

# Azalea Calendar

## ASA Annual 2001 Convention June 14-17, 2001

ASA Convention and Annual Meeting, Asheville, North Carolina. See registration form on the inside of the wrapper for this issue. For additional information or comments, please contact either Bob Stelloh at 1-828-697-9959, bstelloh@aol.com, or Ed Collins at 1-828-697-9228, azaleaed@brinet.com. Remember, you can get regularly updated information online by going to [www.azaleas.org](http://www.azaleas.org) and then clicking on '2001 Convention' for the latest update and to print out a copy of a registration form.

## ASA-ARS Joint Convention in 2002 April 17-22, 2002, Atlanta, Georgia

Work is already underway on a joint convention of the ASA and the American Rhododendron Society. Jim Thornton is coordinating for the ASA, and Earl Sommerville is coordinating for the local ARS chapter, the Azaleas Chapter. Contacts for information: Jim Thornton, 1-770-483-1593; jot@worldnet.att.net; Earl Sommerville, 1-404-428-3226, earlsommerville@mindspring.com. Convention website: <http://arsazalea.tripod.com>.

## Philadelphia Flower Show March 4 - March 11, 2001

Held at Philadelphia Convention Center, 12th & Arch Streets. Theme this year is "Great Gardeners of the World", including gardens of Penelope Hobhouse, Jefferson's Monticello, as well as a collaborative design by Penn State University, University of Delaware, and Temple University. Over 10 acres of exhibits. Proceeds benefit the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's programs, including Philadelphia Green, a program supporting public landscapes and community spaces. Contact: [www.Theflowershow.com](http://www.Theflowershow.com).

## Gifts from Tray Mountain

Jeff Beasley — Lavonia, Georgia

I am going to talk to you tonight about one of my favorite spots on earth. It is such a special and unusual place with its gathering of many forms of plants and flowers, particularly native azaleas!

Tray Mountain is in the northeast Georgia Mountains and is the home of at least four of the native azalea species found in the United States. As you wind up a narrow Forest Service road in mid-June you will pass under huge *Rhododendron maximum* trees. They hang from the sides of the mountain and are covered with beautiful large white blooms.

As you continue to travel upward along a narrow winding road full of bumps and boulders, you will find all sorts of wildflowers. You will finally reach the prolific groups of *R. minus*, with their blooms of different shadings of pink and white. Then, and finally then, you will arrive at the level where the native deciduous azaleas begin. This is an awe-inspiring sight as you see the many and varied colors which cover the sides and valleys of this mountainous area. The pristine air and the clear blue sky with white clouds floating above create a scene of perfect peace. This wonderful feeling of tranquility lasts until you start focusing on the many and varied plants with their different blooms.

First of all, one finds *R. calendulaceum*, a tall vigorous plant that may have blooms of orange, pink, or "hopefully" red; the yellow form is the first to bloom and does not seem to overlap the previous colors. One we call 'Dawn At The River' has a combination of yellow, gold, and red—all on the same bloom. Then you will find *R. cumberlandense*. These medium-size growing plants have blooms that are lustrous and glowing and have recurved petals with a porcelain-like quality. These plants seem to grow in groups or clusters. You will then see



*R. austrium* 'Millie Mac' a selection of the native Florida Azalea made by the Beasleys at Transplant Nursery and part of their "Maid in the Shade" Series. (Photo from Don Hyatt's website.)

*R. arborescens*, which is a large and imposing plant. One may find it in an area next to a mountain stream or perhaps hanging from the side of a waterfall, with its blooms cascading next to the falling water. The fragrance is delightful. Its common name is the Sweet Azalea. There is also a group of extremely low growing *R. viscosum* almost on the very top of the mountain. [Perhaps these are stunted by the high elevation and dry conditions there?] These plants have a mix of different and delicate colors. I believe the combination of these four species which bloom at the same time is responsible for the many and varied forms one finds in this spectacular area. Bumblebees have helped Nature create a far greater variety of blooms than man is capable of.

Now we come home to Transplant Nursery. We have many of the forms noted above. This was possible through Forest Service permission to dig plants and to take cuttings. Sometimes 100 cuttings would yield five or six viable plants, so it was not an easy process. We do have most of the native deciduous species that grow along the East Coast.

I will show you slides of the various kinds. The first is *R. alabamense*, a low-growing plant that has delicate white blooms with a yellow blotch and an enticing, spicy scent. Next is

*R. atlanticum*, which is stoloniferous and has blooms ranging from white to pink. The fragrance is all enveloping and will permeate your garden. These plants range up and down the Atlantic seaboard and can create a carpet of pink along the sides of highway rights of way that have been mowed. Many crosses have been made using this, and wonderful forms have been developed. The Choptank River Hybrids, introduced by Mrs. Polly Hill, are a perfect example.

