TEMPERATE RHODODENDRONS

Julian Taylor-Whall

- Volume Seven -
Directed Pollination (Part One)

Temperate Rhododendrons:

- the species and hybrids established outdoors in the leading woodland gardens of England, Scotland and Wales;

- the species curated in accordance with scientific advances and field study evidence published in the three decades since the 1996 Edinburgh revision of the classification;

- the hybrids selected and assessed with the benefit of hindsight rather than hype, disposition and floral beauty the key determinants for inclusion, not their commercial availability.

The texts are illustrated with over 3000 photographs taken by the author.

Volume One reviews and amends the classification of Genus *Rhododendron* to conform with the molecular phylogeny studies of 2005 and 2010, as well as taking account of recent work on polyploidy. A visual guide to help identify the various species follows this updating, along with a glossary of the scientific terminology and a listing of the various seed collecting expeditions.

Volume Two considers Subgenus *Therorhodion* and the species placed within Subgenus *Azaleastrum*.

Volumes Three and Four document the taxa assigned to Subgenus *Hymenanthes*.

Volume Five examines the rhododendrons within the three sections of Subgenus *Lepidorrhodium*.

Volume Six evaluates the Natural Hybrids, plants that have arisen in the wild from undirected pollination and established stabilised populations, as well as the host of seed pan rogues germinated in cultivation.

Volumes Seven and Eight survey the Azaleodendrons, Deciduous and Evergreen Azaleas, Lepidote and Elepidote Hybrids created through directed pollination.

TEMPERATE RHODODENDRONS

Julian Taylor-Whall

Copyright © Julian Taylor-Whall 2024.

Julian Taylor-Whall has asserted the moral right
to be identified as the author of this work.

- *front cover* -
R. ‘Autumn Glow’

- *title page* -
R. ‘Muncaster Bells’

- *contents* -
R. ‘Perseverance’

- o*verview* -
R. ‘Eddy’

- *Azaleodendrons* -
R. ‘Glory of Littleworth’

- *Deciduous Azaleas* -
R. ‘Hotspur’

- *Evergreen Azaleas* -
R. ‘Hinomayo’

- Lepidotes -
R. ‘Night Sky’

Contents:

Overview: 9

History From A Western Perspective 10
Tribulations - One Necessitating Change 22

Directed Pollinations:

Azaleodendrons 33

Deciduous Azaleas 47
A Tour d'Horizon 48
The Ghent Azalea Strain 52
The Mollis Azalea Strain 70
The Rustica Azalea Strain 84
The Occidentale Azalea Strain 90
The Knap Hill-Exbury Azalea Strain 100
The Solent Azalea Strain 138
Twelve Pollinations Outwith Those Six Battalions 156

Evergreen Azaleas 173
A Tour d'Horizon 174
The Kurume Azalea Strain 182
The Satsuki Azalea Strain 210
The Kaempferi Azalea Strain 224
The Glenn Dale Azalea Strain 250
The Inter-Group Hybrids Strain 272
Twelve Pollinations Outwith Those Five Battalions 300

Lepidote Hybrids 323

Photographic Acknowledgements 472

Index of Plants 477



Overview

History From A Western Perspective

Never one to mince his words, the renowned explorer, botanist, plant hunter and author, Frank Kingdon-Ward, began the chapter titled *Species or Hybrids?* in his 1949-published book *Rhododendrons,* with the following sentence:

> 'There are more hybrids than species in cultivation today,
> yet except in the Azalea group it is doubtful whether any hybrid superior to the
> parent species has ever been produced.'

Not some glib, throwaway sound bite, but a reflective and considered opprobrium.

Moreover, one no knowledgeable rhodophile will disagree with, especially as the first half of the sentence - pre the comma - is even more apropos today than when first written: the 1500-plus pages of the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* confirming this; for they contain no less than '28,000 entries for cultivar and Group epithets' - to quote from Alan Leslie's *Introduction* - spread across two printed volumes. And that was in 2004 when the Second Edition first hit the presses. Before any of the subsequent annual supplements were issued.

But what of the castigating denouement post the punctuation mark?

Other authors have put forward entire chapters of utter hokum in an attempt to rubbish Kingdon-Ward's censure, yet sadly - if we are being truly honest with ourselves - for the vast majority of those registered crosses, it too is cuttingly accurate. Especially with regard to the plethora of cabbages spawned from *R. yakushimanum.*

Yet within the sum of that vast overall aggregate, a small minority of lepidote and elepidote crosses exist, now several thousand strong, which challenge and defy Kingdon-Ward's scathing criticism. So while chronicles for the Azaleodendrons, the Deciduous Azalea and Evergreen Azalea hybrids precede each of those individual sections, the broad-strokes history that follows focuses on the creation of the lepidote and elepidote hybrids, which began in the West with a gathering of species from both the New World and the Old: a quartet of species found in today's genetically re-pigeonholed Section *Ponticum.*

R. maximum was the first of the four to dock, arriving in the UK sometime during 1736, the trans-Atlantic horticultural partnership that had been established between the Pennsylvanian colonist John Bartram and the textile merchant Peter Collinson responsible for the plant's introduction. Except it then sat around and basically did nothing for the next thirty years until *R. ponticum* - the first plant it could be partnered with - was discovered growing in Gibraltar. Specimens were returned from the Rock to British shores during 1763, with 'returned' in this case also covering the fact that prior to the last glaciation - the conclusion of which only began some 16,000 years ago when the ice sheets covering much of the UK kicked-off their retreat - *R. ponticum* had almost certainly been part of the native flora of these Isles as the fossilised remains of its seeds and capsules found at Gort, in Northern Ireland, in 1948, confirm (*The History of the British Flora,* by H. Godwin, Cambridge University Press, 1975). Both shrubs were in bloom and in commerce by the mid 1780s, if not earlier, as the entry for *R. maximum* in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* under Tab 951 indicates:

> 'Our drawing was made in the spring of 1785, at Messrs Whitley and Brame's, Old Brompton, when every shrub both of this and *ponticum* produced an abundance of flowers in the greatest profusion'.

The online edition of *Bean's Trees & Shrubs* reports that 'many intermediates' between the two 'had sprung up by 1806', so they and the two species were available for pairing with a third member of the Section when *R. caucasicum* was introduced from the mountains between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea in 1803. Kew received seeds direct from the team who had made the gathering, Russian chemist and plant collector Count Apollo Mussin-Pushkin, in partnership with the German explorer Baron Friedrich August Marschall von Bieberstein, while Conrad Loddiges' nursery emporium to the east of London, obtained their seed via the Saint Petersburg Botanical Garden. And it was in the-then bucolic surrounds of Hackney where the species flowered for the first time in UK cultivation during August 1807 (*Curtis's Botanical Magazine,* Volume 28, Tab 1145). Yet with a few notable exceptions (discussed below), *R. caucasicum* was basically sidelined into producing dwarf shrubs for the forcing trade.

The last member of the *Ponticum* tetralogy to be delivered to the UK finally arrived in 1809: *R. catawbiense*. Live plants were sent as well as seed, the Scottish botanist John Fraser and his eldest son John Jr. responsible for their collection, while the family's Charleston-based South Carolina plant import-export business - run by John Sr.'s brother James - arranged the shipment. Michael Waterer at Knap Hill is understood to have begun hybridising with the new introduction as early as 1811 after securing one of the juvenile shrubs, this despite the 'official' first flowering not occurring until June 1813. The result of his efforts and those of others were a slew of mauve through pale-pink to blush-white hybrids that flowered from the end of May onwards and included such stalwarts as 'Album Elegans', 'Everestianum' and 'Roseum Elegans', the first fledglings of what would become known as the 'Hardy Hybrids'. But *R. arboreum,* a principal component of that collective's genetic make-up, had not yet bloomed in UK cultivation.

Such an event occurred in 1825, fifteen years after Francis Buchanan-Hamilton sent seed of a high-altitude form of the species back to the UK from the Himalaya. Some texts suggest multiple specimens, up and down the country, opened blood-red buds in concert that year, but officially just one plant is actually documented as having flowered, this domiciled at the Grange, near Alresford, which was the Hampshire garden of Mr Alexander Baring (*Botanical Register,* Volume 11, Tab 890). If the report is a true record of what did occur, then visitors to Mr Baring's residence that April included Messrs Gowen, Russell and Smith, all desperate to obtain a flower truss with anthers secreting pollen. Other published accounts however, suggest flowering branches were cut, packaged and despatched from Northington to the various interested parties the following year.

And the result?

James Gowen, garden advisor to Lord Carnarvon at Highclere Castle, opted to pollinate an unnamed hybrid bred from a *R. catawbiense* seedling crossed with *R. ponticum,* while the two nurserymen each chose to make an F1 match: *R. catawbiense* the pick for Russell; *R. ponticum* for William Smith. Respectively their crosses resulted in 'Altaclerense', 'Russellianum' and 'Smithii', all three bearing rosy-crimson blooms with a bluish undertone.

Rose-coloured specimens of *R. arboreum* would bloom in 1828, white-flowering forms debut three years later in 1831, while *R. cinnamomeum* would draw crowds to the Rollisson nursery in Tooting during 1836.

However, the goal was to raise fully hardy, late flowering plants, so backcrossing the best selections from those inaugural pairings onto one of the other Section *Ponticum* species or a hybrid of such became de rigueur.

At Highclere for instance, Gowen used 'Altaclerense' to pollinate the *R. catawbiense* hybrid 'Lee's Dark Purple', as well as *R. maximum*. These reached flowering size in the early 1860s, opening deep crimson, pink through rose, or dark purple corollas.

On the other hand, John Standish - pre the creation of the Sunningdale Nurseries - used 'Altaclerense' to pollinate *R. catawbiense* around 1838, introducing the rosy-crimson and black-spotted 'Blandyanum' with his new business partner Charles Noble in 1848.

More of course, would follow.

Many more.

From Standish and Noble; from the Waterers; indeed from firms located at Land's End all the way to John o'Groats, nurserymen were churning out Hardy Hybrid crosses by the cartload, so many in fact that backcrossing almost became an art form.

Standish and Noble flowered a fourth-generation seedling in 1855 and by top grafting - slice your seedling from its roots and bolt the scion onto a mature stock of *R. ponticum* - managed to reduce the time it took to go from germination to first flowering, to just four years. This meant that hybrids introduced in the 1870s therefore were potentially seven or eight generations on from those first foundation pairings with *R. arboreum,* though not those where *R. maximum* was involved, because these usually took much longer to begin setting flower buds than crosses with *R. catawbiense* or *R. ponticum*. Indeed - as reported by Standish and Noble themselves - a visit to Highclere would not have found the offspring of their *maximum* x *arboreum* pairing in flower before 1851, when the bushes were twenty-six years old.

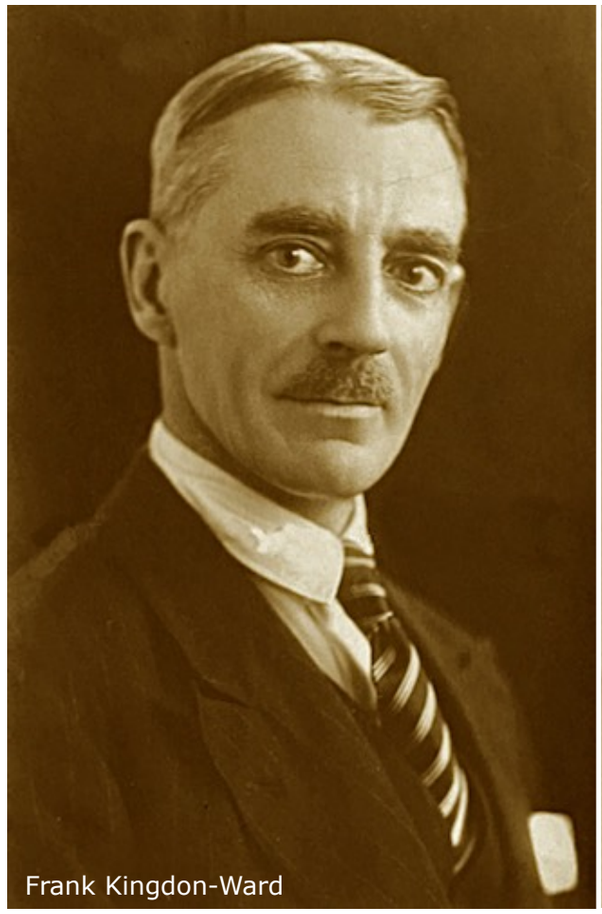
One of these now old warriors deserves special mention, especially as it is still able to give the middle finger to Kingdon-Ward's negative prognosis: 'Sappho' - introduced by the Waterers from their Knap Hill nursery in the mid 1860s, white-flowered, with an eye-magnet blotch of purple and black. Widely planted and still hugely popular today, the cross is one of the few Hardy Hybrids that are notably 'better' than their parents - despite some obvious faults - though only a thorough genetic analysis deep dive will determine what exactly went into the mix besides *R. ponticum*. 'Purple Splendour', introduced in the 1890s is another member of this bijou elite, as is 'Frank Galsworthy'.

Returning to that third Section *Ponticum* introduction, *R. caucasicum* - despite being wrongly assigned to the greenhouse - had also featured amongst the pairings, though as indicated, its use was much more restricted. Smith had pollinated it using *R. arboreum* in the late 1820s to produce his 'Nobleanum Venustum', which first flowered in 1835. The Waterers too had made the selfsame cross at Knap Hill, and at roughly the same time, with the complications arising from who-named-what-when assuredly bringing-on a migraine of epic proportions. 'Cunningham's White' was the result of a *caucasicum* x *ponticum* pairing made at the Comely Bank Nursery, Edinburgh, by James Cunningham in the 1830s, and historically, it is probably the most widely planted white-flowering rhododendron in the whole of the British Isles, though only rarely will a bush bear a label and it should be noted that several clones manufactured many miles distant from the Scottish capital are doing the rounds under the same epithet.

Seed of a second Himalayan species, *R. campanulatum,* which had been gathered by Nathaniel Wallich, reached the UK in 1825 and the first specimen plant to flower did so in the Upton and Newton Nursery Grounds of Mr Francis Dickson in Chester during April 1839, even after being dug up, stuck in a tub and moved to a greenhouse the previous autumn (*Curtis's Botanical Magazine,* Volume 66, Tab 3759). Yet once again, the Waterers - at Bagshot this time, rather than Knap Hill - had already made a *campanulatum* x *maximum* pairing pre this date - according to the *IRRC's* 'Pictum' entry - so either another *R. catawbiense* sleight of hand was pulled off, or someone's calendar got skewed.

British and European nurserymen made a number of other F1 crosses with *R. campanulatum* over the next decade or two, Louis van Houtte's 'Boddaertianum' being the most well known of these, but then, until 'Susan', 'Mount Everest' and 'Muncaster Mist' were introduced a century later, the species was effectively, near forgotten.

Two decades before a certain Joseph Dalton Hooker would board HMS Sidon to begin the long sea voyage to India and kick-off his botanical exploration of Sikkim, a third species



Frank Kingdon-Ward



Colonel William Henry Sykes

native to the Himalaya, which Kew's star-in-the-making would later reintroduce, arrived in the UK thanks to the low-key, less publicised efforts of Colonel William Henry Sykes: *R. falconeri*. Plants grown from his 1830 gathering were established and thriving outdoors - albeit in only a few gardens - with at least one, having flowered and then been pollinated by *R. ponticum,* sometime before 1843. By exactly whom is unknown, but the hybrid raised from that cross was named 'Albertii' - in honour, apparently, of some chappie from Saxe-Coburg and Gotha - and its flowers described as 'whitish-pink and well-spotted' by Standish and Noble in 1850 (*IRRC,* 2nd Edition, 2004, page 30). This of course rather undermines the statement set out under Tab 4924 in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* of 1856 vintage - oft quoted in botanical texts - that '*R. falconeri* has flowered this season for the first time in Europe'. Oops.

Hooker arrived in Darjeeling on April 16th, 1848, and thus missed the first flowering of *R. barbatum* back home. This again occurred at the Upton and Newton Nursery Grounds, Chester, as well as at one or two other venues - the seed received seed in 1841 - and those tightly compact fiery balls of crimson or scarlet should have set the entire hybridising fraternity into paroxysms of delight even without access to today's horde of messaging apps, yet the species was totally ignored until Richard Gill paired it with *R. arboreum* in the 1870s, and then with one of Hooker's 'discoveries', *R. thomsonii,* in the 1880s. That later match of course, conceived the award-winning 'Shilsonii'.

Accompanied and assisted by a bevy of expats now immortalised in rhododendron species epithets - Archibald Campbell, Brian Houghton Hodgson and Thomas Thomson, to mention but three - Joseph Hooker would stay in the region until early December 1850, visiting Bengal - undivided at that time, but now split between India and Bangladesh - eastern Nepal, Sikkim, Sylhet and the Khasi Hills. Those expeditions netted more than twenty rhododendrons new to science and introduced or reintroduced seed of another ten (allowing for subsequent botanical synonymy). Officially, his major elepidote discoveries, in addition to the three gentlemen already mentioned, include *R. campylocarpum, R. fulgens, R. lanatum, R. niveum* and *R. wallichii,* along with superior forms of *R. grande* and *R. griffithianum* to those previously introduced - respectively, *R. argentum* and *R. aucklandii,* both now synonymous - and two natural hybrids, 'Candelabrum' and 'Wightii', though of course these were treated as bona fide specific species at the time. The lepidotes too were no less of a revelation, with two alternate forms of *R. cinnabarinum* returned in addition to the species itself - *blandfordiiflorum* and *roylei* - these rubbing shoulders with *R. ciliatum, R. dalhousiae, R. edgeworthii, R. glaucophyllum, R. maddenii* and *R. triflorum*.

But note, as with *R. falconeri,* Colonel Sykes should now receive the credit for many of these introductions as they were already flourishing in gardens such as Riverhill, near Sevenoaks in Kent, well before Hooker set sail:

> 'I have here a good many Himalayan species between seventy and eighty years old, including Falconeri, niveum, barbatum, Thomsoni, lanatum, fulgens, campanulatum of several varieties, Hodgsoni and arboreum.'
> *Notes on the Garden of Riverhill, Sevenoaks,* Lieutenant-Colonel J. M. Rogers,
> *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* Volume 1, Number 1, 1916, page 35.

Which when you do the maths, confirms that history will have to be rewritten, even if seven decades is the timespan that goes into the calculation.

Yet strangely, the professional hybridisers embraced very few of these discoveries whole-heartedly, if at all. Even - amazingly - the yellow-flowering *R. campylocarpum,* for it was almost completely ignored for nigh-on fifty years. But slowly, as those newly-arrived species began to flower, they instigated two major changes:

Firstly, the straightjacket restrictions on hardiness and flowering time that had previously dictated the breeding goals of the nurserymen went out the door.

And then, by and large, those very same nurserymen found the hybridising reins had been taken out of their hands.

For a group of highly knowledgeable amateurs, most, at that time, members of the landed gentry, were now in charge of the carriage. And they were steering the horses in a totally new direction, away from the repeated backcrossing that had been the hallmark of the Hardy Hybrids Age. And these newly infatuated rhodophiles were intent on including many more individual species within the scope of their mix-and-match experiments.

The ultimate exemplar of this role reversal, who was later dubbed 'the High Priest of the Rhododendron Cult' by none other than John Guille Millais, was James Henry Mangles of Valewood, Haslemere, Surrey. A glance down the list of his hybrids in the *IRRC* will show that *R. griffithianum* was at the front and centre of his breeding programme, but not exclusively so, and with no restriction on its partners: for example, 'Alice Mangles' resulted from a pairing with *R. ponticum;* 'George Hardy', one with *R. catawbiense;* and 'Loder's White', a match with *R. cinnamomeum.* Regrettably, the majority of such crosses can only be given the tag '*griffithianum* hybrid' - 'Beauty of Littleworth', 'Dawn's Delight', 'Isabella Mangles' and 'Mrs Ellice', to list just four - but their differing morphological facets clearly suggests the choice of confederate was in no way limited.

Many of the other Sykes-Hooker discoveries and introductions also feature in the Mangles pairings, notably *R. cinnabarinum* and *R. maddenii,* which when mated together produced shrubs such as 'Hethersett' and the exquisite 'Rose Mangles'; or *R. grande,* and *R. campylocarpum,* respectively for gems such as 'Fulbrook' and 'Mrs Kingsmill', though the details of many of their partners have been lost.

That all this was achieved in little more than twenty years is often overlooked, for Mangles died in 1884 at the age of just 52, little more than three decades on from when Hooker's seed had begun to arrive back in the UK.

Throughout the second half of the 19th Century, such experimentation was not confined to Valewood, although elsewhere in the UK - at Penjerrick and Tremough, for instance - it was conducted on a slightly more modest scale. Equally, the professional nurserymen too found out that they still had lots to offer, hybridisers like Isaac Davies of Ormskirk, though in the main, they initially opted for the Subsection *Maddenia* species and *R. edgeworthii,* in response to the ongoing Victorian craze for greenhouse and heated conservatory plants, which at that time, was yet to peak.

The Lancashire nurseryman's main claim to fame within the denizens of the scaly lepidote rhododendrons was of course 'Praecox', which he coaxed into bloom during 1858. The cross was *ciliatum* x *dauricum,* and given that the former had only flowered for the first time in 1852 - 'scarcely two years since the seeds of this Rhododendron were received from Dr Hooker' - Davis was surely quick off the mark. The quote comes from the text that accompanies Tab 4648 in Volume 78 of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine,* which also reveals the widespread belief then held, that the plant portraits featured within the pages of Hooker's *Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya* were 'beyond nature in the size and colouring of the flowers'. That 1852 first-flowering categorically showed that 'such gratuitous statements, from very incompetent judges, are contradicted by the first species that has blossomed; for assuredly our cultivated *R. ciliatum* far excels in size of the corolla, and delicacy of tint, Dr Hooker's original figure'.

On the other side of the equation, *R. dauricum* had been around since 1780, twiddling its thumbs, waiting for something suitable to be bred with, embarrassed no doubt by the Lake Maggiore-based Rovelli nursery's attempts with *R. arboreum* and *R. ferrugineum,* even if - respectively - they produced the snappily-named and quickly forgotten 'Rovelli' and 'Rovellianum'. So for this resident of the Russian Far East to have hit pay dirt with *R. ciliatum,* such must have come as something of a relief.

Next out of the gate were the Veitch Nurseries with 'Princess Alice', this a *ciliatum* x *edgeworthii* match introduced and awarded a First Class Certificate in 1862, some six years after the pollen parent was featured in the *Botanical Magazine* (twelve tabs on from *R. falconeri*). Able to be grown outdoors only in the UK's mildest gardens, with the flower buds often lost to frost even when sheltered by a wall, the hybrid's white corollas, pink-striped and scented, nevertheless started a hot house trend, though the often horrendously straggly habit of the many iterations that followed - 'Fragrantissimum' being the obvious example - is not a feature of the plant named for Queen Victoria's second daughter.

However, the species that for almost a century would come to dominate the designs of the hybridisers - professional and amateur alike - arrived without fanfare from China late in 1855: *R. fortunei*.

Named for Robert Fortune, the plant hunting Scottish botanist who discovered and collected it, in UK cultivation those newly germinated seedlings took just eleven years to reach flowering size, the first blooms opening during May 1866 in the garden at Coombe Royal, Knightsbridge, Devon, which was then owned by John Luscombe. If that name rings some familiar sounding bells, it is because the gentleman concerned duly transferred pollen

from the stamens of *R. thomsonii* onto the style of those flowers - though it may have been the following year's display - raising the hybrid that William Watson named 'Luscombei' in 1892 - although by then, Luscombe's cross had been blooming for at least a decade (as evidenced in a James Mangles-penned report for the *Gardeners' Chronicle* published during March 1881).

John Luscombe is also known to have paired *R. fortunei* with the Hooker 'Aucklandii' form of *R. griffithianum,* and the hybrid 'Coombe Royal' is believed to be a selection from the raising, although mirroring many of the James Mangles registered pairings, it is simply designated as a 'griffithianum hybrid' in the *IRRC* entry.

That *griffithianum* x *fortunei* parental combination - or the reverse pairing - was of course subsequently repeated by many others, including James Mangles himself, yet more significantly: by William Binder, foreman in the Temperate House at Kew Gardens, his 1875 match introduced as 'Kewense' in 1888; and then, using far superior forms of the two species than were available to Binder, by Sir Edmund Loder at Leonardslee in 1901. Twenty-two named selections make up the superlative 'Loderi' clan, which is a complete and total overkill, however viewed. Yet even the least regarded of these clones stands head and shoulders above a permutative host of distinctly inferior parental combinations. Both figuratively and literally.

Five years prior to Sir Edmund Loder's endeavours however, the tectonic plates of Western rhododendron hybridisation had experienced a massive seismic shift when a second-generation *R. griffithianum* hybrid was unveiled to the gardening public. The chosen venue for the reveal was the historic Temple Gardens, established in the early 1300s during the time of the Knights Templar; the occasion, the 1896 Royal Horticultural Society Great Spring Show, forerunner of today's Chelsea extravaganza; and the plant - 'Pink Pearl'.

Astonished onlookers had to be reminded to breathe.

One even offered to pay £50.00 for the first available plant - an amount that if fed into the Bank of England's online inflation calculator will be shown to be the equivalent of £5,506.28 today.

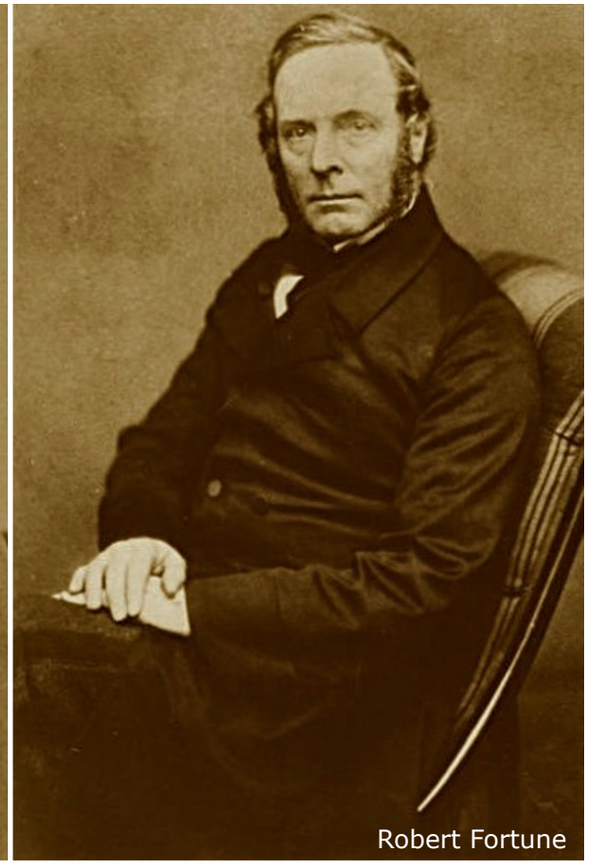
And in consequence, the Waterers of Bagshot were the horticultural toast of the town.

Initially, Master of Ceremonies Gomer Waterer kept schtum on the ingredients that went into the cross, then he followed silence with some artful misdirection. So - however unbelievable this sounds in 2024 - it was only half a century later, circa 1949, that Donald Waterer, Gomer's son, finally conceded to fellow nurseryman and author Frederick Street that 'Broughtonii' had pollinated 'George Hardy'. Which means that the genes of three rhododendron species are almost certainly rollicking about in the mix: *catawbiense* and *griffithianum* from the Mangles cross; plus *arboreum* and whatever else Mr Broughton, who was gardener to Lee of Hammersmith, added to his own conception, with the best bet, given the pre-1840 timeline, believed to be large a dollop of *R. maximum*.

Scroll forward again to 1890 and the index specimen of 'Pink Pearl' had already reached chest-height and begun to bloom - as the now classic photograph with nurseryman Charlie Rose confirms - so the shrub, which was raised by Gomer's father, the second John Waterer (1826-1893), was probably birthed around a decade earlier. By 1900 it had scored an Award of Merit and a First Class Certificate from the RHS, everyone wanted to grow it and nurserymen everywhere wanted to duplicate it. Which means whether you love it or loathe it, 'Pink Pearl' too gives Francis the bird. And in fact, with its classic conical flower truss, the long and thick though insipid-green foliage, and a stick-it-anywhere ironclad constitution, 'Pink Pearl' - despite the 25% genetic inheritance from *R. griffithianum* - could be viewed as the last of the nineteenth century's Hardy Hybrid vintage, even though it was the stepping-stone to a whole new generation of rhododendrons.



Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker



Robert Fortune



The original plant of 'Pink Pearl', *c.* 1890, and nurseryman Charlie Rose.

For although a handful of throwbacks were introduced in the first decades of the twentieth century, backcrossing was out and genetically more complicated 'hybrid' x 'hybrid' pairings became the new norm, especially for the European nursery firms such as the Boskoop-based L. J. Endtz and Co., and M. Koster and Sons, who spent the next thirty years trying to duplicate or better the Waterer pairing, often with admirable success given that 'Betty Wormald', 'Doncaster', 'Mrs G. W. Leak' and 'Souvenir de Doctor S. Endtz' all arose from their breeding programmes.

Another Dutch firm, C. B. van Nes and Sons, opted to buy the entire crop of *R. griffithianum* crosses that the German horticulturalist Otto Schultz had made and raised in the glasshouses of the Royal Porcelain Factory, Berlin - some 200 seedlings that were now at flowering size. These hybrids had been bred solely for the company's artisans to use as floral subjects when embellishing the elaborate vases, dinner services, tiles and cachepots that the pottery firm manufactured - the latter, for those unaware, not some sophisticated Bohemian synonym for a 'po', but an ornamental flowerpot. Except no regard was paid to their hardiness - the plants, not the chinaware - so while they turned out to be completely hopeless outdoors on the Continent, even at Boskoop, a few individuals proved able to survive the UK's maritime climate if grown in the woodland gardens that were then starting to come to the fore, 'Geoffrey Millais', 'Princess Juliana' and 'Queen Wilhelmina' being the most well known of these imports. The rest, van Nes simply paired with a group of largely red-flowering British Hardy Hybrids in a breeding programme that by 1921 had germinated some 250,000 seedlings (as reported by Millais following a visit to the nursery that same year). These were soon culled to just 250, all of which were then trialled for several years while stocks were built up. And the result? Twenty-nine cultivars ultimately named and introduced - from around the end of the decade through into the 1930s. 'Britannia', and its sister seedlings 'Earl of Athlone' and 'Unknown Warrior', are the most well known of these selections, with all three rhododendrons still popular today.

Back in Blighty, the 'amateur' enthusiasts at the turn of the 20th century and in the decades that followed, were swooning over the discoveries of Ernest Wilson, George Forrest, the aforementioned Frank Kingdon-Ward, Reginald Farrer, Roland Cooper, Joseph Rock, and the Frank Ludlow/George Sherriff dyad. For the first Golden Age of plant hunting had dawned and southwestern China, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma (Myanmar) and Tibet were being systematically strip-searched for anything that would take the fancy of British gardeners, with the members of Genus *Rhododendron* top of the list. And amongst the horde they returned - to mention but a few the hybridising fraternity took to heart - were *R. calophytum, R. davidsonianum, R. dichroanthum, R. discolor, R. fargesii, R. forrestii, R. fulvum, R. griersonianum, R. haematodes, R. hanceanum, R. lacteum, R. leucaspis, R. lutescens, R. neriiflorum, R. oreodoxa, R. pseudochrysanthum, R. sinogrande, R. sutchuenense* and, needless to say, *R. williamsianum*. Moreover, those very same deep-pocketed aficionados - J. C. Williams of Caerhays, Henry McLaren of Bodnant, and Lionel de Rothschild of Exbury (to single out but three) - had soon wrested responsibility for funding the collecting expeditions away from the nursery firms and botanic gardens.

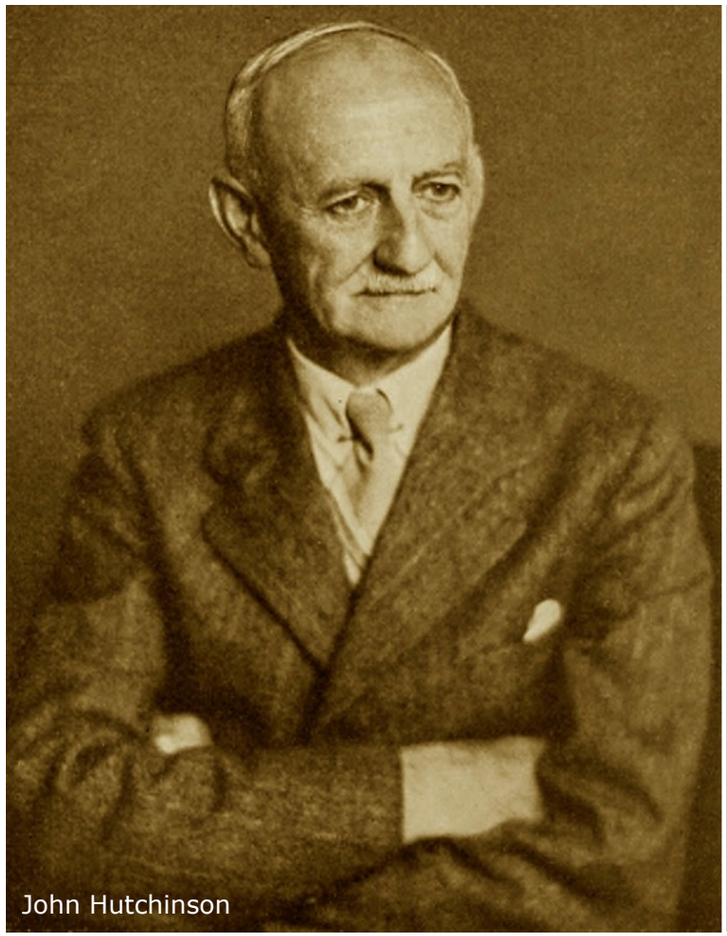
Plundering the botanic hot spots of south-western China, southern and south-eastern Asia kicked-off in earnest, one could say - because despite apparently being guided by the hand of God, the French amateur plant hunters of the Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris, returned very little seed in comparison to their herbarium collections - with Ernest Wilson's first expedition for the Veitch Nursery emporium in 1899 and basically continued at pace for the next fifty years. And this fervid exploration and accumulation of every viable rhododendron capsule hands could be laid on, was completely unfettered by the upheavals of World War I, just temporarily brought to an almost halt by the antics of Hirohito and Hitler, but then finally curtailed for a more than three-decades-long interregnum by a devil incarnate: the Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong; post his army's invasion of Tibet in 1950 and that independent country's illegal annexation. Yet the number of new-to-science rhododendron introductions that were established in UK cultivation across those fifty years was simply staggering, the total count of species gathered between just 1899 and 1934 - the period when the collectors were most active - hitting a grand total many hundreds strong from a parlous base of around fifty.

As a direct consequence of this influx of new material, an elite Rhododendron Society was formed in 1915 to exchange practical, first-hand information, on the dos and don'ts of cultivation and hybridisation via an annual journal - *The Rhododendron Society Notes* (all fifteen volumes of which, plus three indexes, are now freely available online at the RCMG website) - with articles contributed by the membership. This coterie was of course 'invited' rather than 'open to all', a policy that would change in 1927 when the Rhododendron Society 'evolved' into the Rhododendron Association, the new organisation publishing Year Books from 1929 onwards until wartime restrictions came into force after the 1939 issue.

It was in 1930, however, a year or so before the original grouping was effectively wound-up, that the Rhododendron Society published a book that for well over three decades would remain the definitive text on their chosen subject: *The Species Of Rhododendron*. With detailed botanic descriptions in English of all the taxa then known, written by three of the leading rhododendron experts of the time - John Hutchinson of the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, taking on the lepidote species; Harry Tagg at Edinburgh Botanic, the elepidotes; and Alfred Rehder, resident rhodophile botanist at the Arnold Arboretum across the pond in Boston, Massachusetts, the azaleas - it was a milestone, with its 861 pages documenting no fewer than 988 rhododendrons. Of course, many of these would later be lost to synonymy in the series by series classification reappraisals that came from the pens of John MacQueen Cowan and H. H. Davidian - published from the late 1940s through until the late 1960s - after which, beginning in 1978 and concluding in 1996, the major upheavals wrought by James Cullen and David Chamberlain - the principal authors of what would become known as the Edinburgh Revision - hit. But before those axes fell a further thirty-one species were added to the total when the Second Edition of what had by then become a rhodophile's bible, went to print in 1947. The Rhododendron Society had struggled-on post publication of Volume 3, Part 5, of its *Notes,* in 1931, but basically had nothing to do other than oversee the continued distribution of its conceptual masterpiece, which it did, until formerly would-up in April 1952.

On a practical note, conceptually large and physically heavy though it undoubtedly was, *The Species Of Rhododendron* could be taken down from the bookshelf without risk of serious back injury, and even carried out into the garden should the need arise, unlike either of the two monumental volumes from John Guille Millais that had preceded the tome in 1917 and 1924: *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids;* whose illustrious contents were as equally well regarded; for the descriptions were also presented in English, rather than in Latin. But *TSOR* went one better, at least, for those with lower lumbar problems brought about by spending too much time watching their gardening staff double-digging the soil. Because in 1930, an enthusiast's boxed version had also been offered to the membership, this containing an unbound version of the book with the pages for each Series gathered together and kept so arranged by a set of tabbed dividers.

Naturally, and as would be entirely expected, the early 20th century plant-hunting windfall set off an F1 hybridising slugfest. It was led by the aforementioned J. C. Williams, swiftly joined by another Cornish resident, Edward Magor, at nearby Lamellen, then by Henry McLaren, plus Roza Stevenson of Tower Court, Ascot, Berkshire, Sir John Ramsden of



John Hutchinson



Alfred Rehder



John Guille Millais

both Muncaster Castle, Cumbria, and Bulstrode Park, Buckinghamshire, and of course, by Lionel de Rothschild. All were members of the Rhododendron Society, Roza - given the less than enlightened times vis-à-vis equality between the sexes - courtesy of her husband, John Barr Stevenson (who had edited *The Rhododendron Species*), with de Rothschild not only the prime driving force behind the establishment of the Rhododendron Association and its goal of a wider community of enthusiasts, but universally regarded today as the most outstanding hybridiser to have ever worked within the genus. Period.

Each of the newly introduced species was incorporated into the various breeding programmes just as soon as a cosseted seedling opened its first flower bud - assuming it was any good, and many proved to be a revelation - with the individual parental pairings often duplicated - inadvertently or not - at the various gardens and estates. Which of course, from the 1920s onwards, developed into a friendly, highly competitive - if not quite cut-throat - race for Royal Horticultural Society floral awards.

We thus have 'Fabia' - Henry McLaren's 1927 pairing of two especially swooned-over species (the seed x pollen equation being *dichroanthum* x *griersonianum*) - scooping an immediate Award of Merit when it was introduced in 1934, only to then be joined by 'Exbury Fabia', 'Fabia High Beeches', 'Fabia Tower Court' and finally 'Fabia Waterer', though the latter was only listed in 1988. Just how ridiculous this situation became was visually demonstrated in early May 1933, when J. J. Crosfield and the Dowager Lady Loder both arrived at the same flower show - although not together, it must be stressed - with near identical trusses cut from bushes bred from a match between *R. griersonianum* and *R. facetum*. At which point, a typical British compromise was reached: the FCC award was shared between both plants and each then christened 'Tally Ho'. Except the pairings were not the same. For one was *griersonianum* x *facetum;* the other, *facetum* x *griersonianum.* And while this may only have been a minor technicality of little consequence back in 1933, genetically, it is rather significant today, as the provision of a whole armada of organelles is now known to be the sole gift of the female parent. So, if your specimen plant of 'Tally Ho' appears to lack the vim and vigour displayed by the one growing just along the street in a neighbour's garden, you now know why - because the specialist nurseries distributed both cultivars under that single epithet, which ensured they were completely mixed-up.

- above -
Authors of *The Rhododendron Species* and *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids.*
Regrettably, a photograph of Harry Tagg remained elusive despite the most diligent of searches.

- overleaf left & right -
Who's Who No. 6: the leading hybridisers active during the First Golden Age of Gathering.



Lionel de Rothschild of Exbury



E. J. P Magor of Lamellen



J. C. Williams of Caerhays



Richard Gill of Tremough



Samuel Smith of Penjerrick



Sir Edmund Loder of Leonardslee



Sir John Ramsden of Muncaster



John Barr Stevenson of Tower Court



Roza Stevenson of Tower Court



Henry McLaren of Bodnant

As an individual garden's tally of awards began to stack up, those winning cultivars were soon being paired with each other, as well as with other species, plus some of the older creations from yesteryear that were still doing the rounds, so the matches made by the amateur hybridisers quickly became just as genetically complex as those being made by the nursery firms at the start of the century in their quest to better 'Pink Pearl'. It was a trend that would continue and burgeon, especially on the other side of the Atlantic, where from the 1950s onwards, many American hybridisers seemed to relish creating the longest parental equation combinations imaginable - cue a roll of drums, plus a trumpet fanfare, for Messrs Weldon Delp, David Leach and Albert Smith, along with the current uncrowned king of overly long, un-attenuated hybrid formulae, Mr Jim Barlup.

But before we get ahead of ourselves, one species, introduced in the 1930s, must be highlighted, for it has influenced the output of virtually each and every member of the hybridising fraternity worldwide beyond all others: *R. yakushimanum*.

Two small plants arrived at Exbury Gardens, Hampshire, from Japan, in 1934, part of a larger consignment sent to Lionel de Rothschild by Koichiro Wada, owner of the famed Hakoneya Nursery at Numazu, in Shizuoka Prefecture, sixty miles to the southwest of Tokyo on the main island of Honshu. Neither specimen was more than 25cm high and one had shed all but four of its leaves during the journey to the New Forest, but nursed back to health, the two juveniles were planted-out in a secluded spot in the garden, away from the usual paths the invited guests then frequented, and allowed to develop unmolested for the next decade, becoming bushes around 1m wide.

Then, in 1946, four years after Lionel's death - according to C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber (writing in *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* 1967) - one of the plants was 'translated to the RHS garden at Wisley'. Of course, the authors are far too polite to mention that Francis Hanger, previously head gardener at Exbury throughout the whole of the Second World War, had that very year accepted employment in the same role at that prestigious Surrey site. Nor do they apply the term 'synchronicity' to these events, though they were clearly linked.

Rubbing salt into the wound, whether consciously or not, Hanger then exhibited the filched shrub at the 1947 Chelsea Flower Show, where inevitably, the blooms caused an even bigger stir than 'Pink Pearl' had fifty years earlier. A First Class Certificate was swiftly issued and Edmund de Rothschild, Lionel's eldest son - recently decommissioned from the army having served with the British Expeditionary Force in France; fought in the North Africa Campaign and then with the 77th Field Regiment in Italy; and reached the rank of Major - who would become an exemplary hybridiser in his own right and must have been inwardly livid about what was going on despite all outward appearances to the contrary, was asked by the RHS to name the clone. Which however way you look at it, was an indelicate request by almost anyone's standards.

And his choice?

'Koichiro Wada'. Which was absolutely perfect.

Francis Hanger would later offer 'scions of the FCC form' or 'two or three flowers of *R. yakushimanum*' so that others could begin breeding with the species. But such largesse did not come without a quid-pro-quo. In the author and nurseryman Frederick Street's case: 'some old hardy hybrids needed in the garden for general planting'.

All three of the quotes above come from Street's 1965 book *Rhododendrons,* and in an earlier-published tome - *Hardy Rhododendrons* of 1954 vintage - he correctly predicted that *R. yakushimanum* would 'make both *griffithianum* and *griersonianum* look like the back row of the chorus'.

Indeed. For by then, a frenzy of directed pollination pairings was taking place each season, the results of which, were cabbages born of kings (to misquote the line from Lewis Carroll's *The Walrus and the Carpenter,* a narrative poem included in 1871's *Through the Looking-Glass*). Hundreds, then thousands of them. With the choice of partner often ill-conceived and the one intramural genetic fault that *R. yakushimanum* does have, invariably passed on to its offspring: the darker pigmentation that flushes those white blooms pink when first they open, gone in but an instant.

Facetiously, you could blink, and miss its presence entirely.

Yet flippancy apart, once that transforming hue has faded, be it within the corollas of the species or on the massed ranks of its progeny, those blooms quickly become second or even third rate, because they look drained. And this affliction mars the floral display of virtually every F1 *yakushimanum* hybrid raised to date, irrespective of whether the species has been used as the pollen parent, or when given the task of maturing the seed.

Arthur George's AM and FCC-rewarded 'Hydon Dawn' is a classic example: stunning, deep purplish-pink corollas soon metamorphose into a visually unpleasing off-white, with the darker pigmentation siphoned-off even faster if the bush is planted in full sun, where of course, it needs to be sited if a tight and bushy habit is to be maintained into maturity. Moreover, the abaxial leaf indumentum of most of these F1 hybrids is but a shade of the thick and densely woolly tomentum found on the native Japanese plants, with the blades themselves, also poorly fashioned substitutes.

On the bright side, there are one or two exceptions to this sorry state of affairs, but in general, the swift pigmentation bleed is usually only resolved when an F1 *yakushimanum* cross is subsequently paired with another hybrid or species. And then, more often than not, only to a degree. Which in consequence, however fleetingly beautiful over three or four days some of them may indeed be, overwhelmingly, the 'yak' horde are justifiably worthy of Kingdon-Ward's censure.

Switching subjects, polyploid incompatibilities have to an extent curtailed the scope and number of the lepidote hybrids created by the hand of Man, with trial and error being the only way of determining if one species would pair with another - at least, until the publication of an extensive set of chromosome listings in the 1950 *Rhododendron Year Book*. The RHS research team led by E. K. Janaki Ammal found a mix of diploids ($2n = 26$) and tetraploids ($2n = 52$) in three of the groupings - *Glauca, Lepidota* and *Saluenensia;* diploids, tetraploids and hexaploids ($2n = 78$) in another three - *Lapponica, Maddenia* and *Triflora;* no diploids, but tetraploids and hexaploids in *Heliolepida;* and just hexaploids in *Cinnabarina.* There was a single octoploid ($2n = 104$) also present within the ranks of the *Heliolepida* - *R. pholidotum;* and a dodecaploid ($2n = 156$) hidden in plain sight amongst the *Maddenia* - this treated as *R. pseudomanipurense* herein. However, long before the provision of such numerical clarification, the hybridising fraternity had already discovered that the *Cinnabarina* species were fully compatible with *R. maddenii,* and via the J. C. Williams introduction 'Royal Flush', Lionel de Rothschild made a backcross that produced 'Lady Chamberlain', whose blooms most definitely challenge the Kingdon-Ward Doctrine.

Equally, the lavender-blue flowering tetraploid, *R. augustinii,* has also been used extensively. Paired with members of Subsection *Lapponica,* cultivars such as J. J. Crosfield's 'Blue Diamond', or E. J. P. Magor's 'Augfast', 'Saint Breward' and 'Saint Tudy' were the result. Alternatively, when combined with one of the taller-growing scaly rhododendrons at Exbury - 'Eleanor' and 'Electra'. Side by side, Bodnant's output of lepidote crosses is small when compared with other gardens, or even their own flock of red-flowering elepidotes, but one is of particular note, Henry McLaren's 1928 *spinuliferum* x *moupinense* pairing, which resulted in 'Seta' - unveiled in 1933, and swiftly gifted both an RHS Award of Merit, and then a First Class Certificate.

One Scottish hybridising dynasty also consistently challenge Kingdon-Ward's negative prognosis with their dwarf lepidote hybrids - along with a few elepidote cultivars too - the Cox family of Glendoick, at Glencarse, near Perth.

Peter Cox, son of the plant hunter, author and later nurseryman, Euan Cox, began making crosses in the late 1950s, assisted in the task by his father and later by his own son, Kenneth. The first combination to be tried out was a *chryseum* x *ludlowii* match, which gave 'Chikor' (recipient of an AM in 1962 and an FCC in 1968). Next came 'Curlew', which was a *ludlowii* x *fletcherianum* pairing that received its own FCC when introduced in 1969, and has today, become a garden centre staple. More of the 'Glendoick Birds' - the coverall locution under which they roost - soon followed, with the avian flock now encompassing 'Brambling', 'Egret', 'Phalarope', 'Ptarmigan' and 'Razorbill' - to highlight just five - the flight currently totalling twenty-two individuals, who to date, have accumulated some sixteen RHS awards in total.

Then came the second Golden Age of plant hunting:

Begun in the early 1980s, when China allowed Western botanists and horticulturalists to once again roam its hills and even traverse the passes once governed by the Dalai Lama, at the same time, a new generation of plant hunting protagonists were opening-up new, previously unbotanised areas - the state of Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India, and even the mountainous northwestern areas of Vietnam, Lao Cai Province proving to be especially rewarding after its new-to-science native rhododendrons demonstrated that they could thrive in the UK's maritime climate.

This time around however, the idyll was shorter lived, despite running on through the millennium until around 2011. But then, the well-meaning if heavy-handed restrictions of the Nagoya Protocol came into effect. Some laissez-faire collecting continued in fits and starts, but by 2015, each and every bunch of capsules removed from a rhododendron bush out in the wilds by a foreign hand, had effectively, to be officially pre-sanctioned by the government of the country concerned. Freewheeling horticultural expeditions were dealt a death blow; those mounted by the botanic institutions, wrapped up in red tape.

Thankfully however, during the span of the second Golden Age's thirty-odd years, any number of old favourites were reintroduced, new discoveries were made, and some species only poorly known from the dried material pinned to cardboard sheets in the world's herbaria, were found again and this time introduced into cultivation.

Equally, in contrast to the collecting forays launched at the beginning of the last century, these new expeditions - mounted from GB by the likes of Alan Clark, Peter and Kenneth Cox, Mark Flanagan, Peter Hutchison, Tony Kirkham, Edward Needham, Keith Rushforth, Tony Schilling and a host of others - were of but a few weeks duration, as aeroplanes, motor transport and better roads into the hinterland had substantially reduced the time needed to get to where the rhododendron populations were present on the ground. Indeed, sometimes, there were even hotels close enough to the hunting grounds to avoid spending a night or several nights under canvas! Yet as all those gentlemen mentioned above will readily confirm, in addition to the spectacular mountain scenery and entire hillsides ablaze with colour during the flowering season, one constant from the good old days of Forrest, Kingdon-Ward and Wilson remained: the leeches.

Bloodsucking discomforts apart, within the vast sweep of material newly introduced into Western cultivation, species such as *R. davidii, R. dendrocharis, R. ochraceum, R. platypodum, R. sinofalconeri, R. valentinioides* and *R. yuefengense* are all likely to become must-have fodder for members of the current hybridising fraternity to experiment with, especially as many of the recent introductions began blooming away from home more than a decade ago. Micropropagation techniques will mass distribute the fruits of those labours onto the market much faster too, the technique bypassing the delays incurred while waiting for specimens to grow big enough to stool layer in situ, or provide scions for grafting and cuttings for rooting. But fast-tracking the distribution of those cultivars has a demonstrable downside too:

Previously, building-up a substantial stock of saleable plants from a single, flowering-size tree or shrub, could take a nurseryman around ten years and even then - as Frederick Street reports in his book *Hardy Rhododendrons* - he would only have some sixty or so youngsters to hand. In consequence, it might have taken 'between thirty and forty years for a new rhododendron of outstanding merit to become available' widely and in quantity. This is why, to avoid that delay - and as also reported by Mr Street - in the not too distant past, many of the seedlings raised from a cross would 'have been sent out at random all bearing the name of the first selected plant that received an award', a practice that 'has caused considerable disappointment'. To put it mildly. So while microprops are at least true vegetative copies of a plant - as of course are grafts, layers and cuttings - if the process is concertinaed into a few years, rather than a few decades, it prevents those new hybrid introductions from being properly trialled in test gardens. Which will mean more plants lost to severe winter weather events, especially if in ignorance, the youngsters are set out in full exposure instead of half-shade. And when that happens - not if - the reputations of all concerned will take a knock.

So what of the latest, up-to-the-minute hybridising trends?

Post the arrival of the two-volume 2nd Edition of the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* in 2004, some seventeen supplements have been published that added around 1,750 new lepidote and elepidote hybrids to the grand total.

Of those, scaly rhododendrons comprised just over 6%.

Overwhelming the pairings have been made by enthusiasts - 89% - rather than by professional nurserymen - 11% - and the hybridising love affair with *R. yakushimanum* has pretty much come to an end, with only 79 crosses listed where the species was used as the pollen or seed parent - 5% of the total if rounded up.

The majority of matings - some 60% - are between two named hybrids, while crosses onto an individual species or where such is the pollen provider sum to around a third of that figure - just 22%.

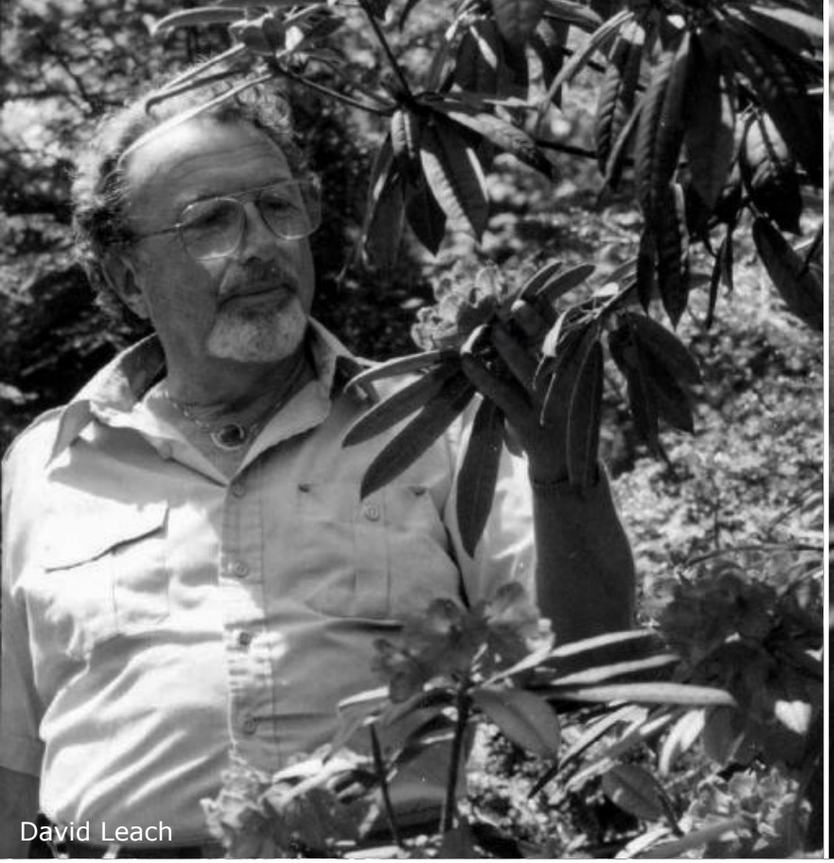
Complicated crosses, where the given parental equation challenges the number of different bracketing symbols available to contain it, come in at 17%, with the registration authorities waiting with baited breath for Jim Barlup to submit {('Yellow Saucer' x 'Anna's Riplet') x ['September Song' x ('Bambi' x *proteoide*s)]} X 'Lem's Cameo' x {[('Lem's Cameo' x 'Ken Janeck') x 'Brandt's Tropicana'] x ('Whopper' x 'Brandt's Tropicana')}. Or the reverse pairing. Which is apparently a distinct possibility.

Turning to all those new-to-science species introductions from the second Golden Age of plant hunting listed above, currently, they feature in just ten listings, with even a few of those simply individually named selections. Of course, someone, somewhere, is eventually going to dabble with *R. ochraceum, R. sinofalconeri* or *R. valentinioides,* but officially, it hasn't happened yet. Nor has anyone attempted to pair a *R. canadense* clone boasting a chromosome count of 2*n* = 24 - one pair less than a 'normal' diploid rhododendron - with the genetically matching *R. camtschaticum* - or at least, if a successful mating has taken place, it hasn't been registered or publicised.

And on that note, so endeth the history lesson. For the moment…

- overleaf left & right -

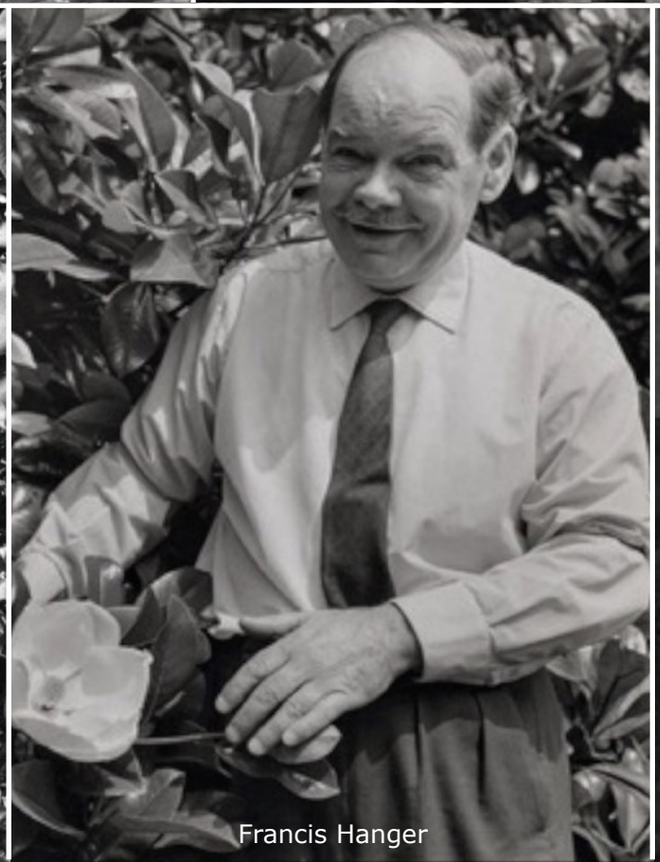
Who's Who No. 7: American, British and European hybridisers from the latter half of the 20th Century.

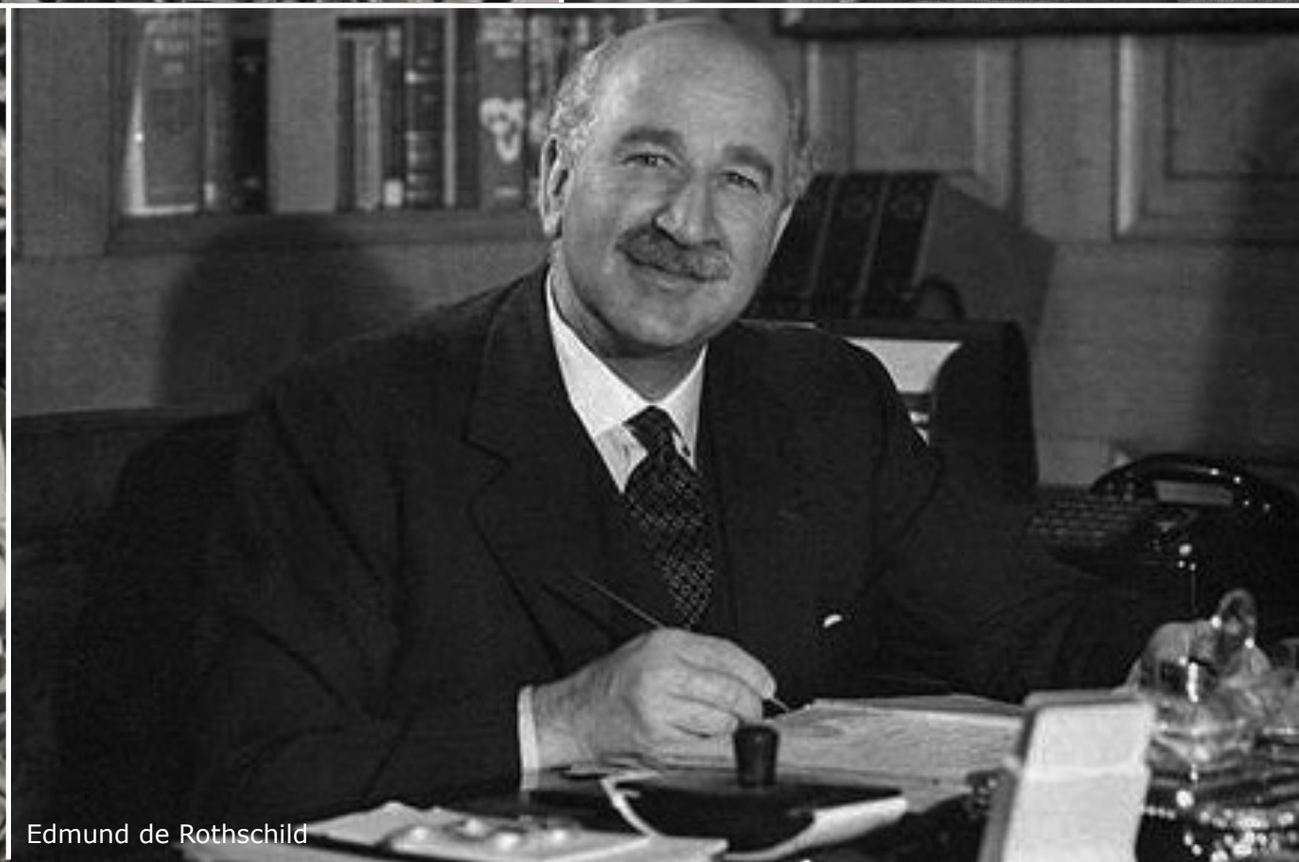

David Leach


Dietrich Hobbie

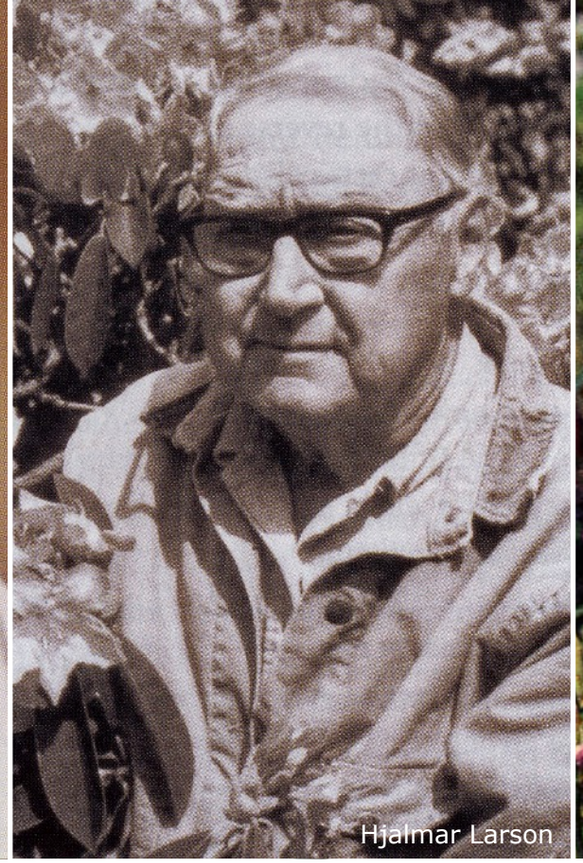

Sir James Horlick

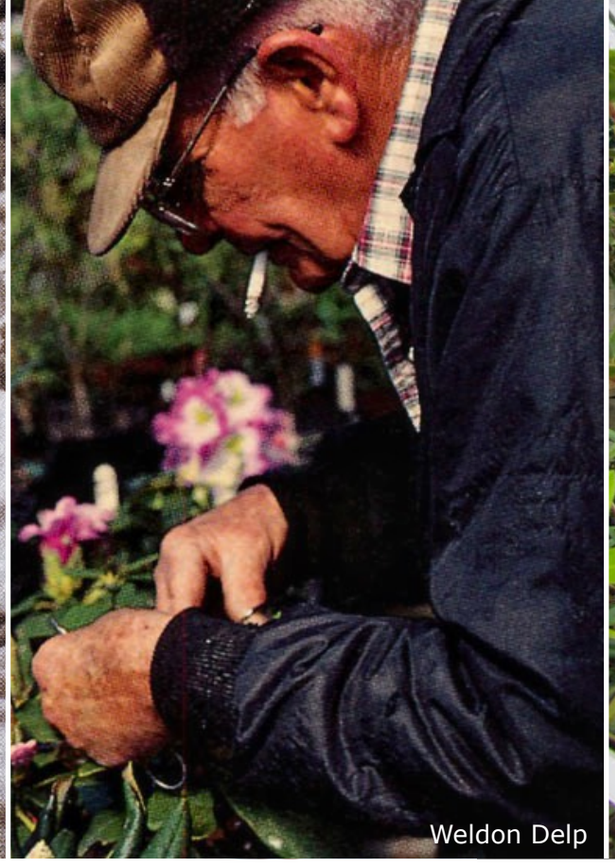

Eric Harrison


Francis Hanger


Edmund de Rothschild


Halfdan Lem


Hjalmar Larson


Weldon Delp


Peter Cox


Hope Findlay


Jim Barlup


Hans Hachmann

Tribulations - One Necessitating Change

Nomenclature issues first:

If - despite their many glaring errors - the various historical species classifications outlined in Volume 1 of these texts were compared with the naming conventions applied to the vast plethora of rhododendron hybrids, which now outnumber the species by a ratio of almost forty to one and counting, they would be considered veritable models of propriety. For a literal free-for-all had existed until the international registration system was begun in the mid-1950s and in consequence, even today, those lists are littered with duplications, inconsistencies and utterly unpronounceable abridgements. The existence of the latter can be laid squarely at the feet of Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour and sets in stone a simple rule that each and every active member of today's directed pollination fraternity should keep to the forefront of their appellative deliberations: don't ever let a botanist anywhere near the list of epithet choices being considered for your newly flowered creation.

In fact, the origins of the problem can be traced all the way back to the early 1800s, when rhododendron hybridising first kicked off - because of course, Latin names were then all the rage.

'Album' was clearly a favourite, for species selections or crosses, with some thirteen entries featuring in the Second Edition of the *IRRC*. 'Elegans' - 'elegant', for the uninitiated Latinophobic (the castigation applicable herein only to that 'dead' language) - proved not quite as popular, with just four registrations, while 'Rubrum' scored five, 'Roseum' and 'Superbum' eight each plus one synonym apiece. And if 'Album' on its own wasn't good enough, yesteryear's hybridisers could demonstrate their creative independence by opting for combinations: 'Album Elegans'; or 'Album Roseum'; even 'Album Superbum'; or some other dyad. And of course, a few more better educated nurserymen went the whole hog, venturing into ungodly triunities - 'Album Magnificum Plenum' or 'Album Plenum Odoratum', for instance - though only two had enough temerity to lumber the plant-buying public with quaternions - 'Album Delicatissimum Folis Variegatum' and 'Album Illustratum Flore Pleno'; both being evergreen azaleas; the first conceived by none other than Louis van Houtte in 1863; the second by a gentleman known only as 'Klein' sometime before 1873.

Not unpredictably, 'fancy' names soon took over, these in vogue from the 1850s onwards, their use nigh-on absolute today. But as with the Latin appellations, throughout the first hundred years of their own ascendancy, epithet duplication was still rife. Examples of such include four entries for 'Princess Alice', five plus one synonym for 'Pink Lady', and a round half-dozen for 'Queen Victoria' (the latter all logged-in by the turn of the century).

Yet over-replication apart, everything else was going swimmingly until the last day of August 1918, which was when the Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, the highly esteemed, rhodo-savvy and aforementioned Professor Isaac Bayley Balfour, wrote to Edward Magor of Lamellen, Cornwall, a respected amateur rhododendron hybridiser and member of the recently formed Rhododendron Society:

> 'I am strongly in favour of naming hybrids if possible by the combination method - that is a word coined out of a portion of the name of each parent. This is more satisfactory than either the popular English name, or the name in Latin form'.

Two months later, a follow-up arrived in the post:

> 'Now as to names. I must not mislead you, as I fear I may have done, to think that the termination of the name of the male plant should always be taken to add to the first part of that of the female in making up the name of the hybrid. The aim of the system is to get an indication of parentage in a name of a euphonious a form as possible. In the case of your *R. prostratum* x *R. fastigiatum,* I suggested R. "prostigiatum", for it sounds to me better than "prostfast".



Isaac Bayley Balfour



Edward Magor

> 'The great point to keep in view is that the name shall not be so like a specific one as to mislead, while at the same time parentage is indicated'.

Both quotes are reproduced from the article *Naming Rhododendron Hybrids* by Walter Magor, the son of Edward, which was part of the *Rhododendron Notes* section in the 1966 *Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book,* published by the Royal Horticultural Society. Oh, and 'Euphonious', by the by, means 'pleasing to the ear'.

Balfour actually went so far as to suggest alternatives to some of Edward Magor's other proposed names - 'Decauk' for instance, instead of 'Decaucklandii'; plus 'Auckivor', 'Campylothoms' and 'Haemkings' (to list just three that thankfully fell by the wayside). But regrettably, E. J. P. Magor was hooked, registering, over the course of the next twenty years, such trip-off-the-tongue gems as 'Callirhoe', 'Campxen' and 'Cilkeisk', though the one most commentators agree takes the biscuit is 'Smirnauck'. The really sad thing is that the adoption of these ghastly contractions as epithets condemned some simply remarkable hybrids to obscurity or worse.

Fortunately, few other rhodophiles boarded this cumbersome bandwagon, though John Dalrymple at Castle Kennedy, Algernon Heneage-Vivian at Clyne Castle, Henry McLaren at Bodnant, and Lionel de Rothschild at Exbury, all flirted with the concept, though to nowhere near the same degree, and predominantly, 'fancy' names were used for their introductions rather than IBB abominations. Suffice it to say: condensed formula naming never became flavour of the month for most breeders.

The Rhododendron Stud Book, published within the *Year Book of the Rhododendron Association 1934,* was the first formal attempt to bring order to the naming of hybrids. Lionel de Rothschild, President of the Association, simply adopted a tried and tested system

that was already being used by orchid breeders: all the seedlings from a cross would be covered by a collective 'fancy' name, this encompassing the progeny of any repeat pairings regardless of how many times or at how many locales such duplication occurred, providing the parental combination was the same. Should a specific seedling within this flock be deemed worthy of special distinction, it would also be given a clonal 'fancy' name that would apply only to that named individual or any plants vegetatively propagated from it. Adopting the formula meant that all the seedlings and clones that could claim common parentage, became part of the same grex.

However, in 1956, the RHS decided that this was wrong, writing that:

> 'The name 'Albatross' has been used to cover all the seedlings resulting from the cross *R. discolor* x 'Loderi', individual clones being distinguished as varieties, e.g. 'Albatross Exbury var.', and 'Albatross Townhill var.' This is clearly undesirable as it means that seedlings differing very considerably from each other are included under the one name 'Albatross' and that, consequently, no one, wishing to acquire Rhododendron 'Albatross', can be sure of what plant he is going to get. It is, therefore, suggested that, in future, this method of naming should be discontinued, and that no "collective names" of the type of 'Albatross', covering numerous seedlings, should be given, but that all names should refer to individual clones'.
> *The Naming Of Rhododendron Hybrids And The Revision Of The Rhododendron Handbook.*
> Published within *The Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book 1956,* no author cited.

All the existing collective flocks would have their names amended so it was obvious as to which was a grex and which was a clone, with a small 'g' or 'cl' appended post the epithet. Where this information was unknown, neither abbreviation would be used.

It was also decided to standardise the nomenclature for subsequent introductions of the same pairing made at different locations. This meant that 'May Day' for the A. M. Williams *haematodes* x *griersonianum* cross introduced in 1932, became 'Bodnant May Day' for Henry McLaren's 1939 offering and 'Exbury May Day' for Lionel de Rothschild's match. And duplication of a registered epithet post this directive also became a no-no, though the previous 150 years of such practice were reluctantly accepted as a fait accompli.

All this came about because in 1955, the Royal Horticultural Society was appointed as the International Cultivar Registration Authority for Genus *Rhododendron,* and as such, had to conform to the rules of the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants that had been published in 1953. Equally immaterial was the imminent publication of the First Edition of the *International Rhododendron Register,* set for in 1958. Really?

Remarkably, the entire, planetary-wide fraternity of rhododendron hybridisers - both amateur and professional alike - accepted the far stricter regime without so much as a quibble or a bleat, even when post 1958, the name of a plant that its creator had already introduced into commerce, then fell foul of the new precepts and was refused registration unless its moniker was changed.

The solution?

The rise of 'Hachmann's This' or 'Delp's That', and the fact that out in the real world, some cultivars still have two names: the first, the moniker they were originally distributed under, now reduced to a synonym, but even today, more widely used; the second, agreed with the registrar and published in a supplement to the checklist.

Of course, it sounds wonderful. One name, and one name only, applying to a single, vegetatively propagated cultivar. But proclamation of such a pie-in-the-sky utopia does not mean that it actually exists. Nor has it, despite the brazen introductory line of that 1956 RHS missive, which claimed that 'up to about thirty years ago practically all rhododendron hybrids in commerce were clones, i.e. all the plants under a given name were the progeny of a single seedling propagated by grafting or layering' (ibid. page 156).

Not so. And unfortunately, not so by a long shot. In fact, an outright lie.

As four quotes from entries that feature in the *Rhododendron Hybrids* section of the online edition of *Bean's Trees and Shrubs* make plain.

First off, that for R. 'Altaclerense':

> 'This foundation-cross, from which many of the pink- and red-flowered hardy hybrids are derived, was made at Highclere, the seat of the Earl of Carnarvon, in 1826, by J. R. Gowen. 1800 seedlings were raised and the bulk distributed to private gardens and nurseries in England and Scotland'.

Or as is made equally clear in the text for R. 'Cornubia':

> 'This cross was made by S. Smith, head gardener to R. Barclay Fox, Penjerrick, in 1901. It was named 'Lilianii' at Penjerrick, but half of the 400 or so seedlings raised were made over to Messrs Gill, who named their share 'Cornubia'. The plants are variable in the shade of red of their flowers'.

And from the account pertaining to R. 'Cunningham's Album Compactum':

> 'A hybrid of *R. caucasicum,* believed to have been raised in the 1830s or 1840s at Cunningham's Comely Bank Nursery, Edinburgh. According to a letter to Kew (1909) from J. Fraser, then co-proprietor of this nursery, one-third approximately of the seedlings from this cross take after *R. caucasicum* in habit, and vary in colour from white to pale yellow'.

Even that for R. 'Vanessa':

> 'There appear to be three clones at least of Vanessa in commerce'.

Numerous other examples of such malfeasant practice are documented in the 1988-published *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* with the book's authors, Peter and Kenneth Cox, stating in their introduction that:

> 'Even since 1958, many clonal names do disguise the fact that several undifferentiated seedlings have been distributed, and it is always worthwhile being wary of this problem. Where possible we warn of the existence and distribution of several clones under one name. The registrars can express discontent at this state of affairs, but there is little that they can do, and with problems of identification always arising, the system will never be perfect'.

The 'several clones' problem that Peter and Kenneth describe applies especially to rhododendron cultivars gifted an Award of Merit or a First Class Certificate at one of the RHS flower shows, or when similarly bestowed after a plant has been presented for appraisal at one of the scheduled meetings of that organisation's Woody Plant Committee. Many breeders then choose not to put their award winning clones into commerce, sending out instead, a lesser substitute to the nursery firms.

For instance, R. 'Alison Johnstone':

> 'In the form that received an Award of Merit in 1945 the corolla is unmarked, but in some plants there are two bands of speckles inside'.

And also, R. 'Bonito':

'A commercial clone differs from the AM plant in having greenish-yellow markings in the throat'.

The two quotes above were again taken from the online version of *Bean's Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles,* a perusal of which via the International Dendrology Society's website - currently at https://www.treesandshrubsonline.org/ - will quickly reveal similar examples covering almost every other letter of the alphabet.

And if that wasn't enough, nurseryman and author Frederick Street, writing in his 1965 book *Rhododendrons,* details yet more bad practice:

'Perhaps one of the most attractive new hybrids in recent times has been Rhododendron 'Fabia' - a cross between *Rhododendron dichroanthum* and *Rhododendron griersonianum* which was introduced by the late Lord Aberconway in that vintage year of 1933. I do not suggest that he started to produce this plant in quantity to sell throughout the world but this has sometimes happened in other large gardens and even in some nurseries. The fault lies in the theory that the same cross between two species should produce the same plant. What has been done is that a cross has been made, the seeds sown, the plants raised and then sold without being seen in flower and selected. Not any form of the two species will produce the same strain, and even the best will vary enormously in their progeny. This means that any imitation of the original cross made by Lord Aberconway could not possibly be expected to produce the same plant as the one seedling which was selected by him and put before the Royal Horticultural Society where it received an Award of Merit in 1934. Only that one plant could provide the grafts, the cuttings or the layers to propagate more plants with exactly the same qualities. For this reason, and it is a very good reason, the true forms of the best and original Rhododendron 'Fabia' are scarce'.

Mr Street also reports that:

'It was the custom among nurserymen to dispose of rejected seedlings, raised in the process of hybridising, at a reduced price for mass planting. Many of these plants were often good in themselves but not outstanding enough to merit vegetative propagation. Very often, only one or two plants will be kept out of a batch of two or three hundred.'

Edward Magor took the idea one step further:

'One of the most significant, and perhaps least known of Mr Magor's activities was his involvement in distributing both species and hybrids to 'gentlemen gardeners' by the circulation of a 'List of Surplus Plants for Sale'. This list was being distributed as early as 1918 and by the 1920s there was a 'network' in place whereby the landed gentry were able to sell or exchange surplus plant material and thereby service each other's needs; however, it was not realised until recently just how large a volume was involved'.

For instance:

'Between November 1926 and November 1930 ten batches of plants were supplied for Larachmhor Garden comprising 102 species, 90 small species seedlings, 64 hybrids (including some of Mr Magor's best crosses) and 32 small hybrid seedlings. Many were large plants around 5 to 6ft high'.

Moreover:

'What is of far more significance is the wide range of both species and hybrid material that Mr Magor had on offer in his listings each year. We can but wonder where he found the time to propagate single-handedly, or the nursery space to raise such a large inventory of plants at Lamellen'.

The last three extracts are reproduced from the article *The Rhododendron Legacy of the Magor Family of Lamellen, Cornwall: An Historical Perspective,* which was written by John Hammond and published in *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias 2012.* And if the phrase 'buyer beware' rightly comes to mind, consider how - if *caveat emptor* applies in its strictest sense - even a rhodophile might be unable to do so, without expert and unbiased help being on hand as they pottered along the nursery or garden centre sales rack.

There is one significant exception to the red flag 'distribution-of-hybrids-by-seed-is-bad' generalisation: where after a series of selective crosses across several generations, the gamut of seedlings reared from further directed pollinations, all have the same form and flower colour. Such breeding programmes were carried out with deciduous azaleas at Exbury Gardens by the Rothschild family, as well as at the nursery of M. Koster and Sons, at Boskoop, in the Netherlands. And although a hint of corolla hue variation will be found along a row of pots containing 'Koster's Brilliant Red', or a line of 'Exbury Pink' youngsters, the tonal differences are so marginal they are barely distinguishable.

Returning to nomenclature matters, prior to publication of the *IRRC's* Second Edition volumes, 'group' replaced 'grex' in the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants (Article 26, published in 1980, the change incorporated fully by 1995). Importantly, the membership criteria of a 'Group' did not change, as the 2004-published *IRRC* listings and the subsequent supplements illustrate. However, two factors now require that term too to be replaced, and a reshuffle of the occupants, at least in some cases, to occur:

Firstly, since 1980, within Genus *Rhododendron* specifically, there have also been species 'Groups'. These were proposed by the RHS after the preliminary Edinburgh Classification papers appeared in the late 1970s, their specific, mandated task, being to retain all those horticulturally important epithets that the revision's authors had - correctly, in most cases - sunk into synonymy. Except 'Repens Group' was now rubbing shoulders in the *IRRC* with 'Loderi Group', 'Litiense Group' with 'Valpinense Group', 'Viridescens Group' with 'Catfortcampy Group', 'Carolinianum Group' with 'Smirnauck Group', and so on and so forth. Plus they were strange bedfellows in a publication meant to cater exclusively for rhododendron hybrids and clearly, a source of some confusion, as it is not immediately apparent which is a species group, which a gathering of hybrids.

Secondly, and far more importantly, scientific evidence from almost a century's worth of genetic research into plastids and mitochondria - organelles - has been ignored with regard to an individual hybrid group's constituent members.

Consider 'May Day Group'.

As currently configured, this contains three cultivars: 'May Day', 'Bodnant May Day' and 'Exbury May Day'. If each had resulted from a *haematodes* x *griersonianum* pairing, all would be fine and dandy, but in fact, they did not. Because Henry McLaren reversed the equation when he made his own match in 1925, opting instead for a *griersonianum* x *haematodes* combination. And as a direct consequence of swapping the female parent, he changed the entire complement of organelles his hybrid would inherit.

Plastids are membrane-bound organelles found in the cells of plants that posses a double-stranded DNA molecule that is circular in form.

They include:

Amylopasts, responsible for the storage of starch and for detecting gravity.

Chloroplasts, for photosynthesis.

Plant cells of *Plagiomnium affine laminazellen* with visible chloroplasts.

Free-floating mitochondria inside human blood cells.

Chromoplasts, for the synthesis and storage of pigments.
Elaioplasts, for storing fat.
Gerontoplasts, for assisting plant senescence.
Leucoplasts, for the synthesis of monoterpene.
Proteinoplasts, for storing and modifying protein.
Tannosomes, for synthesising tannins and polyphenols.
And those are just the important ones.

Mitochondria, on the other hand, are structurally different.

Technically, they are classified as double-membrane-bound-organelles, each with an inner and outer membrane, the two separated by an intermembrane space. And they too also contain their own specific genome held in a circular DNA molecule.

Mitochondria are present in the cells of all forms of higher life found on Planet Earth and within plants, synthesise a complex organic chemical known as adenosine triphosphate (ATP). This is used by the host cell as its primary source of chemical energy in a process known as cellular respiration, and as a result, the mitochondria are often described as a cell's powerhouse.

Now, for good or bad, unquestionably, it is human nature to experiment.

As a technically advanced species, even when the majority of our tools were made of stone, curiosity was both curse and deliverance. So when one form of a plant opened white coloured flowers, another red, the desire to place pollen from the former onto the stigma of the latter, just to see what resulted, was irresistible. And as a corollary of that process, we created hybrids. Some were better than their parents, others not. More importantly, along the way, *Homo sapiens* learnt about the rules of inheritance.

These were first formally set out during 1866 in a paper titled *Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden* - Experiments on Plant Hybridization - written by an Austrian-Czech biologist, meteorologist, mathematician and Augustinian friar - who was also the abbot of St. Thomas' Abbey in Brünn (now Brno), in the Margraviate of Moravia - Gregor Mendel. Pea plants were his chosen subject and between 1856 and 1863 his crossbreeding experiments focused on seven characteristics that varied with the pairing: overall height; the shape and colour of the seed pod; the shape and colour of the seed; and the position and colour of the flowers. During those trials, he conclusively proved that if a true-breeding yellow pea was crossed with an equally true-breeding green pea, their progeny would always yield yellow seeds - the peas we all relish, frozen or otherwise. Except if those seeds were sown rather than eaten, then green peas reappeared in the pods of that next generation of plants at a green to yellow ratio of 1:3.

To explain this phenomenon, Mendel conjured-up a set of new terms, concepts and rules that spoke of 'dominant' and 'recessive' hereditary traits, these governed by what he called 'invisible factors'. Today, those 'invisible factors' are known as genes.

Within the scientific community of the time, the work was either ignored or ridiculed, though Charles Darwin was unaware of its publication. Had he been, the paper might not have been mothballed, but thankfully, it was rediscovered by Theodore Boveri and Walter Sutton in the early 1900s, and confirmed scientifically by Thomas Hunt Morgan in 1915, who integrated Mendel's work into that on chromosomal inheritance and in doing so, created the science now known as genetics.

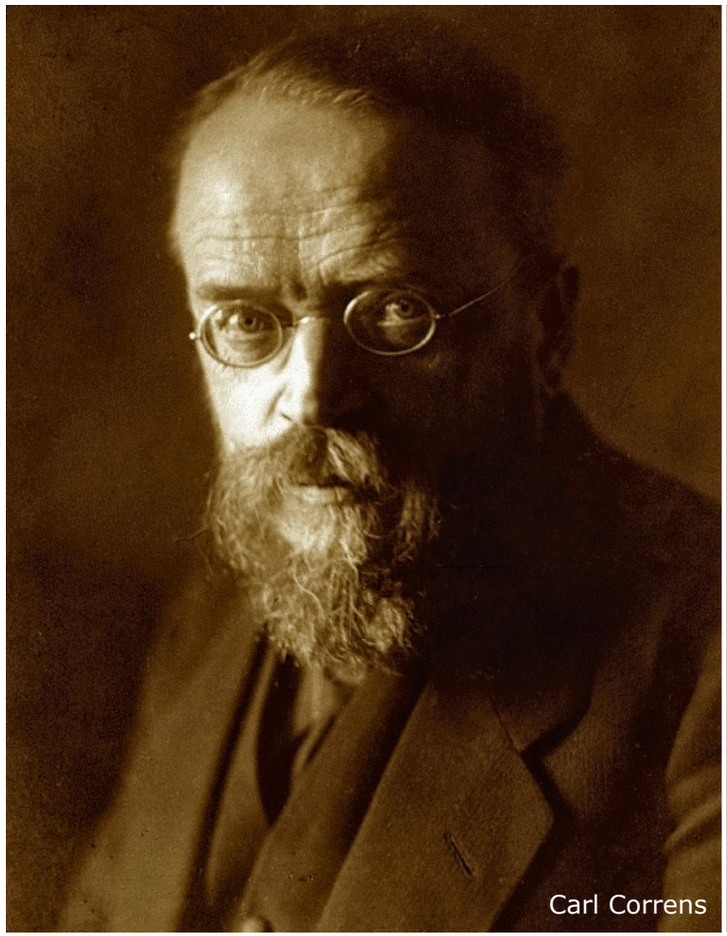
In 1909, the abbot's work was also picked up by two German plant geneticists, who, though working independently of each other, both published papers on non-Mendelian inheritance (where the traits do not divide according to Mendel's Laws): Carl Correns, who had focused his research on *Mirabilis jalapa,* commonly known as the four o'clock plant; and Erwin Baur, who had chosen to experiment with *Pelargonium*.


