

East Meets West — Deciduous Azaleas

Joe Schild — Hixson, Tennessee

Most, if not all of us are familiar with the native azalea species of the United States, but there are a number of delightful deciduous azaleas originating in Asia and one in Europe. This slide program is intended to rouse some interest in those Asian forms and tie them in with our North American natives as landscape material.

My first impulse was to dive right into the Asian species and show you a few of the deciduous and evergreen forms, but since a number of you have signed up for the Wayah Bald tour, let us take a brief side trip.

From the top of Wayah Bald, we look out onto the eastern valley with Franklin visible in the distance. In years past, I have led many groups and individuals to this wonderful mountain, and I think it is imperative that all of us become mentors while teaching those younger than us the merits of native azaleas. Here are a few slides of groups I have introduced to Wayah. The beauty of Wayah is much more than the Flame Azaleas that set the mountain on fire with bloom. It is one of the most accessible locations for those with disabilities or any not wishing to do a lot of walking.

Asian and European Species

Now, on to the slides of a few Asian and one European species, followed by many of our natives and a few shots of my hybrids in my garden. *Rhododendron wryrichii*, shown here in my garden, is a very nice pink form that blooms early midseason and is hardy to -10°F . Like most of the Asian deciduous species, the leaves are interesting with two or three at branch ends.

The single azalea species from Europe is *R. luteum*, a highly fragrant yellow azalea, shown flowering in my garden. It is very hardy to -15°F , and its scent spreads throughout the garden.

Of the yellow-flowering Asian species, perhaps *R. japonicum* is my favor-

ite. This is a delightful form that I have used many times in my breeding program, though most often it is a pollen parent and crossed with a fragrant native to mask its unpleasant leaf odor.

With the very openly bell-shaped, purplish rose blooms, *R. albrechtii* is a very nice addition to the garden. It flowers as the leaves are emerging and is hardy to -15°F .

For very early flowering, *R. mariesii* and *R. reticulatum* accent the garden with beautiful purplish flowers, as does *R. dilatatum*.

For an upright and more tree form, *R. sanctum* is superb. The one shown is a multiple clone from an introduced form that originally grew in the Japanese Royal Gardens. A cutting was sent to Clifton Gann in Hixson, Tennessee, in 1937, from Wada Nursery. Clifton grew it off to about 10 feet in size, and I rooted cuttings from that specimen in 1970.

For evergreen species from Asia, I love *R. macrorosepalum*, for its very hairy leaves and rose purple flowers. It has been in my garden for over 15 years and survived temperatures well below the rated 5°F . *R. oldhamii*, a similar species, does not survive for me in Zone 7a, though Buddy Lee has used it in the Deep South.

For tough-as-nails hardiness, nothing beats *R. yedoense* var. *poukhanense*. Rated at -15°F , it will survive much lower temperatures and delivers a beautiful purple flush of bloom in the early spring. Though listed as evergreen, it is deciduous in most parts of the country.

Many modern evergreen hybrids may be traced back to *R. kaempferi*. Its plant habit, leaves, and beautiful flowers are recognized as having some of the best qualities.

North American Species

Moving on to our native species, I have chased their bloom cycles since 1969, from the panhandle of Florida

to the mountains of Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia. In my garden, the Florida Azalea, *R. austrinum*, is a welcome harbinger of spring with a fantastic flush of fragrant yellow blooms.

Blooming with it is *R. periclymenoides*, and the flowers of white to deep rose offer an interesting contrast. The fragrance is highly variable between individual plants, and some have no fragrance.

Flowering after the leaves start emerging is the Piedmont Azalea, *R. canescens*, and another fragrant species of great report. In my garden, it is mounded and covered with nice pink flowers with light, sweet scent.

On the Cumberland Mountain Plateau, one will find the two previously mentioned species and a collection of interspecific hybrids between *R. alabamense* and *R. prinophyllum*. Flowering in early May, *R. calendulaceum* is in flower along with some nice specimens of *R. viscosum* around the upland bogs. In late May and early June, *R. cumberlandense* and *R. arborescens* take over the flowering with many interspecific forms. I am fortunate to have this collection of azaleas within a 45-minute drive of my home for study.

An interesting collection of native azaleas, rhododendron, and wildflowers are within a 10-minute drive of my home in the North Chickamauga Creek Gorge. For scenic beauty, this place is "eye candy." It also happens to be the home of *R. maximum*, *R. catawbiense* var. *insularia*, *R. arborescens*, *R. viscosum*, and *Stewartia ovata* var. *grandiflora*.