*R. austrinum* is known as the Florida Azalea and is another early bloomer. It grows to a height of six to eight feet and is covered with beautiful clear yellow blooms. This particular form is known as 'Clyde Rushin' and is a lovely soft yellow with a delightful fragrance. Although it is native to Florida, it will grow and prosper in the North.

*R. periclymenoides* is also an early bloomer. It greets the world before its leaves emerge. This accounts for the old name of *R. nudiflorum*. Very descriptive! These blooms are mainly a pale lavender, but several different forms have been found. Dr. John Bell's dark lavender find is one of the finest.

*R. canescens* is native to the Piedmont area in which I live. These blossoms of pink mean "Spring has sprung!" One can still find natural stands of these plants on undisturbed land—which is becoming rarer and rarer! The blooms are generally pink, delicate, and graceful.

*R. vaseyi* is also a harbinger of spring! These plants with their funnel-shaped pink flowers are a welcome addition to the blooming season. This species and *R. canadense* have not been found to cross with any of the other species, so plants from seeds are probably the true species, as the two grow far apart in nature.

*R. flammeum* is found naturally in middle Georgia. This creates a breathtaking sight as you observe these bright orange, gold, or red bright-colored trusses in bloom. These are literally the size and shape of a baseball.

These complete their bloom by mid-April in our section of the country. These are extremely difficult to propagate.

Next comes *R. calendulaceum*. As 18th century botanist William Bartram came around a bend in the trail and saw a mountainside covered with these, he commented, "It seemed the mountainside was aflame with fire." The common name Flame has been describing the beauty of these tetraploids ever since. Many different forms with bright and appealing colors have been found.

*R. cumberlandense*, formerly known as *R. bakeri*, blooms alongside *R. calendulaceum*. A fond memory is that of Dr. Wilford Baker of Emory University, at the age of 90 plus, skipping to the podium and enthusiastically describing his joy and excitement as he told of finding this particular group of June-blooming plants on a high mountain plateau, and his pleasure at having this beautiful species named for him. A garden was developed at Emory University in his honor using these special treasures as its focal point.

*R. viscosum* is the next to bloom. It is a large plant and has spicy-scented white blooms in July. It is known as the Sticky Azalea. If you handle it for any period of time, your fingers will quite literally stick together. This plant grows in the swamps of south Georgia and will tolerate more moisture-laden soil than the others.

Late summer bloom comes from *R. prunifolium*. Callaway Gardens was created by Mr. Callaway in order to preserve this particular rare species, which he found growing in that area. The plants can emerge as large vigorous specimens, which have bright, brilliant flowers that cover the greenery with shades of either red or orange. It is a joy to see in late July and sometimes all the way through August.

*R. serrulatum* [now considered a variety of *R. viscosum*, ed.] is not an attention-getting flower, but the charm

exists because this beautiful plant covered with white star-like blossoms shows forth in the last days of summer, thus creating an oasis of quiet charm in the late summer heat.

As we conclude this talk, I want to tell you about our latest project at Transplant Nursery. About five years ago, we decided to place a group of native azaleas into a tissue culture lab. Our goal was to make available a representative sample of each species in the landscape and retail trade. For years we had been trying to propagate native azaleas from cuttings. After much thought, we came to the conclusion that in order to properly market this group of plants we had to put a name to a face.

In August of 1999, we introduced the "Maid in the Shade" group of native azaleas at the Southern Nurseryman's Show (SNA) in Atlanta, Georgia. At the present time we have ten native azaleas in this group. It has been amazing to watch the response this program has received. All plants come with a full color tag that gives cultural information, planting instructions, and plant identification. Full color bench signs plus hanging danglers are available to aid in the sale of the plants.

*Jeff Beasley was born and raised in Lavonia, Georgia. He is married to the former Lisa Carson and considers his "best crosses" to be his daughters, Camilla and Kelsey. After he graduated from North Georgia Technical School, he assumed the responsibility of running Transplant Nursery, Inc., during his father's illness. Since then, he has developed the nursery into a vigorous and growing enterprise, which serves the Southeast and many other sections of the nation with specialty plants. Jeff is a member of the Southern Nurserymen's Association, the Georgia Green Industry Association, the Southern Appalachian Growers Association, the Athens Growers Association, and the North Carolina Association of Nurserymen. He is on the advisory committee for The Environmental Horticulture program for North Georgia Technical Institute. He is also a volunteer fireman, which he dearly loves.*