

# 'Oh My' Is Very Pretty, But 'My-O' Is 'Irresistible'

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Here we have two similar names and two interesting stories of two very different plants. Their stories demonstrate the importance of cultivar registration, which seeks, among other things, to avoid the confusion of having the same cultivar name (or a confusingly similar one) used more than once.

## Harding's 'Oh My'

On official travel to Japan for the US Department of Agriculture in 1929, R. Kent Beattie, a Senior Pathologist in the Bureau of Plant Industry, collected cutting material of azalea cultivars. Beattie is generally known for the Kurume hybrids that comprised the majority of the plants in the group, since the deciduous cuttings did not survive. Not well known, however, is the fact that there were five Satsuki (see Table 1) among the plants that Beattie collected. One of those Satsuki hybrids, which was later named 'Oh My' by George Harding, is the initial focus of this article.

The author was first introduced to 'Oh My' when visiting George Harding at his home in Germantown, Maryland. According



Fig. 1 'Oh My' showing the occasional self-colored flower.

to George, he named it 'Oh My' because every time a woman saw it, that was what she said. (See Figure 1.) It is not clear when George named it, but the lack of a name was awkward and presented a problem. I have a copy of an August 18, 1970 letter written to George by Dr. Robert G. Angle of Bethesda, Maryland in which Dr. Angle wrote:

*"Dear George,*

*A copy of my reply from [the] Dept. of Agriculture is enclosed. I think I'll write to Japan and see if I can get a name. Do you know any Japanese who can help us put a name on this beauty?*

*Yr. Obed. Serv.*

*RGA"*

A search of the records at Glenn Dale confirms that PI 77087 *Rhododendron indicum* No. 544 "Satsuki," as it was known, was collected at the Agricultural College, Imperial University Komaba, Tokyo, Japan, on February 1, 1928. It was received and propagated at the Glenn Dale Plant Introduction Station, but there is no indication that it was ever planted in the Glenn Dale woods. I could not locate any records indicating to whom the propagations were distributed, although I am sure that it must have been



Fig. 2 Typical 'Oh My' flower with lush green foliage.

sent to the typical list of cooperators as an *R. indicum* "Satsuki" for an evaluation (feedback), because that was what the Glenn Dale Station people did. I sent an e-mail to Kevin Tunison at the US National Arboretum and asked him to check the records to see if he had any information in the Arboretum's files regarding this azalea. He replied that he "had no record of P.I. 77087 *R. indicum* being alive at the Arboretum," so it isn't at the US National Arboretum.

It is fitting to conclude this portion of the article with Harding's description of 'Oh My':

'Oh My': Satsuki - P.I. 77087 - Unnamed introduction - Thulite Pink with white edges and darker blotch. Occasional sport of rose with blotch. One of the latest to bloom and very slow growing. Excellent evergreen. - 2 ½". (See Figure 2).

Photographs of 'Oh My' can be seen at my website at: [www.theazaleaworks.com](http://www.theazaleaworks.com).

## Pryor's 'My-O'

The second part of this article involves 'My-O', which was introduced in 1966 by the Crops Research Division of the US Department of Agriculture in Beltsville, Maryland. This federal azalea breeding program is not to be confused with Ben Morrison's Glenn Dale work. The Beltsville Hybrids (Yerkes-Pryor Hybrids) and later the Beltsville Dwarfs were both the result of work initiated by Guy Yerkes. The work was subsequently completed by Robert L. Pryor, after Yerkes' retirement in 1946 and death in 1949. The goals were to produce hardy evergreen azaleas and azaleas that could be forced for the florist trade. *R. kaempferi*, 'Snow', 'Firefly', 'Indica Alba', 'Maxwell', 'Salmon Beauty', 'Pink Banner', and 'Whitecap' were used as parents. In the 1950s, from 300 candidates out of about 50,000 seedlings, a total of 47 of the so-called Beltsville Hybrids were introduced. Around 1947, Pryor modified his selection process. It had been his policy to discard "small" seedlings, but it occurred to him that the very small seedlings might be useful. That change ultimately gave way to a race of "genetic dwarfs" with normal size flowers, large and vigorous root systems, and low spreading growth habits. Nineteen Beltsville Dwarfs were introduced in 1959 and 1960, and 'My-O' was introduced in 1966.

The official USDA release notice issued on September 27, 1966 by H. Rex Thomas, Director of the Crops Research Division, described 'My-O' as "dwarf and compact in habit, about 1.5 times as wide as high. The leaves are persistent and grayish-green with white margins. Flowers are hose-in-hose, very numerous with 2 to 5 per cluster. The flower color is Spinel Red XXVI 71V RR of the Ridgeway [sic] Color Chart. The flowers are 1.5" in diameter with

from 5 to 7 anthers." In a 1967 article published by Pryor in *HortScience*, he reported that the stamens are about one-quarter-inch shorter than the petals, the anthers are darker than the filaments, and the style is about as long as the filaments.

'My-O' was field tested in Beltsville for three years, was reportedly bud-hardy to Zone 7 and higher, and was found to be suitable for forcing. The conclusion was that it would be well suited for anywhere that dwarf azaleas would be appropriate. It was distributed to cooperators for additional cooperative trials and for multiplication and dissemination to the trade. Among the recipients of record were Tom Dodd Nurseries (Semmes, Alabama), Kingsville Nurseries (Kingsville, Maryland), Ten Oaks Nursery and Gardens (Clarksville, Maryland), August Vorndran Nursery (Webster, New York), Butler Nurseries (Fayetteville, North Carolina), Frierson's Flowers (Denmark, South Carolina), Dr. J. Harold Clark (Long Beach, Washington), Dr. E. A. Hollowell (Port Republic, Maryland), Columbia Nursery (Alexandria, Virginia), and Holland Gardens (Beltsville, Maryland).