Gregor Mendel


Theodore Boveri


Walter Sutton

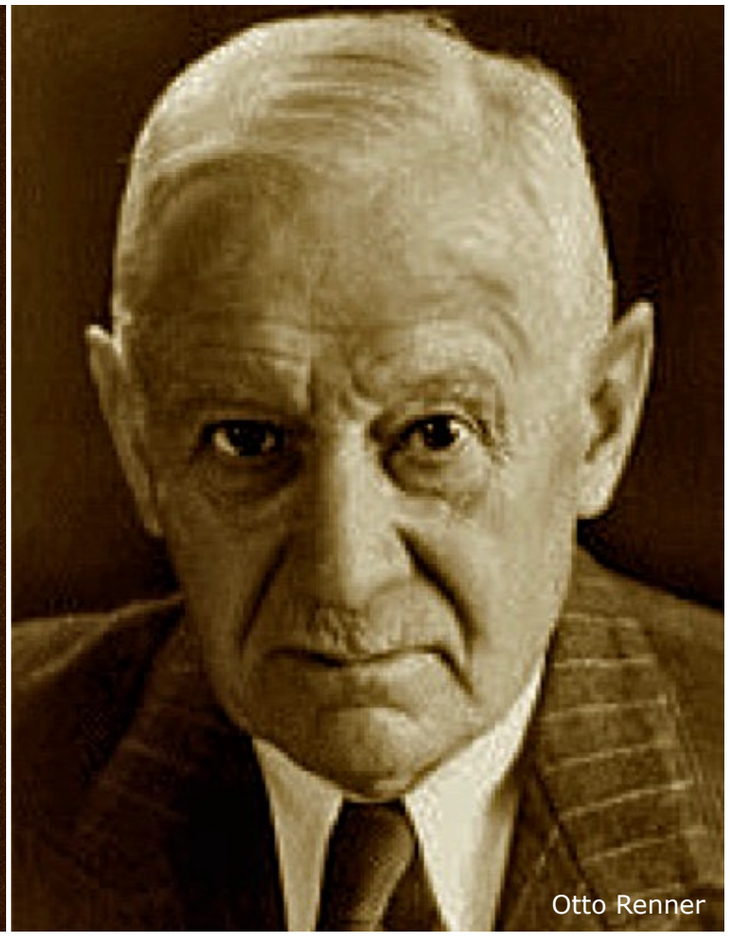

Thomas Hunt Morgan



Carl Correns



Erwin Baur



Otto Renner

In the 1930s, a third German botanist, Otto Renner, who favoured Genus *Oenothera,* the evening primrose or sundrop, proved conclusively that this form of genetic transference took place, and in doing so, shifted the credit for discovering uniparental plastid inheritance to Baur. That biological process requires a more in-depth explanation:

At conception, when a pollen grain and an ovule come together - the sperm and the egg in mammalian reproduction - genetic information held on both the male and female haploid gametes is combined.

A haploid gamete holds just one set of chromosomes.

In Genus *Rhododendron* that would be half the usual *2n* = 26 compliment of a normal diploid cell, so 13 little maggots - one complete set - would be present and correct when viewed under a high power microscope. Once the pollen grain and the ovule merge, the count goes back up to 26, unless the two parents involved were both either tetraploids, hexaploids, or one of the other polyploids found within the genus, or *R. camtschaticum,* in which case 2*n* would total 52, 78 and 24, respectively.

Such inheritance can therefore be described as biparental. But organelles, carrying their own DNA and capable of independent mitotic replication, are inherited from just one parent. In Angiosperms - the clade of seed-producing flowering plants that includes Genus *Rhododendron* - that role is the exclusive province of the female parent. So, in the 'May Day' *haematodes* x *griersonianum* pairing, it was *R. haematodes* that provided the organelles, while in the 'Bodnant May Day' *griersonianum* x *haematodes* cross, it was *R. griersonianum*. Outwardly, the progeny from both matches might appear morphologically similar, but if the mitochondria present in the cells of *R. haematodes* were more efficient than those of *R. griersonianum,* then the seedlings from the original A. M. Williams pairing would have superior vigour to those bred by Henry McLaren because more ATP was being produced to power the former's cells, which in consequence would likely result in larger leaves and bigger flowers. Equally, if the chloroplast cells were more efficient, the photosynthesis process would convert more light into energy. And so on for all the other plastid functions. It also means that the progeny of a *griersonianum* x *haematodes* pairing can no longer be placed in the same group as those from a *haematodes* x *griersonianum* cross because each will have its own suite of genetically different organelles.

To emphasise this change, as well as to eliminate any confusion with the epithet-protecting species groups, hybrids herein have been reallocated into 'prides'.

For example: the 'May Day' Pride contains the original cross, plus that made at Exbury; while R. 'Bodnant May Day', Lord Aberconway's pairing, now exists on its tod.

Equally, although precedence should dictate which member of these new assemblages take the top slot for naming purposes, rebranding the 'Cornish Cross Pride', to better reflect

the pre-1880 origin of New Zealand hybridiser William Martin's *thomsonii* x *griffithianum* introduction 'Marquis of Lothian' - because Samuel Smith's repeat pollination took place sometime between 1889 and 1927 - is about as likely as winged aliens addressing the United Nations General Assembly, so the change from 'group' to 'pride' will have to suffice for this and other such 'set-in-stone' nomenclature instances.

Remaining with this winning combination of rhododendron hybrids and genetics, polyploidy too requires a deeper dive. So to kick-off, a statement of fact:

To date, not one single evergreen elepidote polyploid has germinated from a wild-collected seed capsule or been found growing in some remote corner of the Himalaya, or indeed, anywhere else across the surface of the planet.

Supporters of the triploid *R. decorum* ssp. *diaprepes* 'Gargantua' will disagree with that pronouncement but should try to contain themselves for the next twenty paragraphs or so, rather than send out offensive emails, after which all will be revealed.

Lepidote polyploids, on the other hand, abound.

They actually make up a goodly number of the Section *Lepipherum* species count. As do tetraploid azaleas from Section *Pentanthera.* And where these communities are located in close proximity to one of their diploid relatives, they have even cross-bred to create natural hybrid triploids - as at Audra State Park in West Virginia; Hurricane Creek in Georgia; and on the slopes of Wayah Bald in North Carolina - though their *2n* = 39 offspring are currently just individual plants scattered throughout much larger 'normal' populations; potential new species, certainly, but perhaps just stepping-stones on the road to a hexaploid azalea. Time will tell.

Yet no evergreen elepidote species has been found out in the wilds of Planet Terre with anything but the standard 2*n* = 26 compliment of chromosomes.

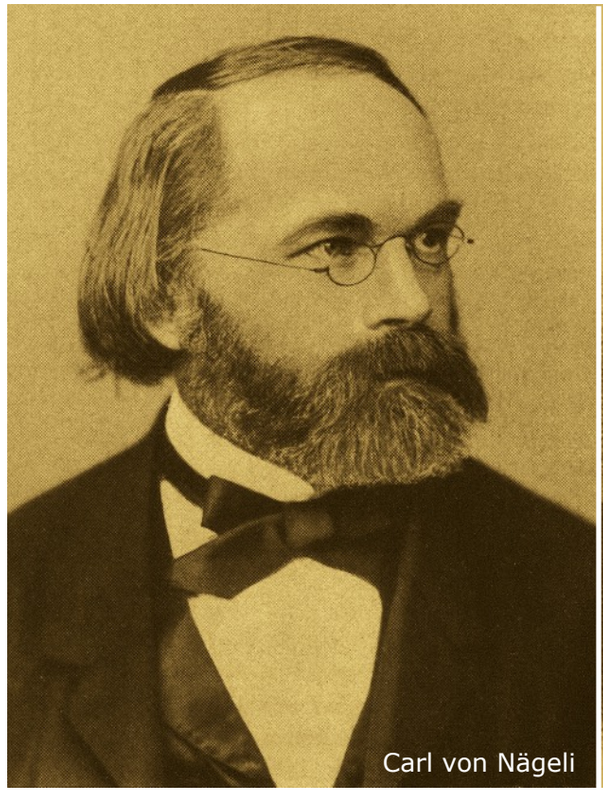
However, that maxim does not hold true when the hand of man has directed the pollination. And then provided the perfect conditions for the seeds to germinate; watched over those juveniles as they developed; spotted anything exotic or peculiar; and singled it out for extra special care and attention.

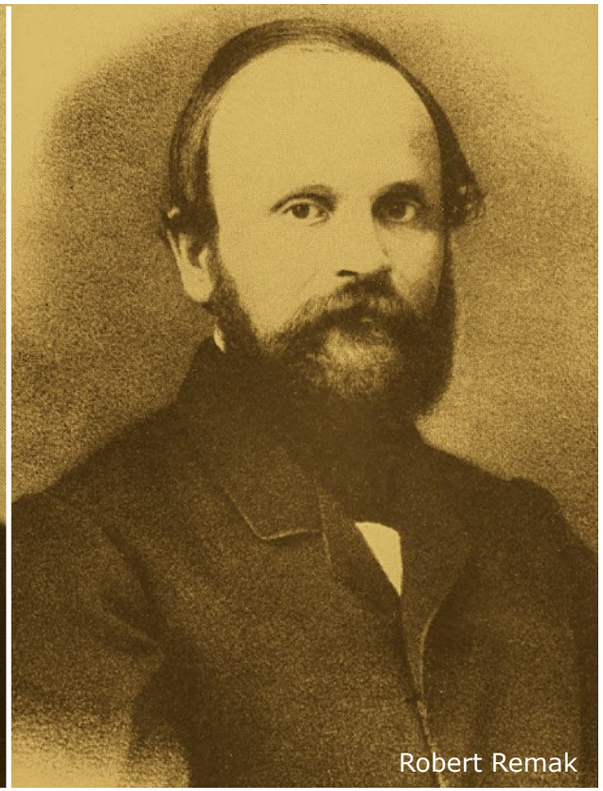
In fact - if published flow cytometry 'weighings' are indeed accurate (see below) - the first polyploid elepidote hybrid is now known to have been widely grown in British gardens before chromosomes were even discovered: 'Broughtonii', an arboreum hybrid that is reportedly a triploid with 39 chromosomes. It was crossed sometime before 1835 and introduced between that date and 1840, two years before the Swiss botanist Carl Wilhelm von Nägeli supposedly became the first human to observe chromosomes within plant cells via a microscope and his Mark-1 eyeball.

A kink in the narrative has to be highlighted here because many scientists and historians dispute this assignment of credit, arguing that it was the German-Polish embryologist Robert Remak who actually made the discovery at approximately the same time. Regrettably, the exact date when he witnessed cell division through his own optical magnifier went unrecorded, but another German scientist, Rudolph Ludwig Virchow, is known to have plagiarised Remak's work on such in 1855, leading to a falling-out between the two men.

With specific regard to Nägeli's claim to fame, the Australian professor of medicine who led a team at Oxford University carrying out pioneering work on cancer and human genetics, Sir Henry Harris, wrote that:

> 'What Nägeli saw and did not see in plant material at about the same time as Remak is somewhat obscure. I conclude that, unlike Remak, he did not observe nuclear division. It is clear that Nägeli did not, in 1844, have any idea of the importance of the nucleus in the life of a cell'.


Carl von Nägeli


Robert Remak

Henry Harris, *The Cells of the Body: A History of Somatic Cell Genetics*.
Published by Cold Spring Harbour Laboratory, Plainview, New York, 1995.

Historical quibbles aside, some other recently documented triploid polyploids are the well-known hybrids 'Anna Rose Whitney', 'Beauty of Littleworth', 'Cynthia', 'Gomer Waterer', 'Phyllis Korn', 'Pink Pearl', 'Rothenburg' and 'Taurus', while tetraploid polyploids include 'Countess of Derby', 'Lem's Monarch', 'Marinus Koster', 'Point Defiance' and 'Trude Webster'. Now, what all these rhododendrons have in common, is their greater vigour; their larger flowers - that are firmer and have more 'substance', so are less easily damaged by the elements; and leaves that are bigger and thicker, with the blades held on similarly uprated petioles and branchlets. Spotting them as juveniles is not at all difficult as they are usually the biggest seedlings in the tray, and considering their long-term popularity, those extra chromosomes have clearly given them a distinct edge in the beauty stakes. But as with many such advantages, nothing comes for free, because they have also been foisted with a significant disadvantage: many have proven to be sterile or shown very low fertility rates.

Jim Barlup, a highly experienced hybridiser based in Bellevue, Washington State, on the West Coast of the United States - with several introductions to his credit that give FKW the middle finger - discussed some of the pitfalls he had encountered in an article for the American Rhododendron Society *Journal* that was published in 2002 and titled *Hybridizing with Elepidote Polyploid Rhododendrons:*

> 'If you cross a diploid with tetraploid pollen, you may get wonderful seed pods, but germination is very difficult. I have found the germination rate with 'Point Defiance' crosses to be less than 3%, if they germinate at all.

'A cross of 'Calsap' with 'Point Defiance' produced five plants, probably diploids. The seed from at least thirty other such crosses did not germinate. Frank Fujioka crossed 'Flirt' with 'Point Defiance' and germinated one seedling. It has a huge, beautiful truss and is probably a tetraploid, but the pollen appears to be sterile'.

And from the same text, with Jim discussing Frank Mossman's hybrid 'Taurus':

'I have concluded it is not a triploid, just a very difficult and temperamental tetraploid or diploid, but which is it? Over the past few years I have made many crosses onto 'Taurus', both with diploid and tetraploid pollen. Only the tetraploid pollen showed faint signs of working. If what I planted was indeed seed, it never germinated'.

Jim's experience with this otherwise stunning hybrid was not an isolated event, for to date, only one pairing of 'Taurus' has resulted in an addition to the *IRRC* listings, the Hans Hachmann 1989 cross that used pollen from the Seidel introduction 'Carola' - which is 'Everestianum' selfed - and resulted in 'Andantino' (named in 2000, introduced/registered in 2001). And equally poor results have been shown by most of the other triploids listed above: 'Beauty of Littleworth' - total, none; 'Rothenburg' - just one; 'Phyllis Korn' - two (both crosses made by Mr Barlup, one in the role of pollen provider, the other maturing the seed); 'Gomer Waterer' - three, giving four registrations, of which 'Phyllis Korn' was one; and 'Anna Rose Whitney' - five. On the other hand, 'Cynthia' and 'Pink Pearl' appear to be less problematical in either role, with 'Cynthia' racking-up a score of six and seven successful pairings as seed or pollen parent, respectively, so thirteen in total, and 'Pink Pearl', fourteen and twelve, to give twenty-six. Clearly though, neither would rival 'Lem's Cameo' or 'Loderi' for their sheer numerical fecundity.

As stated, every wild evergreen elepidote species rhododendron ever discovered is a diploid with twenty-six chromosomes. So if a group of highly qualified scientists - an RHS team no less, led by India's foremost expert in cytogenetics and phytogeography, Professor E. J. Janaki Ammal, who, by the by, was the first woman to gain a U.S. doctorate in botany - discovered an elepidote species with thirty-nine chromosomes - a triploid - they were going to double check their results and reconfirm the identity of the specimen being examined long before announcing that find to the world at large.

In the lab, that would mean lining-up another dividing cell under the microscope and counting how many chromosomes there were within it. A somewhat tedious observational process, though simple and straightforward, which requires only an ability to enumerate. And if there were more than thirty-nine chromosomes present, these would be obvious. For those additional little maggots would be visible in the magnified view of the cell. And give a total count of fifty-two. Making the plant a tetraploid.

But just thirty-nine were counted.

The full results of the study were published in the 1950 RHS *Rhododendron Yearbook,* with Janaki Ammal contributing a second, overview article, this titled *Polyploidy in the Genus Rhododendron*.

So when a new process challenges such a finding, it would not be unreasonable to ask questions about its accuracy.

The new technique is known as flow cytometry, the plant in question is our old friend 'Gargantua' and the published data - posted online on 16 October 2010, the determination made by Dr João Loureiro, Dr Silvia Castro, José Castro, and Mariana Castro, of the Plant Ecology and Evolution Group, University of Coimbra, Portugal - informs us that the plant is now to be regarded as a tetraploid. Or rather, the process suggests that it is such, because the procedure involves 'weighing' the genetic material, not making any observational tally of the chromosomes present in an individual cell.



E. K. Janaki Ammal

Flow cytometry works by staining cells from a sample of the plant to be analysed and then passing the nuclei through the focus of a very intense beam of light, this usually produced by a high-pressure mercury vapour lamp. The stain is known as DAPI and it can travel through an intact cell membrane and then bond with regions of DNA that are rich in adenine and thymine, two of the four nucleobases (the other two being guanine and cytosine). The stain is fluorescent and it can be 'excited' with ultraviolet light. This 'glow' can then be detected through a blue or cyan filter. Moreover, using a photomultiplier, the fluorescence can be directly correlated with the amount of DNA in the cell that has been stained. Cells with 26 chromosomes - standard rhododendron diploids where two sets of 13 chromosomes are present, so 2*n* = 26 - will give one reading, while cells with 39, 52 or 78 chromosomes - respectively, triploids, tetraploids or hexaploids - will give higher readings.

The photomultiplier device measuring the variations in beam intensity can be set to give a reading of say '50' for a diploid, this being calibrated using a similar rhododendron already known to have 26 chromosomes - a control, if you will, where the chromosome count has ideally been established through visual observation. A triploid rhododendron with an extra 13 chromosomes in each cell will then produce a reading of '75', a tetraploid with an additional 26 little maggots, '100', and so on. However:

> 'Because of the woody nature of *Rhododendron,* the preparation of the nuclear suspensions is of critical importance to the flow cytometric procedure'.
>
> And equally:
>
> 'During the course of flow cytometric measurements of cultigens of unknown ploidy, the external standard' *should be* 'analysed every 12 samples' *as this confirms that the* 'diploid signals at channel position 50, triploid and tetraploid signals at 75 and 100 respectively, are stable'.
> *Flow Cytometric Analysis of Ploidy in Rhododendron (subgenus Tsutsusi),* written by S. D. Schepper, L. Leus, M. Mertens, E. Bockstaele, M. Loose, P. Debergh, and J. Heursel, and published in *HortScience,* Volume 36, Number 1, pages 125-127, during February 2001 (with the second, third and fourth quotes linked by abridgements that do not change the essence of the original text).

In 1950, the RHS team understood their triploid 'Gargantua' to have been a form of *R. diaprepes* grown from wild-collected seed that had been gathered by George Forrest in 1913 under the field number F 11958. We now know that the plant arose from a 'selfed' directed pollination performed on a very sick specimen grown from that introduction, long established, but soon to die, in the garden at Tower Court, Surrey (as detailed by Roza Stevenson, who made the cross, in her contribution to *Aims In Breeding Rhododendrons Including Azaleas,* page 37, *The Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book 1960*).

In the new determination, it would appear that the standards set out by Schepper et al., were not met, or alternatively, the control sample used was not an appropriate cellular match for the taxon being tested. Hence, tetraploid 'Gargantua'.

No one else has so far challenged this finding, which was included within the paper *More Weighings: Exploring the Ploidy of Hybrid Elepidote Rhododendrons,* this published in *Rhododendrons with Camellias and Magnolias 2012,* the yearbook of the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group, as well as in the Spring-Summer 2015 edition of *The Azalean,* the journal of the Azalea Society of America. The full text, along with its listing of elepidote hybrid chromosome counts, is also available to read online at the ResearchGate website, the url being:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287646642_More_Weighings_Exploring_the_Ploidy_of_Hybrid_Elepidote_Rhododendrons

Yet if the lab work for the 'Gargantua' determination was indeed slipshod, which on the face of it, appears to have been the case, then regrettably, such poor practice must also cast doubt on some of the other results published by the University of Coimbra team, most especially, those where the number of successful pairings using a cultivar they have identified as a polyploid with more than the normal *2n* = 26 chromosome count, is high.

One might also add that a picture paints a thousand words…



R. 'Gargantua'
(the deformed stigma indicates genetic instability)

Azaleodendrons

Azaleodendrons

Back in the day, around the time that Alessandro Volta's electric pile was beginning to catch on, azaleodendrons too were all the rage. So when a flock of cultivars bred by nurseryman William Smith of Norbiton Common - the former head gardener at the Earl of Liverpool's London residence, Coombe Wood House, in nearby Kingston-on-Thames - were introduced into France between 1845 and 1850, they were simply 'le sujet de toutes les conversations horticoles et de tous les soins des cultivateurs'.

Or as Google Translate would have it: 'the subject of all horticultural conversations and all the care of farmers', with the original quote appropriated from *Plantes de Terre de Bruyères* by Édouard André (1840-1911), which was published in 1864 when he was the Chief Gardener for the City of Paris.

The azaleodendron craze quickly passed however, in France and elsewhere, soon after it was realised that the stunning flowers came at a high price: poor, if not downright ugly leaf blades, on a shrub with a feeble constitution that lacked anything approaching a sustainable level of vigour. Equally, when you knock out all of the synonyms, just 110 azaleodendrons will be found listed within the 1500 pages of the 2-volume Second Edition of 2004's *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist,* with the foliage-physique critique applying to virtually all of them.

Yet by some weird quirk of fate, the very first man-made rhododendron hybrid that resulted from a directed pollination, was actually an azaleodendron, then known as *R. azaleoides,* today as R. 'Odoratum'. It was a cross between *R. ponticum* and *R. nudiflorum,* the latter actually *R. periclymenoide*s hiding beneath a botanical nom de guerre, and the pairing took place at Archibald Thompson's Mile End Nursery to the east of London, the locale then, a leafy rural haven separate from the capital city, whereas now, it is an indistinguishable part of a squalid urban sprawl, with the Mile End Road merely temporary accommodation for a semi-permanent traffic jam. Indeed, if you can believe it, the original firm of Gordon, Dermer and Co., Seedsmen, which Thompson joined in 1780, had traded forest trees and flowering shrubs on nearby Fenchurch Street.

However, most accounts assign the actual credit for the successful combination to an itinerant bumblebee rather than Mr Thompson's dexterity and foresight, for the hybrid was 'discovered' at the nursery circa 1800 and described as *R. ponticum* var. *deciduum* by Henry Charles Andrews in Volume 4 of the *Botanical Repository,* published in 1804, the one-man artist, engraver and proprietor providing a full colour illustration in addition to his illustrious text.

Just how remarkable that pairing was, cannot be overstated.

To put it in context, one-hundred-and-thirty years later, Lionel de Rothschild, the foremost hybridiser to have worked within Genus *Rhododendron,* writing in the *Year Book of the Rhododendron Association 1934,* reports that for two years he crossed every hybrid rhododendron that flowered at Exbury with four different azaleas, both ways, making some fifty to sixty pairings each year.

And the result of all that work?

Just a single swollen capsule of seed from which three plants germinated.

At the time he put pen to paper, none had flowered, and the subsequent lack of any discourse on the subject would hint that the trio all died-off shortly afterwards.

Lionel de Rothschild, master hybridiser, beaten by a bee.

But what of 'Galloper Light', recipient of a 1927 RHS Award of Merit? The question is one that many rhodophiles would pose.

The answer however, rewrites history, for although the cross is credited to Lionel in both the *IRRC* and 1967's *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* it was - according to the entry in *Bean's Trees & Shrubs* - actually raised at the Knap Hill Nursery by the Waterers, which might explain the lack of any parental information from a source usually brimming over with such detail.

Exbury's maestro was not alone in his failure, as any number of both professional and amateur hybridisers have all acknowledged the fact that when crossing an evergreen rhododendron with a deciduous azalea, the percentage of viable seedlings - if indeed there are any - is ridiculously low. Moreover, any that do germinate are often lost at an early age, even when overtly cosseted. So the dozen or so William Smith registrations confirm William Jackson Bean's assessment that he was probably 'one of the most adventurous hybridisers of his day'. That high-standing ranking can also be applied to J. R. Gowen of Highclere, for in 1825 he made a pairing that is no less exceptional in that ninety-seven plants were raised from a single pollination, the stated equation again casting 'nudiflorum' in the role of seed parent - thereby inferring *R. periclymenoides* - with *R. catawbiense* listed as the pollen provider and the purple-flowered 'Cartonii' the result, this described as 'Carton's Rhododendron' by John Lindley in the 1831-published Volume 6 edition of the *Botanist's Repository* (Plate 379) - the epithet, an honorific for Highclere's then head gardener - and even given specific species status as *R. cartonianum* by the Swiss botanist responsible for the 'Nature's War' doctrine that so heavily influenced Charles Darwin's thoughts on natural selection, Augustin Pyramus de Candolle.

Jumping back to the 20th Century, a number of botanical purists have decreed that 'azaleodendron' can only encompass crosses between a Section *Leiorrhodium* evergreen elepidote rhododendron and a Section *Pentanthera* deciduous azalea, such gentlefolk excluding pairings between deciduous and evergreen azaleas, or those involving evergreen azaleas and the lepidote rhododendrons. Horticulturalists are more inclusive in their outlook, allowing-in the award-winning Hardijzer Nursery hybrids between *R. racemosum* and a trio of Kurume strain evergreen azaleas, for instance, along with many other nonconformist combinations that even include a former Genus *Ledum* species.

Delving deeper into that 110 azaleodendron registration sum-total, 63 originate from the 19th Century, with the bulk of these crossed before 1850, yet because of their lack of vigour, only a handful of such clones survived to witness the very first dawn of a new millennium. Indeed, finding any azaleodendron in a British rhododendron garden today - if the often hideous, but widely-grown 'Martha Isaacson' is excluded from the count on the grounds of its extremely poor foliage - is akin to hunting down a will-o'-the-wisp. Moreover, of these, just six would get a thumbs-up as being better plants than their parent species if the Kingdon-Ward Doctrine were applied.

R. 'Fragrans', the first member of this sextet, came into being around 1804, and even when awash with bloom, could hardly be described as 'eye-catching', with many a garden visitor passing the shrub by without a second glance or a pause in their stride. If indeed, it was noticed at all, though one's olfactory senses should have been popping from such a close encounter. The plant is one of the oldest rhododendron hybrids still grown in UK cultivation and considered - at one time - to be the first ever azaleodendron cross made, though a number of competing claimants vie for that cachet, so biographically, it has a unique, complicated, and colourful history.

The plant most commonly found bearing a R. 'Fragrans' label today - apart from the Section *Pogonanthum* species, of course - is officially regarded by the *IRRC's* registrars as a *catawbiense* x *viscosum* cross, with Joseph Paxton listed as its raiser. If that name sounds familiar, it likely stems from the fact that he designed the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851. Yet he was also an eminent gardener, the publisher of several botanical magazines, and co-founder of *The Gardeners' Chronicle,* which he later edited. His hybrid opens very fragrant flowers during June, the funnel-shaped corollas grouped in a

R. ‘Odoratum’

R. ‘Fragrans’

globular cluster of 12 to 20 trumpets, each a little over 3cm long and wide. In bud they are purplish-lilac, but open with white centres and just the lobe margins unevenly fringed with this deeper hue, giving an overall impression of lilac-mauve. Two small rays of greenish-yellow spots decorate the dorsal, while at the rear, the small calyx lobes are distinctly linear in shape, with pointed tips, pale green in tone, downy and glandular. The leaf blades are effectively evergreen, only being prematurely shed in the hardest of winters, up to 10cm long by 4cm wide, glossy green above and initially glaucous-green below, oblanceolate in shape, tapering gently towards the base, but more distinctly so at the pointed apex. The shrub is slow growing, tolerant of full sun or partial shade, with a mature bush keeping below the 2m-mark wherever sited, while spreading-out wider.

The problem, is that these plants do not match exactly with Paxton's description, which was given in Volume 10 of his *Magazine of Botany*, this published in 1834, although they do come close. That text also reveals that Paxton himself was not the hybridiser, but had merely seen the plant at the nursery of Messrs Chandler and Sons, Vauxhall, London, and details it being 'raised accidentally, from seed of a variety of *R. catawbiense,* some twenty-five or thirty years ago', hence the 1804 conception date. Which immediately initiated a bust-up with the Thompson Nursery over their 'First Azaleodendron Ever Bred' claim, this resolved in the latter's favour because although 'Odoratum' was first described in 1804, it must have been raised several years before that publication date, most likely in the early to mid 1790s.

The *Trees & Shrubs* entry for R. 'Fragrans' explains that 'many crosses of this type' - between either *R. periclymenoides* or *R. viscosum,* with *R. catawbiense, R. maximum* or *R. ponticum* - 'were made in the first half of the 19th century, and the resulting hybrids all had flowers in some shade of lilac or purple with a white centre, and many were fragrant' (the photographs proving the pigmentation point, if not the smell). They were also wrongly described as being synonyms of 'Azaleoides' or 'Odoratum'. Bean indicates that the plants we now grow under the 'Fragrans' epithet were known in 1835 and described in Volume 62 of the *Botanical Magazine* (Tab 3454), but classified as *R. maximum hybridum:*

> 'Sir William Hooker renamed it thus in the belief that it was the same hybrid between "the common white glaucous-leaved azalea" and *R. maximum,* which was raised by the Rev. William Herbert at Spofforth, and was figured in the *Botanical Register,* Volume 3, Tab 195, 1817, under the name *R. hybridum*'.

So the 'Fragrans' of today is clearly not the 'Fragrans' of the 1800s.

Nor is it the only existent clone, for the American nurseryman and hybridiser Harold Greer offered an orchid-blue 'Fragrans Affinity', which may be same cross - except for its very dense habit and superior foliage - while the Roslyn Nursery of Dix Hills, New York, listed 'Fragrant Affinity', this ticking the *catawbiense* x *viscosum* box, but again, having scented, orchid-blue flowers, plus a bushy mien.

Not content with his flock of 'Cartonii', at around the same time, James Gowen, also bred a second azaleodendron, 'Gowenianum'

This was named as such by Robert Sweet, in Volume 3 of *The British Flower Garden,* which was published between 1827 and 1828, but specimens still around today, may also be sheltering under a 'Govenianum' label.

The RHS's International Registrar decided to ditch the latter's long-accepted, but incorrect, 'v' for a 'w', when the Second Edition texts hit the presses in 2004, but what is currently grown under the 'Gowenianum' epithet - according to the doyens - may again, not be the same plant as that raised at Highclere by Gowen around 1820, while adding to the confusion, 'Govenianum' is now believed to be a selection from 'Fragrans'.


R. 'Fragrans'


R. 'Gowenianum'

R. ‘Torlonianum’

Robert Sweet's text provides a short botanic description in Latin, a comprehensive elucidation in English and a paragraph detailing the shrub's conception, with the latter reproduced below:

> 'The present singular and handsome plant is of hybrid origin, and was raised from seeds in the superb collection of American plants at the Earl of Carnarvon's, at Highclere; the seed was procured from *Azalea nudiflora* or *viscosa* that Mr J. R. Gowen had fertilized with the pollen of a hybrid Rhododendron, between *R. ponticum* and *R. catawbiense;* and we are informed by that gentlemen, that there is in the same collection "nearly a hundred seedlings, very healthy plants, two years old: they are all from Azaleas; from different varieties of *A. viscosa* and *nudiflora,* are all free growing plants, evergreen in ordinary Winters, but in severe frost showing a tendency to shed their leaves more or less: they were procured by fertilizing the Azaleas with the pollen of Rhododendrons, that are intermediate between *R. ponticum* and *catawbiense*." In the same collection are numerous hybrid Azaleas, between most of the different species and varieties, and also plants from the hybrid *R. catawbiense* and *ponticum,* with *R. arboreum,* so that in the course of a few years we may expect this tribe of plants to rival if not exceed all others.'

R. 'Gowenianum' is in fact similar in many respects to 'Fragrans' and to that earlier conception, R. 'Odoratum', but with darker flowers. These are carried 17 to the truss, are tubular-funnel shaped and pale purplish-rose in tone, and highly scented, with the perfume described as 'heady'. A smattering of greenish-brown spots will be found across the dorsal lobe. The foliage is glossy, pale green at first but darkening with age, lanceolate through elliptic-oblong in profile, with slightly recurved margins.

On an historical note, James Robert Gowen is often misidentified as Highclere's Head Gardener - this actually being James Carton - even by the gardening press of the day, but as an 1839 apology that appeared in Volume 65 of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* makes clear: 'Mr Gowen is a gentleman of independent fortune, much devoted to Science, and well known in the most respectable circles in London; and under whose advice and direction many of the improvements at Highclere had been effected by the late Earl of Carnarvon.' Online biographies also highlight Gowen's work as an unpaid Honorary Lunacy Commissioner, as Secretary of the RHS from 1845 to 1850, and its treasurer until 1855.

R. 'Torlonianum' is simply a stunner, at least, when its blooms first open, though they quickly transition from dark lilac-rose to deep, then pale pink, with the orange blotch on the dorsal lobes also swiftly loosing its intensity. Crossed by Maurice Young of the Milford Nursery, Godalming, Surrey, sometime before 1845, any set-in-stone information regarding its true parentage is lacking. Alfred Rehder, writing in *A Monograph of Azaleas,* the work he jointly authored with Ernest Wilson in 1921, believes it to be a *calendulaceum* x *catawbiense* hybrid, stating that 'the flowers much resemble in size, shape and colour the plant figured as R. Azaleoides, but the upper lobe shows a large orange blotch, while the figured plant does not show the slightest trace of orange or yellow. This, and the shape of the corolla, seem to indicate the influence of *R. calendulaceum*'. And he too considers 'Torlonianum' to be 'one of the handsomest of this group of hybrids'.

The flowers are usually produced in quantity, held in a domed truss of 12 or 13 funnel-shaped corollas that are enhanced by that mesmerising marmalade eye. The leaves are evergreen, elliptic in shape, glossy dark green and up to 11cm long by 4cm across; more substantial than found on most other azaleodendrons, thicker, and so not the usual eyesore post winter. The habit is open, the upward-ascending branches mostly bare, and the hybrid, probably the best azaleodendron currently grown in UK gardens.



R. 'Torlonianum'



R. 'Gemmiferum'

'Gemmiferum' isn't quite in the same class.

Alfred Rehder, again writing in *A Monograph of Azaleas,* suggests the likely parentage involves *R. catawbiense* and *R. prinophyllum,* and given the evergreen nature of the leaves, if the constituents of the mix are correct, then it was almost certainly the elepidote species that was responsible for maturing the seed. The *IRRC* however, denotes the ingredients as being unknown.

The plant is a Waterer cross, made at the Bagshot nursery in the mid 1800s and for an azaleodendron, it bears foliage that is actually quite pleasing to the eye, though the leaf whorls will only be found at the branch tips on a shrub that is leggy, loose, open and bare. The blades themselves are obovate through oval in shape, 6cm long by 3cm wide, glossy green, and have distinctively recurved margins. But it is the striking, rose-flushed-crimson flowers that have guaranteed the hybrid's longevity.

These are carried in compact, hemispherical trusses, of around 16 funnel-shaped corollas, the individual trumpets 3.5cm long and of equal width, starting off dark crimson in the bud, paling on opening, but with their hue remaining uniform and unmarked.

In the various editions of *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles,* W. J. Bean describes the multitude of azaleodendron hybrids as basically having 'ugly foliage' that is 'tolerated only because of their striking flowers'. When writing those words, one suspects a picture of 'Glory of Littleworth' was floating before his mind's eye: stunning blooms let down by an atrocious habit and leaves that at winter's end are often so ravaged, ragged, worn and in tatters, that they should be pulled off by hand instead of being left to cling on, disfiguring the whole shrub, but more especially, the floral display to come in late April.

Evolution designed the thin and flimsy blades of a deciduous azalea to be shed in the fall, which for human observers entranced by the autumn colouration, means a shabby and somewhat threadbare appearance towards the end of their life is immaterial. But when we incorporated that lack of substance into a leaf held for twelve months or more, the wrack and ruin is preserved. That 'Glory of Littleworth' is so widely planted in UK gardens, the most popular azaleodendron hybrid despite this visual despoliation, is all down to those absolutely scintillating corollas, which are sometimes produced with such abandon as to rival the best Knap Hill or Exbury strain deciduous azalea.

James Henry Mangles is now officially credited with making the cross, sources published prior to the Second Edition of the *IRRC* in 2004, suggesting the plant was raised by his brother Henry Albert. As with many of the Mangles hybrids, any parental details are completely lacking and the date of conception can only be stated as being prior to the hybridiser's death in 1884. However, a morphological spec sheet is available:

'Glory of Littleworth' has hemispherical flower trusses composed of 15 to 18 corollas, tubular-funnel-shaped, 5-lobed, 4.5cm in length, 6cm across, and scented. They are creamy-orange tipped pink in the bud and open milky white with a large, heavy, copper-orange blotch on the dorsal. When first expanded, the somewhat shiny glaucous-green or matt and blue-grey foliage is quite appealing, the large lanceolate, oblong-lanceolate or elliptically-shaped leaves up to 13cm long and 3cm wide. But at maturity they are twisted and bent, as if balled up, crushed and crumpled. Or torn, shrivelled and browned. Add to that a sparse and leggy habit, with some specimens often looking in poor fettle and barely clinging-on to life. But they do cling on, slowly forming multi-stemmed domes 3m high and sometimes double that in width, with the ascending framework of branches supporting a mass of bloom, thereby confirming that the shrub's outwardly ailing appearance is to some extent an illusion, though expert doyens all agree that the challenges of long-term cultivation are demanding.

Now, although technically an azaleodendron, 'Hardijzer Beauty' is different to most other members of this hybrid class aside from its own doppelgängers. This is because instead of the pairing being an elepidote rhododendron matched with a deciduous azalea, the cross involves a lepidote species, *R. racemosum,* receiving pollen from an evergreen azalea, an unnamed Kurume. So irrespective of the fact that Willem Hardijzer's trio of selections from that mating - 'Hardijzer Beauty', 'Madame Loth' and 'Martine' - plus 'Lilian Harvey' and 'Ria Hardijzer' - from crosses with 'Hatsu-giri' and 'Hinodegiri', respectively - are simply the best azaleodendrons available on the market today - as their tally of AM and FCC awards confirms - for some stick-in-the-mud doyens, as already indicated, they are simply not azaleodendrons 'in the true botanical sense' (to directly quote Fred Galle from 1987's *Azaleas,* which also paraphrases a similar line in W. J. Bean's *Trees & Shrubs*).

But on the bright side, the dissenters are absolutely right.

Why?

Because none of these five plants show any general lack of vigour and they have attractive foliage that remains on the bushes all year round, turning bronzy in the winter. Plus, they are gifted with a profuse, annual display, of stop-you-in-your-tracks flowers.

R. ‘Glory of Littleworth’


R. 'Glory of Littleworth'


R. 'Glory of Littleworth'


R. 'Glory of Littleworth'

So how could they be ‘true’ azaleodendrons?

Morphologically, the genetic influences of both parents are easily seen: *R. racemosum* in the terminal and axillary inflorescences, plus the lepidote scales; the Japanese azalea, in the appressed strigose hairs along the branchlets, the quintet of stamens and the spring-summer leaves.

Introduced in the mid 1960s, ‘Hardijzer Beauty’ has large compound flower clusters that open in April through to early May. They are made up from the trusses of several buds, so as many as sixty individual corollas might contribute to the whole. Their colour is listed as fuchsine pink or strong purplish-pink, each, a bright funnel some 3cm long that is spotted darker on the dorsal lobe. The glossy leaves are of two types, the upper blades in the whorl most definitely evergreen, the lower ones deciduous. They are obovate through elliptic in shape, up to 4.5cm long by 2.5cm wide, with lepidote scales across their abaxial surface. Hardiness is very good, with a H6-7 figure quoted, the habit compact. But be aware that a lack of sun and heat to ripen the wood in northern climes, especially in Scotland, is detrimental to their long term health (as reported by Peter and Kenneth Cox in their *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988).



R. ‘Hardijzer Beauty’



R. ‘Hardijzer Beauty’

R. `Hardijzer Beauty'



R. ‘Broughtonii Aureum’



R. ‘Galloper Light’



R. ‘Martha Isaacson’



R. ‘Smithii Aureum’

Deciduous Azaleas

A Tour d'Horizon



The natural endemic distribution of the deciduous azalea species is in stark contrast to those with evergreen leaves, for while the latter are confined to the eastern fringes of Asia in a narrow ellipse whose boundaries include Japan to the north, China, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines in the south, the former have a much wider geographic spread, with indigenous populations on both the west and east coasts of North America, as well as being present in eastern and southeastern China, throughout the entirety of Japan and the Korean peninsula, plus a single species - the yellow-flowering *R. luteum* - native to Turkey and the Caucasus around the southwestern corner of the Black Sea, with additional, but disjunct populations, in southern Poland, Slovenia, Ukraine, and even as far north as Lithuania.

The entire coterie of deciduous-leaved azaleas within Genus *Rhododendron* amounts to some thirty-six individual taxa, yet an examination of the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* database will show that it is the Section *Pentanthera* species that have predominantly been used to create the many hundreds of cultivars that comprise the six major hybrid strains now in existence. Dig deeper, and just seven of those azaleas will be found to have been responsible for the scintillating displays that light up our woodland gardens from early May through until late June: *R. calendulaceum, R. occidentale, R. periclymenoides* and *R. viscosum* from North America, *R. luteum* from the Caucasus, and the geographically distinct components of the *R. molle* dyad, ssp. *japonicum* from Japan, and ssp. *molle* from China. Just as astonishing, the total number of parental combinations made that incorporate any of the remaining Section *Pentanthera* azaleas or those species from the four Subgenus *Azaleastrum* subsections - *Azaleastra, Brachycalx, Sciadorhodia* and *Viscidula* - barely tops one hundred.

But before any of that directed genetic mixing could occur, the ingredients for such had to be gathered up:

In the second half of the 17th Century, being appointed Bishop of London, meant taking on a diocese that not only spanned the United Kingdom's capital city, but which also encompassed the British Empire's newly acquired American colonies, some three thousand seven hundred odd miles away across the Atlantic ocean. Henry Compton, previously the Bishop of Oxford, was assigned that role in 1675, and shortly after his appointment, despatched the missionary clergyman John Bannister to look after the souls of a growing flock of parishioners in Jamestown, Virginia.

Bannister had been trained as a naturalist at Oxford University while completing his studies to become a minister in the Anglican Church; Compton was an avid gardener and amateur botanist who had decided to fill the grounds of his residence at Fulham Palace with 'exotics' from around the world. Correspondence between the two men was therefore quickly established, and while 'God' was likely touched on in the to and fro, the flora and fauna of the American east coast became their main topic of discussion. As a direct consequence of that interchange, the first shipment of plants and seeds sent from Virginia to Fulham Palace arrived in 1680, the entire assortment of plants and shrubs all new to science. One of these was later seen in flower by Leonard Plukenet, supervisor of the King's garden at Hampton Court Palace, and he described it as *Cistus virginiana flore et odore periclymeni* within his multi-volume book *Phytographia,* the first three tomes of which were published between 1691 and 1692. Now, although that Latin may translate as 'Virginia rock rose with flowers and odour of honeysuckle', in fact, the text's subject was actually the first deciduous azalea to be grown in England, which would later be correctly named as *R. viscosum* by the American botanist John Torrey in his 1826-published book, *A Compendium of the Flora of the Northern and Middle States*.

A much wider distribution of the species to many more British gardens took place when seed or live plants were sent across the Atlantic by the Pennsylvania colonist, John Bartram, during 1734.

Bartram was also responsible for the discovery and introduction into the UK of a second deciduous azalea species, *R. periclymenoides,* though it was then known as *Azalea nudiflora,* and he may be due a similar credit for a third, *R. calendulaceum,* although regrettably, the discovery and introduction of the latter is without provenance, whereas *R. periclymenoides* and *R. viscosum* are both confirmed in the historical record.

John Bartram's British contact was Peter Collinson, a wealthy textile merchant and haberdasher, who traded with the Colonies from London. And just like Henry Compton, he too was an avid gardener and botanist, obsessed with collecting anything new. But unlike the good bishop, Collinson used his business acumen to financially support Bartram's field trips, selling the seeds and plants his partner gathered for £5.00 a box, which according to the Bank of England's inflation calculator, would today be the equivalent of £933.70. His clients for those "Bartram's Boxes", as they became known, were a circle of wealthy landowners who wanted to beautify their estates with the new American discoveries and their deep pockets paid for the expeditions that allowed the two men to introduce over one hundred previously unknown species during the course of their long association. Those finds included not only rhododendrons, but kalmias, magnolias, the Franklin Tree and the Venus Flytrap.

R. periclymenoides was found by Bartram sometime between 1725 and 1730, and arrived in the UK during 1734, part of the same consignment that included *R. viscosum*.

As mentioned above, some contemporaneous sources, along with others written later, report that another, 'unnamed' azalea, might also be attributed to the Bartram-Collinson partnership, with the likely mystery contender believed to be *R. calendulaceum,* as this species is endemic to areas that Bartram explored. Failing to spot those gleaming blooms in

shades of orange, red or scarlet - it is argued - would have been an impossibility. Yet no authenticated specimens survive from that probable gathering in any British garden today.

One somewhat outlandish explanation for the disappearance of those azaleas, is the wholesale theft of plants from Peter Collinson's garden that occurred one night in 1768. The rationale for this theory, however, fails to take cognisance of the fact that each and every specimen of *R. calendulaceum* then growing in the UK would have to have been domiciled at that one address, thirty years after their likely importation, and stolen en masse by the burglars, which renders the hypothesis ludicrous. More likely, is a botanic faux pas dated to 1753, and repeated in 1762, which erased their existence. Not physically of course, but in wrongly grouping together plants from two species under one banner and thereby negating their individuality. The source of this textual misnomer was the First Edition of *Species Plantarum,* the guilty epithet *Azalea lutea,* which came with a description that cast too wide a morphological net, capturing elements of both *R. calendulaceum* and *R. periclymenoides*. In the Second Edition, although *Azalea nudiflora* replaced the offending moniker, it simply compounded the mistake. Yet ironically, the author of those two monumental works, Carl Linnaeus, actually regarded Bartram as 'the greatest contemporary natural botanist in the world' (*Dictionary of American Biography,* edited by Allen Johnson, published in 1929).

Credit for the first 'official' encounter with *R. calendulaceum* therefore went to John Bartram's son William, after he discovered the species growing in northern Georgia during 1774. Perplexingly, and what most commentators overlook, is the fact that the endemic distribution extends northwards to take in southern Pennsylvania, with plants almost certain to be found growing not all that far away from the Bartram family home on the west bank of the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. The Georgia find did let William report that the Cherokee Indians called the azalea the 'Sky Paint Flower' and his on-the-ground observations extended to the blooms 'flaming on the ascending hills or wavy surface of the gliding brooks'.

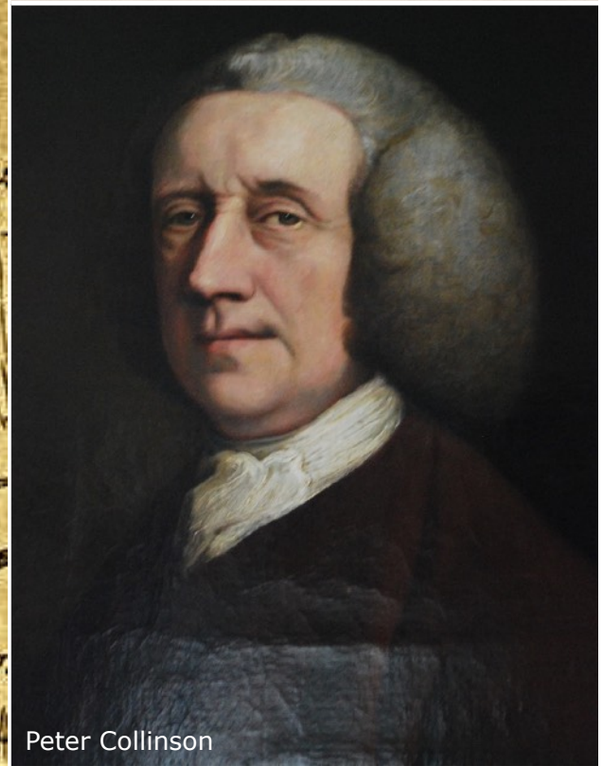
> 'The epithet fiery, I annex to this most celebrated species of azalea, as being expressive of the appearance of its flowers, which are in general of the colour of the finest red lead, orange and bright gold, as well as yellow and cream colour; the various splendid colours are not only in separate plants, but frequently all the varieties and shades are seen in separate branches on the same plant; and the clusters of the blossoms cover the shrubs in such incredible profusion on the hillside, that suddenly opening to view from dark shades, we are alarmed with the apprehension of the hill being set on fire'.
> *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee country, the extensive territories of the Muscogulges, or Creek confederacy, and the country of the Chactaws, Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions, Together with Observations on the Manners of the Indians.*
> William Bartram, 1791.

A number of doyens suggest in their own writings that William Bartram collected *R. calendulaceum* in Georgia at this time; others refute such a claim, indicating that the expedition was undertaken as a purely scientific affair rather than some slash-and-burn commercial forage for seed. It took Bartram much of the next decade to get that snappy book title just right and to transcribe his wanderings onto the 521 pages of *Travels,* that sojourn allowing the French plant hunter André Michaux to steal a march on America's finest, and introduce the species into Europe.

Michaux had arrived in the United States just two years after the American Revolution

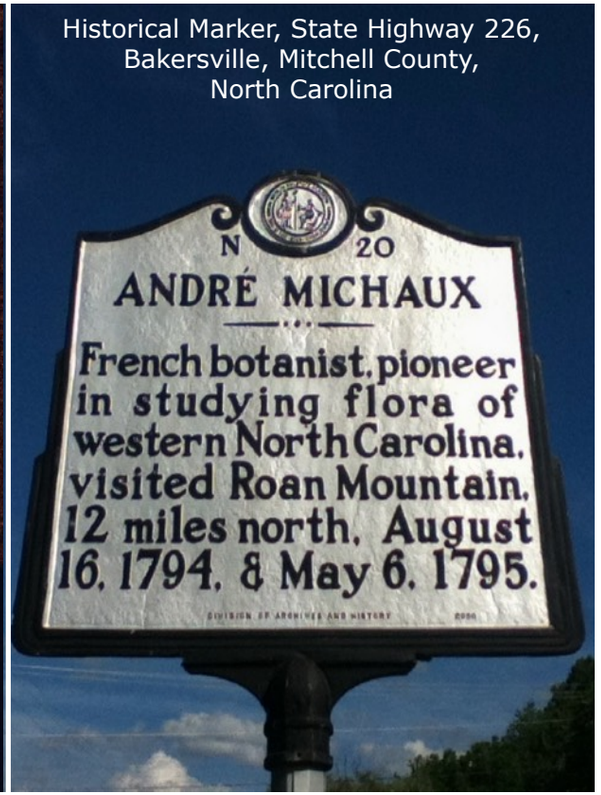

John Bartram


Henry Compton


Peter Collinson



William Bartram



Historical Marker, State Highway 226, Bakersville, Mitchell County, North Carolina

had ended, crossing into the country from Canada during 1785. The following year he opened a nursery business near Hackensack, New Jersey, but one East Coast winter at that latitude was enough to send the Frenchman south.

Arriving in North Charleston, South Carolina, in 1787, he quickly established a 111-acre botanic garden on what today is Aviation Avenue. This remained his base of operations and home over the next decade, for the local Huguenot community made him welcome and the town had a distinctly French flavour, though the New Jersey site remained open for business. A somewhat moot point is whether his new neighbours were aware that prior to his departure from France, he had been made Royal Botanist to the King, Louis XVI, and tasked with securing any plants that might be of value to his country, be they medicinal, agricultural or for use in the construction or carpentry trades, although the plethora of adulatory historical marker signs now in place across the State at locales he visited would suggest that no one was in the least bit bothered by his activities, especially, as in a kind of quid pro quo, he introduced many of the exotics then arriving in France from other parts of the world, into the New World - *Albizia julibrissin, Camellia japonica* and *Ginkgo biloba* to mention but three.

Expeditions and collecting trips to many of the wilderness areas of North America were mounted during each year of his stay, the territory covered stretching from Florida in the south to Hudson Bay in the north, and extending westwards along the basin of the Mississippi River. Some ninety crates of plants and seeds were despatched to the King's residence at Rambouillet and the Jardin des Plantes in Paris between 1787 and 1791 alone, with seed of *R. calendulaceum* finally collected on a visit to North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains in 1795. And the spectacular floral displays he found on those Appalachian Balds must have been truly impressive - just as they are today - for as the sign says, it was a repeat visit.

Events on the other side of the Atlantic forced André Michaux to return to Europe in 1796, the French Revolution having guillotined his patron and thereby drastically reduced the funds he could draw upon. A host of young plants, packets of seed and his collection of pressed herbarium specimens were boxed for the trip, but the ship that carried him safely across six-thousand-six-hundred kilometres of ocean was blown off course in the English Channel and wrecked on the European coast between Belgium and the Netherlands.

If fate appeared to have given Michaux the thumb's down, the opposite was actually the case, for literally, if you were going to be shipwrecked at that time, there was no better place for it to happen than the Low Countries. And miraculously, he not only managed to save himself, but also salvaged nearly all the crates of plants - washing salt off of the live specimens and repacking his seeds - though much of his dried material was ruined. A horse and cart were purchased with the funds he had left and the journey to Paris resumed.

On the way, it is thought likely that Michaux called-in on an old Belgium friend to seek assistance. Again, it was a lucky stop, for the true situation in France had escaped him, along with the scale of the bloodbath, and the rather inconvenient fact of life that botanists previously supported by the nobility, might not be welcomed home with open arms. So to preserve the collection in the event he was detained at the French border, Michaux agreed to divide it in half. Which explains why even though he got through unmolested and was eventually able to set up a nursery near Rambouillet, *R. calendulaceum* flowered in the botanic garden at Ghent in the spring of 1804, some two years before Michaux's own plants bloomed in his homeland.

UK nurserymen and gardeners had to wait until that very same year, 1806, for the species even to be introduced, the azalea part of a consignment of plants collected on the Appalachian Mountains - including from sites on the Roan Highlands - and shipped home by the Scottish botanist John Lyon, who then sold them at auction in London. Lyon returned twice more to the American East Coast, dying in the field near Asheville, North Carolina, on the second of those expeditions, having caught 'bilious fever'.

Switching continents, at roughly the same time as André Michaux was scouring the Blue Ridge Mountains of America's east coast for new plants, Peter Simon Pallas was exploring the Crimea, southern Russia, the Black Sea coast and the Caucasus Mountains. A Prussian zoologist and botanist, this expedition - his second - was carried out on behalf of his principal sponsor and benefactor, Catherine the Great, Empress of Imperial Russia. Pallas had been working in the world's then third-largest empire since 1767, when Catherine had appointed him Professor of Natural History at the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, and it was she who had encouraged him to undertake his first botanical expedition to the central Russian provinces, western Siberia, the Caspian Sea and Lake Baikal, this taking place between 1768 and 1774.

But it was in 1793 that he collected *R. luteum* and remembering contacts he had made in London during the early 1760s, sent some of that seed to the Lee and Kennedy Nursery in Hammersmith, as well as to another friend, Mr Thomas Bell, who lived in Brentford. Three years later, Anthony Hove encountered the species growing at Oczakow, close to the northern shore of the Black Sea in southern Ukraine, and he returned seed to the Watson Brothers nursery in Islington, where grown under glass, the species flowered for the first time in the UK during 1798.

Neither Pallas, nor Hove, however, could claim credit for discovering the species, that distinction having already gone to the French botanist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, who had

chanced upon the azalea, established on hillsides close to the eastern fringes of the Black Sea, when journeying through the Levant between 1700 and 1702.

Yet even the de Tournefort claim is a bit suspect given that Pliny the Elder (*c.* AD 23-74), and Pedanius Dioscorides (*c.* AD 40-90), had both identified *R. luteum* as being responsible for the 'mad honey' poisoning of Xenophon's Ten Thousand on their retreat from Mesopotamia around 400 BC, Pliny in his *Naturalis Historia,* and Dioscorides in *De Materia Medica*.

The 'mad honey' problem is down to grayanotoxin.

This is also known as acetylandromedol, andromedotoxin, asebotoxin or rhodotoxin. And the pollen and nectar of *R. luteum* are full of it.

Symptoms that rhodophiles should be aware of are blurred vision, coordination loss, dizziness, hypersalivation, hypotension, nausea, paresthesia, perspiration, vomiting and weakness - though not necessarily in that order - plus cardiac rhythm disorders and even atrioventricular block. Just in case anyone is tempted to experiment.

Potential consumers can pick up jars or larger containers of the honey in Turkey, where it is known as 'deli bal', and whilst not one of northeastern Anatolia's major exports, beekeeping is apparently on the up and up. The concoction is sometimes employed in traditional medicine, more frequently taken as a recreational drug, but most often used as a sexual stimulant - occasionally with fatal consequences - by middle-aged Turkish men, this despite such a perceived enhancement being classic 'fake news'. Its widespread usage could therefore explain why good ole Recep Tayyip (b. 1954), is none too keen on handing that part of the country over to the Kurds. Nevertheless, should that indeed happen in the future, with a consequent reduction in available supply, the Gurung people of Nepal will happily step in to fill the shortfall with as many jars of 'Crazy Nepal Honey' as are required to maintain the Turkish Republic's burgeoning population.

Back to being serious, by the early 1800s, those four deciduous azalea species from the New and the Old Worlds - *R. calendulaceum, R. luteum, R. periclymenoides* and *R. viscosum* - were all flowering in the grounds of Belgium's Ghent Botanic Garden, or at a nearby commercial nursery. And all would be used to start the hybridising ball rolling.

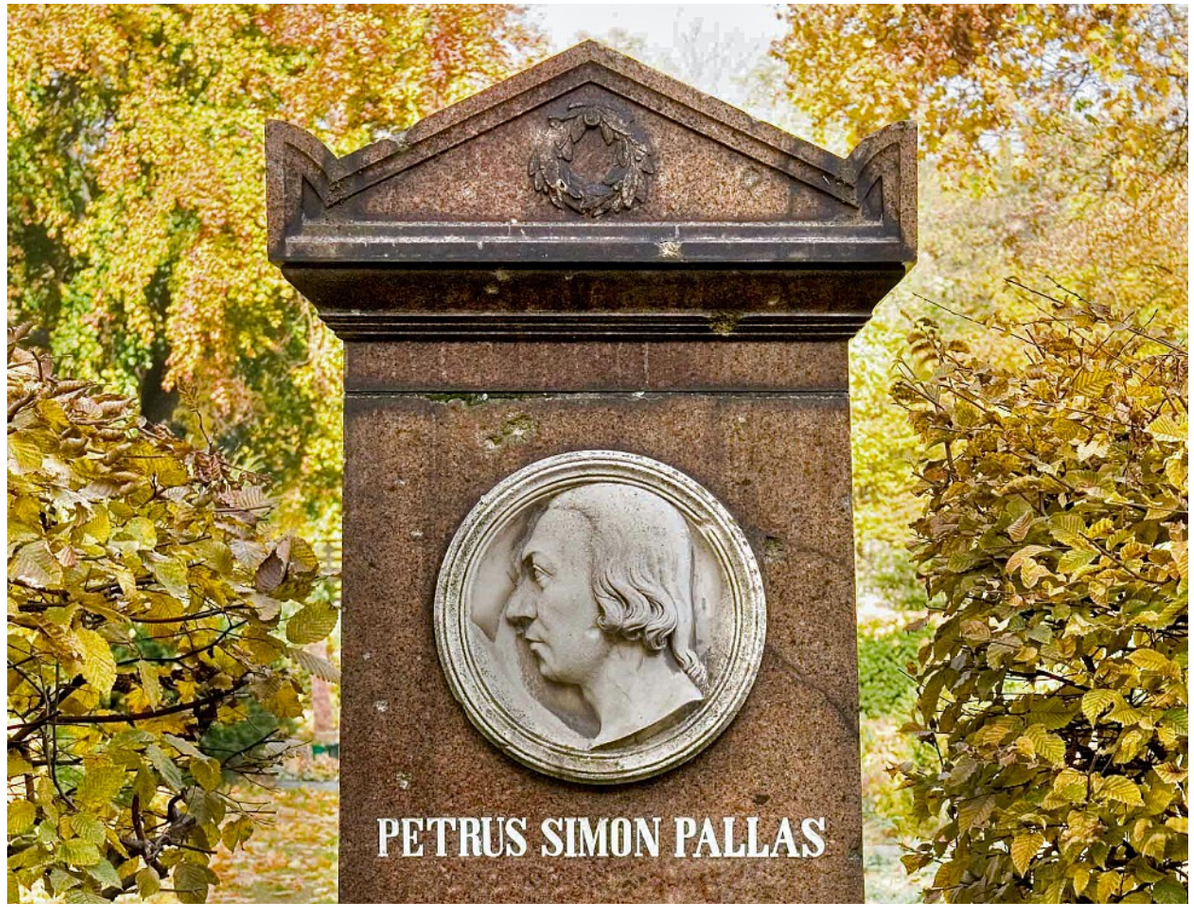
But not by a commercial nurseryman.

Or even a professional botanist.

Oh no.

By a flower-mad boulanger.

The story of that subsequent development, which over the next two-hundred years led to the creation of the six major strains of deciduous azalea hybrids available today - the Ghent, Mollis, Rustica, Occidentale, Knap Hill-Exbury and Solent Azaleas - is detailed in the sections that follow.





- opposite right above -
Headstone above the grave of Peter Simon Pallas in the Berlin-Kreuzberg cemetery.

- opposite right below -
A recent advertisement for Nepalese 'Mad Honey'.
The text on the jars below the nett weight figure is a health warning.
It reads: 'Do not exceed 1 tablespoon of Mad Honey in any 24-hour period'.
Australian rhodophiles - where the measure is 20 ml compared to the North American, European and post-Brexit United Kingdom standard of 15 ml - should therefore take particular care
(not that any aspersions are being cast).

The Ghent Azalea Strain

Mirroring the parental combinations that had resulted in the first elepidote rhododendron hybrids - American members of Section *Ponticum* crossed with *R. ponticum* itself or each other - the initial deciduous azalea hybrid crosses paired those East Coast members of Section *Pentanthera* then available in Europe, with *R. luteum* or each other. Four species from across the Atlantic were to hand and established in European gardens during the early 1800s: *R. calendulaceum, R. periclymenoides, R. prinophyllum* and *R. viscosum*. All were growing in the Ghent Botanic Garden or on the grounds of one of the many famous nursery firms gathered around that Belgium city.

Yet the man responsible for creating the kernel of plants that would become the Ghent Azalea Hybrids was neither a trained botanist nor a pre-eminent nurseryman, but as mentioned above, a baker. He was also a plant enthusiast, for historical records tell us that Monsieur P. Mortier (1768-1847), won big in 1811 when he exhibited a double-flowered white camellia at the Ghent Agriculture and Botanic Society's Winter Show, receiving the highest floral honour that that organisation could bestow.

And his bakery ovens would play a central role in the hybridising work he carried out with the azaleas: because he used the heat, channelled into his greenhouse, to force late blooming species such as *R. calendulaceum* and *R. viscosum,* to break their dormancy early, while at the same time, out in the cold, he held back the earlier flowering plants, including *R. luteum*. So, with his chosen subjects floristically synched together, pollen could be freely transferred onto a host of receptive stigmas by the boulanger, regardless of Mother Nature's biological clock.

The results of Mortier's thirty-year-long breeding programme, begun in 1804, were a set of cultivars that bloomed from mid to late season. They were vigorous growers, the mature shrubs varying between 2 and 3m high, and by 1.8 to 2.5m wide, which had good autumn leaf colour and were hardy down to -26ºC or below. Although individually small, the long-tubed funnel-shaped and sweetly-scented corollas were carried in a dense truss of ten or more trumpets, the blooms orange-red, pink, white or yellow in hue, some showing a pink or yellow flush, and they were produced in quantity from a fairly young age.

Originally christened the 'Mortieriana Azaleas', for a while, they were also known as the 'Tardives', while Dutch and German horticulturalists opted for the 'Pontica Azaleas', until their current appellation was coined.

In 1834 however, Mortier - starting a trend that would be repeated with the Solent Strain azaleas - sold his entire flock to Louis Verschaffelt, one of those famous, if not quite as perceptive, Ghent nurserymen.

Meanwhile, across the Channel in England, from around 1820 onwards, J. R. Gowen was beautifying the grounds of Highclere Castle (then a square, classical mansion with a Greek Revival exterior, now of course, a Jacobethan monstrosity designed by Charles Barry that visually, would be the perfect home for Count Dracula rather than the vampire-lite cast of Downton Abbey). Gowen was a friend of the 2nd Earl of Carnarvon, owner of said pile, but most certainly not the estate's 'head gardener' as one William Jackson Hooker had once erroneously postulated. Kew's luminary grandee would later clarify that Gowen was actually 'a gentleman of independent fortune, much devoted to Science, and well known in the most respectable circles in London' - to quote from the printed apology in an 1838 issue of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* - or to quote others, 'a genteel gardener'. Who was also conjugating European with American, specifically *R. luteum* with *R. calendulaceum* and *R. viscosum* - this set of cultivars known for a time as the Ornatum Hybrids - and *R. molle* with *R. viscosum,* the latter starting-off the Viscosepalum Hybrids with the clone 'Altaclerense'.

'Viscosepalum' itself was bred and introduced from the Knap Hill Nursery by Anthony Waterer in 1842, while up north, Isaac Davies had opted to reverse the parentage equation so it read *viscosum* x *molle,* releasing 'Daviesii' from his Brook Lane Nursery in Ormskirk, Lancashire, during 1840, this cross one of the few Ghent azaleas to maintain its popularity and remain continuously in commerce up to the present day. However, sources other than the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* - such as Bean, Galle and Street - opt for an 1879 introduction date.

Regrettably, 'Viscosepalum' has largely disappeared despite its large flowers and sweet scent, but 'Nancy Waterer', another Ghent hybrid introduced in the 1860s from Knap Hill, is still available today and widely planted. Another - 'Unique' - a clone dating to the 1850s, is variously credited to Waterer by Galle (*Azaleas,* 1987), to Standish and Noble by Street (*Azaleas,* 1959), and to Verschaffelt by the *IRRC*.

Thomas Rivers, a respected nurseryman from Sawbridgeworth in Hertfordshire, is understood to have seen the Mortier azaleas at the Verschaffelt Nursery in 1835 and is credited with introducing a number of them into UK cultivation, advertising them for sale in 1843 (Galle and Street), though other sources indicate that 'some entered the trade and had reached Britain by 1831' (*Bean's Trees & Shrubs,* online).

Back in Europe, Monsieur Verschaffelt was busy crossing Mortier's hybrids with members of the Ornatum clan that he had obtained from Gowen, as well as backcrossing all of them onto three of the species: *R. luteum, R. periclymenoides* and *R. viscosum*. He named and introduced around one hundred cultivars in total, the first twelve being listed in 1846 in the *Annales de la Société Royale d'Agriculture et de Botanique de Gand*.

Other hybridizers were also hard at work, adding to the stock: in Belgium, Josse Verleeuwen bred 'Gloria Mundi'; in France, Lísha Sénéclause introduced 'Coccineum Speciosum'; while in Germany, Jacob Rinz produced the double-flowered clones 'Bartholo Lazzari' and 'Narcissiflorum'.

To single-out but three individuals from a very crowded field.

For by the mid 1870s there were at least six hundred named cultivars with published colour descriptions and around another four hundred clones being marketed that lacked such detail.

It was their highpoint, as the French botanist and nurseryman L. Duval predicted in 1875, writing that 'these beautiful plants have seen their star pale before the arrival of a newcomer, which possesses even more of the same qualities' (*Deciduous Azaleas: The Hybrids,* Renaud de Kerchove, writing in *The Rhododendron Story,* 1996). Duval was of course referring to the Mollis Azaleas, crosses between the two subspecies of *R. molle:* the Japanese form, then known as *Azalea mollis;* and the Chinese plant, *Azalea sinensis.* Yet the fate of the Ghent Azaleas was finally sealed when the European nurseries abandoned their wholesale commercial production soon after the end of World War I.

Today, from that total count of a thousand or more cultivars, few remain: some 135 individual clones, retained for posterity across twenty private and public gardens in Belgium, England, France, Germany and the Netherlands; fewer than 25 now available commercially. They are all gathered under the banner of the 'Ghent Azaleas', although 'Hardy Ghent' was the first iteration, this proposed by another revered Belgian nurseryman, Louis van Houtte, in 1870. That categorisation was supposed to distinguish the group from the decidedly not hardy race of evergreen azalea hybrids bred from *R. simsii* that were the other Ghent nursery staple at that time, and there was also a contrived species name - *R. x gandavense* - that will be found in one or two surviving historical catalogues, gardening magazines and books.

In the UK, the National Collection of Ghent Strain Azaleas has been established in the woodland at the National Trust's Sheffield Park Garden, Kent.



The Verschaffelt Nursery, Ghent, Belgium, c. 1854

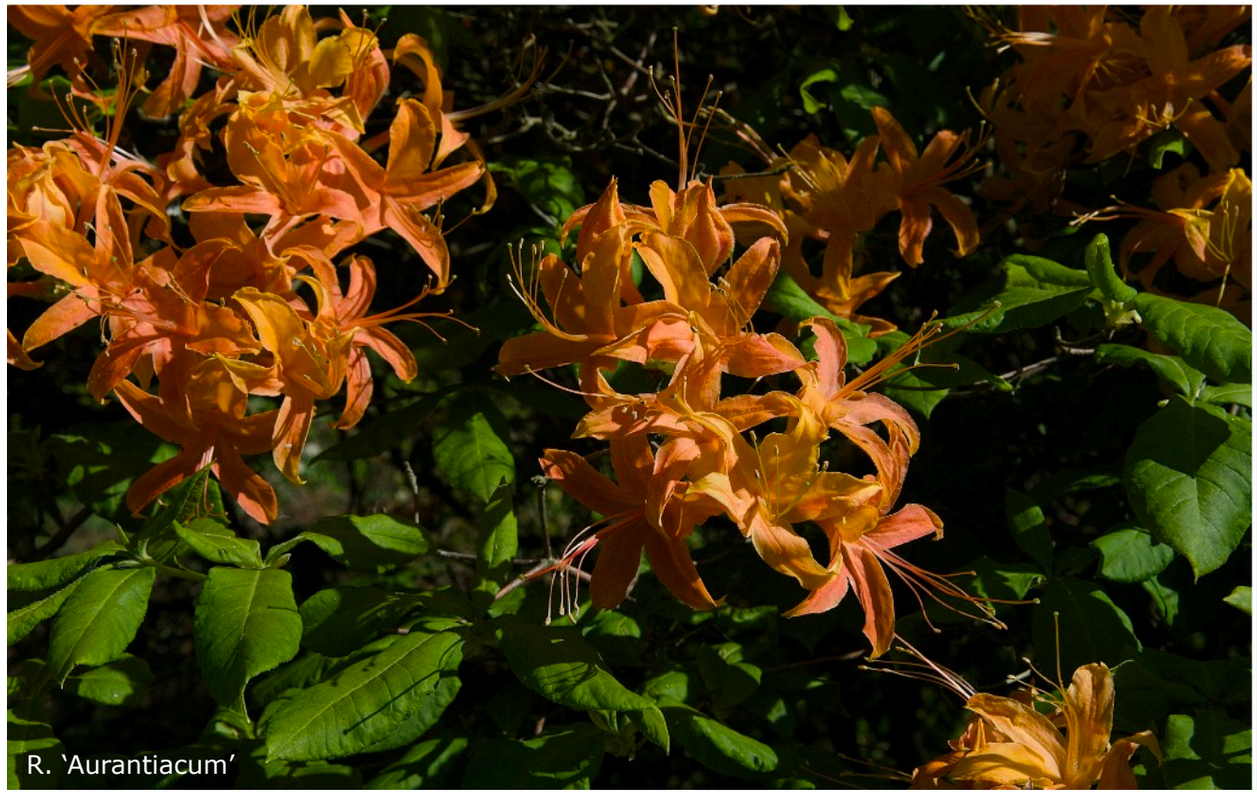
R. ‘Aurantiacum’

R. ‘Aurantiacum’
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late May-June 3m x 2m

Listed by the Waterers’ Bagshot Nursery in 1865, ‘Aurantiacum’ is thought to be the same plant that Conrad Loddiges & Sons, of Hackney, East London, had added to their own catalogue in 1804 - under the epithet ‘Aurantium’ - with both plants orange-flowered Ghent Azaleas. In 1812, the latter name also featured amongst the stock of the J. Fraser American Nursery, in Leyton, Essex, the two firms relatively close neighbours in what was then the decidedly non-urban environment of today. Any parentage details are completely lacking, though just a cursory glance at the flowers screams *R. calendulaceum,* which at that time - *c.* 1803 - had been named *Azalea aurantiaca* by Friedrich Gottlieb Dietrich. So the ‘Aurantium’ moniker could just be a coverall for a selected ‘superior’ form of the species, especially given the proclivity of nineteenth-century nurserymen to offer their customers something different, even when it wasn’t.

Technically of course, *R. calendulaceum* was not introduced into UK gardens until 1806, but the species had arrived on the Continent some years earlier and it is considered highly likely that a few plants crossed the Channel from the Dutch nurseries clustered around Ghent in advance of the historical record. Regardless, the flowers of ‘Aurantiacum’ / ‘Aurantium’ are simply stunning, opening deep orange, though the pigment fades to a pale yellow-orange with age. The stamens and style are often similarly coloured, though the filaments of the former may also be white, the stalk of the latter reddish.


R. ‘Aurantiacum’


R. ‘Aurantiacum’


R. ‘Aurantiacum’


R. ‘Bartholo Lazzari’

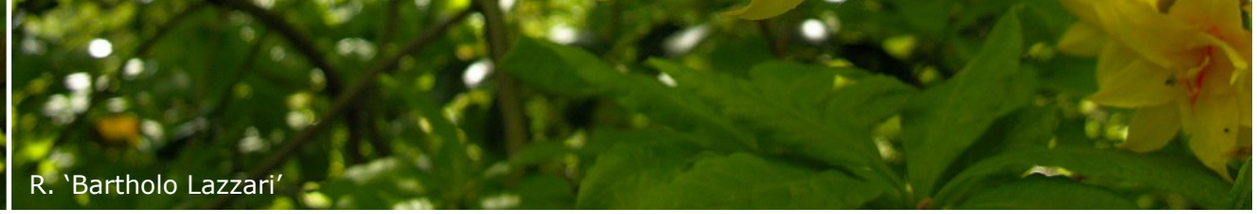
R. ‘Bartholo Lazzari’
unknown x *unknown*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	May	3m x 3m

A German nurseryman, Jacob Rinz, from Frankfurt-on-the-Main in the state of Hesse, made the cross that resulted in R. ‘Bartholo Lazzari’ sometime during 1853, though some sources report this as the date when a dozen of his firm’s new hybrid azalea varieties were first introduced to the gardening public. Any details of the actual parentage are long lost, but the shrub is considered a member of the ‘Ghent’ deciduous group by the doyens and has flowers that are scented, double and widely-funnel-shaped (almost flat-faced in fact). Coloured a moderate yellow, they have tones of reddish-orange in the tube, which may also infuse the stamen filaments and style. The number of corollas in the inflorescence also varies, the truss, when most heavily populated, near ball-shaped in form, but more often flat-topped or open, these both present on the same shrub.

Variant spellings of the epithet - ‘Bartolo Lazzaris’ or ‘Bartolo Lazaris’ - may also be encountered across published texts and garden labels, even though ‘Bartholo Lazzari’ is the *IRRC*-accepted enumeration.


R. ‘Bartholo Lazzari’


R. ‘Bartholo Lazzari’


R. 'Coccineum Speciosum'

R. 'Coccineum Speciosum'
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Late May-June 3m x 3m

As a web search will quickly reveal, little is now known of Monsieur Lísha Sénéclause, the French hybridiser who introduced R. 'Coccineum Speciosum' to the gardening world, beyond that bare fact. Even the date concerned is a flexible commodity, requiring the use of a 'pre' 1832, 1836 or 1846 caveat, although the third figure is the one most often quoted given the quotient of wriggle room. Equally, there is also debate over the shrub's status, with some expert opinion of the view that a selected form of *R. calendulaceum* is once again to hand, while others argue that it is a true Ghent hybrid azalea. Genetics may one day offer an answer to that question, but whatever the result, the continued popularity of this exceptionally fine plant will not change a jot:

Because the floral display proffered each season by 3m high and wide specimens will still be a fiery cornucopia of tier after tier of bloom, wave after wave of brilliant colour set against a contrasting background of the darkest green. Whichever clone is being viewed. And that is all that counts.

The individual flowers are small and there is virtually no scent, but en masse, those brilliant orange-red tubes with their prominent stamens and style are dazzling. The leaves too are somewhat bijou; certainly dinky, in comparison with those on most modern-day hybrids, the Exbury-Knap Hill clan and Solent Strain plants especially. But their autumn colours are no less riveting. Annual growth is also more modest, especially as a young plant, but ultimately a fine, layered specimen results.

'Coccineum Speciosum' is also known as 'Coccinea Speciosa' - although such a synonym is absent from the *IRRC* listings - and it was one of the first deciduous azalea hybrids to be sold in Britain, reportedly as early as 1843.


R. 'Coccineum Speciosum'

R. 'Croceum Tricolor'

R. ‘Croceum Tricolor’
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 May 2m x 3m

Seen from a distance, the kaleidoscopic nature of Lambert Jacob-Makoy’s ‘Croceum Tricolor’ cross is lost, transformed into a not-unattractive orange-yellow wash, dotted with the rose-pink punctuation of corollas still in bud. Move in closer, and the sublimely beautiful palette of the newly opened blooms is fully revealed, as tones of white, yellow, pink and cream vie for your attention, stripes of colour subdividing individual petals, the flare of orange-yellow deepening with age and suffusing the whole dorsal lobe.

Over time, the soft pink hue is lost completely from the ventral lobes, as a rich cream tone takes its place, though the upper two arms of the star retain their pink edging longer, the cream just a band between. Or sometimes, the lobes will remain split lengthways by their shades.

Based in Liège, Lambert Jacob-Makoy was one of Belgium’s pre-eminent nurserymen in the 19th Century and ‘Croceum Tricolor’ first appeared in his 1851 catalogue of plants. It was available from Sunningdale Nursery around 1898 and lots of plants were sold, though today, it is a rare find, with labelled mature specimens like gold dust.


R. ‘Croceum Tricolor’


R. ‘Croceum Tricolor’



R. ‘Daviesii’

R. ‘Daviesii’
viscosum x *molle*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 Late April-June 2m x 2m

Isaac Davies (1812-1897), owned and operated the Brook Lane Nursery in Ormskirk, West Lancashire, and has a host of azaleodendrons, deciduous azaleas, evergreen azaleas, lepidote and elepidote crosses all registered in his name. The most famous and widely distributed of these is ‘Praecox’, the March-flowering *ciliatum* x *dauricum* pairing introduced around the middle of the 19th century, but his contribution to the Ghent Azalea Strain, ‘Daviesii’, is almost as popular, as the wealth of mature specimens found in private and public rhododendron gardens confirm. Equally, the cross is still available commercially, 180 years after its introduction in 1840, though likely not one of the seasonally-based offerings at your the local DIY gardening emporium.

An upright grower, topping-out around the 2m-mark in time, ‘Daviesii’ has leaves that are grey-green and hairy, and flowers that are creamy-white with a yellow blotch, these produced in quantity. It will eventually spread as wide or a touch wider than it grows high, thanks to its stoloniferous inheritance from *R. viscosum,* and autumn leaf colour is also good. Apart from a lack of scent, the azalea has only one other vice: it is effectively sterile, with just a single sport - ‘Moorgold’ - found on a plant in Wiesmoor, Germany, in the early 1960s, which was named and registered by Walter Schmalscheidt in 1985.

A second clone of ‘Daviesii’ is also in commercial circulation, this with smaller, more tubular flowers that have a noticeably pinker flush. They are also faintly fragrant.



R. ‘Daviesii’

R. ‘Daviesii’



R. ‘Emile’



R. ‘Edison’

R. ‘Emile’



R. ‘General Trauff’



R. ‘Grandeur Triomphante’



R. ‘Guelder Rose’



R. ‘Maja’

R. ‘Igneum Novum’
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 Late May-June 3m x 2m

Unveiled by the Belgian nurseryman Lambert Jacob-Makoy in 1852, the only time R. ‘Igneum Novum’ appeared in anything other than a sales catalogue or listing of very hardy deciduous azaleas, was when - one-hundred-and-twenty-five years after the revelation that it was available for purchase - the hybrid secured a prestigious Award of Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. Immediately afterwards, it quietly dropped back into relative obscurity, yet it is one of the few Ghent Azaleas still being propagated today, albeit by only one or two specialist rhododendron nurseries in the UK.

‘Igneum Novum’ - though perhaps not in all its various spellings and synonyms that can be found in the catalogues: ‘Ignaeum Novum’, ‘Ignoeum Novum’, ‘Ignoea Nova’, ‘Ignea Nova’ or just simply ‘Ignaea’ - bucked the Ghent Azalea trend by not only crossing the Channel, but jumping the Atlantic too, with many mature specimens still to be found thriving in establishments such as the Arnold Arboretum in Boston, Massachusetts, as well as in private collections. Moreover, today, it is also much more widely available from East Coast US rhododendron nurseries than their British counterparts.

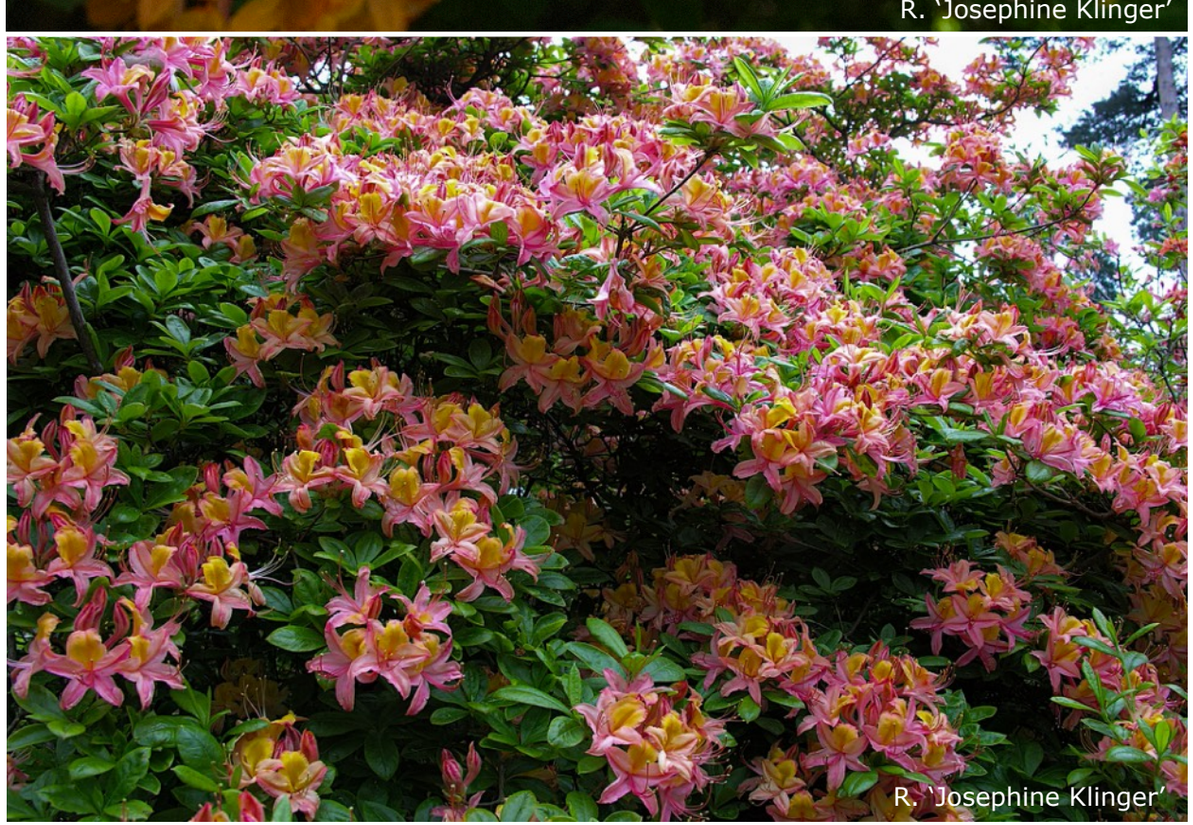
The cross is one of the taller-growing Ghents, eventually hitting the 3m-mark after many years, and the plants opens their flower buds later in the season, towards the end of May into June. Those corollas are tubular-funnel-shaped, 5-lobed, 3.5cm long and up to 6.5cm across when fully expanded. Carried in a loose truss of six or seven trumpets, a deep yellowish-pink base is shaded strong yellowish-pink and red, with a blotch of orange-yellow occupying much of the dorsal. The lobe tips are usually bent backwards and the stamen filaments often infused with a reddish-pink hue. The short white ciliate hairs found on the outer surface of the lobes and along the tube are sticky to the touch.


R. ‘Igneum Novum’


R. ‘Igneum Novum’



R. 'Josephine Klinger'



R. 'Josephine Klinger'

R. 'Josephine Klinger'
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late May-June 3m x 3m

'Josephine Klinger' is another of the taller-growing Ghent Deciduous Azaleas. The plant dates from around 1869, when it was first listed in the catalogue of the Belgian nurseryman Joseph Baumann (1817-1883), who, aside from trade notices, received only one partially biographic text in his lifetime, this dating to April 1883, a few months before his death. It comes from a *Gardeners' Chronicle* article titled *Ghent and its Nurseries:*

> 'From Wondelgem continue the journey westwards, instructing the driver to proceed to the Nouvelle Promenade, where is situated the nursery of Mr Joseph Napoleon Baumann, and also the private garden, with its magnificent *jardin d'hiver* of Madame la Comtesse de Kerchove. Mr Baumann is a famous grower of Araucarias and Bays. Of the former he grows about thirty species and varieties, and remarkably handsome and distinct are many of his specimens. Mr Baumann also grows Azaleas largely, and in his country nursery Rhododendrons and Azalea mollis; besides in the houses here many of the fine varieties of hybrid Rhododendrons raised by Mr Davies, of Ormskirk, and which are becoming popular in the Ghent trade.'

