is fun to have. 'Yachiyo Red' is one of those that came into the West Coast without a label or the label was lost, and then they labelled it. I think it should have been 'Yachiyo Pink' instead of red. I had fun introducing this to some of the nurserymen all the way up into Long Island, and they called back and they say "Hey, you really ought to come up and see 'Yachiyo Red', it's better this year than it was last year". It's just their way of sharing the fact that they enjoy the plants they have, and they are proud of it too. It's a neat little compact plant of the Satsukis azaleas and it does quite well.

This is an interesting plant called 'Balsaminaeflorum'. Some years ago

(about six or seven), I was asked to suggest some azaleas for a replacement garden that was behind the Art Museum in Philadelphia. I was up looking at some of their plants and this plant fortunately had a few flowers on it; you can always recognize 'Balsaminaeflorum' just by the blooms alone, but it "snowed" me because it was standing up about six feet high and the trunks were close to 2-1/2 inches or larger. After looking at it, I said, "We've got to save this plant, I will prune it and we'll have to build around it". But, then I turned my back to start, and they said "This man's crazy about it, and he then cuts it down about half its size". But it's come back in good form with its beautiful looking double flowers. And another double—"Gyokurei". This is one of the few doubles of the Satsukis. I have found that the rabbits, along with the deer just love them. Enjoy 'Gyokurei' in California rather than in the East. Of course, 'Macrantha'. There's nothing better than the foliage on 'Macrantha', I love it even when it's not in flower because you can remember the flowers and see the good linear foliage, always a good green; it's just a beautiful plant. 'Flame Creeper'—this is just right at my home again, it's always nice to have that. Should be in flower hopefully when I get home. Once again this was given to me when it was first introduced by George Beasley or James Harris, I'm not sure which, I'll give them both credit.

My azaleas remind me of my many friends — thank you.

Fred C. Galle was Director of Horticulture at Callaway Gardens during 1953-1973 and Curator until his retirement in 1983. He has served as a Governor of the Azalea Society of America and in a similar capacity in numerous horticultural societies and organizations including the Advisory Council of the U.S. National Arboretum. Author of numerous publications, his current book "Azaleas" is the most authoritative reference on the subject. □