
Designing with Azaleas

Contrasting and Blending

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Exciting landscape design elicits positive human emotions. Azalea flower color and diverse varietal form provide rich resources which combined with strong landscape design can be breathtaking. This article will explore concepts of design and qualities of azaleas that lend themselves to exciting landscape design.

Landscape design necessarily begins with a plan. Like pieces of a puzzle, the individual pieces affect each other in such a way that an overall goal is necessary to create order and beauty. Pleasing design brings order and clarity to human senses. Strong landscape design minimizes confusion to the human mind. Landscape design is concerned with directing the eye, directing human traffic, human use of spaces, and an anticipation of human needs and preferences both present and future. Exciting landscape design planning satisfies the physical and emotional needs of human beings.

Landscape design can be compared to the architecture of a house. The roof of the "house" is the canopy trees, providing shade from the sun and a sense of secure cover. The walls of the "house" are the trunks of the trees, shrubs, fences, and vines, providing division of space. The floors of the "house" are the ground covers such as lawn grasses and paving materials, which provide surfaces upon which to walk, drive and play. Azaleas most commonly serve as walls for the "house"; dividing space, directing traffic, and providing adornment.

Form is an important concept in constructing the landscape walls. Many of the Kaempferi azaleas are vertical in form, Kurume azaleas are generally spherical in form, and the North Tisbury azaleas are known for their low ground-cover forms. Strong landscape design utilizes a variety of well defined forms to appeal to the human need for diversity. Similarity and linearity in design can become very boring. Just as a multi-layered wedding cake is more interesting in form than a single-layered pan cake, azalea walls become more interesting with multiple layers rather than the flatness that similarity introduces. Strong design brings order to form which can be more appealing than the amorphous, ill-defined form characteristic of chance. Azalea planting design can be initiated with sketches reflecting pure form followed by the selection of appropriate azalea varieties. There should be a purpose for the placement of each plant. An undesirable view may be screened by a large evergreen azalea, or a pathway defined by a narrow, upright evergreen azalea. A seating area might benefit from a deciduous azalea which provides shade from the sun in the summer but allows light to enter in the winter. Many times a desirable view is enhanced using low growing azaleas in the foreground with viewing space above them. Try sketching purely with form to redesign an existing azalea bed or prior to the construction of a new azalea bed. Azalea plantings are enhanced with a variety of form.

Scale is another concept which must be considered in design. A North Tisbury hybrid might be in scale and appropriately planted under a low window where a clear view is desired, while a Southern Indian hybrid would be out of scale and inappropriately planted in the same location, because it blocks the view with its size. A Beltsville Dwarf hybrid might be inappropriately planted in a

large space, much like furnishing your living room with doll furniture, whereas a Southern Indian hybrid would be in scale, filling the same space provided. Scale concerns balance. If the design demands a plant that is fifty feet tall and fifty feet wide, a canopy tree is selected rather than an azalea.

Azaleas direct traffic and define spaces as the walls of the landscape, but their major impact is probably on the human psyche. Table 1 lists some qualities that evoke human emotion. Active qualities that evoke human emotion are listed on the left opposite the contrasting passive qualities. For example, jagged qualities generally evoke human fear or caution, whereas smooth qualities are generally perceived by humans to be soothing and tranquil. Table 2, which is divided into advancing and recessive columns, lists some qualities that affect human perception. Advancing qualities appear to be closer to the viewer than recessive qualities when viewed from the same distance. The concept of color intensity is shown in Table 3. As white is added to high intensity colors, the perception is that the colored object becomes more distant as it becomes more washed out. As more and more white is added, the white begins to advance. The color wheel is introduced in Table 4. High color contrasts are opposite positions on the color wheel; for example, red and green. Low color contrasts are adjacent colors on the color wheel. Shades are color mixed with black. Tints are color mixed with white. Many azalea flower colors are tints. Let's explore Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 for applications in designing with azaleas which will evoke positive human responses.