And the 'driver' would have been steering horses rather than one of Karl Benz's yet-to-arrive-on-the-market, gas-powered Motorwagens.

Two clones of 'Josephine Klinger' are thought to exist.

Early accounts detail crimson flowers, dotted with whitish or flesh-coloured spots, while the plant available today has salmon-orange blooms with a large golden-yellow blotch, these opening from deep orange-red buds.

The official *IRRC* citation however, denotes strong yellowish-pink corollas, blotched deep yellow, a description that tallies with the entry in Fred Galle's 1987-published *Azaleas.*

Luckily, the quandary is easily solved, for the dorsal lobe of the corolla is virtually golden-yellow across its entire surface, this tone extending onto the upper halves of the two adjacent lobes, with the salmon-orange hue dominant only across the lower half of the flower. But with age, salmon-orange changes into pinkish-yellow across the whole bush, thus conforming to accepted accounts. And this transformation is so effective that many onlookers - even those adjudged to be doyens - will indeed think that two wholly different plants exist. But the top image was taken on May 22nd, 2007, the lower, seven days later on May 29th, and both feature the same azalea, unconcerned with all the negative press, happily growing in the woodland at the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, Hampshire.

R. ‘Narcissiflorum’

R. 'Narcissiflorum'
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 Late May-June 2m x 1.5m

Despite most texts assigning the directed pollination credit for R. 'Narcissiflorum' to Louis van Houtte, the *IRRC* entry is alone in pointing out that the van Houtte nursery catalogue of 1894 - though published almost twenty years after the firm's founder had passed on to that great woodland garden in the sky (or not) - declares Jacob Rinz to have been the creator of probably the most widely-planted Ghent Strain Azalea still available in commerce today.

Rinz (1809-1860), was the eldest son of Sebastian Rinz (1782-1861), who had established himself as a garden designer in the German town of Frankfurt on the Main, setting up his own nursery business around 1831-32. Ownership was transferred to his son in 1842 and by 1861 the S & J Rinz catalogue offered around twenty deciduous azalea cultivars and over thirty rhododendrons, the most famous of the latter being a pairing of *R. edgeworthii* pollinated by *R. formosum* that was named 'Sesterianum' for Rinz's brother-in-law, Jacob Sester.

'Narcissiflorum' was crossed sometime before 1855, though details of its ingredients are of course long since lost if they were ever recorded. Free-flowering from a young age, the hybrid sports pale yellow corollas, the tone deeper towards the centre of the lobes and the throat. They are tubular-funnel-shaped trumpets with a long tube, distinctly double, each around 3cm long with a similar spread at the mouth. And they are gathered into tight, globular trusses of ten. Autumn leaf colour is also very good and the mid-green blades are usually untroubled by azalea mildew. Habit is upright, yet narrow. However, reports detail some clones as showing a decided lack of vigour, while others are noted as being difficult to please, and a few are even credited with being highly fragrant, from which we can only assume that back in the day, vegetative propagation was likely augmented by a botanically nefarious distribution of seedlings.

The Rinz hybrid garnered its first RHS floral award - a First Class Certificate, no less - in 1879, when a specimen was exhibited by James Veitch & Sons of Chelsea, with it then going on to pick up an AM in 1954, and a second FCC in 1963, the latter two both gifted after successful trials at Wisley.


R. 'Narcissiflorum'


R. 'Narcissiflorum'

R. ‘Orpheus’
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Mid May-June 2m x 2m

‘Orpheus’ is another Ghent Strain azalea that began its life at the Waterers’ Bagshot nursery. It was introduced in the 1920s and despite being an absolute cracker, is rarely available commercially and is even absent from the online RHS plant name database (though the Glenn Dale evergreen azalea that uses the same epithet is listed). In bud the flowers are reddish-orange, but they open deep orange, with all the lobes except the dorsal, variably flushed reddish-orange, these darker tones fading with age. Blooming is prolific, the habit upright, and the autumn leaf colour especially fiery.



R. ‘Orpheus’

R. ‘Willem III’
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late April-May 3m x 2.5m

‘Willem III’ was first listed in the 1894 catalogue of the Seidel Nursery, the German firm based in Grüngräbchen, Dresden, but it is not known if the hybrid was crossed by the company’s owners, Hermann or Rudolf Seidel, or by someone else. It was named for the then King of the Netherlands, William III (1849-1890), who *The New York Times* would describe post his death as ‘dissolute and lustful’ and ‘the greatest debauchee of the age’ in an article titled *‘Holland’s Queen’* published on September 26, 1897, though the bulk of the text detailed a visit to the World’s Fair by Queen Emma and her daughter Wilhelmina.

One of the taller-growing Ghent azaleas, in time ‘Willem III’ will hit the 3m-mark and spread out almost as far. Bloom time is early, from late April into May, when the bush will be covered in a massed array of yellowish-pink, yellowish-orange or dark orange corollas.



R. ‘Willem III’

R. ‘Willem III’

The Mollis Azalea Strain

The Mollis Azaleas are a mix of seed-grown selections of *R. molle* ssp. *japonicum* - the form of the species native to Japan and the only member of Section *Pentanthera* endemic to that country - crosses between those selections, crosses between those same selections and the Chinese form of the species, *R. molle* ssp. *molle,* and crosses between the ssp. *japonica* hybrids and ssp. *molle*.

Oh, and with an occasional whiff of *R. viscosum* thrown into the mix.

Confused?

Because if not, historical records further muddy the hybridising waters by confirming that *R. molle* ssp. *japonicum* was first known as *Azalea mollis.* Wrongly so of course, for this epithet was the prerogative of the Chinese species, *R. molle* ssp. *molle,* which then had to go by the moniker *Azalea sinensis* in consequence. So *Azalea mollis* was changed to *R. japonicum,* while *Azalea sinensis* became first, *Azalea molle,* and then *R. molle,* before finally becoming *R. molle* ssp. *molle* courtesy of the Edinburgh Classification Revision of 1996, which also changed *R. japonicum* to *R. molle* ssp. *japonicum*.

Which proves beyond reasonable doubt that if the Brexit negotiations had exclusively been the remit of the botanists, we'd all still be voting in European elections!

Still compos mentis?

Because in 1917, J. G. Millais was far from such, writing that:

> '*R. molle* seems to be exclusively confined to Japan (though some authorities also give China as its habitat), whereas *R. sinense* is confined to China. Moreover, a friend who has recently travelled in the wilder parts of the Japanese mountains tells me that he never saw a wild *R. molle* with any but red, rose or orange-red flowers, whereas in China, *R. sinense* in a wild state develops only flowers in shades of yellow'.
> *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids.*

The author's task to differentiate between truth and fiction was not made any easier by the fact that the first plants of *R. molle* ssp. *japonicum* to arrive in Europe around 1830 were not gifted *Azalea mollis* labels by the German physician, botanist and traveller who brought them home from Japan, because they were misidentified, the good doctor denoting them to be specimens of *Azalea sinensis*. All of which means that despite knowing the 'who' and having a pretty shrewd idea of the 'when', any hope of sorting out the 'what was crossed with what' equation will remain beyond the capacity of most mere mortals until someone peers really closely at those highly complex strands of deoxyribonucleic acid.

Returning to historical fact, two gentlemen kick off the story: Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796-1866), the medical practitioner mentioned above, who was employed by the Dutch East India Company - the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie - in the role of resident clinician at Dejima, the VOC's Japanese trading base (an artificial island built in Nagasaki Bay); and Louis Benoît van Houtte (1810-1876), Ghent's foremost nurseryman and Belgium's most revered and respected horticulturalist.

Siebold arrived at Dejima during August 1823 and stayed for seven years, winning the trust of the Japanese, setting up a medical school in Nagasaki, and eventually being allowed to travel quite widely. His students, and the patients he treated, often repaid him with gifts, everyday objects from Japanese homes, but also specimens and living plants to aid his studies of the fauna and flora. He acquired seeds of *Camellia sinensis* fifteen years before Robert Fortune even set sail for China, which allowed the Dutch to set up their own tea plantations in Java, then a colony. On his return to Europe in 1830, he docked with a living collection of over 2,000 Japanese plants that included hostas and hydrangeas, as well as those fallaciously identified specimens of *R. japonicum*.

Oh, and *Reynoutria japonica.*



Philipp Franz von Siebold:
Christoph Roth's bronze bust on a red marble plinth,
Würzburg, Lower Franconia, Bavaria, Germany.



Louis Benoît van Houtte:
stained glass window at the National Agricultural
Institute of Gentbrugge, Ghent, Belgium.

Japanese knotweed. Previously known as *Fallopia japonica*.

Which as everyone knows, got off to a great start.

All were entrusted into the care of the Ghent Botanic Garden.

Now fast-forward twenty-nine years, and in 1859, Siebold returned to Japan, initially as an adviser to the Dutch Trading Society - Nerderlandsche Handel-Maatschappij - which again, was based at Nagasaki. Later on, he took up a role with the Japanese Government at Edo (Tokyo), but this proved too much of a diplomatic faux pas for the Dutch Consul General, who took serious umbrage at the appointment, and as a result, Doctor Siebold was ordered to return home in 1861. Yet despite the relatively short duration of his second visit, another large collection of plants journeyed back with him, including additional specimens and seed of *R. japonicum* - correctly labelled this time - the bountiful miscellany being established in the grounds of the Hortus Botanicus Leiden, which was the town where von Siebold had settled in the 1830s.

- opposite -

Plan of the Dutch trading post at Dejima, Nagasaki.
Built on an artificial island in Nagasaki Bay, as measured by Engelbert Kaempfer, the enclosed area was just 200m long by 80m wide. The image is adapted from an original woodblock print by Toshimaya Bunjiemon that has been dated to 1780. It was first published in the West within Isaac Titsingh's *Bijzonderheden over Japan, c.* 1824.

出嶋阿蘭陀屋敷景



And it is at this point in the story that Louis van Houtte arrives on the scene, although he might have made an earlier appearance in the 1840s.

Because although the most oft-quoted historical reportage suggests that van Houtte began hybridising with a set of *Azalea mollis* seedlings purchased from Siebold via the HBL soon after the German arrived home in 1861, Louis himself is on record as stating that the twenty selected deciduous azalea hybrids he exhibited in 1873 were the result of a thirty-year-long breeding programme, which means the stock came from the GBG. It has been suggested by some authors that this ties in neatly with when the *R. japonicum* seedlings from 1830 should have begun flowering in Belgium, but such texts skip over the fact that live plants had also arrived, protected from the elements and any salt spray in purpose-built greenhouses on the decks of the clipper ships.

And that is important, because:

> 'No other plants of *R. japonicum* collected in Japan were of so fine a colour or of such vigour, or with so large flowers, as those that came home with von Siebold, the first to arrive in Europe'.
> *Azaleas,* Frederick Street, 1959.

The corolla pigmentation of Louis van Houtte's founding members of the Mollis Azalea Strain cover a sweep of hues that include reddish-orange, orange, rose, salmon, pink, and yellow-white, and this range suggests a much longer period of development than a mere decade would have seen wrought. Equally, a few of his introductions were also fragrant, a characteristic that is usually absent from most members of the pride and certainly from *R. japonicum* itself. But van Houtte had a plant to hand that he called *Azalea sinensis Alba,* which most experts agree was likely the product of a *molle* x *viscosum* cross. Moreover, from its introduction by one of the Belgium horticulturalist's contemporaries in 1850 - Charles Vuylsteke - he may also have incorporated a white-flowering plant known today as 'Elegantissimum Odoratum' into his designs, this being a form or hybrid of *R. viscosum*. Equally, the yellow-flowering form of *R. japonicum* that Karl Maximovich had collected in Japan during the early 1860s was despatched poste haste from the Botanic Garden at Saint Petersburg to the van Houtte nursery at Gentbrugge thanks to his contacts with the Russian Trubetskoy family (made at earlier Ghent Floralies exhibitions).

All these new Mollis hybrids could have been stuck straight out into the garden and left to thrive unprotected from the elements, but the commercial nursery firms of the time - including Établissement Van Houtte - regarded them as house plants, to be bought indoors in the closing months of the year and forced into early flower in a conservatory or a greenhouse. Just how much work went into this process was detailed by a reporter for *The Field* in the December 23rd, 1911, edition of that magazine:

> 'The plants of *Azalea mollis* that are imported for forcing in this country are from three to six years old, the latter being about 18 in. high, with from twenty to thirty main shoots, and about twice as many branchlets, most of them terminated by a fat flower bud. They are sent over out of pots, the root system being so close and matlike that the plants are not easily upset. Where only a few are forced it is usual to put them into pots as soon as the arrive from the dealer, but the market growers have a different method. They stand the plants close together in frames until they are wanted for forcing, which begins in January and ends in April. They are taken into a greenhouse, which is kept very moist and warm, the temperature rarely falling below 70°. The plants are stood on benches as close together as possible, and they are frequently syringed overhead. The roof glass is covered with several layers of mats or even boards, heavy shade being necessary to force the flower buds to push quickly and the stalks to elongate sufficient to make the developed flower head loose and elegant. The shading is not removed until the flower buds are nearly full sized, when more light is admitted, and finally the plants are exposed to all the light they can get. The next operation is that of gumming, every flower as soon as possible after it has expanded being visited by a careful workman, a bicycle oilcan in hand, with which he places a drop of well-watered gum at the bottom of the corolla outside, so that it runs between the the base and the calyx lobes. Each plant must be gone over three or four times until all the flowers have been gummed. The hardening off process is then applied, and the plants are ready to be placed in pots, the root stock being often considerably reduced to make it of convenient size, the plant not objecting in the least. Plants thus treated have been known to hold their flowers fresh in a dwelling room for nearly a month. The gum is the most important factor in this. It will be seen that plants subjected to this course of treatment cannot be sold for less than 5 shillings each'.

Placed outside after their month of purgatory, it was eventually discovered that the Mollis Azalea Hybrids performed just as well out in the open, although blooming at the beginning of May, the display was sometimes hit by a late spring frost.

Following the van Houtte introductions, other Dutch and Belgian nurserymen were soon adding to the strain: Frederik de Coninck, L. J. Endtz & Co., the Kersbergen Brothers, Ottolander & Hooftman, Ambrose Verschaffelt and Charles Vuylsteke. All brought new crosses to the market before the turn of the century. But it was the firm of M. Koster & Sons who really picked up the ball and ran with it.

Founded by Marinus Koster in 1840 and then run by his son Anthony, the nursery first concentrated on breeding *molle* x *japonicum* crosses. This programme continued when Anthony Koster's son Hugo took charge of the business, working in concert with a relative, Bas de Bruin. But they were also progressing along a completely different track. One that was based on the laws of Mendelian inheritance:

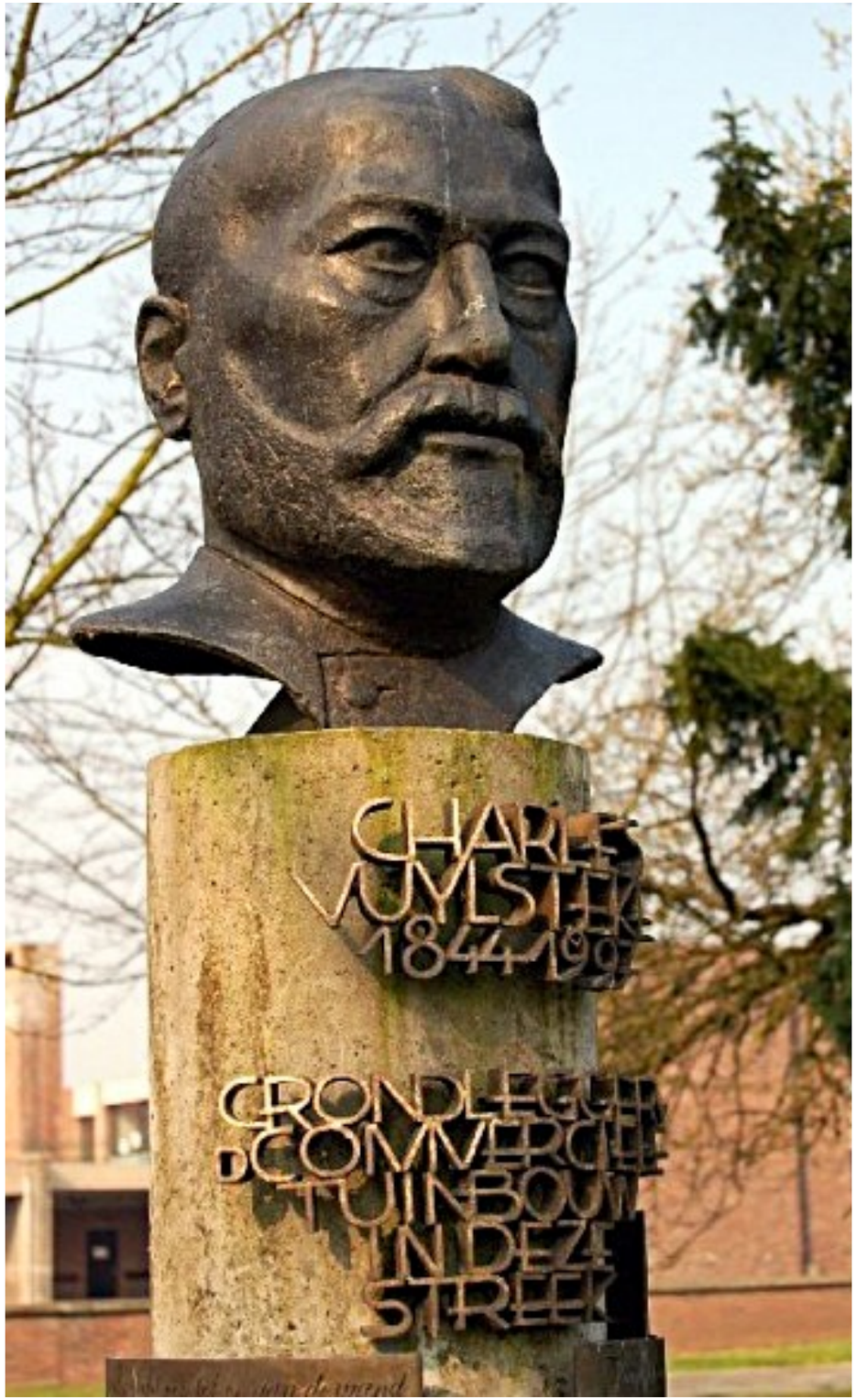
> 'It was their custom to take their Sunday morning tot of Hollands gin together, seated on the flat roof of their office. One day, when they were admiring the beauty of the nursery in the spring, Hugo Koster saw, among a batch of seedlings, one azalea that was quite outstanding. He pointed this out to Bas and together they went down to the nursery to examine it more closely. There was no doubt that it was outstanding. They marked it out for selection and for propagation. It was the plant from which the strain which is known and grown today as 'Koster's Brilliant Red' was raised'.
> *Azaleas,* Frederick Street, 1959.

Introduced in 1918, 'Koster's Brilliant Red' - to borrow a line from an early 1970s BBC surreal comedy show - was something completely different: a line hybrid.

During the course of their endeavours, the two nurserymen had discovered that by crossing a pair of selected Mollis clones that had a similar corolla colour, then crossing their offspring together, and then crossing their progeny with each other - while all the time maintaining matching hues in their selections - the seedlings that germinated when those third generation plants were crossed all had flowers of the same tone.

Or very nearly so, the difference in colour infinitesimal.

Which meant that that third generation match could be repeated ad infinitum to produce thousands of seedlings all with matching flowers, at very low cost. And those azaleas could then be sold under a colour designation - 'Mollis Pink' or 'Mollis Red', for instance - rather than as a named cultivar (though 'Koster's Brilliant Red' proved to be so good that it was - and still is - propagated vegetatively).



At this point, with the disruption of World War I finally ended, the Belgian and Dutch nurserymen began to export their Mollis Hybrids to Great Britain and America in quantity, the Koster nursery leading the way. The plants were also exhibited at the Chelsea Flower Show, after which, their popularity knew no bounds, for as Frederick Street once again makes clear, at that time 'the colours were beyond anything seen in any other flowering shrub' (*Azaleas,* 1959).

In general, the Mollis Azalea Hybrids are slightly lower growing than the Ghents, maxing-out at 2.5 rather than 3m tall, while only spreading to around 2m. They are also a little less hardy, those with ssp. *molle* blood in the mix being rated at H5-6, the tougher ssp. *japonicum* clones, to H7, although reliably, only down to -24ºC. The flower trusses hold from 7 to around 13 corollas, and they are always single, never double or hose-in-hose, and usually they lack any scent. The blooms are larger than those of the Ghents however, 5 to 6cm across rather than 4 to 5cm, with a shorter tube and stamens that do not project out beyond the lobes, a characteristic that can be used to quickly distinguish one strain from the other when in flower.

A position in full sun is best, although placement in dappled shade will be fine in the UK's southern counties. The plants are also more tolerant of heat than either the Ghent Azaleas or the strain of hybrids from the Waterer Nurseries that would surpass and ultimately replace them. Because on a patch of the Bagshot Sands not far from Woking in Surrey, two men, father and son, both named Anthony, had been steadily working away at perfecting a new race of deciduous azalea hybrids since the 1850s. And following the introduction of those vivaciously-bloomed Knap Hill Azaleas that began in the 1930s, the popularity of the Mollis Hybrids nosedived, so much so that today only a very few clones of the strain remain commercially available, despite those brilliantly coloured corollas. But first up, came the Rustica Azaleas, and then, the Occidentales.

- *opposite* -
The Marc de Brujin 1995 bronze bust of Charles Vuylsteke,
set within the grounds of the municipal park at Lochristi, East Flanders, Belgium.



R. ‘Adriaan Koster’



R. ‘Alice de Stuers’



R. ‘Altaclerense’



R. ‘Christopher Wren’



R. ‘Comte De Gomer’



R. ‘Comte De Papadopoli’



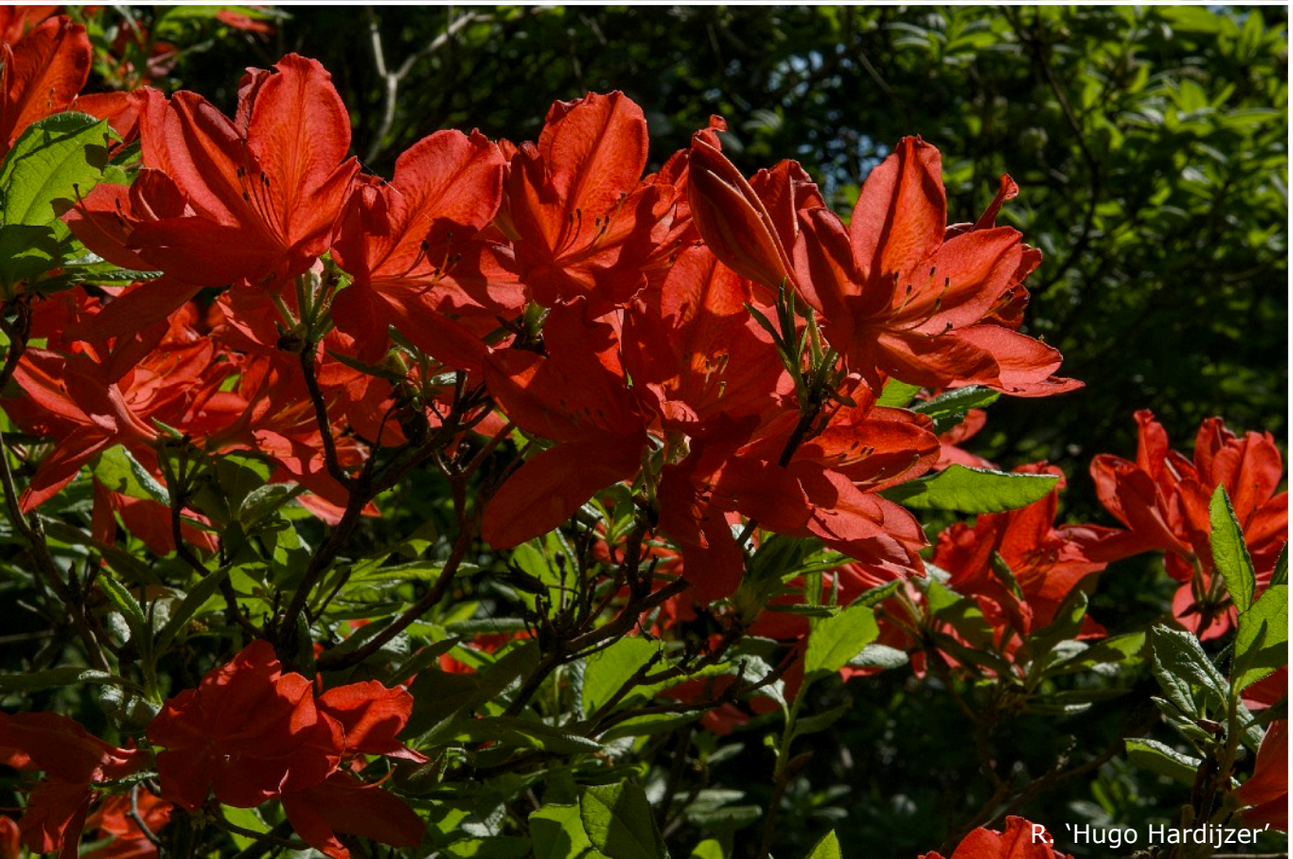
R. ‘Doctor M. Oosthoek’



R. ‘Florodora’


R. ‘Frans Van Der Bom’


R. ‘Hortulanus H. Witte’


R. ‘Hugo Hardijzer’


R. ‘Koningin Emma’



R. ‘Koster's Brilliant Red’


R. ‘Koster's Brilliant Red’


R. ‘Koster's Brilliant Red’


R. ‘Lemonora’


R. ‘Mrs L. J. Endtz’


R. ‘Mrs L. J. Endtz’


R. ‘Mrs L. J. Endtz’

R. ‘Mrs Oliver Slocock’

R. 'Mrs Oliver Slocock'
molle x *japonicum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 Late April-May 2.5m x 2m

Named for the wife of Oliver Charles Ashley Slocock, the younger son of the nursery firm's founder, Walter Charles Slocock, 'Mrs Oliver Slocock' has orange-yellow flowers that are flushed orange-red at first. The blooms open at the end of April and the cross is one of the taller-growing Mollis Azaleas, with the corollas often forming a globe from multiple buds and producing an absolutely dazzling display on a mature shrub.

Introduced from the family's Goldsworth Nursery in 1933, 'Mrs Oliver Slocock' was gifted an Award of Merit by the Royal Horticultural Society that very same year, yet opinion is divided on the parentage, with the *IRRC* and other sources listing a straight *molle* x *japonicum* pairing, while the online edition of *Bean's Trees & Shrubs* for instance, proclaims it to be a combination between 'Altaclerense' and a Mollis azalea, the text implying that the Gowen Ghent hybrid was involved rather than the FCC-awarded Mollis cross from the firm of J. & C. Lee.

Whichever proves correct, 'Mrs Oliver Slocock' is a stunner nonetheless.


R. 'Mrs Oliver Slocock'


R. 'Mrs Oliver Slocock'


R. 'Mrs Oliver Slocock'

R. ‘Spek’s Orange’
molle x *japonicum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Late May 1.5m x 1.5m

Clearly gushing over with praise, but at the same time also sounding a cautionary word of warning, nurseryman and author Frederick Street had this to say about ‘Spek’s Orange’, regarded by many as the star of the Mollis Azalea Strain:

> ‘There is no adjective to describe the intensity of the colour of this azalea in the form that is growing on Battleston Hill in the RHS Gardens at Wisley. It is breathtaking, and could well qualify as the most striking Mollis hybrid. Unfortunately many different forms are on the market, which vary considerably - often a chance seedling having been given this name. Consequently, it is best to see the stock of this variety in flower before buying a plant’.
> *Azaleas,* 1959.

Wise words that should still be followed today.

Jan Spek founded his Boskoop nursery in 1890 and it is still trading, run by his direct descendants. Roses were and remain the firm’s prime focus, with just three deciduous azaleas registered across its 130-year-plus history: ‘Speorie’ the most recent, introduced in the 1990s; ‘Spek’s Brilliant’ and ‘Spek’s Orange’, introduced after the Second World War, but bred by Jan much earlier. They are both officially *molle* x *japonicum* Mollis Strain azaleas, though Fred Galle, writing in his 1987 book *Azaleas,* gives their parentage as ‘Mollis’ x ‘Kosterianum’.

This would make them [(*molle* x *japonicum*) x (*molle* x *japonicum*)].

However, the single generation combination - as given in the *IRRC* - is the equation followed herein.

A true plant of ‘Spek’s Orange’ will have 8 to 12 widely funnel-shaped corollas gathered together in a globular truss, each member of which will be 5cm long by 6.5cm wide, deep red in bud, opening vivid red and orange, the darker hue on the outside of the tube and flushing the lobe margins. The blooms will then turn almost wholly orange as they age, with the stamens and style flushed to match.

Some published descriptions speak of a greenish flare, but if there is a pattern of speckles on the dorsal lobe, they are also of an orange hue, their tone barely a shade darker than the blooms themselves, so the blotch is virtually invisible. Equally spurious are claims that the blooms are scented.

‘Spek’s Orange’ has a compact habit that only just reaches 1.5m in height, with a similar spread, so labelled plants that soar higher towards the heavens are pretenders, outright fakes, like the absentee landlord of said mythical facility.


R. ‘Spek’s Orange’


R. ‘Spek’s Orange’

R. ‘Spek’s Orange’

The Rustica Azalea Strain

In amongst the thousand or so named cultivars of the Hardy Ghent azaleas that were being sold in the 1870s, more than a few existed that were double-flowered - plants where the stamens had been converted into additional petals.

Each corolla on a single-flowered Ghent clone exhibits five lobes and five stamens, alternatively spaced around the ovary, so when a genetic hiccup metamorphoses the latter into a second set of petals, a symmetrical, almost hose-in-hose design is the outcome, with that second corolla superimposed onto the first, but rotated round by about 36º.

Some experts have termed these the Double Ghent Hybrids; others, gifted them the specious botanical coverall name of *R. x gandavense plenum;* and their ranks included the two best-known Jacob Rinz hybrids - 'Bartholo Lazzari' and 'Narcissiflorum'. But being without stamens, they are unable to produce any pollen. Yet their styles are still fully receptive to any tetrad grains that might come their way. Usually.

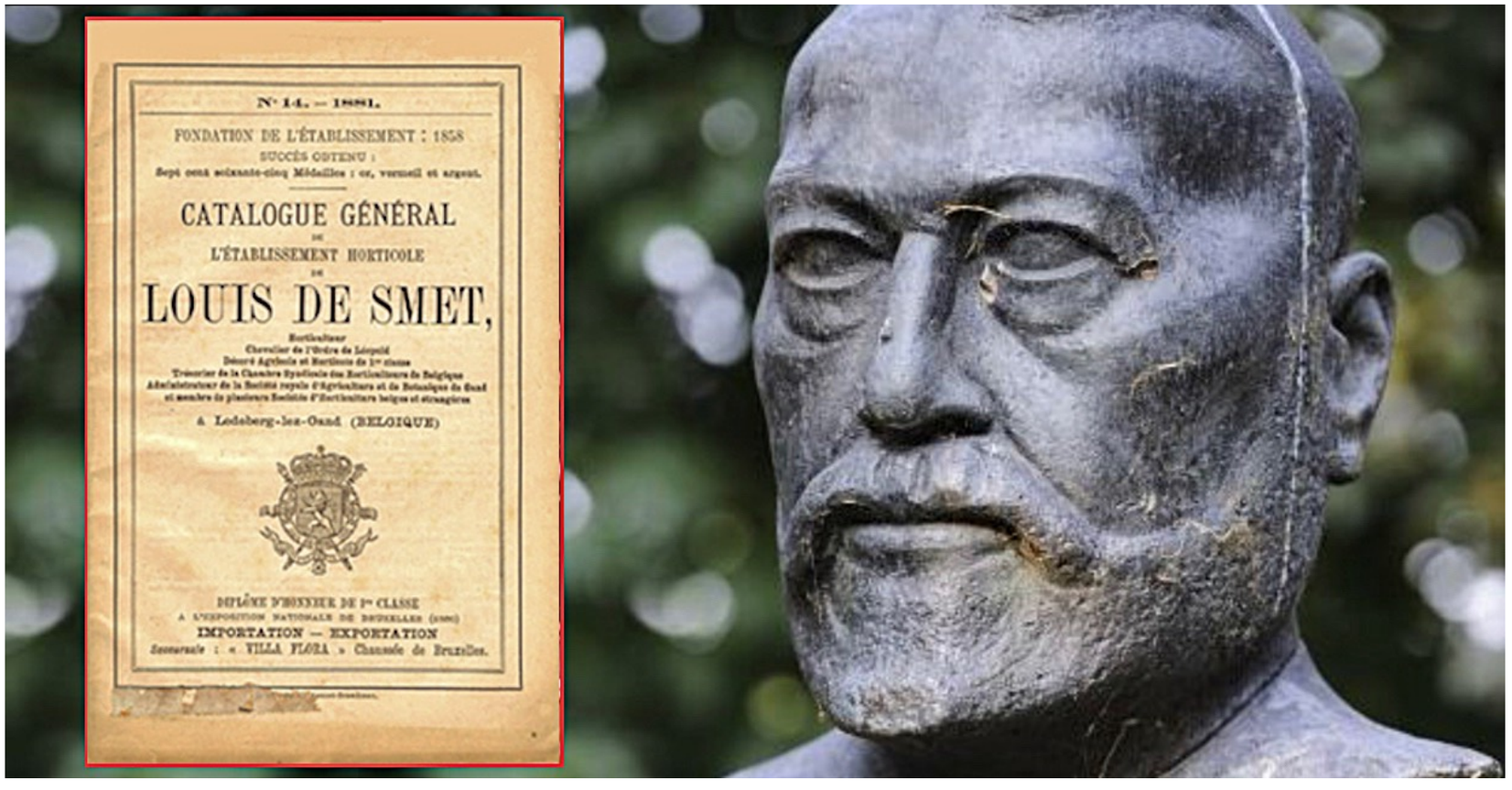
Louis de Smet-Duvivier (1813-1887), a nurseryman from Sint-Amandsberg, near Ghent (now a sub-municipality of the town), appears to have been the only hybridiser to have discovered this fact of life and taken advantage of it. In doing so, he bred the entire race of plants that are known today as the Rustica Azaleas, or alternatively, as the Rustica Flora Plena Hybrids. But they barely get a mention in most specialist texts, and even then, the detail given is often wrong, especially if Louis van Houtte crops up in the narrative.

Twenty-two cultivars are listed in the *IRRC* where de Smet is correctly assigned the hybridiser credit, another five lack such detail, though all record Charles Vuylsteke as responsible for their introduction.

Based at nearby Lochristi, Vuylsteke did indeed name and bring to market all twenty-seven selections, for as with Monsieur Mortier and the original Ghent hybrids, Louis de Smet sold his entire stock shortly before his death in the mid 1880s. And likewise mirroring the Mortier-Verschaffelt transaction of 1834 vintage, Charles Vuylsteke had no idea of what the parentage was of the plants he was buying.

Expert opinion has therefore suggested that either *R. molle* ssp. *japonicum* or *R. occidentale* provided the pollen that was daubed onto whichever double-flowered Hardy Ghent clone - or clones - Monsieur de Smet had to hand, though other equally authoritative voices bend towards the involvement of a Mollis or an Occidentale strain hybrid. Of course, until the geneticists get to work, all such eloquent pronouncements will remain on a purely speculative basis.

Happily, in recent years, pastel-coloured flowers have come back into fashion, and as the Rusticas combine these hues with an alluring, sweetly sugary fragrance, this has led to them becoming popular once again. Even better, most of those twenty-seven introduced clones have been rediscovered and are now being propagated by the specialist nurseries. And to ice the cake, major collections of the shrubs have now been established at Sheffield Park, Hilliers, Wisley, and the Savill Gardens.



- inset -
The Smet Nursery Catalogue from 1881.

Charles Vuylsteke:
a closer look at the Marc de Brujin statue, Lochristi municipal park, Belgium.


R. ‘Aida’


R. ‘Apelles’


R. ‘Ariadne’


R. ‘Corneille’


R. ‘Fénelon’


R. ‘Freya’


R. ‘Hora’


R. ‘Il Tasso’


R. ‘Mécène’


R. ‘Milton’


R. ‘Murillo’


R. ‘Norma’



R. ‘Phébé’



R. ‘Phidias’



R. ‘Praxitèle’



R. ‘Quentin Metsys’



R. ‘Racine’



R. ‘Raphael de Smet’



R. ‘Teniers’



R. ‘Velasquez’

The Occidentale Azalea Strain

Historically, the story of the Occidentale Azalea Hybrids is a tale of two Anthonys, just not the two you might expect. It begins with the introduction of the species into British gardens in the middle of the 19th Century.

William Lobb collected that first batch of *R. occidentale* seed sometime between 1849 and 1850 while he was working for the Veitch Nurseries. The capsules were gathered from a population of plants growing near San Diego, California, and their acquisition was almost an afterthought, because the expedition's prime goal was to seek out and harvest the strobili - cones - of the American West Coast conifers, and had *Sequoiadendron giganteum* set right at the top of its procurements list as the prize trophy. However, the Veitch Nursery emporium never looked any gift horse in the mouth and the new azaleas were in flower at their Coombe Wood facility - to the north of Kingston in Surrey - during June-July 1857. Yet according to Frederick Street, (*Azaleas,* 1959, the quotes unreferenced), they received a set of dire reviews from the botanic doyens of the day:

'A plant of little value'.
John Lindley.

'A mere form of *calendulacea,* of little horticultural importance'.
William Jackson Hooker.

Opinions that the two images opposite clearly refute.

But if you dig a little deeper, a dried herbarium specimen will be found to have been the kernel that generated that Hooker remark, not a cultivated plant in full bloom. For when the Director of Kew Gardens viewed such in 1857, his appraisal changed markedly, as evidenced by the text in Volume 83 of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine,* which opens with the words 'our drawing was made from a beautiful specimen sent by Messrs Veitch'. And as no less an authority than Renaud de Kerchove has written far more recently, *R. occidentale* is 'perhaps the most beautiful species of all in nature' (*The Rhododendron Story,* Chapter 12, 1996). It is also one with the most exquisite scent.

Anthony Waterer Senior (1822-1896), obtained a particularly good specimen of the species for his Knap Hill Nursery, with larger flowers that were 'more pink than those of the ordinary type' according to Street, and by 1870, he had crossed it with the Chinese form of *R. molle,* and later, with some of the ssp. *japonicum* Mollis Hybrids that were then available. 'Albicans', a selection from the earlier pairing, had been named and introduced sometime before March 1894, when a greenhouse-forced plant with near white flowers and a yellow blotch shown from Syon House - the Duke of Northumberland's west London pied-à-terre - had won an Award of Merit for said Algernon Percy, at an RHS flower show. The chosen epithet would ultimately end up being applied as a coverall to all those early Waterer Occidentale Hybrids, which despite having a large flower truss and scented corollas, have virtually disappeared from UK gardens today, although their blood is infused into the race of deciduous azaleas that were subsequently raised at Knap Hill and are the next strain to be detailed. 'Albicans' itself, is also believed lost.

Alternative sources to Messrs Street and Galle (*Azaleas,* 1959 and 1987 respectively), suggest that Anthony Waterer did not acquire *R. occidentale* until 1870, and that it came from contacts in America. This plant was also, apparently, a much better form than the Veitch introduction and was gifted a Botanical Certificate in 1886. It was then crossed with the best Ghent Hybrids available at the time, rather than *R. molle* or the Mollis Hybrids, and produced a range of late-flowering seedlings with white, cream, pink and deep pink scented corollas (*Bean's Tree & Shrubs,* online edition).

Whatever was actually the case, shortly after the turn of the century, the Waterer Occidentale Hybrids began to be superseded, and ultimately completely overshadowed, by a set of far superior European-bred clones. At which point, enter the second Anthony.

Though not Anthony Waterer Junior (1850-1924).

Rather, Anthony Koster.

Son of Marinus - who in 1840 had founded the M. Koster & Sons nursery firm at Boskoop in the Netherlands - Anthony was already a hybridiser of high repute, having created many of the best *molle* x *japonicum* Mollis Hybrids of the time. But in 1895, or more likely a few years earlier at the start of decade, he would pair the best of these famed magnum opuses with a plant he had purchased in England under the name 'Azalea pontica pink'. The label was wrong of course, because the shrub was actually *R. occidentale*.

Five selections from those fated couplings were unveiled in 1901: 'Delicatissimum', pale yellowish-white, flushed pink, with a yellow blotch; 'Exquisitum', creamy-white, flushed a soft amber-yellow, blotched saffron-yellow, the recipient of an Award of Merit in 1950, and a First Class Certificate in 1968; 'Graciosum', pale orange-yellow, flushed strong pink, with an orange blotch, this gifted an AM in 1908; 'Magnificum', creamy-yellow at first, then suffused with purplish-red, sporting an orange-yellow blotch; and 'Superbum', this white flushed pink, and also with an orange-yellow blotch. All, devastatingly beautiful and sweetly scented; tall plants attaining 3m in height over time; with stunning autumn foliage and a hardiness rating of H5-6. Cultivation-wise, in the UK's southern counties, where the sun is strongest, a placement in light dappled shade will maintain the depth of colour in those blooms longest; elsewhere, along the east or west coasts for instance - as at Edinburgh Botanic - set out in the open, they will thrive. Moreover, their flower buds unfurl towards the end of May, so usually avoid any late frosts, and they persist well into June.

In around 1915, a new clone, 'Roseum', was introduced by the Koster nursery with flowers of the purest pink. And then, sometime before 1925, came the pièce de résistance, the crowning glory: 'Irene Koster' - bearing white blooms that are flushed with rose-pink and marked deeper along the centre of the lobes, the dorsal bearing a large yellow flare and the tube suffused crimson-pink.

By mid May those blooms will be fully open, so initially, the shrub was foisted into the Ghent Azalea Strain, but this was later revised. Also, and regrettably, the initial distribution of 'Irene Koster' was by means of seedlings rather than vegetatively produced stock, so some variance will be seen in the corolla colour even today, if several clones are compared. Note that it has never been suggested that 'Irene Koster' was a Koster 'line' hybrid, even though the nursery was producing several Mollis selections in this way, and designating the seedlings as 'Mollis Pink' or 'Mollis Red' - the near-consistency in their flower tone the result of successively pairing similarly coloured clones over three generations to eliminate any genetic dissimilarity, a practice that would later be taken up at Exbury by Lionel de Rothschild and his son, Edmund. At around the same time, 'Koster's Brilliant Red' was also being distributed as a line hybrid (for only later would it be propagated vegetatively), so it is not entirely inconceivable that Hugo Koster - Anthony's son, who was then in charge of the family firm and trialling the Mendelian Inheritance breeding programme with his Mollis clones - might also have included a member of his father's Occidentale strain into that programme, the twenty-year gap between the 1901 introductions and the debut of 'Irene Koster' potentially confirming such.

Other hybridisers - Leonard Frisbee of Tacoma; Ben Lancaster of Lackamas Gardens, Camas; Doctor Clausen of Oregon; or the UK's very own, Denny Pratt - have all, over the years, introduced *R. occidentale* crosses into commerce, but none have so far struck such a chord with the public and attained the level of popularity that those five original Koster clones, or 'Irene Koster' did. Moreover, maintained that lionisation for more than a hundred years. Which explains why all six remain worldwide commercial standards.

What isn't so obvious, is why some of the epithets for the Koster Occidentale hybrids are now different from the ones they were originally given - for instance, 'Delicatissimum', instead of the nursery-chosen 'Delicatissima', and 'Superbum' rather than 'Superba' - with the primary monikers now treated as a synonyms, though these are not formerly recognised as such in the *IRRC,* and indeed, are absent from the listings. However, they are still widely used in any number of other texts - W. J. Bean's *Trees & Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles,* and Kenneth Cox's *Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* to give just two examples.

So why the change?

Well, believe it or not, the reason is down to gender and how that is handled by the dead language favoured by botanists the world over, Latin.

So, to quote from the *IRRC* text headed 'Gender of epithets' - located on page 8 of the Second Edition's Introduction section - albeit herein, with a tense change and a bit of added punctuation:

> 'When *Azalea* was recognised as a genus separate from *Rhododendron,* Latin form cultivar epithets of azaleas had to agree with the feminine gender of *Azalea*. When the two were united under the neuter genus *Rhododendron,* such Latin form epithets had to change to reflect this. Thus in the *Register and Checklist,* azalea cultivars originally published as 'Alba' and 'Iveryana' will now be found listed as 'Album' and 'Iveryanum'. This can sometimes make a significant difference to their position in the alphabetical listing and should be borne in mind if an epithet appears at first to be missing from the *Register and Checklist*'.

Of course, the Royal Horticultural Society, as the International Cultivar Registration Authority for Genus *Rhododendron,* had its hands tied, but even so, 'a' being replaced by 'um' on purely gender grounds still smacks of Nineteen Eighty-Four and one suspects that this side of the millennium, if such a change were proposed today, rhodophile members of the MeToo movement would rightly be up in arms. Moreover, if that same botanic standard is applied to the species classification, why was the male Genus *Ledum* changed to the female *Leda?* Comfortingly however, it is nice to know that even in the politically correct botanic halls of Edinburgh, both R. 'Delicatissima' and R. 'Superba' still survive, as an online check of the RGBE's *Catalogue of the Living Collections* will quickly confirm (at least, at the time of writing).



R. occidentale 'Copperleaf'



R. occidentale 'Crescent City Double'

R. ‘Bridesmaid’

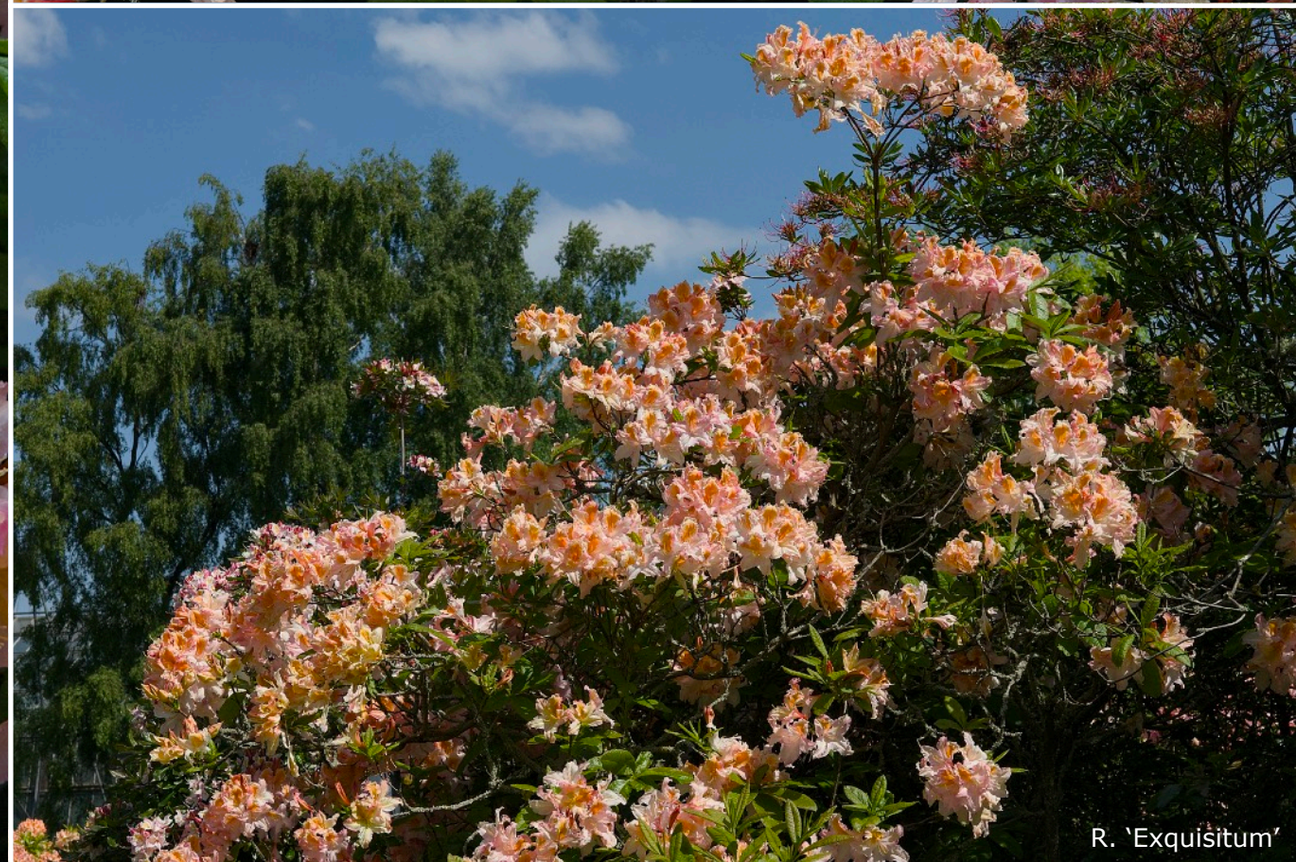
R. ‘Bridesmaid’

R. ‘Delicatissimum’

R. ‘Delicatissimum’

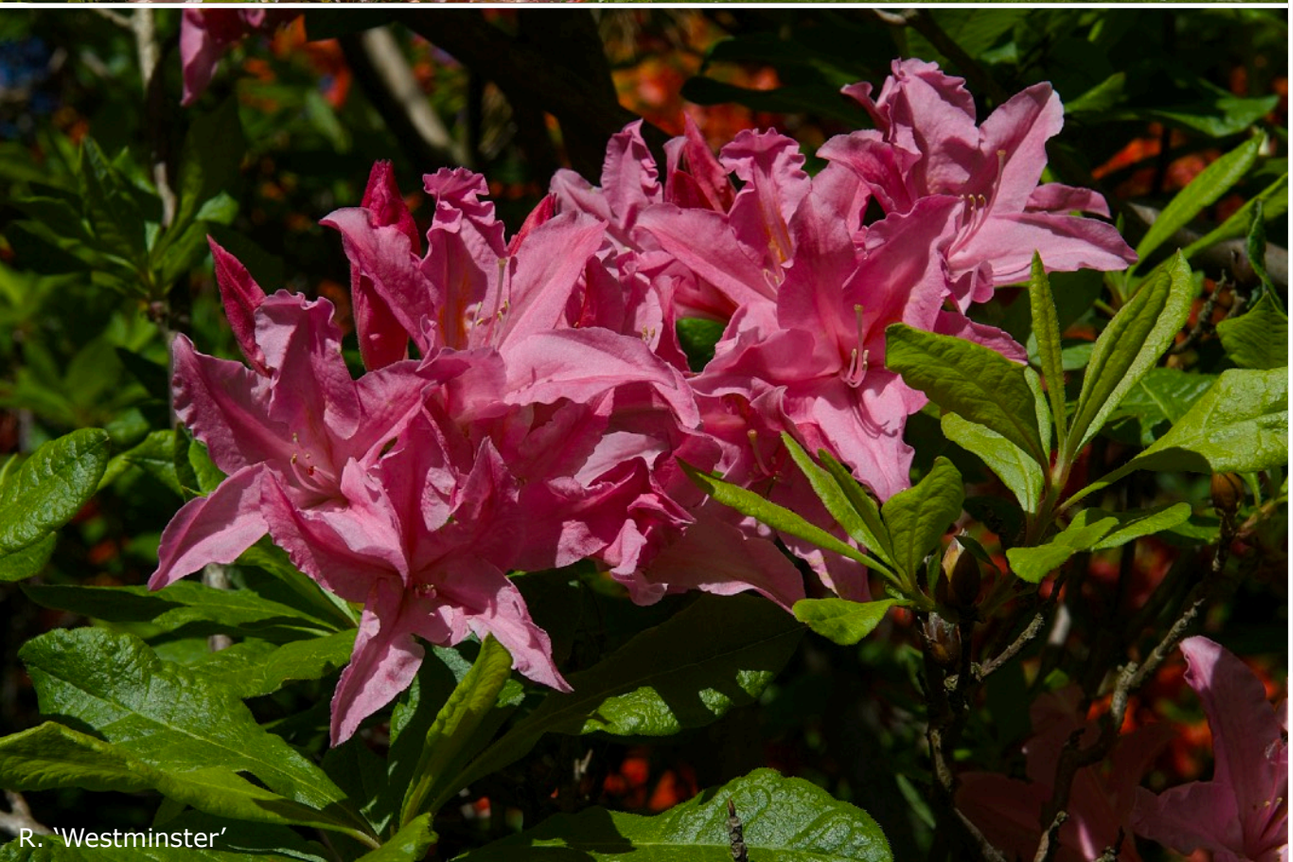

R. ‘Exquisitum’


R. ‘Exquisitum’


R. ‘Exquisitum’



R. ‘Superbum’



R. ‘Westminster’



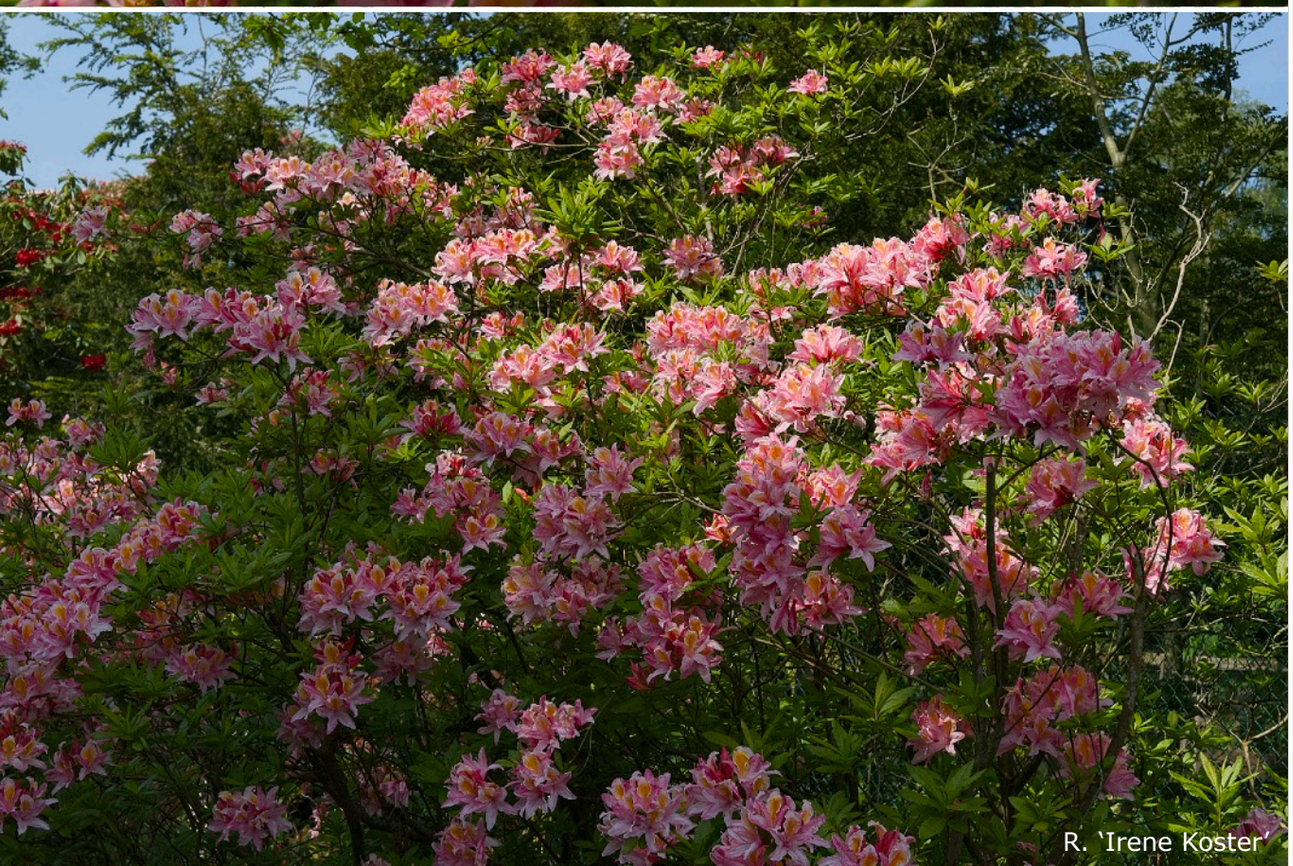
R. ‘Superbum’


R. ‘Irene Koster’


R. ‘Irene Koster’


R. ‘Irene Koster’


R. ‘Irene Koster’


R. ‘Irene Koster’


R. ‘Irene Koster’

The Knap Hill-Exbury Azalea Strain

Late May 1937: the Chelsea Flower Show, London, England.

An amateur gardener has dug-up a few of the plants from his garden to assemble an exhibit for the main marquee, fashioning a resplendent floral pageant that will be talked about for years, World War II notwithstanding.

Because all of the shrubs are the culmination of an eighty-seven-year-long breeding programme begun and largely completed by two professional nurseryman, with the icing on the cake created by the foremost hybridiser ever to have laboured within the ranks of Genus *Rhododendron.* And his dynamic contribution would lift their original work into an entirely different stratosphere.

Those three men were Anthony Waterer Senior, Anthony Water Junior and Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, and the massed display of deciduous azaleas they had brought into existence filled much of the pavilion, was composed of hundreds of plants, no two alike, in full bloom, with the exhibit forming a woodland dell through which the thousands of visitors meandered, completely transfixed. For nothing that matched this stellar floral spectacle had ever before been seen by the gardening public at a flower show, or indeed, anywhere else. And it has yet to be surpassed.

Of course, the presentation won the Coronation Cup, the premier award for an exhibit staged by an amateur, in the year when two other rhodophiles - King George VI and Queen Elizabeth - celebrated their ascension to the throne. Frederick Street would describe the Exbury display as 'the group of Azaleas to end all groups of Azaleas' (*Azaleas,* 1959), while the horticultural press reported that 'such was the art and craft displayed in this memorable exhibit, blended into a perfect harmony of delightful colours, making a pleasant, restful garden the memory of which will surely live long with all who had the good fortune of sharing its delights' (*The Gardeners' Chronicle and New Horticulturalist,* Series 3, Volume 101, 1937, January-June).

The breeding programme that would ultimately spawn this new strain of plants had commenced in 1850 at the Knap Hill nursery to the south of London, near Woking, in Surrey, which at that time was owned by Anthony Waterer Senior (1822-1896). The 1850 date is fateful for a second reason: it is the year when Anthony Waterer Junior, who would takeover the family firm and complete his father's work, was born. The heathland on which the nursery sits is part of the Bagshot Formation of sandy clays ideal for the cultivation of rhododendrons and azaleas, the 'American Plants' as they were then colloquially known, with evergreen crosses between the New World and the Old World members of the Section *Ponticum* family, as well as with the newly introduced *R. arboreum,* already establishing the Waterer name within the trade and with the general public. Yet deciduous azalea hybrids at that time were by and large the province of the Belgians and the Dutch.

Whether a conscious decision was taken to upset this apple cart is unclear, but Anthony Senior was soon importing Hardy Ghent and Mollis hybrids from Europe in quantity. Not just to resell, but to backcross onto the original East Coast species and *R. luteum;* to pair clones from the two strains in new combinations; and to introduce the Chinese *R. molle* into the mix. And by 1861, the first glimmerings of success were being reported in the horticultural press:

> 'By means of crossing the hardy kinds with the bright orange yellow Chinese sort, some fine seedlings have been obtained, with blooms of large size and possessing great richness and variety of colour. They also have the good property of being late bloomers. Though among them orange and flame tints prevail, yet one we remarked had a crimson to petal and the rest rose; equally remarkable combinations of colour were also to be met with in other sorts. Of standard Azaleas, Messrs Waterer and Godfrey cultivate large numbers, which, when in full bloom as they are at present, have a fine effect. Planted out in the form of single specimens on lawns, they cannot fail to be admired; it is therefore singular that so few are met with in such situations'.
> *The Gardeners' Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette,* 1861, p. 531.

The reason for such a 'singularity' was simple: popular taste at that time was for indoor plants, be they evergreen 'Indian' azaleas or the deciduous kinds, which could be 'forced' into early flower in the heated greenhouses and conservatories that were all the rage. Thus only one new deciduous azalea hybrid was named and introduced by the Waterer nursery through the whole of the 1860s, the vivid-yellow and orange spotted 'Nancy Waterer', and that was immediately classified as a Ghent and remains so to this day. Yet the hybridizing work continued:

> 'It was in the early seventies that Anthony got a break that showed greater substance, symmetry and size than had been known at that time. The size came from *sinensis,* the substance from the American species, but he was careful not to use *sinensis* too freely, as he considered it was very liable to burn'.
> P. D. Williams, *The Knap Hill Azaleas*.
> Published in *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* Volume 2, Number 5, 1924.

Of course '*sinensis*' is *R. molle* ssp. *molle* and by the time of his death in 1896, Anthony Senior had used it to breed a set of seedlings with corollas more than 7.5cm across. But none of these were named or handed-off for propagation, a practice that would be maintained by Anthony Junior (1850-1924).

However, hybrids that incorporated the blood of *R. occidentale* in their parentage were introduced over the closing years of the century:

> 'Among other types at Knap Hill there were two distinct types bred from *A. occidentalis*. One was somewhat fastigiate and very late flowering, with a strong honeysuckle scent to the white or nearly white flowers. The Waterers kept no notes on parentage, and the younger Mr Waterer did not know how they were bred beyond that *A. occidentalis* was one parent. The other was a fine race, being full of vigour, with immense trusses of white or nearly white flowers with pink or yellow buds and tube. They flower in late May, and the type had a First Class Certificate from the RHS in 1894 as 'Albicans'. Young Anthony was disappointed in these, as he found that in the cold Knap Hill gardens the flower buds were very liable to be frosted, but I believe the present wonderful strain of Knap Hill whites could be traced to these plants'.
> P. D. Williams (*ibid,* p. 274).

The named FCC clone - as previously detailed - was actually shown from Syon House, Isleworth, where it was grown under glass and forced, as the date of the award - March 13th - quickly confirms, and Anthony Waterer Junior did indeed reincorporate those *R. occidentale* hybrids back into his breeding programme.

History has consigned these 'Albicans' hybrids to the Occidentale Strain and although Percival Dacres Williams (1865-1935), was a fine judge of flowers, the Waterer plants were soon outclassed and superseded by a quintet of named cultivars from the Dutch nursery firm of M. Koster & Sons in 1901, the aforementioned 'Delicatissimum' and 'Exquisitum' among their ranks.

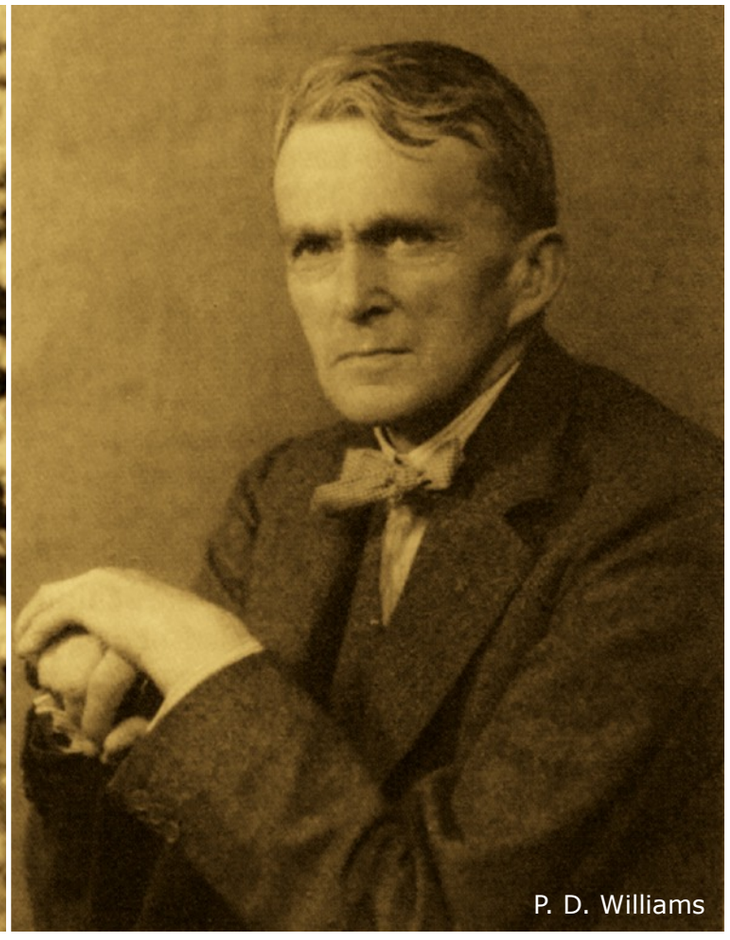
Of course, Anthony Waterer Junior carried on regardless, making new pairings and selecting the best plants from the resulting seedlings for further experimentation, but the work was now solely for his own enjoyment. Because none of those crosses would be selected for commercial release or even displayed to the general public during the remainder of his lifetime, as his accrued wealth and modest needs, along with an 'eccentric'



Anthony Waterer Senior, *c.* 1895



Anthony Waterer Junior (right)



P. D. Williams

bachelor lifestyle, allowed him, and him alone, to decide to whom he would sell or show his azaleas, if indeed, he sold them, or showed them, at all.

P. D. Williams of Lanarth (an estate near St. Keverne on Cornwall's Lizard Peninsula), was one of the lucky few allowed to see and take home some of those prized creations:

> 'Their colours have always been remarkable: the crimson deep and solid, the scarlets brilliant as a new hunting coat, the yellows attaining the colour of rich Guernsey butter, the oranges bright with crimson filaments to the anthers, and of course there were beautiful pinks and whites. Bronze foliage, which harmonises so well in azaleas, was also carefully developed'.
> P. D. Williams (*ibid,* p. 274).

On that very short list of accepted admirers permitted to enter the private sections of the nursery grounds were two somewhat better known horticulturalists: Percival's cousin, J. C. Williams (1861-1939), who resided and gardened further east along the Cornish Riviera Coast at Caerhays Castle, near Mevagissey; but more importantly for lovers of Genus *Rhododendron,* Lionel de Rothschild (1882-1942), of Exbury, Hampshire.

Several dates are given for when Lionel first acquired his Knap Hill azalea seedlings from Anthony Junior: 1920, according to Frederick Street (*Azaleas,* 1959); 1921 if *Bean's Trees & Shrubs* is consulted; or in 1922 if Fred Galle's *Azaleas* of 1987 vintage is vouched accurate. All three texts however report that 'George Reynolds' was amongst the group of plants taken south down the A3 Portsmouth Road.

Completely out of character, this plant had actually been named by Anthony, the epithet an honorific for the head gardener at Gunnersbury Park, which was the home of Lionel's parents, Leopold and Marie. It had soft buttery-yellow flowers whose hue deepened towards the centre, broad petals that were crimped around the edges, bifurcated to the base and when first open, flushed with a touch of pink, plus a dorsal lobe that bore a dark chrome-yellow flare. Remarkably, each huge corolla was over 9cm across. Frederick Street ups that measurement, suggesting they were six inches wide, moreover, stressing the point by adopting italic text - *six inches across* - which at 15cm in today's metric world would see it dwarf the sizeable blooms of *R. auriculatum,* those of *R. diaprepes,* and even the latter's triploid offspring R. 'Gargantua', so a pinch of salt may be needed before continuing. Oh, and if that were not enough, the shrub was also graced with a fiery autumn leaf colour.

Oft quoted is the unattested opinion that Anthony Waterer only gave away 'George Reynolds' because the hybrid was completely out of character with the rest of the strain he had bred, though as it was the only one of his crosses he ever deigned to name, such disapprobation is probably not even rumour mill worthy. What does speak volumes is that it

was later gifted an Award of Merit by the RHS on May 19th, 1936, and as P. D. Williams has written, Anthony 'had a shrewd instinctive knowledge of a good breeder, and stuck to that judgement with marked success'.

The recipient of the gifted plant however, knew immediately that it was special, and in direct consequence, the orders went out:

> 'Every possible azalea flower was at once prepared for hybridisation - petals cut, stamens removed, labels attached. The seed heads were carefully watched and guarded. They began to ripen. In the autumn they were collected and sown. The seedlings were pricked out and planted into nursery beds, then into the garden. About 1924 they began to flower. And they were good. The pollen from "George Reynolds" gave birth to the Exbury Strain of the Knap Hill Azaleas'.
> Frederick Street, *Azaleas,* 1959.

But they were not good enough. At least, in Lionel's eyes.

> 'So he set out on a lavish programme of hybridising, accompanied by ruthless selection. As each new batch of seedlings flowered, he selected two of the best reds, the best pinks, the best yellows and so on. He went for colour, substance, vigour, size, texture and decorative quality. He then went on to cross his selections, always keeping them in their colour categories. Every single seedling, however slow and small, was planted out, but, as each year another generation flowered, he destroyed all but the chosen few. Thousands of plants thus went on the bonfire every year. He made in all some fifty matings, from which hundreds of thousands of seedlings were raised and flowered'.
> C. E. Lucas Phillips & Peter N. Barber, *The Rothschild Rhododendrons (Revised Edition),* 1979.

By the early 1930s some were ready to be shown and introduced, and Lionel chose a cultivar with deep orange-red flowers that bore a yellowish blotch and similarly flushed filaments and style for his prime exhibit. He named it 'Hotspur' and it won an Award of Merit in 1934 on first presentation. As did 'Balzac', 'Basilisk', 'Berryrose' and 'Knighthood', which were in vases alongside 'Hotspur' on the showbench that very same year. And amazingly, still to come, were 'Cecile', 'Corringe', 'Fireball', 'Gibraltar', 'Klondyke', 'Oxydol', 'Scarlet Pimpernel', 'Silver Slipper' and the sublime 'Strawberry Ice'.

> 'Broad-petalled, of great size and substance, balanced and shapely, poised in rhododendron-like trusses yet of sprightly deportment, the range of colours embraces not only the brilliant reds and the brazen oranges but also the tender hues of silvery pink, salmon, rose, apricot, and of course white. All have a luminous and radiant quality, their colours accentuated by the beauty of the young foliage and, when the season is not too hot, they often remain in bloom for a month'.
> *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* (*ibid,* p. 37).

But what of the Knap Hill Azaleas themselves?

Anthony Waterer Junior had died in July 1924 and the nursery had been left to his younger brother Hosea, who had actually emigrated to the United States and settled in Philadelphia, but returned to run the business. He named and exhibited a few of Anthony's azaleas - 'Mary Waterer' and 'Marion Merriman', for instance - and sold a few other clones to the Goldsworth Nursery then run by Walter Slocock - 'Fireglow', 'Gog', 'Persil' and 'Satan' to name but four - yet in September 1926, he too died. At which point Hosea Waterer's family, who had remained in America, decided to sell the firm.



Lionel Nathan de Rothschild



Gomer Waterer (far right),
at a John Waterer & Sons exhibition in Regent's Park, 1914.

By 1930 a buyer had still to be found and it was at this point that Gomer Waterer (1867-1945), decided to leave the Bagshot Nursery for Knap Hill. Owned by another branch of the Waterer family, financial difficulties in 1914 had forced Bagshot to merge with the Wargrave Plant Farm of Twyford, Berkshire, and the firm had become John Waterer, Sons and Crisp. John Waterer - Gomer's brother (named after his father, whose moniker is reflected in the firm's title) - retired soon after, but Gomer continued on in the role of Managing Director. However, staff changes over the years, which apparently favoured the Wargrave side of the business, plus some reported friction between the two senior partners, precipitated the switch, and so, with a financial rescue package put together by Lionel de Rothschild, the Knap Hill Nursery Ltd reopened for business under Gomer's direction. The only problem, as history graphically outlines, is that this was smack bang in the middle of the Great Depression.

Six years of a holding pattern decline meant rather a lot of brambles, weeds and silver birch saplings had to be removed from the nursery grounds before anything resembling a rhododendron was found, but progress was made and the work soon revealed the treasure trove of deciduous azalea hybrids created by the two Anthonys. Except that Gomer's interest had always been in the evergreen elepidotes, be they species or hybrid. So given the times, it was decided to sell off most of the deciduous crosses. Large parcels of plants went to the Slococks, to the Bagshot nursery, to Sunningdale - then being run by Harry White - and of course, to Exbury. In hindsight, it was probably the best thing that could have happened: multiple nurseries naming and introducing the best of the clones and using them to fashion even more dazzling creations. Yet all this took time. And there was also an intolerant, moustachioed upstart from Austria occupying the Reichstag in Berlin who was about to set Europe alight. So it was not until the 1950s that both the Knap Hill and the Exbury hybrid azaleas really started to become widely available. And they have dominated the market ever since.

Members of the strain will in time develop a branch framework that in some clones tops-out at around 1.6m, but in most hits 3m in height or even a touch more, extending outwards, respectively, by similar dimensions. Habit is generally upright, with just a few dwarf-spreaders within the group, while hardiness varies between H6 and H7. The young foliage of a goodly proportion of the cultivars is tinted reddish-orange or bronze when the leaves first emerge and an equal number put on a stunning, incandescent display in the autumn, though both traits will not necessarily be found on the same plant. Corolla size averages between 5 and 8cm across, which is nearly always larger than the blooms of the Hardy Ghents. They have a profile that is predominantly widely-tubular-funnel-shaped, the actual tube longer than that found on the Mollis hybrids. There are single, double and hose-in-hose clones, which may have a solid flare on the dorsal lobe or one made up of a collage of spots and speckles. Most are fragrant to some degree and excepting those hues from the blue through purple to magenta end of the visible spectrum, offer a rainbow of colours to prospective purchasers. These pigments will last longer in the light dappled shade of a woodland glade rather than out in the full glare of the sun, especially in the UK's southern counties, but never should the canopy above the plants be allowed to become too dense. Equally resented is soil that becomes too hot and dries out over the summer months, so a decent depth of mulch can be allowed to build-up over the rootball naturally, or with assistance.

In addition to the named clones, as a direct result of Lionel's repeated selective breeding by hue, many of the Exbury azaleas are available at reduced cost as designated colours - 'Exbury Apricot', 'Exbury Pink', 'Exbury Salmon-Orange', 'Exbury White' and 'Exbury Yellow', to single-out but five of such. Moreover, development of the strain continues, with a host of new cultivars registered by hybridisers domiciled not just in America and England, but as far apart as Germany, Latvia and New Zealand.

Of these, the name Arneson must stand out from the crowd. Ivan (1910-2005), and Robertha (1915-2012), were teachers from Canby, Oregon, who in 1946 went into the horticultural nursery business. They bought their first azalea - a Mollis hybrid - during 1950, and started collecting the Exbury cultivars in 1956, which kicked-off their own breeding programme in 1959. 'Arneson Gem', 'Fluffy', 'Frilly Lemon', 'Mount Rainier', 'Orange Splendour', 'Red Sunset' and 'Rose Ruffles' are among the results, all highly rated introductions, many of which are becoming available in the UK thanks to tissue culture propagating techniques.

Taken together, the Knap Hill and Exbury strains have been described as an 'omnium gatherum' in some texts - a miscellaneous collection of things - due to the vast mix of components that went into their fabrication: any number of Ghent and Mollis hybrids; virtually all the native American species; plus *R. luteum* from the Caucasus; and *R. molle* ssp. *molle* from China. They could also be viewed as the deciduous equivalent of the Glenn Dale azaleas bred by B. Y. Morrison, which were also a complete hotchpotch. And precisely mirroring their American evergreen relatives, there are now far too many near identical, named Knap Hill and Exbury clones in commercial circulation. Yet even those who suggest that a cull of their numbers down to twenty or so named individuals would still leave a garden with all the possible colour variations it might ever need, are loath to begin such a process by uprooting near-duplicate specimens established in their own woodland plot. For no sane rhodophile would ever want to be without, or diminish, that flamboyant spectacle of scintillating colour come late May and June.


