

Azalea Gardens

Ames-Haskell Collection at the National Gallery of Art

A very special collection of azaleas now resides at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., due to a generous donation by Mr. Allen C. Haskell of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Many of the plants from the Ames-Haskell Collection are from the original Kurume azalea collection brought into the United States by John S. Ames of North Easton, Massachusetts. Mr. Ames obtained a small group of Kurumes from the Yokohama Nursery Company in 1916, with the assistance of the famous plant explorer Ernest ("Chinese") Wilson. In 1917, the Ames Collection was increased when Wilson obtained additional Kurumes from Oishi Gardens in Hatageya. In all, Wilson collected 50 Kurumes, sending them to the Arnold Arboretum near Boston for evaluation, where they were judged to be a valuable introduction into American gardens.

Originally, the Ames Collection plants were grown as greenhouse specimens, and they were only gradually introduced to Boston's climate. The plants proved relatively hardy, and many are now grown in the Boston area. The Kurumes have become popular in American gardens, especially in the Mid-Atlantic States, whose climate is similar to their native Japanese environment.

After Mr. Ames died, the collection came into the hands of noted Massachusetts horticulturist and nurseryman Allen C. Haskell of New Bedford. Haskell added substantially more plants of his own collection to make the whole collection an outstanding display of azaleas. The Ames-Haskell Collection was first displayed in 1976 at the New England Flower Show in Boston. Since that time, the collection has won more than 30 awards, including the Arnold Arboretum Award, the Garden Club of America Award, the Chicago Horticultural Society Award, the New England Flower Show Director's Award, and nine gold medals.

Regarding the displays of the collection, Geneva Higginson, Assistant to the Director for Special Events at the Gallery, noted "For many years, Allen Haskell, an artist whose medium is plants, worked closely with me, planning and growing the appropriate plant material to accompany exhibitions. In 1991, he asked if the Gallery might be interested in having the azalea collection, and thus it came here on the occasion of the Gallery's 50th anniversary. Since then, it has become a tradition to display them each spring around the great rotunda fountain in the West Building, where they are seen by thousands of visitors from all around the world."

The Gallery's Chief Horticulturist Don Hand says, "The National Gallery of Art is, indeed, fortunate to have this amazing collection of azaleas. We not only maintain the present collection but continue to propagate and renew the plants in the collection, as well as add new varieties from the groups represented."

The present collection at the National Gallery contains several of the original varieties sent to Mr. Ames by "Chinese" Wilson (Wilson's names in parentheses):

- 'Benifude' ('Sunbeam')—salmon pink, white throat, single, 1-2 inches in diameter
- 'Hana Asobi' ('Sultan')—red-orange, single, to 2-3 inches in diameter, highly ruffled
- 'Ho O' ('Apple Blossom')—mostly white blushed with light pink, single, 1-2 inches in diameter
- 'Otome' ('Maiden's Blush')—blush pink, single, 1-2 inches in diameter
- 'Sakura Tsukasa' ('All-A-Glow')—bright pink, very open corolla, single, 1-2 inches in diameter
- 'Waka Kayede' ('Red Robin')—bright orange-red, single, borne in heavy masses, 1 inch in diameter

- 'Beni Kirishima'—orange-red, large, double, now classified as a Satsuki

The collection also includes many specimen plants from other hybrid groups, such as the Belgian, Rutherford, Southern Indian, and Glenn Dale hybrids.

Further Reading on Wilson's Fifty:

Coleman, Joe H. 1997. "Kurume Azaleas — Personal Reflections." *THE AZALEAN*. 19(3): 45-47.

Miller III, William C. 1997. "A Few Thoughts on the Kurume Hybrids." *THE AZALEAN*. 19(3): 48-50. [Cites an extensive bibliography.]

Switzer, Sue and George. 1990. "The Flowering World of "Chinese" Wilson by Daniel J. Foley: A Review." *THE AZALEAN*. 12(4): 70-75.

Wilson, E. H. and A. Rehder, 1921. *A Monograph of Azaleas*. In Publications of the Arnold Arboretum Series, No. 9: 33-38. Cambridge, MA: The University Press.

[This article was developed at the suggestion of ASA member Jerry Goodman from Verona, New Jersey, who saw this collection at the National Gallery. Material used is based on information provided by the National Gallery of Art. Some Society members may remember that Don Hand used to draw the covers for THE AZALEAN. A similar article appeared in THE AZALEAN in 1991, 13(3): 56, after Diane Gregg from Brookside Gardens chapter had visited the National Gallery and had seen the display, Ed.]

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