There is something special about the foliage. Described as originating as a "sectorial chimera" in a seedling from the cross 'Hino Crimson' x 'Salmon Elf', it is variegated. Rather than the typical white mottling or flecking, it is a white band on the leaf margin (e.g., 'Silver Sword', the sport of 'Girard Rose'). In its day, this form of leaf variegation was quite novel.

Edwin K. Parker (Jay Murray's predecessor), self-described as the "intermediary for U.S. registrations of rhododendrons (including azaleas) internationally", had noted the reference to 'My-O' in an article that Pryor had published in the *Journal*,

*American Rhododendron Society*. In a letter dated February 2, 1977, he encouraged Pryor to register 'My-O'. Pryor, in his February 8, 1977 reply, indicated that 'My-O' "was supposed to have been registered in both the American and International Registrar [sic] by Dr. Harold Clark of Washington State." He went on to say, "It is possible that it was registered under the name 'Irresistible'. I had this name cleared by Dr. Clark, but found after clearing that it was being used by Mr. Lewis." In a February 11, 1977 reply, Parker reported, "I find 'Irresistible' (U.S.D.A. #60-7) registered. Has the plant been distributed widely under the name, 'My-O'? If so, perhaps I should look into a name change with 'Irresistible' as a synonym. I'm not sure the International Registrar would go for this, but we could ask." To my knowledge, a change was not pursued. To be sure, reversals and changes in registrations do not contribute to keeping matters straight.

Pryor's 'My-O' (more properly 'Irresistible') and Harding's 'Oh My' are two attractive evergreen cultivars with similar names and radically diverse but interesting histories. From what I have been able to determine, 'My-O' may well be 'Irresistible', but 'Oh My' is available.

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Plant Introduction No.	Name	Beattie No.	Bell No.	Description from Gunning/Morrison
77087	Satsuki	544	B10202	Stamens 5, stigma pink, petals rounded. Very symmetrical flower, large. Blotching conspicuous Thulite Pink. 1/29/29 A perfectly typical form of <i>R. indicum</i> ( <i>A. macrantha</i> ). Useful pollen parent.
77104	Satsuki	561	B10219	Stamens 5, stigma pink, anthers large. Spots conspicuous, large, many. Excellent foliage. Spinel Pink (Ridgway). Very good. 9/18/29 A very good form of <i>R. indicum</i> ( <i>A. macrantha</i> ).
77105	Satsuki	562	B10220	Stamens 5-6. Stigma pink. Moderate-sized flowers. Lobes equal or nearly so. Very good shape, no blotching. Slightly darker than Rose color, but not as dark as Rose Red (Ridgway). This form is very similar to 77099 ('Kurai-no-himo'). <i>R. indicum</i> clone.
77145	Indica, Mac. Satsuki*	605	B10260	(Not described)
77146	No Name	607	B10261	Stamens 5, stigma pink, star shape, large flower. Good. Deep Rose Pink (Ridgway). 2/2/29. Blotched, but not conspicuously. Drawing shows a rounded flower that suggests a clone of <i>R. indicum</i> .

**TABLE 1:** In 1948, Ben Morrison recorded notes of field observations of Beattie's plants taken at the Glenn Dale station by himself and Harry A. Gunning, the Glenn Dale Superintendent. Morrison noted "The complete collection was not maintained at Glenn Dale, Maryland, which is now (1948) very much regretted from the historical, not horticultural, point of view." The only person known to have received the complete collection of Beattie's plants, according to Morrison, was H. E. Allanson, who was Assistant Chief in the Bureau of Plant Industry. The records of Beattie's collections appear in the USDA Inventories Nos. 93 (October-December, 1927), 95 (April-June, 1928), and 98 (January-March, 1929). The Beattie azalea introductions were propagated and distributed to commercial nurseries in 1933, 1934, and 1935.

\*Note: Plant Inventory 95 entry for PI77145 is "*Rhododendron* sp. No. 605 Satsuki."

Cultivar Name/Number	Formula	Description
'My-O' / (#60-7)	'Hino Crimson' x 'Salmon Elf'	Dwarf and compact in habit. Leaves are persistent and grayish green with white margins. Flowers are hose-in-hose, 2 to 5 per head, 1.5 inches in diameter, Spinel Red (RHS 66/86/95 58A/60C/58A) with 5-7 anthers.
'Hino Crimson'	'Amoenum' x 'Hinodegiri'	1 1/4 inch, Vivid Red (RHS 52A); Strong Red (Galle)
'Salmon Elf' / (#528)	#140 x #72	Very dwarf, about as wide as high. Flowers are hose-in-hose, 2 to 3 per head, 1 1/4 inch, deep yellowish pink with a dark blotch.
#140	<i>R. kaempferi</i> (Plant A) x 'Snow'	Not available
#72	'Maxwell' x 'Snow'	Not available

**Table 2:** In the literature, Pryor reports the parentage of 'Salmon Elf', the pollen parent of 'My-O', as being (*R. kaempferi* x 'Snow') x ('Firefly' x 'Snow'). Pryor's working papers, however, indicate that 'Maxwell' rather than 'Firefly' is the correct seed parent of the pollen parent for 'Salmon Elf'.