Before about 1990, my interest in gardening was limited to enthusiastically enjoying the blooms of redbuds and dogwoods and a casual interest in trees. Indeed, I was somewhat put off by the juxtaposition of hot pink and orange evergreen azaleas that is all too common in my area.

But soon thereafter, I fell in love. Following an infatuation with the Ilam hybrid 'Peachy Keen' that I purchased on a whim at Wal-Mart, I fell head over heels for the fantastic deciduous azalea seedlings of Wyatt Lefever of Kernersville, North Carolina. Among his multitude of beauties, I was especially attracted to several 'Cecile' x 'My Mary', *Rhododendron calendulaceum* x unknown Exbury, and *R. atlanticum* x unknown seedlings. I have managed to root two of them; it is a shame that they are not all in the trade. I think it was the wonderful, subtle color blends, but who can discount the enticing effect of the perfume(s)?

Like a lot of novice gardeners or garden lovers, I ran into my share of frustration. I discovered that a lot of the hybrid deciduous azaleas that tend to show up in the nurseries in my area do very well in England where they were developed, but less well in the heat of Zone 7. I have learned a good bit in the last few years; and through the ASA and ARS, I've come in contact with a number of gardeners who know more than I ever will. I thought perhaps if we could pool the knowledge flowing from our experiences, we might be able to save future nascent enthusiasts some avoidable frustration—not to mention money, as the typical deciduous azalea costs more than twice what the typical evergreen does. The purpose of this article is to try to bring together that knowledge as to which cultivars will thrive in the relatively hot humid areas of Zones 7 and 8.

My concentration here is primarily on older and relatively available hybrid cultivars. Exburys, Knap Hills,
Ghents, Girards, and similar families of hybrids make up a dominant part of most catalogues and local nursery selections. A priori, I assume that most of the (relatively modern) Southern-developed cultivars (Aromi, Dodd, Beasley, Sommerville, etc.) will thrive in Zones 7 and 8. (I find it interesting that in my area, Lowe’s and Home Depot have been quicker than the “quality” nurseries to sell Aromi and other heat-tolerant hybrids and natives.) I have included numerous species as well, though I think knowledge of their appropriate range is more widespread.

In constructing the chart below, I have invited input from ASA members generally and from people I know to be heavily involved in this area of gardening in particular. I have consulted current ARS “good-doers” lists and older ASA and ARS lists. I have delved into Galle’s and Dirr’s monographs. Still, it seems likely that some readers will have areas of disagreement. The numerous details of site selection, soil, care in irrigation, etc. may well influence each gardener’s results more than the particular cultivar’s strengths or weaknesses. While my garden is Zone 7a and at 850 feet above sea level, I attribute my degree of success—such as it is—to soil preparation (lightening our native clay broadly with all manner of organic materials) and watering during dry periods of the summer. But I’ve certainly had my share of failures. Thus, I offer this diffidently as an aid to those wanting to grow some of the beautiful older hybrids in the South with a little less frustration.

Acknowledgments
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References

Will Ferrell is a general dentist practicing in High Point, North Carolina, who is, in the Jeffersonian use of the term, “a young gardener.” His other interests include history, economics, and ideas.
### Chart of Other Gardeners’ Responses to Selected Deciduous Azaleas in Zones 7 and 8

#### Category 1: Consensus “Good Doers” In Hybrid Group Cultivars/Comments

**Beasley**
- ‘My Mary’, ‘Nacoochee Princess’, ‘Rosy Cheeks’ (and probably others of Beasley group)

**Confederate Series**
- ‘Admiral Semmes’ (and probably other Southern-developed hybrids by Aromi, Dodd, Sommerville, et al.)