Table 1
Qualities That Evoke Human Emotion

Active	Passive
Jagged	Smooth
Instability	Stability
Vertical	Horizontal

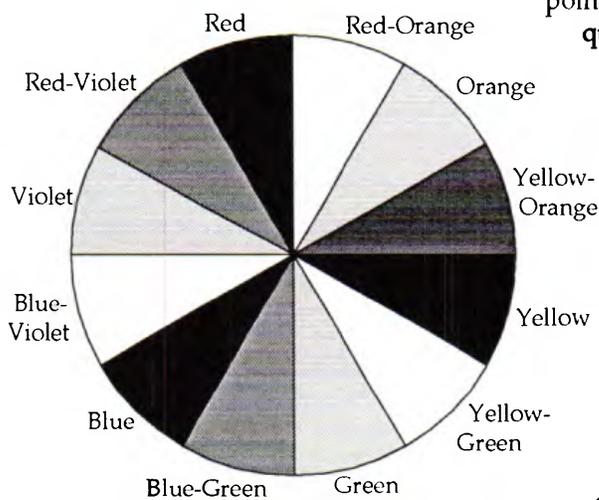
Table 2
Qualities That Affect Human Perception

Advancing	Recessive
Coarse texture	Fine texture
High color intensity	Low color intensity
Shiny	Flat/dull
High contrast	Low contrast

Table 3
Color Intensity



Table 4
Color Wheel



Designing with azaleas for high emotional impact is much like building a house or painting a picture. To establish order and clarity of purpose it is wise to establish a vision of the final product either on paper or in the designer's mind. The clarity of the azalea planting plan will be reflected in the planted design's impact. Azalea plantings to be viewed only from a few specific vantage points are somewhat easier to design with enhanced impact than plantings which have

greater human interaction. Focal points are generally used to capture and direct the human eye. The focal point will generally be an advancing quality that affects human perception or an active quality that evokes human emotion.

The focal point is typically placed in the center of the view or slightly off center to the viewer. A secondary focal point which is less eye catching is generally placed to the right of the primary focal point. In most cultures of the United States, left to right is the generally accepted path of expected eye movement. The focal points are framed in recessive or passive qualities. Balance color, form and texture in the planting! Color is dominant over texture.

Design to the speed and distance of the viewer. The higher the speed and the more distant the viewer, the more uniform and simple the planting should be such as a front yard facing a public street. The slower the speed and the closer the viewer, the more complex and diverse the planting should be such as a private garden used for relaxation. The color of azaleas in full flower can be very dramatic, but by contrasting the color at the focal points, then blending color by us-

ing adjacent color on the color wheel and recessive color, azalea plantings can truly become breathtaking.

Azalea design can become a challenge when only azaleas are used to create the planting. Decisions must be made as to a single show of color versus an extended bloom. An extended bloom will reduce the impact of color (which may be a blessing). Flowering azaleas must be used with restraint so that they do not dominate to the point of overpowering a tastefully color coordinated planting. Leaf color in the fall and winter, particularly the enhanced leaf color of azaleas planted in full sun, becomes a design element that is very appealing. Red and pink flowered azalea varieties generally have bronze or wine colored fall and winter foliage. White flowered azalea varieties generally have green fall and winter foliage. A successful methodology for designing azalea plantings after form is established is to plan attractive patterns in winter leaf color and texture, then fine tune for flower color and bloom period. Many varieties consistently flower in the spring and the fall. The spectacular color display of the early blooming Kurumes is very different from the color display of many of the later blooming Satsukis. Many very cold-hardy azaleas will lose most of their leaves in the winter whereas other more southern azaleas will retain most of their leaves. The similarity of azalea leaf texture is the single characteristic that holds an azalea planting together regardless of the season, texture is the thread in the cloth that ties the planting together.

In design there are no rules. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I have quantified some of the design elements that I have found to be personally appealing. I hope that this article provides a resource for thought and possibly some explanation for what you have felt but may not have been able to express. Enjoy your azaleas!
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