Heat- and drought-tolerance is reflected in the species *R. flammeum*, a tough shrub with glowing flowers of orange-red to bright yellow. For example, the form *R. 'Hazel Hamilton'*, a great yellow azalea with tight ball trusses.

Early midseason blooms of *R. atlanticum*, *R. prinophyllum*, and *R. viscosum* fill my garden with a heady perfume and colors from white to delicious pink. By mid-May, *R. calendulaceum* is in full flower with colors of yellow, orange, burnt orange, and watermelon red.

For late flowering, the reds of *R. cumberlandense* and *R. prunifolium* are contrasted with the white flowers of *R. serrulatum*.

Landscape Uses

My home landscape reflects something of an eclectic collection that was put in about 15 years ago. Arranged more for convenience than some well thought out plan, it affords me easy access to the shrubs for breeding and propagation purposes. Numbering about 1,500 shrubs, the landscape gives us flowering azaleas, rhododendron, mountain laurel, and wildflowers from early April through September. Ferns offer a fine-textured contrast with nine deciduous species used.

A number of my own hybrids grace my garden with their beauty. Crosses between a number of Exbury and Ilam hybrids with natives species have given me some very hardy azaleas. As mentioned early on, *R. japonicum* has been used often, as has the Ilam Hybrid *R. 'Primrose'*, for the good yellow color.

The final slides show a few of my hybrids that have bloomed for the first time and will be tested over the next five to ten years. For this article, I mention only two: a cross between *R. flammeum* and the Exbury *R. 'Gibraltar'* and one between *R. 'Gibraltar'* and *R. arborescens*.

Joe Schild has been an azalea chaser for over 30 years, and his gardens reflect his passion for the natives. He is the current President of the ASA, president of the Tennessee Valley Chapter of the ARS, a member of the Tennessee Nursery and Landscape Association, landscape consultant with Reflection Riding Arboretum, and an azalea breeder.

2001 Annual Meeting Minutes

Azalea Society of America
University of North Carolina –
Asheville, North Carolina
June 16, 2001

President Bill Bode called the meeting to order at 9:02 p.m. with opening remarks. He congratulated the assembled members and officers on the increase in membership in a time when other organizations are struggling to survive. It was noted that the Azalea Society website, azaleas.org, has brought in 14 new members in 2000 and 38 new members in 2001. In addition, 17 new members signed up at this convention.

Old Business

Reading of the Minutes: The minutes of the last Annual Meeting were published in **THE AZALEAN**. President Bode asked for and received a motion from Bill McDavit that the minutes be accepted as published. Bob Hobbs seconded the motion, and, there being no objection, the motion was passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: A motion was made by Mrs. Donna Adams to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented to the Board of Directors. Billy Lucas seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Bob Hobbs brought up the subject of and made a motion to publish the Treasurer's Report in **THE AZALEAN**, on an annual basis. The motion was seconded by Jim Thornton, and after debate, was passed by the members. The details of this report will be left to the Board of Directors.

Joe Coleman made a motion to accept the changes to the By-Laws as published in **THE AZALEAN** and to incorporate those changes into the By-Laws of the Azalea Society of America. The motion was seconded by E. White Smith and passed unanimously by voice vote.

New Business

The Charter for the new Vaseyi Chapter was signed by outgoing President Bill Bode and incoming President Joe Schild, and signed and sealed by incoming Secretary John Brown. The Charter was then presented to Ed Collins, President of the Vaseyi Chapter. Sixteen members of the new Chapter were present for the ceremony.

Joe Schild won the Best Article in **THE AZALEAN** in 2000 Award for his stimulating article "Fire on the Mountains." It is worth re-reading.

The results on the elections for Azalea Society of America national officers were announced. They are:

President — Joe Schild
Vice-President — Robert (Buddy) Lee
Secretary — John Brown
Treasurer — Bob Stelloh

Elected to the Board of Directors:
Leslie Ann Naney, John Migas, and
Maarten van der Giessen

Retiring President Bill Bode laid down the gavel to a standing ovation that lasted for a period of minutes. A moistening in the President's eyes was undoubtedly due to the harsh glare of the muted fluorescent lighting.

Incoming President Joe Schild spoke to the upcoming joint meeting of the American Rhododendron Society and the Azalea Society of America to be held in Atlanta on April 17th through the 21st of 2002. Jim Thornton is heading the committee for the ASA and Earl Sommerville for the ARS. Joe Coleman is Chair of the Speakers Committee. The theme for the Convention is "A Family Reunion." It promises great tours and speakers.

A motion to adjourn was made by Jim Thornton and seconded by Bill Bode at 9:30 p.m. and passed by the attendees.

Respectfully submitted,
John Brown, Secretary