**Choptank River Group**
- All cultivars

**Exbury**
- ‘Balzac’, ‘Brazil’, ‘Gibraltar’

**Ghent**
- ‘Daviesii’

**Ilam**
- ‘Ilam Primrose’

**Knap Hill**
- ‘Homebush’ (tends to get gangly with age), ‘Orangeade’

**Slonecker**
- ‘Wallowa Red’

**Species**
- *Rhododendron alabamense*,
- *R. atlanticum*, *R. austrinum*,
- *R. canescens*, *R. cumberlandense*,
- *R. eastmani*, *R. flammeum*, *R. periclymenoides*, *R. prunifolium*, *R. viscosum*

#### Category 2: Lots Of Positive Comments Hybrid Group Cultivars/Comments

**Abbott**
- ‘Jane Abbott’

**Arneson**
- ‘Mount Ranier’

**Aromi**
- ‘Pink Carousel’

**Beasley**
- ‘Lemon Drop’

**Coolidge Rare Plant Gardens**
- ‘Snowbird’

**Exbury**
- ‘Cecile’ (some mildew), ‘Golden Eagle’, ‘Hotspur Yellow’, ‘Klondyke’, (overwhelmingly positive responses, but sometimes reported challenging)

**Galle**
- ‘Choice Cream’

**Ghent**
- ‘Narcissiflorum’

**Ilam**
- ‘Ilam Copper Cloud’

**Knap Hill**
- ‘Golden Oriole’, ‘White Swan’

**Metselaar**
- ‘Golden Flare’

**Northern Lights**
- ‘White Lights’

**Slocock**
- ‘Satan’

**Windsor**
- ‘Windsor Daybreak’

**Unknown**
- ‘Tabasco’, ‘Walla-Walla’

**Species**
- *R. japonicum*

### What Do The Zones Mean?

When a description of a plant in a book or magazine or on a plant label includes a Zone designation, it normally reflects one of the 10 United States Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zones. The USDA developed this system, based on 60 years of data collection and analysis. What the hardiness zones indicate is based on a range of average annual minimum temperature; thus, they reflect cold-hardiness or cold-tolerance. According to the official USDA Hardiness Zone Map, the coldest temperature range for Zone 7 is 0° to 10°F (or -17.8° to -12.3°C) and 10° to 20°F (or -12.3° to -6.6°C) for Zone 8.

However, for gardeners in the South, cold-tolerance is not so relevant as heat-tolerance. More recently, the American Horticultural Society and the president emeritus of the AHS Dr. H. Marc Cathey developed a system of Heat Zones to reflect the opposite extreme of hardiness conditions. They analyzed data from the National Weather Service for the daily high temperature recorded between 1974 and 1995. The standard is number of days per year over 86° F (30° C). For Heat Zone 7, this means an average of 60 to 90 days per year over 86° F (30° C); for Heat Zone 8 the number would be 90 to 120. Will Ferrell’s garden happens to be in both USDA Hardiness Zone 7 and AHS Heat Zone 7. Both systems help you “bracket” likely survival of a plant in your area; however, the whole range of horticulture skills (adapting soil type and fertility, air circulation, watering, as well as actual exposure to direct sunlight, etc.) and microclimates can enable gardeners to help marginal plants survive. Some wholesale nurseries are beginning to tag their material with Heat Zones as well as USDA Hardiness Zones.

To learn more:
- **Cathey, Dr. H. Marc with Linda Bellamy. 1998.** *Heat-Zone Gardening: How to Choose Plants That Thrive in Your Region’s Warmest Weather.* Time-Life Books.


**Book Review**

Success with Rhododendrons and Azaleas by H. Edward Reiley.

Eve Harrison — Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

(This book review appeared previously in the Northern Virginia chapter newsletter; it is reprinted here by permission of the author, a Northern Virginia Chapter member, Ed.)

This informative, well-written book kept me turning pages and making notes on the blank pages conveniently provided at the back with an ongoing sense of not being able to imagine what could possibly be around the “next corner”! The index is excellent and inclusive. The pictures are both exciting and beautiful and gave me many new ideas for my own woodland garden. I referred frequently to the well-outlined table of contents and will refer throughout the season to the Pest Management Calendar as well as the extremely helpful Good Doer and Heat, Drought, and Sun tables provided.

This is the first book I’ve seen giving a map of Heat Zones along with the usual Cold Zones [USDA hardiness zones]. This is quite important in choosing the right cultivar for the right site and temperature. The many zones shown in the Good Doer lists showed locations not only in the USA but also in Canada, British Columbia, Australia, and the British Isles.

Mr. Reiley teaches every single aspect of azalea and rhododendron gardening, leaving absolutely nothing continued on page 15.