

# Photographing The Glenn Dale Azaleas

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I bought my first of the 454 different Glenn Dale azaleas in approximately 1984, and began buying them in earnest in 1986 when I saw them in bloom at various nurseries in the Washington, DC, area. I kept adding more Glenn Dales over time, primarily from specialty nurseries run by ASA members, fellow azalea enthusiasts, and the plant sales and auctions of the Northern Virginia Chapter



'Dream', a cross of *simsii* x *mucronatum*. (All photos by Dan Krabill.)

of the ASA. Somewhere along the way, as I kept seeing beautiful varieties that I had previously never heard of, I began buying every Glenn Dale I could, sight unseen.

Almost from the outset, I discovered that the flowers of many of the plants I bought did not come close to matching the written descriptions in Lee's *The Azalea Book*, Galle's *Azaleas*, or Morrison's *The Glenn Dale Azaleas*, also known as Monograph 20. As a result, I have thrown out or moved aside a number of plants that were clearly misnamed and obtained replacements for many misnamed plants and plants of questionable accuracy. Over time, I have become acutely aware of the need for a collection of photographs of the Glenn Dales.

In March 2002 I bought a digital camera, and for two years I took close-up pictures of the flowers of every azalea I could. This past winter I sorted through the results of my first two years of digital photos, and counted approximately 180 good quality pictures of Glenn Dales that seemed to match the written descriptions. This spring I noticed that I had far more Glenn Dales in bud than in previous years, and focused my photographic efforts on taking pictures of as many of the Glenn Dales as possible.

## Digital Photography

Digital cameras have been on the market for a number of years and have been getting better and cheaper every year. Instead of using photographic film, they somehow translate the results of each picture into millions of bits of information that are encoded and recorded on a reusable storage medium. All of this is done in a second or two, after which the camera provides a small image of the picture just taken, which provides immediate feedback on color, centering within the frame, and resolution. (I can pick out the dots in the blotch of a picture that is well focused.) If the photographer does not like the picture, it can be erased and replaced with a new picture. At the end of a picture-taking session, the pictures are downloaded to a computer and then erased from the storage medium. All of this is at an incremental cost per picture of zero, after the substantial initial investment in camera, storage medium, extra battery, and computer.

Before I bought my camera, I asked for advice through the ASA e-mail discussion forum. Several people offered advice, and each recommended his camera. This says something good about the quality being provided by several different companies. Eventually, I bought a Canon G2, on the basis of a review in *PC World* that said the Canon provided the best reproduction of color of all the cameras in its price class that they tested. It also has a great feature that I did not realize was an important one—an LCD monitor that swivels and twists so that when I take a close up of a flower (just about the only kind of picture I take), I can stand or kneel comfortably without having to get myself directly behind the camera. Despite the fact that my camera dropped in price



'Content', a light purple sister seedling of the popular white azalea 'Glacier'.

substantially before it was replaced by a new model, I am totally satisfied with my choice and the timing of my purchase.

I have made many mistakes in taking pictures of azaleas, many more than once and have learned a number of helpful techniques through trial and error. The simplest thing is that I must use the macro focus switch in taking pictures up close and make sure that it stays on. My first day of digital photographs had to be thrown away, as have parts of many other sessions, because the macro switch was off. Also, many of my early pictures were out of focus, despite use of the macro switch. The automatic focus mechanism in my camera was focusing, in many cases, on the anthers of the flower, which of course stick out, rather than the petal. I solved this by fixing the automatic focus on the top or side of the flower, and then centering the flower in the frame before taking the picture.



This photo of 'Acrobat' shows the mallow purple sanding on the white flowers.