R. ‘Albacore’


R. ‘Annabella’


R. ‘Arneson Gem’

R. ‘Aurora’

R. ‘Avon’

R. ‘Ballerina’

R. ‘Basilisk’



R. ‘Beaulieu’



R. ‘Berryrose’



R. ‘Brazil’



R. ‘Bright Forecast’



R. ‘Bright Straw’



R. ‘Buzzard’



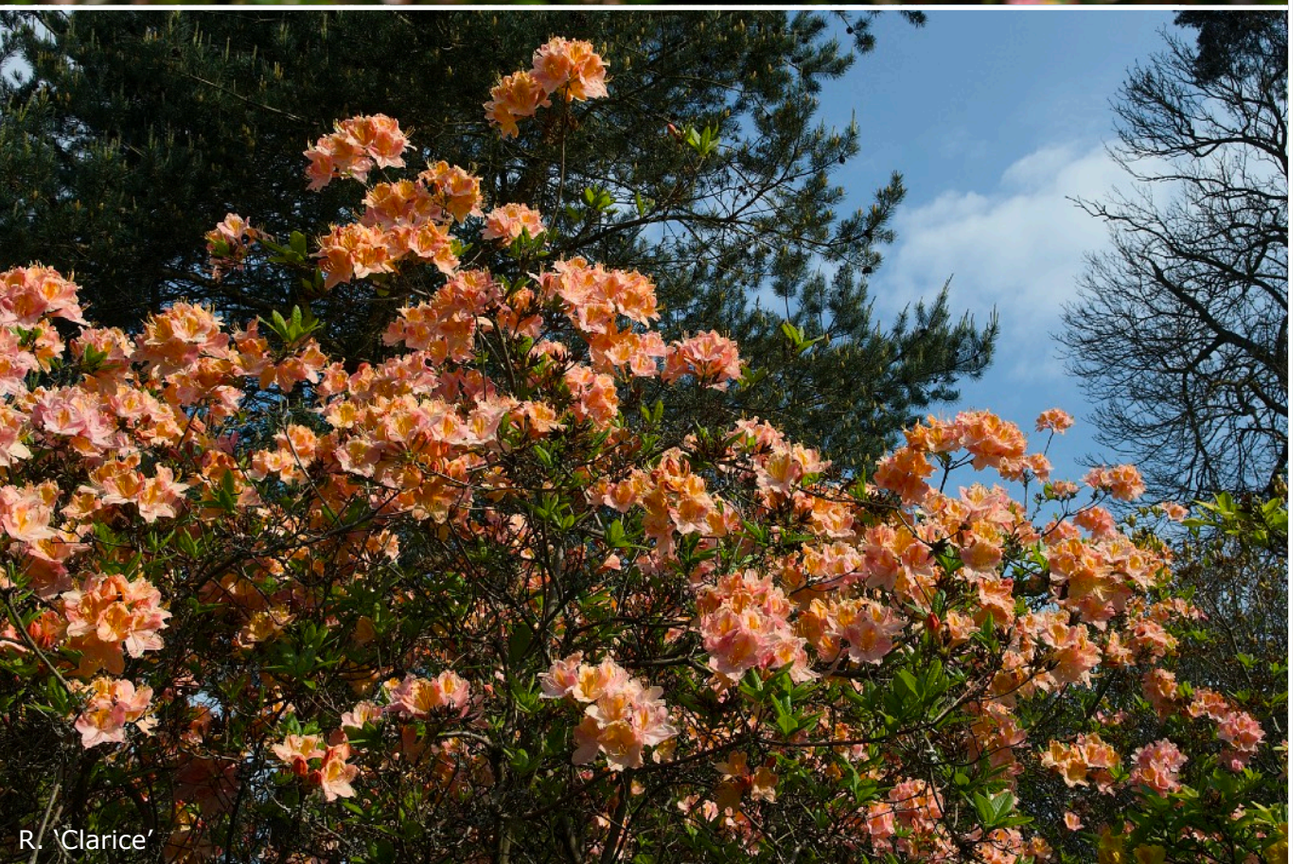
R. ‘Calder’



R. ‘Canasta’



R. ‘Cecile’



R. ‘Clarice’



R. ‘Cockatoo’



R. ‘Colin Kenrick’



R. ‘Coronation Lady’



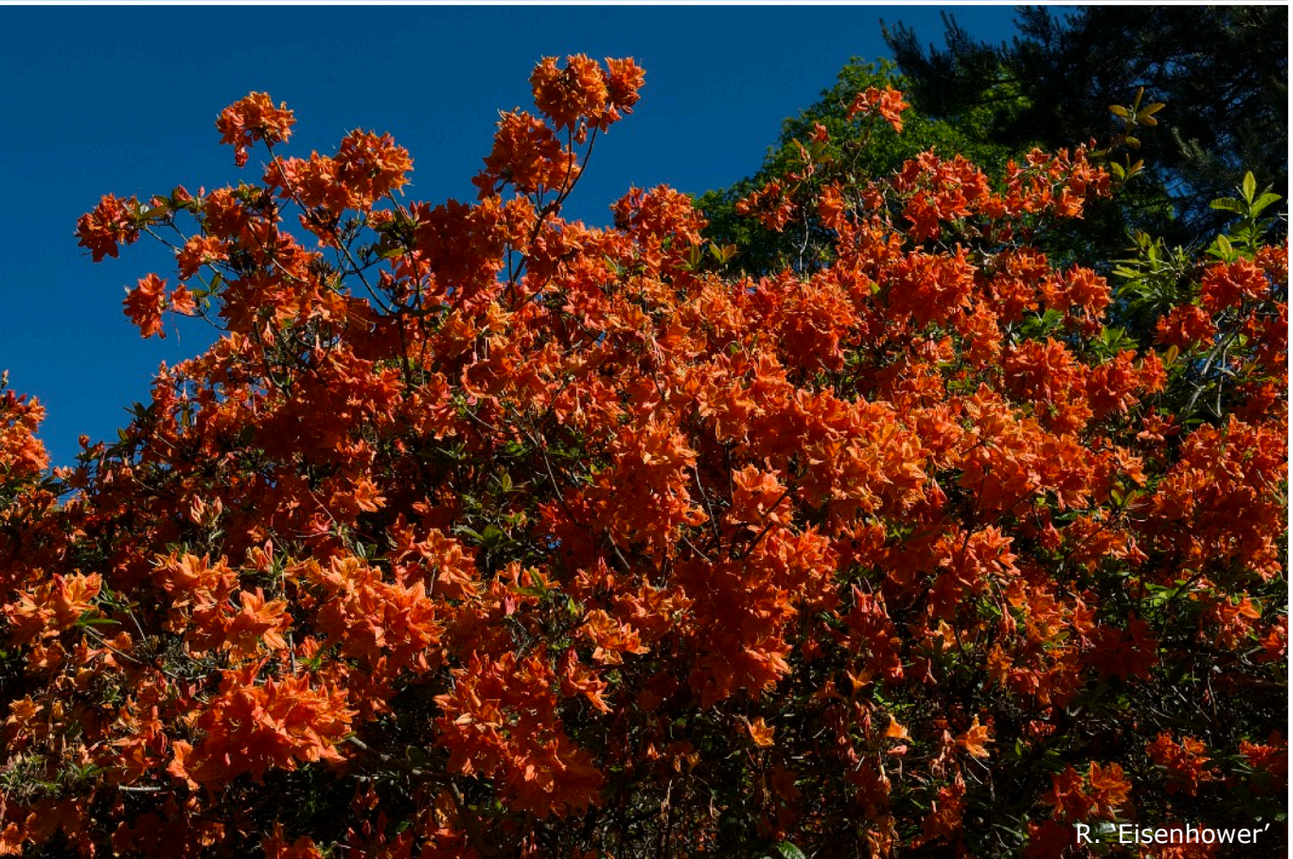
R. ‘Dawn’s Chorus’



R. ‘Devon’


R. ‘Dracula’


R. ‘Edwina Mountbatten’


R. ‘Eisenhower’


R. ‘Exbury Salmon-Orange’

R. ‘Fireball’

R. ‘Frills’



R. ‘Frilly Lemon’



R. ‘Frome’



R. ‘Gallipoli’



R. ‘George Reynolds’

R. 'Gibraltar'

R. 'Ginger'

R. ‘Gold Dust’

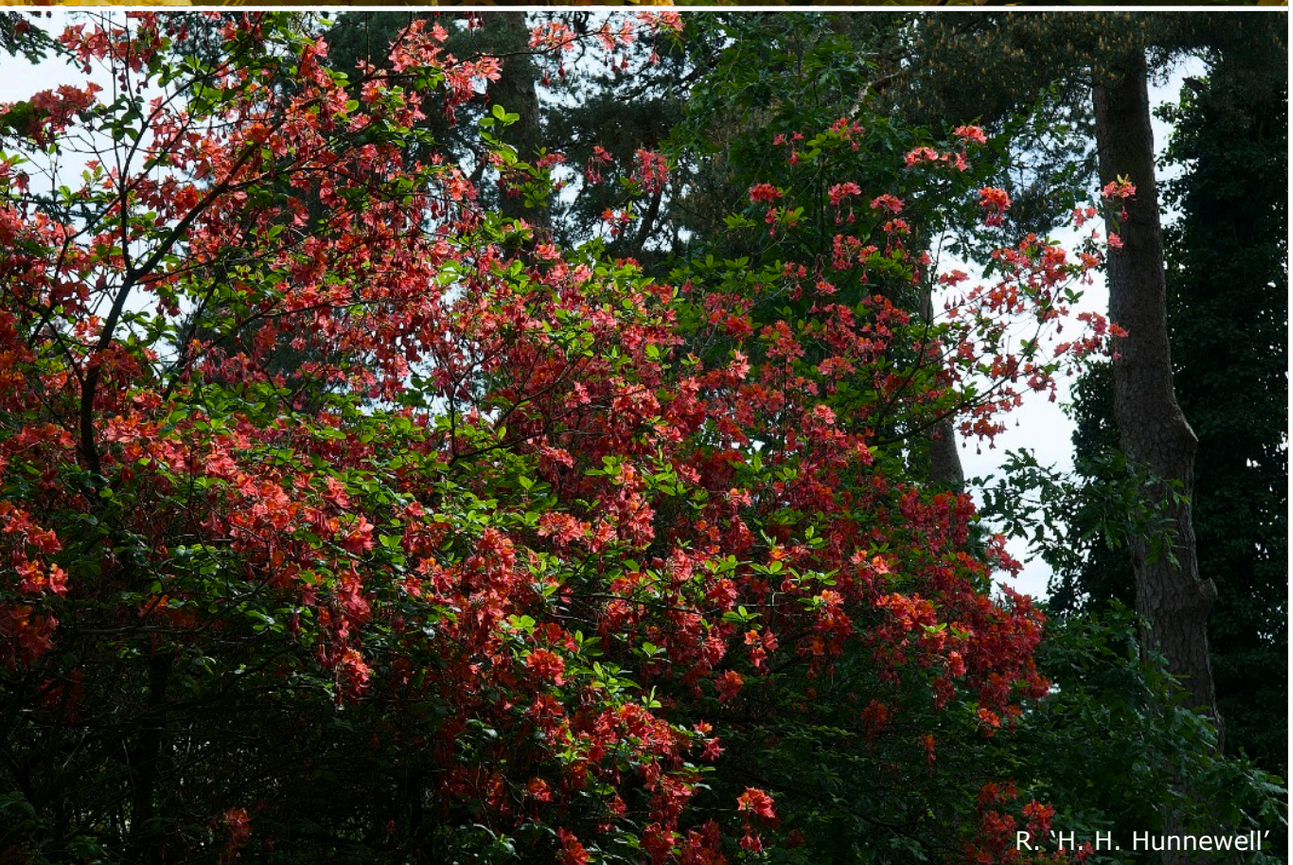
R. ‘Golden Eagle’

R. ‘Golden Horn’

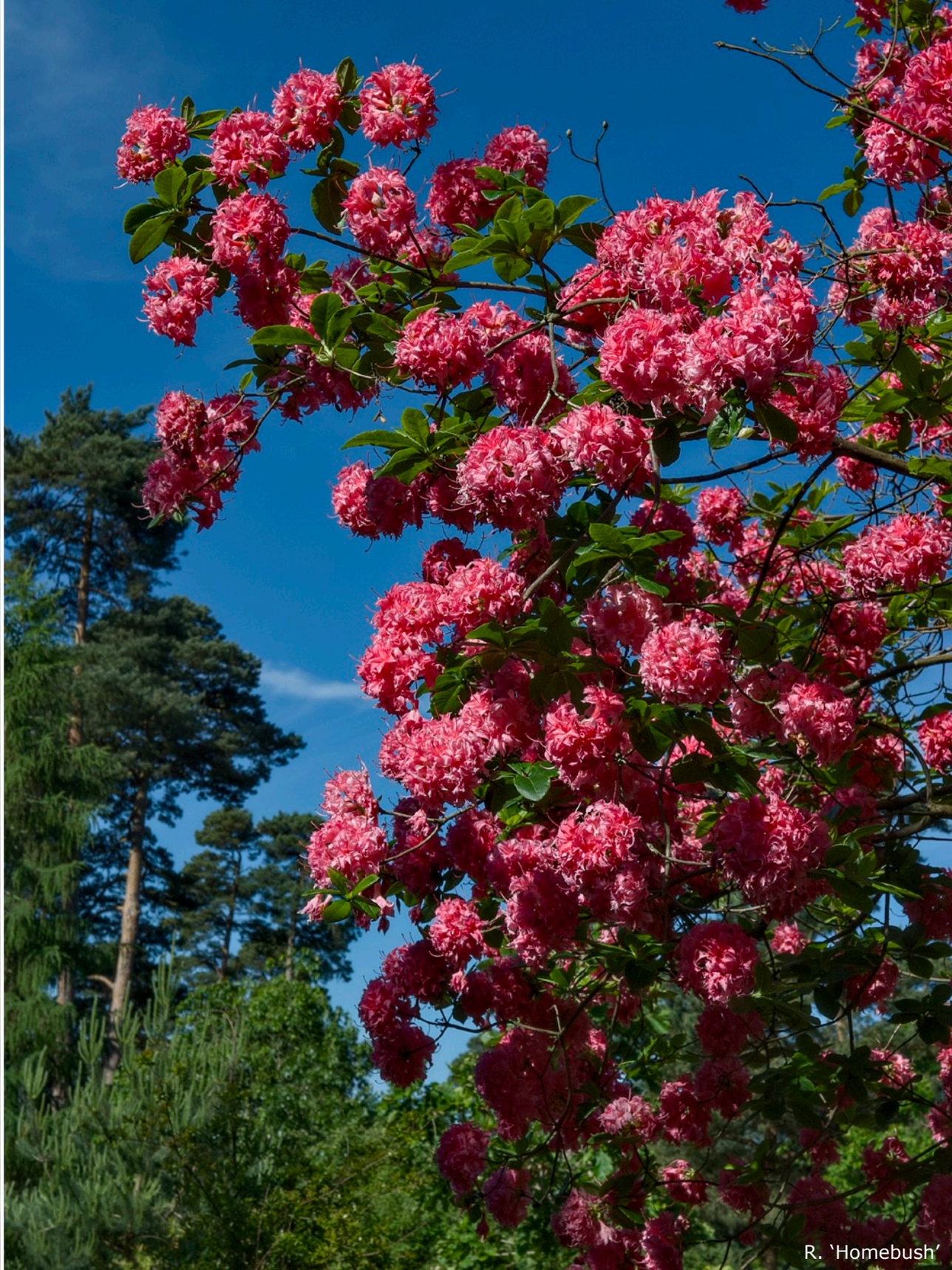
R. ‘Golden Oriole’



R. ‘Golden Sunset’



R. ‘H. H. Hunnewell’



R. ‘Homebush’

R. ‘Hotspur’

R. ‘Hotspur’



R. ‘Janet Baker’



R. ‘Kathleen’



R. ‘Kestrel’

R. ‘Klondyke’



R. ‘Knap Hill Apricot’



R. ‘Knap Hill Apricot’



R. ‘Lapwing’



R. ‘Lapwing’



R. ‘Marion Merriman’



R. ‘Marion Merriman’



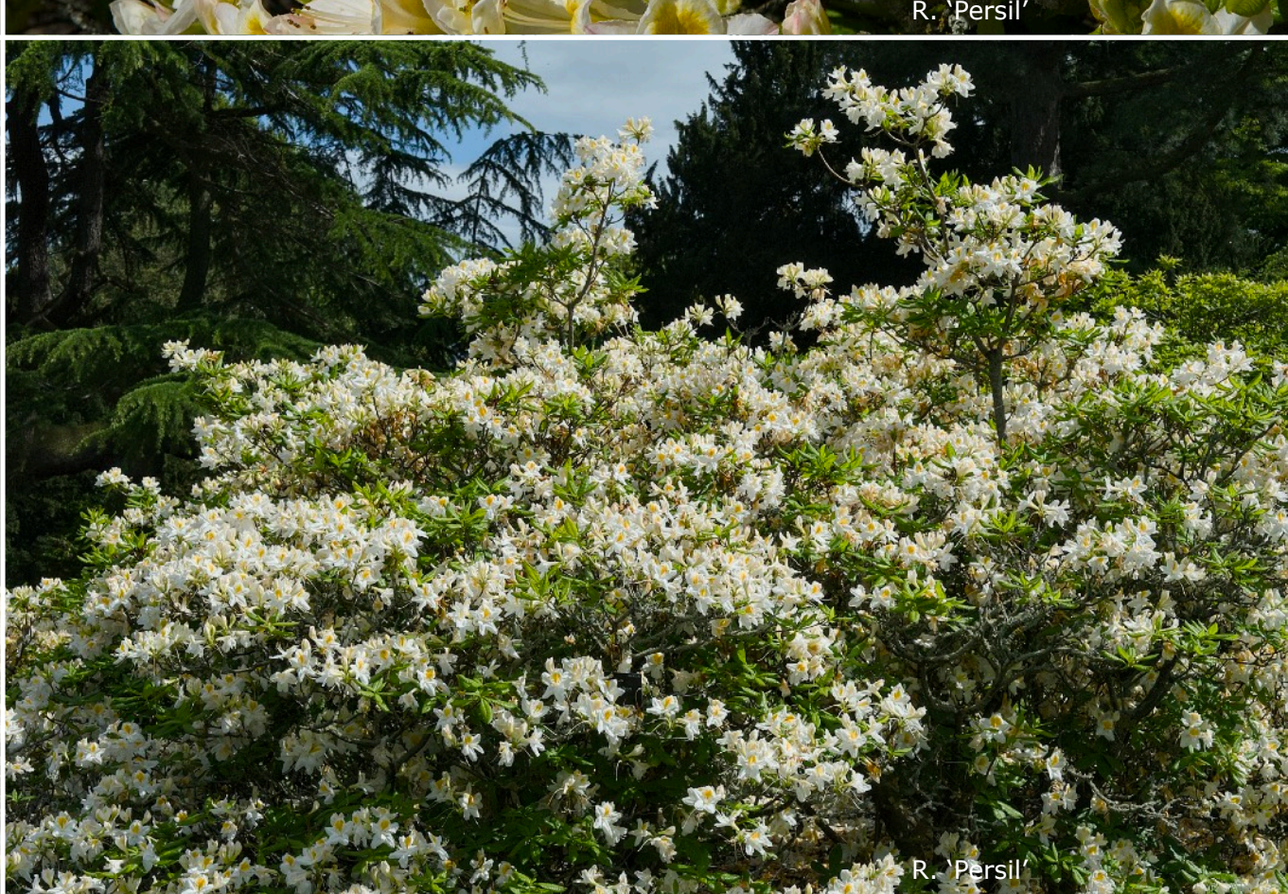
R. ‘Orange Truffles’



R. ‘Oxydol’


R. ‘Persil’


R. ‘Persil’


R. ‘Persil’

R. ‘Persil’



R. ‘Pink Delight’



R. ‘Royal Command’



R. ‘Royal Lodge’



R. ‘Satan’

R. ‘Satan’

R. ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’

R. ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’



R. ‘Silver Slipper’



R. ‘Strawberry Ice’



R. ‘Strawberry Ice’



R. ‘Strawberry Ice’

R. ‘Strawberry Ice’



R. ‘Sunte Nectarine’



R. ‘Sunte Nectarine’



R. ‘Sunte Nectarine’

R. ‘Sunte Nectarine’



R. ‘Sylphides’



R. ‘Toucan’



R. ‘Umpqua Queen’

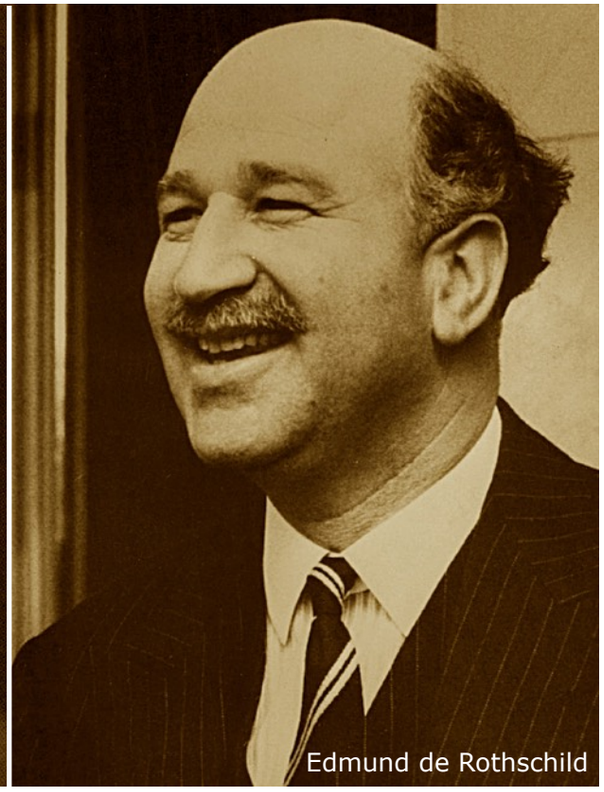


R. ‘White Swan’

R. ‘Tunis’

The Solent Azalea Strain


George Hyde


Edmund de Rothschild

When Edmund de Rothschild died in January 2009, many of the obituaries published to honour his passing spoke of his stewardship of the family merchant bank, N. M. Rothschild & Sons, his voluntary work with several charitable organisations, and his many horticultural achievements at Exbury Gardens, the woodland estate he had inherited from his father Lionel in the 1940s. But within the broad-strokes outline of his hybridising work, a mistake was made: credit for creating the Solent Strain of deciduous azalea hybrids was wrongly assigned. For although Mr Eddy was responsible for growing them on into adulthood, as well as for naming, introducing and registering the many selections, he did not actually formulate or make the pairings, as he would have been the first to point out. Because that task had been the sole province of nurseryman George Hyde.

Descended from a family of Dorset nurserymen and farmers, William George Thomas Hyde (1916-1980), was first bowled over by rhododendrons when taken to Meyrick Park in Bournemouth by his maternal grandmother. He was a member of the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and once decommissioned, began the search for a suitable nursery site on which to establish his burgeoning collection of rhododendrons, deciduous and evergreen azaleas, and camellias. 'Woodlands' was purchased in 1951. It was a five acre plot of land given over to pine trees set around a nursing home then known as 'Langshott', which his wife Evelyn, a State Registered Nurse, would run. Many of the conifers were removed, the sandy soil was turned and oxygenated, and a stock of plants for sale was quickly built up. Then, once a regular income had been secured, the hybridising began:

George Hyde's vision was to significantly improve the flowers of the Exbury deciduous azaleas. As previously outlined, these were the strain of hybrids that Lionel de Rothschild had developed from the Knap Hill Azaleas bred by Anthony Water Senior and his son, Anthony Waterer Junior, but which hybrids or species George Hyde used to do that, or what those individual pairing equation combinations were, is a mystery, with none of that detail if originally recorded, surviving today. Yet as the set of images that follow show, he more than succeeded in his goal.

In 1961, eleven plants from the maturing stock were displayed at the Chelsea Flower Show. They were immediately accepted for trial at Wisley, but far more importantly for the fate of those dazzling blooms, they caught the eye of two fellow plantsmen: one, a banker by trade, the other a rhodo-savvy horticulturalist - Edmund de Rothschild, and his then head gardener, Fred Wynniatt. Both visited Woodlands before the week was out to see George Hyde's azaleas flowering en masse and so impressed were they by the display of plants that a deal was quickly reached and Exbury purchased every single seedling.

Many years later, the group would be christened the Solent Strain, reflecting the fact that the New Forest garden that had become their new home, was located but a stone's throw from that body of water. Some seventy individual plants would ultimately be named and registered with the ICRA - the International Cultivar Registration Authority - which for Genus *Rhododendron,* is the Royal Horticultural Society.

The largest group of Solent Strain azaleas to be found at Exbury today grow along either side of 'Lover's Lane'. This was originally the locale for Lionel's utterly ravishing pride of *R. cinnabarinum* hybrids, crosses such as 'Lady Chamberlain' and 'Lady Rosebery', but these had proved hopelessly susceptible to the powdery mildew fungus and had had to be removed. Yet thanks to George Hyde's breeding skill, one sublime blaze of colour was replaced with an even more arresting display, this lighting-up the entire length of the avenue from mid May through June. Elsewhere throughout Exbury's two-hundred acres, many other Solent clones will be found individually dotted about, stunning on their own, but lacking the full-on bedazzlement generated by that breathtaking massed display. And of course, many visitors to the Rothschild garden will have noted the names of those plants in their notebooks, diaries or smart phones - 'Crown Supreme', 'Drury Lane', 'Le Havre', 'Madame Bovary', 'Rousseau', or 'Sword of State', to single-out just six - after seeing them in flower. And they would then have made enquiries as to their availability with their local garden centre or specialist rhododendron nursery. But found that none were being offered for sale. Anywhere.

The reason for this was simple: as a group, they were, and still are, the most difficult deciduous azalea cultivars to vegetatively propagate. And the nurseryman and plant hunter who related this fact to me - the late, but still legendary Alan Clark - in a conversation that took place some thirty years ago at Muncaster Castle, was regarded as one of the foremost green-fingered wizards working within the genus. One, moreover, who was renowned for getting even the most recalcitrant scion to take. So it has only been in last decade or so, since micropropagation techniques became more widespread, that a very small selection of the clones have begun to be listed by one or two specialist UK nurseries. But as anyone who has seen them in flower will confirm - especially if en masse - of all the deciduous azalea hybrids created by the hand of man, the Solent Strain Azaleas are pre-eminent, and easily worth their weight in gold for the floral colour progressions alone.

Members of the group are generally domed bushes when mature that vary in height from 2 to 3m, with a similar or slightly lesser spread. They have hardiness ratings between H6 and H7, so can be grown wherever rhododendrons succeed outdoors across the British Isles, even on exposed sites, though the blooms will suffer if banged about by strong, gusting winds. At Exbury, which while not quite as far south as you can get in the UK, but pretty close, most are grown in full sun - the 'Lover's Lane' collection, for instance - or alternatively, in very light, dappled shade.

R. ‘Drury Lane’

R. ‘Drury Lane’

R. ‘Drury Lane’

R. ‘Arctic Regent’

R. ‘Beaulieu Manor’

R. ‘Cézanne’


R. ‘Citroen’


R. ‘Corot’


R. ‘Dawn’s Glory’


R. ‘Gauche’

R. ‘Crown Supreme’

R. ‘Crown Supreme’

R. ‘Delectable’

R. ‘Delectable’

R. ‘Don Quixote’

R. ‘Invincible’

R. ‘Le Havre’

R. ‘Madame Bovary’



R. ‘Oregon Trail’



R. ‘Oregon Trail’



R. ‘Tinsmith’



R. ‘Sword Of State’



An unnamed Solent Clone at Exbury

R. ‘Rousseau’

R. ‘Rousseau’

Twelve Pollinations Outwith Those Six Battalions

R. ‘Anneke’
unknown x *unknown*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 Late May-June 2.5m x 2m

Type ‘Montague Camden Pratt’ into any Internet search engine and the only spot-on hits to come up will all be links to a scientific paper on the photosynthesis process going on within daffodil leaves that was written jointly with Eustace Cecil Barton-Wright in 1930. The study was part of the research quotient a student had to amass for a Master of Science doctorate, because Denny Pratt was first and foremost, a fully trained biologist who later became a lecturer on botany at Liverpool Evening Institute (now known as Liverpool John Moores University). Plus, he was also one of the UK’s leading experts on the genus *Prunus*.

Until, in the mid-1950s, the azalea bug bit:

His garden on the Wirral, at Ness Holt, which was already renowned for its exotic plant collection, was quickly made home to a selection of the best Exbury, Ghent, Knap Hill, Mollis and Occidentale hybrids, as well as specimens of all the deciduous species. And with the psyche of a scientist, combined with the enthusiasm of a born-again gardener, a full-on breeding programme was probably never in doubt. At first, the goal was new colours with increased scent, but this soon morphed into delaying the bloom time to both escape any late spring frosts and extend the season past the end of June into July and even August.

Equally, given his employer, it was almost inevitable that many of Denny Pratt’s best seedlings ended up in Ness Botanic Garden, a property gifted to Liverpool University in 1948 by the daughter of its creator, the cotton merchant Arthur Kilpin Bulley (who was also founder of the nursery firm Bees Ltd, and a principal sponsor of the early plant hunting expeditions to China carried out by George Forrest and Frank Kingdon-Ward). And one of the plants that went to Ness shortly before Denny retired in 1969, caught the eye of the garden’s then director, Ken Hulme. This was tentatively named ‘Deep Yellow Mr Pratt’, though - thankfully! - it was never registered with the ICRA as such. That azalea - ‘DYMP’ - had a 9-flowered truss of brilliant pale yellow, which was spotted deeper on the dorsal lobe, those blooms, considered by their creator, to at least be the equal of the best Knap Hill clones. And to boot, the plant had fiery autumn leaf colour.

Several years later, the now mature shrub was spotted by Fred de Jong, a Dutchman whose long-established nursery - W. de Jong & Sons - had already picked-up and marketed several of Denny’s earlier crosses. Together, the pair re-christened the cross ‘Anneke’, the epithet borrowed from de Jong’s younger daughter - as ‘Marlies’, her elder sister’s name, had already been taken - and in 1987, when the hybrid was exhibited at the Flora Nova horticultural show in Holland, the cross won a gold medal for outstanding new azalea.

Label-wise, ‘Anneke’ may occasionally be found with a ‘Gold N’ tag hanging from one of the branches, which, for reasons unknown, is its synonymic monicker, though long gone are any references to ‘DYMP’.


R. ‘Anneke’


R. ‘Anneke’

R. ‘Anneke’

R. ‘Ben Lomond’

R. ‘Ben Lomond’
‘Homebush’ x ‘Arneson Gem’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 Mid May 1.5m x 2m

Unveiled for the 2013-14 season, the ‘mountain’ series of deciduous azalea hybrids bred at Glendoick Gardens - ‘Ben Cruachan’, ‘Ben Lawers’, ‘Ben Lomond’, ‘Ben Vorlich’ and ‘Ben Vrackie’ - are all very hardy, medium-sized shrubs with double flowers, whose buds open from mid May onwards. They were crossed by Peter Cox’s son Kenneth back in 2003, with pollen supplied by Ivan and Robertha Arneson’s best introduction - R. ‘Arneson Gem’ - this placed onto the style of an older, but equally outstanding hybrid, ‘Homebush’, one of the better - if not the best - Knap Hill azaleas from the Waterer nursery.

Now, as most rhodophiles will know, deciduous azaleas per se are often not the ideal plant for the higher latitudes of the British Isles, especially those stretching across the north of Scotland, where a lack of strong sunlight - despite the long summer day length - often fails to fully ripen the new wood before the first frosts of autumn strike, or from an adulatory point of view, encourage a profuse set of flower buds year-on-year. Equally, the plant’s habit will also suffer, with the branchlets trending towards longer internodal growth. However, the Cox hybrids have been specifically bred to cope with just those latitudinal aberrations and to date, appear to have succeeded admirably.

‘Ben Lomond’ is the most popular of the five clones released to date and covers itself in a barrage of pale pink double flowers. These are gathered together in heavily populated ball-shaped trusses that merge into a single sweep of bloom across a well-grown mature specimen no more than 1.5m in height, but spreading out a little wider. Each corolla has a deeper bar of pink running down the centre of its lobes, with a hint of orange in the throat, and as the hardiness rating above indicates, the azalea will cope with almost anything the Scottish climate can throw at it, though poor planting site drainage will lead to dieback.


R. ‘Ben Lomond’


R. ‘Ben Lomond’

R. 'Choptank River Traveller'
atlanticum x *periclymenoides*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 May 2m x 3m

In the mid 1950s, Julian and Polly Hill, of Barnard's Inn Farm, Martha's Vineyard, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, transplanted several wild azaleas to their garden from an area of the coastal plain between Dover, the state capital of Delaware, and the headwaters of the Choptank River in the west of Kent County. These were gathered from a stabilised population of natural hybrids that had arisen from crosses between bushes of *R. atlanticum* and *R. periclymenoides*. The best plant was selfed and then the most beautiful of the ninety plants grown from this seed were also bred together, with the bounty from those capsules widely distributed and the offspring subsequently grouped together under the 'Choptank River Hybrids' banner.

Polly Hill described the pride as having 'a rich fragrance, a glaucous bluish leaf and an abundantly stoloniferous habit', and while the corolla size and hue might both vary when young, adult plants 'blend together as a single clone' (*JARS,* Volume 32, Number 4), which rather questions the need for all the separate registrations subsequently logged with the ICRA by the recipients of said seed, but nonetheless…

One such is 'Choptank River Traveller', grown in Windsor Great Park and named by the Crown Estate Commissioners in 1989 after it received an Award of Merit for its flowers. These are white, with the tube flushed purplish-red, and carried in an open truss of up to twelve tubular-funnel-shaped corollas. In time, a twiggy, multi-stemmed bush growing to around 2m or more if planted in dappled shade, but only 1.3m if planted in full sun, will result, this preferring a damp, humus-rich, well-drained and friable soil rather than a heavy loam. Summer heat to ripen the wood is a must-have cultural requirement, with specimens established in the northern counties of England, and more especially in Scotland, far less floriferous and exhibiting a lower level of hardiness than those grown in the south.



R. 'Choptank River Traveller'

R. ‘Diorama’
(*viscosum* x Koster’s Brilliant Red) x Fireglow
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Late April-Early June 2m x 2m

‘Diorama’ is one of the deciduous azalea hybrids released by what was then known as the Research Station for Arboreus Crops, based in Boskoop, The Netherlands, though this is now a part of the Wageningen University and Research Centre. ‘Carat’ and ‘Jolie Madame’ are amongst the Station’s other well-known crosses, while ‘Silvester’ tops their evergreen azalea hybrids list, and ‘Karin’, ‘Linda’ and ‘Purple Lace’ are amongst their equally widely-distributed elepidote pairings.

In 1938, independent nurseryman Batavus Bernardus Cornelis Felix (1867-1949), once of the Felix & Dijkhuis firm - also based in Boskoop - created a flock of azaleas from a *viscosum* x ‘Koster’s Brilliant Red’ pairing that included the registered cultivars ‘Antilope’, ‘Arpège’, ‘Pink Mimosa’, ‘Réplique’, ‘Rêve d’Amour’, ‘Rosata’ and ‘Soir de Paris’. One of these is the ‘Diorama’ seed parent, though which received pollen from ‘Fireglow’ is now anyone’s guess. That genetic combination however, produced a real winner: a plant graced with stunning blood red flowers, fragrance, and fiery autumn colour.

Corollas that are narrowly tubular-funnel-shaped in outline and that become widely flared at the mouth when fully open and up to 6cm across, are grouped into an open truss of 9 through 12 trumpets. Each has a faint orange-yellow flare on the dorsal lobe and the stamen count of five reflects the genetic input from *R. viscosum*. Foliage is elliptic, mid green, up to 6cm in length, convex in profile and somewhat glossy, with a distinctive midrib groove along the leaf’s upper surface. The plants are exceptionally hardy - an inheritance from ‘Fireglow’, which is a member of the Knap Hill Strain - as well as being exceptionally free-flowering, with the bushes often so awash with bloom that the leaves and branches are barely visible if not completely hidden.


R. ‘Diorama’


R. ‘Diorama’


R. ‘Elsie Pratt’


R. ‘Elsie Pratt’

R. ‘Elsie Pratt’
‘Sylphides’ x Unknown Pink Mollis Hybrid

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	May	2.5m x 2m

When a hybridiser names one his creations for the ‘trouble and strife’, that plant had better be a cracker, because otherwise, the ramifications might rumble on for decades. On the knockout front, such is most definitely the case here, for the deep carmine-pink tubular-funnels of ‘Elsie Pratt’, carried in a truss of 8 to 16 corollas, are outstanding. Each is around 7cm long and up to 8cm across; display a splash of orange on the dorsal lobe; and all five petals are deeply divided into a distinctive star. They open in May and as indicated, are the result of a cross between the Knap Hill Strain azalea ‘Sylphides’, with the pollen provided by an unknown Mollis Strain hybrid that had pink blooms. Lanceolate-shaped leaves begin to extend at the same time as the flower buds swell, attaining 9cm in length when mature, and a third of that in width. They are mid-green in colour, glossy, and somewhat ciliate.

Montague Camden Pratt - ‘Denny’ to all who knew him - was a lecturer in botany at Liverpool Polytechnic, while his wife was a secondary school teacher. They lived in Ness Holt, on the Wirral, and it was there, beginning in the late 1950s, where Denny began hybridising with azaleas. At first he experimented with inter-hybrid pairings - his favourite Knap Hill and Exbury azaleas matched with the best Ghent, Mollis and Occidentale cultivars he could find. Later on, following retirement and a move down south in the early 1970s to Fittleworth, in West Sussex, he incorporated the very late-flowering American species into his designs, and from the host of seedlings he grew to flowering size, selected the best clones and backcrossed or selfed these to produce even better plants.

After his death at the end of 1988, many of Denny’s hybrids and a thousand or more still-to-bloom seedlings were gifted to two Cheshire gardens, Ness Botanic and Dunham Massey, where today, they can be seen in all their glory, mature specimens whose blooms exude a carnation-like scent, their blaze of colour tempered by a mid-green foil of fully-expanded leaves. The best of these, selected from both gardens, have been named and are now being propagated and distributed, but they sell like hot cakes when in bloom, so are rarely in stock at the few specialist nurseries still trading in the UK.

R. ‘Embley Crimson’
Unknown x Unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late May-June 3m x 2m

Embley Park, near Romsey in Hampshire, and Joseph John Crosfield (1866-1940), are best known for lepidote or elepidote rhododendron hybrids such as ‘Tally Ho’, ‘Aladdin’ and ‘Blue Diamond’, not deciduous azaleas, but ‘Embley Crimson’ may change that view.

The plant appears to have been among a group of Crosfield’s rhododendron crosses rescued by the Hillier Nurseries after the Second World War just before the Embley Park estate was divided up and sold off, the whole now split between a school, a golf course and over a dozen private residences. However, the official *IRRC* entry lists the hybridiser as ‘unknown’, the parentage equally so, with the only categoric fact stated within the text denoting the flower colour as red.

Look more closely, and more than a hint of orange in the hue will be discerned, with the tubular-funnel-shaped corollas 6-lobed, deeply divided, elliptical in profile, and gifted pointed tips. That orange tone is most pronounced on the two dorsal lobes, though it never amounts to a formal blotch or a flare.

Each inflorescence comprises between 4 and 8 blooms that are held in a flat, open truss, with the filaments of the six stamens and the style that each contains flushed orange-red, while the anthers of the former are large and a contrasting creamy-white. The outer surface of the long and narrow corolla tube is moderately ciliate, the short hairs white, these extending onto the lobe ribs.

In contrast, the foliage is dark green and glossy, oblanceolate in shape, with a flat or convex silhouette, and the leaves are fully extended when the flowers open. Habit is upright and much branched, individual specimens attaining a height of 3m and a spread of 2m or more. And the autumn colour display is just as fiery as the flowers.

Yet not a single British specialist nursery - including the one named above - currently offers ‘Embley Crimson’ as an ‘in-stock’ item, though one or two will propagate the plant on request.


R. ‘Embley Crimson’


R. ‘Embley Crimson’

R. ‘Gena Mae’

‘Homebush’ x ‘Cecile’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6-7	May	2.5m x 2m

‘Gene Mae’ opens her blooms in UK gardens during May and once fully expanded, the pale orange flowers are simply enchanting, prompting Ken Cox to eloquently describe them on the Glendoick nursery website as ‘perhaps the most impressive double selection’ yet made. The rounded truss, some 15cm wide by 7.5cm high, is composed of between 20 and 25 openly-funnel-shaped trumpets, each of which is 4.4cm long and 6.4cm across at the mouth. Their underlying colour is a pale greenish-yellow, but the lobe tips are flushed vivid reddish-orange, while the centre is pure orange, giving an almost apricot-orange effect across the whole. And as indicated, the blooms are double, hose-in-hose with no stamens, and very long lasting.

And if that were not enough, an added bonus is spectacular autumn foliage colour.

Hailing from Puyallup, in Washington State, USA, Frank Clement’s cross repeats an earlier ‘Homebush’ x ‘Cecile’ pairing made by Peter Girard at his nursery in Geneva, Ohio, during 1969, although the ‘Gena Mae’ selection from Clement’s seed was actually raised and named by James and Genevieve Kowalsky of Bremerton, while it was introduced and registered in 1991 by the nearby Briggs Nursery in Olympia.


R. ‘Gina Mae’


R. ‘Gina Mae’


R. ‘Gina Mae’


R. ‘Golden Flare’

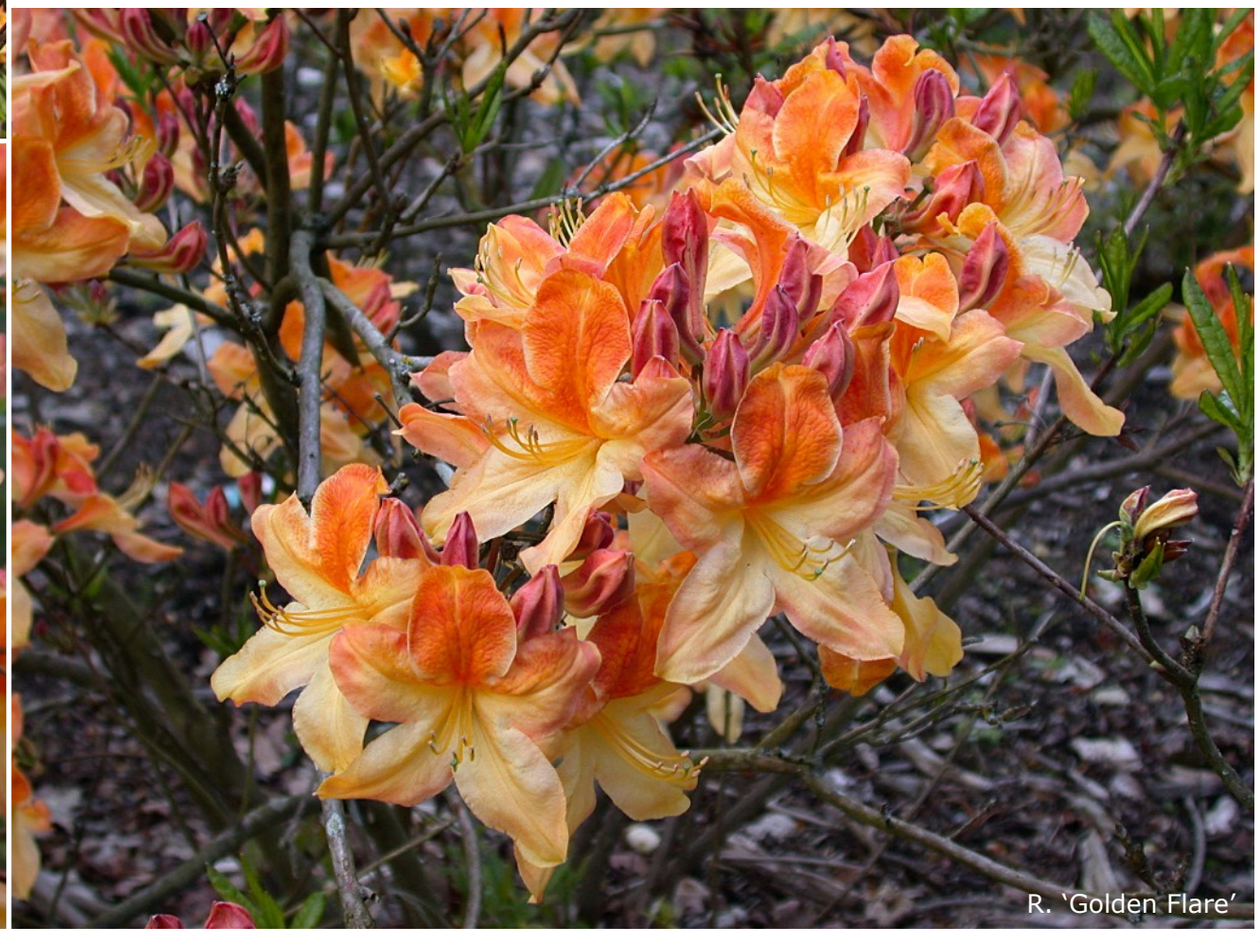

R. ‘Golden Flare’

R. ‘Golden Flare’
‘Altaclerense’ x Unknown

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5	May	2.5m x 2m

The official description for ‘Golden Flare’ details vivid yellow tubular-funnel-shaped corollas with a reddish-orange blotch and specifies that each trumpet is some 6cm long and wide, with the flat-topped trusses holding 12 to 14 individuals in a loose circle. Yet with age, the flowers pale, with the lower two lobes passing through pale yellow to yellowish-white, while the upper three retain their original hue for a touch longer, especially around the lobe margins. In contrast, the blotch becomes even more orange. And pink too enters the equation, sometimes as an undertone, sometimes as a flush, or not at all, its presence apparently dependent on the severity of the winter just ended.

‘Golden Flare’ is at least 25% *R. molle* ssp. *molle* courtesy of its ‘Altaclerense’ lineage whichever of the two possible deciduous hybrids was the seed parent: the Gowen Highclere cross of 1842 vintage; or that from the J & C Lee, Hammersmith Nursery, dated to 1862. Which means that it is only hardy to around -15ºC, which rules out a sizeable number of UK gardens from attempting long-term cultivation, and that is a shame, because the shrub has a fine, bushy habit (for a deciduous azalea) and very good autumn foliage colour.


R. ‘Golden Flare’



R. ‘Golden Lights’

R. ‘Golden Lights’
R. atlanticum hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Late April-May 1.6m x 1.6m

The US State of Minnesota is set pretty much in the middle of the North American continental landmass, with summer temperatures sometimes hitting 46ºC and winter lows recorded as dropping to a bone-chilling -51ºC, though both figures are extremes and recorded half a century apart (in 1936 and 1996 respectively, for those into minutiae). But even so, most rhododendrons would quickly give up the ghost.

At least, that was the case until 1957, when faculty members of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum - part of the Twin Cities University - began a deciduous azalea breeding programme. Twenty-one years later the first batch of hybrids were released to the nursery trade and they caused a sensation by being flower bud hardy from -34ºC down to -40ºC, and to date, a dozen or so crosses from the programme have now been introduced and registered, and of course, gathered together under a commercial trading banner as the “Northern Lights Azaleas”.

‘Golden Lights’ is one of these, with the best blooms of the bunch.

Crossed in 1975 and introduced just a decade later in 1985, the tubular-funnel-shaped corollas are carried 10 per truss, have frilly lobe margins and begin life coloured reddish-orange in bud. When fully expanded, each is 5cm long by 7cm across at the mouth, orange-yellow suffused reddish-orange in tone, the latter hue solely decorating the tube, and with a strong orange-yellow blotch on the dorsal lobe. And if that wasn’t enough, the flowers are also deliciously fragrant.

The hairy leaves are olive green in colour, oblanceolate through narrowly obovate in shape and turn maroon through red in the autumn to give a blaze of colour before they fall. And within the strain, those blades are the most resistant to mildew.

But a word of caution before those gardening halfway up a mountain in northern England or Scotland rush out to their nearest specialist nursery, chequebook or credit card in hand, to search out a specimen:

Minnesota sits just to the south of the 49th parallel and north of the 43rd - within the set of latitude lines that graticule Planet Earth - while Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds rest just above the 53rd parallel and Lerwick on the Shetland Isles, resides a tad north of the 60th. So the strength of the sun’s rays will be significantly reduced across those UK regions from that which the “Northern Lights” azaleas experience in their US home.

As a result, the new growth will take a good deal longer to fully ripen.

If it ever does.

Before the first frost hits.

And moreover, the climates experienced in the two locales are also radically different: predictably stable continental; as opposed to wildly fluctuating maritime. So this too will interfere and play havoc with a plant’s capacity to confront the onslaught of winter.

For those still undaunted, a check of the RHS online plant finder will detail all the UK nurseries that stock ‘Golden Lights’ - currently four - as well as other members of the strain, but perhaps significantly, Glendoick, near Perth - at 56.4º North - does not feature amongst that quartet of sellers, nor did it when the nursery was trading at full capacity rather than in its current, post-Brexit ‘downsized’, form.

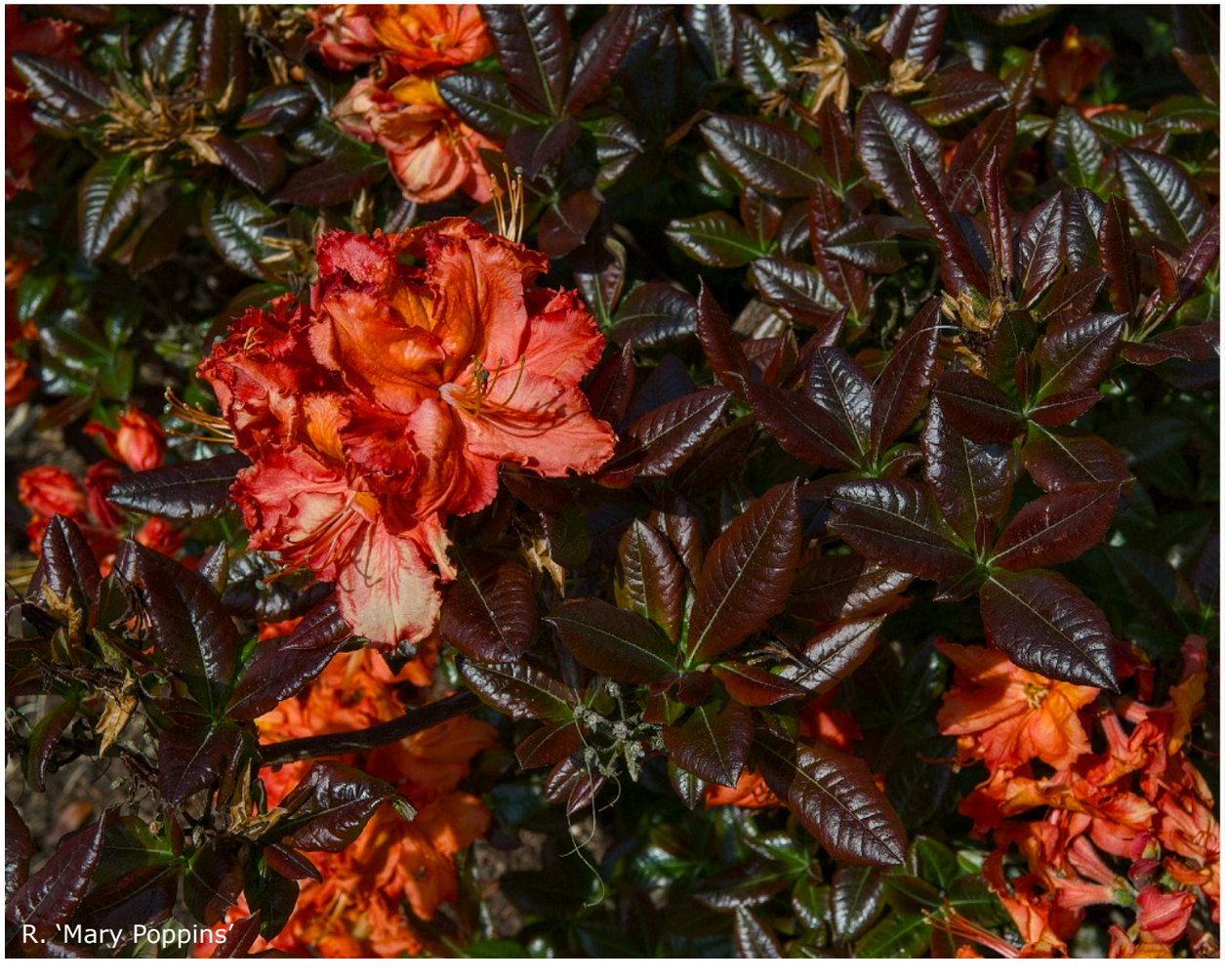
R. ‘Golden Lights’

R. ‘Mary Poppins’

R. ‘Mary Poppins’
Unknown x Unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 May 2m x 2m

Whether blown into our gardens through the auspices of the East wind - as was P. L. Travers’s magical English nanny (after whom, of course, the shrub has been named) - or conjured-up by some other magical aberration, ‘Mary Poppins’ arrived out of the wide blue yonder in 1974, sans parentage, hybridiser or any other cogent details. Yet its stunning combination of bright orange-red blooms, set against a lustrous foil of bronzy foliage, actuated without resort to the Imperious Curse, an unquenchable need to impulse purchase that was only satiated when the car boot closed on your very own micro-propagated liner.

A paler orange blotch decorates the dorsal, with the same hue infusing the stamen filaments and the style, while the lobe margins are frilly and the corollas - held in a tight rounded truss of up to sixteen tubular funnels - each up to 7cm across. Regrettably, the leaves will have transformed into an unremarkable dark green before the blooms are shed, but will once again up their tonal profile in the autumn to go out in a blaze of glory.


R. ‘Mary Poppins’


R. ‘Mary Poppins’

R. 'Silverwood'
'Silver Slipper' x Unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 May-early June 2.5m x 2m

Yellowish-pink in the bud, opening to milky-white with a hint of pink at the lobe tips and along the outside of the tube, plus a splendid golden-yellow blotch on the dorsal, the blooms of 'Silverwood' also exude the most delicious fragrance, as those visitors to recent Chelsea Flower Shows likely experienced when venturing anywhere near the gold medal-winning floral displays set out by the Millais Nurseries. The firm's founder, Edward Grey St. Helier Millais (1918-2003) - 'Ted' to each and every rhodophile who knew him - youngest grandson of Sir John Everett Millais, the famous Pre-Raphaelite painter, and nephew of the equally renowned naturalist John Guille Millais, author of the two-volume *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids* of 1917 and 1924 vintage, made the pairing in 1976, pollinating Lionel de Rothschild's 'Silver Slipper' with an unknown member of the tribe to produce a compact-growing shrub with good autumn colour that will hit 1.6m in height after a decade or so and likely ascend to around 2.5m when fully mature.

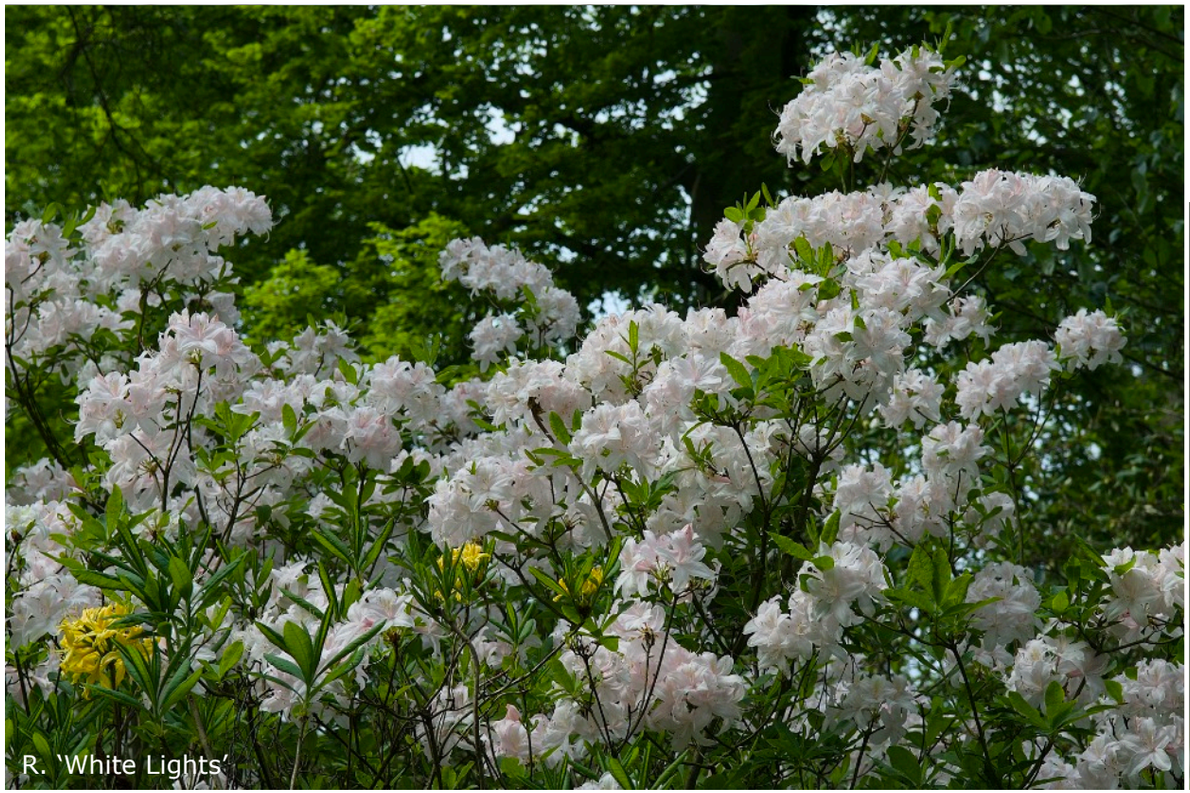
The chosen epithet is borrowed not from the woodland garden at Howick Hall in Northumberland, as most rhodo-savvy pilgrims touring the UK's horticultural hot spots would assume, but is the name of the cottage in the woods at Crosswater Farm.


R. 'Silverwood'


R. 'Silverwood'


R. 'Silverwood'


R. ‘White Lights’


R. ‘White Lights’

R. ‘White Lights’
Unknown x Unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 Late April-May 1.6m x 2m

‘White Lights’ is another of the “Northern Lights” deciduous azaleas bred by the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum to be completely bud hardy in that Upper Midwest American state. Fred Galle, in his 1987 book *Azaleas,* gives the hybrid a winter rating of -35ºF, which for those using the Celsius scale is -37ºC (the conversion formulae is non-linear: subtract 32, multiply by 5, then divide by 9). So if you garden half way up a Scottish Munro and want to diversify away from lichen and stunted conifers, look no further, even though the new branchlets will struggle to fully harden in time for winter due to the sun’s weaker strength at that latitude.

The pairing - details of which are still lacking - was made by Dr Harold Pellett, who joined the breeding programme in 1970, some thirteen years after it had been instigated, and became project leader in 1978. The official *IRRC* entry has the parentage recorded as ‘unknown’, although other sources indicate that *R. prinophyllum* may have been pollinated by a white-flowering Exbury azalea.

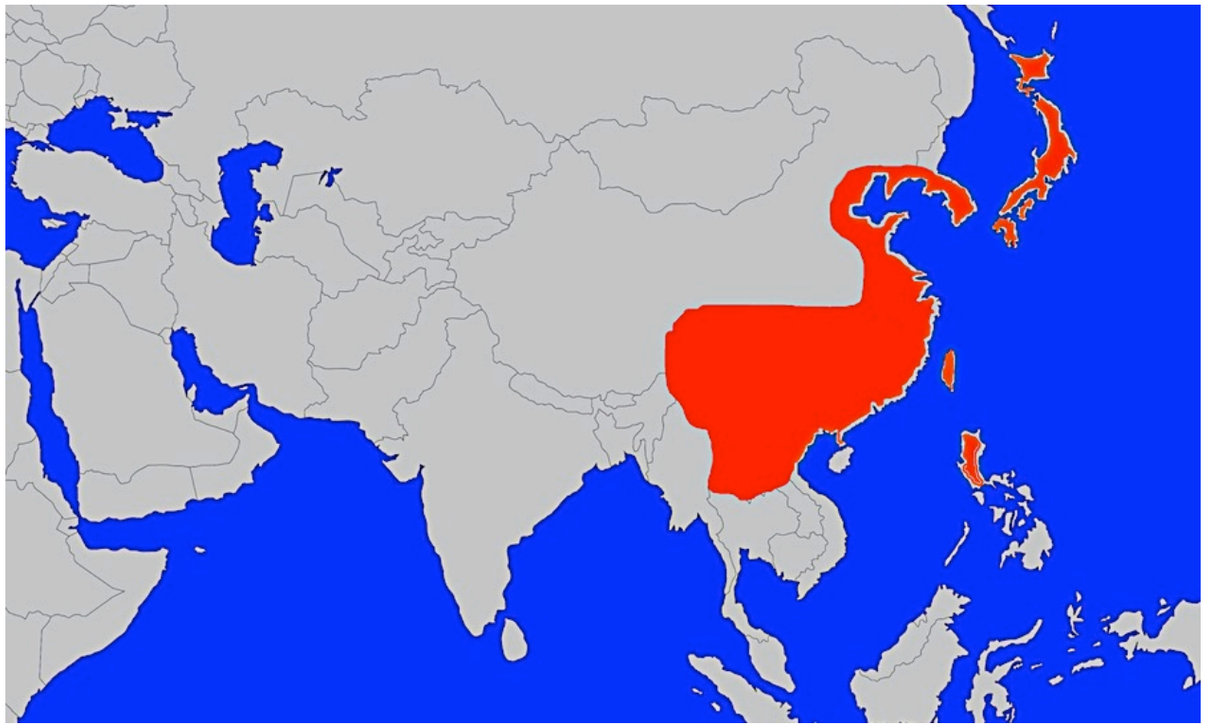
‘White Lights’ carries five, tubular-funnel-shaped corollas, in each truss, which are purplish-pink in the bud, as well as when they first open, but swiftly fade to near white. Each five-lobed trumpet is gifted a pale orange-yellow ‘blotch’ on the dorsal, although this is actually just a barely visible narrow fan of spots and speckles, and they are also slightly fragrant. Oblanceolate through elliptic leaves complete the picture, olive green in hue, with each about 6cm long.

A medium-sized shrub, rarely more than 1.6m high, with a similar or slightly wider spread, ‘White Lights’ opens its mass of flowers from late April onwards, yet despite flying off American shelves in inordinate quantities, the plant has not featured in the parentage of any other deciduous azalea hybrid since its introduction in 1983. Many will doubtless have tried to pair it with their favourite Knaphill or Exbury clone, but regrettably - as readers of Mr Galle’s excellent tome will know - its flowers are sterile.


R. ‘White Lights’

Evergreen Azaleas

A Tour d'Horizon



The wild endemic distribution of the Subsection *Tsutsusia* evergreen azalea species most notably encompasses the four home islands of the Japanese archipelago and the chain of smaller islets that curve southwards towards Taiwan, where a number of taxa may also be found. Continuing that progression eons before the current territorial fracas began, a few species vaulted across the South China Sea to take up residence on the Philippines.

Along the western side of the Sea of Japan, the range takes-in the Korean Peninsula, then extends down through much of eastern China - as well as travelling as far west as Yunnan Province - hops over the border to invest the top northeastern corner of Upper Myanmar, crosses into Vietnam, and concludes its march in Thailand, beyond which the complement is decidedly 'tropical' rather than 'temperate'.

The 1998 RHS *Rhododendron Handbook* indicates that around forty of the temperate species are cultivated in the UK, while the *Flora of China* website totals more than eighty entries. Known hybrids - natural and man-made - are included in both of these counts, and a raft of newly described individuals feature on the latter's inventory, though most of these would not survive the first frost of autumn outdoors in the UK, yet alone one of our unpredictable spring chills. It is the much hardier species, native to Japan therefore, that the hybridising fraternity have incorporated into their breeding programmes, along with *R. poukhanense* from the Korean Peninsula, *R. simsii* from China - even though it is only borderline hardy in the mildest of British gardens - and more recently, the tough little dwarf from Taiwan, *R. nakaharae*.

With the plants on their doorstep, it was almost inevitable that the Japanese would kick off the pairing game, the first round in the competition beginning some four hundred years ago in the 1600s, though initially - as detailed within the Kurume and Satsuki Strain deep dives - the native natural hybrid populations were denuded of their prize winners while the techniques of pollination, cultivar selection and propagation were learnt by the nurserymen. Equally inevitable was an exchange of material with their nearby neighbours, the two-way process seeing the introduction of Bamboos, Chrysanthemums, the Maidenhair Tree and Peonies into Japan, while Azaleas, Cryptomeria, Hinoki Cypress and the Black Pine - *Pinus thunbergii* rather than *Pinus nigra* or *Pinus jeffreyi* - travelled westward into China. Buddhist monks on pilgrimages are believed to have engineered the trade.

Now, without delving too deeply into the machinations of the Tokugawa Shogunate, by 1641, Japan's isolationist foreign policy - known as 'Sakoku', or 'closed county' - was fully in effect: all of the Jesuits had been expelled; Christian converts were being crucified or encouraged to commit seppuku if of daimyō rank; and only ships from China, Korea and the Netherlands were allowed into Japanese ports. Representatives of the Dutch East India Company - the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC - were the only Europeans permitted entry into the country itself and they were restricted to Dejima, a man-made artificial island in Nagasaki Bay (see page 71). Venturing out beyond the confines of their residential stockade was only possible when travelling under escort to Edo - Tokyo - to reaffirm trading ties with the government and oil the wheels that kept that business running smoothly. Tribute in the form of clocks and telescopes, rare animals and medicines, guns and artillery pieces were presented to the Shōgun, who would likewise respond and present gifts to the Dutch. *R. indicum,* the first evergreen azalea species introduced into the West, may have been one such token, though it was probably acquired locally in Nagasaki. Arriving in the Netherlands around 1680, it came via Batavia, the capital of the Dutch East Indies, which was the VOC's main base of operations in the Far East - present-day Jakarta, and Indonesia, respectively - and thus was a Japanese endemic sidled with the geographically incorrect appellation of "Indian Azalea", which still bedevils the species and its hybrids today.

The new introduction was first detailed within *Prodromus Plantarum,* written by Jakob Breyne, a merchant from Danzig (Gdańsk), who was also a distinguished botanist, his text available from all good booksellers in 1680, and the plant was still thriving in 1687 when Paul Hermann, the Director of the Hortus Botanicus Leiden, described and illustrated the species within *Hortus Academicus Lugduno-Batavus,* though he named it *Cistus indicus* (shown opposite). However, frost struck soon after publication and the azalea was then lost to Western cultivation for more than a century, which required Carl Linnaeus to base the *Azalea indica* entry in his 1753 tome *Species Plantarum* - which tangentially introduced the world to binomial botanic names - on those original Dutch descriptions.

The British East India Company reintroduced the species in 1808, William Townsend Aiton, the eldest son of the first Director of Kew Gardens, William Aiton, able to write in 1810's *Hortus Kewensis* that *Azalea indica* was back in cultivation, having arrived all the way from China on the ship *Cuffnels,* its care personally overseen by the master, Captain Wellbank. Except what actually turned up, was *R. simsii* - so cue even more confusion.

Next to dock from Canton - Guangzhou - in 1819, were *Azalea indica alba* and *Azalea indica purpurea plena,* these secured by Joseph Poole for the Barr & Brooks nursery on Newington Green's Ball's Pond Road. Samuel Brooks himself sponsored the trip, and paid for passage on the 1813-built clipper ship 'Lady Melville', an East Indiaman captained at the time by John Steward. Of course, future generations of botanically-minded professionals would regard both of these introductions as forms of *R. x mucronatum*.

Then, five years later in 1824, albeit having to share space with a cargo of Lapsang souchong - according to Frederick Street's 1959 tome *Azaleas* - a purplish-red-flowering shrub arrived from the same port of departure. It subsequently went through four identity crises in little less than a decade: *Azalea indica* changing to *Azalea punica;* which was replaced by *Azalea rawsonii;* before George Don settled on *Azalea phoeniceum* in 1834.

nigricantibus *C. B. P.* 468. Nerium Alpinum quibusdam, aliis Ledum glabrum *I. B. tom.* 2. *l.* 13. 21. Balsamum Alpinum glabrum vulgo.

Cistus Indicus, Ledi Alpini foliis & floribus amplis. Chamærhododendron exoticum, amplissimis floribus Liliaceis *Brevn. Prodr.* 23.

Inter utriusque Indiæ miracula, quæ in florido Theatro Illustrissimi Beverningii vigent, eminet speciosissimus hic Cistus ex Jaccatrâ advectus, cujus florum eximia pulchritudo quemlibet intuentem in summam rapit admirationem. Fruticat duorum cubitorum altitudine, trunco pollicem crasso, Cortice scabro, inæquali, ex fusco cinereo, Ligno duro, solido, pallescente; Ramis brevibus, contortis, inordinatis, circa fastigia foliis, Balsamo Alpino non disparibus, sed rigidioribus & villosis, densissimâ serie perpetuoque virore refertis. Intra hæc prodeunt flores quodammodo Liliacei, monopetali, quinquè partiti, structurâ Balsami Alpini, amplitudine Narcissi Gareti, colore fulgentis dilutioris cocci, Iunio vero & Augusto tantâ ubertate luxuriant, ut superiorem fruticis partem quasi elegantissimâ coccineâ veste videantur cooperire. His nisi odor deesset, diceres naturam nihil amabilius, nihilque ad-

CISTUS INDICUS, LEDI ALPINI FOLIIS ET FLORIBUS AMPLIS.



admirabilius unquam produxisse; Attamen odoris desiderium rependere videntur florum congeries numerosa, amœnissima Liliacea structura, & vivacitas exquisitissimi coloris. Cæterum ex singulis floribus sese exerunt quaterna apiculata stamina incurvata pallidè coccinea, unico intermedio longiori, insidente futuri fructus rudimento, His unà cum flore defluxis, perficiuntur in parvis oblongis villosis quinquifidis utriculis, conceptacula villosa, veluti in Cisto Ledo vulgo Balsamo seu Nerio Alpino, quinque intus carinulas habentia, in quibus semina exigua flavescentia. Quò contumacius est Balsamum Alpinum locis mitioribus, in quibus vivere refragratur, tanto sequacior est hic Cistus, qui hortensem culturam in laudatissimo Beverningiano Theatro jam ad duodecimum annum innoxie sustinuit. Facultate ad congeneres Cistos accedere, putamus ex adstringente gustu, quem cum illis habet communem.

Cistus Mas, folio rotundo hirsutissimo *C. B. P.* 464. Cistus mas major folio rotundiore *I. B. tom.* 2. *l.* 13. 2.

Cistus Mas, folio oblongo incano *C. B. P.* 464. Cistus Mas IV. Monspeliacus folio oblongo albido *I. B. tom.* 2. *l.* 13. 3.

Cistus Mas, angustifolius *C. B. P.* 464. Cistus Mas

The *R. indicum* entry in *Hortus Academicus Lugduno-Batavus,* published in 1687.

Yet despite being initially popular with nurserymen and the plant buying public of the time, *indica-punica-rawsonii-phoeniceum* was later relegated to the role of a rootstock onto which the better varieties could be grafted, and then finally - after on the ground footwork reported the total lack of any endemic existence out in the wild - reclassified as a hybrid, namely, R. 'Phoeniceum'.

Spin back to 1832 however, and no less than three forms of the true *R. indicum* had managed to survive the voyage from China: two under the care of a Mr M'Killigan, which would be pampered at the 'Exotic' Chelsea nursery of Joseph Knight and his nephew Thomas Perry - *Azalea indica variegata* and *Azalea indica lateritia;* while the third - *Azalea indicum var. ignescens* (as described by Robert Sweet) - was gifted to the Slone Square nursery of Mr Tate by Captain Farrer of the tea clipper 'Orwell'.

> 'These are the original plants from which the original 'Indian' azaleas of the first half of the nineteenth century were raised. Hybridization went forward with a rush. Thousands of seedlings were raised, hundreds were named. Soon these Indian azaleas were known as some of the finest 'Florists' Flowers', but always grown under glass'.
> Frederick Street, *Azaleas,* 1959.

Knight and Perry, Tate, and the Norbiton Common nurseryman William Smith - of 'Broughtonii Aureum' fame - were the main hybridisers and throughout the 1840s and 1850s, their crosses were probably the most popular indoor greenhouse plants available on the market. However, some years earlier, in 1835, both Knight and Tate had visited Ghent in Belgium, their endeavours resulting in the sale of several batches of hybrids to their European competitors.

It would be a fateful trip for all the parties concerned, because ultimately, one set of nurserymen would prosper, while another would fall into decline, this reversal of fortunes down to three forms of *R. simsii.*

Found growing in a Shanghai nursery. That were successfully transported to England in 1851. And later included in one of those shipments that crossed the Channel.

The man responsible for their initial discovery and purchase was the Scottish botanist, traveller and plant hunter, Robert Fortune (1812-1880).

Sponsored by the Horticultural Society of London, precursor of the RHS, he had set sail for China in 1843, the year after the Treaty of Nanjing was signed, and remained in the region, on and off, until 1859, exploring not only the local gardens and nursery firms of the treaty ports, but venturing into the remote areas of the Fujian, Guangdong and Jiangsu Provinces, which were well beyond the 'one day's journey' limit that the treaty specified. But like his other European contemporaries, Fortune learnt mandarin and often disguised himself as a Chinese merchant to facilitate such expeditions.

Of course, his most noted accomplishment was effectively 'stealing' close to 20,000 plants and seedlings of *Camellia sinensis.* That were then transported in small greenhouses - known as Wardian cases - on the decks of ships; carried overland after docking to the town of Darjeeling in the Indian state of West Bengal; and which at a stroke, broke China's monopoly on tea. In comparison to such a venture, Fortune's three azaleas might seem like small fry, but note that the white flowers of *R. simsii* 'Vittata', 'Vittata Bealii' and 'Vittata Punctata' were each striped and flecked with red. And in 1851, nothing like them had been seen before. So when they reached Belgium three years later in 1854, not only did the plants create a sensation, but they initiated a breeding and propagation programme on a scale never seen before. And so successful was this enterprise that by 1860, the English Indian Azalea hybrids had been totally supplanted.



Robert Fortune

Continuing their history:

> 'By 1864 'Vittata Punctata' was a popular forcing azalea in France. Indeed all of Europe was flooded with Belgian Indian Hybrids. Since most of the plants were bred for greenhouse growing and the florist trade, they were bred for forcing. But the true *R. indicum* does not force readily. So despite the popular name, the species was not incorporated into the breeding lines. Hybridizing intensified in Belgium as the Belgian Indians became widely popular as greenhouse and indoor plants in Europe. They were grown by the millions and exported to all parts of the world, with more than two and a half million exported annually from Belgium alone'.
> Fred C. Galle, *Azaleas,* 1987.

But always, they were grown under glass.

Except in the Southern States of the United States, where they flourished outdoors.

The English Indian Azalea hybrids had first arrived in Boston during 1838 and just a decade later, the Reverend John Grimké-Drayton was planting them at what would become the famed Magnolia Gardens near Charleston in South Carolina. At the time the property was simply known as Magnolia-on-the-Ashley, but Drayton's ultimate horticultural aim was to create a floral paradise on earth for his Philadelphian wife, Julia.

Scroll forward another decade to 1856, and the respected horticulturalist Prosper Julius Alphonse Berckman, the son of a Belgian immigrant nurseryman from Lierre, departed the cold of New Jersey with his extended family - father, stepmother and younger half-brother - to inaugurate the Fruitland Nursery in Augusta, Georgia, the flowering-shrub-filled grounds of which are now occupied by the National Augusta Golf Course, home each spring to the annual Master's Tournament.

Both men were soon importing the Belgian Indian Azaleas in quantity, with Magnolia Gardens alone able to list some 230 cultivars growing on the grounds by 1870. And of course, each was cross-pollinating their acquisitions, which ultimately birthed the race of plants known today as the Southern Indian Hybrids. These have a quite disparate mix of parents, but despite this, can still be divided-up into two basic groups: tall shrubs hitting 2.5 to 3.5m in height, usually with a fairly open habit and robust growth, which flower first, in mid-season; and those that reach to 2 or 2.5m, have a much denser and compact habit, are slower growing and bloom later in the season, usually because *R. indicum* genes have entered the meld. All are graced with large flowers, the individual corollas 5 to 9cm across, in tones of pink, purple, red and white, the blooms usually single, rarely double, none being hose-in-hose and only a few bearing differently coloured stripes on the lobes or the borders around the margins. Hybridising work tailed-off in the early 1900s, with more recent introductions the result of genetic misfires - sports - rather than specific, directed pollinations, though the group as a whole have been used in the breeding programmes of others whenever the aim has been to maintain that large corolla size while also improving on cold hardiness (see the write-up on the Glenn Dale azalea strain).

A far different fate was in store for the Belgian Indian Hybrids however, as even today, the nursery profession is still actively developing new cultivars on both sides of the Atlantic, and elsewhere. The Rutherford Hybrids, for instance, were created in the early 1920s at the Bobbink and Atkins Nursery in New Jersey, while on the other side of America in California, Howard Kerrigan's nursery in Oakland, the Mossholder Nursery of Costa Mesa (introducing plants bred by Owen Bristow of San Bernardino), and from 1935 right up to the millennium and beyond, the Nuccio Brothers Nursery of Altadena, have all added to the long list of cultivars. Because who doesn't want a pot-grown azalea in full bloom decorating the dining table at Christmas?

Other hybridizers - largely amateur - have also widened the range by adding blood from the Kurume and Kaempferi Strains into the gene pool.

The introduction of *R. kaempferi* into Europe through the auspices of the VOC is believed to have occurred a few years prior to 1854 when Jules Émile Planchon described the species in Volume 9 of *Flore des Serres et des Jardins de L'Europe*. Japan's seclusionist policies were still in effect despite numerous challenges from American, British, French, Portuguese and Russian merchant and naval vessels, this culminating in 1853 when four American warships under the command of Commodore Matthew C. Perry - the Black Ships, or '*kurofune*', as they became known - steamed into Tokyo Bay and began to demonstrate the effectiveness of their weaponry (the new Paixhans artillery guns, which fired explosive shells). In 1854, Perry returned, this time with seven battleships, which forced the Shōgun to capitulate and sign a 'Treaty of Peace and Amity' at the Kanagawa Convention, this establishing full diplomatic and trading relations with the United States, an opening the UK was quick to exploit, initialling their own Anglo-Japanese Friendship Treaty later that very same year. And just as night follows day, the plant hunters were quickly on their way: Robert Fortune, visiting from 1860 through 1862; the Russian botanist Karl Maximovich, also travelling around the country between these dates; the French missionary-botanist Urbain Jean Faurie, arriving in 1874 and staying until 1897; Charles Maries, collecting for the Veitch nursery, who visited the archipelago each year between 1877 and 1879, and possibly introduced *R. kaempferi* into the UK as a result; and in 1892, Charles Sprague Sargent, of the Arnold Arboretum, Boston, who explored the four home islands, collecting seed of *R. kaempferi* during the expedition, which he introduced into America that same year and sent to Kew in 1894.


Karl Maximovich


Charles Maries


Urbain Jean Faurie


Charles Sprague Sargent


Ernest Wilson

Although the commercial ties between Japan and the United States began to develop more fully during this period, it was not until the first two decades of the new century that Western horticulturalists finally learnt of the Kurume azaleas, despite the 1844 discovery by Robert Fortune of *R. x obtusum* and several of its forms, which were established in the Pou-shan Azalea gardens in Shanghai. Regrettably, the English plant hunter did not know that the original plants had been imported from Japan, or that they were hybrids, the same being true of his 1850 introduction 'Amoena', which John Lindley would describe as *Azalea amoena* within Volume 3 of *Paxton's Flower Garden,* published in 1852. Seventy years later, in 1914, Ernest Wilson, on his first collecting trip to Japan for the Arnold Arboretum, visited the Yokohama Nursery Company, where he was introduced to the Kurume Azaleas. And blown away. Of course, he also ventured out onto the hills, on this and all subsequent visits, so the plant hunter could write of 'Amoena' that:

> 'It is generally assumed to be of Chinese origin, but there is no evidence to support this view. On the contrary, I do not think there can be any doubt whatever that it is a Japanese plant and merely a colour form of the Azalea so abundant on Nishi-Kirishima, Kyushu, hereunder described as *R. obtusum* forma *amoena*'.
> Ernest Wilson and Alfred Rehder, *A Monograph of Azaleas,* 1921.

In 1915, Kurume resident, nurseryman and hybridiser Kijiro Akashi, exhibited twelve choice cultivars of the strain at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition that was held in San Francisco, the 31-plant display winning him a gold medal for the exhibit. When the Exposition closed, each and every plant was snapped-up by the Domoto Brothers Nursery of Haywood, California, who then propagated all of the azaleas and went on to sell them far

and wide, including to several East Coast firms.

Ernest Wilson would first source his plants from the Yokohama Nursery - in 1916 - then from the Oishi Gardens at Hatagaya, to the north of Tokyo - in 1917 - and finally from Mr Akashi himself - in 1918 - this purchase, which included two sets of his now 'famous fifty', safely reached the Arnold Arboretum in 1919.

The exultant fanfares and gushing praise that followed the commercial introduction of Wilson's Kurume hybrids into America should, however, be tempered somewhat by the fact that Dutch and Belgian nurserymen had been importing Kurume clones into Europe since the turn of the century, albeit unknowingly. Some sources suggest such arrival dates could have been as early as 1901, others as late as 1910, and 'unknowingly', because they were purchased as forms of *R. indicum*.

A perusal of the Yokohama Nursery Company's English-language catalogues will show that the firm only began describing the shrubs as *Azalea indicum* Kurume in 1912, with this changing to *Azalea obtusum* Kurume in 1918. However, independent confirmation of their presence in Europe comes courtesy of an open-to-the-public exhibition put on at the Boskoop Horticultural School in the spring of 1911: for the floral displays included the clones we know today as 'Beni-giri', 'Hinodegiri', 'Hinomayo' and 'Yaye-hiryu', with the second and fourth mentioned being Wilson 42 'Red Hussar', and Wilson 39 'Scarlet Prince', because across the pond, the original Japanese names were considered by entrepreneurial nurserymen to be unpronounceable by the great American public so were changed to aid their 'marketability'. The Domoto clones had also included some of the Wilson Fifty cultivars and these too had been given new 'apple pie' monikers, which of course, were different from those chosen by E.H.W. for his set. So from as early as the mid 1920s, several of the Kurume hybrids were each being traded under three different aliases, because of course, the Belgians and the Dutch were also exporting their merchandise across the Atlantic.

Further mass importation of the Kurume clones from Japan occurred in 1929 - when Rolla Kent Beattie of the United States Department of Agriculture's Plant Introduction Section acquired some sixty cultivars, forty-nine being new to American horticulture - and in the early 1930s - when John Barr Stevenson and his wife Roza, of Tower Court, Ascot, introduced fifty-nine new clones into the UK, these sourced from both the Yokohama and Hakoneya nursery firms, with the plants later propagated and distributed by Sunningdale Nurseries, Windlesham, Surrey, which was then under the direction of Jim Russell.

The last major importation of cultivars from Japan appears to have been in the mid 1970s when azalea expert Dr John Creech - also employed by the USDA - was responsible for the selection of some fifty varieties, thirty-three of which have now been released commercially. Equally, to state the glaringly obvious, hybridisers in America, Great Britain, Europe, Japan and elsewhere, continue to work within the strain, though no one individual stands out from the pack and no new registration has significantly challenged the popularity of 'Azuma-kagami', 'Kirin', 'Kure-no-yuki' or 'Takasago'.

Spooling back to 1897, when *R. kaempferi* flowered for the first time outdoors in Boston, Massachusetts, its fine floral display, superior hardiness to the *indicum-obtusum-simsii* cultivars that were then available, and ease of propagation, began to be noticed by British and European nurserymen and gardeners, and once those traits were confirmed, the species was selected for pairing with others that were less rugged, or with the best of the 'hardy' hybrids then to hand.

First to the crease was a Dutchman, P. M. Koster of Boskoop, despite the chaos that World War I had inflicted across the Low Countries. He chose an equally tough, but at that time unknown hybrid, 'Malvaticum', to partner *R. kaempferi,* and so bred the race of plants that formed the kernel of the Kaempferi Hybrid Strain, though a change of circumstances ultimately resulted in these being named and introduced by others.

Lionel de Rothschild of Exbury, as well as the Stevensons of Tower Court - also using 'Malvaticum' in many of their crosses - were later contributors to the bloodline, introducing fifteen and ten cultivars respectively, while Arthur George, owner of the Hydon Nursery in Godalming, Surrey, would later use many of the Stevenson-bred hybrids in his own backcross combinations with the species to produce another nine highly regarded members of the strain.

Jump across the Atlantic, and two names stand out from the assemblage: Joseph Gable, and Peter Girard.

Gable, a nurseryman from Stewartstown, Pennsylvania, used the equally tough *R. poukhanense* from the Korean Peninsula to mature the seed of his F1 crosses with *R. kaempferi,* and in doing so, produced some of the hardiest evergreen azalea hybrids that are available today, with many tolerant of lows down to -20ºC. These were then recrossed, backcrossed or paired with other hybrids, including some Kurume strain clones.

The Girard azaleas were developed from the late 1940s onwards and continued this process, first pairing Gable's hybrids with each other, then making crosses with the best of the resulting seedlings. The outcome was a group of brightly-flowered cultivars with much better leaf retention, many of which bore their creator's name and still remain as popular as ever with the plant-buying public.

A standalone discourse on the Kaempferi Azaleas, including the full backstory on the arrival of 'Malvaticum' at the Koster & Co. nursery in the early 1900s, will be found within that strain's historical write-up.

The unparalleled Glenn Dale azalea breeding programme, touched on briefly above in connection with the Southern Indian Hybrids, was carried out at the United States Department of Agriculture's Plant Introduction Station in Maryland. It began in the late 1920s and continued without a break until the start of the 1950s under the personal direction of one man, Benjamin Yeo Morrison, who was a Principal Horticulturalist in the Division of Plant Exploration and Introduction when the project was inaugurated, and ended up as the Director of the United States National Arboretum at its conclusion. The objective set at the beginning of the initiative was to create a race of hybrids with corolla sizes that matched the creations of Berckman and Drayton, but that would be winter hardy in the environs of Washington D.C. In and of itself, this was an estimable and credible goal, the outcome however, was the evergreen equivalent of the Waterers' Knap Hill strain: far too many registrations; a complete sweep of form, colour and flower shape; and most critically, inconsistent hardiness across the group. In other words, a total hodgepodge, to borrow the perfect Americanism.

It was the last of these caprices - hardiness - which would garner the strain such a bad reputation amongst gardeners, even though in the main, it was unjustified. Because each and every one of those 454 - four-hundred-and-fifty-four! - named and registered introductions met the American capital city's cold-hardy test. For as not quite two-year-old seedlings, they had been planted out and left to thrive or fail in the environmental conditions experienced at the station, so the weaklings would be weeded-out. And all of those eventually selected and offered into commerce had survived that fall winterkill. It was just that some proved to be much hardier than what was required of them or was written on their accompanying label, and the assumption was then wrongly made that this tolerance applied to the entire flock. Not by Ben Morrison of course, but by the American gardening public.

As indicated, the full history of the Glenn Dale Azaleas is set out within their own dedicated chapter, which leaves just one major cultivar strain to discuss:



Rolla Kent Beattie



John Creech



Ben Morrison

In Japan, hybrid and species azaleas are divided into two mixed groups: those that flower in mid-April, roughly thirty days after the spring equinox, are known as the Tsutsuji; those that bloom sixty days on from when the sun crossed that celestial equator, so mid-May into June, the Satsuki; and as indicated, hybrids and species are pigeonholed under the same coverall. Ernest Wilson was the first Western plant hunter to highlight this decidedly unconventional disposition in his 1921-published title *A Monograph of Azaleas*. He also focused on the ongoing confusion over the Chinese *R. simsii* and the Japanese *R. indicum,* for the two still resided under that single *Azalea indica* coverall, writing that:

> 'The question as to what *Azalea indica* really was began to arouse my interest. On the occasion of the Arnold Arboretum Expedition to Japan in 1914 I devoted much time to the problem, and in Yakushima in February collected an azalea that later I discovered to be the true *Azalea indica* of Linnaeus. I questioned many botanists in Japan, but none at that time had any definite views on the subject. Nevertheless, by deduction and comparative study I arrived at the conclusion that the group of azaleas cultivated in Japan under the name "Satsuki" all belonged to Linnaeus' species and that the material collected on Yakushima was its wild parent'.

One suspects that language difficulties were to blame for the faux pas of otherwise overlooking a hybrid dynasty that at that time comprised many hundreds of named individuals, though the error was undoubtedly helped by the fact that *R. indicum* is known and spoken of as Kawa satsuki by the Japanese, *R. eriocarpum* - the other major contributor to the Satsuki strain's genetic heritage - as Maruba satsuki, with all the various individuated forms of both species likewise described. So: Shide satsuki for the plant Wilson designated as *R. indicum* f. *laciniatum;* Komanyo satsuki for his *R. indicum* var. *balsaminaeflorum;* and Shiki-takane satsuki for *R. indicum* f. *variegatum,* which had 'white and red striped, and spotted flowers' no less.

As with the early Kurume imports, a few Satsuki strain cultivars had unknowingly been introduced into the West during the early 1900s, but it was not until the late 1930s that the first major consignment of plants arrived. These resulted from Ben Morrison sourcing fifty-three clones - 'chosen at random' according to Galle - from the 1936-1937 "English Speaking" catalogue of the Chugai Nursery in Kobe, which advertised their wares as having flowers 'of the most noble and refined beauty' that were of 'the highest attainable grade' and 'totally unknown outside of Japan'.

Satsuki Strain genes would feature prominently in the parentage of some 150 Glenn Dale Azaleas, and in 46 of Morrison's Back Acres Hybrids, these bred after he retired from the USDA in 1951, but for many years, those 53 imported plants were known as the Chugai

Hybrids, only switching back to their true allegiance post the arrival of Frederick P. Lee's *The Azalea Book,* which was published in 1958.

In addition to Ben Morrison, two other American hybridisers who incorporated the Satsuki hybrids into their designs deserve mention: Robert Gartrell, and James Harris.

Gartrell, of Wyckoff, New Jersey, had set himself the goal of breeding late-flowering azaleas that would be hardy enough to survive the climatic rigours of his Mid-Atlantic state, but crucially, retain the inherent floral beauty of the Satsuki hybrids. His sixty-nine named and registered selections - the result of more than a thousand individual pairings and a tally of some 25,000 seedlings grown over the last forty years of Gartrell's life - are today collectively known as the Robin Hill Hybrids.

Harris, who resided in the far more balmier climes of Lawrenceville, Georgia - where the winters are benign with just one or two degrees of frost, though temperatures can drop on exceptional occasions to -20ºC - began hybridising in 1970. His aims, at first, were threefold: heat tolerance, given the climate; a cascading growth habit, for hanging basket cultivation; and very large corollas. Acknowledging the fact that one of his hybrids has blooms 11cm across, another, 15cm - on an azalea! - those boxes were certainly ticked. Then, from the mid-1980s onwards, two additional goals were appended onto his to-do list: red flowers; and a constitution better able to withstand sub-zero winters.

Step away from the four major strains outlined above, and many of the evergreen azalea hybrids introduced over the last sixty years will be seen to have a mixed parentage and no clear association to any particular cabal. For want of a better name, these have all been termed the Inter-Group Hybrids and technically, the Glenn Dales should feature within their ranks. So, working down a very long list where anyone who has ever placed pollen onto the stigma of an evergreen azalea seems to have been assigned their very own hybrid group, a few names deserve mention. Specifically, those whose creations grace the racks of the UK's specialist nurseries and a few up-market garden centres:

German nurserymen Georg Arends (1863-1952), and his son Werner (1896-1967), of Wuppertal-Ronsdorf - near Cologne, in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, which borders the Netherlands and Belgium - crossed the *R. x mucronatum* clone 'Noordtianum' with *R. kaempferi,* as well as with an unknown *R. kaempferi* hybrid, to produce a set of plants suitable for northwest European gardens that are now known as the Arendsii Hybrids. Hardy down to -23ºC, they are typically 1.6m high and wide when fully grown, and have purplish or reddish-orange flowers. A further development added 'Multiflorum' (one of their own hybrids from the early 1940s), and probably *R. kiusianum* into the mix. These reside under the banner of the Aronense Hybrids, and are lower growing, mound-forming plants to around 0.6m high.

The 'Diamant' hybrids were the result of a cross made in the early 1960s by another German hybridizer, Carl Fleischmann, of Wiesmoor, in Lower Saxony. 'Multiflorum', mentioned above, was pollinated by *R. kiusianum,* and ten named selections were introduced onto the market in 1969. These plants follow the species in habit and hardiness, but come autumn, have a tendency to shed most of their leaves in colder climes - the UK's northern counties and Scotland, for instance - leaving the tangle of twiggy branches bare for much of the year. The registered epithets reflect the hue of their corollas as well as their coverall appellation.

In those northern counties of England, but more especially across the border into Scotland, as has already been reported with regard to deciduous azaleas, the strength of the summer sun is often not sufficiently intense to fully ripen each year's new growth before the first frosts of autumn strike. Evergreen azaleas can suffer the same fate and a number of hybridisers have tried to tackle this problem with varying degrees of success, the best plants currently available being those bred by Peter and Kenneth Cox of Glendoick Gardens, Perth, notably their 'Mammals' series, and a newer group of double-flowered plants under the 'Glendoick' banner. Equal to these are a set of crosses made by Hans and Holger Hachmann, whose rhododendron nursery business resides on the other side of the North Sea at Barmstedt, in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. A check of the bloodlines for both flocks will reveal that many of these introductions pair a tough, dwarf species - such as *R. kiusianum,* or the Taiwanese endemic *R. nakaharae* - with a less rugged hybrid that has larger corollas, the resulting selected progeny generally low growing plants that can take full exposure and indeed thrive best when planted in full sun. Like the 'Diamant' pride however, the earlier introductions were near-deciduous throughout the winter, whereas some of the more recent registrations can at least lay claim to being 'relatively' evergreen going into December. The best of these is undoubtedly R. 'Marushka' from the Hachmanns, as its dark and shiny, burgundy-coloured foliage, is retained throughout the winter months, and the carmine-red flowers in spring are equally first-rate.

