

driveway. *Rhododendron* 'The Hon. Jean Marie de Montague' x 'Etta Burrows' has yielded a series of good reds and a series of cream to yellow rhododendron from the cross. *R. 'Dumpers Yellow'* x *R. 'Phipps 32'* is being evaluated. This far south, any growable yellow rhododendron should be named "in your dreams." *R. 'Marchioness of Lansdowne'* x *R. 'Ruby Bowman'* has produced some interesting lavenders. *R. 'Red Slippers'* x *R. 'Mother's Day'* did not render a single scarlet, but did produce a beautiful rose, a circular orange/red blotch, even a bicolor. *R. 'Mildred'* x *R. 'Dainty'* produced a wide range of colors including a translucent white called *R. 'Whiteout'*, and *R. 'Glacier'* x *R. 'Red Slippers'* produced a wide range of pinks to light roses, and there is also a potpourri of native azalea crosses.

The newest area of the garden to be developed is the riverbank, extending 200 feet down to the floodplain of the Yellow River. We constructed a flag-

stone stairway several years ago so Donna could walk the dogs down to the riverbank. Stone benches added later allow for rest stops to enjoy the view. Planted on the bank are both a Holly Springs azalea collection and a large collection of Glenn Dale azaleas, accented by rhododendron hybrids of Russ and Velma Haag and Wayne Hutchins. Across the ravine, space has been left for a Huang azalea collection and a Delp rhododendron planting.

Donna's favorite garden spot is found beside the granite outcrop where she watches the butterflies visit the water gardens. Bird watching areas are found close to the house near the many bird feeders in the side and back yards. The birds love the mature plants to hide and nest in. Hummingbirds can be enjoyed from April through October. Bird and nature watching at the Yellow River can include kingfishers, blue heron, river cooters basking on logs in the sun, and an occasional river otter searching for fish.

Color and fragrance can be found in the Coleman garden 12 months of the year. From March through August, native azaleas bloom in some corner. The best way to view it is to pick a path and meander, enjoying each nook and cranny. And for another perspective, simply turn around and retrace your steps. When you begin to tire, just find a bench, relax, and enjoy the sights and sounds. Above all, Donna and I want everyone to enjoy our garden as much as we do!

Joe and Donna Coleman are both Georgia natives who have lived most of their lives in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Joe, a graduate of Emory University, has maintained a general dental practice in Stone Mountain for the last 31 years. Donna has employed her organizational skills in several professions: as an RN with interest in orthopedics and infection control, as a teacher and director of a day care center, and now works for Hallmark cards. Family, church, and club activities keep them busy.

Earl Sommerville Garden

Roger Duvall — Atlanta, Georgia

You don't notice it right away. The first thing you notice about Earl Sommerville's garden is the color from the camellias in February and the azaleas and rhododendrons from March through July. Then you notice the vigor of the plants, the spotless leaves, the turgid new growth, the multitude of stems on many of the natives. Only then do you realize that you have been walking for half an hour and you haven't seen a single weed. About this time, you realize that Earl does not do things halfway.

This nearly perfect garden is situated at the foot of Little Kennesaw Mountain, just next to Kennesaw Mountain, where a bloody Civil War battle, a prelude to the siege of Atlanta, was fought. Earl's two acres lie less than 1000 feet from the Kennesaw National Battlefield Park. Little Kennesaw is clearly

visible over the 'George Lindley Taber' azaleas at the back of the garden, a beautiful example of borrowed landscape.

The garden includes around 3,000 evergreen azaleas, most of them planted in beds where several of the same variety are grown in mass. Earl prefers the Robin Hills, Southern Indicas (particularly 'George Lindley Taber'), the Girard, and Back Acres hybrids. And speaking of "back achers," Earl sprays the azaleas every week for about six weeks beginning when they first start to show color. This is primarily to prevent petal blight and lace-bug infestation. The evergreens are pruned annually, to knock off the vertical shoots, but they are allowed to grow together, forming unbroken expanses of gently curving green. The plants are well cared for and produce plenty of foli-



What happens when a Japanese azalea (*Rhododendron japonicum*) crosses with a Flame azalea (*R. calendulaceum*)? A delicate pale yellow ball-truss form, found in Earl Sommerville's huge collection of his species azalea hybrids.
(Image by Earl Sommerville.)



This *R. canescens* ball-truss form is a natural hybrid from Earl's collection. He selects for the unusual flower formation.
(Image by Earl Sommerville.)

age; as a result, they are assets to the garden even when they are not blooming. This is not always the case in Atlanta where azaleas will drop leaves and produce sparse new growth if they are not well watered and properly fertilized. Earl warns, however, not to over fertilize the evergreens.

As a gardener, Earl's first love is his native azaleas and he wants everyone to grow them. They have held up well through the heat and drought of recent years, and when they drop their leaves naturally, they will come back next spring undaunted. There are about 1,000 native azaleas in the garden. Some are relatively pure species, some named hybrids, but most are natural hybrids and their seedlings. Georgia boasts 13 native species, many of them growing in the same region and blooming at the same time. This has created a wealth of natural hybrids. According to Earl, you can hardly find a pure species azalea in Georgia, but he sees this as a virtue, the cross fertilization having produced plants of exceptional vigor and unique beauty.

Gardeners with a special interest in the genus *Rhododendron* or in native plants have been growing native azaleas in Georgia for years, but only recently have the deciduous azaleas become easily available in the large retail nurseries. Earl's advice on growing

these plants successfully is to give them plenty of sun and lots of fertilizer. He prunes when it is required, usually cutting the center stems out to keep them from getting too tall. This also promotes vigorous growth at ground level. The resulting multi-stemmed plants can survive the loss of several stems. Cuttings taken from new stems are also easier to root. Earl prefers to put his natives in the ground in October. He mixes two tablespoons of slow release fertilizer and three or four tablespoons of pelletized lime into the planting medium. Earl has his soil analyzed every two or three years and when it becomes too acidic, he treats the garden with pelletized lime. He has seen the pH as low as 3.9. Native azaleas do best with a pH about 5.6, but never above 6.0. When the pH was too low, Earl's azaleas responded to lime "like it was fertilizer."

Earl is especially interested in breeding native azaleas with ball-truss blooms. To those who argue that ball trusses are the result of culture rather than genetics, Earl answers, "If fertilizer and sun produced ball trusses, all of mine would have them." He insists that there is a strong element of genetics in the formation of ball trusses and collects for this feature. There is no arguing with the fact that he has



Some of Earl's most wonderful hybrids result from crosses of evergreen hybrids with native deciduous species. This specimen shows characteristics of both its parents: the large colorful flower form of an Exbury hybrid and the pink-and-yellow truss form of *R. flammeum*, the Oconee Azalea (previously often called *R. speciosum*). (Image by Earl Sommerville.)

many ball-truss azaleas that would stand out in any garden.

Persian carpet makers are said to introduce a "mistake" intentionally into their best carpets because only God is perfect. Maybe that explains the shoulder-high pokeweed rising above the 'Martha Hitchcock' azaleas and near one of the *Franklinia* trees. Earl's neighbors call his garden Paradise, and maybe a garden like this one is as close as we get.

For More Information

Earl's garden website is www.mindspring.com/~earlsommerville/.



Besides the unusual and strikingly colorful hybrids, Earl's garden is also home to pure species, such as this *R. serrulatum*, the Hammocksweet azalea. (Image by Earl Sommerville.)