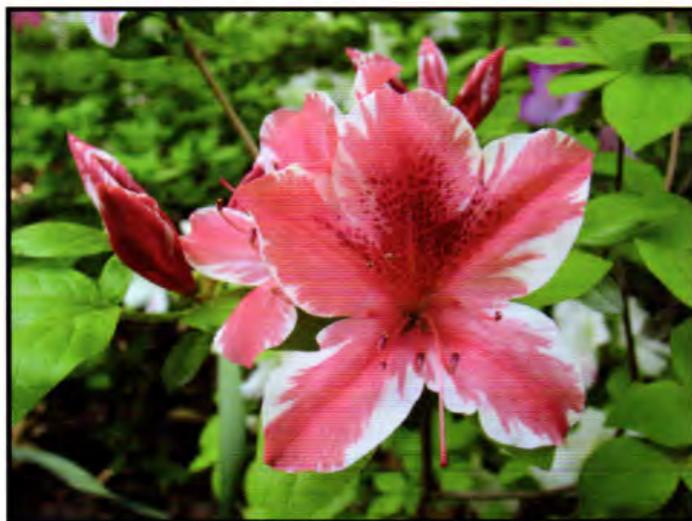
Color is a constant problem. I have to work for a living, and therefore I am usually not available to take pictures between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm when the light is best for providing accurate reproduction of color. As a result, I have taken a lot of pictures in which pinks have been too purplish and yellowish pinks have been too orangy. In some cases I have picked a flower and put it in front of the computer screen to determine which of several pictures of the same plant provided the most accurate reproduction of color.

Sunlight can provide striking photographs, but it often introduces problems. Red colors in particular do not come out well for me if taken in direct sunlight. Generally, I have had the best results taking pictures on cloudy days or in the shade. Larry Martin of the Northern Virginia Chapter of ASA moves his containerized plants into the shade to take pictures, but I grow plants in the ground and therefore cannot move them. I do pull off flowers and move them to the shade. I also bend branches and sometimes stand between the flower and the sun.

My computer software provides the opportunity to adjust the color, and also to touch up flaws in flowers. So far, I have been a purist and stuck with what the camera has provided me, preferring my photography over my artwork.

With digital photographs, there are no negatives or hard copies of pictures, unless you print them or have prints made. I have panicked on occasion, thinking I might erase all my digital photos from the computer. Now I back everything up at regular intervals on an external hard drive that can be attached to another computer, and I have created CDs of my better pictures for various purposes.

Some long-time film photographers complain that the quality of digital photographs is not as good as film photographs. One reason why many digital photos are not



'Surprise' is red with irregular white margins and bears a strong resemblance to 'Ben Morrison'.

good is that people do not take the time to set up before taking pictures that many film photographers do. In my case, the lack of set-up time is a result of the benefits of digital photography – zero incremental cost for each picture, immediate feedback on the results, the opportunity to re-take if a picture does not turn out, and the opportunity to take 100 or so pictures in a session. In my view, when I do not do things wrong and when light and flower conditions are good, the results are often excellent.

### Flowers

This year was my best year by far for Glenn Dale blooms. One factor is that all of my plants, many of which I bought in 3-inch pots or got from cuttings, were a year older and larger. More importantly, we had about 25 trees cut down during the last two summers. The added sunlight has been great for azalea blooms. Finally, we had a lot of rain last year, a fairly mild winter, and no late frost this spring.

Every flower is different, and flowers on the same plant differ from year to year. This is particularly the case with many of the Glenn Dales, presumably due to the Satsuki parentage of many varieties. For varieties having white flowers with colored flakes, stripes, and sectors, there is a great deal of variety in the patterns, in addition to solid colored sports and solid white flowers. Some varieties having colored borders and white centers some years do not have white centers other years. This year two Glenn Dale varieties that are supposed to have hose-in-hose flowers seemed to bloom initially with single flowers, and later with hose-in-hose flowers. I will have to look at those plants more carefully next year.