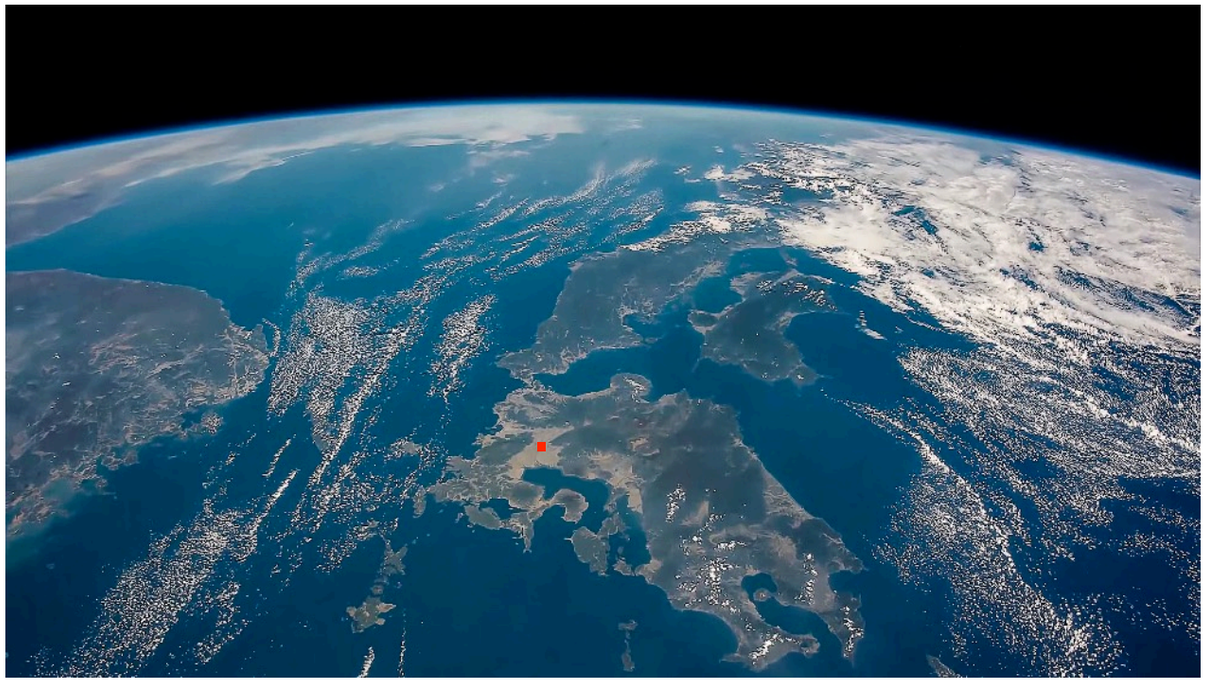
At the opposite end of the country in Dorset, the creator of the Solent Strain of deciduous azaleas, George Hyde, was also hybridising with their evergreen cousins and around twenty-five named selections from crosses involving 'Mucronatum', some of the better known Kaempferi Strain hybrids such as 'John Cairns', 'Sir William Lawrence' and 'Vuyk's Scarlet', plus a few of Joseph Gable's and Ben Morrison's offspring, have been named and introduced. In the main, the Hyde azaleas are low to medium growing plants with a fairly dense habit, while a few are true dwarfs that may have included genetic input from *R. nakaharae*. Regrettable, George Hyde died suddenly in 1980 at the age of sixty-four, and although his stud books detailed the pairings he made, it proved impossible to link these with the rows of seedlings growing in banked peat beds at his Ferndown nursery, which means the exact parentage of most of his crosses remains a mystery.

But what of the future?

Evergreen azalea hybridisers worldwide have yet to create a true, yellow-flowering cultivar, despite ongoing, longterm breeding programmes to achieve just that proceeding at pace in America, Europe and Japan. The tick box next to cream has been checked, but a deep, 'English Mustard' hue, has to date proven elusive. Double flowered forms, deeply-cut lobes, even 'spider' types where each petal around the corolla is individually distinct like the blooms of *Magnolia stellata,* are all currently proving popular, though as ever, whatever fad is in vogue today will change by tomorrow. Greater hardiness, better foliage retention, and the colour of those leaves throughout the year, not just over the winter months, are challenges yet to bested, as is extending the season of bloom and even producing true autumn-flowering clones. Moreover, on the disease front, a cure for the now widespread petal blight fungus - *Ovulinia azaleae* - is still urgently awaited, with the best advice currently - given it spreads by wind-dispersed spores - the same as for *Exobasidium vaccinii* var. *japonicum* - leaf galls - pick off the diseased bits - that wet and slimy mess that was once a flower - and destroy them. Ideally, in a fire.

A detailed examination of the five main evergreen prides - the Kurume, Kaempferi and Satsuki Strains, plus the Glenn Dale Azaleas and the Inter-Group Hybrids - follows, with a 'best of the rest' synopsis concluding the section. However, many of the cultivars grown in UK gardens suffer from wholesale mislabelling - those within the Kurume Strain especially so - with the corolla pigmentation on display, completely at odds with the accepted descriptions published within the 2-volume *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* and its supplements. These have therefore been excluded from the coverage that follows, knowledge of which will hopefully pre-answer questions such as 'why hasn't he included a photograph of R. 'Irohayama' in the Kurume section?'

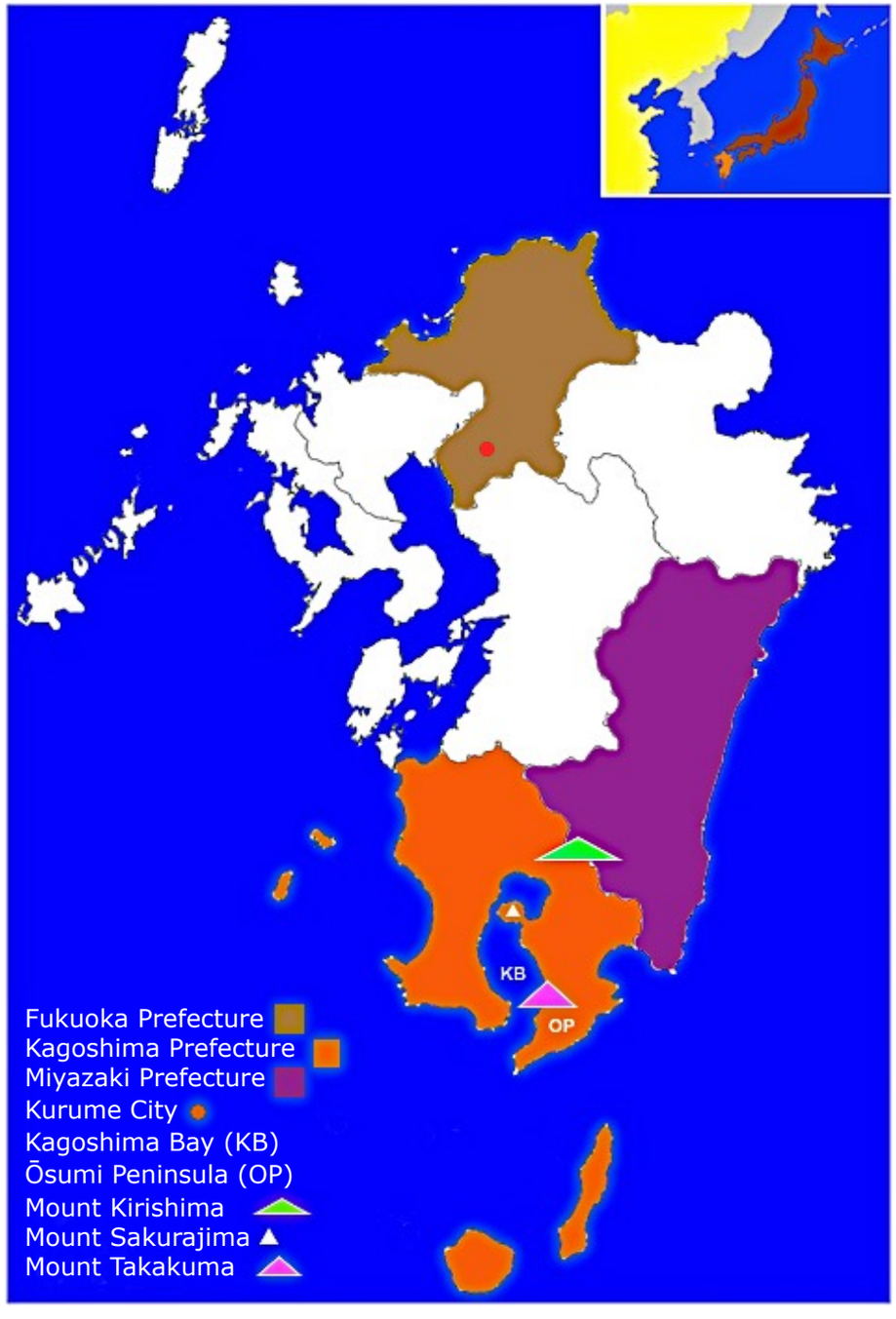
The Kurume Azalea Strain



Kyushu, Japan, as seen from the International Space Station on October 17th, 2015.
The city of Kurume, in Fukuoka Prefecture, is marked by the red dot.

Quaint but erroneous accounts of their development in Japan and importation into Western gardens, from both European and American authors, bedevil most historical reporting of the Kurume Azaleas, this especially true of those texts published in the first half of the last century. This was because the distribution of the endemic evergreen azalea species and their natural hybrids on the island of Kyushu was not properly documented or understood until quite recently, the botanic terminology was littered with errors, and the constituents used by the local nurserymen to breed their hybrids were simply guesstimates made by visiting foreign observers on day trips. The United States Department of Agriculture began to correct that picture in the early 1960s, undertaking a set of extensive field trips, but it was not until 1987 that a full, coherent, and accurate account of their history finally appeared with the publication of Fred Galle's book *Azaleas*. And forty years on, only the treatment of *R. sataense* in that narrative requires an update, for the taxon has since been recognized as the natural hybrid jam in a *kiusianum-kaempferi* layer cake, although a more recent report on the anthocyanin and flavonol pigments found in the flowers suggests the swarm has also had input from *R. eriocarpum* and *R. tosaense*.

Kyushu is the southernmost of Japan's four main home islands, spanning roughly two hundred miles from top to bottom, sixty miles from side to side, and the azaleas growing on its hillsides are now believed to have contributed their genes to the original Kurume hybrids. They are distributed across three mountain chains located at the island's foot in Kagoshima Prefecture, which rise around Kagoshima Bay. The tallest of these, at around 1700m in height, is Mount Kirishima, at the head of the bay, the name covering a cluster of volcanic peaks that extend eastward into neighbouring Miyazaki Prefecture, with one of the group - Shinmoe-dake, which has erupted eight times since 1991, most recently in 2021 - easily recognisable as the lair of Ernst Stavro Blofeld in the 1967 James Bond film Y*ou Only Live Twice.* To the south will be found the stand-alone Mount Sakurajima, currently at a height of 1,117m. This is Japan's most active volcano, which has been spewing ash and rocky debris onto the surrounding area intermittently since 2009. It was once an island in the middle of the bay, but in 1914 its lava flows linked it with the Õsumi Peninsula and the adjacent, 1,236m-high Mount Takakuma, this chain of hills running along the southeastern arm of the bay, paralleling the coast.



Evergreen azaleas will be found growing on the outer slopes of all three mountains, for the climate experienced on these cone volcanoes - typhoons notwithstanding - is equable throughout the year, namely: mild maritime, with moderate, evenly distributed rainfall; winter lows down to -7ºC in January; some snowfall, but the build-up never topping more than a metre in height. The physical surrounds - eruptions excepted - are also near perfect: porous soil, with a low pH; tree-cover extending from sea level to around the 1,000m contour; this woodland dotted with open meadows, which then predominant above the timberline. And the flora present is diverse: *Cryptomeria* and *Chamaecyparis* forests peppered with broad-leaf evergreen shrubs including hollies and camellias, plus other rhododendron species, both evergreen elepidotes and deciduous azaleas.

On Sakurajima, *R. kaempferi* is widespread across the lower slopes, flowering orange-red in harmony with the volcano's outpourings, and blooming during May. Slightly higher up, a swarm of natural hybrids resembling the Kurumes in corolla colour and habit will also be found, along with a lavender-flowering azalea that although similar to *R. kaempferi* in other respects, Japanese botanists have dubbed *R. x obtusum*. It is highly likely that *R. kiusianum* was once present on the mountainsides above these plant populations, but only bare lava rock exists there today.

On Kirishima, *R. kaempferi* will be found growing from sea level up to around 800m, while from the 1,200m contour, *R. kiusianum* is dominant, the species distributed across open alpine slopes above the treeline, flowering in June, with some decidedly long-lived, mature specimens at the summits still able to be cupped in two hands. In-between will be found a hybrid swarm of *kiusianum-kaempferi* clones that bloom crimson, pink, purple and scarlet, and show differences in their foliage size and shape. It is these plants that are associated with the Kurume strain in historical accounts, their populations often forming waist-high, extensive, near impenetrable thickets:

> 'Mount Kirishima, of which there are two principal peaks, Nishi and Higashi, is a sacred mountain celebrated in Japanese mythology. It was on Nishi-Kirishima that the god Ningi, grandson of the sun-goddess Amaterasu, alighted when he came down from heaven to pave the way for the conquest of Japan. A bronze sword, fixed in the ground, hilt upward, crowns the peak and is considered to be a relic of this divinity.
>
> On visiting Nishi-Kirishima, where between 650 and 1500m altitude a form of *japonicum* grows in great abundance, and after seeing the wide range of colour among the flowers, I am absolutely convinced that this Azalea is the wild parent of the race known as Kurume azaleas.'
>
> Ernest Wilson & Alfred Rehder, *A Monograph of Azaleas,* 1921.

Regrettably, Wilson's travel itinerary appears not to have taken in the nearby Õsumi Peninsula, so the plant hunter never ventured onto the mountain chain that runs down the eastern side of Kagoshima Bay. Had he done so, not only would he have been able to see the wild populations of *R. serpyllifolium* at Sarugajo, but his assignment of progenitor would likely have been different. For another evergreen azalea natural hybrid population exists there; one that completely escaped his attention: that of *R. x sataense*.

On Takakuma as elsewhere, the *R. kaempferi* populations dominate from sea level, in this locale, up to the 500m-contour, while those of *R. kiusianum* encircle the summits. In-between, *R. x sataense* holds sway. The habit of this natural hybrid is densely mounding out in the open, with the bushes between 1 and 2m high, but it becomes much more open in wooded areas, where some specimens top 3m in height. The *R. x sataense* corollas span hues from pink to purple, and they have overlapping lobes. Moreover, their leaf blades are elliptic through ovate in shape, shiny above, and either flat or with a convex profile. They are larger than the leaves of *R. kiusianum,* but smaller than those of *R. kaempferi,* and it is these plants that Japanese botanists and American experts such as the late Doctor John Creech (1920-2009), now believe kick-started the Kurume breeding programme, only later being crossed with hybrids from the other two mountains. A scientist in the Crops Research Division of the US Department of Agriculture, John Creech, working with knowledgeable local Japanese colleagues, carried out extensive investigations into the azaleas on Kyushu during the 1950s and early 1960s. His fieldwork studies were published under the title of *Ornamental Plant Explorations in Japan, 1961,* from which the text above borrows heavily. Later, working with Professor Kaname Koto of Tokyo University, Doctor Creech helped with the translation into English of Ihei Ito's 1692 monograph *Kinshu Makura,* which is better known in the West today as *A Brocade Pillow: Azaleas of Old Japan*.



John Creech, out in the field, packing young azalea seedlings in sphagnum moss,
Mount Takakuma, April 1961.

A 1997-published scientific paper, *Morphology and Flower Pigments of Wild Evergreen Azaleas in Southern Kyushu,* written by Ikuo Miyajima, Shunpei Uemoto, Yusuke Sakata and Ken-ichi Arisumi, from the Agricultural Faculties at Kyusyu and Kagoshima Universities, has now decisively confirmed the natural hybrid status of *R. x sataense* following an examination of the chemical constituents of the pigments present in its flower petals.

The actual town of Kurume will be found at the top end of Kyushu, inland from the sea, where it is a part of Fukuoka Prefecture. Two centuries ago it was the home of Motozo Sakamoto, a gentleman of samurai descent but probably not the 'Sir Lancelot of Kyushu' Frederick Street describes in his 1959-published addition to the literature, *Azaleas*. It is not known if Sakamoto himself collected specimen plants from Takakuma, or received them from others - as Ernest Wilson suggests in his *Monograph,* though from the wrong locale - but regardless, the hybridising bug bit and he was soon 'raising and selecting seedlings, including one he named 'Azuma-kagami', from which it is claimed all the pink-flowered forms have descended'. Initially, germinating the seeds proved problematic, but Sakamoto noticed that they sprung-up in quantity without any assistance on the moss that was growing beneath the parent plants. So he copied nature's method, and a century later, Lionel de Rothschild would rediscover the technique in the glasshouses at Exbury.

Continuing the story, Wilson writes that:

> 'After the death of Mr Sakamoto his collection passed into the hands of Mr Kijiro Akashi. This fine old gardener has for more than forty years devoted himself to the development of this race of Azaleas and has raised from seeds and perpetuated from cuttings nearly all the forms in cultivation. The original plant of 'Azuma-kagami' is still healthy, and I tried, but without success to induce Mr Akashi to part with it. Japanese experts recognise by name more than 250 kinds of Kurume Azaleas, but the differences are often infinitesimal'.

The year was 1918 and Wilson would select his 'Famous Fifty' on guidance from Mr Akashi, along with another expert, Mr Kuwano, but they would not be the first Kurume strain azaleas to be introduced into Western gardens.

This was down to the fact that during the opening years of the 20th century, despite Kurume being remote from the main centres of Japanese horticulture, the Yokohama Nursery Company had stocked and propagated a number of its clones, including 'Beni-giri', 'Hinodegiri' and 'Hinomayo'. Moreover, Dutch and Belgian nurserymen had been importing these into Europe from perhaps as early as 1901, and certainly by 1910, as an exhibition of these Japanese azaleas was, as reported above, staged at the Boskoop Horticultural School in the spring of 1911.

Frederick Street details what happened next:

> 'These inspired Mr W. F. Koppeschaar to visit Japan. Within six days of seeing these plants he was on his way to that country to see if he could find more. Through letters of introduction given to him by the Director of the Botanic Garden at Leiden he met Professor Matsumura, Director of the Botanic Garden in Tokyo, and Doctor Hayata, who gave up the whole of his annual holiday to help him. He was able to return to Holland with a number of different new Japanese azaleas, in various forms and colours.
>
> One of these was the plant that we know today as Azalea 'Hinomayo'. Strictly speaking, this should be 'Hinamoyo', which means, in Japanese, the 'mark of chicks'. It is one of the finest of them all - with masses of shell-pink flowers, a dwarf habit and of reasonable hardiness. However, when he returned to Holland he found that his introduction had been forestalled. The following spring Mr J. H. van Nes (of the firm C. B. van Nes and Co., which, unfortunately, no longer exists) asked him to look at an azalea that, he said, he had managed to import direct from the Imperial Garden of Tokyo. It was the same plant - Azalea 'Hinomayo'.
>
> These first introductions were taken up by the Boskoop nurserymen who began to make them popular - 'Hinomayo', 'Hinodegiri', 'Esmeralda', 'Hatsu-giri', 'Christmas Cheer', 'Amoenum', 'Amoenum Coccineum', 'Kirin', 'Snow' are all varieties that came to Europe even before the great treasure trove of Kurume was discovered. For it was difficult to enter Japan and, once there, it was harder still to travel round inside the country.'

Fast-forward to 1915 - again as reported above - and the spritely Mr Akashi, the very same who would welcome Ernest Wilson to his nursery in 1918, walked-off with a gold medal for an exhibit of a dozen Kurume hybrids at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, this held in San Francisco on America's Pacific Coast. All thirty-one plants that had made up the display were sold immediately after the Exposition closed to a family of Japanese-American nurserymen, the Domoto brothers, one of whom visited Kurume city shortly afterwards and arranged the importation of a host of additional varieties. On arrival and once propagated, these were sold throughout California and also distributed to three of the leading East Coast horticultural firms: the Bobbink & Atkins nursery at Rutherford, New Jersey; Cottage Gardens, on Long Island, New York; and the Henry A. Dreer Company of Riverton, New Jersey.

And Wilson too had sent back a consignment of Kurume hybrids prior to the despatch of his 'Famous Fifty', having first become acquainted with the strain in 1914, when:

> 'At the invitation of Mr Suzuki of the Yokohama Nursery Company and a foremost Japanese horticulturalist, I accompanied him on a visit to the nursery district at Hatagaya, a few miles north of Tokyo. There, in the garden of Mr Oishi, I saw thousands of tiny plants bearing white and coloured flowers of nearly every hue. Later, in 1916, at my suggestion, Mr John S. Ames, of North Easton, Massachusetts, purchased a selection of living plants from Mr Oishi's collection. These arrived in the spring of 1917 and were the first Kurume Azaleas introduced into eastern North America'.

The two duplicate sets of cultivars that made up 'Wilson's Fifty' safely reached his sponsors at Boston's Arnold Arboretum in 1919, where they were swiftly propagated and distributed far and wide, including to the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, and several other private gardens on this side of the Atlantic. As previously detailed, another sixty cultivars were later imported into America by Rolla Kent Beattie of the USDA during 1929, forty-nine of which were new clones, eleven, duplicated hybrids that had already been acquired by Wilson or the Domoto Brothers. And again, in England, John Barr Stevenson and his wife Roza had sourced a similar number of plants in the early 1930s, these purchased direct from the Yokohama Nurseries, as well as from Lionel de Rothschild's Japanese contact, Koichiro Wada, of the Hakoneya Nursery. Which meant that the specialist rhododendron establishments of Europe, America and the United Kingdom, plus any number of amateur hybridisers, had a horde of cultivars to cross-pollinate when attempting to improve the strain for their own unique set of growing conditions.

The popularity of the Kurume Azaleas however, especially in America, came at a price: the loss of the original cultivar names when they were exchanged for English sound-bite epithets that were not translations of the original appellations, but merely gimmicky aids to assist the marketing campaigns: 'Cherryblossom' apparently easier to sell than 'Takasago', and 'Peach Blossom' better than 'Saotome'. To highlight just two examples from what is a very long list.

And of course, inevitably, the records detailing each of those substitutions were soon consigned to the trash bin, leaving only their crass replacements - at least, for most of the surrogate listings that were proposed by Henry Dreer and adopted wholesale by the Domotos, Bobbink, and Cottage Gardens.

Another observation Wilson made in Japan, was also included in his *Monograph:*

> ‘The fame of the Kurume Azaleas has reached Osaka, Tokyo and other places, and growers have obtained stocks and are propagating them apace. Unfortunately, every grower and enthusiast names the plants according to his own fancy and the result in a few years will be chaos’.

Yet he too renamed his collection, dropping the Japanese epithets. And in doing so, duplicated the exact kind of chaos he had described.

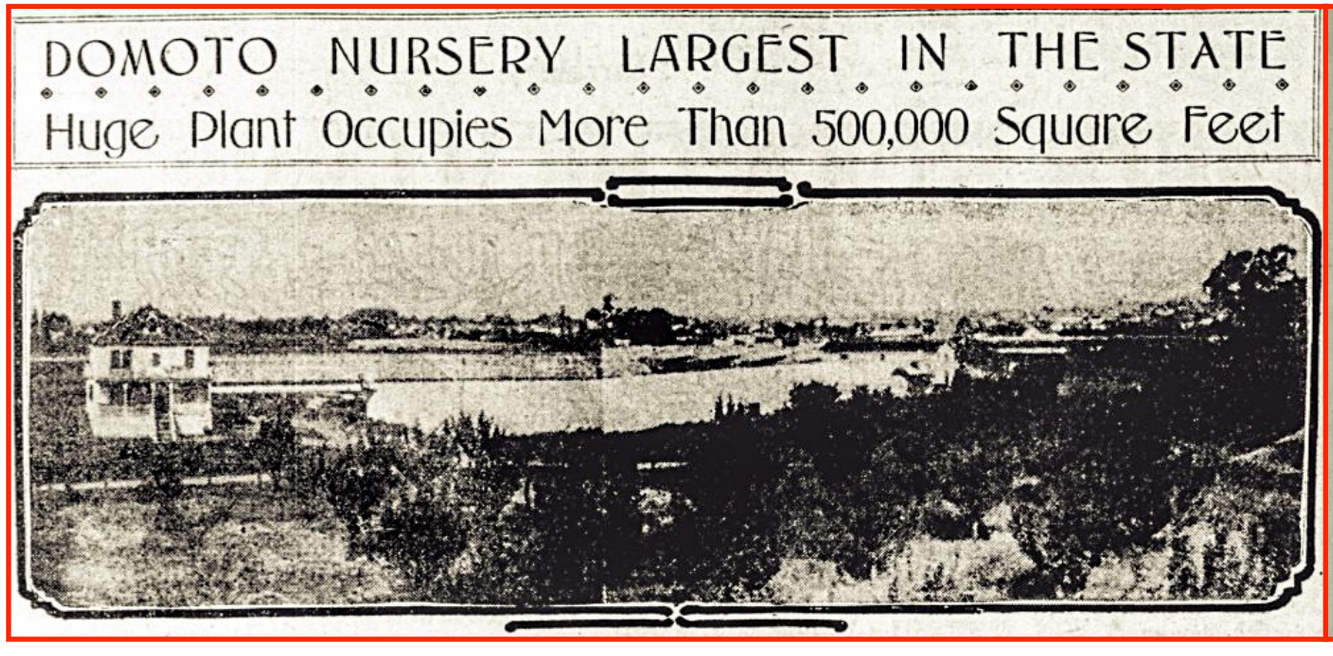
For ‘Kirin’ became Wilson’s ‘Daybreak’, which was ‘Coral Bells’ for the Domotos; and ‘Tsuta-momiji’ was transformed into ‘Cardinal’ and ‘Orange Beauty’; while ‘Ima-shojo’ changed overnight into ‘Fascination’ or ‘Christmas Cheer’. Pity then the poor consumer, who of course, had no idea that two beautiful azaleas in the same nursery plant racks - each with a different name - were in fact one and the same. Yet what may come as a greater surprise, is that in British gardens today, as well as those in America and elsewhere, it is doubtful if a complete and documented collection encompassing all fifty of Ernest Wilson’s introductions still exist, especially as many of the individual cultivars are no longer commercially grown and widespread mislabelling has taken a toll.

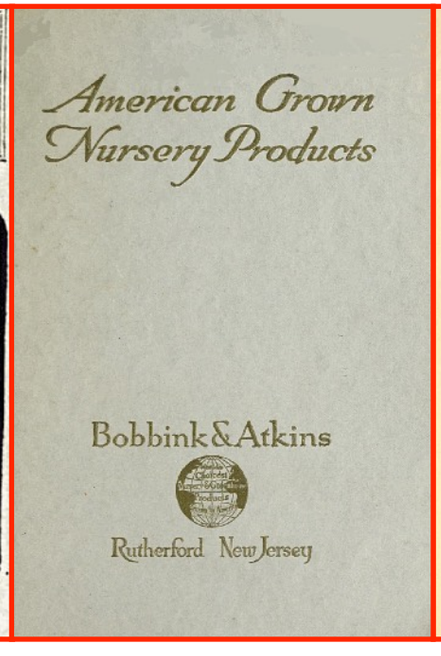
The gardening staff at the Isabella Plantation in London’s Richmond Park found this out to their cost when attempting to establish a National Collection of ‘Wilson’s Fifty’ in the early 1990s, as not only were the plants supplied to them by the specialist nurseries mislabelled, the majority of specimens in established collections - those at Exbury Gardens, the Valley and Savill Gardens at Windsor, and the RHS’s flagship establishment at Wisley, for instance - were either unlabelled or wrongly labelled.

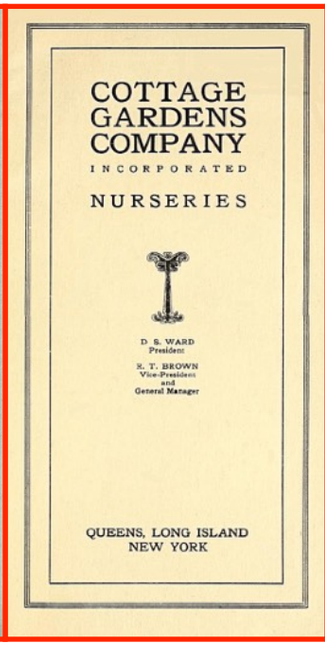
The Isabella Plantation’s 2012 *Habitat and Health of Plants Survey* records that John Bond, the curator of the Savill and Valley Gardens in the 1980s, had supplied material to Richmond from plants at Windsor that had originally come from Glasnevin, the National Botanic Garden of Ireland. It was just that the rooted cuttings, the mature shrubs in the Great Park, and the primary Irish scion donors, on critical examination, were found not to be what was stated on their labels. Moreover, even the Arnold Arboretum did not have a complete collection and wider enquiries determined that true examples of most of the fifty were likely lost to cultivation in the US and the UK. But fortunately, help may be at hand, for even though the only way to conclusively prove the identity of the unlabelled cultivars that remain in UK gardens and elsewhere requires gene sequence matching to be undertaken for each clone, which despite the spectacular scientific advances and order of magnitude reductions in the costs associated with carrying out such work is a la-la land project if ever there was one, it is in fact, exactly what is being undertaken by members of the Life and Environmental Sciences Faculty of the Shimane University of Japan, led by Professor Nobuo Kobayashi (no relation to the lawyer employed by Keyser Söze).

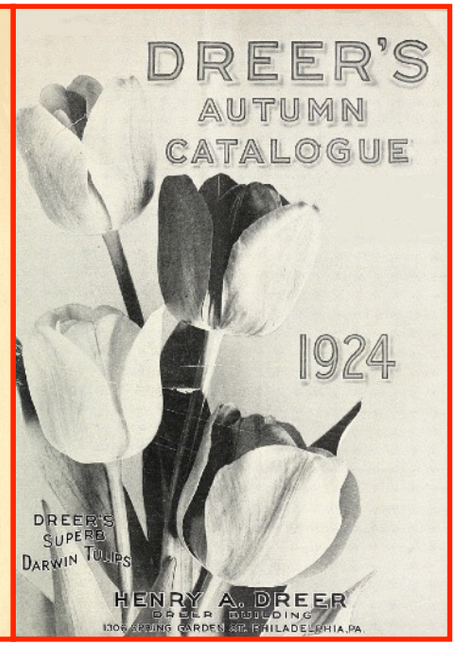
UK, Belgian and Italian partner organisations are assisting by providing Dr Kobayashi with samples of all the Japanese evergreen azalea cultivars introduced into their countries and the DNA of these will be analysed using a technique known as SSR - Simple Sequence Repeat - though their morphological characteristics such as corolla form and colour, the configuration of the stamens, stigma and style, the leaf’s shape, hairs and pubescence, will also be examined and used to narrow-down the possibilities. SSR sequencing relies on the fact that along the length of each strand of DNA are areas where a small part of the code, between 1 and 6 base pairs, is repeated from 5 to 50 times. These regions are known as ‘microsatellites’ and they have been used by geneticists for DNA profiling in cancer diagnosis, by forensic scientists at crime scenes to identify the perpetrators, and in paternity testing. The Shimane Azalea Project will compare the European specimens with cultivars that are still grown in Japan today, and if they match, hopefully ‘Wilson’s Fifty’ will be reconstituted, though whether Bryan Singer will turn the venture into a major Hollywood movie is, at the time of writing, still in the balance.

At their peak of popularity, some 700 Kurume hybrid cultivars existed and although that number today has dropped to around 300, as Ernest Wilson wrote over a century age, they are still ‘the loveliest of all Azaleas, their colours so pure and exquisite, of every hue and shade from white, pink and salmon to scarlet, crimson and the richest magenta’.











R. ‘Addy Wery’



R. ‘Adonis’



R. ‘Amoenum’



R. ‘Amoenum’



R. ‘Asahiryn’



R. ‘Aya-kanmuri’



R. ‘Azuma-kagami’

R. ‘Banzai’



R. ‘Beni-fude’



R. ‘Blaauw’s Pink’



R. ‘Esmeralda’



R. ‘Eureka’



R. ‘Hana-asobi’



R. ‘Hatsu-giri’





R. ‘Hatsu-giri’

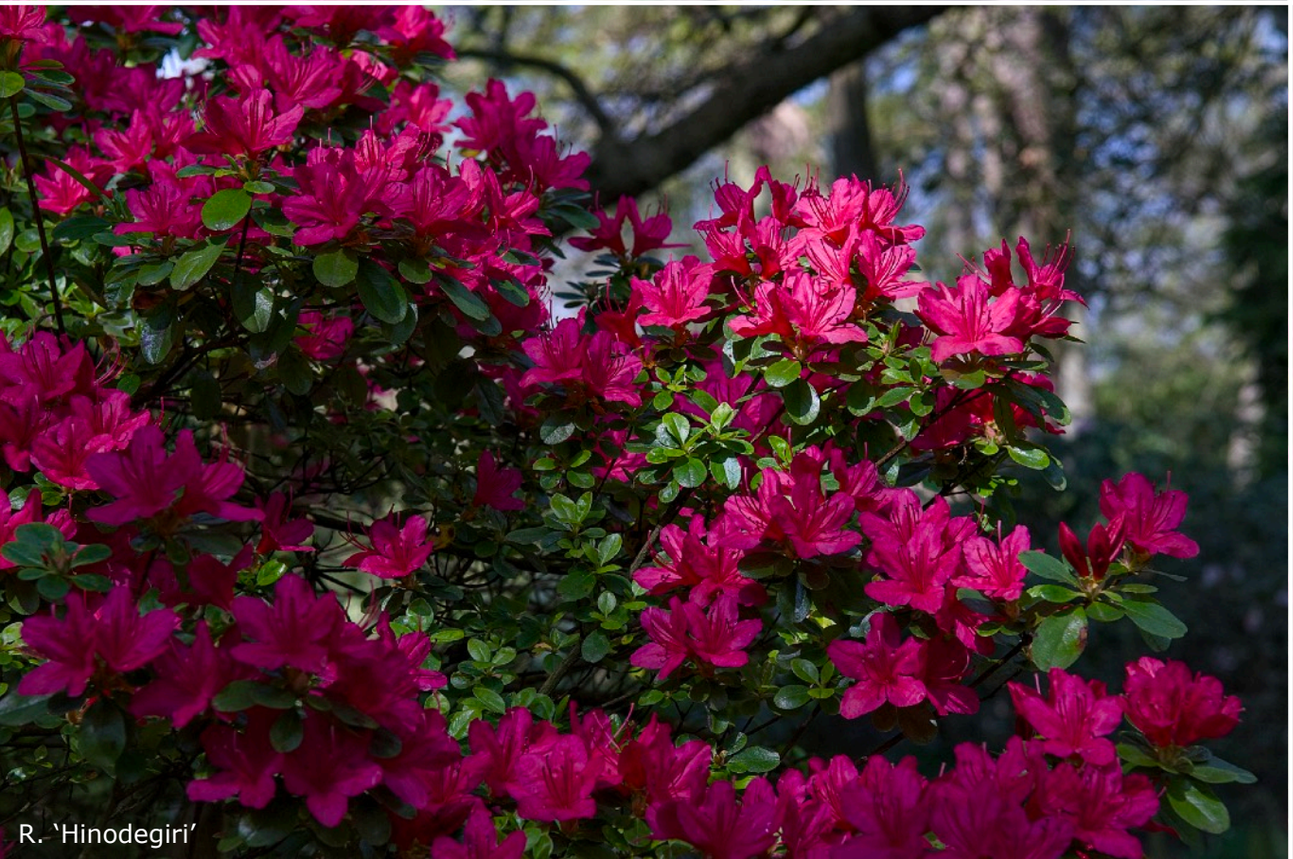
R. ‘Hatsu-giri’



R. ‘Hikkasen’



R. ‘Hino-crimson’



R. ‘Hinodegiri’



R. ‘Hinode-no-taka’

R. ‘Hinomayo’

R. ‘Hinomayo’

R. ‘Hinomayo’

R. ‘Ima-shojo’

R. ‘Ima-zuma’

R. ‘Iwatokagami’



R. ‘Kirin’

R. ‘Kojo-no-odorikaraka’

R. ‘Kiritsubo’

R. ‘Kokinran’

R. ‘Malvaticum’

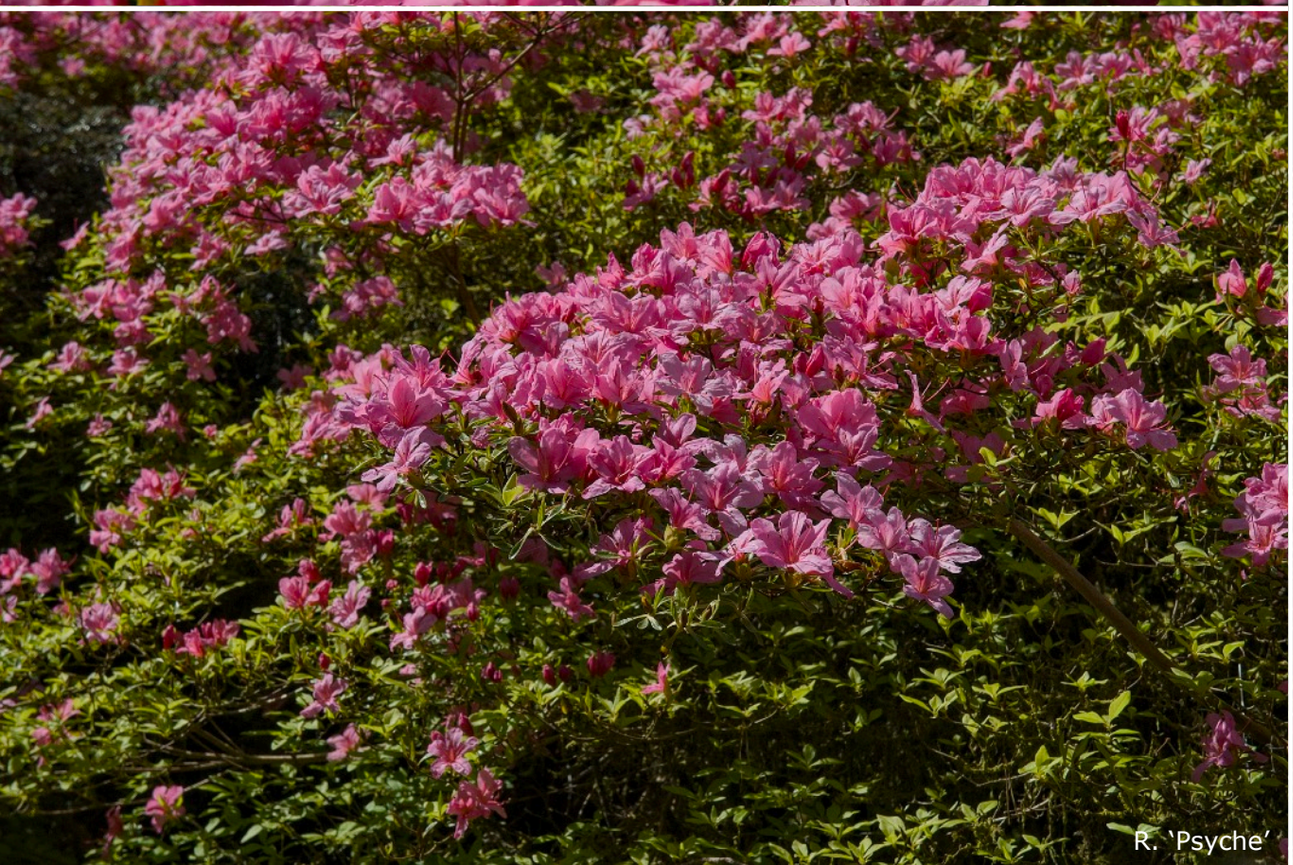

R. ‘Mother’s Day’


R. ‘Mother’s Day’


R. ‘Mother’s Day’



R. ‘Psyche’



R. ‘Psyche’





R. ‘Psyche’

R. ‘Rankyoken’

R. 'Rankyoken'



R. ‘Rashomon’



R. ‘Salmon Beauty’



R. ‘Seikai’

R. ‘Takasago’

R. ‘Vida Brown’

R. ‘Yoro-zuyo’

The Satsuki Azalea Strain

Roses have long claimed the top spot at English horticultural shows: beloved, revered, the competition amongst gardeners to win prizes at competitions cut-throat and the array of available cultivars almost overwhelming, at least to the uninitiated. In Japan, that zenith is occupied by the Satsuki Strain hybrids and the annual exhibitions held in early June at Utsunomiya - near Nikkō, to the north of Tokyo - are in a whole different league to even RHS-organised events. For the Japanese are far more fanatical about their hobbies than the British, plus the azaleas are amazingly long-lived, they can be grown as Bonsai, and these can easily be transported to the shows in their shallow containers. Which means many of the prize-winning showstoppers on display are not simply hundred-year-old centenarians, but sesquicentenarians, bicentenarians or even tricentenarians. And quickly sensing a fine entrepreneurial opportunity, big business has moved in wholesale, the commercialisation rampart, with a 150-page, full colour monthly magazine devoted entirely to the strain, just one aspect of the obsession.

On the other side of the world, in America, and to a lesser extent in the UK - because of hardiness issues - the Satsuki Azaleas are generally regarded as garden shrubs, no different from the Kaempferi or Kurume Strain hybrids, just later flowering. So despite the Japanese craze for artificially dwarfing ornamental plants that is currently taking root in the West, it has yet to become the central focus of gardening life. At least, not as far as the evergreen azaleas are concerned. Or indeed, Genus *Rhododendron* as a whole.

The Japanese people began their infatuation with evergreen azaleas in the 1600s at the time of the Tokugawa Shogunate - read the 1975 novel by James Clavell; see the Toshiro Mifune and Richard Chamberlain-starring 1980 TV miniseries based on the book; or even the 2024 remake - with the first text on the subject - the azaleas! - written by the garden artist Motokatsu Mizuno and titled *Kadan Kōmoku*. In English, this translates as *An Outline of Flower Gardens,* and its three volumes were published in Kyōto during 1681, though they had actually been written in 1661. Some 147 indigenous azalea cultivars are listed, though only four or five of these are known Satsuki hybrids, with one quote from the manuscript quaintly delineating the transfixion:

> 'The rage these days is for various kinds of azalea, which are in vogue among all classes of society. Even the poorest people do not consider themselves human unless they have one or the other, even if they have to grow it in an abalone shell'.

And there you have it.

Scroll forward just thirty years from when Mizuno's pen was put to parchment and that handful of crosses had become a literal hoard, as reported in Ihei Ito's five-volume, woodblock-illustrated monograph *Kinshu Makura*. This hit the bookshelves in 1692 and amongst the 337 clones described in the text, some 162 are members of the Satsuki Strain. Far more importantly however, it was Ito who first formally divided the Japanese evergreen azaleas into two groups: the Tsutsuji - pronounced 'suit-suit-gee' - which flower around thirty days after the spring equinox and include the Kaempferi and Kurume Strain hybrids; and the Satsuki - pronounced 'sat-ski' by most Japanese, with the 'u' silent, though 'sat-su-ki' is also correct - these flowering around sixty days after the vernal. And this distinction, as reported previously, is still maintained in Japan today. Because 'Satsuki' actually means 'Fifth Month' on the old Japanese lunar calendar, indicating that most members of the strain flower from mid-May through mid-June.

As with the Kurume hybrids, the exact origin of the Satsuki Azaleas is lost in the mists of time, with the parentage of all the older clones a complete enigma, though most are believed to have initially been derived from *R. indicum* x *R. eriocarpum* pairings.

R. indicum is widely distributed across the west and the south of Honshu, Japan's main island, as well as on the smaller home islands of Kyushu and Shikoku, with the species also found on many of the rocky islets of the Ryukyu Islands, these forming the archipelago chain that heads south towards Taiwan. The shrub is known in Japan as Kawa satsuki - the river satsuki - and that moniker makes clear its preferred environmental niche: pockets of soil collected in the hollows and crevices between boulders, found on the steep slopes that parallel deep river gorges. Earlier field reporting had suggested that the species was a feature of open alpine meadows, but this is now known not to be the case. The scarlet through rosy-red corolla colour is consistent across the range.

R. eriocarpum, known to the Japanese as Maruba satsuki - the round-leaved satsuki - may once have grown on the lower slopes of the mountainous southern flank of Kyushu, as historical records report its possible presence there during the 1800s. Today however, it has a much more southerly and restricted distribution, being found only on the string of islands to the south, including Kuchinoerabu-jima, Tanegashima and Yakushima, of the Ōsumi group, which lie closest to Kyushu (see the map opposite). The species also favours much lower altitudes than *R. indicum,* with prostrate specimens being found amongst rocks just above the beaches of Nagata, on Yakushima's northwest coast, for instance. Note too that these zones are frost-free all year round, with a near subtropical climate. Here, the plants grow in a shallow, gravelly soil, often in fissures between sloping granite slabs, so cope with a daily grilling from the sun and a near constant battering from onshore winds, this breeze hot and humid, the latter a likely saving grace.

Across their endemic range, the distributions of *R. eriocarpum* and *R. indicum* may appear to overlap, but altitude preferences usually keep the two species apart - except on just one of the Ōsumi Islands: the UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site of Yakushima. Here they meet and grow alongside each other. And as night follows day, it is here where natural hybrids between the two rhododendrons occur, these swarms located near Nagata Beach on the northwestern coast, Isso Beach, on the northern tip of the island, and at locales close to Anbo Port, midway down the eastern flank. Field reporting has confirmed that the flowers of these hybrids exhibit similar corolla colours to those displayed by the Satsuki Strain hybrids, but you will have to visit the gardens of the local farmers to see them, because of course, those specimens with the most eye-catching blooms were long ago dug up and replanted - avec or sans any abalone shells - while many others were spirited-away to home island nurseries.

Extensive fieldwork carried out in the late 1970s by Barry Yinger, who was then the Assistant Curator of the Chollipo Arboretum - located in South Korea's South Chungcheong Province - offers further detail on the undirected get-together:

> 'The island of Yakushima is dominated, or perhaps overwhelmed, by Miyanoura-dake, at 1,935m the highest peak in southern Japan. Temperatures range from subtropical at sea level to cold temperate at mountaintop, with very strong winds at high altitude. The rainfall is very heavy, averaging 4m per year at sea level, and as much as 10m per year at high altitudes. Most of this great volume of rainwater plunges down the steep mountainsides, excavating gorges cluttered with boulders larger than houses, around and over which race streams of pure cold water. *R. indicum* typically inhabits crevices in these boulders, and creeps here and there among the shattered rocks of the walls of the gorges, forming dense neat mats of shiny dark green foliage starred with flowers of that uniformly uncertain colour between orange and rose from May throughout summer.
>
> It is not until we follow the river to sea level that the action begins. Here the populations of *R. indicum* encounter the populations of *R. eriocarpum*. It has been noted that this species forms thickets on sandy beaches on Yakushima but there were



Southern Japan and the Ōsumi Islands
- inset -
NASA Landsat photograph of Yakushima Island
(taken on May 25th, 2002)

- The Japanese Home Islands -
Kyushu (K)
Shikoku (S)
Honshu (H)

- The Ōsumi Islands -
Kuchinoerabu-jima (KJ)
Yakushima (Y)
Tanegashima (T)

Locations of the *R. indicum* x *R. eriocarpum*
natural hybrid swarms on Yakushima Island.
Nagata Beach (NB)
Isso Beach (IB)
Anbo Port (AP)

no beaches at any of the sites I visited. Here at the mouth of Hana-age-gawa it clung to rocky buffs facing the Pacific, apparently oblivious of salt and wind, forming thickets with *Pittosporum tobira, Raphiolepis umbellata, Pinus thunbergii* and *Eurya emarginata*. The leaves were round, or at least oval, and very hairy. The flowers, which opened somewhat flatter than those of *R. indicum,* were blooming in white and various shades of pink, mostly pale shades.

Where *R. indicum* and *R. eriocarpum* do meet and mingle, the hybrid progeny take on an astonishing range of flower colour and form, including most of the colours found among the Satsuki hybrids. Most common were white, various pinks, and soft oranges, plus some very hard pinks with a lot of orange mixed in. The most interesting of the natural hybrids are no more to be seen in the wild: most of them have been dug and moved to the gardens of local farmers who cultivate the scraps of somewhat level land between the mountains and the ocean, and it is in these gardens that we can fully appreciate the potential of the mingling of the two species. Some gardens contain plants that are evidently quite old, two or three metres tall and as broad. It would be worthwhile to mount an expedition to Yakushima to collect as many of these variants as possible and preserve them for study and evaluation. Most of them will eventually be lost otherwise, as Yakushima becomes more a haven for tourists, and the little land near the ocean endures development.

I believe that *R. eriocarpum* has made a significant contribution to the Satsuki hybrids by stimulating a wide colour range and, to a lesser extent, a range of flower form. I also believe that the characteristic of variegated flowers, which is by no means spread evenly throughout the hybrid group, could well have come from another source, perhaps the 'Vittatum' form of *R. simsii*. I suspect that thorough exploration of gardens in Yakushima will find old plants of *R. indicum* and *R. eriocarpum* growing side by side with other species such as *R. simsii* and *R. x mucronatum*.'

Barry Yinger, *The Origin of Satsukis: The Yakushima Connection*.
The Azalean, Volume 3, Number 3, July 1981.

The 1997 edition of *Satsuki Daijiten* - the Satsuki Dictionary - lists and describes no fewer than 1,012 individual cultivars. These can be gathered together into smaller groups for identification purposes thanks to each and every Japanese Satsuki enthusiast's basic love of complexity and minutiae. Thus, eighteen common flower forms are recognised, along with more than twenty-six colour patterns:

- pages 212 & 213 -
The eighteen Satsuki flower form descriptions and diagrams shown opposite were included in an article
The Changing Fashion of Satsuki,
written by Jim Trumbly and published in *The Azalean,* Volume 23, Number 2, 2001.

- overleaf pages 214-217 -
The pattern descriptions featured on these four pages were first published in the book
Satsuki Taikan, written by H. & M. Suzuki, in 1972.
A translation of the descriptions by Charles and Sheba Hiers was first published in *Azaleas,* by Fred Galle, in 1987.
The accompanying corolla photographs are reproduced from the book
Floral Treasures of Japan: The Satsuki Azaleas,
which was written by Alexander Kennedy, and published in 1997,
although regrettably, there were no matching images for the
Shibori-sokojiro, Tsuma-jiro, Tobiiri-shibori, Sarasa-shibori and Kanoko-shibori forms.



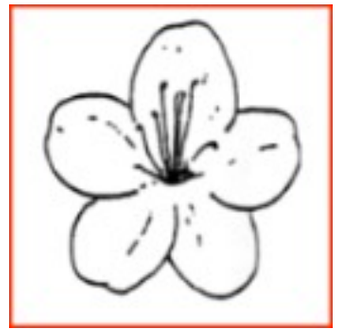
Choji saki
- T-shaped bloom -
A mixture of stamens and petaloid stamens;
semi-double.



Fukakire saki
- deeply cut bloom -
The lobe margins irregularly sinuate.



Futae saki
- layered bloom -
Also known as the Kasane bloom;
hose-in-hose.



Futu saki
- ordinary, average bloom -
Five lobes and five stamens;
single.



Hakama saki
- skirt-bloom, formal male bloom -
The same as the Koshima bloom, except the margin of
the skirt is not irregular.



Hataben saki
- flag bloom -
Small lobe-like flags replace the anthers at the
end of the stamen filaments.



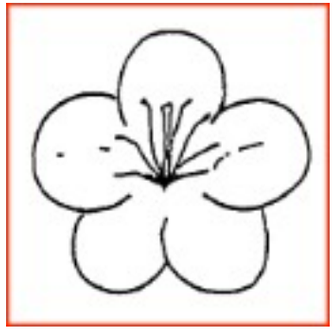
Kenben saki
- sword-shaped bloom -
The tips of the lobes are pointed.



Kikyo saki
- trumpet-shaped bloom -
Deep, tubular flowers, nearly always small.



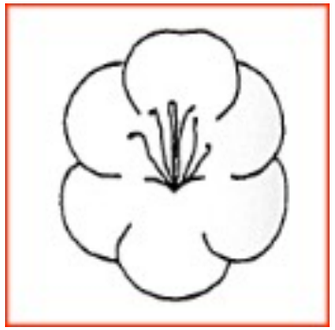
Kire saki
- deeply cut bloom -
Lobes cut almost to the base, with no overlap,
broader than in the Sai bloom.



Korin saki
- elegant, rounded bloom -
Well-formed lobes, neatly shaped flowers.



Koshima saki
- skirt bloom / farmer’s grass skirt bloom -
Has a partially developed, irregularly shaped lobe-like
structure between the calyx and the corolla;
a less developed form of hose-in-hose.



Kuruma saki
- wheel-shaped bloom -
Quite shallow, flat from the bottom,
the lobes overlapping.



Manju saki
- 10,000 layers bloom -
A more pronounced stage of the Yae bloom;
double hose-in-hose.



Namiuchi saki
- wave bloom -
Lobes wavy or with frilly edges, a distinction is often
made between large and small waves.



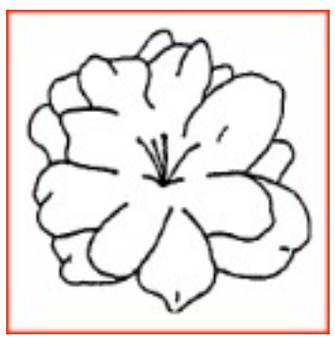
Sai saki
- tassel bloom -
Lobes divided into narrow strips,
much narrower than in the Kire bloom.



Shibe saki
- degenerate lobed bloom -
The lobes have become filamentous,
like the stamens.



Shishi saki
- lion bloom / lion’s mane bloom -
The lobe margins are irregularly shaped.



Yae saki
- eight-layer bloom -
Stamens transformed into lobes that overlap
each other; semi-double hose-in-hose.

Satsuki Corolla Patterns

- solid base or ground colours -

Shiro-muji



- base colour white -
Solid white,
with or without green mottling in the centre.

Aka-muji



- base colour red -
Solid red or purple,
with or without red mottling in the centre.

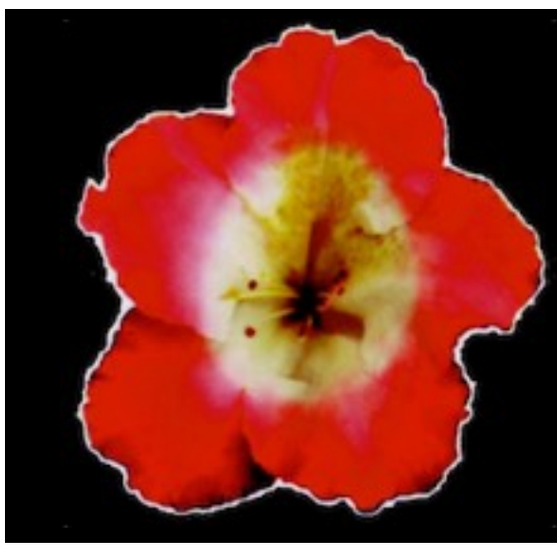
Jiai-zaki



- base colour pink -
Pink is regarded as a combination colour from two base colours,
red and white.

- colour ring variegation -

Soko-jiro



- white throat -
White spreading evenly from the centre of the corolla, surrounded by a continuous border of a darker, solid colour, the effect often described as ‘picotee’.

Shiro-fukurin



- white jewel-border -
The reverse of sokojiro, with the darker colour (fukurin) in the centre and the lobes bordered in white, this margin either narrow or wide.

Shibori-sokojiro

- variegated sokojiro -
Flowers are a mixture of sokojiro with variegations, usually with the variegation subordinate to the sokojiro.

Janome-shibori



- bulls eye variegation -
A sokojiro flower with shirofukurin and variegations superimposed.

- dabs and dubs -

Shiro-tamafu



- white jewel spot -
A lighter smudge of colour in the centre of the lobes. When it becomes larger, it is known as ‘O-tamafu’.

Tsuma-jiro



- white fingernail -
The white margin occurs only at the lobe tips. It is the opposite of ‘Tsumabeni’.

- stripes and sectors -

Tsuma-beni



- crimson fingernail -
The white centre has expanded to cover all but the lobe tips. It is the opposite of ‘Tsumajiro’.

O-shibori



- major variegation/sector -
One lobe or as much as half the lobe coloured.

Ko-shibori



- minor variegation/sector -
Corolla is sharply divided from the edge of the lobe to the centre by a line of colour, this covering less than half of the lobe. Two half-coloured lobes side by side are still regarded as ‘Koshibori’.

Daisho-shibori



- major and minor variegations -
When both ‘Oshibori’ and ‘Koshibori’ occur on the same lobe.

Date-shibori



- showy variegation -
White crowded with variegations of colour, uniform outline extending from the edge of the lobes to the base.

Tate-shibori



- lengthwise variegation -
Similar to ‘Date shibori’, but variegation is narrow and does not extend along the length of the corolla.
The two types often combine.

Shiro-shibori



- white variegation -
White variegation on an otherwise red or purple corolla.

- speckles and sprays -

Fukiage-shibori



- fountain variegation -
Fine sprays and streaks of colour extending in a feathery pattern from the centre of the lobe toward the edge (like spray from a fountain). The definite spray pattern is heaviest along the centre line of the lobe.

Fukkake-shibori



- spray variegation -
A fine spray of many streaks originating at the edges, trending toward the centre of the lobe.
Colour heaviest near the edges, especially the apices.

Arare-shibori



- hail variegation -
Innumerable large specks and streaks all over the lobes.
Larger streak size, of even distribution, and no long lines.

Mijin-shibori



- fine particle variegation -
A heavy fog of countless, extremely small particles of colour all over the lobes, heavy enough to give the corolla a decided pink cast or entirely colouring it.

Hakeme-shibori



- parallel line variegation -
The corolla is covered in numerous, fine parallel lines.

Tobiiri-shibori

- patchy variegation -
Irregular, large and small splashes of colour, here and there on the corolla.

Haru-same



- spring rain variegation -
Numerous dots and very small lines over all the lobes.

Sarasa-shibori

- fine and thick parallel line variegation -
The lobes are covered with fine parallel lines interspersed with a few thicker lines.

Hanzome-shibori



- half-coloured -
When half or more of the corolla is a solid red/purple, the other segment white.

Kanoko-shibori

- lily or deer spot variegation -
The lobe markings resemble a lily, or the flecks on the back of a fawn.

If the pattern descriptions above have generated nothing but confusion, you will be delighted to know that not only can multiple patterns occur on the same plant, they can even arise on the same corolla. And as your shrub ages, so a greater and greater number of sporting branches are produced. Which means that a juvenile pure white-flowering cultivar has the potential to produce sokojiro and fukurin blooms as it matures, and these branches never revert. So in time, only blooms with a red base colour may appear each spring. Ken Cox eloquently sums up the situation in his 2005-published appraisal of the genus, *Rhododendrons and Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* remarking that:

> 'Many have different colours of flower on one plant, dots, spots, rings and other effects. This makes naming some of them a nightmare - and a bit meaningless, as you never know what colour you'll get next'.

Historically, and despite some plants apparently being introduced into Europe by the Dutch in the 1830s, the Satsuki azaleas were basically unknown in the West prior to the early 1900s, when a handful of cultivars were introduced into America from Japan. Even more astounding is the dearth of information on the strain within the 1921-published *A Monograph of Azaleas,* by Ernest Wilson and Alfred Rehder, this especially mystifying as the plant-hunting member of the team had visited Japan twice - in 1914-1915, and again in 1917-1919 - specifically to search out azaleas. And although those explorations took Wilson onto Yakushima Island where, despite finding *R. indicum* and elaborately reporting that 'its native name is "Satsuki-tsutsuji", that is Fifth-month Azalea, from the fact that it blossoms in June, which is the fifth month of the year reckoning by the old Chinese calendar', he makes no mention at all of the hybrid strain that at that time must have topped several hundred members, with no shortage of plants in bloom for him to encounter. Oh, and as well, during the course of those investigational botanic meanderings on the island, he also missed a certain *R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum*. Oops.

So it was not until the late 1930s when the first major introductions of the strain were made into the United States, Ben Morrison at the USDA's Glenn Dale Plant Introduction Station, sourcing around fifty clones from the English-language catalogue of the now-defunct Chugai Nursery in Kobe for his own evergreen azalea breeding programme. Initially called the Chugai Hybrids, these were all propagated and distributed to the Station's co-operating public gardens and nursery firms in the late 1940s.

The publication of the first edition of Frederick Lee's *The Azalea Book* in 1958 was the moment that this group were recognized by Western horticulturalists as Satsuki Hybrids, with the 1965 second edition expanding its coverage of the strain. Then, following an increase in their popularity as landscape plants, as well as for Bonsai, over the next decade, Barry Yinger was sponsored to select a far larger collection of cultivars for import into the USA. Some 387 clones were eventually imported as cuttings from Japan in 1978 and 1979, with these distributed by the Azalea Society of America to its commercial nursery firm members.

Regrettably, very few Satsuki azaleas are currently grown outdoors in British gardens compared with their Kurume and Kaempferi cousins and only in recently published texts will members of the strain be found described under their true identity. Frederick Street's 1959 *Azaleas,* for instance, fails to mention the word 'Satsuki' even once, though a few clones are inadvertently misfiled in the text under the *R. indicum* banner. Members of the strain are generally less hardy than the Kurumes and require prolonged high summer temperatures to ripen the new wood pre the first frosts of autumn, making them a no-no in the northern counties of England and in Scotland, unless grown in containers, which can be moved indoors immediately prior to Jack's arrival.



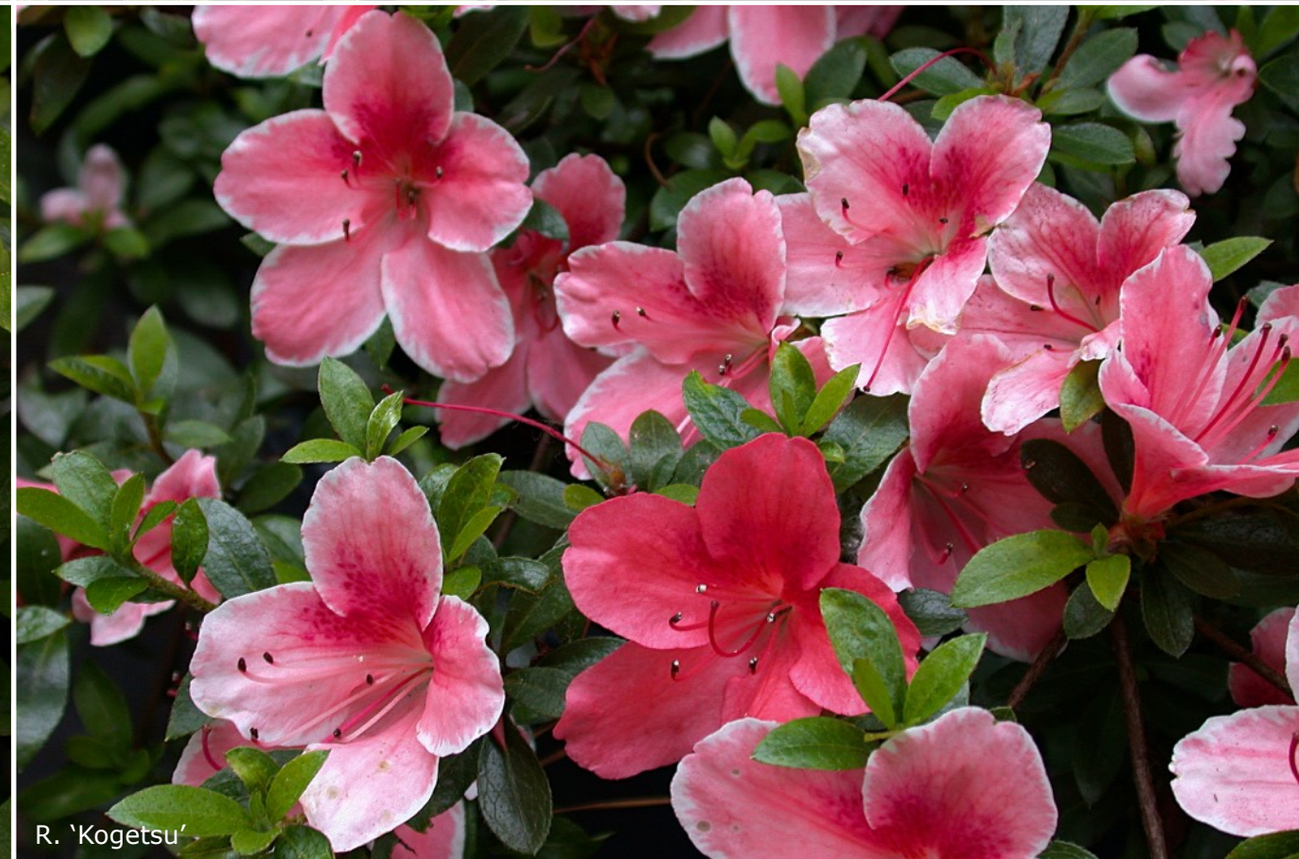
R. 'Aizen-no-tsuki'

R. ‘Gosho-zakura’


R. ‘Gumpo Fancy’

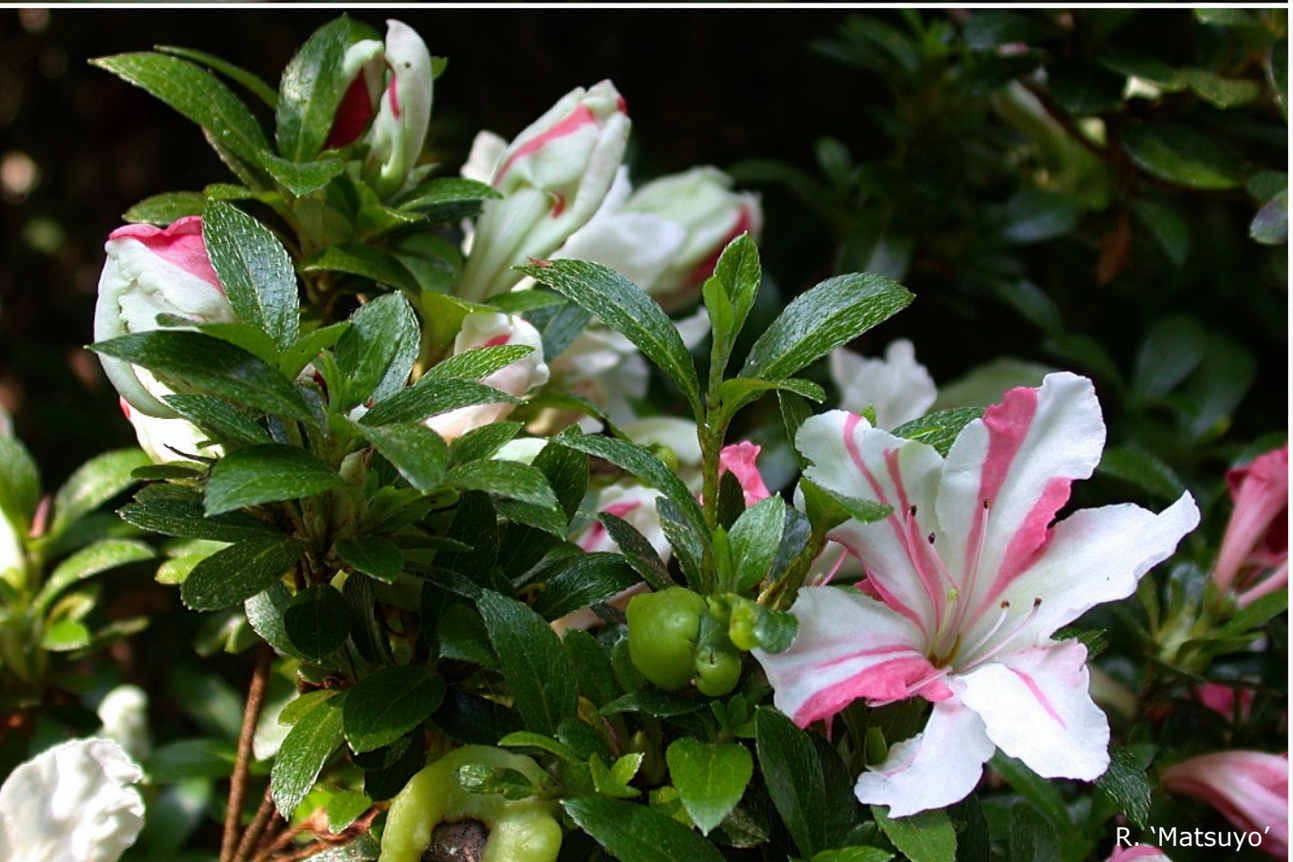

R. ‘Gumpo Pink’


R. ‘Gumpo White’


R. ‘Kogetsu’


R. ‘Matsuyo’


R. ‘Matsuyo’


R. ‘Matsuyo’


R. ‘Matsuyo’

R. ‘Midori-no-tsuki’

R. ‘Midori-no-tsuki’

R. ‘Midori-no-tsuki’

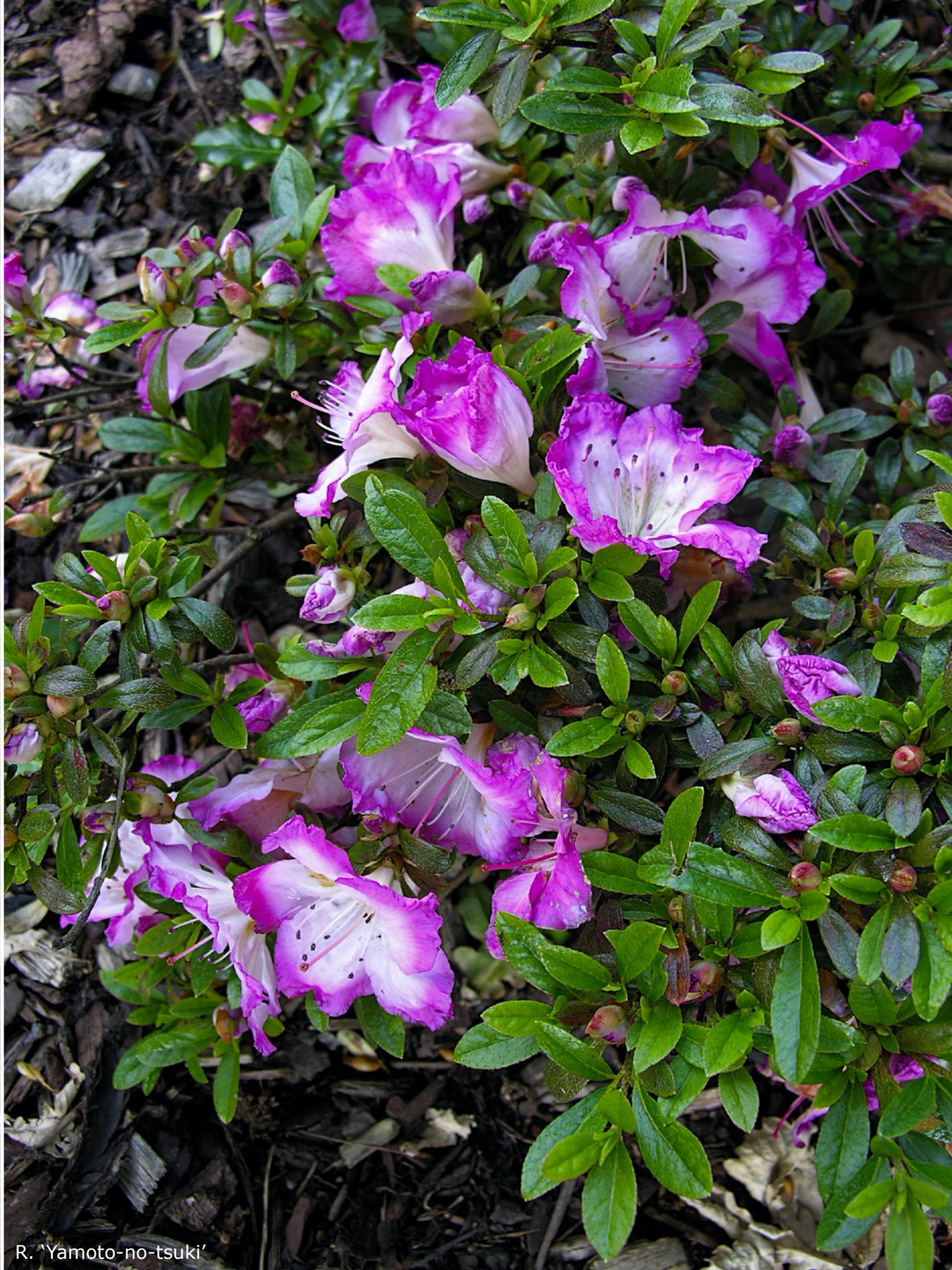
R. ‘Shinnyo-no-hikari’



R. ‘Shiryu-no-homare’

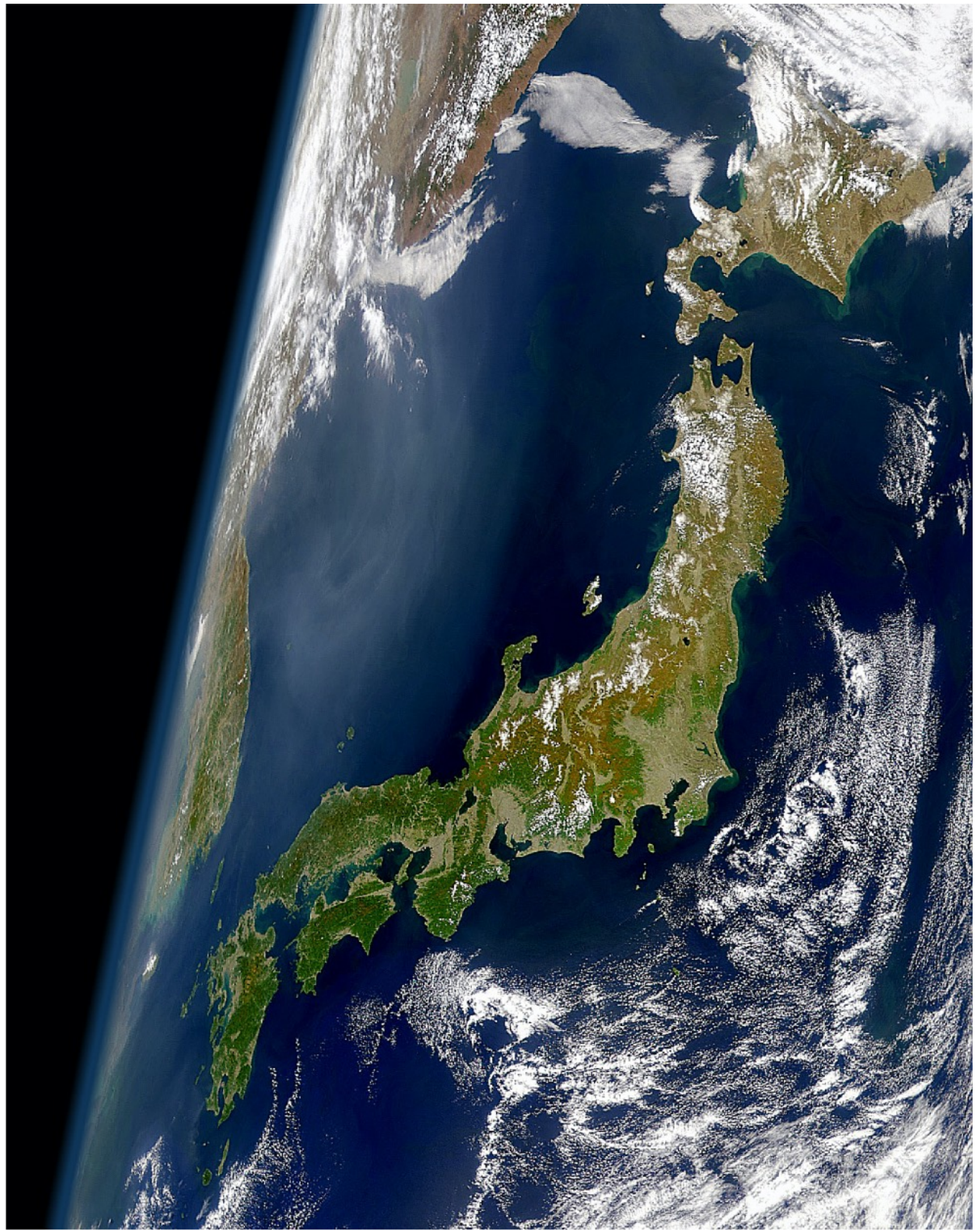


R. ‘Yaye’



R. ‘Yamoto-no-tsuki’

The Kaempferi Azalea Strain



Notwithstanding the genetic contribution *R. kaempferi* made to the Kurume Azalea Strain, the Japanese endemic has also been used to create its own race of cultivars by European and American hybridisers.

The species was first documented in *Amonenitatum Exoticarum,* a Latin text written by the German naturalist and physician Engelbert Kaempfer in 1712. At the age of thirty-two, the good doctor had set out on a ten-year working tour of the Near and Far East, which prior to his arrival in Japan during September 1690, had taken him to Russia, Persia, Arabia, India, Java and Siam. Outwardly, at the Dejima trading post in Nagasaki - at least, as far as the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie were concerned (the Dutch East India Company) - he was employed as their chief surgeon, but in reality, he was also a spy, tasked by the Governor General of Batavia, Johannes Camphuys, to amass as much up-to-date intelligence on all things Japanese as possible, not only from his contacts with local dignitaries, but most especially when assigned to the official entourage on diplomatic trips across the Kanmon Straits to Honshu, Japan's main island. Two of these excursions clocked up durations of over three-months and they both included an audience with the Shogun, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, at Edo (Tokyo's historical name).

Kaempfer's illustrated account of these travels - *The History of Japan,* published in three-volumes - had been translated from German into English as early as 1727 and the observations he made, along with the maps of the interior he drew, remained relevant for the next 150 years. The scope of his assignment moreover, also included a directive to secure specimens of any plants he encountered that were new to Dutch science. And as *Amonenitatum Exoticarum* details, he more than succeeded in this task, for in addition to *R. kaempferi* and several other azaleas, his 'finds' encompassed a host of then unknown maples, bamboos and pines, along with the Maidenhair Tree - *Ginkgo biloba* - probably his most outstanding contribution to Western horticulture. Visitors to the botanical garden at Utrecht in the Netherlands can admire a now three-hundred-year-old specimen of this last extant species of the gymnosperm order Ginkgoales, while reading that it was grown from seed Kaempfer brought back with him when his tour concluded in October 1692.

Surprisingly perhaps, Engelbert Kaempfer was not responsible for the introduction of *R. kaempferi* into Europe at the same time, nor did he name it, that latter task falling to Jules Émile Planchon in 1854, when Volume 9 of *Flore des Serres et des Jardins de L'Europe,* was sent to the publishers. The short, thirteen line entry at the bottom of the book's seventy-seventh page, was written after viable seed or living plants had finally reached the Continent through the auspices of the VOC a few years earlier.

Across the Chanel, British gardeners had to sit on their thumbs until 1878, which was when Charles Maries, working for James Veitch & Sons of Chelsea, is believed to have introduced the species into UK cultivation following his expeditions to China, Japan and Taiwan, though the evidence for this is not conclusive and only a handful of plants may have been involved. However, seed collected in Japan by Charles Sprague Sargent in 1892 was despatched to Kew from the Arnold Arboretum in 1894.

R. kaempferi is Japan's most widespread native evergreen azalea, found on all four of the home islands, with the distribution extending from southern Hokkaido, through Honshu and Shikoku to Kyushu, and concluding on Yakushima Island, 38 miles off the Ōsumi Peninsula in the Pacific Ocean (just discernable - bottom left - in NASA's OrbView-2 satellite photo of the whole archipelago that was captured on April 30th, 1999). The species is also relatively hardy, growing at sea level all the way up to the 1,220m contour, a fact warmly welcomed by East Coast American horticulturalists when the plant flowered outdoors in Boston during 1897, and acted-on by the owners of the family-run Boskoop-based Dutch nursery firm, Koster and Co:

Sometime early on in the 20th Century's second decade, P. M. Koster had decided to pair *R. kaempferi* with a cultivar then known as 'Malvatica'. This plant had arrived at the Koster nursery in the late 1890s or soon after the significant digits of the date changed, part of a consignment despatched to the Netherlands from Japan. 'Mucronatum' was specified on the ship's manifest, but an interloper was present in the ranks: one that had rich purple-lilac flowers, not white, though they were just as large; bore foliage that was dark green and shiny, not greyish and hairy; and proved to be just as hardy outdoors as *R. kaempferi*. So a match between the two would seem fated. Predestined even.

Except other sources replace 'Mucronatum' with 'Hinodegiri' and suggest 1910 as the date of arrival. Undoubtedly, the chaos of mankind's first great war descending on Europe monkeyed-up the breeding programme, but eventually the cross was made, both ways, and the seed sown. Which was when the post-World War I recession kicked-in and most countries went into an economic slump. The Koster nursery went into liquidation.

P. M. Koster himself emigrated to America in 1921, setting up a new nursery firm in Bridgeton, New Jersey. But before embarking for the New World, he sold the flats of seedlings to four other Dutch nurseries - namely, L. J. Endtz, Hugo Hooftman, C. B. van Nes, and the long-established but totally separate Boskoop firm of M. Koster and Sons - who all made their own selections, then named, propagated and introduced those chosen hybrids. And who then - unfairly - received the kudos for breeding 'Atalanta', 'Betty', 'Carmen', 'Fedora', 'Jeanette', 'John Cairns' and a horde of others, but later, and deservedly this time, for making backcrosses with their award-winners to further develop the line.

In fact, 1921 proved a seminal year, especially for Art Vuyk of the Vuyk Van Nes Nursery - another Boskoop horticultural firm - who was busy using the deciduous azalea hybrid 'J. C. van Tol' to pollinate a *R. kaempferi* hybrid. He would later release onto the market clones such as 'Johann Strauss', 'Mozart', and the sublime 'Palestrina', although expert opinion regards these as either straight *R. kaempferi* seedlings or pairings with 'Maxwellii', for not a single trace of a Mollis Azalea can be found in their morphological countenance - so one more conundrum for future geneticists to unravel.

Hybridising with *R. kaempferi* also took off in England and America:

In the UK at Exbury, Lionel de Rothschild was using the shrub in his own breeding programme to produce some of the most outstanding cultivars ever to be added to the strain - 'Bengal Fire', 'Eddy', 'Louise' and 'Sir William Lawrence' (to highlight just four) - but a mismatch with the parentage equations later resulted in the *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* wrongly pigeonholing them into an 'Oldhamii' category within the Inter-Group Hybrids Strain. The table opposite juxtaposes the pairings that C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter N. Barber detailed in *The Rothschild Rhododendrons* - these compiled from the original Exbury stud books, plant labels in the garden, and an article Lionel himself wrote for the Rhododendron Association's 1935 Yearbook - with those in the *IRRC*.

At the same time on the other side of the pond, starting with Joseph Gable - the work then continued by Orlando Pride, Tony Shammarello and Ernest Stanton - pairings with *R. poukhanense* were all the rage, the first batch of F1 crosses including 'Kathleen', 'Louise Gable', 'Nadine' and 'Springtime' - to again just pull four from the pack - and F2 crosses such as 'Hino-red', 'Sham's Flame' and 'Wyandot', introduced later.

Today therefore, there are two branches to the Kaempferi tree: the Malvatica Hybrids, taller growing, to around 1.8 or 2.5m in height, with foliage that is often shed in the autumn (the remaining leaves turning red), these hardier and with larger flowers than those of the Kurume Strain; and the non-'Malvatica' pairings, which top-out at around 1.5m in height, are graced with somewhat more 'evergreen' leaf blades (though these still colour), often bear brighter coloured flowers in spring, and if *R. poukhanense* is part of the parental mix, are some of the hardiest evergreen azalea hybrids available on the market. Flowering time for the Malvatica introductions is just after the Kurumes, so early to mid-May; for the second branch, a touch later still.

On the subject of 'Malvatica', post-publication of the 2-volume Second Edition of the *IRRC,* rhodophiles discovered that in accordance with the Latin-form gender regulations of the International Cultivar Registration Authority, which the RHS has no choice but to comply with, the plant had officially been rebranded 'Malvaticum'. Note too that individuals in circulation today under that changed epithet are probably not a precise match with the original stowaway, as considered doyenic opinion suggests that a number of clones may in fact be doing the rounds.

