

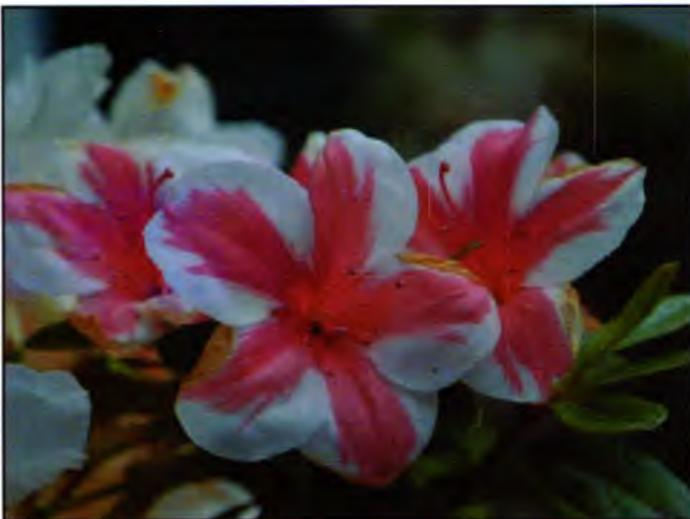
# My Orphan Azalea

Scot Henney, Coquitlam, British Columbia

It hasn't a name. It appeared with no more fanfare than greeted Ernest on his arrival in a handbag at Victoria Station. There is no record of when and how it was deposited in my garden near Vancouver in British Columbia. Over several years it has grown to portray a personality that says "I am worthy to be regarded for myself, whether I have a name or not." Faced with its forthright presence, the least I could do was to try to discover what its true name should be.

The flowers of my evergreen azalea are distinctive, being what one might describe as candy-striped red on white. It is low-growing, less than three feet in five years. The leaves are evergreen, small, and dark green. It is somewhat tender, having been cut back twice by severe cold weather. Flowers are medium sized, about two and a half inches across, and prolific. Flowering time is late April to early May.

In May 2012 I took a spray of flowers to the Fraser South Rhododendron Society's annual show. There was general interest in the flower's unusual coloring. No one there suggested a name for my azalea, but **Sue Klapwicz**, whom I had known for several years as an expert grower and vendor at club sales, said she would ask a knowledgeable friend. Sue took home the spray and by her special magic produced several cuttings from the by now wilting clipping. Only one cutting survived, but it proved to be a vigorous plant. The picture "Unknown Azalea" is of the first flowering of the plant. Sue is propagating cuttings from this original survivor.



Unknown Azalea. Photo by Sue Klapwicz

Sue's friend suggested 'Kasa-no-yuki'. On a bonsai-related site ([bonsaispecials.nl](http://bonsaispecials.nl)), I found a photograph and its description as a Satsuki azalea. I thought the stripes were too broad and diffuse, so I looked further by seeking general information on evergreen azaleas.



'Kasa-no-yuki'

In Japan evergreen azaleas have been hybridized for hundreds of years. In North America there has been great activity by hybridizers in the twentieth century. Groups of hybrids are listed under such names as Glenn Dale, Robin Hill, Bowie Mill, and Deckert. More than 10,000 of these hybrids are registered. The hybridizers experimented widely in choosing from species azaleas and hybrids as parents.



'Antoinette Martin' and 'Ben Morrison'. The pictures are by permission from the [www.pbases.com/azaleasociety](http://www.pbases.com/azaleasociety) web site.

I found 'Ben Morrison' and 'Antoinette Martin' on an Internet search for photographs of azaleas with similar coloring to mine.

'Ben Morrison' - A Glenn Dale hybrid, propagated by Ben Morrison and introduced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, parentage unknown. Is said to be columnar in habit, blooming mid to late May.

'Antoinette Martin' - A Klimavicz hybrid. **Joe Klimavicz**, based in Vienna, Virginia, has been hybridizing since the late 1980s. In the Azalea Society notes it was described as a cross between 'Festive' and 'Satellite' introduced in 2013.

I found "Striped Azalea" on a private website featuring a Southern California garden. My enquiries led to an engaging email correspondence with the owner.



Striped Azalea Bonsai and Striped Azalea.  
Photos are by permission from the owner.

“Striped Azalea” - The plant was bought in 2008 or 2009 as a remnant with no tag from a nursery no longer in existence. Flowering time in Southern California is January/February. The leaves are said to match a detailed description that I had sent.

After reviewing the pictures from the Internet, I concluded that ‘Ben Morrison’ was too tall and late flowering, but that ‘Antoinette Martin’ and “striped azalea” were, by appearance, distinct possibilities. Against ‘Antoinette Martin’ is its introduction date, which is several years after “Unknown Azalea” and “Striped Azalea” were acquired. Sue said “Mmm!” when she looked at the picture of “Striped Azalea,” which I interpreted as “Yes! - this is it.” So perhaps we have found a clone of my azalea, itself without a name.

In comparing the photographs the question of color accuracy seems very important. Should I discount a picture because the flower is orangey red, rather than the purple red of another possible choice? I have tried to obtain the most authentic pictures for this article, but some doubt must remain based on the limitations of photography.

Bearing in mind that there are thousands of named hybrid evergreen azaleas and many more thousands unnamed, it seems that the only chance of establishing a name would be to have both known and unknown flower and leaf specimens in hand. Then, by careful inspection and reference to plant size and form, identification might be possible. Even if it was possible to arrange such a comparison, who but the original hybridizer could guarantee that the supposed named hybrid was indeed truly named? It would be a different matter if we were dealing with species azaleas, when a key might be followed and a precise identification made.

Should someone have a plant similar to mine, I give further details which might help in confirming that a match is possible. In January I examined leaves, stems and the one calyx remaining on my plant. The leaves

were up to one and a half inches long and were slightly obovate. Under a magnifying glass I saw that the leaves had sparsely occurring hairs on upper and lower surfaces and also hairs projecting out from the leaf edges. The new wood leading to the calyx was densely clad with hairs. On Sue’s plant she observed petal-like doubling of the calyx.

The versatility of small-leaved evergreen azaleas is demonstrated by the history of “Striped Azalea.” Quoting from the owner’s email: “It was growing in the ground for a season, then I decided to move it into a pot. There was a tiny portion of the plant that had self-layered from the parent plant, so I made it into a bonsai. It has grown in a windswept style and is about three inches high.”

Now I look at my azalea and say, “I have done my best to give you a name. I know you better now than I did before. You remain in my affectionate regard whether or not you remain an orphan of unknown parentage.”

*Scot Henney is a retired engineer and member of the Fraser South Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. He volunteers at the rhododendron garden at Whonnock Lake, Maple Ridge, British Columbia.*



You are cordially invited to join the  
American Rhododendron Society

Benefits: quarterly journal,  
seed exchange, chapter affiliation,  
conventions

Inquiries regarding membership in  
the American Rhododendron Society  
and the Scottish Rhododendron Society,  
a chapter of the ARS,  
may be sent to:

Laura Grant, Executive Director  
P.O. Box 525  
Niagara Falls, NY 14304-0525 USA

Annual Subscription of \$40 (USA)  
ARS Website: <http://www.rhododendron.org>

## The Conifer Society welcomes you!

Conifers and azaleas are natural garden companions

- Add year-round color and texture
- Brighten small garden spaces
- Create living sculptures
- Screen views and create focal points

Visit [www.conifersociety.org](http://www.conifersociety.org)  
call (410) 721-6611 or mail \$30 annual dues to:

Conifer Society  
P.O. Box 3422  
Crofton, MD 21114-0422