When a bud first blooms, the flower is usually nearly perfect, although it may take a day or so to bloom fully. Most flowers begin to deteriorate within a few days, or sooner, depending on the weather, even when the overall effect of the plant from a distance is still beautiful. Also, color can change over the short life of a flower. Fortunately, from the point of view of the photographer, not all buds bloom at the same time, so a short business trip or a rainy day or two may not ruin the opportunity to take a good picture of a plant for the year. The flowers of some varieties have stayed in nearly perfect condition for me longer than others, perhaps due in part to location within the yard, but primarily, I suspect, because the flowers of some varieties stand up better over time than others.

This year, the flowers of some varieties were spotted or otherwise flawed before they bloomed (with petal blight), presumably due to the combination of unusually hot weather and rain in early and mid-May. Also, it seems that insects or malnutrition can ruin all of the blooms of some varieties, particularly small plants blooming for the first time.

### The Results

As I mentioned at the outset, it has been particularly difficult to get cor-

rectly named plants of some of the Glenn Dale varieties. The variability of flowers from year to year and the propensity of many varieties to throw off sports have contributed to this problem. I also suspect the large number of 454 varieties and the lack of a photographic reference source has contributed to some propagators being careless.

I started this year with 436 of the 454 Glenn Dales, at least nominally, and added one more this spring. I knew then that the names of many of my plants were of questionable accuracy, but did not realize how many. This year the blooms of about 15 plants were so far from the written descriptions that they were immediately thrown away. Fortunately, I already had replacements in hand for the majority of them, although most of the replacements have not yet bloomed for me. Another 50 or so varieties that have bloomed for me are of questionable accuracy, and I will need to observe them more closely next year.

There were several additional cases of different plants of the same name having significantly different flower characteristics such as color, size and shape, bloom time, or more than one of these characteristics. In most cases, one of the plants clearly does not match the written description. In a few cases, I have not yet determined which of my plants, if any, is "correct."

I have taken approximately 2,500 pictures of Glenn Dales over the last three years, mostly at my home but also at the US National Arboretum and private homes that were on this year's ASA Convention tours. In photographing the Glenn Dales, I have tried to take pictures of flowers that had stripes or flakes, a white center, etc., if that was part of the written description, even if not all flowers on the plant had those characteristics. Given the zero incremental cost of each picture, I took pictures of a number of imperfect flowers, on the belief that a picture of a flawed flower is more useful than no picture

at all. I will be looking to upgrade the quality of many of my pictures in future years.

I have compared my pictures to written descriptions and photos taken by others, and have selected approximately 900 pictures on the basis of photographic quality, accurate representation of the flowers, and conformity to the written descriptions. The next step, for some varieties, will be to compare the colors in my pictures to the RHS color chart, using the translation of Morrison's original color descriptions that was prepared by Don Voss and included in *The Glenn Dales Revised* by West and Miller.

'Cinnabar' provides an interesting example of two different plants in my garden with the same name. Morrison's description of the flowers is white with stripes and sanding of spinel red (purplish red). My initial plant had flowers the last two years that match that description. I have another 'Cinnabar' plant that has dark orangish red or brownish red stripes, as does Jane Newman of the Northern Virginia Chapter of ASA. 'Cinnabar' is a mineral, mercury sulfide, which is variously described as being bright scarlet, cinnamon red to brick red, or cochineal red to brownish red, which is consistent with my second plant. It is puzzling to think that Morrison might have named a plant 'Cinnabar' that did not have any cinnabar coloring.

'Serenade' provides another interesting example of different plants seeming to have the same name. My first 'Serenade' meets Morrison's written description in the original Monograph 20, an early-blooming rose pink (purplish pink) similar to 'Dream'. Malcolm Clark, my source for the plant, said he got it from a source that was usually quite accurate. The "corrected" description of 'Serenade' in *The Glenn Dales Revised* is of a later blooming salmon pink sister of 'Fashion'. Jane Newman had drawn the same conclusion earlier, based on her experiences in buying 'Serenade' from more than one

source and having each plant resemble 'Fashion' rather than 'Dream'.

This article includes digital photos of four varieties of Glenn Dales, plus the photo of 'Cinderella' on the cover of this issue of *The Azalean*. All are available from multiple sources within the ASA, and some are available at commercial garden centers.