Lionel de Rothschild's Evergreen Azalea Hybrids

- Epithet -	- Exbury Parentage -	- *IRRC* Parentage -
'Audrey Wynniatt'	'Bassett Wood' x *kaempferi*	'Bassett Wood' x *kaempferi*
'Bengal Fire'	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'
'Eddy'	*kaempferi* x 'Apollo'	*kaempferi* x 'Apollo'
'Imbros'	*simsii* hybrid	*simsii* hybrid
Lady Ivor Churchill'	Unknown	Unknown
'Leo'	'Malvaticum' x *kaempferi*	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'
'Louise'	*kaempferi* x unknown	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'
'Marie'	Malvaticum' x unknown	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'
'Naomi'	'Malvaticum' x *kaempferi*	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'
'Nigella'	*scabrum* 'Kanabo' x 'Louise'	*scabrum* 'Kanabo' x 'Louise'
'Nimrod'	*scabrum* 'Kanabo' x 'Louise'	*scabrum* 'Kanabo' x 'Louise'
'Pekoe'	'Malvaticum' x *kaempferi*	'Malvaticum' x *kaempferi*
'Pippa'	*kaempferi* x 'Mucronatum'	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'
'Sir William Lawrence'	'Hinodegiri' x *kaempferi*	*kaempferi* x 'Oldhamii'
'Tamarisk'	*scabrum* 'Mikado' x *kaempferi*	No entry

R. ‘Atalanta’

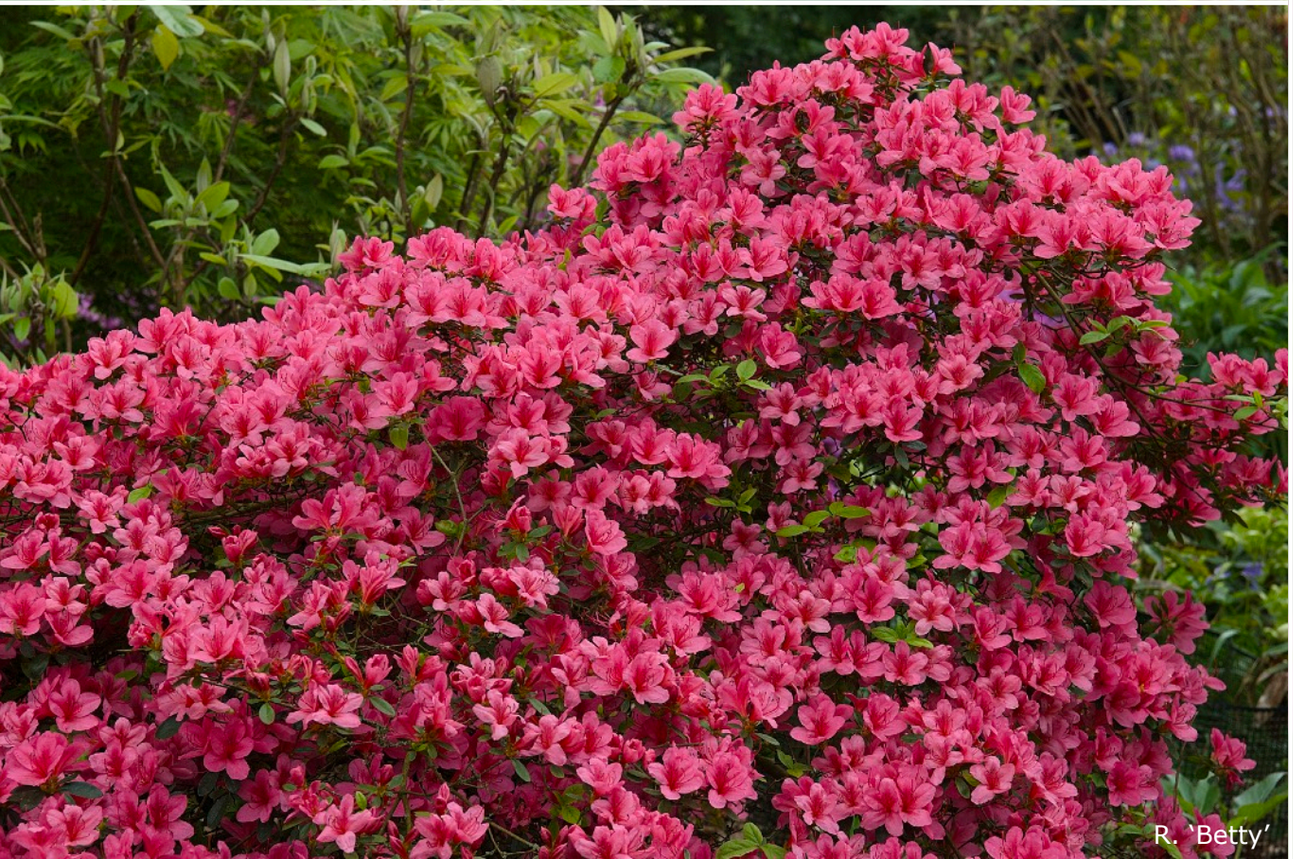
R. ‘Atalanta’

R. ‘Bengal Fire’

R. ‘Bengal Fire’



R. ‘Audrey Wynniatt’



R. ‘Betty’



R. ‘Betty’

R. ‘Blue Danube’

R. ‘Blue Danube’

R. ‘Eddy’



R. ‘Eddy’



R. ‘Eddy’



R. ‘Eddy’

R. ‘Eddy’



R. ‘Fedora’



R. ‘Gretchen’



R. ‘Ivette’



R. ‘Jeanette’

R. ‘Johann Strauss’

R. ‘John Cairns’

R. 'John Cairns'

R. ‘Kathleen’



R. ‘Louise’



R. ‘Louise’



R. ‘Louise’



R. ‘Marie’



R. ‘Naomi’



R. ‘Orange Beauty’

R. ‘Orange Beauty’

R. ‘Palestrina’

R. ‘Palestrina’

R. ‘Palestrina’

R. ‘Palestrina’

R. ‘Pekoe’

R. ‘Sir William Lawrence’

The Glenn Dale Azalea Strain

Quandary number one:

Many of the gardens found in the US coastal states that fringe the lower half of the North Atlantic or curve around the Gulf of Mexico have a moist and mild climate that allows the many frost-tender evergreen azalea hybrids bred from *R. simsii* to be grown outdoors, all-year-round, and provide a spectacular floral display.

These were first created by Belgium horticulturalists during the early 1800s, basically for use as houseplants, with many bred specifically for the forcing trade. However, as indicated above, millions were also exported and that worldwide distribution drive embraced the American Deep South with a vengeance. Here, they became a feature of South Carolina's renowned magnolia gardens, whose owners, plus many of the local nurserymen, began to cross them with the equally tender forms and hybrids of *R. indicum,* some of which also had a genetic heritage that included input from *R. x mucronatum.*

As fully paid-up members of the Inter-Group Hybrids Strain, these cultivars have now been denominated the Southern Indian Hybrids and they are generally tall-growing shrubs, attaining heights of between 2 and 3m when mature. Each bears literally thousands of extra large corollas - individually between 6 and 9cm wide - and the colour range on offer spans white through pink to red and deep purple, with some gifted Satsuki-like differently-coloured stripes, flakes, borders and selfs. But they come with one distinct disadvantage:

Move virtually any of them over the state border into neighbouring North Carolina, or in a complete act of madness, transport them to the even higher-latitude east coast states of Virgina, New Jersey, Massachusetts or Maine, and outdoors, very few would survive their first encounter with a mild autumn frost, yet alone the full-on onslaught of winter.

Quandary number two:

By the mid 1920's, evergreen azalea hybrids from each of the Kurume, Satsuki and Kaempferi Strains, had been introduced right across North America by the Japanese and European nursery firms, and they had become all the rage. The vast majority of these had a far hardier constitution than their *indicum* or *simsii* cousins, with many well able to survive frosts of -15ºC or lower without significant damage. This meant that they could be grown all the way along the east coast and thrive in cities such as Charlotte, Richmond, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and a host of others. Yet despite an annually impressive display of flowers, individually, the corollas were very small. And there was also a gap in the pageant:

A month-long dearth of bloom centred on mid-May.

For there were very few evergreen azalea hybrids then available that did not fall into the classic two group division first set out by the Japanese nurseryman Ihei Ito in his 1692-published, five-volume-spanning tome *Kinshu Makura,* the single volume, English-language 1984 translation of which, bears the title *A Brocade Pillow: Azaleas of Old Japan.*

First to bloom are the 'Tsutsuji' cultivars, flowering around thirty days after the spring equinox, and then, a whole month later, some sixty days on from the vernal, the 'Satsuki' crosses finally begin to open their buds.

The solution?

Surprisingly, the United States Department of Agriculture.

Specifically, the Plant Introduction Station at Glenn Dale, Maryland.

And on an individual level, its Senior Horticulturalist.

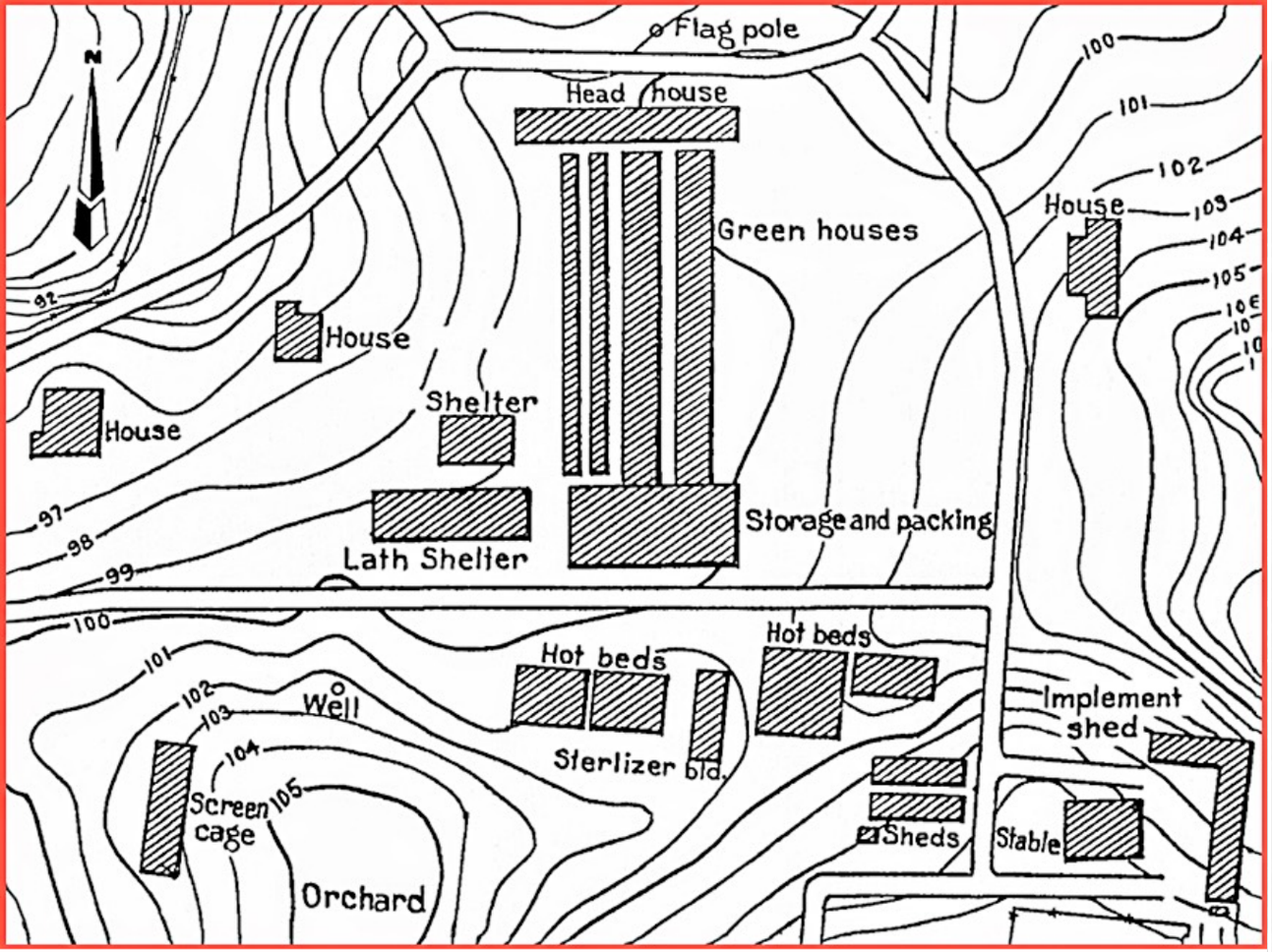
The gentleman occupying that role in 1929 and tasked to rectify the dilemma, was virtually unknown beyond the ranks of that organisation. Today however, his name can be recited from memory by rhodophiles the world over - Benjamin Yeo Morrison (1891-1966).

- opposite on page 251 -

Site plan and general views of the USDA Plant Introduction Station at Glenn Dale, Maryland.



Ben Morrison




Looking northeast.


The quarantine greenhouses from the southwest.


Looking west.


Looking southeast.

The USDA's azalea-expert-in-the-bud would soon become the Plant Exploration and Introduction Division's Principal Horticulturalist and in 1937, take on the then unpaid role of Acting Director at the nascent National Arboretum in the nation's capital city - in addition to his other duties - spending fourteen years in the job before finally being confirmed as it's first Director in April 1951. His Government salary then rose to the dizzying heights of a GS-14 ranking, just eight months before his retirement in November of that same year. Initially, Ben Morrison had trained as a horticulturalist and landscape architect at Harvard University, receiving a Sheldon Fellowship to travel to Japan in 1916, where a springtime encounter with massed evergreen azaleas would change his life forever. In 1920 he joined the USDA at Glenn Dale, his official title, Scientific Assistant in Landscape Gardening, but swiftly began ascending the career ladder rungs while also developing an azalea garden at his home in nearby Takoma Park and expanding his interest and expertise with the new material arriving at the Plant Introduction Station from Europe, China and Japan. A document authored by Morrison and titled *Report of Azalea Breeding July 1, 1928,* which included details of his personal plant collection, likely proved the decisive asset when the higher-ups settled on his selection.

The Department of Agriculture's decision to undertake the project at Glenn Dale in 1929, 'set activity into motion on a serious scale', with the stated outcome 'the creation of a race or races of azaleas that should be winter-hardy at Washington, D.C., and that should have flowers as large as those borne by the varieties of "Indian azaleas", which are the great ornament of southern gardens' (the two quotes, along with several that follow, are sourced from the USDA's Agriculture Monograph No. 20, *The Glenn Dale Azaleas,* which was written by B. Y. Morrison and published in October 1953).

And of course, the project's third objective was to bridge that mid-May flowering gap.

The entire enterprise ran for almost a quarter of a century and involved the active participation of nearly all the Station's staff at one time or another, with Morrison doing most of the crossing - aided initially by Harry Gunning - and two other employees, Albert Close and Frank Dowdle, the subsequent propagation. That assistance was repeatedly acknowledged by Morrison in subsequent publications and lectures, with beds dug in the gently rolling terrain; the soil improved; trees removed - so the deciduous canopy provided exactly the right amount of shade; and a temporary watering system installed.

> 'To this area there were brought the hybrid seedlings that had been carefully grown under greenhouse conditions through one summer and winter and whatever part of the second summer that elapsed before all transplanting was completed. The seedlings were by no means uniform in size, but nearly all had sound woody stems at ground level. Watering was carefully attended to the first summer but not thereafter, the plantings left to thrive or fail under natural conditions, in order that all weaklings might perish'.

Over the following years some seventy thousand seedlings were planted in total, the germinations from hundreds of crosses involving a bevy of species and garden hybrids: *R. indicum, R. kaempferi, R. oldhamii, R. poukhanense, R. scabrum* and *R. simsii* amongst the species; 'Alice', 'George Franc', 'Gibiyana', 'Hatsu-shimo', 'Ho-oden', 'Louise', 'Madame Dominique Vervaene', 'Malvaticum', 'Maxwellii', 'Modèle', 'Mucronatum' and several of its named forms, 'Obtusum', 'Omurasaki', 'Phoeniceum', 'Vittatum', 'Willy' and 'Yozakura' among the hybrids.

> 'During the first years all the plants were grown under glass, so that certain combinations were possible that have not been duplicated in later years when the work was done outside. The first year's work saw the use of the following basic combinations:
>
> Rhododendron *simsii* forms X all other types;
> Rhododendron Mucronatum X all other types;
> Rhododendron *indicum* X all other types;
> Rhododendron Phoeniceum X all other types;
> Rhododendron *poukhanense* X *R. simsii* clones.
>
> In each case the seed parent was large-flowered. In some cases both parents were large-flowered.
>
> In addition to these basic crosses, there were certain combinations in which the seed parent was a garden clone of known parentage (e.g. *kaempferi* x 'Malvaticum'), in other cases, of unknown parentage (e.g. 'Malvaticum' itself). In all of these the seed parent was larger flowered than the pollen parent.
>
> The first winter outdoors passed judgement on the seedling plants. All weaklings were killed and none that barely survived were coddled back to health. The rest were allowed to grow normally and with no special care in the woodland where the seed population had been planted. No choice was ever made from a plant that did not grow vigorously. Propagations by cuttings made in a cold frame under good but not better than nursery facilities produced the thousands of cuttings that were sent to the National Arboretum for permanent display. After five years it was possible to tell that all would grow well in field conditions, but a location free from late spring frosts would have produced even better plants. No training or pruning was given, and eventually much overcrowding resulted before transplanting to a permanent location was possible.
>
> A review of these plants showed no weaklings had been chosen and none on which the foliage was poor, the essential point being that the plant should, at maturity, appear well clothed with foliage'.

Those first selections for further study were actually made in 1937, the same year Morrison took on the acting role at the National Arboretum. The following year saw crosses made with some newly acquired Satsuki strain azaleas, notably 'Adzuma-no-hana' and 'Shinnyo-no-tsuki' from the Chugai Nursery of Kobe, Japan, while 1939 through 1941 saw further selections made. The number of chosen clones had by then reached 830 and in 1941-42 some of these were named and distributed to the project's participating set of public gardens and commercial nurseries, as well as to a few knowledgeable individuals. But then World War II intervened and Ben Morrison was retasked to support the war effort, initially reporting on the state of cinchona production in Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala, as American combat troops would need copious doses of quinine whilst they expelled the Japanese from most of Southeast Asia and the Philippines.

After the war, selections for trial began again in 1946, while distribution of the named clones resumed in 1947 and continued until 1952. In total, 1,142 azaleas were judged suitable for transfer to the National Arboretum, but just 454 of these - less than 0.7% of all the seedlings raised - were considered good enough to be named, propagated and distributed. The Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, Kosaku Sawada's Overlook Nurseries in Mobile, Alabama, and the University of Washington Arboretum in Seattle were four of the seven participants who received plant material from each of the eight, separate distributions, which began with just twelve beneficiaries in 1942 and reached a high point of thirty-three in 1950.

In hindsight, the project was simply the most monumental evergreen azalea breeding programme ever to have been undertaken, its scope unlikely to be matched by anyone else in the future - government department; private individual; or commercial nursery.

Regrettably however, over the past seventy years, the fate of the Glenn Dale azaleas has mirrored that of the fifty Kurume azaleas selected by Ernest Wilson in 1918: many of the clones have been lost to cultivation; and no complete collection is believed to currently exist, even at the National Arboretum. David Leach, one of the New World's most highly regarded rhododendron experts, explains why in the introduction he penned for the ARS-sponsored history of rhododendron development on the east coast of America, 1978's *Hybrids and Hybridizers:*

'Morrison justified the introduction of 454 Glenn Dale cultivars by his expectation that they would find niches in varying climates for gardeners with diverse preferences in colour, stature, and season of bloom. Some, he thought, would quietly disappear as sister clones proved to be more adaptable under the differing conditions of growth to be found south of the Mason and Dixon Line. Unhappily, it did not work out that way. The trade found the legion of Glenn Dales so bewildering that they were generally shunned by nurserymen. Only two large growers propagated them in any assortment representative of their splendid multiformity. Had he known the outcome, it would not have deterred Morrison in the least. It was a worthy challenge; it was a contribution. Today, one or two hobby nurseries offer good assortments of the Glenn Dale hybrids, but many sources would be needed to assemble a comprehensive collection'.

Frederick Street, in his 1959 book *Azaleas,* also tackles the hardiness issue:

'With an ancestry so mixed, more than the Ghents or the Knaphills and much more than the Mollis azaleas, it is obvious that the plants would have many different likes and dislikes - some growing well under some conditions and others not. Because it was found that some were even more hardy than they were expected to be, it was assumed that all would grow well anywhere. Yet the original intention was only to breed a race of azaleas that would have the flowers of the *simsii* hybrids and be hardy in the area of Washington, D.C., not for all points north of Canada.

And then what happens?

Some unsuspecting beginner buys a plant for a place that is quite unsuitable. Another does the same. Both plants fail. Both are condemned. The word goes round and before you know it the Glenn Dale azaleas are given a bad name'.

And that statement was made in an age before social media got going!

The UK climate is milder than that experienced at the Glenn Dale Plant Introduction Station, where average winter minimum temperatures range from -13 to -23ºC and a low down to -31ºC was recorded in January 1935. The amount of rain dropped on Maryland throughout the year is also a touch higher than that currently delivered to most of southern Britain, around 1m compared to just 0.6m in London, for instance. So a fair few members of Ben Morrison's Glenn Dale Strain will prosper in the gardens of the southern counties, and along the east coast, but they do not do as well in Scotland or parts of northern England, where a combination of higher rainfall and the lower intensity of the sunlight often result in unripened wood when the first frosts of autumn strike. Cultivars such as 'Ben Morrison' - not one of the original 454 named clones, but a selection made and registered by the Plant Introduction Station after Morrison's death in 1966 - 'Buccaneer', 'Chanticleer', 'Everest', 'Gaiety', 'Glacier', 'Helen Close' (named for the wife of Albert Close), 'Louise Dowdle' (named for Frank Dowdle's wife), 'Martha Hitchcock', 'Mary Helen' (named for Harry Gunning's daughter), 'Merlin', 'Niagara', 'Scout' and 'Tanager' have all been widely planted in the UK and are propagated off-and-on by the specialist nurseries. Some have even found their way into the Garden Centres and DIY stores. But the majority of the Glenn Dales never made it across the pond.

Continuing the biography, after his retirement, Ben Morrison moved to Pass Christian in Harrison County, Mississippi, and simply carried on from where he had left off, though for the most part he concentrated on breeding double-flowered clones that were late blooming. Fred Galle, in his 1987 book *Azaleas,* reports that:

'124 flats of seedlings were moved from Maryland to Morrison's new home - "Back Acres" - where over 500 crosses were made with 370 numbered clones selected for testing and evaluation'.

The first batch of these were named, introduced and registered in 1964-65, with the plants heat tolerant, their foliage and flowers quite heavily textured, and most of the shrubs Mid-Atlantic State hardy, though their flower buds were a touch less resistant to the cold. The 'Back Acres Hybrids' - as they have been named - currently comprise around fifty cultivars, with some seedlings Morrison gave to friends also being named after his death. One of these is the reddish-orange-flowered 'B. Y. Morrison', which is often confused with 'Ben Morrison', though the latter has deep yellowish-pink corollas.

Serious efforts to re-establish complete collections of all 454 named Glenn Dale azalea hybrids began in 1991 when Richard West and William Miller - later, the authors of two books on the strain: 1994's listing of the cultivars, *The Bell Book;* and 1996's update of Morrison's 1953 text, titled *The Glenn Dale Azaleas Revised* - met with Barbara Bullock, the then newly-appointed Curator of Azalea and Rhododendron at the National Arboretum. As a result, the Mount Hamilton massed planting site at the garden was surveyed and conditions on the hillside, which had deteriorated over the forty years since Morrison's departure, substantially improved. Equally, although very few labels were still attached to the plants in residence, many of the mature specimens have now been identified as selected forms or named hybrids.

This work is still ongoing today, though it suffered a setback in 2010 when the Garden Unit Leader at the Arboretum declared the collection to be of no further scientific benefit and announced that the azaleas would be cut down the following summer and their stumps treated with herbicide. The sheer level of outrage generated by this decision had to be experienced to be believed and those raised voices were especially mocking of one of the arguments put forward to justify the measure, namely that, 'the azaleas attract too many visitors, and this creates problems in April and May when they are in bloom'. Apparently, the Arboretum's 'inadequate parking and restroom facilities' were being overwhelmed by those flocking to take-in the spectacle.

The Appropriations Committee of the United States House of Representatives begged to differ with the Garden Unit Leader's assessment, decided en masse that the Arboretum's justifications were hogwash and directed that the Glenn Dale hillside portion of the azalea collection be maintained, the legislative bill containing these measures passing the full house on June 16th, 2011.

The re-establishment project was aided by the discovery at Ten Oaks Nursery in Clarksville, Maryland, of an arboretum containing mature specimens of many of the Glenn Dales, some labelled, though not all, with between 200 to 250 cultivars on site. The firm, part of the original distribution programme, after being contacted by West and Miller, signed-up and have been distributing cuttings of the plants to participating public gardens and arboreta all across the United States. Some fifty additional cultivars have also been found at the Plant Introduction Station, including a few that are considered very rare, and the hope remains to eventually find the rest, with those clones still 'lost' thought likely to be resident in a private garden somewhere, hidden from view, awaiting rediscovery.



R. ‘Adorable’



R. ‘Advance’



R. ‘Ambrosia’



R. ‘Angelus’



R. ‘Bride’s Bouquet’



R. ‘Bride’s Bouquet’



R. ‘Bride’s Bouquet’

R. ‘Buccaneer’

R. ‘Buccaneer’

R. ‘Chanticleer’

R. ‘Chanticleer’


R. ‘Colleen’


R. ‘Commodore’


R. ‘Crinoline’


R. ‘Elizabeth’


R. ‘Eucharis’


R. ‘Everest’


R. ‘Fawn’


R. ‘Fawn’


R. ‘Gaiety’


R. ‘Harbinger’


R. ‘Louise Dowdle’


R. ‘Lullaby’

R. ‘Lullaby’

R. ‘Martha Hitchcock’

R. ‘Martha Hitchcock’

R. ‘Merlin’

R. ‘Merlin’

R. ‘Niagara’

R. ‘Niagara’


R. ‘Novelty’


R. ‘Satrap’


R. ‘Silver Moon’


R. ‘Vespers’



R. ‘Viking’



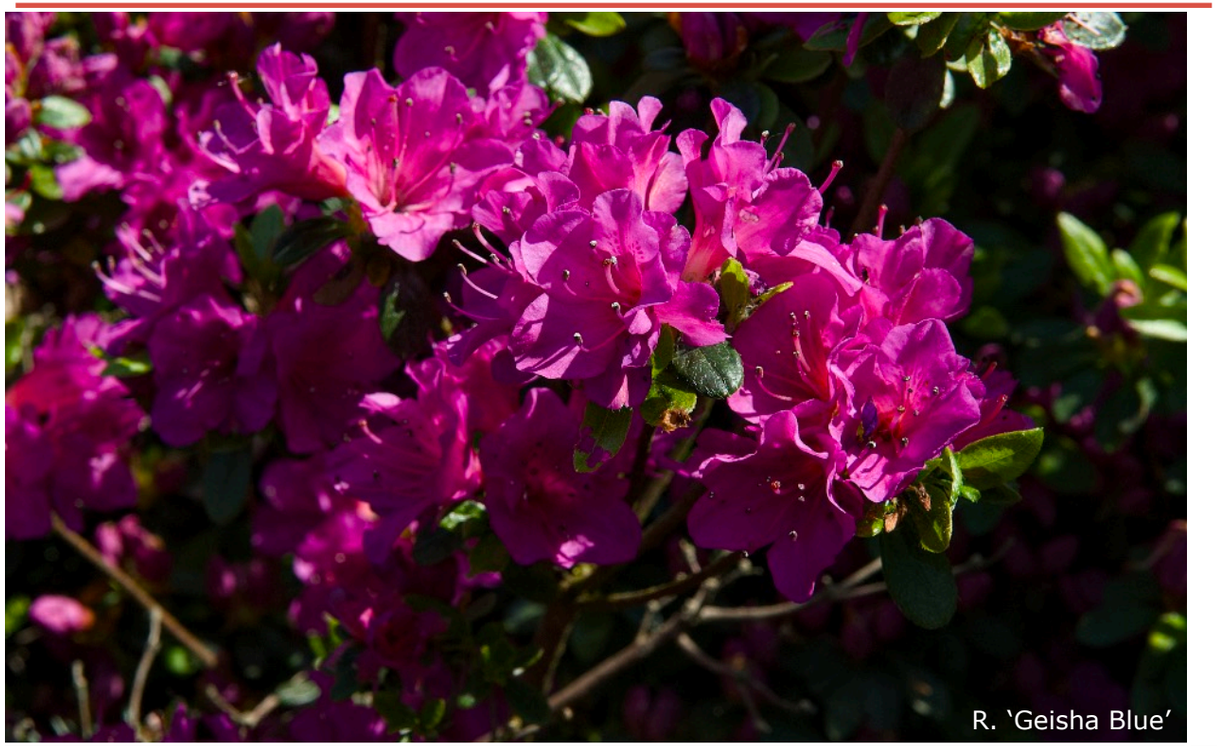
R. ‘Viking’



R. ‘Witchery’



R. ‘Witchery’



R. ‘Geisha Blue’



R. ‘Geisha Lilac’

The Arendsii & Aronense Azaleas

Georg Arends (1863-1952) - seen below, working at his nursery at Wuppertal-Ronsdorf, near Cologne, in Germany, during the 1930s - is best remembered for his perennial hybrids, most especially his *Semperviviums*, but he also grew and crossed rhododendrons and evergreen azaleas. ‘Mucronatum’ and *R. kaempferi* were primarily used in the latter programme, producing a set of plants that had flowers up to 5cm across, grew into 1.6m high bushes that spread out a touch wider, and which were winter hardy down to around -23ºC. These are known today as the Arendsii Hybrids and they were bred to cope with the climatic conditions of Northern Europe.

His younger son Werner continued their development, addressing the problem of ripening the new growth under a weak summer sun, but the exact parentage of these later crosses - known as the Aronense Hybrids - is unknown, apart from the fact that they were developed using cultivars that paired his father’s Arendsii clones with ‘Multiflorum’ and other ‘Indian’ azaleas. These have often been marketed under a ‘Geisha’ cover-all, with a colour-tag added on - so ‘Geisha Blue’ or ‘Geisha Lilac’ - with the most popular, probably, ‘Satschiko’ (also sold as ‘Geisha Orangerot’ or ‘Geisha Orange’). Introduced in Germany during the 1960s, the cultivar only crossed the Channel into British gardens in 1971.

The plant forms a low-growing compact mound to around 0.6m high, with a spread of at least double that figure, and in the northern counties of England and across the border in Scotland, it should be grown in full sun, out in the open, for it was raised to cope with such exposure in order to thoroughly mature the wood before the onset of winter. Further to the south however, where the sun’s rays are stronger, placement in dappled shade would prove a better option.



R. ‘Satschiko’

The Diamant Azaleas

In the early 1960s, Carl Fleischmann of Wiesmoor, Lower Saxony, a small town tucked away in the northwestern corner of Germany less than twenty miles from the North Sea coast, placed pollen from *R. kiusianum* onto the style of 'Multiflorum', a Georg Arends introduction of 1940 vintage, whose parentage is unknown. From the collection of seedlings he raised, ten plants were selected by their colour and introduced in 1969. All follow the Japanese species in habit, but have an increased hardiness courtesy of 'Multiflorum', and are awash with bloom from late April onwards, the flowers often completely obscuring virtually any trace of the leaves.

As with all evergreen azaleas, that foliage is dimorphic - large 'summer' leaves, produced in the spring, which fall in the autumn; smaller 'winter' leaves, which remain attached until the next flush of glossy-green blades burst forth once temperatures warm back up - and it is the 'Diamant' pride's bane, for the supposedly evergreen winter foliage is mostly shed in the UK's colder northern climes, to leave just a criss-cross of bare twigs. Come spring, leaf and flower buds swell and a densely-cloaked bush reappears, but as Ken Cox reports in his 2005-published *Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* that near deciduous nature has led to many nurseries no longer offering the group for sale.

Carl Fleischmann did not give his ten chosen selections individual names, but merely indicated their hue in parentheses after the epithet, which translates as 'Diamond', but effectively these are now used wholesale as cultivar names, giving:

'Diamant Dunkellila' - moderate purple, English synonym 'Dark Lilac Diamond';
'Diamant Enzianblau' - dark lilac, English synonym 'Gentian Blue Diamond';
'Diamant Hellila' - purple, English synonym 'Lilac Diamond';
'Diamant Himmelblau' - pale lilac, English synonym 'Skyblue Diamond';
'Diamant Lachs' - salmon, English synonym 'Salmon Diamond';
'Diamant Lachsviolett' - English salmon-violet, synonym 'Salmon Purple Diamond';
'Diamant Purpur' - deep purplish-pink, English synonym 'Purple Diamond';
'Diamant Rosa' - strong purplish-pink, English synonym 'Pink Diamond';
'Diamant Rot' - vivid purplish-red, English synonym 'Red Diamond';
'Diamant Violett' - pale purple, English synonym 'Violet Diamond'.

It should be noted however, that 'Diamant Weiss' - 'White Diamond' - is a pairing made by Ernst Stöckmann in 1971 with the parentage 'Kermesinum' x *prinophyllum,* which not only makes it an azaleodendron, but confirms that it is most definitely not a member of Fleischmann's Diamant clan.

Equally, labels in gardens may and do stray from that authorised colour palette set out above, with 'Diamant (Indigo)' and 'Diamant (Rosy Red)' found growing at Wisley, for instance, and 'Diamond Lavender Brilliant', plus 'Diamant Pink', ensconced in beds at the Savill Gardens, Windsor Great Park. All such instances, and a probably host of undocumented others, are likely down to the vagaries that abound in German-English dictionaries rather than further clonal selection.

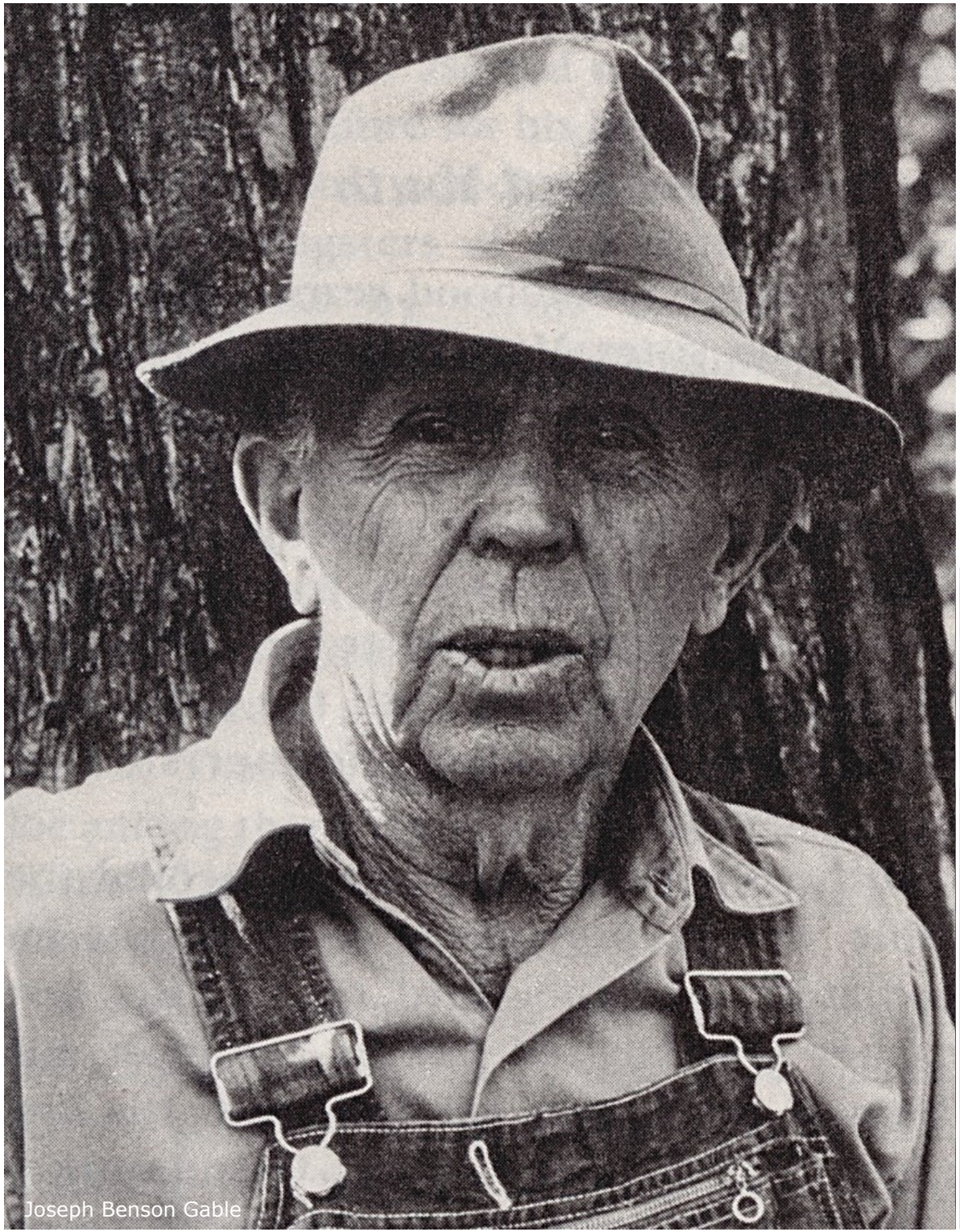

R. 'Diamant Pink'


R. 'Diamond Lavender Brilliant'

R. ‘Diamant Indigo’

R. ‘Diamant Rosy Red’

R. ‘Diamant Rot’

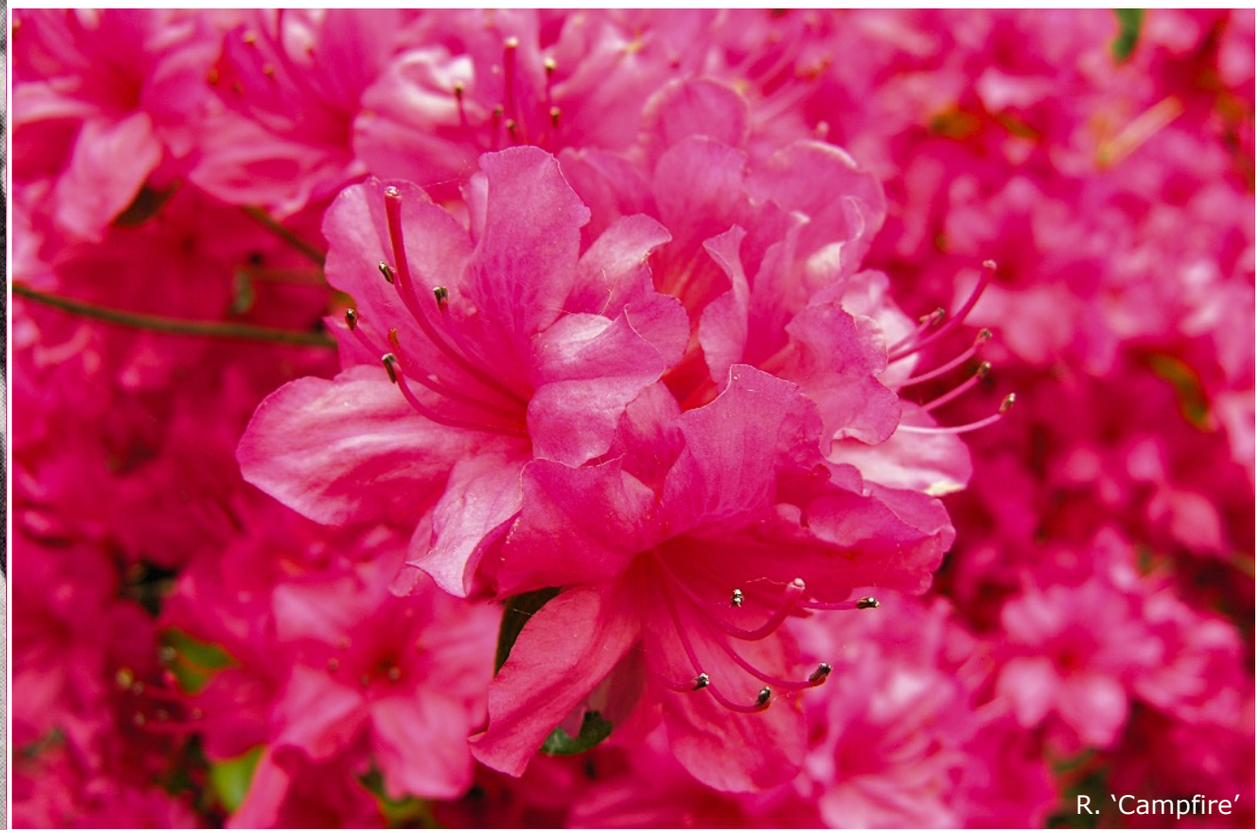


Joseph Benson Gable

The Gable Azaleas

A significant increase in hardiness was the raison d'être driving the breeding programme begun in the late 1920s or early 1930s by the first recipient of the American Rhododendron Society's Pioneer Achievement Award, nurseryman Joseph Gable (1886-1972). Based in Stewartstown, York County, Pennsylvania, which can experience winter lows down to -23°C on occasion and summer highs that peak at 42°C - though average temperature minima and maxima of -6°C and 31°C are the usual fare, with the overall climate described as 'humid continental' by the weather forecasting professionals - the toughest forms of the Korean species *R. poukhanense,* along with its 'Yodogawa' derivative, were paired with the Japanese *R. kaempferi,* and with *R. x mucronatum*. Selected offspring from those first F1 seedling batches were then crossed with each other, as well as with cultivars such as 'Hexe' and 'Hinodegiri', 'Maxwellii' and 'Yaye-hiryu' to produce a troop of F2 hybrids, and from both these groups, some 80-plus named registrations in total ultimately made it onto the pages of the *IRRC,* with the first of the shrubs being introduced as early as 1938.

In America, the Gable hybrids are widely available commercially and acknowledged to be some of the hardiest evergreen azaleas on the market. Typically, they will grow to a height of between 1.4 and 2.4m, with a similar or slightly wider spread, and have been given US zonal hardiness ratings of 6b through 8b, which equates to H5-6 in the UK and minimums of -15°C down to -20°C. As would be expected, the hybridising fraternity have used them extensively in their own pairings, yet only a few of the better clones such as 'Old Faithful' and 'Stewartstonian' have travelled across the Atlantic, with 'Rosebud' the only cultivar widely available commercially.



R. 'Campfire'

R. ‘Old Faithful’

R. ‘Rosebud’

R. ‘Stewartstonian’

The Hyde Azaleas

With the entire stock of his Solent Strain deciduous azalea breeding programme sold to Edmund de Rothschild and despatched to Exbury Gardens just weeks after the plants had been triumphantly introduced at the Royal Horticultural Society's 1961 Chelsea Flower Show, William George Thomas Hyde (1916-1980), switched his attention to another section within Genus *Rhododendron* and at his Woodlands Nursery, near Ferndown in Dorset, one of the double-length Dutch light greenhouses was soon home to a swarm of evergreen azalea seedlings. Twenty-four named selections from that breeding programme have now been registered and they are gathered together within the Inter-Group Hybrids Strain under the 'Hyde Azaleas' banner. Better still, in the last decade or so, they have begun to be much more widely marketed.

The plants were bred from a variety of parents that were the best hybrids then available, with those recorded in George Hyde's studbook including 'Betty', 'John Cairns', 'Maxwellii', 'Purple Splendor', 'Sir William Lawrence' and 'Vuyk's Scarlet'. All the introduced selections he made are basically low-growing, highly floriferous shrubs, with hardiness ratings reported as H4-5. A wander around Battleston Hill at RHS Wisley in Surrey, will swiftly confirm that they outstanding in bloom, the now mature bushes beacons of colour throughout May into early June. Yet despite having the studbook to hand, the exact parentage of many of the crosses has proved hard to pin down, because George Hyde died suddenly, watering his rhododendrons on a May afternoon in 1980, at the age of just 64, and linking a written entry to an actual plant growing in the nursery grounds has proved near impossible without its author present. Yet a few of the pairings are known:

Joseph Gable's orchid-purple hybrid 'Purple Splendor' was teamed with the centuries-old white-flowering Japanese hybrid 'Mucronatum' in 1964 to produce 'Evelyn Hyde', the selection named for George's wife and introduced in 1970.

The P. M. Koster cross 'Betty' was also employed to pollinate 'Mucronatum' and led to 'Beattie' being selected in 1972.

Lionel de Rothschild's 'Sir William Lawrence' got friendly with the Phoeniceum hybrid 'Maxwellii' to give 'Rosemary Hyde', the selection named for George and Evelyn's daughter and the plant gifted an Award of Merit in 1974.

'Palestrina' x 'Mucronatum' is the 1961 pairing that resulted in 'Silver Fountain', while 1967's matching of the cross 'Vuyk's Scarlet' x 'Tanager', with 'John Cairns', gave 'Autumn Glow', this another of the Hyde azaleas to secure an AM from the RHS, in 1987.

'Autumn Glow' is unlike its comparatively taller growing associates as it is the perfect plant for a rock garden placement, having a dwarf spreading habit that ends up being around three times as wide as it is high when mature. Yet far more importantly, the azalea literally submerges itself under a dense blanket of stunning red flowers from early May onwards, with the blooms usually completely hiding the dark green, glossy foliage.

Boasting semi-double corollas with wavy lobe margins that are deep purplish-pink in bud, the same tone only slightly paler when the flowers are fully open, those blooms completely cloak the shrub that bears George Hyde's own name. Another cross from the 1960s, but one where the parentage is unknown, the plant was named for her father by Rosemary Legrand (née Hyde), in 1994, and introduced through Linwood Plants that same year. All of the corolla's stamens have been transformed into petals and the dorsal lobes are speckled a strong purplish-red. Glossy green elliptic leaves, about 2cm long by 1cm wide, will occasionally be seen peeking through the dense floral blanket, but the odd visible whorl will be the exception and just like 'Autumn Glow', the ultimate height of a mature specimen will be no more than 0.6 to 0.7m. Note, however, that the branches will spread sideways from the core to at least double that amount.



George & Evelyn Hyde

'Valentine Surprise' is another of George Hyde's evergreen azalea hybrids where the parentage can only be guessed at, though *R. nakaharae* from Taiwan must surely have had an input in the spreading dwarf habit. The foliage is elliptically-shaped, with the leaves up to 4cm long by 1.3cm wide, dark glossy green in colour and with good retention across the winter months, yet as good as these are, it is the flowers that are the main draw: entirely reddish-orange when they first open, then fading to apricot-pink in the centre while the lobe margins remain edged with a 5mm wide band of deep red. This gives the blooms an almost two-tone effect, and that changing palette and banding are mirrored on the reverse of the widely-spreading corollas. Outdoors, flowering is from late April into May, but if a residence under glass can be provided by a romantically inspired rhodophile, then coaxing out the display for that special day in mid February becomes a definite possibility.

R. ‘Autumn Glow’

R. ‘Beattie’



R. ‘Dear Grandad’



R. ‘Evelyn Hyde’



R. ‘George Hyde’

R. ‘George Hyde’

R. ‘George Hyde’

R. ‘Hydie’

R. ‘Rosemary Hyde’

R. ‘Silver Fountain’

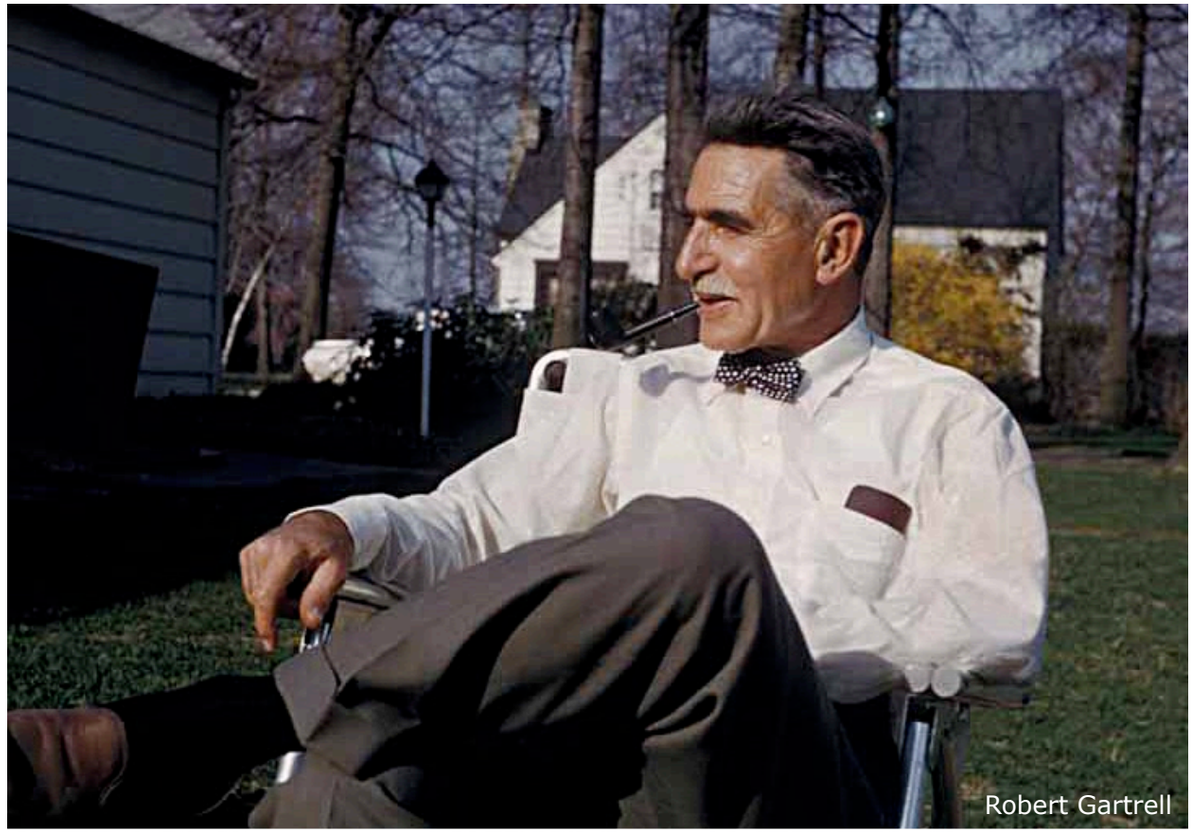
R. ‘Valentine Surprise’

The Robin Hill Azaleas

After building-up a collection of the hardiest forms of the species and hybrids for his garden that were then available, by the end of the 1940s, Robert Derby Gartrell (1895-1985), later of Wyckoff, New Jersey, was ready to embark on a pre-planned, scientific, well thought-out azalea breeding programme, the goals of which were to produce large, flat-faced corollas of fine form, with rounded and overlapping petals; to improve the foliage so that the it looked good across the whole fifty-week period when the plants were not in display mode; to aim for low to medium-height shrubs that would better suit more modest gardens; to increase their cold hardiness; and finally, to extend the blooming season.

Amongst the plants involved in his directed pollinations - some 1500 pairings made over a span of nearly thirty years - were members of the Gable Azaleas, the Glenn Dales, the Satsukis, the Kurumes, *R. x mucronatum,* and some unnamed 'Indian' hybrids, as well as a few of his own crosses post their selection after trial. Estimates suggest he raised some 25,000 seedlings to flowering-size and from these a set of almost 100 crosses have been registered.

All are now gathered together under the banner of the Robin Hill Azaleas, this cover-all dating back to the late 1930s, which was when the Gartrell family moved to Ridgewood, New Jersey. At their old house, Robert had read John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* to his two daughters - Jeanne and Elizabeth Anne - and one of the houses in the novel had been named 'Robin Hill'. The Gartrell's new house was also built on high ground and at the rear of the property, the slope dropped steeply away to a small stream, so when Jeanne asked if they could also name it 'Robin Hill', everyone agreed. The 1960 move to Wyckoff happened after their father retired, and that house became 'Little Robin Hill'. So when his azaleas began to be distributed and marketed commercially, the choice of a group name for them was a no-brainer, though some of the individual cultivars needed a pre-epithet addition of the group name to secure registration, or a post-epithet 'of Robinhill' termination.


Robert Gartrell


R. 'Early Beni'


R. 'Greta'



R. ‘Nancy of Robinhill’



R. ‘Robinhill Frosty’



R. ‘Robinhill Gillie’



R. ‘Sherbrooke’

The Vuykiana Azaleas

The oft-accepted historical reporting on the 'Vuykiana' azaleas in general and cultivars such as 'Beethoven', 'Johann Sebastian Bach', 'Johann Strauss', 'Joseph Haydn', 'Palestrina' or 'Schubert' in particular, indicates that Aart Vuyk's objective was to create a range of hardier evergreens with bigger flowers than the norm. On those two counts the boxes can be ticked, because he pretty much succeeded, except for the fact that Mr Vuyk himself may not have dabbed pollen onto stigma, or more tellingly, that those grains did not come from a Mollis Strain deciduous azalea hybrid, namely 'J. C. van Tol'.

Those contentions are made by the authors Fred Galle and Frederick Street - in their individual, 1987 and 1959 publications, *Azaleas* - and by the team of writers responsible for updating *Bean's Trees and Shrubs*.

All declare that the likelihood of the male parent being a *molle* x *japonicum* cross such as 'J. C. van Tol' is nil, because 'Palestrina' - for instance - shows not a single trait that could have come from a paternal deciduous forebear. All its characteristics denote a purely evergreen azalea heritage, as does the morphology of the five other cultivars listed above, these likely resulting from a 'Malvaticum' x *kaempferi* pairing, or the reverse.

Frederick Street did business with many of the Belgian and Dutch rhododendron nurseries in the two decades after the Second World War and was close friends with many of their owners, so when he writes that the Vuyk van Nes firm was one of those who bought the original 'Malvaticum' crosses from Koster and Co., immediately prior to P. M. Koster emigrating to America in 1921, and that this was the reason behind the brand name change to 'Vuykiana', his sources can be regarded as pretty much impeccable.

On the other hand, *Bean's Trees and Shrubs* reports that Art Vuyk may indeed have later used 'J. C. van Tol' on one of the Koster seedlings, but as a method of inducing an apomictic seed set, this claim sourced from H. J. Grootendorst's 1954-published book titled *Rhododendrons en Azaleas*. In flowering plants, the use of this technique can result in viable seed developing from an unfertilised egg cell that did not complete the meiosis cell division process - scientists described this as gametophytic apomixis - or alternatively, if the unfertilised egg combines with a nucellus or tissue from the integument - known as sporophytic apomixis.

The official *IRRC* entries for the six cultivars detail the pairings as either 'Maxwellii' x 'J. C. van Tol', 'Mucronatum' x 'J. C. van Tol', or '*kaempferi* hybrid' x 'J. C. van Tol', with the credit for the matches going to Vuyk van Nes and a varied set of dates ranging from 1926, 1931, pre 1941, to 1958, given for their hybridisation/introduction. Aforementioned azalea über-master, the late Fred Galle, suggests this all be taken with a large pinch of salt, and herein it is, with 'Palestrina' featuring in the Kaempferi Strain. Aart Vuyk remained adamant that his hybrids were the result of a cross between an evergreen and a deciduous azalea.

Officially, the breeding programme at the Vuyk van Nes nursery in Boskoop, was begun in 1921 and it continued in fits and starts over the next forty years, with the most successful of the early introductions being paired with other hybrids that had a 'Mucronatum' heritage and good evergreen foliage retention across the winter months. By the early 1950s hundreds of seedlings from a cross between one of the nursery's highly-rated orange-flowering cultivars and a plant that had a good habit, along with fine foliage and large flowers, and was exceptionally hardy, were being grown outdoors to see how they faired. Two of these were selected for introduction and both are now commercial standards across the entire rhododendron world, with each the recipient of a Royal Horticultural Society Award of Merit, as well as a First Class Certificate: 'Vuyk's Rosyred' and 'Vuyk's Scarlet'.

'Vuyk's Rosyred' is reported by some as being hardy down to -25ºC, though again, salt may have recently been digested. Other nursery firms give a figure of -10ºC, which conversely, is erring on the side of caution to a ridiculous degree. The shrub's habit is compact and spreading, forming a mound no more than 0.8m high but extending out to as much as 2m in time. Winter leaf retention is excellent, with the blades turning red on autumn's arrival. Spring will prompt a new flush of glossy green foliage to emerge.

Bloom time is May, with an occasional extension into early June, and while not every leaf on the bush will be hidden under the plant's near solid sheet of colour, most will lurk unseen. Because from each flower bud, one or two widely funnel-shaped corollas will open, these 4cm long by almost 8cm across, their rosy-red hue - Neyron Rose, bright rose-pink or deep purplish-pink are the alternative descriptors - speckled with some darker spots across the dorsal lobes. Stamen filaments and style are flushed to match the corolla, though the former may pale to pink over time, and their black anthers are the only colour contrast within the bowl. Note too that here and there, a few branches may sport semi-double blooms.

Sister seedling 'Vuyk's Scarlet' has slightly smaller flowers, each 4.5cm long, but only 5.5cm wide. These are still produced in quantity, with one or two corollas emerging from each flower bud, but the sheet of colour that extends across the bush is not quite as dense as that of its sibling. The funnels are crimson in tone despite the proclamation made by the epithet, have wavy lobe margins and the dorsal is home to some darker spotting close to the base of the throat. Bloom time is around two weeks earlier than its sister, with flowering usually well under way by late April. Any other differences between the two are minimal: a mature mound might just hit 1m in height rather than top-out at 0.8m; the red hue of the winter leaves be a shade darker.



R. 'Christina'

R. ‘Lily Marleen’



R. ‘Mahler’



R. ‘Prins Bernhard’



R. ‘Prinses Juliana’



R. ‘Prinses Juliana’

R. ‘Vuyk’s Rosyred’

R. ‘Vuyk’s Scarlet’

R. ‘Vuyk’s Scarlet’

Twelve Pollinations Outwith Those Five Battalions



R. ‘Bengal Beauty’

R. ‘Bengal Beauty’
simsii x *kaempferi* ‘Daimio’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4 Mid May-earlyJune 0.6m x 2m

Nurseryman and writer Michael Haworth-Booth (1896-1986), is most remembered in the gardening world for two of his books, *Effective Flowering Shrubs,* and *The Hydrangeas,* both of which, although first published in 1965 and 1950 respectively, are still highly regarded. His full subject range extended from tree peonies to the game of boules, and in between running a business and publishing those texts, he somehow managed to fit in being a rhododendron hybridiser. And an accomplished one at that. R. ‘Bengal Beauty’ is probably his most well known commercial introduction and it is the only one of some 30 crosses registered in his name to have garnered a coveted FCC award.

The plant is a basic F1 cross, *R. simsii* pollinated by the much hardier *R. kaempferi,* specifically the very late-blooming, orange-flowered ‘Daimio’ selection of that Japanese species. The result is a low growing, but far wider spreading jewel, with large wavy-edged, purplish-pink corollas, up to 4cm long and 5cm wide. These are carried in a compact truss of 2 to 3 florets and each is lightly flushed and veined a deeper purplish-red, with a faint spray of reddish-brown spots on the dorsal lobe. The leaves are light glossy green and slightly longer in length than the flowers, the perfect foil for the blooms.



R. ‘Bengal Beauty’

R. ‘Elsie Lee’
‘Desire’ x ‘Rosebud’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 May 1m x 1.5m

Tony Shammarello (1909-1982), was a nurseryman from South Euclid, Ohio, who in the mid-1930s caught the rhododendron bug. In the penultimate year of that decade a hard winter hit, temperatures fell to -32°C and there was very little snow cover: it was a massacre; and an inspiration. For whichever graft or seedling rhododendron survived into 1940 became part of his new breeding programme and over the course of the next fifteen years, only plants that could cope with the rigours of an Ohio winter were selected from the estimated 100,000 seedlings he grew to flowering size.

Shammarello turned his attention to evergreen azaleas in 1955 and sixteen crosses are today registered in his name, all dwarf or low growing bushes, with pure, long-lasting flower colour, good winter leaf retention and exceptional hardiness. ‘Elsie Lee’, crossed in 1960 and introduced ten years later, is one of the best of these.

The azalea has semi-double flowers composed of ten lobes in three whorls, with 2 or 3 blooms held in each truss. The individual corollas are broadly funnel-shaped, 3cm long and twice that across, lilac in hue even though the official registration records them as being light reddish-purple. The foliage is broadly elliptic in shape, each glossy leaf about 4cm long by half as much across. Habit is upright and fairly compact, with the plants fully hardy across the the whole of the UK provided a position in full sun is provided, this requirement de rigueur in northern England and Scotland in order to ripen the wood in time for the onset of winter. One minor negative should be mentioned: our maritime climate appears to have worsened winter leaf retention.


Tony Shammarello


R. ‘Elsie Lee’

R. ‘Hachmann’s Rokoko’

R. ‘Hachmann’s Rokoko’
[‘Rubinstein’ x (‘Red Pimpernel’ x ‘Kermesinum’)] x ‘Johanna’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6-7 May-early June 0.5m x 1.3m

The German hybridiser Hans Hachmann (1930-2004), is primarily known for his elepidote rhododendron crosses - plants such as ‘Fantastica’, ‘Goldkrone’, ‘Kokardia’ and a host of others - but he also bred deciduous and evergreen azaleas at his Barmstedt Nursery. ‘Rokoko’, one of the latter and formerly registered as ‘Hachmann’s Rokoko’, is his pièce de résistance within Subsection *Tsutsusia*. First off, it is extremely hardy, coping with temperatures down to -20ºC or even slightly lower, so the shrub can be grown outdoors in any UK garden where the soil is suited to rhododendrons. Secondly, it retains most of its summer leaves throughout the winter, emerging into the spring not in a state of undress that contravenes the Trades Description Act, but near fully clothed. And thirdly - ‘Rokoko’ is simply an out-and-out gem!

The technical specifications detail a low-growing, dwarf shrub barely topping 0.4m after a decade, with a spread of no more than 0.7m at that time, its ultimate dimensions unlikely to exceed 0.5m in height or a width of 1.3m. The foliage is ovate in shape, each blade up to 3cm long and 1.6cm across, dark green and glossy above, the leaves turning purple-bronze in the winter months. The flowers open in May, often in the second half of the month, and so extend into early June. Their colour is a strong pinkish-red with barely visible darker markings on the dorsal, and between three and seven corollas are carried in each truss. Individually these are 3cm long by as much 5cm across, but this would be no great shakes if they were not also double and hose-in-hose, had eight outer lobes, each a broad oval with recurved margins, plus up to six inner ones, these smaller, twisted and crisped, formed from the petaloid stamens.


R. ‘Hachmann’s Rokoko’


R. ‘Hachmann’s Rokoko’

R. ‘Hershey’s Red’
Unknown x Unknown
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 April 0.6m x 1.5m

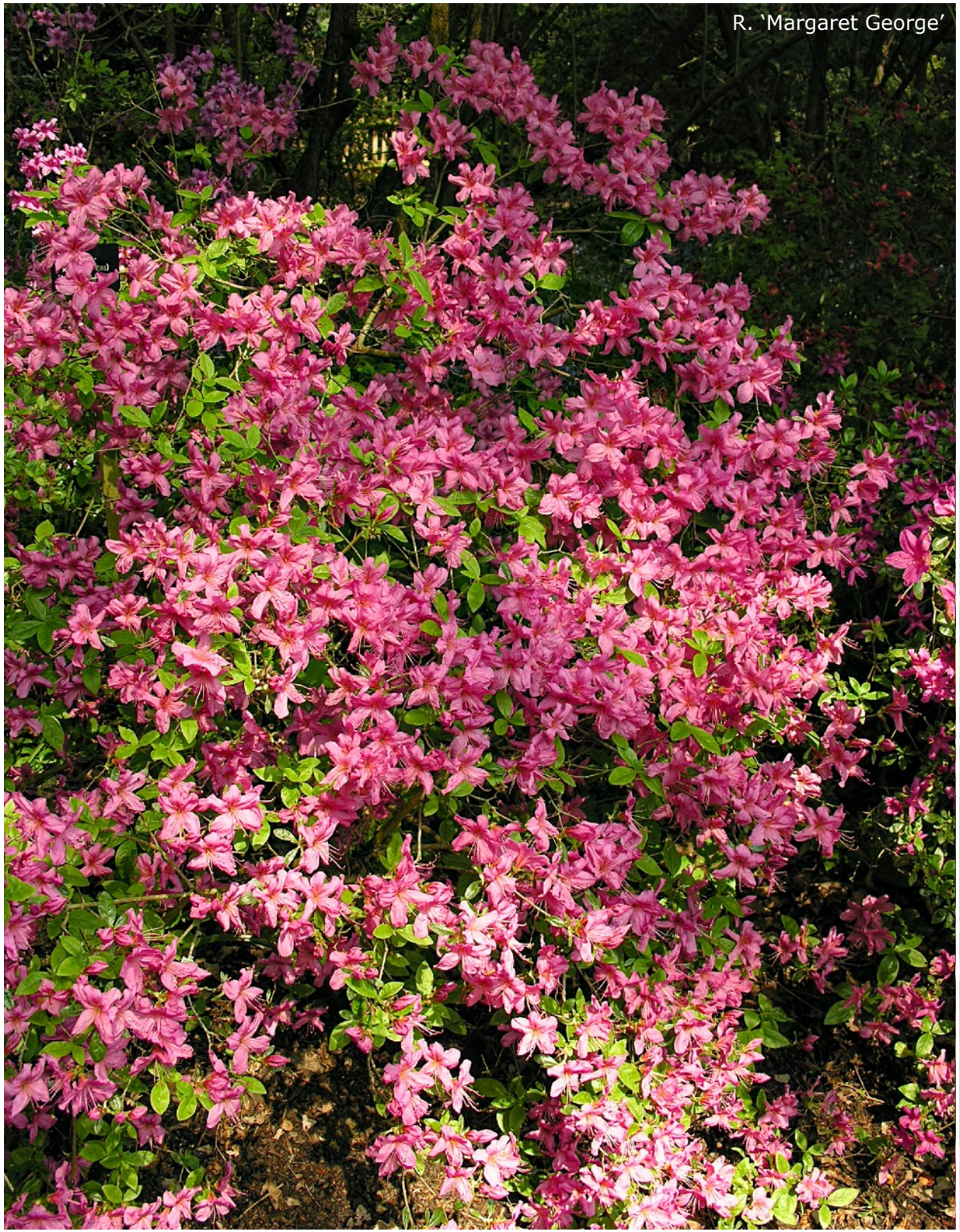
A dwarf evergreen azalea eminently suitable for a rock garden placement - ideally raised-up, so its hose-in-hose flowers can be fully appreciated - ‘Hershey’s Red’ is a low spreading shrub, never likely to top 0.6m in height. The corollas are a bright crimson-red set against dark glossy green foliage, flowering is profuse even on quite young plants, and the summer leaves turn a bronzy hue through the autumn and winter.

Leaf spot and rhododendron lacebug are known problems, as is a susceptibility to root rot if good drainage is not maintained, but Ralph Hershey’s hybrid is well worth an extra bit of TLC for its demur yet stunning floral display. The family nursery business is located near Gap, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and close to twenty evergreen crosses, bred for the rigours of the northeast American states, have been registered by the hybridiser to date.


R. ‘Hershey’s Red’


R. ‘Hershey’s Red’


R. ‘Hershey’s Red’


R. ‘Margaret George’

R. ‘Margaret George’
‘Eira’ x *kaempferi*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Late April-May 1m x 2m

Arthur George, of Hydon Nurseries, near Godalming in Surrey, registered a trio of evergreen azalea hybrids in 1972, the pairing placing pollen from *R. kaempferi* onto the style of one of John Barr and Roza Stevenson’s lesser-known hybrids ‘Eira’. This azalea is a ‘Kirishima’ x ‘Malvaticum’ cross dating back to 1938, while ‘Heather Macleod’ and ‘Mary Meredith’ were the sister seedlings introduced with ‘Margaret George’. The latter, however, is the pick of the crop.

The shrub has a compact, low and wide-spreading habit that a decade of growth would barely have it topping 0.5m, while approaching around 1m in width. The leaves are dark green and glossy, around 3.5cm long by 1.7cm wide, and near completely hidden when a sheet of purplish-pink bloom covers the plant in early May. Three open-funnel-shaped corollas emerge from every inflorescence, each one as long as a leaf blade, but almost double that at the mouth, so close to 6cm across. They have slightly wavy lobe margins and are spotted deep red on the dorsal.


R. ‘Margaret George’



R. ‘Margot’

R. ‘Margot’

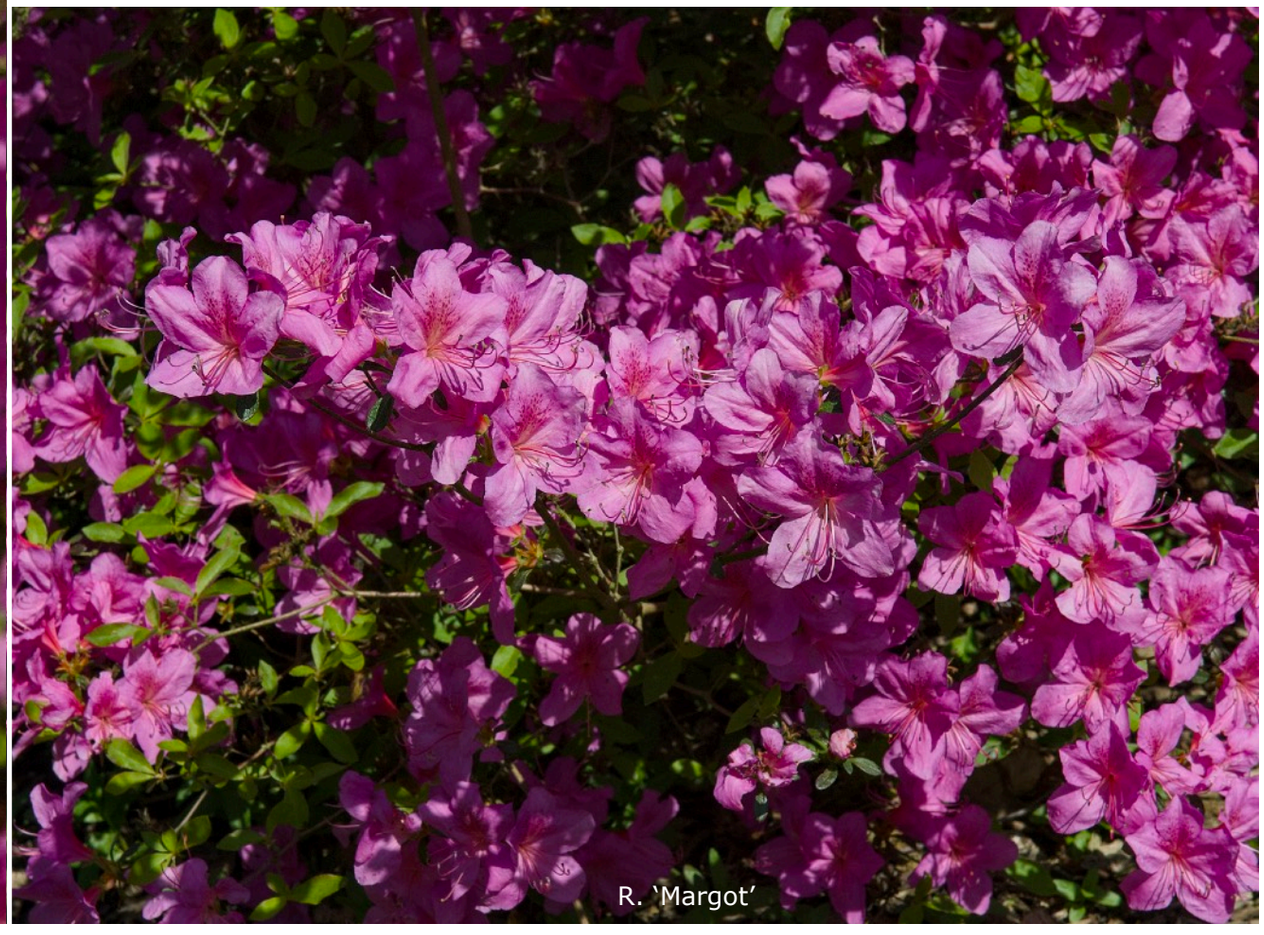
‘Mucronatum’ x *simsii*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5	May	1m x 2m

In 1848, John Standish and Charles Noble were the first nurserymen to make a ‘Mucronatum’ x *simsii* pairing, introducing ‘Elegans’. Benjamin Yoe Morrison, creator of the Glenn Dale Azaleas, followed on in the 1930s, adding another half dozen cultivars to the listings in 1947, while Collingwood Ingram - of Japanese cherry tree fame - may have beaten him to the draw in 1937. Morrison’s sextet of selections have likely never crossed the Atlantic and appear not to have fired the public’s imagination on the American side of the pond, while Ingram’s plant, clearly a cracker, is now a very rare find in UK gardens.

The flowers, produced in profusion from early May onwards, are a vivid magenta-pink in hue, with the dorsal lobe spotted darker and the throat coloured pale orange. This tone will also be found at the base of the stamen filaments and style, but higher up, all the way to the anthers and the stigma, they are flushed reddish-pink. And it is this flash of orange that draws the eye.

Mature specimens have an upright habit to around 1m and spread out slightly wider, although the bush is somewhat open, even when grown in full sun.



R. ‘Margot’

R. ‘Margot’

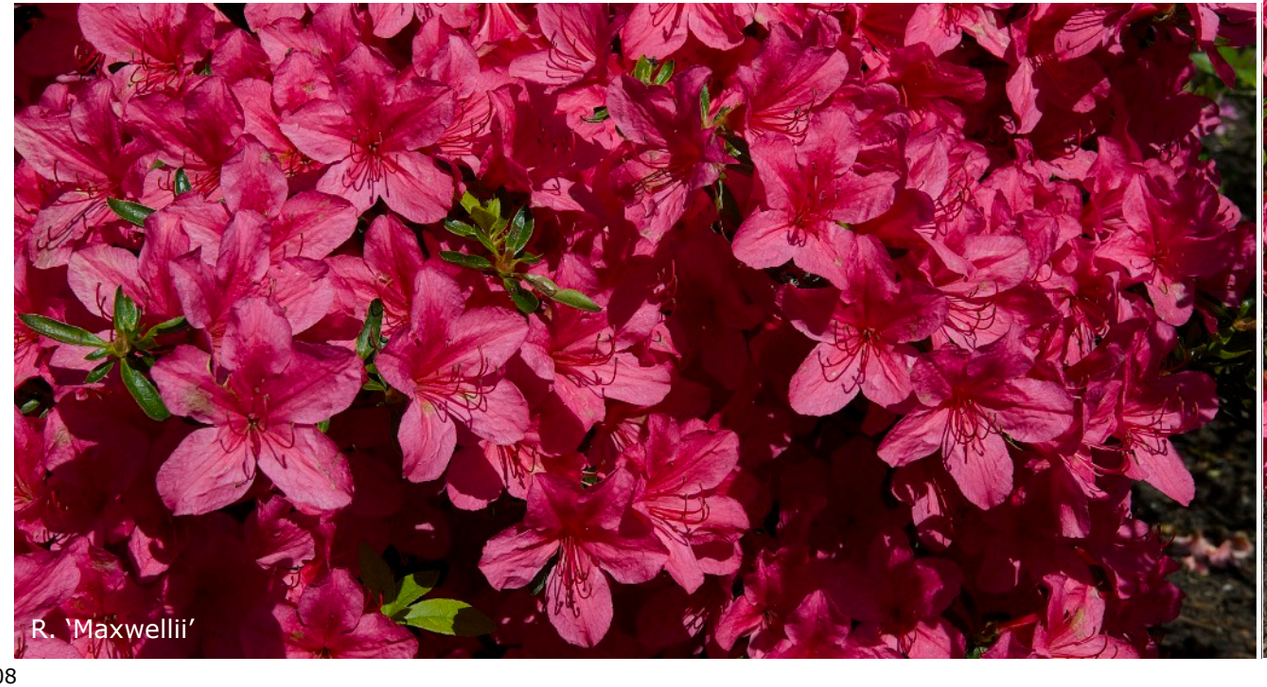
R. ‘Maxwellii’
‘Phoeniceum’ hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 May 1m x 2m

R. ‘Maxwellii’ is one of the better-known hybrids or forms of R. ‘Phoeniceum’.

The latter was introduced into British gardens from Canton (Guangzhou), China, in 1824, but was originally bred in Japan, and although first treated as a species, few authorities today continue to maintain the shrub as a form of *R. scabrum,* accepting it to be of hybrid origin. What the parentage mix will prove to be when the geneticists eventually get to work is anybody’s guess, though *R. ripense, R. scabrum* and *R. stenopetalum,* plus some DNA from the hybrid R. ‘Mucronatum’, are all likely to feature.

Still grown in a large number of UK gardens - albeit with a ‘Phoeniceum’ label hanging from the branches; or under its ‘Aka-yodogawa’ or ‘Maxwell’ synonyms - ‘Maxwellii’ was introduced into Europe from Japan during the early years of the last century and only later made its way across the Channel in consignments from the Belgian or Dutch nurserymen. It is considered the hardiest of the ‘Phoeniceum’ clones, able to thrive in east coast gardens all the way up to Edinburgh and beyond if given a sheltered position and ample sunlight to fully ripen the wood before the inevitable arrival of autumn’s first frosts. In such a position, the shrub will be a low-growing compact dome that completely covers itself with vivid, purplish-red blooms each season, these produced singly or with up to three corollas emerging from each flower bud. In a more shaded locale, the 1m height mark will soon be crossed and a much more open framework develop.

Each of the ‘Maxwellii’ funnel-shaped corollas is around 5cm long, almost 7.5cm across when fully expanded, and comes with a heavy patina of dark-brown spots and speckles on the dorsal lobe. The leaves are somewhat thin, mid to dark green in colour, obovate through narrowly oblong in shape, each blade around 5cm long with hairs on both the upper and lower surfaces.


R. ‘Maxwellii’


R. ‘Maxwellii’

R. 'Mucronatum'

Unknown x Unknown

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 May 1.4m x 2.5 or 3m x 5mm

R. 'Mucronatum' is a hybrid, not a species.

The confusion over its status effectively dates back to 1921 and the publication of *A Monograph of Azaleas,* co-authored by Ernest Wilson and Alfred Rehder. Although other botanists had described the plant from cultivated specimens, Wilson, fresh from his collecting trips to Japan, Korea and Taiwan, wrongly concluded that the hybrid was 'a white-flowered form of a plant wild near the banks of rivers on the island of Shikoku, which has lilac-purple flowers and to which Makino has given the name *R. ripense*.' The nomenclature precedence rules then allowed him to compound his mistake by making 'Mucronatum' the specific species and *R. ripense* a variety of it. And thus set it in botanic stone. For that blunder stymied the hand of the two Edinburgh Revision botanists - David Chamberlain and Sally Rae - in 1990 when *A Revision of Rhododendron IV Subgenus Tsutsusi* was published in the *Edinburgh Journal of Botany.* So despite the aide-memoire 'only known in cultivation', *R. mucronatum* var. *mucronatum* began its masquerade as a species, while *R. mucronatum* var. *ripense* was forced to adopt the fiction of a true species being classified as a variety of a hybrid. Pure madness.

In an article for *The Rhododendron Year Book 1948,* Professor Hiroshi Hara, a renowned Japanese botanist employed at the University of Tokyo, pulled the rug from under Wilson's feet - along with all those who had gone before him - when he wrote that 'Mucronatum, conspicuous for its large, pure white flowers, has been cultivated in Japan for about 300 years. It is not a white-flowered form of *R. ripense,* although it is still thought by some to be a native of middle China and to have been imported to Japan by priests with many other cultivated plants.' He also categorically stated that it had 'not been derived from a single species' but had 'originated in western Japan from the hybrids between *R. ripense* and *R. macrosepalum*' - the latter now redesignated *R. stenopetalum* - and was 'also influenced by *R. scabrum* and *R. kaempferi*'.

H. H. Davidian, in 1995's Volume 4 of *The Rhododendron Species,* confirms this to be the case, sides with Hara, and sticks a great big 'X' in front of the epithet. He also places the Wilson concoction - *R. mucronatum* var. *ripense* - in synonymy under *R. ripense,* the specific status epithet coined by Tomitarô Makino in 1908. Peter and Kenneth Cox too, in their 1997-published *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species,* agree that '*R. mucronatum* var. *mucronatum* is of cultivated origin', while the authors of *The Rhododendron Handbook 1998,* published by the Royal Horticultural Society, not only had the temerity to ditch the species designation, then write that 'Mucronatum' is 'an artificial hybrid derived from *R. ripense* and *R. stenopetalum*', but also mirrored the reinstatement of *R. ripense* to specific species ranking.

Such clarifications have been gladly followed herein, especially as so many doyens who are usually not in agreement, are all lined up on the same side of the argument, quietly rubbishing the species notion. Maddeningly however, the 2004-published Second Edition of the *IRRC* has doggedly chosen to maintain the Wilson species status quo of *R. mucronatum,* yet at the same time, has accepted the *R. ripense* upgrade. Which is frankly demented. Equally regrettable is Japanese nurseryman Koichiro Wada's muddled stance on the subject, this outlined in an article for *The Rhododendron And Camellia Year Book 1968,* the text's only redeeming point being that not once is the location of a single wild stand of 'Mucronatum' in his country given. And nor has anyone else reported the locale of such a cluster in the intervening half a century.

Joseph Poole, a collector for the Ball's Pond Road nurseryman Samuel Brooks, first introduced 'Mucronatum' into British gardens from China in 1819. Two decades later in 1843, Robert Fortune also despatched live plants back to England from Shanghai. However, what both gentlemen were unaware of, was that their specimens had been propagated from shrubs imported from Japan.

The taxon was first botanically described by George Don in Volume 3 of his *A General History of the Dichlamydeous Plants,* published in the autumn of 1834 and in which, Carl Ludwig Blume's 1823 *Azalea mucronata* epithet was transformed into *Rhododendron mucronatum.* The plant had also been previously described and illustrated as *Azalea ledifolia* by none other than William Jackson Hooker in Volume 56 of *Curtis's Botanical Magazine,* published in 1829, so the list of synonyms under *R. x mucronatum* is fairly substantial, as is the roll call of named selections and clonal forms, many of which also have multiple epithets.

The basic hybrid is now very widely grown in the UK, but when first introduced, it was condemned to a pot-plant hothouse culture. Yet it is hardy outdoors, thriving in all but the coldest gardens, and can be planted in full sun even in the southern counties. According to the online *Bean's Trees & Shrubs,* Sir Charles Lemon discovered this was so as early as the 1830s - at Carclew, his Palladian house and garden near Falmouth in Cornwall - and J. G. Millais, in the 1917 edition of *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* wrote that the shrub 'makes a wonderful show in the garden at Leonardslee, where thousands are planted', adding that 'out in the open it grows slowly and seldom exceeds 4 ft. in height, but in the sheltered garden its green platforms rise tier above tier to a height of 6 or 8 ft. I have seen hedges of it in Cornwall quite 9 ft. high and as much as 12-15 ft. through'. Both quotes will be found in the text under the now synonymous *R. ledifolium* entry, with all those imperial measurements respectively 1.4, 2, 2.6, 3, 4, and 5m, under today's metric system.

Between one and three widely funnel-shaped corollas emerge from each flower bud, carried on hairy pedicels that may sometimes also be slightly sticky. Individual trumpets can be up to 5cm long and 6cm across, these pure white in hue, with some forms having a light scattering of brownish or pale crimson spots on the dorsal, and a few being fragrant. On a mature shrub in full bloom their total count would likely be measured in the thousands, and sticking with numbers, those counts summing how many stamens protrude from each corolla will vary from eight to ten, while their filaments, like the style, will be flushed pure white.

'Mucronatum' has typical spring and summer dimorphic foliage. The former are deciduous and thin, lanceolate through oblong-lanceolate in shape, pale green in colour, usually between 3 and 5cm long by up to 1.5cm wide, densely hairy on both surfaces and along the margins, and shed in the autumn; the latter, evergreen and thicker, lanceolate through oblanceolate in shape, dark green in colour, smaller, between 1 and 4cm long by up to 1.2cm wide, but equally hairy, and they persist over winter.

Japanese nurserymen have bred an inordinate swarm of 'Mucronatum' clones - with larger flowers, spotted flowers, double flowers, semi-double flowers, variously coloured flowers - the majority of which have not been introduced into the West. One of those that has reached our shores was previously known as *R. mucronatum* f. *plenum,* then just 'Plenum' and now 'Fuji-manyo'. Floristically, it is as far removed from the bog-standard white-flowering form of 'Mucronatum' as it is possible to get, having semi-double or double corollas in tones of rosy-purple, which are a delight to behold, even when the their hue has paled to lilac. Other imports, such as the greenish-yellow spotted 'Noordtianum' with slightly larger corollas than the type, are much of a muchness.