'Dream' is the best-known of the 10 Glenn Dale azaleas from the cross *simsii* x *mucronatum*. Others include 'Allure' and 'Serenity'. All have early-blooming rose pink flowers of varying shades. Two years ago I moved them all together. They provided a stunning display in mid- to late April, but they were out of the way and no one saw them. Early this spring I moved them to the front of our house and am happy with the result.

'Cinderella' is one of two named varieties that came from the same seedling. The plant pictured on the cover does not match the description of 'Cinderella' in Monograph 20, but has been distributed as 'Cinderella' for many years if not from the outset. The early-blooming white flowers with red stripes are striking. It is one of a number of early-blooming white Glenn Dales having stripes of various colors that have 'Vittatum' as a parent.

'Content' is a light purple sister seedling of the widely-planted white Glenn Dale 'Glacier'. The picture shown on the cover was taken in 2002.

'Acrobat' is a low-growing azalea having white flowers heavily striped and sanded with mallow purple. It has a light greenish blotch that for some reason showed up quite prominently in my pictures last year. The greenish blotch was much more muted in my picture this year, which is shown here. It bloomed for me in McLean, Virginia, on May 13 this year and May 18 last year.

'Surprise' is a very attractive red with irregular white margins. It has a strong resemblance to 'Ben Morrison', which was created by

Morrison but not included in the Glenn Dales. 'Surprise' has been easy to photograph despite the red color, and its blooms last longer than many. It bloomed for me on May 9 each of the last two years.

I am working on creating a CD of pictures of Glenn Dale azaleas, to consist of many of my digital photos and hopefully a number of slides taken over a period of years by Jane Newman that are being scanned into digital form by Don Hyatt. I anticipate that the CD will include roughly 500 pictures of approximately 350 varieties of Glenn Dales. Details will be published in a future volume of *The Azalean*, and also on the ASA e-mail discussion forum.

The initial CD will not be a finished product. I hope that people who receive the CD will provide feedback on the accuracy, and especially any inaccuracies, of the plant names. Future editions will include more varieties, improved pictures, and corrections of any misnamed plants.

The reason for all the effort, first in growing the plants and then in photographing them, is that some of the Glenn Dales are among the most attractive azaleas in the market. My hope is that these pictures will be useful to people in identifying Glenn Dale azaleas, and in reducing the propagation and distribution of misnamed plants. More broadly, I hope this effort will contribute to the preservation, distribution, and planting of this wonderful group of azaleas.

*Dan Krabill, currently vice-president and formerly president of the Northern Virginia Chapter of the ASA, has been a member of the ASA since 1987. He grows approximately 1,000 varieties of azaleas at his home in McLean, Virginia. When not digging in the dirt or taking pictures of the results, he is a management consultant to the banking industry. This article is his first attempt at publishing outside of the field of banking and finance.*

## Technical Note About 'Cinderella'

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The relationship of 'Cinderella' and Satrap was reported in considerable detail by Rothe and Miller in "The Most Unusual Striped Flower," *The Azalean*, 1988 10(1) 5-8. 'Cinderella' and 'Satrap' are both derived from the same plant (B32140) that was initially withdrawn due to its instability owing probably to its 'Vittatum' heritage. 'Cinderella' should be so red that it appears to be white stripes on a red flower. The existing line of six specimens of B32140 at Glenn Dale continued to demonstrate the extreme variability with the production (in order of frequency) of red stripes on a white background ('Satrap'), red selfs (unnamed), and an irregular white margin version (unnamed but nice and available from Mike White as "Sport of Satrap"). A flower described as white stripes on a red background ('Cinderella') was comparatively rare in my observations of these plants.

Careless selection of wood for propagation and failure to "rogue" out sports could both contribute to a loss of the true 'Cinderella'. There is also the possibility that folks had the correct 'Cinderella' initially only to lose it over time due to reversion.

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