R. ‘Mucronatum’


R. ‘Mucronatum’


R. ‘Mucronatum’


R. ‘Mucronatum’

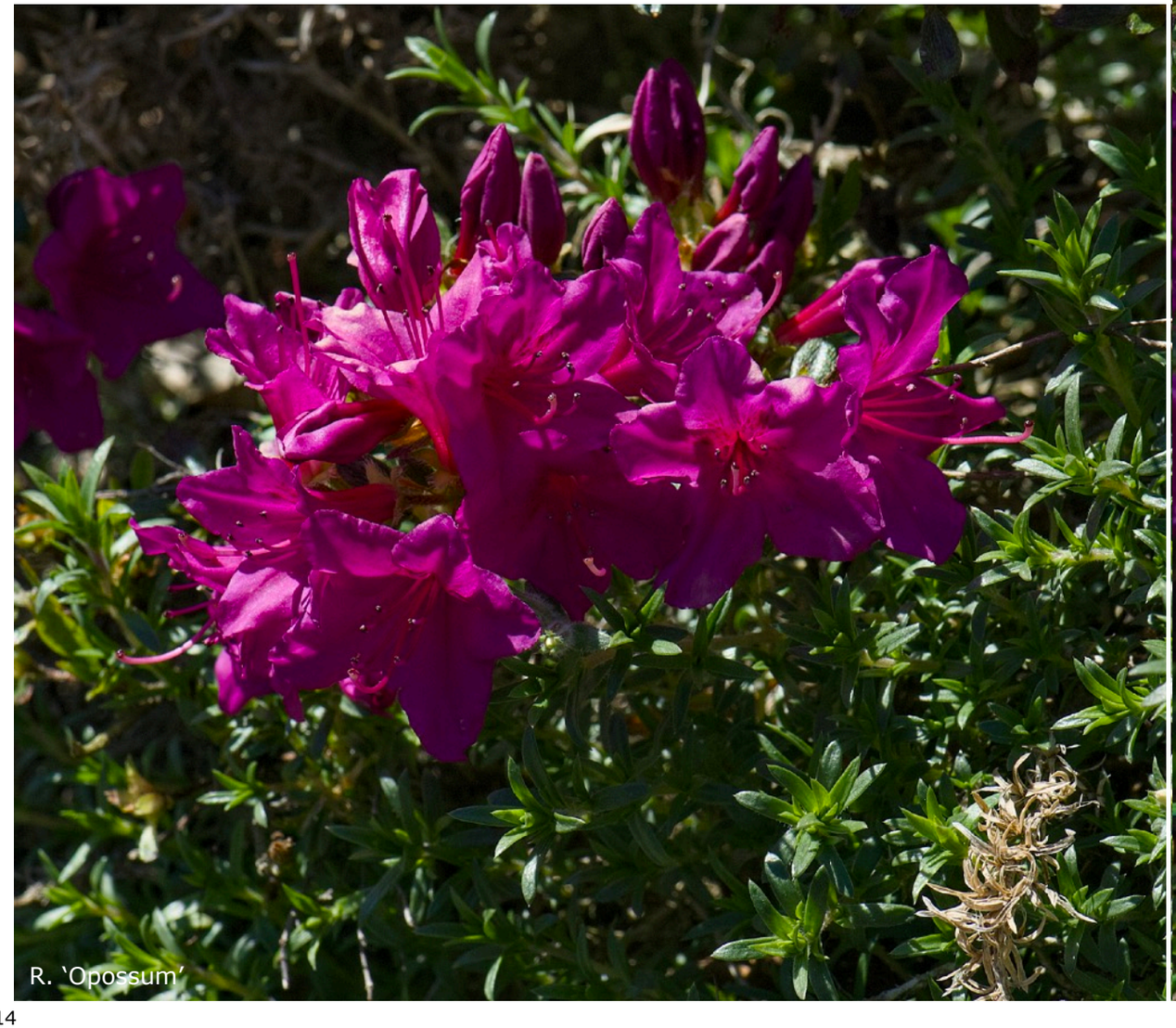

R. ‘Mucronatum’

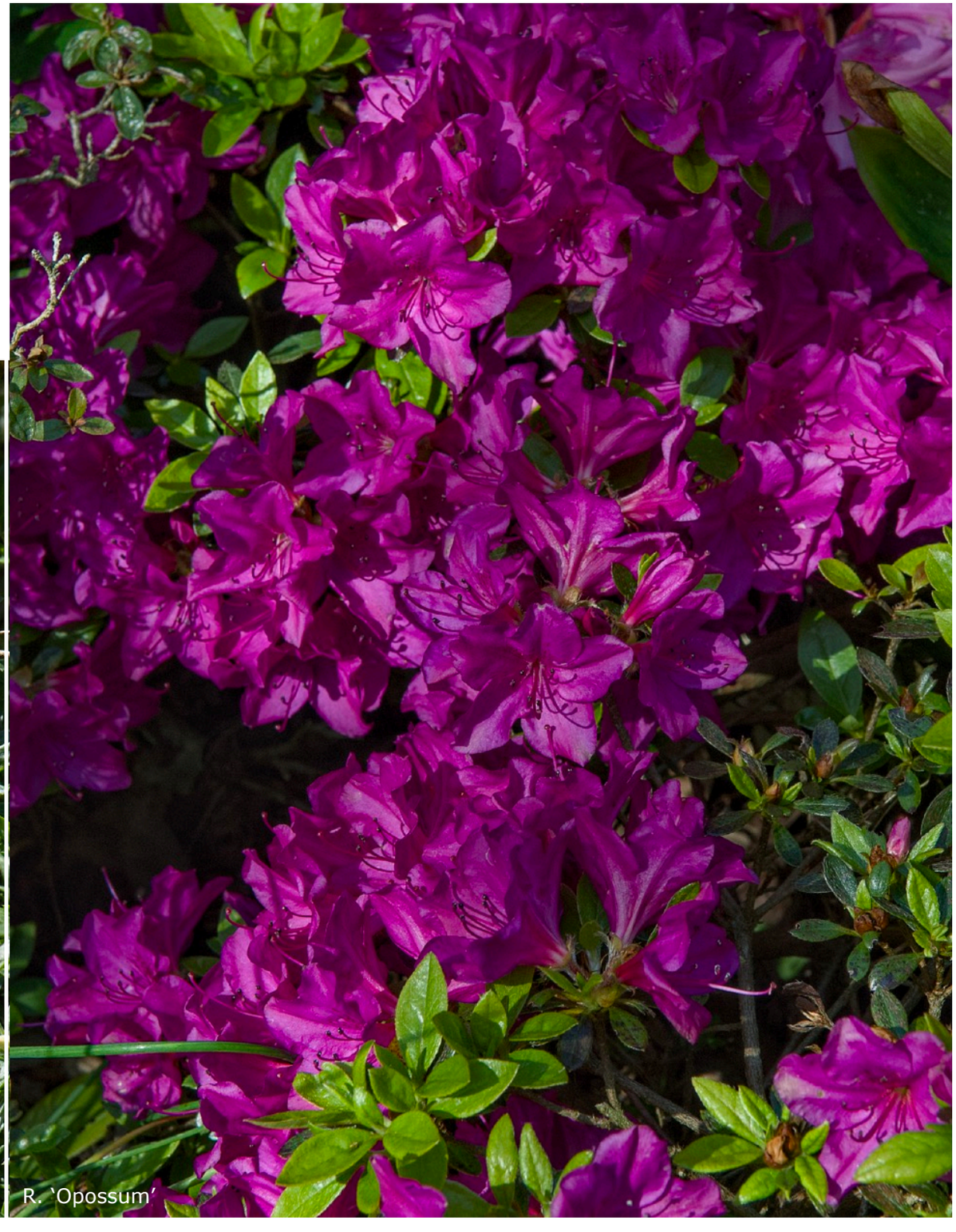
R. ‘Mucronatum Fuji-manyo’

R. ‘Mucronatum Fuji-manyo’

R. ‘Opossum’
‘Purpurtraum’ x ‘Blue Danube’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Mid-late May 1m x 2m

‘Opossum’ is an evergreen azalea bred by the owners of Glendoick Gardens, Peter and Kenneth Cox. The cross was pollinated in 1997 and the hybrid named and introduced in 2007. Inheriting their hue from the ‘Malvaticum’ genes in ‘Blue Danube’, the flowers open in a tone between deep purplish-red and vivid reddish-purple, the campanulate corollas are carried 3 to 5 in an open truss, with each around 3cm long by up to 5cm across at the mouth, and the dorsal lobe is spotted darker. Foliage is dark green and glossy, the leaves obovate in shape and slightly hairy, each blade between 1 and 1.5cm long. The habit is low and spreading, so a more compact iteration of the pollen provider, and it is named after the largest order of marsupial animals in the Western Hemisphere.


R. ‘Opossum’


R. ‘Opossum’

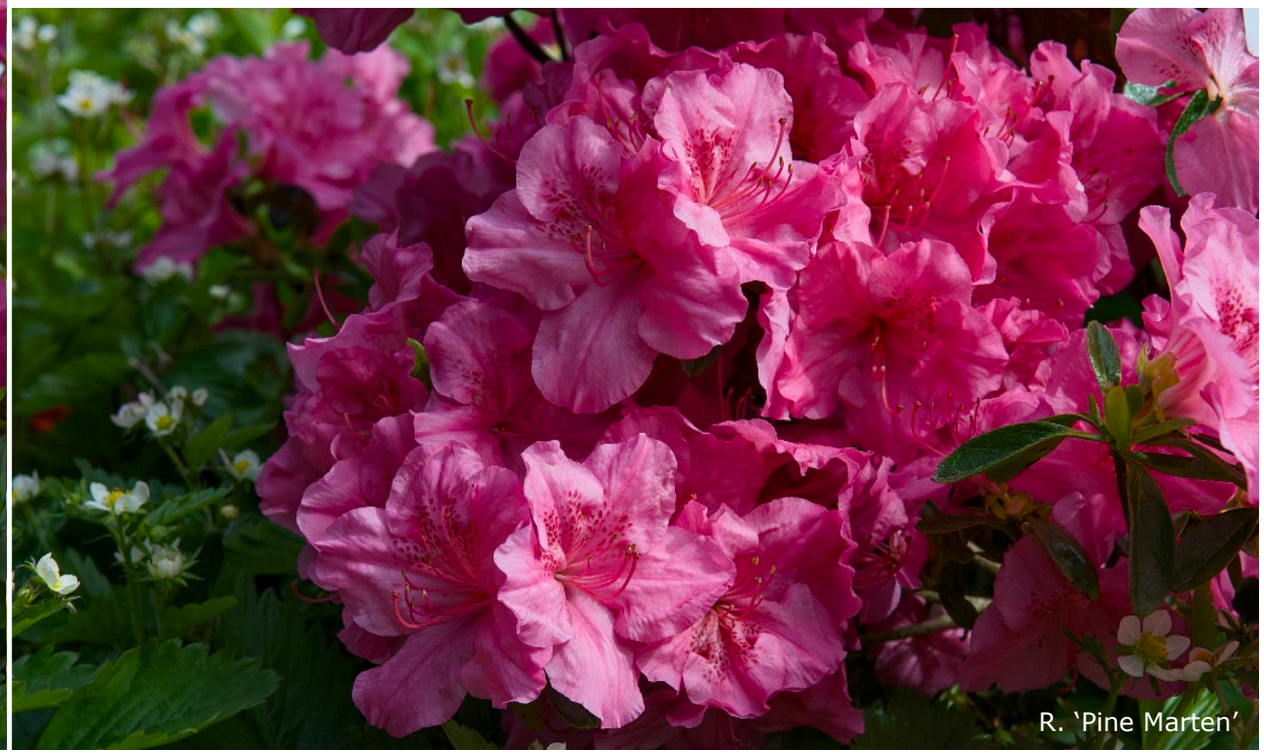

R. ‘Pine Marten’

R. ‘Pine Marten’
‘Eisprinzessin’ x Unnamed seedling No. 94-3A
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 May 1m x 2m

Another introduction from the 1997 evergreen azalea pollinations at Glendoick, ‘Pine Marten’ is a sister seedling to ‘Glendoick Rosebud’. Hans Hachmann’s ‘Eisprinzessin’ has here been paired with an unnamed seedling - No. 94-3A - whose parentage has not been published, though whatever the latter might turn out to be, it is inconceivable that it could bring a more substantial genetic heritage to the table than the seed parent, which if the parentage is plotted-out in flow chart form will show that it has virtually the entire cohort of Subsection *Tsutsusia* present along its DNA strands.

In combination, all those C, G, A and T nucleobases - Cytosine, Guanine, Adenine and Thymine - have produced a shrub that opens a sweep of campanulate corollas in tones of strong purplish-pink. Three or four are carried in each truss, with the blooms individually between 2 and 3cm long by 6 to 7cm wide, gifted 5-lobed wavy margins, and spotted red on the dorsals. The stamens and the style are consistently flushed pink. The leaf blades are dark green in hue, somewhat shiny, ovate in shape with a slightly up-curved hairy margin and occasionally concave in profile. They are also 2 to 3cm long, but only 1cm wide, although very few will be visible when even quite small specimens smother themselves in bloom during May. Older plants, having built themselves up into a wide-spreading dome around 1m high, but twice that figure or more across, will offer a floral display that will simply leave you transfixed.

Ken Cox has described ‘Pine Marten’ as a showstopper and a better adjective would be hard find even if a thesaurus was to hand.


R. ‘Pine Marten’

R. `Pooh-Bah'

R. 'Pooh-Bah'
'Kirishima' x 'Malvaticum'
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 May 1m x 2m

'Pooh-Bah' is one of the eight registered selections from Roza Stevenson's 1938 'Kirishima' x 'Malvaticum' pairing that was introduced by Arthur George's Hydon Nurseries in the mid 1960s. Of course, John Barr Stevenson is listed in the hybrid's *IRRC* entry as being responsible for the directed pollination, which simply confirms that equality between the sexes in the 1930s was non-existent. That all of those *IRRC* entries were not updated after Roza's death, especially given Sir Eric Savill's glowing accolade that was published in *The Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book 1968* - where who did what and when was made crystal clear - also speaks volumes.

Gilbert and Sullivan fans will know that the 'Pooh-Bah' epithet is borrowed from the duo's 1885 comic opera *The Mikado,* as were five others from the group - 'Katisha', 'Nanki-Poo', 'Peep-Bo', 'Titipu' and 'Tit-Willow' - while 'Princess Ida' opened at the Savoy at the start of 1884. 'Eira' is anyone's guess, although she does get taken to a G&S production by Warrick Synclaire in the Tinnean novel *Destiny's End,* but as this was only published in 2016 its relevance to the subject at hand is tangential at best.

The flowers of 'Pooh-Bah' are reddish-purple in tone and spotted deep red on the dorsal lobe. Each is 2.5cm long by 4cm across, and three or four tubular-funnel corollas form each truss. Stamens and style are flushed crimson. Completing the picture, the glossy green leaves are 3cm long by 1.5cm wide, though these will barely be visible beneath the sheet of bloom that covers the shrub during May.

Had 'Hatsu-giri' from the Kurume Strain not already taken the evergreen azalea world by storm, one would expect that each spring, pots of 'Pooh-Bah' would have been filling the racks of the gardening section in every DIY warehouse from Land's End to John O'Groats instead, eagerly snapped-up by hordes of impulse purchasers. Regrettably, despite being the better plant, with truly deep mauve flowers, it has been completely overlooked.


R. 'Pooh-Bah'


R. 'Pooh-Bah'



R. ‘Tebotan’

R. ‘Tebotan’

Unknown x Unknown

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5	April	1.8m x 2.5m

Bred in the 17th Century, perhaps even earlier, ‘Tebotan’ is one of the oldest hybrids still in cultivation today. It was first described in the now classic work on azaleas written by the Japanese nurseryman Ihei Ito that was published in 1692, *Kinshu Makura,* though the volume is better known by its translated title, *A Brocade Pillow: Azaleas of Old Japan.*

Ernest Wilson was the plant hunter who introduced the cultivar into America from Kurume in 1919, with the shrub soon flowering at Holm Lea, the estate of Charles Sprague Sargent, director of the Arnold Arboretum, located in Brookline, Massachusetts. In the 1922 edition of *The Rhododendron Society Notes,* Wilson wrote that the azalea:

> ‘Has double flowers with small green leaves showing in the centre of each, and is remarkable for the colour of its flowers, which is the same as that of the bracts of *Bougainvillaea glabra* of *Choisy,* and quite unique among Azaleas. It is an old plant in Japanese gardens, but is very rare’.

His 1921-published *A Monograph of Azaleas,* written with Alfred Rehder, lists the plant as Rhododendron phoeniceum var. tebotan, with its parentage recorded as *Rh. Kaempferi* x *Rh. rosmarinifolium,* the combination sourced from an article that appeared in Volume 32 of the *Tokyo Botanical Magazine,* published in 1918 and written by the botanist Shunzo Komatsu. Post the millennium however, while the alliance with ‘Phoeniceum’ is maintained, the *IRRC* entry lists the ‘Tebotan’ lineage as unknown and designates ‘Rosmarinifolium’ as a synonym of ‘Mucronatum’.

The ‘Tebotan’ flowers are double, mallow purple in tone with a sparse sprinkling of crimson spots, and the 4cm-wide eleven-lobed corollas are carried in a truss of six. A tiny cluster of undeveloped leaves at the centre of each bloom have replaced the stamens and a ‘leafy’ calyx will be found gripping the base of each corolla. Foliage is oblanceolate in shape, the blades 3cm long by 2cm wide, dark green in colour with a fringe of ciliate hairs around the margins. Habit is upright and spreading, but the weight of the blooms often produces shrubs with an arching set of branches.

100-year-old specimen plants grown from that first distribution of R. ‘Tebotan’ by the Arnold Arboretum in the early 1920s are still thriving today at Caerhays Castle in Cornwall, these likely the fruit of the close association that J. C. Williams had established with Ernest Wilson while he was still employed as the collector for the Veitch nurseries. Equally fine specimens can be seen at Exbury, and in the Savill Gardens, Windsor Great Park.

R. ‘Tebotan’

R. ‘Tebotan’

R. ‘Tebotan’

Lepidote Hybrids

R. ‘Alison Johnstone’
yunnanense x *concatenans*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Early May 2m x 3m

George Johnstone, owner of the Trewithen estate near Truro in Cornwall, and a noted hybridiser, likely made the *yunnanense* x *concatenans* pairing that resulted in R. ‘Alison Johnstone’ in the early 1940s, certainly before 1945. The flowers open apricot, but quickly fade to amber flushed with pink, and are usually produced in abundance on a compact but upright, bushy shrub. The leaves follow the pollen parent, being rounded, glossy and bluish-green in colour. Specimens do best when they are planted in a sunny but sheltered position in northern gardens, while dappled shade is the ideal for the southern counties, because although more light results in more prolific flowering, too much sun causes a yellow edge to form on the leaf blades.

Regrettably, a number of seedlings were distributed from the original pollination, which are all now mixed up in commerce, though the true AM clone can be identified from the pack by its unspotted flowers. Equally, and as will be repeated in the text of many of the forthcoming entries for *R. cinnabarinum* crosses - *R. concatenans* being one of its four subspecies - the leaves of ‘Alison Johnstone’ are somewhat susceptible to the powdery mildew fungus. The likelihood of an attack can be reduced by good basic garden husbandry and dealt with by spraying with a fungicide should any yellowish spotting appear on the foliage - visible on the image below - which for this cultivar is usually a mild disfigurement that rarely results in an early leaf drop unless your specimen has been planted too close to a more disease-prone variety.


R. ‘Alison Johnstone’


R. ‘Alison Johnstone’

R. ‘Alison Johnstone’

The ‘Anna Baldsiefen’ Pride

‘Gable’s Pioneer’ x ‘Gable’s Pioneer’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 March 1.2m x 1m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Anna Baldsiefen	Warren Baldsiefen	1956	before 1964
Malta	David Leach	1956	1962

R. ‘Gable’s Pioneer’, a prolific-flowering lepidote hybrid raised from a *mucronulatum* x *racemosum* cross made by Joseph Gable sometime before 1946, comes with an ironclad constitution that allows it to flourish along the eastern seaboard of North America way beyond the lines of latitude that cross New Hampshire, Maine or even Nova Scotia. It was already acknowledged to be a very fine rhododendron when Warren Baldsiefen of New Jersey, selfed it in 1956. He registered ‘Anna Baldsiefen’ in 1964, and although his selection lost ten degrees of hardiness in the pairing process, it gained reliably evergreen, dark glossy green foliage, with the blades - despite turning reddish-bronze in winter - held, rather than falling. That recombination of the genes also gave the cultivar brilliant purplish-red through purplish-pink star-shaped flowers, each of which has a white throat, these held in terminal and axillary trusses of 1 to 3.

A multitude of them.

Gone too were the decidedly leggy stems that needed pruning every other season, these replaced by a set of far shorter, twiggy branches, which grow tightly upright to give an almost columnar profile.

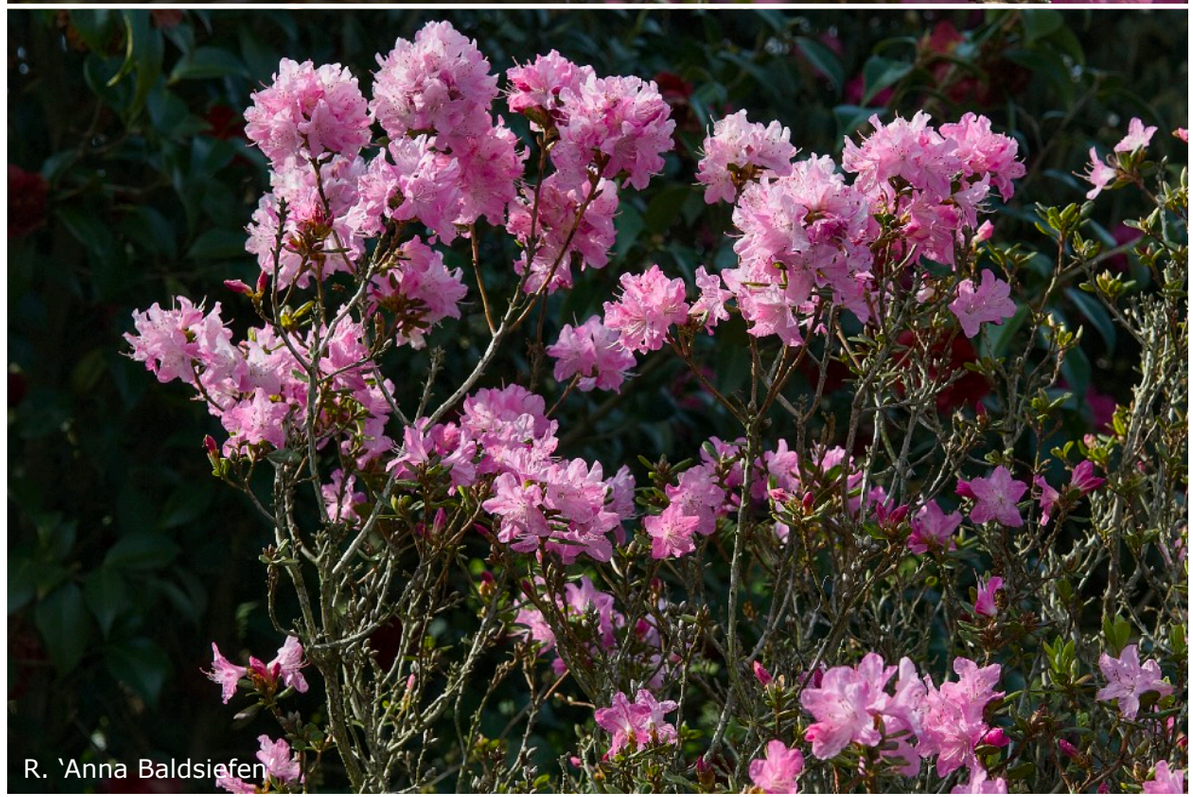
There was only one fault: the tiny leaves were far more receptive to rust, a group of thirteen fungi whose spores first appear as groups of powdery orange dots on the lower leaf surface. Left untreated, they cause black spots to appear on the upper surface and can ultimately result in an early leaf drop. Luckily, the cure is no more complicated than simply spraying the undersides of the leaves with a fungicide available from the gardening section of the local DIY Superstore. So if the shrub appeals, help it thrive by choosing a planting position away from any *Tsuga* or *Picea* trees, especially the overhanging branches of such, because these conifers act as alternative hosts for the disease and so can drip water containing the spores down onto the plants.

R. ‘Anna Baldsiefen’ can be grown in any UK garden where the soil is suitable for rhododendrons, however exposed the situation, and it will cover itself with bloom each and every year whether planted at Land’s End or John o’Groats.

Another American rhodophile, author and hybridiser David Leach, also selfed ‘Gable’s Pioneer’ in 1956 and introduced his own selection - ‘Malta’ - in 1962.



R. ‘Anna Baldsiefen’



R. ‘Anna Baldsiefen’



R. ‘April Chimes’

The ‘April Chimes’ Pride

hippophaeoides x *mollicomum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Late March-April 1.5m x 1.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
April Chimes	Hilliers Nurseries	1938	1969
Hipmol	Clibrans Nursery	1938	before 1958

Hilliers Nurseries, of Braishfield, Hampshire, introduced R. ‘April Chimes’ in 1969, while the now defunct Clibrans Nursery, of Altrincham, Manchester, had registered a sister seedling - R. ‘Hipmol’ - several years earlier. Yet the apparent, duplicated pairing, was far from a coincidence as both hybrids arose from seed of *R. hippophaeoides* that was supplied by the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh. The pollen parent, *R. mollicomum,* was basically a guesstimate, made by the gardening staff at both venues, when in amongst the true seedlings, a number of rogues were spotted.

These have turned out to be low growing, but fairly vigorous plants, with R. ‘April Chimes’ producing long stems that if left unpruned, result in a straggly habit. The flowers develop from a mass of buds found not only at the branch tips, but in the axils of the leaf stalks immediately below, with 3-6 blooms carried in each truss. These combine to form larger clusters, with the funnel-shaped corollas coloured a clear and uniform rosy-mauve. The leaves are quite small, narrowly elliptic, each around 2.5cm long, yet densely scaly beneath, their hue, a pale golden-brown.



R. ‘April Chimes’

R. ‘Arctic Tern’

trichostomum x Subsection *Leda* species

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 Late May-June 1.5m x 2.5m

If physical proof were ever needed to show that the plants of the old Genus *Ledum* were actually rhododendrons - in addition, of course, to the overwhelming genetic evidence now available - *R. Arctic Tern* could step up to the plate.

Back in the early 1980s, when Peter Cox first spotted that Hjalmar Larson’s cross wasn’t quite as advertised and categorically not a form of *R. trichostomum,* being in fact, a *Ledodendron* - a cross between *R. trichostomum* and an unknown member of the widely distributed *Ledum* fraternity - such terminology implied the unique nature of what was then considered to be an inter-genus cross, a bi-generic hybrid no less. However, our scientific knowledge has advanced substantially since then and removed the blinkers, so that today, we know it is simply a pairing between two lepidote rhododendrons.

Yet despite the mythology being debunked, ‘Arctic Tern’ remains special, because it beautifully combines the traits of both parents.

And as with all the best hybrids, in doing so, surpasses them.

The character of the foliage throughout the winter months is a fundamental and obvious improvement, as unlike most Subsection *Leda* species, the leaves of R. ‘Arctic Tern’ remain green and healthy from the first frosts of autumn to the last of spring. It is also far easier to cultivate than *R. trichostomum,* some forms of which - as most rhodophiles are well aware - can be downright tricky, especially in the UK’s hotter southern counties. In fact, ‘Arctic Tern’ is hardy enough to be grown anywhere in the UK, with a full sun placement keeping a vigorous plant compact. Equally, a more neutral soil prevents any yellowing of the leaves, this an inherited trait from its seed parent that can be remedied in the same fashion, by the application of a little lime.

Yet the flowers remain the real selling point, even though these are individually small. For they are carried in compact trusses of up to 20 corollas, pure white with a hint of green in the throat, and not a single branch tip is without a flower bud: year on year on year. And a mature plant in full bloom is not only breathtaking to behold, but it casts aside FKW’s seventy-five-year-old aspersions on first glance.



R. ‘Arctic Tern’

R. 'Arctic Tern'

R. ‘Arctic Tern’

R. ‘Arctic Tern’

R. ‘Ashcombe’

R. 'Ashcombe'

'Cubittii' x 'Cubittii'

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H3 Late February-April 2.4m x 3m

R. 'Ashcombe' is more commonly known throughout the worldwide rhododendron community as *R. veitchianum* Cubittii Group 'Ashcombe', but in fact, the plant has only a second-generation link to the species at best and its Royal Horticultural Society group status has been assigned in error. For 'Ashcombe' is a full-blown lepidote cross, bred from a selfed natural hybrid, as an examination of its history will show:

In March 1909, the American naturalist George Cubitt was exploring the Bhamo District of Kachin State in northern Burma, now, of course, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. It was while he was botanising at Maru-kahtung (Sindum), that he came upon the shrub whose epithet would later bear his name: *R. cubittii.* Although this was identified as *R. veitchianum* in the plant hunter's field notes, John Hutchinson, Kew's resident rhodo-savvy botanist of the time, later decided the herbarium material was intermediate with *R. formosum* and so designated the find as a new rhododendron species (*Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh,* Volume 12, 1919). Six decades later, when another botanic sage of the genus was reviewing those very same herbarium plates for a much more significant classification update - the Subgenus *Rhododendron* monograph of the Edinburgh Revision (*Notes,* Volume 39, Number 1, 1980) - James Cullen sided with Cubitt and sunk the 1909 find under the aforementioned *R. veitchianum*.

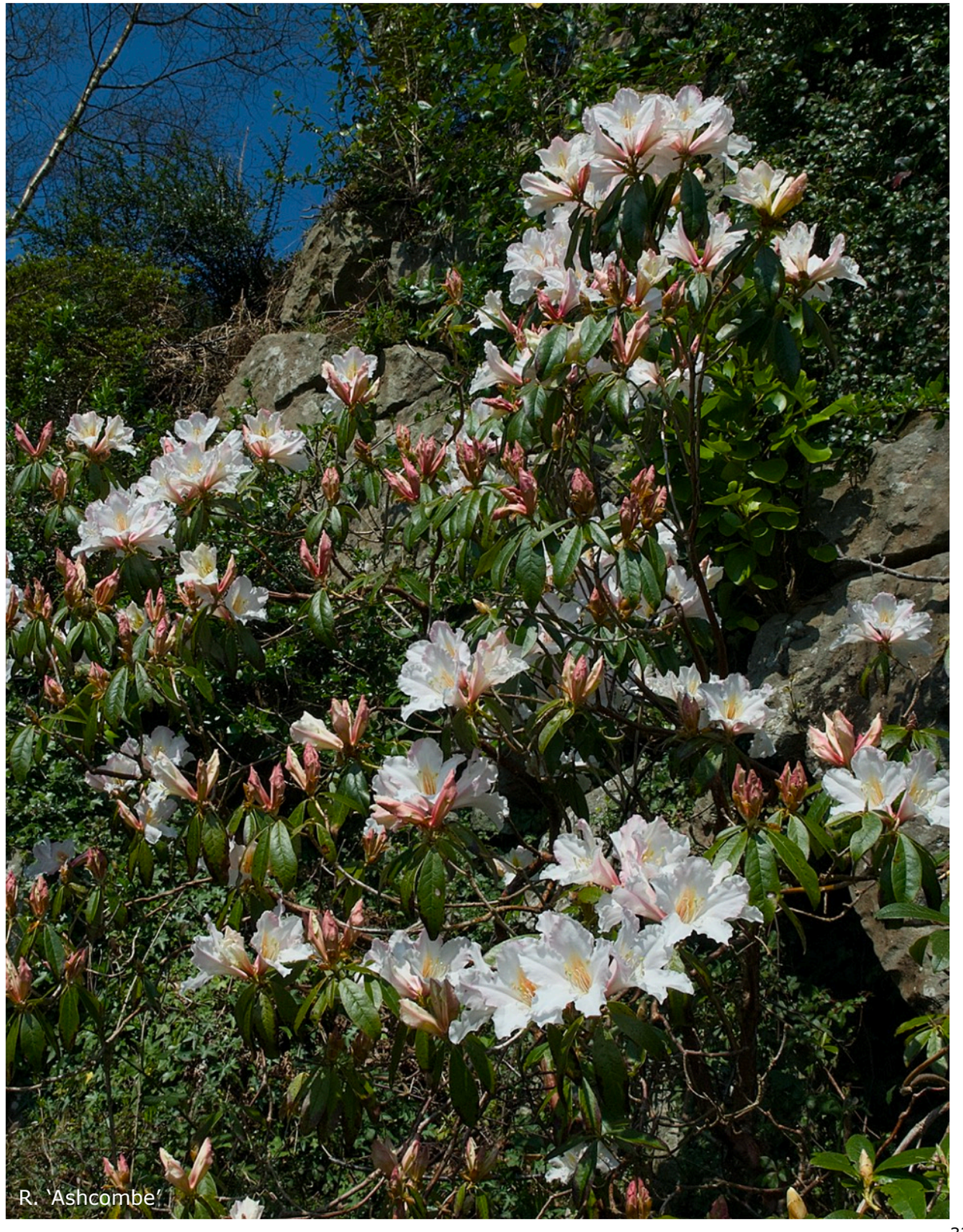
All well and good, except for the fact that the plants germinated from Cubitt's seed were a mismatch with his dried specimens, as the entry in the *Rhododendron Handbook 1998* clearly states. As these plants cannot be associated with *R. veitchianum* and are of dubious provenance, they need to be treated as natural hybrids, with the designation *R. x cubittii* being as good as any (although technically, the Hutchinson assigned epithet applies only to the seed parent - the herbarium material - so a new name will be required for the germinated progeny).

Be that as it may, back in the 1950s, when Hope Findlay was hybridising at the Savill and Valley gardens in Windsor Great Park, *R. x cubittii* was still regarded as just another specific species, albeit decidedly tender for UK cultivation. For whatever reason, a specimen was self-pollinated in one of the greenhouses and 'Ashcombe', graced with that dazzling, deep orange flare at the base of its corollas, emerged as a result. Named and registered by the Crown Estate Commissioners in 1962 shortly after the plant scooped an FCC award from the RHS - their choice of epithet seemingly misconstruing the American plant hunter with another George Cubitt, the British politician and peer, said gentleman being the first holder of the title, Baron Ashcombe - today, mature specimens will be found planted outdoors in mild west coast gardens from the tip of Cornwall all the way up to Inverewe in Wester Ross, Scotland, and likely beyond, though elsewhere, even in the south, plants will require domicile in a cool greenhouse to survive the chills of winter.

And of course, all will be labelled as originally distributed - *R. cubittii* 'Ashcombe' - or even worse, as the precipitately formulated *R. veitchianum* Cubittii Group 'Ashcombe'.

Both of which are technically wrong.

For as set out above, 'Ashcombe' is the offspring of a selfed natural hybrid - denoted herein as *R. x cubittii* - whose seed parent simply happened to be *R. veitchianum*. A fact that most admirers, completely blown away by the blooms, will consider irrelevant, if they consider it at all.



R. 'Ashcombe'

The ‘Augfast’ Pride

augustinii x *fastigiatum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April 0.6m x 1m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Augfast	Edward Magor	unknown	1921
Heki-hoh	K. Ono	1984	1998
Ightham	G. Reuthe Ltd	before 1952	1958

With ‘Augfast’, E. J. P. Magor’s split-butt-and-join naming technique finally hit a pay dirt combination that could easily roll off most people’s tongues, the cross a pairing of two ‘blue’ flowered species, *R. augustinii* and *R. fastigiatum*. When the directed pollination took place is unknown, but the hybrid was introduced in 1921, the first of many similar matings and two duplicate pairings.

The Magor plant is a semi-dwarf, compact shrub, around half-a-metre high, spreading to twice that or a touch more, and if your soil has the same acidity and mineral content as that found at Lamellen in Cornwall, where the hybrid was raised, the quotation marks encompassing the hue can be dropped and the star-shaped corollas will indeed be a true blue. Otherwise, and they will open lavender-blue or with some mauve in the mix. Yet despite these being quite small and only held in trusses of three, flowering is prodigious most years, with the bush usually completely cloaked in bloom.

Their foil, the leaves, are deep green and shiny lanceolate daggers, densely scaly on both surfaces, which can shrug off full sun even in the southern counties, though a passing respite from the furnace when at its hottest would benefit both foliage and flowers.



R. ‘Augfast’

The ‘Azurika’ Pride

russatum x *impeditum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 April 1m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Azurika	Hans Hachmann	1963	1979
Hachmann’s Violetta	Hans Hachmann	1963	1977

A compact-growing shrub, dome-shaped and far wider than it is high, R. ‘Azurika’ is a cross between two equally distinguished lepidote species, reflecting the best characteristics of each. Bred in Germany by Hans Hachmann in 1963, the hybrid has the constitution to survive winters on the Continent undamaged, so can be planted virtually anywhere in the UK where the soil is acidic. The leaves are small, scaly on both surfaces, mid through dark green in colour, and on a well-grown mature specimen they completely mask the tangled framework of short branches that support them. Flowering occurs in April, when the plant will be blanketed in a shawl of violet-blue, deepest when the corollas first open, paling with age, and more quickly so if subject to strong sunlight.

The perfect subject for the rock garden, ‘Azurika’ demands an open position and swift drainage. It is happiest in colder climes, the shrub performing best in the northern counties of England, and in Scotland, but tolerant of the stronger sunlight and hotter temperatures found in the south providing the excess heat of midday can be moderated somewhat by a patch of shade. Yet even when so ensconced, the root ball must never be allowed to completely dry out.



R. ‘Azurika’


R. ‘Biskra’

R. ‘Biskra’
cinnabarinum x *ambiguum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 Mid April-early May 5m x 3m

Before the devil’s serpent known as Powdery Mildew struck, “Lover’s Lane” in Exbury Gardens was densely planted on both sides by clones of the pendant-flowered hybrids ‘Lady Chamberlain’ and ‘Lady Rosebery’. Visit today however and only Solent Strain azaleas will be seen hedging the path: for so savage was the fungal attack - annually defoliating most of the shrubs - that virtually all had to be removed, leaving just a few scattered specimens of the ‘Ladies’ across the entire 200-acre estate. Thankfully, another of Lionel de Rothschild’s *R. cinnabarinum* crosses came through those plague times almost unscathed. It was a seedling grown from a mating where *R. ambiguum,* of Subsection *Triflora,* had provided the pollen. Introduced in 1934, Lionel had named it ‘Biskra’.

5m-tall mature specimens of his pairing will still be found in gardens up and down the country, for not only is ‘Biskra’ resistant to the mildews, but it is also one of the hardiest *cinnabarinum* hybrids that has been introduced to date. Its habit is willowy, open and slender, the branchlets graced with clusters of elliptically-shaped leaves around 6.5cm long, dark green above and very scaly below. The abaxial leaf surface is also densely covered with minute, crimson-coloured, resin-bearing cells, and it is likely this profusion of sticky glands that plays a central role in preventing the *Erysiphe* fungus from establishing on the foliage. And that is just capital. For a well-grown and tended mature plant blooms with unfettered abandon each season and is an instant eye-catcher.

The flowers are pendant, narrowly trumpet-shaped, in a truss of up to eight corollas, their colour, vermilion blended with biscuit in the Award of Merit clone (deep rich orange, flushed rose), but also deep pink through orange, or even bluish-pink, these latter forms fast fading-out to an unappealing brownish-salmon-orange. The former, however, retains its pigmentation, without paling, almost until the moment when the corollas are finally discarded, unless planted in near full sun.

The seed parent of R. ‘Biskra’ was actually a plum-crimson-flowering member of what today is designated *R. cinnabarinum* Roylei Group - at least by rhodophiles and the RHS - though at the time L de R made the directed pollination, it still retained its Hooker-assigned specific status.


R. ‘Biskra’

R. ‘Biskra’

R. ‘Biskra’


R. ‘Blue Diamond’


R. ‘Blue Diamond’

The ‘Blue Diamond’ Pride

‘Intrifast’ x *augustinii*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	April	2m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Blue Diamond	J. J. Crosfield	unknown	1935
Oudijk’s Favorite	Le Feber & Co.	unknown	1958

J. J. Crosfield’s late-1920s directed pollination remains the most popular and widely planted ‘blue’-flowering rhododendron in the UK, in Europe, in the United States, Australia and New Zealand, indeed, wherever hybrids of the genus are grown it tops the charts, though as the quotation marks allude, the corollas are violet-blue rather than true blue. Or nearer purple if anything other than the FCC clone is planted. And of course, regrettably, there are a number of those clones in circulation masquerading as the real thing.

The placing of pollen from *R. augustinii* onto the stigma of R. ‘Intrifast’ - a dwarf hybrid from a T. H. Lowinsky *intricatum* x *fastigiatum* cross - has produced a medium-sized upright shrub that will ultimately graze the 2m-mark if left unchecked for thirty years or so. It does best in full sun, remaining compact and densely filled with foliage, though southern gardeners should opt to provide a modicum of light dappled shade for at least part of the day to avoid the leaves scorching in a summer heatwave or the flower colour paling after a week or so of strong sunlight. Appearing in April, those blooms are carried in trusses of 4 or 5, with the buds often gathered together in knots or clusters. The corollas are unspotted and up to 5cm wide at the mouth, 5-lobed, and deeply divided, while the leaves are no more than 2.5cm long and half that in width (more rotund specimens being charlatans).

‘Blue Diamond’ boasts a hardiness rating good enough for all but the very coldest UK gardens, as mature specimens planted up and down almost the length and breadth of the entire country will confirm.

‘Oudijk’s Favorite’ has flowers its *IRRC* entry describes as ‘campanula violet’, though pale lilac would be a more accurate description.

R. ‘Blue Diamond’

R. ‘Blue Tit’

The ‘Blue Tit’ Pride

impeditum x *augustinii*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 April-early May 1.3 to 3m x 2 to 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Blue Tit	J. C. Williams	unknown	1933
Blue Tit (Magor)	E. J. P. Magor	before 1936	before 1936
Saint Breward	E. J. P. Magor	before 1936	1962
Saint Tudy	E. J. P. Magor	before 1936	1961
Vibrant Violet	Frank Fujioka	1966	1986

Writing in *Plantae Wilsonianae* back in 1913, Ernest Wilson describes J. C. Williams as the first amateur gardener in Britain to fully appreciate the horticultural value of the rhododendrons of western China, and he notes that Williams has the best collection of these new varieties to be found. Two of those plants, thriving in the woodland at Caerhays Castle - above Porthluney Cove in Cornwall - *R. impeditum* and *R. augustinii,* were paired to create the hybrid John Charles named for a small passerine that flitted about amongst the branches of his trees: *Cyanistes caeruleus* - R. ‘Blue Tit’.

The cross combines the best characteristics of each species, with ‘Blue Tit’ forming a low growing, wide-spreading shrub around 1.3m high by 2m across that covers itself with mauve-blue flowers throughout April. In southern locales, a placement in dappled shade achieves the best form while maximising the floral display, but to achieve this state in the gardens of northern England a position in full sun is required. In the higher latitudes of Scotland, the shrub’s performance simply tails-off. Morphology-wise, the corollas are broadly funnel-shaped; carried in trusses of three to five; have two barely visible rays of small olive-green spots on the dorsal lobes; come with stamen filaments coloured as the flowers; and a style in a contrasting shade of purplish-red. Improbably, the flower colour actually intensifies with age, though it fades eventually, just before the blooms fall.

Foliage is mid- through dark green, matt, scaly above and below, elliptic or rounded in shape, each blade around 2cm long. Paler leaves predominating en masse is a clear indication of an unhappy plant, especially if the young growth is chlorotic and leaf spot is a problem. More sunlight and better drainage is usually the cure.

The Williams hybrid was introduced in 1933 and it was quickly followed onto the market by a duplicate pairing of the same two lepidote species, this made independently at nearby Lamellen, by Edward Magor. Different clones of the seed and pollen parents were used, so this plant has slightly larger leaves and flowers, but is reportedly a touch less hardy. It is known today as R. ‘Blue Tit (Magor)’.

In the early 1960s, two other clones from the Lamellen cross were named and introduced by Magor’s neighbour and fellow enthusiast, Eric Harrison of Tremeer, namely ‘Saint Breward’ and ‘Saint Tudy’, both of which gained FCC awards from the RHS. They are also taller growing and wider spreading than the earlier two introductions. Then, in 1966, Frank Fujioka, a hybridiser from Whidbey Island, Washington State, repeated the cross, registering ‘Vibrant Violet’ in 1986.

In the UK - and elsewhere as a consequence - the Williams and Magor plants are often mixed-up in the nursery trade, as are the Tremeer clones, indeed, some proprietors view all four as interchangeable.


R. ‘Blue Tit’


R. ‘Blue Tit’



R. ‘Saint Breward’



R. ‘Saint Tudy’

The story behind the introduction of the two award-winning cultivars was documented for the American Rhododendron Society by Walter Magor, son of the renowned E.J.P., but an error crept into his text:

> ‘Shortly before the Second World War, Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Eric Harrison bought Tremeer in north Cornwall and started to plant rhododendrons, mainly obtained from over the hill at Lamellen. J. C. Williams had made the dwarf hybrid ‘Blue Tit’ (*R. augustinii* x *R. impeditum*) in 1933. My father had liked it so much that he made the reverse cross and planted a hedge at Lamellen. When General Harrison returned to Tremeer after the war, the hedge was not thriving. With my mother’s permission, he took many cuttings from it, from which he raised ‘St. Breward’ and ‘St. Tudy’, both of which have since been awarded the F.C.C. after trial at Wisley.’
> *A History of Rhododendrons,* Walter Magor,
> *Journal American Rhododendron Society,* Volume 44, Number 4, 1990.

The *IRRC* entry for the original Caerhays ‘Blue Tit’ cross indicates that a ‘lavender form of *R. impeditum’* was used to mature the seed, while *R. augustinii* supplied the pollen. This contradicts the parental equation detailed in *A History of Rhododendrons,* though by reversing it back to *impeditum* x *augustinii,* Edward Magor duplicated the pollination made by J. C. Williams at Caerhays exactly. The *IRRC* listing confirms this, stating that ‘the same cross was repeated by E. J. P. Magor’, while other expert authors - Peter and Kenneth Cox, in both their 1988-published *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* and Ken’s 2005 solo text *Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* for instance - also follow the official ‘Blue Tit’ registration delineation. For all four cultivars.

‘Saint Breward’ opens its blooms from both terminal and axillary flower buds, these combining to form tightly-packed globular trusses of up to 26 individual corollas, each one shallowly-campanulate in shape, 5-lobed, around 3cm long and up to 6cm across at the mouth. Their hue is a bright violet-blue, shading darker towards the margins, the former tone also lightly flushing the stamen filaments, but not the style, which is a pale pink. The dark green, matt leaves are lanceolate-elliptic through elliptic in shape, acute at the apex, around 5cm long and between 1.5 and 2.5cm wide respectively. The shrub is a strong grower, forming an upright dome, with mature bushes attaining a height and spread of 2m after twenty years or so, and older specimens topping 3m and extending-out even further.

Technically, ‘Saint Tudy’ differs from ‘Saint Breward’ in having a more compact, lower-growing habit, with slightly smaller flowers that form a domed-shaped truss of up to 15 rotate-funnel-shaped corollas, 5cm across at the mouth rather than 6. The hue of the ‘Saint Tudy’ blooms has also been documented as being ‘brilliant violet, paling towards the throat, some flushed strong purple’ in the *IRRC,* as compared with ‘sea lavender violet, shading darker towards the margins’ for ‘Saint Breward’.

Basically, ‘deep violet-blue’ covers both.

As indicated above, and perhaps inevitably, the four clones have been thoroughly mixed-up by the gardening trade, although the height advantage of a mature specimen of either of the ‘Saints’ offers an obvious morphological clue to getting the labelling right. However, like the prospect of a former KGB Lieutenant Colonel - one Vladimir Vladimirovich Putrid - ever loosing an election as President of Russia, any hope of sorting out the rest of the shuffled pack is decidedly improbable.

R. ‘Saint Breward’

R. ‘Saint Tudy’

R. ‘Bluebird’

intricatum x *augustinii*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	April	1m x 2m

Crossed in 1930 and introduced seven years later, R. ‘Bluebird’ is the Bodnant Garden equivalent of the Williams/Magor ‘Blue Tit’ hybrid, though it uses *R. intricatum* as the dwarf seed parent instead of *R. impeditum.* The official description speaks of ‘rich blue’ or ‘electric blue’ flowers and the award clone does indeed display corollas infused with a pigmentation that comes close to the hyperbole, though other clones have been distributed that are distinctly more mauve (as the photograph below shows, despite its labelled subject bearing an ‘AM 1943’ addendum).

Henry McLaren’s hybrid carries its flowers in trusses of 7 to 10, the corolla lobes less deeply divided than ‘Blue Tit’ and each with a rounded apex and wavy margins. The leaves are ovate, to 4cm long, and dark green in hue, but are unfortunately prone to chlorosis and leaf spot, to a greater degree on some of the clones in circulation than either of the two Cornish crosses mentioned above. Again, light levels and good drainage will alleviate the problem, with the plants performing best in the south, though hardiness levels allow their establishment in all but the coldest UK gardens.


R. ‘Bluebird’


R. ‘Bluebird’


R. ‘Bluebird’


R. ‘Bo-peep’


R. ‘Bo-peep’

R. ‘Bo-peep’

lutescens x *moupinense*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 March-early April 1.2m x 1.5m

R. ‘Bo-peep’ is a perfectly named, low growing, upright dome that displays funnel-shaped primrose-yellow flowers singly or in pairs. These emerge from both terminal and axillary buds, giving the illusion of a much more densely populated truss. The corollas pale quite quickly after fully opening, their yellow hue becoming a creamy white, though the two lemon-yellow rays of spots and speckles on the dorsal lobe retain their deeper colour and visual impact a touch longer.

The newly extending young growth inherits its red colouration from both parents, though the leaves soon mature and transform into a dark, glossy green. These are oblong-ovate in shape, around 6.5cm in length and densely scaly only on the lower surface. They are held for one or two years at most, this resulting in a sparse appearance if specimens are grown in too much shade. Yet the hardiness rating and early bloom time seem to demand that such a position be selected and a neat bush sacrificed for a leggy one. Not so. As the mature specimen in Ray Wood, Castle Howard, North Yorkshire, proves. For it is set on a site that is an open glade on sloping ground, providing good frost drainage, encircled by a not too distant shelterbelt of trees.

The true AM clone is reported to be more tender than the form in general commerce and has suffered bark split at Glendoick (detailed in *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* authored by Peter and Kenneth Cox).

Lionel de Rothschild made the pollination at Exbury in the late 1920s, securing an Award of Merit for the hybrid in 1937, three years after its introduction, yet amazingly, no one has repeated the pairing, and despite being available commercially for the last nine decades, bred the cultivar with any other rhododendron.


R. ‘Bo-peep’

R. 'Brambling'

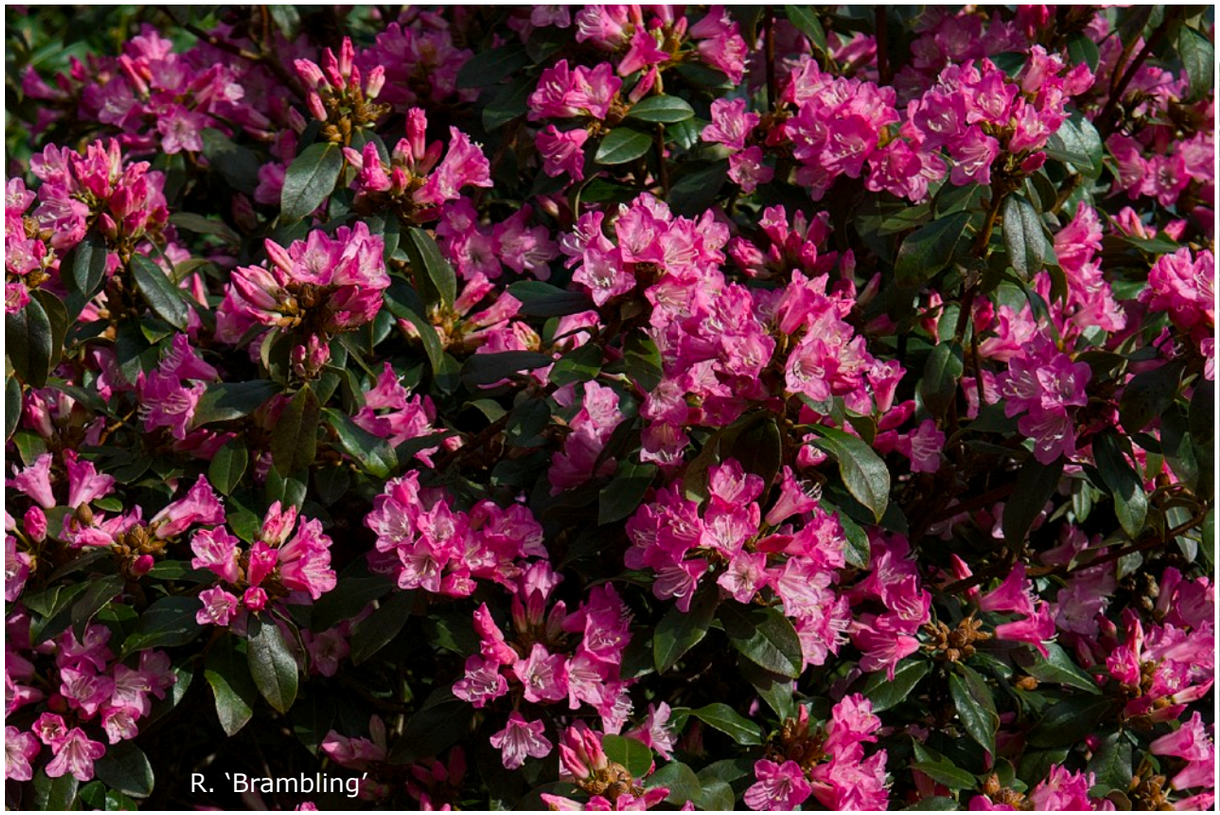
'Razorbill' x *racemosum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 April 1.3m x 1m

Fringilla montifringilla, the mountain finch - colloquially, the cock o' the north - donated its common English name to Peter and Kenneth Cox's R. 'Brambling' in 2003, when the hybrid was added to the growing list of "Glendoick Birds". All are crosses between dwarf lepidote species or hybrids, the first, 'Chikor' - *Alectoris chukar,* a partridge-like bird from Asia, with a *chryseum* x *ludlowii* pedigree - being introduced in 1962, while the latest, 'Glendoick Flamingo' - *Phoenicopterus;* a pairing of R. 'Oban' with *R. dendrocharis* - arrived in 2014/15. For 'Brambling', pollen from *R. racemosum* was placed onto the stigma of one of the other members of the flock, the award-winning 'Razorbill' - *Alca torda;* a seedling that arose from *R. spinuliferum* via an unknown pollinator. And the result? Yet another stunning addition to the flight.

The 'Brambling' corollas are broadly-funnel-campanulate in shape, some 2.5cm long, purplish-red in the bud and an intense, brilliant pink when fully open, paling towards the throat but darker on the reverse. In contrast, the style and stamens are white. And while each bud produces only one corolla, there are so many buds on each stem - both terminal and axillary - that huddles of flowers are the norm and even quite young plants are awash with bloom. The leaves are dark green, with an ovate outline, 4.5cm in length, scaly and somewhat crinkled at the edges - the perfect foil for the flowers - while the plant's habit is a dense and compact upright dome that will top-out a touch below 1.5m.



R. 'Brambling'

R. 'Bric-à-brac'

leucaspis x *moupinense*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Late February-March 1m x 2m

If you garden where spring frosts are a problem or winter temperatures regularly dip below -10ºC, then Lionel de Rothschild's *leucaspis* x *moupinense* cross must remain on the wish list unless additional protection can be moved into place to cover a mature specimen and so protect the flower buds before they swell, with the wash of blooms once they open, requiring a similar panacea. Alternatively, a container-based plant could be wheeled into a heated greenhouse or conservatory whenever danger threatens, if such facilities are to hand. And if they are, that extra effort will be well rewarded when the plant is adorned with hundreds of pink or white trusses: for 'Bric-à-brac' is a stunner, as those rhodophiles who cultivate rhododendrons in near frost-free Gulf Stream-protected woodland will confirm.

The hybrid comes in two flavours: the scintillating pure-white blooms of the AM clone, faintly spotted on the dorsal lobe and graced with contrasting chocolate-coloured stamen anthers; and those with blush-pink corollas, more distinctly spotted, where the tonal polarity between facets is not quite so explicit. Putting the pigmentation differences to one side, each form is enchanting, growing into a small bush no more than 1m high, open, yet neat, and with shiny, peeling bark on mature specimens. The leaf blades too are bronze-coloured, but only at first, the foliage changing in time to a glossy dark green, decorated with lepidote scales below, while the young stems are bristly and glandular. Bud scales are brightly coloured and persistent. The blooms themselves are carried in loose trusses of three corollas, these small, wide-open funnels some 3.5cm long that are near 5cm across at the mouth when fully expanded.



R. 'Bric-à-brac'

R. ‘Chiffchaff’

hanceanum Nanum x *fletcherianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 April-early May 0.8m x 1m

Another of the “Glendoick Birds”, ‘Chiffchaff’ resulted from Peter Cox pollinating *R. hanceanum* Nanum with pollen from *R. fletcherianum* in 1964. The seedling selected from those offspring is semi-dwarf in height, has a compact and spreading habit, with ascending branches. Dark green elliptic leaf blades, sparsely scaly below, are the perfect foil for the lemon-yellow flowers, which are held in a loose truss of 5 to 6 broadly-funnel-campanulate corollas. The foliage adopts reddish hues in winter.

Introduced in 1975 and the recipient of an Award of Merit from the RHS the following year, somewhat strangely, ‘Chiffchaff’ is not one of the more highly regarded Cox hybrids, even by its own creator. The reason for this is down to a known susceptibility to chlorosis, which can detrimentally effect its growth, the condition apparently brought-on or exacerbated by dry weather. Yet the specimen seen here at Branklyn Garden, just a few miles to the west of Glendoick, was in obvious good health and a joy to behold - as were those observed in many other gardens, the majority, albeit, along the west coast - so perhaps any misgivings have been a touch overplayed.

The chosen epithet honours *Phylloscopus collybita,* more widely known as the common leaf warbler, an avian widespread in patches of open woodland during the summer months, when it returns to Northern Europe and the British Isles to breed.


R. ‘Chiffchaff’


R. ‘Chiffchaff’


R. ‘Chiffchaff’

R. ‘Chink’

keiskei x *trichocladum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late March-April 0.6m x 0.4m

When Hope Findlay named and introduced his low-growing *keiskei* x *trichostomum* cross in the early 1960s, it was during an era when golliwogs advertised jars of jam, Alf Garnett appeared on the BBC, and racism was overtly endemic throughout the whole of the UK and went largely unremarked. Registering ‘Chink’ as the epithet for a yellow-flowering rhododendron hybrid therefore, caused not the slightest politically incorrect ripple to stir, even in the hallowed halls of the Crown Estate Commissioners. Heads would certainly roll if an equally offensive tag were suggested today and even the Robertson’s Wikipedia page now simply refers to ‘Golly’ branding, as if the now removed final three letters had never existed, though thankfully, the revisionists have yet to get around to Florence Kate Upton or Debussy. Of course, the epithet was almost certainly chosen with one of its other noted definitions in mind - a chink of light; a narrow opening; a weak spot in someone’s character or armour; even a high-pitched ringing sound - and all those who knew him agree that in hindsight, Hope would have been appalled that his choice of moniker might cause offence.

That said, the plant itself can be an eye-catching sheet of chartreuse-yellow when in bloom - the image below right - each truss holding five nodding corollas that are spotted darker on the dorsal lobes. But unfortunately, once those flowers fall, a dichotomy is more starkly revealed: the quality chasm between corolla and leaf.

Bronze-coloured when they first unfurl, the small, elliptic-lanceolate-shaped blades soon morph to a dull mid-green, remaining so until the chills of autumn prompt reddish hues to return. Because the foliage is semi-deciduous, and around half the leaves end up being discarded over the winter months.

Which is fine.

As the problem lies with those that persist:

For each will be spotted to some degree and so rendered unsightly, marring the floral display to come.

The AM clone - the selection least widely distributed, of course - seems to sport the most resilient and least disfigured leaves, but only when conditions in December through March remain relatively mild. Yet more often than not (climate change notwithstanding), the weather will turn severe and the visual outcome of that is decidedly unsavoury, as the images above right and opposite, on page 349, make clear. Other clones from the cross - those distributed to and sold by the specialist nurseries and some garden centres; supplied, of course, under the exact same appellation as the award winning plant (a practice that must surely breach the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 in one way or another, pre or post its modification under the EU Unfair Commercial Practices Directive, or indeed, the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations that supplanted it during 2008) - fair just as badly or even worse, emerging from a hard winter in a state that can only be described as distinctly sorry.

For all that, habit is upright, the shrubs compact, growing taller than they spread out, so multiple specimens will need to be planted to achieve the sweep featured in the aforementioned photo of the AM clone, clearly captured on a ‘good’ year.


R. ‘Chink’


R. ‘Chink’

R. ‘Chink’

R. ‘Chrysomanicum’

R. ‘Chrysomanicum’
chrysodoron x *burmanicum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H3-4 March-early April 1.7m x 2m

R. ‘Chrysomanicum’ is easily the best of the four crosses made at Bodnant where *R. chrysodoron* was used as the seed parent - the other three being ‘Chrycil’, ‘Chrysaspis’ and ‘Chrypinense’ - with *R. burmanicum* being Henry McLaren’s choice of pollen partner for this iteration. Unfortunately, that pick does nothing for the hardiness rating and outwith one of those Gulf Stream moderated sites on the west coast, or even in a southern county garden swaddled in its own mild microclimate, the flower buds are more than likely to be damaged if temperatures dip even slightly below zero after the inflorescences begin to swell. In moderate to hard winters, they will probably all be lost, regardless of dormancy, and a bush will likely also suffer bark-split or branch dieback. Oh, and severe, prolonged cold, will almost certainly completely finish-off a plant. So the delightful primrose-yellow blooms will only be found outdoors in a few well-sheltered venues in the UK. Yet wherever the climate allows it to positively thrive, R. ‘Chrysomanicum’ is simply one of the best low-growing yellow-flowering hybrids available, highly rated by both connoisseur and breeder alike.

Carried in trusses of eight funnel-shaped corollas, each around 4cm long and 5cm across, the blooms are greenish-yellow in hue with darker shading and speckling towards the throat. The leaves are elliptic in outline, dark green and shiny above, lepidote below, and carried for two years or more. And the bark is mahogany-coloured and peeling. Habit is spreading and compact, but while the height will be low in dappled shade, with short internodes, in gloomier locales a more open and drawn-up structure will develop, with elongated growth. Regrettably, the latter tends to be the norm in the UK, even in those west coast gardens, as winter’s chills require a denser set of defences to be in place to hold those injurious caprices at bay.

But on the bright side, longer branches equal more peeling bark, and even the epithet is almost pronounceable. Just.


R. ‘Chrysomanicum’


R. ‘Chrysomanicum’



R. ‘Cilpinense’

R. ‘Cilpinense’
ciliatum x *moupinense*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4-5 March-early April 1.5m x 2m

For once, the usually unwieldy and tongue-twisting chop-and-join condensed-hybrid-naming formula, which was originally proposed by no less a personage than Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour, followed to distraction by Edward Magor, and to a far lesser degree by Henry McLaren, has delivered an epithet that is not only lusciously epigrammatic, but matches the beauty of the plant it labels: ‘Cilpinense’. Of course, we could equally have been lumbered with the far less erudite ‘Ciliatinense’, so the grateful thanks of countless rhodophiles and the plant-buying general public should be extended in posterity to Lord Aberconway’s English teacher.

That officially unduplicated *ciliatum* x *moupinense* combination, has produced a cultivar with white-flushed-rosy-pink flowers, which are carried in trusses of two to three tubular-campanulate-shaped corollas, these each around 4cm long and slightly wider across at the mouth. More importantly, they open a month later than the earliest *R. moupinense* clones, so in March rather than February, which is still early and means that protection from overnight frosts remains a de facto requirement, but it is not the hopeless case the pollen parent presents for most gardeners. And the fact that the hybrid remains one of the most popular ever introduced confirms that in spades, though of course, the sheer profligacy of bloom sported by a mature specimen is clearly the deciding factor.

Equally, ‘Cilpinense’ has a domed habit that is perfect for today’s smaller garden plots: forming a semi-dwarf to low twiggy bush; taking ten years to top 1m; and ultimately spreading no more than 2m wide. The leaves it carries are glossy dark green above, with scattered, golden-brown scales on the underside, the foliage broadly elliptic to near orbicular in shape, with sparsely ciliate margins, and although those blades are only held for one year, an otherwise open and bland cross-hatching of branches, is relieved by a peeling and mahogany-coloured bark.

Prospective purchasers should note that once they begin to swell, the flower buds are decidedly frost sensitive, so if hit, much of the display will be lost before the corollas have even ventured past their supposedly protecting scales. And strong sunlight will quickly bleach those blooms of their deeper tones, so a position in at least dappled shade is essential. But too much shade, or in northern gardens, not enough sun, will result in a much more open structure and fewer inflorescences. Yet those negatives apart, the hybrid is far easier to cultivate than either of its parents.

Admirers of R. ‘Cilpinense’ need also to be aware that as usual, several clones have been distributed within the nursery trade, these bearing paler flowers and smaller corollas than the award-winning plant, so select accordingly.

R. ‘Cilpinense’

R. ‘Cilpinense’

R. ‘Cilpinense’

R. ‘Cinnkeys’

The ‘Cinnkeys’ Pride
cinnabarinum x *keysii*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Late April-May 3m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Cinnkeys	E. J. P. Magor	1917	1926
Minterne Cinnkeys	Lord Digby (gardener - Mr. G. Smith)	1931	1951

Only two clones of R. ‘Cinnkeys’ have officially been registered with the *IRRC:* the original 1917 cross made by Edward Magor that has a red tube but yellow lobes; and the wholly scarlet hybrid of 1931-vintage paired by Lord Edward Digby and christened ‘Minterne Cinnkeys’. Yet several other gardens must have duplicated the pairing as a far wider variance in flower colour can be observed on long-established specimen plants at multiple horticultural venues. Lionel de Rothschild’s contribution excepted - for in his New Forest woodland fairyland the shrub bears an ‘Exbury Cinnkeys’ moniker - all the others falsely lay claim to the original epithet.

Now, admittedly, one or two of these could be mislabelled plants of the pollen parent with larger, less narrowly tubular corollas, especially where the yellow tone is restricted to just the very tip of the lobes, but others display blooms where that hue has ventured further down the length of the tube. Moreover, the ultimate height and spread of these specimens also far exceed the figures given above, with some expert texts often quoting even more modest values than those presented herein. One example of such is a specimen growing at Muncaster Castle in West Cumbria that at 8m in height, with multiple trunks forming a graceful umbrella-shaped dome, has attained small tree status.

The habit of the true R. ‘Cinnkeys’ is indeed upright, with the dark green or grey-green, glossy ovate leaves clustered at the branch tips, but it tops-out at or below 3m. Equally, the flowers begin to expand from terminal and axillary buds towards the end of April - those on ‘Minterne Cinnkeys’ do so in mid May; ‘Exbury Cinnkeys’ in late May - with the individual trusses of 5 or 6 tubular corollas, often more, combining into vast pendent arrays. Note too that Edward Magor’s hybrid is free-flowering from a young age, while mature plants redefine the definition of floriferous with their sheet of bloom.

Lord Digby’s version boasts an even more crowded truss, sometimes holding 30 individual tubes, though the majority of inflorescences are less densely populated. These are coloured nasturtium red inside, scarlet on the outside, the pigmentation paling towards the apex with just a hint of yellow at the very extremities of the lobes. The rumour mill has it that the pollen parent was actually *R. keysii* var. *unicolor* - now Unicolor Group - rather than the unadulterated form of the species.

A note should also be made of the hardiness value, with the -15°C minimum rating a bottom limit below which specimens have been reported to succumb. Peter and Kenneth Cox, for instance, detail the loss of a plant in the woodland garden at Glendoick - on the same latitude line as Perth in Scotland, but nearer the east coast - when the temperature fell just three degrees lower than that given value (*The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988). And because of its *R. cinnabarinum* heritage, the cross is also somewhat susceptible to powdery mildew, though not to the same extent as its seed parent.


R. ‘Exbury Cinnkeys’


R. ‘Minterne Cinnkeys’

R. ‘Cinnkeys’

R. 'Cinnkeys'


R. ‘Cream Crest’


R. ‘Cream Crest’

R. ‘Cream Crest’

chryseum x ‘Cilpinense’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5	April	0.6m x 1.5m

R. ‘Cream Crest’ was crossed by nurseryman Arthur O. Wright of Canby, Oregon, in the mid to late 1950s, and has small, creamy-yellow, simply to-die-for flowers held in open trusses of six to eight funnel-shaped corollas. On many of the blooms a faint streak of pink will be seen on one or two of the five deeply indented lobes, this an inheritance from *R. moupinense,* passed down through the ‘Cilpinense’ pairing. Flowering is usually profuse, but as the blooms open in early April, gardens that are subject to regular spring frosts will not prove conducive to a fine display, especially as the buds themselves are also tender, hence the hardiness rating given above.

The hybrid’s branches and leaves are a little tougher however, withstanding -18ºC without sustaining any damage, though ‘Cream Crest’ is probably not a good choice for an east coast rock garden placement unless microclimate conditions apply. The shrub itself is an upright, twiggy confection with small, dark green and scaly, elliptic leaves, and although demonstrating quite vigorous growth, remains a semi-dwarf bush never more than 0.6m high, while spreading-out wider. It is sun tolerant in northern gardens along the west coast, but when grown further south, will require a patina of dappled shade if the flowers are not to be bleached.


R. ‘Cream Crest’

The ‘Crossbill’ Pride

spinuliferum x *lutescens*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 February-April 3.5m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Caerhays Crossbill	J. C. Williams	before 1926	after 1933
Crossbill	J. C. Williams	before 1926	1933
Spinlut	J. C. Williams	before 1926	after 1933

‘Crossbill’ is probably the weirdest rhododendron hybrid John Charles Williams of Caerhays, Cornwall, ever paired or registered, though given the variety of clones found in British gardens today the inspiration to place pollen from *R. lutescens* onto the stigma of *R. spinuliferum* was not restricted to the UK’s south-western peninsula. Two other selections from the Cornish version of the cross have also been logged with the international registrar - ‘Caerhays Crossbill’ (blooms greenish-yellow, tinged pink); and the equally imaginatively named ‘Spinlut’ (with pale lemon-yellow corollas, faintly tinged rose) - though both clones are rarely encountered, at least under an accurate label. Other pretenders, including at least one clone from Exbury, currently remain unregistered.

The original 1933 introduction has yellow flowers tinged red and tubular-campanulate corollas, these emerging from the inflorescence singularly, as a pair, or in a trio. Multiple buds occur at most branch tips however, so in combination, a fairly dense cluster of bloom is the usual outcome. Stamens and style are markedly exserted (protruding), while the corolla tube length varies between the clones. Note also that the flowers borne on some of the pretenders are nearer open-campanulate in shape. Leaves are elliptic in outline with an acuminate apex and convex profile, each a little under 9cm long, bright green in colour and with both upper and lower surfaces scaly.

Initially, the foliage and the new growth are tinged dark red, but this soon fades, with the hue only returning if a hard frost damages the leaves over winter. Up-close, this can mar the subsequent flower display, as a disfigured blade often remains stubbornly in place. Habit is upright and straggly, growth vigorous, all three registered shrubs easily reaching the height and spread shown above in little more than fifteen years.

There is one drawback to widespread cultivation however, hardiness, which is not sufficiently robust for many northern or east coast gardens, the rating further challenged by flower buds that are supposed to open in late March through April, opting instead for a February-March appearence, which is a shame, because the floral display is certainly impressive on a mature specimen or when a group of bushes are grown in a clump and covered in a sheet of hundreds if not thousands of blooms.



R. ‘Crossbill’



R. ‘Crossbill’

R. 'Curlew'

R. 'Curlew'

ludlowii x *fletcherianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 April-May 0.5m x 1.5m

Any rhodophile will confirm that *R. ludlowii,* the Tibetan dwarf endemic species named for plant collector Frank Ludlow, is difficult in cultivation, with those who have actually tried to grow it, then likely to begin pulling their hair out while cursing vociferously.

For 'difficult' is an understatement.

Of epic proportions.

And one that challenges even the well-known British flare for such.

So a hybrid that combined its large, bowl-shaped yellow flowers with an ease of cultivation equivalent to one of the innumerable elepidote yak cabbages, would be highly prized and sought after. Step forward Peter Cox, who in 1969, introduced just such a plant to the rhododendron fraternity and scooped an immediate First Class Certificate for 'Curlew' from the Royal Horticultural Society (an Award of Merit, plus a second FCC would follow after trials at Wisley in 1981 and 1986).

The parentage equations shows pollen from *R. fletcherianum* - a sometimes equally temperamental species from the ranks of Subsection *Maddenia* - was placed onto the style of *R. ludlowii,* and Peter Cox himself was surprised by just how good the hybrid turned out, later describing the selected progeny from the mating of two such capricious dwarf species, as a miracle (in 1988's *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* co-authored with his son Kenneth).

R. 'Curlew' remains a dwarf shrub despite the influence of its taller-growing pollen parent, with specimens usually attaining no more than 0.3m in height, occasionally hitting 0.5m, but spreading far wider. Visually, the best effect is achieved when three or more individual shrubs are planted close together and allowed to intertwine. The framework will then appear far bushier than it really is, because the small, narrowly-obovate through elliptic-ovate deep green leaves are only held for two years, so a single specimen can look quite bare. Morphology-wise, each leaf blade is between 3 and 4cm long, 1 to 2cm wide, and sparsely lepidote below, with the scales pale brown in colour.

A trio of bushes interlaced also provides a much more striking display when the blooms open in mid April through May, the single to three-flowered inflorescences then completely covering the whole branch structure in yellow. Individual corollas are open campanulate in shape, 3.5cm long and 5cm across, their hue technically yellow-green, with the dorsal lobe spotted and flecked greenish-brown.

Cultivation of 'Curlew' right across the UK is straightforward and falls almost within the 'plant-and-forget-me' category if a few obvious pitfalls are avoided:

First - dismiss any notion of applying a granular, foliar or liquid drench fertiliser to specimens whatever their size. A natural build-up of leaf or twiggy detritus around the base of the stems will be more than sufficient.

Second - avoid an overly hot planting position, especially in southern England, as this will initiate a rapid decline, so situate accordingly.

Third - the swelling flower buds are averse to even a degree or two of frost, so again, the planting position must be chosen with care. Otherwise, hardiness is sufficient to allow the hybrid to be grown wherever the soil allows rhododendrons to thrive.

And finally - if the roots are permanently wet, the shrub will die, so make sure the drainage is swift at initial planting, and remains so ever afterwards.



R. 'Curlew'



R. 'Curlew'

The ‘Dora Amateis’ Pride

minus Carolinianum Group x *ciliatum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 April-May 1.5m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Dora Amateis	Edmond Amateis	1951	1955
Helen Amateis	Edmond Amateis	1951	1958
Schneekope	Dietrich Hobbie	1952	before 1983

The sheer toughness of R. ‘Dora Amateis’ surprised even its breeder when the flower buds - exposed but still dormant - came through the winter of 1960-1961 unscathed: for temperatures in the northeastern states of America had fallen below -30ºC. Only one other rhododendron in the collection Edmond Amateis had built-up displayed a similar mettle and that was ‘Praecox’, the 1861 introduction from the Ormskirk nursery of Isaac Davies in Lancashire, England - on the other side of the Atlantic to Brewster, New York. Even notably ‘ironclad’ species such as *R. mucronulatum* and *R. schlippenbachii* had lost buds in his garden that winter, so too the usually reliable hybrids ‘Boule de Neige’, ‘Mrs Charles S. Sargent’ and ‘Roseum Elegans’ (reported in the article *Hardy Rhododendrons for Colder Climates,* Journal American Rhododendron Society, Volume 15, Number 2, April, 1961).

What was even more stunning however, was the fact that ‘Dora Amateis’ showed a level of cold hardiness greater than that demonstrated by either of its parents, the matchmaking transferring pollen from *R. ciliatum* - a Subsection *Maddenia* species that had been killed outdoors if the mercury dropped much below -12ºC - onto the style of a plant native to the hills of North Carolina, *R. minus* var. *minus* Carolinianum Group, some forms of which are good down to -26ºC, although their flower buds will have given up the ghost several degrees above that minimum figure.

Widely known for his garden-figure sculptures, his large architectural sculptures that were commissioned for public buildings, as well as his more intimate bronze busts - such as those for the Polio Hall of Fame in Warm Springs, Georgia - Edmond Romulus Amateis had made the pairing in 1951, so a decade later, the now mature plant had long ago reached its full potential in terms of hardiness. The chosen epithet honours his mother, and the plant’s blooms are possibly the prettiest to be found on a low-growing lepidote hybrid. They open in April from pale pink buds and when fully expanded are white with a faint tinge of pink, spotted greenish-yellow on the dorsal lobe. Carried in loose trusses of 6 to 8 widely-flared funnels, the flowers are produced in such quantity as to near completely cover the dome of supporting leaves and branches. Each of those blades is elliptic in shape, dark green in colour, often with a convex profile, 6.5cm long by half that amount in width, and densely scaly on both the upper and lower surfaces.

Unsurprisingly, ‘Dora Amateis’ is now one of the most popular dwarf rhododendrons in commerce, available from most UK garden centres and even the odd DIY warehouse, but although hardy enough to succeed anywhere in the British Isles where the soil is appropriate for the genus, in the south, placement in full sun will not result in a happy plant. Nor will poor drainage. However, in both cases the foliage will quickly highlight the problem, becoming pale green, mottled in yellow, with the leaves hanging down dejectedly. Chlorosis produces a similar feature set, but reports indicate this only afflicting very old plants. More recently, in 1995, Wolfgang Reich debunked the myth that the cross sterile when he registered ‘White Rays’, a pairing with R*. moupinense.*


R. ‘Dora Amateis’


R. ‘Dora Amateis’

R. 'Dora Amateis'



R. ‘Duchess of Sutherland’

The ‘Duchess of Sutherland’ Pride
‘Multiflorum’ x *edgeworthii*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H3-4 Mid May 2m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Countess of Derby	Isaac Davies	before 1865	before 1865
Duchess of Sutherland	Isaac Davies	before 1865	before 1879
Lady Skelmersdale	Isaac Davies	before 1865	1879
Miss Davies	Isaac Davies	before 1865	before 1879
Mrs James Shawe	Isaac Davies	before 1865	before 1879

Five plants from this Isaac Davies cross of pre 1865 vintage were introduced from his Brook Lane Nursery in Ormskirk, Lancashire: ‘Countess of Derby’, ‘Duchess of Sutherland’, Lady Skelmersdale’, ‘Miss Davies’ and ‘Mrs James Shaw’. A sixth plant, unveiled to the gardening public in 1877 - ‘Countess of Sefton’ - reverses the given parentage and so herein - because of where all the organelles come from - is excluded from the pack.

Back in the middle decades of the 19th century, the listed quintet were actually bred for forcing in the exotic hot houses of the time - a de rigueur constituent of any seemly Victorian mansion, much as the DIY conservatory is for today’s less grandiose homes - so all are really only suitable outdoors for mild west- or south-coast gardens. The pairing combines another Davies hybrid, the FCC-awarded R. ‘Multiflorum’ - a *ciliatum* x *virgatum* cross - with pollen from *R. edgeworthii,* so right from the off, there was never any intention of creating anything but a tender hybrid.

Reddish-pink buds open white, the corollas randomly stained and lined rosy-pink along the centre of all, or just some of the lobes, and they are funnel-campanulate in shape with wavy margins, 2 to 4 per truss. The foliage is distinctly bullate, dark green and glossy, elliptic in outline and densely scaly below, while the plant’s habit is fairly compact in a good sunny spot, but leggy in shade, though in the latter case, it bears no resemblance to the outlandishly straggly ‘Fragrantissimum’. Equally however, the upward-ascending criss-cross of branches will not in any way be hidden by the leaves regardless of the strength of light they may be forced to endure. Flowering is usually profuse however, in either situation, unless the buds are lost to frost, temperatures below -5ºC impinging on their survival, below -10ºC that of the plant itself.

Strangely, the historical record reveals that ‘Countess of Derby’ was considered to be the best clone selected from the pairing, which must have come as something of an affront to Anne Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, who would have read that horticultural assessment when on August 16th, 1879, the *Gardeners’ Chronicle* dropped through her letterbox. For not only was Anne the 1st Countess of Cromartie in her own right, and previously the Marchioness of Stafford, but the actual ‘Duchess of Sutherland’ to whom the honorific epithet applied. So one suspects that a certain Lancastrian nursery owner was on the receiving end of a significant tongue-lashing when next he met Queen Victoria’s ex-Mistress of the Robes.

The ‘Egret’ Pride

campylogynum x *racemosum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Early May 1.4m x 1.6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Betty’s Bells	B. Sheedy	before 1988	before 1988
Candi	Jim Caperci	before 1963	1963
Egret	Peter Cox	1972	1982

Three hybridisers have to date made and registered a *campylogynum* x *racemosum* pairing, but only Peter Cox has used white-flowering clones for both parents. The result of his endeavours, ‘Egret’, is most definitely worthy of the RHS Award of Merit it won on its introduction in 1982, for a mature bush is completely covered in sublime, small, nodding white thimbles during early May, their long pedicels holding the blizzard of blooms high above the glossy mid-green leaves. Those corollas - as descriptively implied - are tubular-campanulate in shape; 5-lobed; with a long and exserted, declinate style; carried in an open truss of 2 to 6 bells; and their colour is a pale yellowish-green on first opening, this quickly fading to pure white.

The cultivar’s foliage is in proportion to its blooms, each broadly elliptic leaf around 2.3cm long, 1.5cm wide, with a sprinkling of scales on both surfaces, while the plant’s habit is dwarf and bushy when grown in an open, sunny site, but far more upright in shade, with the original plant in the woodland at Glendoick, for instance, now around 1.4m high. Usually, the shrub spreads out wider than it grows tall, with the compact domes always spick and span, and the foliage healthy.

Yet ‘Egret’ does have one fault: its leaf buds begin to swell and extend in harmony with the burgeoning inflorescences, which can sometimes mar the display, as is clear in both photographs.

Moniker-wise, rather than the Energetic Gamma Ray Experiment Telescope, which was part of the instrument package on NASA’s Compton Gamma Ray Observatory satellite (predecessor to the still-in-orbit Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope), the cross is named for a white-plumed member of Genus *Egretta,* and therefore another member of the Glendoick avian flock.



R. ‘Egret’



R. ‘Egret’

R. ‘Eleanore’

rubiginosum x *augustinii*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April-earlyMay 6m x 3m

A plant from *R. rubiginosum* Desquamatum Group has to date only once been used as the seed parent in a hybrid cross, this when pollen from *R. augustinii* was applied by Lionel de Rothschild, resulting in the sublime R. ‘Eleanore’. Introduced in 1937, the shrub is tall-growing like both its genetic forebears and bushes are smothered in amethyst-violet or lavender-blue blooms during the latter half of April and early May, their hue dependent on which distributed clone is to hand, for there are two. The corollas of both are carried in trusses of 4 or 5 open funnels, but the dorsal lobes of one have darker, purplish-brown speckles, while the other has olive-green flecks (respectively). Foliage is narrowly elliptic-ovate on both clones, dark green above with a liberal flush of dark-brown scattered scales on the underside.

R. desquamatum is now bereft of the specific status it once held and exists in the botanic world only as a synonym of *R. rubiginosum,* while members of the horticulturally recognised Desquamatum Group are possessors of a 1934 Award of Merit and 2004 First Class Certificate thanks to their steely bluish-purple flowers, which was clearly L de R’s primary motivation for the pollination with *R. augustinii*. Both parent plants are also tetraploids, with 52 chromosomes in each of their cells rather than the normal diploid count of 26, which likely explains the extra pizzazz.

‘Eleanore’ is best planted in full sun in northern counties, but benefits from light, dappled shade in the south. Plants are vigorous, but not sufficiently hardy to prosper in the coldest east coast gardens.


R. ‘Eleanore’


R. ‘Eleanore’


R. ‘Eleanore’



R. ‘Electra’

R. ‘Electra’

chasmanthum x *augustinii*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 Late April-May 6m x 4m

Lionel de Rothschild directed the pollination that resulted in the absolutely stunning R. ‘Electra’ during the spring of 1937. Botanically at that time, both parents were regarded as individual specific species, so the cross was recorded as *R. chasmanthum* x *R. augustinii* in the Exbury stud book, while today’s classification has rightly reduced the duo to subspecies ranking, meaning the combination in longhand would be *R. augustinii* ssp. *chasmanthum* x *R. augustinii* ssp. *augustinii,* which explains why the hybridising fraternity plumb for an abbreviated delineation, especially in conversation.

‘Electra’ is a willowy, upright grower, attaining 6m or more in height, though it remains well-cloaked in matt green, narrowly elliptic leaves, each of which is around 6.5cm long, with undersides that display a scattering of golden-coloured scales. Plants flower from a young age - confirming such, the RHS Award of Merit was received on April 30th 1940, and given to a specimen that had been germinated less than four years earlier - while mature shrubs are usually covered in bloom from head to toe. Those corollas are carried in trusses of 4 to 7; each is widely funnel-shaped with a fairly short tube; and their hue is described as violet-blue, heliotrope, or a mix of violet and lavender. They are paler in the throat and have two rays or a fan of chartreuse spots and flecks on the upper lobe, with the whole fading to near white just before the discard.

Prospective purchasers should note that juvenile plants can be a little touchy when first set in the ground, but once established, are vigorous and grow without problem. Like their parents, hardiness is not of the first-order, so while ‘Electra’ can successfully thrive in east coast gardens, a warm and sunny site, protected from late spring frosts is essential. Buyers should also be aware that a darker-toned clone is also in commercial circulation under L de R’s chosen epithet.

That honorific was likely plucked from the Greek tragedies of Euripides or Sophocles, or perhaps the plays by Aeschylus, Alfieri, Galdós, Giraudoux, Hofmannsthal or O'Neill. Less likely would by the Neo-Freudian psychological complex, the Haeffner opera (the one by Richard Strauss is ineligible, being spelt with a ‘k’, and so likewise, the now disbanded German football club). And while the Electra Private Equity Investment Trust might otherwise be a shoo-in - given the hybridiser’s private banking background - it was only founded in 1976. Equally, the so-so thoroughbred racehorse, active between 1906 and 1918, was long dead by 1940. There are also named terrestrial features that could have donated the appellation, as well as municipalities, a building in Moorgate, any number of long-forgotten nonentities who believed themselves famous at the time, plus ships, planes, railway engines and a newly conceived serif typeface.

My guess?

L de R, like most other observers, simply found the flowers visually electrifying.

R. ‘Electra’

R. ‘Electra’



R. ‘Elena’



R. ‘Elena’

The ‘Elena’ Pride

cinnabarinum x *yunnanense*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Late April-May 1.8m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Elena	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1937	1937
Robbie Evans	John P. Evans	before 1970	1988
Youthful Sin	Henry McLaren	before 1960	1960

Many authors group Lionel de Rothschild’s *cinnabarinum* x *yunnanense* cross ‘Elena’ with either Edward Magor’s ‘Yunncinn’, which reverses the parentage, or the Ted Millais hybrid ‘Pink Gin’, where the seed parent was again *R. yunnanense,* but the pollen provider ‘Lady Rosebery’. In both cases the flowers and leaves are similar, but the three offspring are genetically dissimilar: ‘Pink Gin’ obviously so as the genes of *R. maddenii* are part of its heritage through ‘Lady Rosebery’; while ‘Yunncinn’ has the chloroplasts and mitochondria of *R. yunnanense,* ‘Elena’ those of *R. cinnabarinum*. The true doppelgängers are in fact ‘Youthful Sin’ - a hybrid paired by Lord Aberconway at Bodnant and introduced in 1960 - and ‘Robbie Evans’ - an American registration dated to 1988. Hairs can be split on how true the genetic match within the pride is if group status is taken into account, as ‘Youthful Sin’ is straight *R. cinnabarinum,* while ‘Elena’ comes from Blandfordiiflorum Group, and ‘Robbie Evans’, Roylei Group. Botanically of course, the experts who penned the 1996 classification would assert and assure us that there is no difference; that all three were the same plant. Horticulturists and geneticists - and yours truly - will beg to differ.

Stature is the most obvious difference between the Rothschild and the Magor-Millais hybrids, with ‘Yunncinn’ and ‘Pink Gin’ topping 3m in height, ‘Elena’ staying below 2m and having a far more open and spreading deportment. Her flowers have a tubular-funnel-shaped profile and are primrose-pink shading to white in colour, the tone darkest on the outer surface of the tube. The corollas are carried in a flat and open truss of 3 to 5, their pedicels perpendicular to the rhachis, and that line continued-on down the style. Each small leaf blade is oblong in shape, dark green and glossy in hue, and scaly on both surfaces, but only held for one year and often lost just as the flowers buds begin to swell, the bush therefore a tangle of near bare branches when not covered in bloom.

R. 'Euan Cox'
hanceanum Nanum Group x *ludlowii*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 May 0.7m x 1.3m

Euan Hillhouse Methven Cox (1893-1977), author, nurseryman and expert rhodophile, is probably best known as the man who accompanied Reginald Farrer on what would prove to be a fateful expedition to Upper Burma (Myanmar), in 1919. Cox returned to Britain at the end of that year, while Farrer stayed on to continue the collecting into the following spring and summer; became ill with diphtheria (although alternate accounts suggest alcohol poisoning); and died in October 1920. Which meant that Euan Cox alone became responsible for cataloguing and distributing their collections. In 1926, he also published a full account of their expedition titled *Farrer's Last Journey*.

Up until this point, the Cox family had been prominent in the jute trade based around the port of Dundee, with the *Corchorus* stems shipped to Scotland from India. Their factory in the town's Camperdown suburb, spun the coarse vegetable fibres into strong threads, producing ropes, hessian sacking, burlap and gunny cloth. Rhododendrons however, would soon become their focus.

For Euan's father Alfred had purchased the Glendoick House estate in 1899 and as early as 1921, his only son had begun transforming the gardens, planting many of the shrubs and perennials he had gathered in Burma, especially the rhododendrons. Seed from expeditions undertaken by George Forrest, Frank Ludlow and George Sherriff was also soon enhancing the collection.

After the Second World War ended, the jute business was sold off, more plants for the burgeoning woodland garden were obtained - species rhododendrons from Tower Court; magnolias from the Veitch nursery at Exeter; hybrid rhododendrons from America - and in 1953, in partnership with his own son Peter, a nursery business was begun.

Glendoick Gardens was still in its infancy in 1965 when Euan placed pollen from *R. ludlowii* onto the style of the dwarf, pure yellow-flowering form of *R. hanceanum,* then known as 'Nanum', but today, recognised only through its horticultural status as Nanum Group. One of the seedlings that resulted bore pale greenish-yellow campanulate corollas in a domed truss of 3.

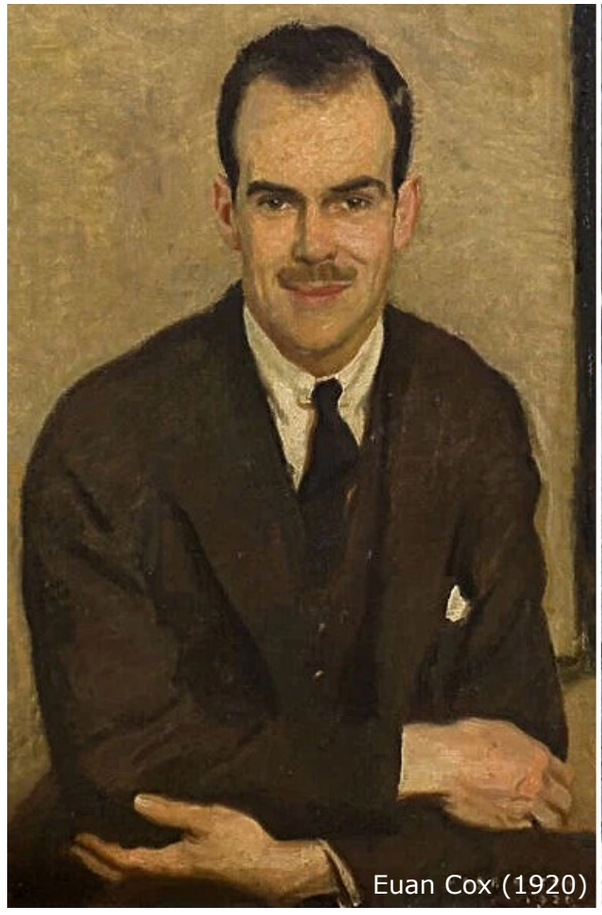
Each bell was just 2.5cm in length and 3.5cm wide at the mouth, with a dappling of reddish-orange spots on the dorsal lobe, but they were produced in such profusion that the foliage was often completely hidden.

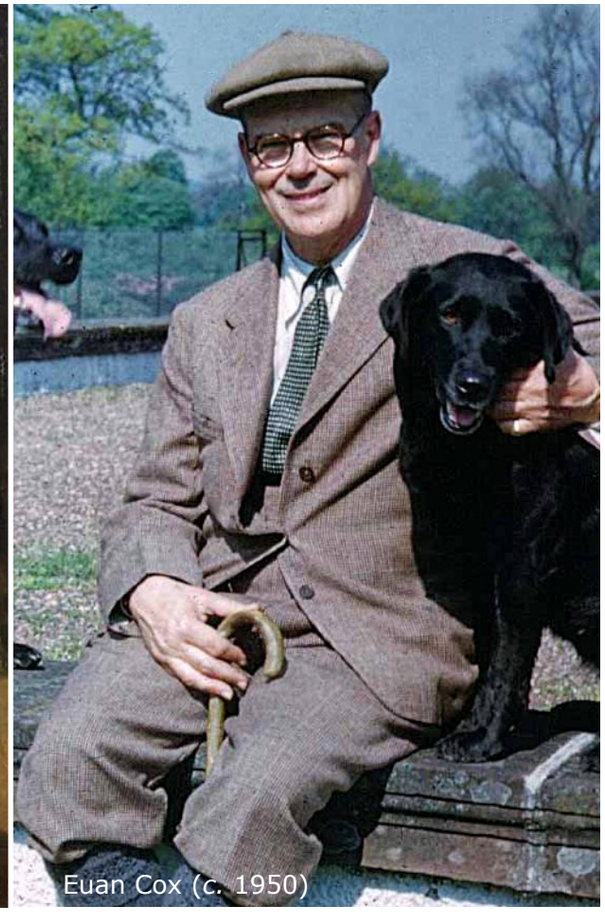
Those leaves, while equally small, were deep green in colour, elliptic in shape, with a distinctive and impressed adaxial midrib.

Time would show that the shrub rarely exceeded 0.7m in height, but it would spread to double that measure in width, and flowering in May, usually missed any of the late spring frosts that yearly plagued Scotland's east coast in the spring.

The cultivar was introduced and named in the mid 1970s, with the chosen epithet an obvious and deserved honorific for its hybridiser. It is, moreover, the only registered cross that Euan Cox would make, such duties then falling to his son - who at the time pollen had been dubbed onto style had been away on a collecting trip to the northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh - and then to his grandson, Kenneth (as reported in *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988). An Award of Merit was secured from the Royal Horticultural Society six years after its introduction, following a successful trial at Wisley Gardens that concluded in 1981.

Specimens of R. 'Euan Cox' in cultivation can be 'somewhat temperamental' and 'lacking in vigour' - to directly quote from the same source as above, which can be taken as


Euan Cox (1920)


Euan Cox (*c.* 1950)

gospel given the book was authored by Peter and Kenneth - though such idiosyncrasies, along with the leaf margins occasionally turning brown, are as nothing when compared with the machinations required to successfully grow the pollen parent in virtually every garden across the whole of the British Isles. Those rhodophiles up for the challenge however, should note that 'Euan Cox' does not thrive when placed in full sun in any of the southern counties, nor does it enjoy prolonged periods of excessively high temperatures even when shaded. So as with many of the dwarf lepidote species and their hybrids, success rates improve and problems decrease the further north the planting site happens to be and here, given good drainage and a modicum of protection from the wind, in a raised peat bed or amongst a potpourri of rocks, 'Euan Cox' will require very little remedial attention. It will also cover itself in an annual veil of bloom that is simply a knockout, as the images overleaf clearly illustrate.

R. ‘Euan Cox’

R. ‘Euan Cox’

R. ‘Ginny Gee’

The ‘Ginny Gee’ Pride

ozawae ‘Yaku Fairy’ x *racemosum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 April 0.6m x 1.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Christa Reich	Wolfgang Reich	1979	1986
Crane	Peter & Kenneth Cox	1983	1991
Gary Gee	G. David Lewis	1992	1999
Ginny Gee	Warren Berg	1969	1979
Westport	Hybridiser Unknown	before 1985	1999

The following statement of fact is mind-boggling:

Not one single member of the rhododendron hybridising fraternity has used Warren Berg’s divine ‘Ginny Gee’ cross in any pairing registered with the *IRRC* since the plant was introduced forty-five years ago.

Blessed with a dwarf habit that is suitable for the smallest patch of garden; foliage that is pleasing to look at all year round; winter hardy to temperatures of -20ºC or below, as growers in eastern North America can confirm after their plants came through a freeze that saw the mercury fall to -29ºC (Cox & Cox, *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988); tolerant of a planting site in sun or shade; and floriferous to such a degree that the leaves are completely hidden under a blanket of bloom in April. That those simply drop-dead gorgeous, two-tone flowers of white edged pink are singularly beautiful is without question; gathered together in clusters and sweeps, they are seraphic.

So the question must be asked.

Why has a cross involving ‘Ginny Gee’ as a parent not been officially logged-in?.

The answer, perhaps, is that the challenge of improving on perfection, is simply too great to be taken-up.

R. ‘Ginny Gee’ resulted from pollen taken off a George Forrest-collected clone of *R. racemosum* - F 19404 for completists - being dabbed onto the style of the ‘Yaku Fairy’ selection of the prostrate *R. keiskei* var. *ozawae*. The latter species is only found high up on the mountains of Yakushima Island, Japan, where it grows alongside another superstar of the genus, *R. yakushimanum,* and Warren Berg managed to obtain one of the last legally-gathered plants of the ‘Yaku Fairy’ form from the nursery of Koichiro Wada in the mid 1960s. Legally gathered, because shortly afterwards, the Japanese authorities banned any further collecting on the mountains to protect their flora from over exploitation and to ensure that those unique species did not become extinct (as Berg reports in a 1972 article for Volume 26, Number 2, of the *Journal American Rhododendron Society*).

Note too that at about the same time Berg received his plant, Wada also sold some of his propagated stock - basically small rooted cuttings - to Barry Starling in England, and one of these, not unsurprisingly, scooped an Award of Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society in 1970 (*Some Oreads of the Rhododendron World,* written by Barry Starling and published in the 2014 RCMG Yearbook, *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias*).

Prior to 1970, the plant had simply been regarded as a dwarf form of *R. keiskei,* but post the award, a clonal name was required and it was Starling who devised and registered ‘Yaku Fairy’. Vegetatively propagated from the same source, the Berg and Starling plants are identical, both morphologically and genetically, and following publication of Takashi Yamazaki’s botanic description in 1993 (*Flora of Japan,* Volume 3a, *Angiospermae, Dicotyledoneae and Sympetalae*), they both became *R. keiskei* var. *ozawae* ‘Yaku Fairy’.

The ‘Ginny Gee’ entry in the *IRRC* details a terminal inflorescence cluster of 9 to 11 individual buds, each containing 3 to 5 tubular through widely funnel-shaped corollas, so the resulting dense cloak of bloom across a mature specimen should again come as no great surprise, even though each trumpet is at most just 2.5cm long and wide. Yellow-green in bud, the flowers open white with a purplish-pink mottling around the lobe margins on both the inner and outer surfaces, and if Jack holds off, along with any heavy rain showers, they will remain eye-catching for three weeks or more.

Post the corolla drop, when the foliage is again revealed to anyone passing by, the leaves will be found to be elliptic in shape, 3cm long by 1.3cm wide, and somewhat stiff. They are dark green in hue, this tone turning to reddish-bronze throughout the winter months in colder climes. Habit is very compact, the cultivar’s short branchlets forming a tight mat no more than 0.6m high when mature, but extending out much wider than that.

Cultivation in the UK is usually without problem, regardless of locale or position, the shrub shrugging-off drought, excessive heat and extreme cold, with the leaves proving to be even moderately immune to ‘fertiliser burn’ if recourse to chemicals is the rashly preferred alternative to a natural build-up of leaf detritus.

The four other members of the pride don’t come close floristically, though ‘Crane’ - one of the Glendoick “Birds”, which benefitted from pollen taken from the ‘White Lace’ form of *R. racemosum* - is perfectly pleasant if not placed in direct association.



R. ‘Crane’

R. ‘Ginny Gee’

R. ‘Ginny Gee’

R. ‘Harry Tagg’

The ‘Harry Tagg’ Pride

‘Albescens’ x *ciliicalyx*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H3-4 Late April-May 1.6m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Basileos	Strybling Arboretum	1958	1970
Harry Tagg	Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh	before 1958	1961

Despite a long and authoritative association with Genus *Rhododendron,* the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh’s contribution to the 30,000 or more hybrids that fill 1500 pages of the 2-volume *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist* (not including the supplements), amounts to just a mere half dozen. Of those, ‘Harry Tagg’ is the most well-known and outstanding pairing, though which member of the gardening staff put pollen to style remains a mystery.

The cultivar is an ‘Albescens’ x *ciliicalyx* combination, with the parentage of the seed parent unknown. Low growing to 1.6m, it spreads-out quite a bit further and can also be decidedly leggy, both in too much shade and when established in adequate light. For the small, elliptic, mid-green leaves have a life expectancy of no more than twelve months and post being shed, much of the supporting framework is revealed. R. ‘Harry Tagg’ is also emphatically tender, with only the mildest UK gardens able to grow it outdoors. But when smothered in a mass of highly fragrant, long-lasting flowers, the reason for its popularity and longevity becomes immediately apparent.

Those corollas are shallowly campanulate in form, carried 3 or 4 to the truss, have variably frilly lobe margins and are pure white, flushed pink at first, with a yellow flash in the throat. Owners of conservatories or heated greenhouses who see a mature specimen covered in bloom at one of the Scottish west coast gardens or in Cornwall, will spend the rest of their vacation visiting every nursery or garden centre in the area seeking out a specimen to take home - the rhododendron is that beautiful.

In 1958, the hybrid was named for one of Edinburgh’s past members of staff: the rhododendron specialist who authored all of the elepidote entries in the 1930-published book *The Species of Rhododendron,* which was the first truly comprehensive classification of the genus - Harry Frank Tagg (1874-1933). His biography appears in *The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh 1670-1970,* written by Harold Fletcher and William Brown (HMSO, 1970), which can be read in its entirety online and from which the extracts below have been reproduced:

> ‘To the charge of the Museum, Harry Frank Tagg was appointed. Tagg was but twenty years of age when he joined [Sir Isaac Bayley] Balfour’s staff, having received some training in horticulture at Swanley College in Kent. Thereafter for nearly forty years he was to fill the post of Assistant in the Museum. In this capacity, in 1904, Balfour granted him long leave of absence for the purpose of collecting botanical material, for his Museum, in other parts of the world, and in the course of this prolonged tour he visited Australia and New Zealand. His early years in Edinburgh were devoted to the study of plant pathology, especially with regard to the diseases of timber, and during the 1914-18 War he performed valuable work as Scientific Officer to the Timber Supply Department under the Board of Trade. In the preparation of Museum exhibits Tagg was an expert, developing methods for the preservation of specimens that were quite unique at the time. Gradually, scope for his activities in the Museum became less and less. At the same time scope for research in taxonomic botany in Edinburgh increased enormously with the influx of the rich collections from the Sino-Himalaya. Thus, under Balfour’s prompting, Tagg turned his attention to taxonomy and especially the taxonomy of the genus *Rhododendron* on which he became a great authority.’
>
> ‘In 1933, Tagg, who, though officially in charge of the Museum had been working on the taxonomy of rhododendrons for so long, and who, with [John] Hutchinson of Kew, was regarded as the authority on the genus, died, leaving his work far from finished. Forrest’s rhododendron collections from his last expedition still required to be named, as did many of the collections of Kingdon-Ward and Joseph Rock. Moreover, George Sherriff and Frank Ludlow in 1933 were collecting in Bhutan, on the first of many subsequent expeditions; their rhododendron collections [too] would be sent to Edinburgh for naming.’

John MacQueen Cowan and H. H. Davidian stepped into that breach, their surnames destined to appear again and again against the botanic citations for the slew of species rhododendron discoveries that would be made and published over the next thirty years.

Tagg’s co-author on *The Species of Rhododendron,* John Hutchinson (1884-1972), the lepidote rhododendron specialist based at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in southwest London, had named *R. taggianum* for his friend and colleague in 1930.



R. ‘Harry Tagg’


R. ‘Harry Tagg’


R. ‘Harry Tagg’


R. ‘Harry Tagg’


R. ‘Harry Tagg’


R. ‘Harry Tagg’


R. ‘Harry Tagg’

The ‘Hydon Mist’ Pride

russatum x ‘Blue Diamond’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 April-early May 1.2m x 1.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Azurwolke	Hans Hachmann	1961	1977
Blue Chip	Arthur George	1966	1976
Gletschernacht	Hans Hachmann	1961	1976
Hydon Mist	Arthur George	1966	1976
Rustic Maid	Collingwood Ingram	before 1945	1945

R. ‘Hydon Mist’ is one of the lepidote hybrids introduced and registered by Hydon Nurseries of Godalming, Surrey, which was crossed by the firm’s founder, the late Arthur George, in the mid 1960s. Other hybridisers had already made the same pairing, matching *R. russatum* with pollen from J. J. Crosfield’s award-winning ‘Blue Diamond’ hybrid - first, Collingwood Ingram, sometime pre 1945; then the German nurseryman Hans Hachmann in 1961 - with ‘Rustic Maid’ introduced during 1945, ‘Azurwolke’ in 1977 and ‘Gletschernacht’ in 1976, but different clones of the seed parent species had been pressed into service for each mating, so the various offspring that were selected are not exact mirror images of one another, though similarities abound.

The Hydon cross produced plants with pale to dark purple-violet flowers that had good ‘blue’ tones in their rounded terminal and axillary trusses of 5-7 corollas. Each widely-funnel-shaped member of those inflorescences is between 2.5 and 3.3cm long and from 4 to near 5cm across at the mouth. Their five lobes are deeply divided, the lower two almost to the base, and in ‘Hydon Mist’, the dorsal is spotted darker. A purple hue colours the stamen filaments, this tone deepest in ‘Blue Chip’, while the style is a contrasting purplish-red.

On both of the Hydon introductions the foliage is dark green above, paler below, with scales found on both surfaces, each leaf elliptic through narrowly-elliptic in shape and akin to *R. augustinii,* but only around 5cm long. Their habit can be kept compact if a plant is grown in only a modicum of dappled shade, though the flower pigmentation will quickly pale in strong sunlight. More open, leggier and taller specimens would be the result of too dense a canopy, so hitting the sweet spot is all important.



R. ‘Hydon Mist’



R. ‘Blue Chip’



R. ‘Intrifast’



R. ‘Intrifast’

R. ‘Intrifast’

intricatum x *fastigiatum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 April-May 0.6m x 1m

‘Intrifast’ is the sole registered lepidote cross that T. H. Lowinsky ever made, the Subsection *Lapponica* combination developing into a compact mounded dome around 0.6m high that bears small, grey-green leaves at the branch tips. These have a rash of large and distinctive scales across their upper surface, visible without recourse to a hand lens or a microscope. Moreover, the new growth is distinctly blue-green and glaucous when it first emerges, this often occurring in concert with the flowers. These are widely-funnel-shaped saucers about 2cm across, violet-blue in tone, produced singly or in clusters, with stamen filaments that are flushed pale mauve and a style that is plum-red. Most knowledgeable doyens rate ‘Intrifast’ as better than either of its parents and so too might a certain FKW, though we shall never know the answer to that bit of speculation.

Thomas Hermann Lowinsky (1857-1931), the plant’s hybridiser, made his fortune first as the General Manager of Hyderabad (Deccan) Ltd, a mining company that in 1886 acquired the rights to exploit coal deposits found around Yellandu, a town in the Indian State of Telangana; and then as a stockbroker in the City of London. Which meant that in 1898 he was able to purchase the 72-acre estate of Tittenhurst Park, close to Windsor Great Park, where he spent the next 28 years establishing a renowned collection of rhododendrons in the grounds and using some of the best forms of the species then available to create a slew of highly-rated hybrids, many of them pairings with *R. griffithianum*. His favoured form of that Subsection *Fortunea* species was a borderline-hardy rose-pink flowering plant that was then known as *R. aucklandii* ‘Roseum Superbum’, which each year, was protected over winter by being wholly enclosed within a canvas tent. That same plant can now be found thriving at Muncaster Castle in Cumbria, atop the hill alongside an equally impressive specimen of *R. protistum* (this locale different to the Church Wood planting site detailed in Patrick M. Synge’s portrait of the gardens that was published in the *Rhododendron Year Book 1953*).

Then, for reasons still largely unknown, Lowinsky’s obsession with rhododendrons abruptly ended. Almost overnight. The Tittenhurst Park estate was sold, the species and hybrids abandoned, along with the stud book that detailed his breeding programme and many other records. As luck would have it, the new owner was not a big fan of the genus, but Lionel de Rothschild, at that time in the process of creating the now fabled Exbury Gardens, most certainly was, and with J. J. Crosfield of Embley Park and Sir John Ramsden of Bulstrode Park and Muncaster, all three purchased much of the collection, with the bulk of the plants going south to Exbury from where many of Lowinsky’s hybrid crosses were later introduced. All three grandees would also use the Lowinsky pairings in their own hybrid breeding programmes, as a number of the elepidote entries in Volume 8 will confirm.

R. ‘Lady Berry’

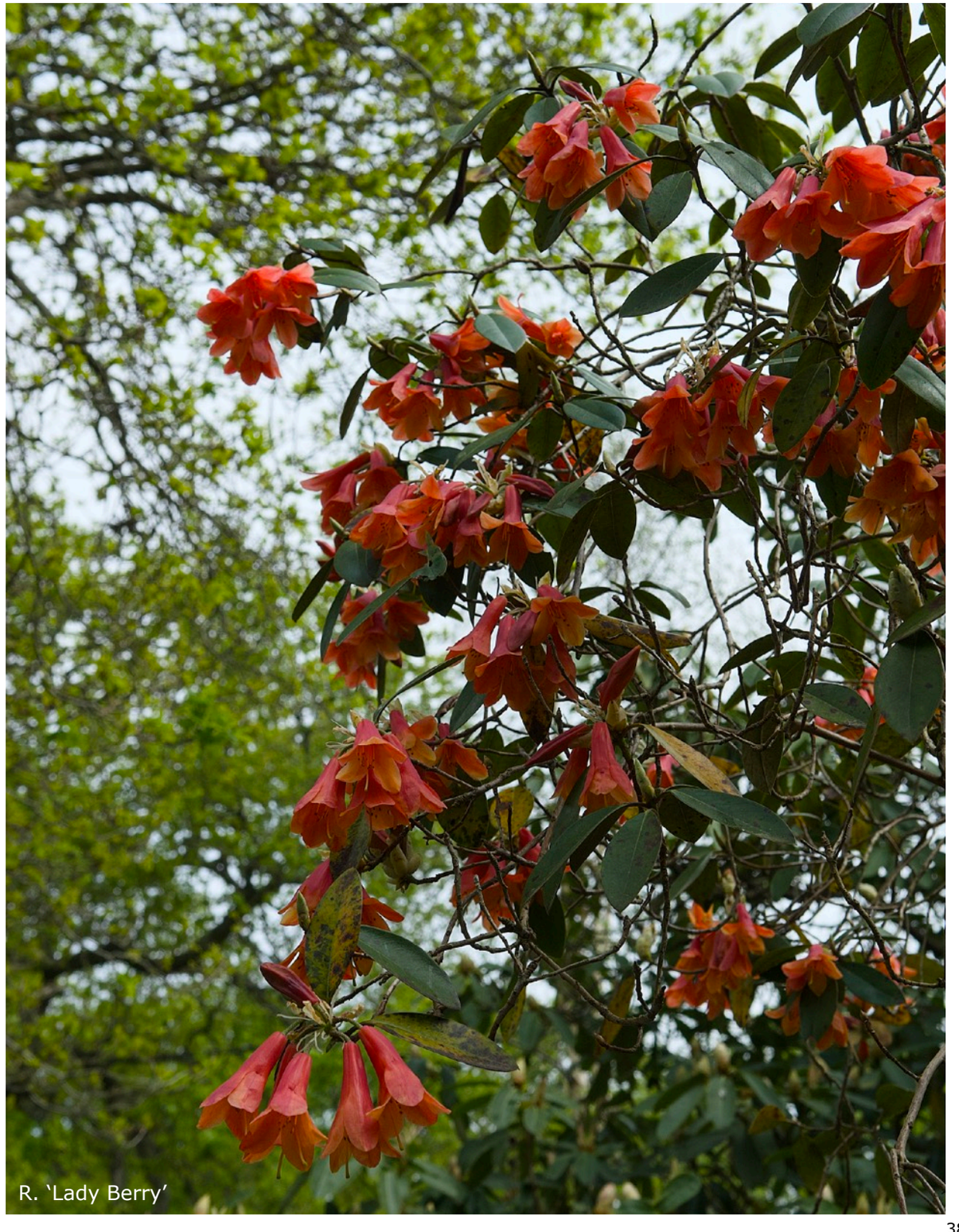
R. ‘Lady Berry’
‘Rosy Bell’ x ‘Royal Flush’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4-5 Late April-May 3m x 3m

Introduced from Exbury in 1935, gifted an Award of Merit in 1937 and a First Class Certificate in 1949, Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Lady Berry’ is a more tender variant on the ‘Lady Chamberlain’ theme, despite the given parentage. The award clone has pendulous tubular-campanulate flowers held in loose trusses of five, each fleshy trumpet around 7.5cm long and some 6cm across at the widely flaring mouth. They are shaded rose-opal within and jasper-red without, the latter tone paling towards the lobe rim.

The foliage is aromatic, those leaf blades ovate through oblanceolate in shape, bright green and glossy above, densely scaly below, with each extending close to 10cm in length and some 3.5cm in width. A whorl of leaves will be found at the end of each long branchlet, which means that mature specimens will basically be a criss-cross of ascending bare twigs and branches, this partly the result of the plant’s susceptibility to the powdery mildew fungus, but mostly because of the natural willowy disposition and upright habit, which is a shame, for the two RHS floral commendations are fully justified.

However, the registered parentage of ‘Lady Berry’ - shown above and in the plant’s *IRRC* listing as ‘Rosy Bell’ x ‘Royal Flush’ - is questioned by the doyens on two counts: the clear influence of *R. cinnabarinum,* despite only contributing 25% of the genes as stated; and the fact that the given pairing is between a diploid seed parent and a polyploid pollen donor. Had ‘Royal Flush’ matured the capsules, the genetic barriers would have been lower, indeed the ovules could have been fertilised through a process known as apomixis, this resulting in not a trace of *R. ciliatum* or *R. glaucophyllum* being apparent in the outward appearance of ‘Lady Berry’, which is clearly the case. So while genetic examination may at some future date prove that the entry in the Exbury studbook was correct, until that genetic sequencing is available, the accepted advice is to cough loudly whenever the given parentage is quoted.

In UK cultivation, apropos the hardiness rating, ‘Lady Berry’ requires a mild south coast or western seaboard locale to prosper, and as the high rainfall levels experienced at those latter sites are now known to be conducive to the powdery mildew fungus, mature specimens of this fabulous plant, although once widely planted, will today, rarely be encountered.


R. ‘Lady Berry’

R. ‘Exbury Lady Chamberlain’

The ‘Lady Chamberlain’ Pride
cinnabarinum x ‘Royal Flush’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 May-early June 3m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Apricot Lady Chamberlain	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1931
Bodnant Yellow	Henry McLaren	1935	1944
Chelsea	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1931
Exbury Lady Chamberlain	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1931
Gleam	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1931
Golden Queen	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1947
Ivy	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1931
Lady Chamberlain Seville	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1931
Lady Rosebery	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1930
Lady Rosebery Dalmeny	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1930
Lady Rosebery Etna	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1930
Oriflamme	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1930
Pink Dawn	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1954
Pink Lady Rosebery	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	1955
Salmon Trout	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1930	after 1931

The entries LR 178 and LR 179 in the Exbury Gardens stud book detail the pollination of a plant from what is now horticulturally recognised as *R. cinnabarinum* Roylei Group by the J. C. Williams *cinnabarinum* x *maddenii* hybrid ‘Royal Flush’. An orange-flowering clone of the latter was used for the first entry - LR 178; one of the pink blooming selections servicing the second - LR 179. Because the distribution of ‘Royal Flush’ from Caerhays to the landed gentry rhodophiles of the time appears to have included most of the seedlings that germinated and the colour spectrum of such spans wavelengths from yellowy-bronze to coppery-bronze, though the ‘orange form’ - with orange-pink corollas that are buff yellow within and have an orange throat - and the ‘pink form’ - with rose-red corollas that are soft pink within - were also propagated vegetatively, as apparently were individuals with apricot and cream flowers.

Exbury has registered a total of eight selections from the first pairing - under the ‘Lady Chamberlain’ banner or with individual epithets - and three from the second - these beneath the ‘Lady Rosebery’ moniker. Lord Digby, at Minterne House, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, christened a fourth clone from the latter mating as ‘Pink Dawn’ in 1954, and Sunningdale Nurseries, of Ascot, Berkshire, a fifth, in 1955, this as ‘Pink Lady Rosebery’. The cross was also duplicated by Henry McLaren using a different form of *R. cinnabarinum* in 1935 to produce ‘Bodnant Yellow’.

Confusing matters still further are a host of synonyms, which for the pride as a whole runs into double figures. Equally, many hybridisers have wrongly registered the parentage of their own crosses when designating ‘Lady Chamberlain’ as either the seed or pollen parent, because technically, such a plant does not exist, despite hordes of rhodophiles believing the cultivar was introduced in 1931. This is because having immediately won a First Class Certificate from the RHS, it was then swiftly transformed into ‘Exbury Lady Chamberlain’, with the good lady herself basically reduced to a coverall (though there is a de facto ‘Lady Rosebery’ clone, and even at Exbury, plants may still be found today, tagged with a simple ‘Lady Chamberlain’ label).

C. E. Lucas Phillips and Peter Barber, authors of *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* state that ‘Lady Rosebery’ should in fact be regarded as a clone of the ‘Lady Chamberlain’ grex, since they are the same cross, despite the colour variations of ‘Royal Flush’. And that advice is followed in gathering both plants together herein, along with their various clones. It also reflects the underlying genetics.

Lionel de Rothschild made the two pairings in the early to mid 1920s, revealing ‘Lady Rosebery’ in 1930 and ‘Exbury Lady Chamberlain’ in 1931. The plants are tall growing and upright in habit, with arching branches that become decidedly ‘leggy’ in too much shade. The ovate-lanceolate foliage mirrors *R. cinnabarinum,* being dark-green and waxy above, scaly and grey-green below, with the juvenile leaves tinted blue-green. The corollas are tubular-campanulate in shape, flaring widely at the mouth, quite heavily textured, and held in a loose and pendulous truss of three to six luminous trumpets. Mature bushes will flower profusely and are a stunning sight, but note that all of the clones will suffer if sited in full sun in the southern counties and will require a sheltered position in gardens along the east coast. Peter and Kenneth Cox report that the pride’s cultivars are only just hardy in the woodland at Glendoick, located on a hillside above the River Tay, halfway between Perth and Dundee, in eastern Scotland (*The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988).


R. ‘Lady Rosebery’

For many years - as detailed in some of this volume's previous entries - the "Lovers' Lane" path at Exbury was home to many splendid specimens from the entire pride - Ladies Chamberlain and Rosebery both - but only a few remain in place today and these are pale shadows of what once stood resplendent.

For the hybrids are susceptible to the rust fungus.

And worse, to the *Erysiphales* - the powdery mildews: Putin-esque parasites that can not only completely defoliate otherwise healthy plants, but result in their premature death if remedial treatment is not swiftly begun.

Yet when the mildew attacks first began, the symptoms were different to those seen on other genera, the discolouration on the underside of the leaves being hardly noticeable until the fungus was very well established, with only deciduous azaleas showing distorted leaves or the usual extensive patches of white mycelium. Equally, as no cleistothecia are produced on infected rhododendrons - globose, and completely enclosed fruiting bodies - and as different strains attack different plant groups - the one hitting the azaleas, for instance, is genetically different to the pox scourging the rhododendrons - it has been very difficult to identify exactly which *Erysiphales* taxa are involved, although current research has established that more than three types of the fungus are present on the lepidote or elepidote species and hybrids.

Application of a fungicide - rather than reducing the Kremlin to a pile of smoking rubble during the annual Presidential State of the Nation address (though that too would be fine and should have happened long ago when the first internationally recognised border was breached) - involves basically repeated power spraying of either the most susceptible plants or every rhododendron in your garden. And both the upper and lower surfaces of the leaves need to be thoroughly drenched. Such industriousness also needs to take place on days without rain so that the chemicals are not immediately washed-off or diluted by already wet foliage. Alternatively, increase the air circulation around a plant by thinning out any shelter, site the most vulnerable cultivars in open positions well away from any likely sources of infection - stands of wild *R. ponticum* and beds of rose bushes are frequently mentioned as the preferred fungal hosts - and then let nature take its course. Some plants will die, but most will battle-on, often showing little ill effect. Apart from the species and hybrids of Subsections *Cinnabarina* and *Thomsonia,* which are most likely to fall foul of the disease. Outside those two residencies, taxa such as *R. argipeplum, R. barbatum, R. fulgens, R. glaucophyllum, R. griersonianum, R. kyawii, R. mekongense* and *R. wallichii* - to mention just a handful - are all prone to the contagion, and note too, that the widely planted Henry McLaren *forrestii* Repens x *griersonianum* hybrid 'Elizabeth' will often be the first rhododendron to succumb.

Fine, mature specimen plants of the 'Lady Chamberlain' pride will still be encountered in rhododendron gardens up and down the country, but as the photographs show, few are completely disease-free.

Exbury's two coverall epithets for the pollinations are actually, each, an honorific - for Ivy Chamberlain; and Eva Primrose.

Ivy Muriel Chamberlain née Dundas (1878-1941), married the British statesman Sir Joseph Austen Chamberlain in 1906, assisting him to bring about the Locarno Treaties in 1925 when he served as Foreign Secretary, and campaigning for the relief of women and children during the Spanish Civil War.

Eva Isabel Marion Primrose née Bruce (1892-1987), was the Countess of Rosebery. Her husband Harry, the 6th Earl of Rosebery, was the son of Hannah Primrose, née Rothschild (daughter of Baron Mayer Amschel de Rothschild), while the Rosebery family's ancestral home is Dalmeny House, on the Firth of Forth, to the northwest of Edinburgh.



R. 'Exbury Lady Chamberlain'



R. 'Lady Rosebery Dalmeny'



R. ‘Apricot Lady Chamberlain’



R. ‘Apricot Lady Chamberlain’



R. ‘Lady Rosebery Etna’



R. ‘Salmon Trout’

R. ‘Laerdal’

johnstoneanum x *dalhousiae*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H3-4 May 1.5m x 2.5m

The placing of pollen from *R. dalhousiae* onto the receptive style of *R. johnstoneanum* was made at Trengwainton, a country house and garden to the west of Penzance in Cornwall, which is now in the care of the National Trust. In 1937, it was the estate’s owner, Sir Edward Bolitho, who undertook the pairing and it produced a stunning, if tender, hybrid. The narrowly funnel-campanulate corollas of R. ‘Laerdal’ are somewhat ventricose and held in a loose truss of five. They are entirely creamy-yellow in the bud, this tone receding back along the tube as the flowers develop, replaced by a pure white hue, so that when fully expanded, only the lobe limbs within a centimetre or so of the calyx on the outside remain greenish-yellow, while within, just the throat retains a flush of mustard-yellow. The plant’s leaves are oblong-elliptic in shape, dark green and slightly bullate above, scaly below.

Most rhodophiles would assume the hybrid’s epithet to be derived from a combination of the parents’ botanic names as is usually the case with such obfuscations, but this is not the case here, as there is no, now sunk, synonymic for *R. johnstoneanum,* nor any other obvious association within the genus involving the first four letters. So in naming the cross, Sir Edward either borrowed the name of a municipality in the southeast of Norway’s Sogn og Fjordane County - noted for its salmon fishing - or alternatively, it is an honorific for the medical company that manufactures ‘Resusci Annie’.

As should be obvious from the parentage, ’Laerdal’ is only hardy outdoors in the mildest of the UK’s west coast gardens, with winter protection under glass the only way to succeed with the hybrid anywhere else.



R. ‘Laerdal’



R. ‘Laerdal’



R. ‘Laerdal’

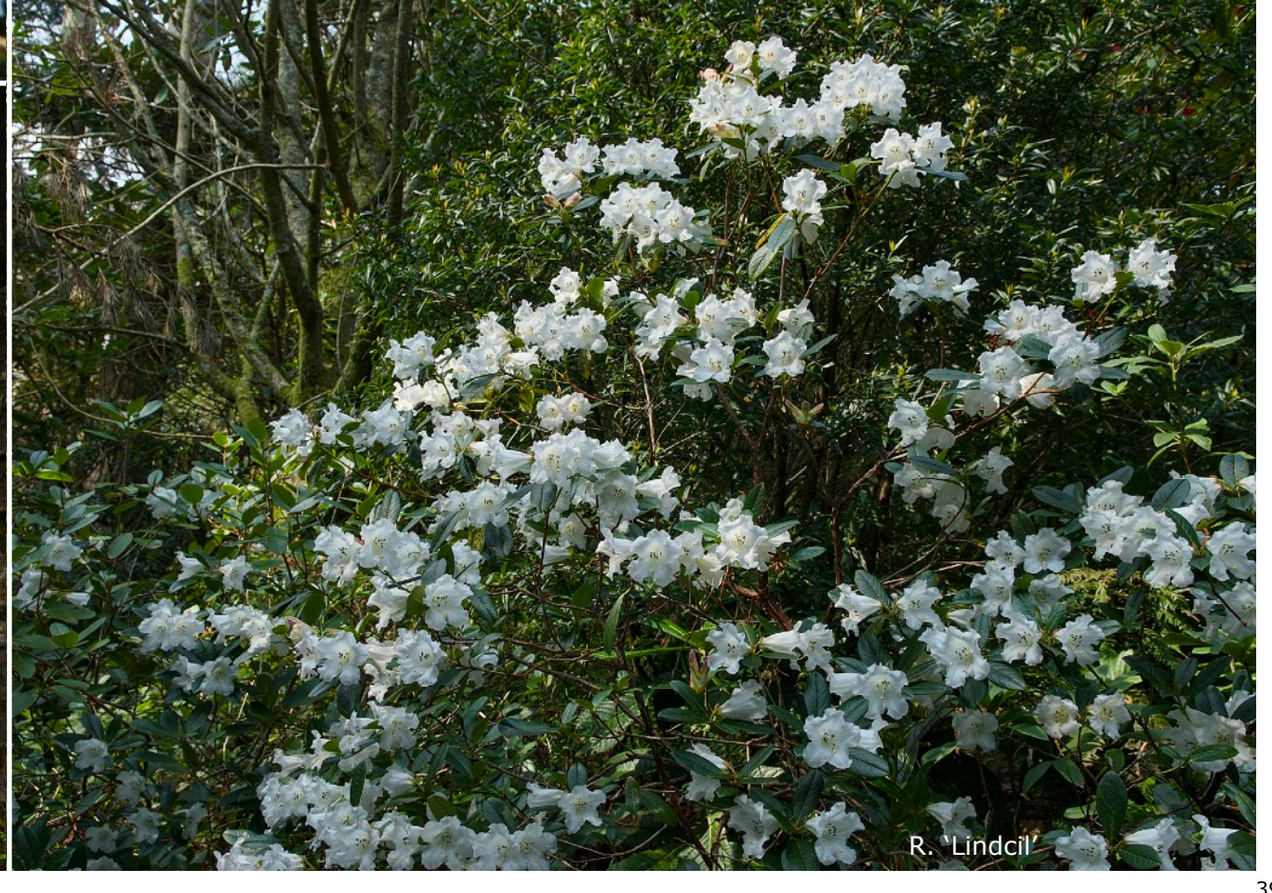

R. 'Lindcil'


R. 'Lindcil'

R. 'Lindcil'
lindleyi x *ciliatum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4 Late March-April 1.6m x 2.5m

Growing in the woodland at Brodick Castle Gardens on the Isle of Arran, without an *IRRC* registration, but named and clearly labelled, conjecture and supposition - but mostly location - would peg 'Lindcil' as a *lindleyi* x *ciliatum* cross made by John Basford during his 33-year stint as head gardener. If that parentage is correct, then the cross is likely only suitable for outdoor cultivation in mild west coast gardens, which is unfortunate, as the hybrid is a cracker when in bloom. The large, funnel-shaped corollas, with frilly lobe margins, are pure white with just a tiny flush of mustard-yellow at the base of the dorsal lobe when fully expanded, and they are carried singly or in open trusses of three or four. Medium-sized, dark green elliptic leaves complete the picture, with these held for one, sometimes two years, so much of the branch framework will be visible. Habit is upright and spreading, the specimen seen here around 1.6m tall by 2.5m wide when photographed a decade or so ago.

Brodick have been showing trusses of 'Lindcil' at flower shows since at least 1975 (*The Rhododendrons Exhibited at the Scottish National Trust Show,* an article for *JARS,* Volume 29, Number 4), and winning prizes with the hybrid too - for instance, at the Scottish Rhododendron Society's show in 2016.


R. 'Lindcil'



R. ‘May’s Lemon’

R. ‘May’s Lemon’

mekongense x *lutescens*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5-6	Mid April	2m x 2m

John May and his wife Enid bred many fine rhododendrons at Wimborne Botanic Garden, their home near Ferndown, in Dorset, making this cross in 1969, when pollen from the FCC form of *R. lutescens* was placed onto the style of a plant from the *R. trichocladum* var. *mekongense* Melinanthum Group. The resulting twiggy bush, named and introduced in 1988, has lovely 5-lobed funnels of pale yellow-green that are tinted pink at the margins when they first unfurl and up to seven corollas are carried in each open truss. A mature specimen in full flower therefore, appears to have a cloud of yellow butterflies fluttering around its crown.

The foliage is lanceolate in shape and bronzy coloured when newly expanded, but the bush is poorly served by its deciduous-evergreen nature. None of the leaf blades persist on the plant for more than a year or so, and those that do, clinging on through the winter months, are often badly spotted or frosted brown come spring, and so an eyesore. Graced with either fully deciduous or fully evergreen leaves, ‘May’s Lemon’ would truly have been a cracker, but as it is, on occasion, only distance gives its blooms esteem.



R. ‘May’s Lemon’

R. ‘Merganser’

campylogynum x *luteiflorum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late April-May 0.4m x 1.5m

Another of the Glendoick “Birds” - named for a duck, the common merganser, *Mergus merganser* - Peter Cox made this pairing in 1969 using a white-flowering form of *R. campylogynum* pollinated by *R. luteiflorum*. Introduced around a decade later, ‘Merganser’ is a semi-dwarf shrub, perfect for a rock garden placement as it spreads far wider than it grows high. Flower-wise, three corollas emerge from each bud on long yellow pedicels, these small, primrose-yellow thimbles that are each about 2cm long by 3cm across, which droop or are held in a somewhat conical truss. They have the typical, bent-downward club style found on both parents. In contrast, the leaves are dark green, narrowly elliptic in shape, 3.5cm long by half as much in width, scaly both above and below, with a distinct mucro at the apex.

R. ‘Merganser’ is very free-flowering from a young age, but mirroring a predisposition of the high altitude dwarf lepidote species, though hardy enough to be planted anywhere in the UK where rhododendrons succeed, the cooler northern climes are preferred, while a full sun position in southern gardens is likely to give the plant’s owners much grief.



R. ‘Merganser’



R. ‘Merganser’

R. ‘Mozari’

concatenans x *ambiguum*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5	May	2m x 3.5m

Bred by John Barr and Roza Stevenson of Tower Court, Ascot, in 1941, ‘Mozari’ is a straightforward F1 *concatenans* x *ambiguum* pairing, so apricot-yellow pigmentation genes would have been input into the equation along with yellow from the pollen parent and the resulting corollas show a pastel mix of those tones. They are usually darker on the outside with a few crimson-apricot flecks on the dorsal, tubular-funnel-shaped, carried in open and drooping trusses of six, and the lobes often have reflexed margins. En masse, their appeal is obvious; up-close, perhaps less so.

The leaves of R. ‘Mozari’ are elliptic in outline, dark green in colour, scaly both above and below, but only held for one year, so the intricate framework of branches will clearly be on display unless foreground masking by some other cultivar is put in place. Leaf spot is a problem, with the ravages of winter clearly apparent on many of the blades until they are shed soon after the new growth emerges.

One last morphological fact - reported in the article *There are Also Lime Tolerating Rhododendrons,* by Friedrich Heiler, of Munich, Germany, as translated from the German by Alfred A. Huber (*JARS,* Volume 16, Number 3, July 1962) - the hybrid is lime tolerant.

And so to the epithet:

Mozari Point is one of the scenic viewpoints close to Chikhaldara Hill Station in the Satpura Mountain Range, Maharashtra, eastern India, though it is unknown by this author if the Stevensons ever visited.

Alternatively, the appellation might be an anagram, for ‘Mi Roza’.

Its origin, otherwise, is obscure.



R. ‘Mozari’



R. ‘Mozari’



R. ‘Mozari’

R. 'Mozari'

R. ‘Muncaster Bells’


R. ‘Muncaster Bells’


R. ‘Muncaster Bells’

R. ‘Muncaster Bells’
cinnabarinum x *concatenans*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5 Mid April-early May 3m x 3m

The ultimate accolade any hybrid can receive is an acknowledgement that the cross is better than its individual parents. Within the pantheon of registered rhododendron hybrids, as Frank Kingdon-Ward viscerally pointed out in his 1949 book *Rhododendrons,* the vast and overwhelming majority would fail to receive such praise. ‘Muncaster Bells’ gets it in spades.

The match was made by Sir John Ramsden (1877-1958), and later introduced around 1964 by his son, Sir William Pennington-Ramsden (1904-1986), the pairing *cinnabarinum* x *concatenans,* which remarkably, no one else has duplicated to date.

Set in a now too shaded spot at Muncaster - along the main drive to the castle from the entrance gate - the shrub pictured herein has been drawn-up into a 3m high and wide stretched dome that is also very open, this not helped by the high susceptibility of the typical *R. cinnabarinum* grey-green and glaucous leaves to the powdery mildew fungus, which has denuded much of the foliage. Yet somehow the plant struggles on through this adversity and every few years, manages to set an above average number of flower buds. And it is on these occasions, come mid April, when the corollas start to expand and emerge, that ‘Muncaster Bells’ puts on a simply stunning display.

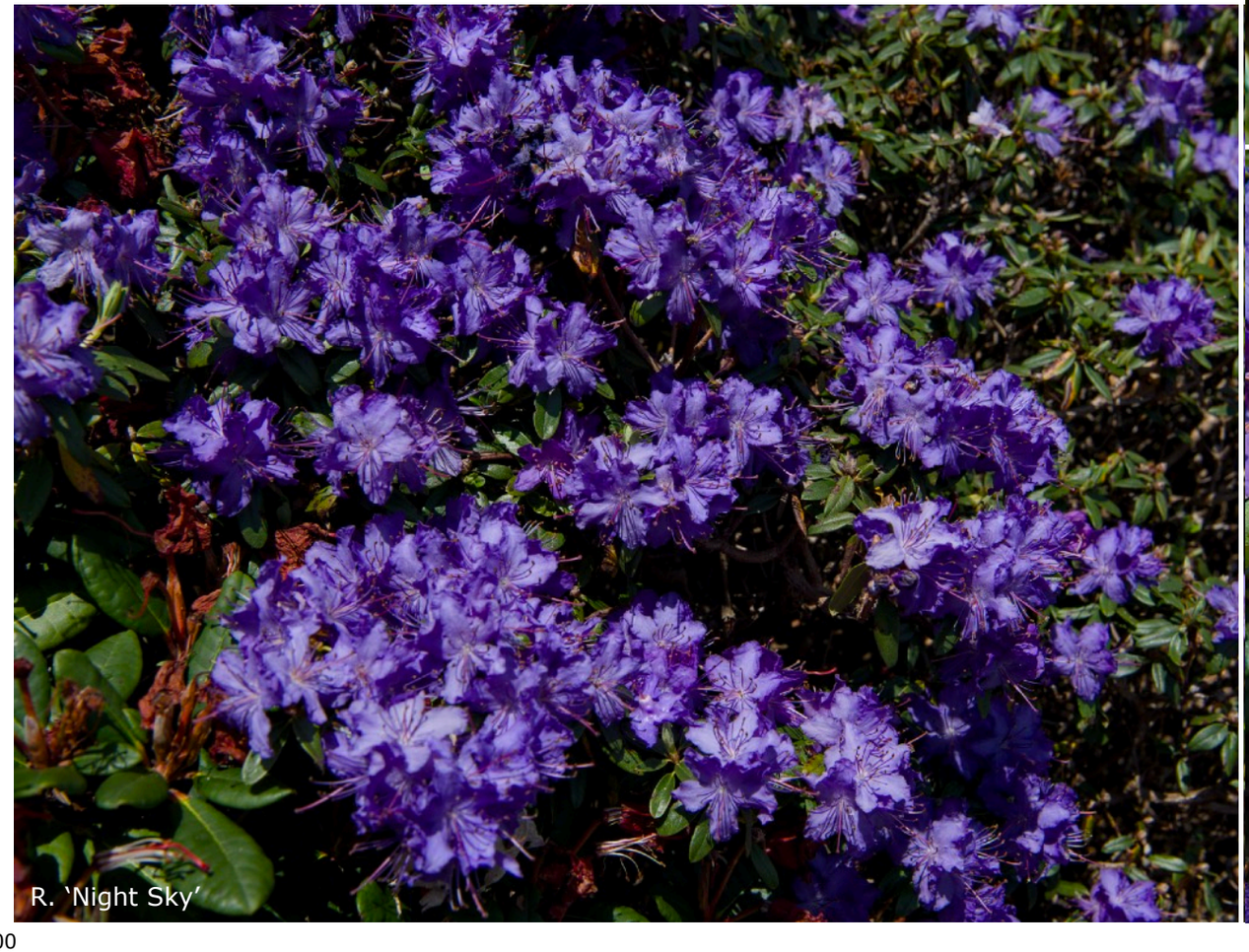
The flower trusses it carries are loose and pendulous. They each hold between six and ten 7.5cm-long tubular-campanulate bells of a deep and unblemished apricot-yellow hue, darker on the outside of the tube, that when hit by the merest glimmer of sunlight, glow from within, leaving those fortunate observers privileged to view the spectacle, completely mesmerised.


R. ‘Muncaster Bells’

R. ‘Night Sky’
impeditum x ‘Russautinii’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late April-May 0.8m x 1.5m

‘Night Sky’ is the near blue-flowered cross James Russell made in 1967. Pollen came from ‘Russautinii’ and it was placed onto the style of *R. impeditum* ‘Blue Steel’. The seed parent is listed as an *impeditum* x *impeditum* pairing in the pages of the *IRRC* that was crossed by Harry White, Russell’s predecessor at the now defunct Sunningdale Nurseries, Windlesham, Surrey, in 1956. In other registrations however, it has been recorded as a straight selection from *R. fastigiatum.* Herein, following the choice opted for by a number of more knowledgeable experts, it is referenced simply as *R. impeditum*.

Russell’s hybrid is a low-growing, compact, but spreading dwarf shrub, with small and sparsely scaly lanceolate-shaped leaves that are unfortunately prone to leaf spot, though not chlorosis. The flowers are produced in abundance from a young age and while technically violet in hue, they are as near to blue as makes no difference. At least within Genus *Rhododendron*. Five are carried in each truss and their reddish-purple style and mauve stamen filaments emerge from a dense central circle of white pubescent hairs that often completely obscure the ovary.


R. ‘Night Sky’


R. ‘Night Sky’


R. ‘Night Sky’

The 'Olga Mezitt Pride
minus x dauricum hybrid
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H7 April 1.6m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Olga Mezitt	Edmund V. Mezitt	1958	1975
Weston's Aglo	Edmund V. Mezitt	1958	1986

The Mezitt family have operated Weston Nurseries since 1923, when Peter J. Mezitt founded the business in a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. His son Edmund (1915-1985), bred many of the firm's now world-famous rhododendron hybrids, beginning with the *minus* Carolinianum x *dauricum* var. *sempervirens* cross in 1939 that produced the renowned P.J.M. clan (though the pollen parent has since been reclassified as *R. ledebourii*). Other pairings followed and in 1958 a combination was tried that would result in a plant named for his mother, which was introduced in 1975: 'Olga Mezitt'.

Initially the parentage was registered as *minus* Carolinianum x *minus,* then as *minus* 'Compacta' x *mucronulatum,* and finally, in the Second Edition of the *IRRC,* as *minus,* compact selection x pink-flowered dauricum hybrid. The pollen parent was detailed to be *mucronulatum* x *dauricum* by Richard Brooks in a 1999 review of the Weston Hybrids, which was published in Volume 53, Number 4, of the *Journal American Rhododendron Society,* though the proviso 'probably' is inserted before that part of the equation.

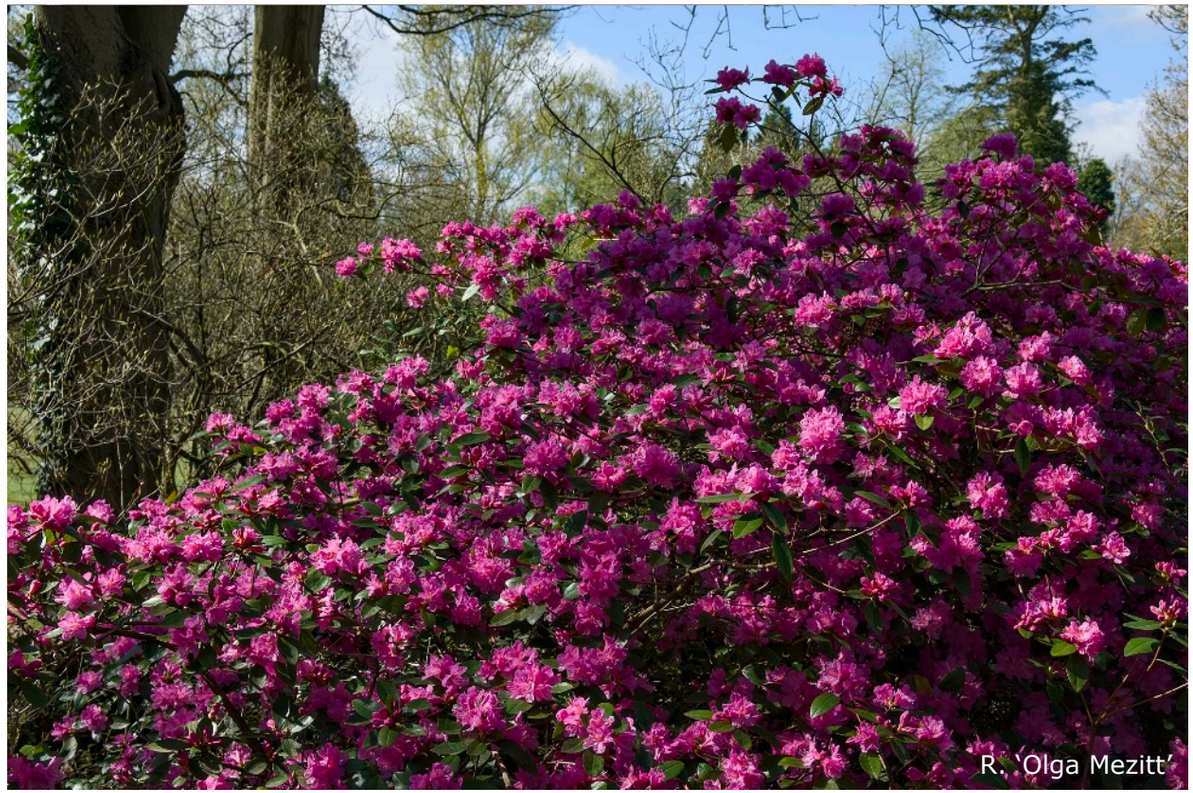
'Olga Mezitt' flowers in April in British gardens, opening flat-topped trusses of up to twelve open- or tubular-funnel-shaped 5-lobed corollas, each one just 2cm long by 4cm across when fully expanded, but produced in such quantity as to virtually swamp a mature bush in purplish-pink bloom. Up-close, the dorsal will be seen to be flecked with a few golden-green spots - that age to reddish-brown - the style tube flushed reddish-pink in contrast to the white stamen filaments, and the small calyx coloured to match the corolla, but the hybrid is best appreciated in wide-shot and from a distance.

The foliage is somewhat shiny, olive-green in hue, with bronze-coloured scales on the underside. Each blade is lanceolate in shape and up to 5cm long by 2.5cm across, and in the colder parts of the UK will take on mahogany tints over winter. Habit is compact yet wide-spreading, mature shrubs peaking in height around the 1.5m-mark but extending out to twice that figure, and though the leaves are only carried for one year, multiple shoots emerge from each branch tip once the corollas are shed, deploying enough green whorls to adequately fill the framework.

As with all of Edmund Mezitt's hybrids, 'Olga Mezitt' was bred to cope with the climatic demands of New England, the northeastern tip of the United States comprising the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. These have what is termed a 'humid continental climate', which must be a meteorologist's attempt at a joke given the mere 90-day frost-free growing season in the north, the fact that most locales have between 1.5 and 3m of snow dumped on them annually and cope with winter lows down to -26ºC most years. However, anything planted in the ground long-term must also be able to survive the occasionally dip to -38ºC and summer highs that can reach 39ºC. So 'Olga Mezitt' is tough, and probably the perfect addition to any Cairngorm summit garden, yet it also shines in the UK's southern counties.

'Weston's Aglo' is a sister seedling from the same pairing, with paler pink flowers, despite the *IRRC* entry documenting a hybridising date of 1964.


R. 'Olga Mezitt'


R. 'Olga Mezitt'

R. ‘Patty Bee’

R. ‘Patty Bee’

ozawae ‘Yaku Fairy’ x *fletcherianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 April 0.6m x 1.5m

A pairing made in 1970 by the American hybridiser Warren Berg (1923-2006), which he named for his wife, the ‘Patty Bee’ species combination displays the best features of both those rhododendrons in a dwarf shrub that is fully hardy and also very easy to grow. The elliptic, dark green leaves are fairly rigid, pointed at the tip with a distinct mucro, and tapering or wedge-shaped (cuneate) at the base. Genetically gifted from the pollen parent, the blades are also quite large - between 3 and 4.5cm in length and up to 2cm wide - held for around two years - despite turning bronzy in winter - so provide the tight framework of shortish branchlets with a fairly dense cloak of foliage. Leaf spot indicates poor drainage and the hybrid has a known aversion to too much chemical fertiliser, so if grown in a tub where a natural build-up of decaying organic matter is unlikely to amass, shun any temptation to overdose.

The flowers are simply divine, but as they open in mid April, the cultivar will require a sheltered site if spring frosts are a problem. Up to six widely-funnel-shaped corollas are held in each loose, domed truss, their tone a pure pale yellowish-green, unmarred by any blotch or spots. The lobes have wavy margins and the blooms are 5cm across at the mouth when fully expanded, but they have one fault - life expectancy; being quite short-lived; most especially if subjected to repeated dousings from heavy rain.

‘Patty Bee’ has a low spreading habit, a mature shrub forming a mound rarely more than 0.6m high, but extending out to at least twice that amount. A position in full sun will produce the best specimens, especially in the northern counties and Scotland, but excessive and prolonged summer heat will be detrimental, so a site in dappled shade post midday would be best in the south, and a containerised plant in such locales, should be kept well away from any potential heat sinks such as brick walls or a stone patio.



R. ‘Patty Bee’



R. ‘Patty Bee’



R. ‘Perseverance’

R. ‘Perseverance’

‘Lady Chamberlain’ x *cinnabarinum*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5	May	2.5m x 3.5m

Captain G. Murray Adams-Acton (1886-1971), aside from growing and hybridising rhododendrons, was a sought-after interior designer and author of a number of books on art and architecture, his 1929-published *Domestic Architecture and Old Furniture* being the stand-out title. ‘G’ was for Gladstone, in honour of his godfather, William Ewart Gladstone, the ‘Grand Old Man’ of 19th Century British politics, but it was a forename that he never used. He served in the Scots Guards during the First World War, relinquishing his command on account of ill health in June 1918.

Some thirty or so elepidote and lepidote Adams-Acton crosses are registered with the *IRRC* and of these, ‘Alisa-Jean’ - a *tephropeplum* x *moupinense* pairing that received an Award of Merit in 1946 - is probably his most well-known. But his best, is ‘Perseverance’.

Pollen from *R. cinnabarinum* Roylei Group was dabbed onto the style of Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Lady Chamberlain’, probably the FCC clone, but possible another, for this is one of those aforementioned incorrect registrations. L de R’s pride had been birthed from a *R. cinnabarinum* Roylei Group x ‘Royal Flush’ combination, with the J. C. Williams hybrid itself a *cinnabarinum* x *maddenii* cross, so the progeny from the Adams-Acton pairing were basically *R. cinnabarinum* on steroids, with the ‘Perseverance’ selection having the biggest corollas and most populous truss of the germinated seedlings. It also has a knockout flower colour, apricot fading to coral, the reddish tones courtesy of its Roylei Group inheritance. More importantly, the glossy green leaf blades show some resistance to the foul powdery mildew fungus, though they are not totally immune.

The clump of ‘Perseverance’ featured in the photographs - growing in the grounds of Muncaster Castle, Cumbria - is currently not in possession of a label, but was identified to me by the late Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington (1930-2021), the Castle’s elder statesman and poet-in-residence, whose readership knew him as ‘Patrick of the Hills’. My interest had been peaked after the bush flowered with abandon three times over the course of a single year - in February, June and late October - which if nothing else is a testament to the woodland’s fabulous hillside and coastal microclimate. Regular double flourishes of bloom have occurred since - in May and October - but the 2012 triple has not as yet been repeated. Whether such profligacy occurs elsewhere is unknown because this is the only specimen of the hybrid personally encountered in a UK garden, but Murray Adams-Acton’s choice of epithet is certainly appropriate for Muncaster’s luminary.

Returning to the powdery mildew issue, no fungicidal spraying programme is carried out at Muncaster, with the plants simply left to fend off the disease as best they can, and here, the microclimate on the hillside may be doing more than its fair share to help. For the clearly robustly healthy bush of ‘Perseverance’ is sited in a glade, out in the open, with nothing encroaching overhead to either shade or drip rainwater down onto the shrub. Moreover, air circulation is of a high order, the coastal breezes coming in off the Irish Sea, if not constant, certainly what could be described as a feature, though their ferocity is tempered by the surrounding, if somewhat distant shelter belt of trees, as well as the other plants growing nearby.

R. ‘Perseverance’

R. ‘Perseverance’

R. ‘Perseverance’

The ‘Phalarope’ Pride

pemakoense x *davidsonianum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 April 1m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Phalarope	Peter Cox	before 1968	1968
Snipe	Peter Cox	before 1968	1975

‘Phalarope’ is a *pemakoense* x *davidsonianum* combination that exhibits the best character traits of each parent, the match made by Peter Cox at Glendoick Gardens in the 1960s. It also pairs a diploid with a hexaploid, the seed parent having the standard 26 chromosomes, but the pollen parent 78. ‘Phalarope’, and its sister seedling ‘Snipe’, are therefore both likely to be tetraploids with 52 chromosomes each, which could explain why two hugely popular garden plants have logged-up only one registered hybrid in the forty-plus years since their introduction.

Gifted an Award of Merit in 1983 after trials at RHS Wisley, ‘Phalarope’ forms a dense, low-growing shrub never more than 1m high but spreading out to 2m or more. The leaves are narrowly obovate through narrowly elliptic in shape, held in clusters at the branch tips, mid to dark green in tone and individually 2.5cm long by 1.5cm wide. And they are pretty much completely obscured when a mature bush is awash with bloom during April. Those pale purple, widely-funnel-shaped corollas are each 3cm long by 5cm across at the mouth, and 3 to 6 of these populate a truss, with the flower buds usually single and terminal, but often supplemented by additional axillary buds in the uppermost leaf axils. The purple hue of the blooms is darker on the outer surface of the corollas and around the lobe margins, with a few even darker spots and speckles found on the lower half of the dorsal.

‘Phalarope’ is easy to grow, but the plant is not considered suitable for the UK’s coldest gardens, or given the bloom time, those subject to repeated spring frosts. The foliage is also somewhat prone to powdery mildew.

‘Snipe’ got its AM in the year it was introduced, 1975, and boasts blooms that are described as white through pale pink, suffused pale violet through mallow purple to reddish-purple, with some darker spotting of the same tone or of a magenta hue. It has 3 to 5 corollas in each truss that are 1.5cm long by 4.5cm wide, slightly longer leaves, and a lower-growing habit.

And of course both are members of the Glendoick avian menagerie.


R. ‘Phalarope’


R. ‘Snipe’



R. ‘Phalarope’



R. ‘Snipe’


R. ‘Pink Gin’


R. ‘Pink Gin’

R. ‘Pink Gin’

yunnanense x ‘Lady Rosebery’

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5	May	3m x 3m

‘Pink Gin’ is a pairing made by Ted Millais in 1971, a year or so after he and his wife Romy gave up growing mushrooms for a living and instead, established their specialist rhododendron nursery at Crosswater Farm, Farnham, Surrey, which is now run by their son, David. Formally Edward Gray Millais (1918-2003), Ted - to everyone who knew him - was the youngest grandson of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Sir John Everett Millais and also the nephew of John Guille Millais, though ‘he hardly knew his uncle and regarded his own interest in rhododendrons as due to his aunt (the widow of J. G. Millais), who gave him the freedom of her garden at Comptons Brow, near Horsham, where he came to know and understand rhododendrons’ (Eleanor Willson, *Nurserymen to the World,* 1989).

Named for the English cocktail drink created in the mid 19th Century - Plymouth gin with a dash of Angostura bitters, which gives the mix its colour - R. ‘Pink Gin’ is an outstanding addition to the lepidote hybrid ranks, for not only its proclivity to bloom with total abandon, but its acknowledged resistance to powdery mildew, the latter distinction, as John Hammond wrote in his 2004 *In Memoriam* eulogy, ‘enabling gardeners to grow *R. cinnabarinum* types where previously they would have succumbed to the fungus’ (*JARS,* Volume 58, Number 1).

The Millais hybrid sports between 4 and 5 widely-flared tubular corollas in each open flower truss, the 5-lobed trumpets 4cm long and 4cm wide. They are yellowish-pink in bud, opening white flushed pale pink, with the throat a pale yellowish-pink and the tube on the outside a darker shade of pink. The latter hue continues to infuse the exterior of the tube, paling with time, but the yellow tint within and the pink blush on the petals is lost. Two small rays of crimson speckles and spots, surrounded by the last vestiges of a now muddy yellow pigment, will be found at the base of the dorsal lobe. The blooms are set against leaves that are elliptic in outline, near 7cm long by 3.5cm across, mid to dark green in colour, lepidote beneath, and often graced with a concave to V-shaped longitudinal profile.

Prospective purchasers should note that ‘Pink Gin’ is only rated down to -15ºC, so it is not hardy enough to prosper in the coldest UK gardens, but elsewhere, it can be sited in full sun, even in the southern counties, and allowed to develop into a 3m wide and high dome. The intricate crisscross framework of branches will be on display throughout the year, because the leaf blades are only retained for twelve months and gathered in a whorl at the tips, but come May, when that blitz of bloom smothers the whole plant in colour, the underlying scaffold will be completely immaterial.

R. ‘Pink Gin’

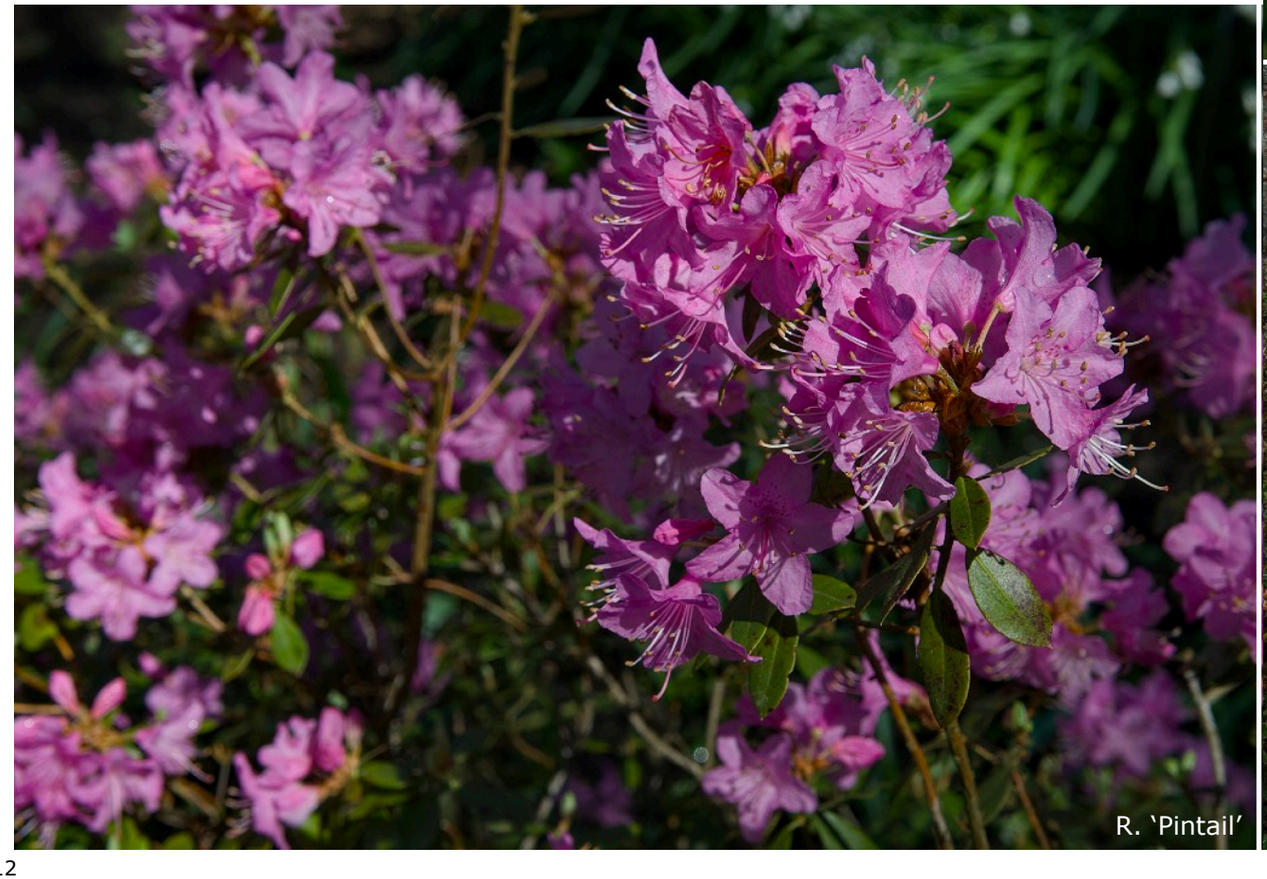
R. ‘Pintail’
racemosum x ‘Snipe’
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 April 1m x 2m

‘Pintail’ can be nothing other than one of the Glendoick “Bird” hybrids, in this case, the chosen epithet - the common name - honouring a species of migratory duck, *Anas acuta,* although given its parentage - *racemosum* x ‘Snipe’ - hybridiser Peter Cox might also have had *Gallinago stenura* on his mind (a sandpiper native to Russia and southern Asia, which is more commonly referenced as the pintail snipe). On the rhododendron, bright pink flowers open in April from terminal and axillary buds, the widely funnel-shaped corollas carried in trusses of three through five, with the multiple inflorescences combining to form a much larger cluster of bloom, the hybrid free-flowering from a young age.

Habit is upright and spreading, with the plant remaining fairly compact initially, but becoming somewhat ‘leggy’ with age, mirroring the seed parent in this regard, but topping out around the 1m-mark. The leaf blades are narrowly through broadly elliptic-lanceolate in shape, pointed at the apex and tapering or rounded at the base, mid to dark green above and somewhat shiny, lepidote below.

A full sun placement will produce the best specimens except for those who garden in the south of the UK. Here, a modicum of shade from midday onward should be provided, with the shrub also sited away from any heat sinks - brick walls, patios, etc. - especially if domiciled in a container.


R. ‘Pintail’


R. ‘Pintail’


R. ‘Pintail’



R. 'Polyroy'



R. 'Polycinn'

The 'Polyroy' Pride

polyandrum x *cinnabarinum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 May 3m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Polycinn	Hybridiser Unknown	before 1988	before 1988
Polyroy	Sir John Ramsden	before 1958	before 1958

'Polyroy' is an exquisite but unregistered hybrid. Mature and labelled specimens of the cross can be found growing in the woodland garden at Brodick Castle, on the Isle of Arran, Scotland; at Caerhays Castle, Cornwall; at Glendoick, near Perth; and likely in many other UK gardens as well.

The first locale mentioned might suggest it was raised by the late John Basford, who was head gardener at the property for a staggering span of 33 years, especially as a number of very similar-looking plants may be found dotted about the grounds, suggesting different selections grown-on from the same pairing. However, only one of these plants is graced with a 'Polyroy' tag and none of John Basford's registered crosses used the Bayley-Balfour chopped-up parentage formula to generate their epithets. So his is not amongst the names put forward for the hybridiser credit.

Caerhays, where a group of some five plants may be found growing in a clump near "George's Hut", believe the shrub to be a Millais cross and give the parentage as *polyandrum* x *cinnabarinum* Roylei Group, though apportionment to either John Guille or Edward Gray is not made. That same combination of parent plants was probably used to produce the hybrid 'Polycinn', but although this does appear in the *IRRC,* it only has a 'listed in the UK (1988)' entry.

Noted expert Kenneth Cox however, writing in his 2005 book *Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* reports that Sir John Ramsden made the pairing and that three colour forms are to be found in gardens: bright pink, reddish, and apricot. He reports that the hybrid is similar to 'Lady Rosebery', but more importantly, is much less susceptible to the powdery mildew fungus. Sir John, who was responsible for much of the rhododendron planting at Muncaster Castle, Cumbria, and is known to have exchanged plants with the Duchess of Montrose at Brodick when the gardens on Arran were being developed, registered a number of crosses with epithets that follow the condensed naming formula that was so heartily adopted by the hybridising fraternity of the 1920s even when the resulting combination was abhorrent. Some of the Ramsden hybrids so christened include 'Griersims', 'Lodauric', 'Russautinii', 'Shilsoneri' and 'Venapens', which if nothing else, at least roll off the tongue. Sort of.

The labelled 'Polyroy' plant at Brodick is a 3m tall and wide bush that in May redefines the concept of 'free-flowering' by several orders of magnitude. Its tubular-funnel-shaped 5-lobed corollas are each around 7.5cm long by 5cm wide and held in a loose, open truss of between four and seven trumpets. These are reddish-pink in the bud, opening white and flushed pink within, the pointed lobes deeper on the reverse, while the exterior of the tube retains the original pigmentation. The base of the dorsal lobes and the throat is stained orange-pink, these rays becoming more obvious as the overall pink flush fades over time. The foliage is a dark glossy green, oblanceolate through elliptic in shape and up to 7cm long by 2.5 to 3cm wide, and although held for just one year, the blades still manage to provide the crisscross framework of branches with an adequate level of decorum.

R. 'Polyroy'

R. ‘Polyroy’

R. ‘Praecox’

The 'Praecox' Pride

ciliatum x *dauricum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 Late February-March 1.7m x 3m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Amoenum	Hybridiser Unknown	before 1958	before 1958
Emasculum	Hybridiser Unknown	before 1958	before 1958
Praecox	Isaac Davies	around 1855	1861

Expert opinion on the parentage equation of R. 'Praecox' is a little - shall we say - conflicted. Everyone agrees on the ingredients of course, but not on how those individual constituents were brought together.

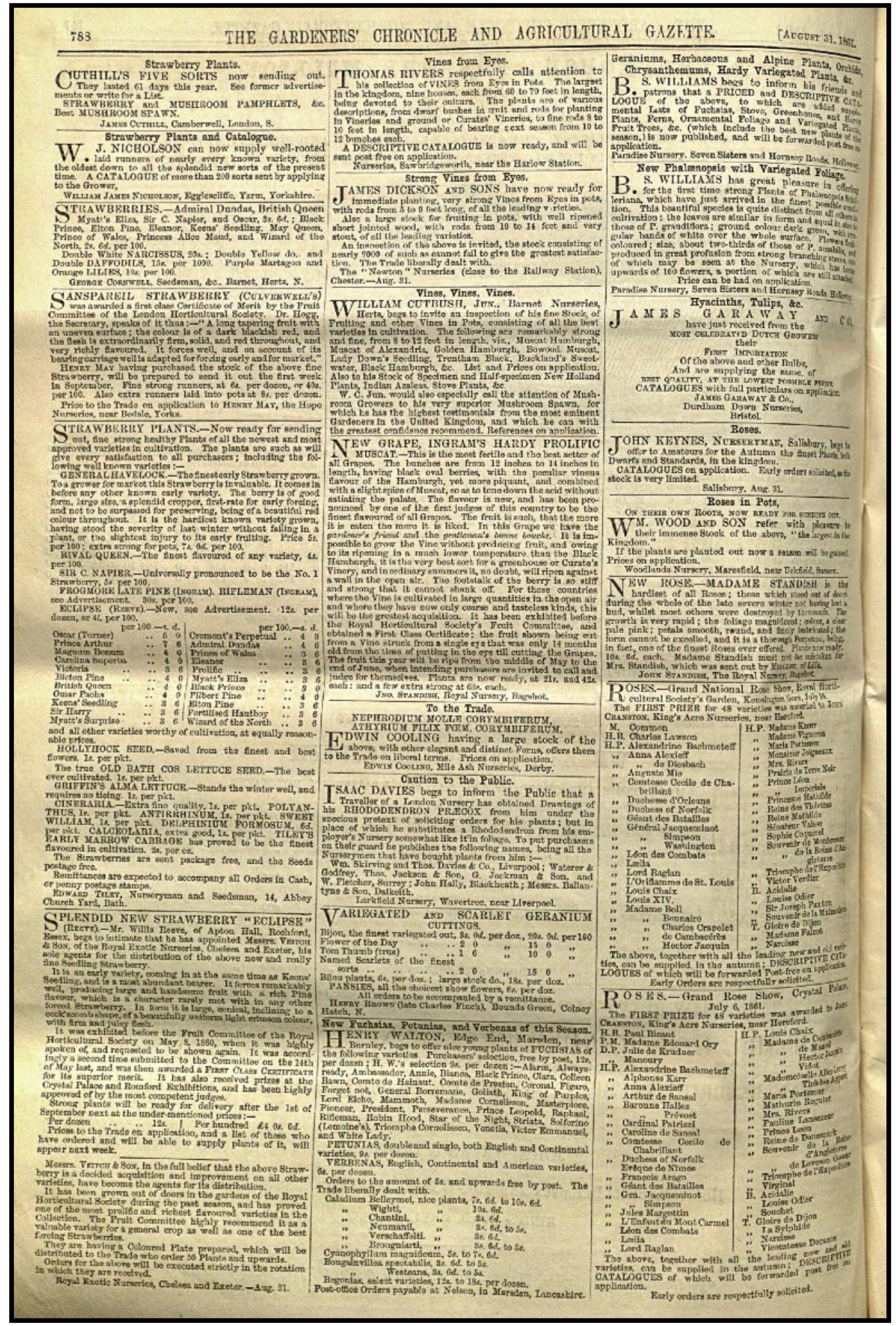
Isaac Davies made the cross in 1853 at his Larkfield Nursery in Wavertree, Merseyside. This was the original site of his business before it upped sticks and moved thirteen miles north of Liverpool to Ormskirk, the locale more usually associated with his name. However, 'Praecox' was introduced from Larkfield in 1861 and the pairing is the first recorded use of *R. ciliatum* as a parent, this occurring just three years after Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker had introduced the species into UK cultivation from Sikkim in 1850 and barely twelve months after it had first debuted its blooms in March 1852. *R. dauricum,* the other parent, had been present and flowering in British gardens since the 1780s.

Now, the species combination is usually given as *ciliatum* x *dauricum,* the *IRRC* entry following that given by J. G. Millais in his 1917-published *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* a formula that was also endorsed by Henry McLaren and Eustace Wilding in their 1926 parental pairings table that appeared in Volume 3, Number 2, of *The Rhododendron Society Notes.* Unfortunately, the team of authors updating the eighth edition of *Bean's Trees and Shrubs* do not agree with those historical accounts. They state that Isaac Davies 'put the pollen of *R. ciliatum* onto *R. dauricum,* not the other way about, as wrongly stated in the *International Register*', though no source is given for this assertion. In the second edition of the work however, published back in 1919 - the one that Mr Bean himself wrote - Isaac Davies is credited with raising the hybrid 'by crossing ciliatum with dauricum', which infers that *R. ciliatum* was on the receiving end of the operation, though the far-from-clear wordage could be taken either way, which the eighth edition's authors obviously did. Online however, the current construal has gone with the crowd and reverted to the equation given herein, but whereas previously such a conundrum would have remained unsolved, today, science and technology can today provide an answer: as it is now known that any hybrid's chloroplast cells are exclusively the gift of the female parent. So all that is needed to quell the argument, is for someone to look at and compare the organelle DNA.

'Praecox' first flowered in 1858 and was exhibited the following year, with the first botanical description of the hybrid credited to Élie Abel Carrière (1818-1896), the French botanist and conifer expert, his *R. x praecox* citation appearing in the March 1878 edition of the *Gardeners' Chronicle*.

But back in 1861, trouble was a-brewing:

Prompting the issuance of a "Caution to the Public" notice in the published media of the day. And not in any old journal. In *The Gardeners' Chronicle And Agricultural Gazette* no less. On page 783 of the edition published on August 31st, which is shown opposite and the text of the warning reproduced in full overleaf.



783 THE GARDENERS' CHRONICLE AND AGRICULTURAL GAZETTE. [August 31, 1861.

Strawberry Plants.

CUTHILL'S FIVE SORTS now sending out. They lasted 61 days this year. See former advertisements or write for a List.
STRAWBERRY and MUSHROOM PAMPHLETS, &c. Best MUSHROOM SPAWN.
James Cuthill, Camberwell, London, S.

Strawberry Plants and Catalogue.

W. J. NICHOLSON can now supply well-rooted laid runners of nearly every known variety, from the oldest down to all the splendid new sorts of the present time. A CATALOGUE of more than 200 sorts sent by applying to the Grower,
William James Nicholson, Egglescliffe, Yarm, Yorkshire.

STRAWBERRIES.—Admiral Dundas, British Queen, Myatt's Eliza, Sir C. Napier, and Oscar, 3s. 6d.; Black Prince, Elton Pine, Eleanor, Keens' Seedling, May Queen, Prince of Wales, Princess Alice Maud, and Wizard of the North, 2s. 6d. per 100.
Double White NARCISSUS, 25s.; Double Yellow do., and Double DAFFODILS, 15s. per 1000. Purple Martagon and Orange LILIES, 10s. per 100.
George Cornwell, Seedsman, &c., Barnet, Herts, N.

SANSPAREIL STRAWBERRY (Culverwell's) was awarded a first class Certificate of Merit by the Fruit Committee of the London Horticultural Society. Dr. Hogg, the Secretary, speaks of it thus:—"A long tapering fruit with an uneven surface; the colour is of a dark blackish red, and the flesh is extraordinarily firm, solid, and red throughout, and very richly flavoured. It forces well, and on account of its bearing carriage well is adapted for forcing early and for market."
Henry May having purchased the stock of the above fine Strawberry, will be prepared to send it out the first week in September. Fine strong runners, at 6s. per dozen, or 40s. per 100. Also extra runners laid into pots at 8s. per dozen.
Price to the Trade on application to Henry May, the Hope Nurseries, near Bedale, Yorks.

STRAWBERRY PLANTS.—Now ready for sending out, fine strong healthy Plants of all the newest and most approved varieties in cultivation. The plants are such as will give every satisfaction to all purchasers; including the following well known varieties:—
GENERAL HAVELOCK.—The finest early Strawberry grown. To a grower for market this Strawberry is invaluable. It comes in before any other known early variety. The berry is of good form, large size, a splendid cropper, first-rate for early forcing, and not to be surpassed for preserving, being of a beautiful red colour throughout. It is the hardiest known variety grown, having stood the severity of last winter without failing in a plant, or the slightest injury to its early fruiting. Price 5s. per 100; extra strong for pots, 7s. 6d. per 100.
RIVAL QUEEN.—The finest flavoured of any variety, 4s. per 100.
SIR C. NAPIER.—Universally pronounced to be the No. 1 Strawberry, 5s per 100.
FROGMORE LATE PINE (Ingram). RIFLEMAN (Ingram), see Advertisement. 30s. per 100.
ECLIPSE (Reeve).—New, see Advertisement. 12s. per dozen, or 4l. per 100.

	per 100.—s. d.		per 100.—s. d.
Oscar (Turner)	5 0	Cremont's Perpetual	4 0
Prince Arthur	7 6	Admiral Dundas	4 0
Magnum Bonum	4 0	Prince of Wales	3 6
Carolina Superba	4 0	Eleanor	3 6
Victoria	3 6	Prolific	3 6
Bicton Pine	4 0	Myatt's Eliza	3 6
British Queen	4 0	Black Prince	3 0
Omar Pacha	4 0	Filbert Pine	4 0
Keens' Seedling	3 6	Elton Pine	3 6
Sir Harry	3 6	Fertilised Hautboy	3 6
Myatt's Surprise	3 6	Wizard of the North	3 6

and all other varieties worthy of cultivation, at equally reasonable prices.
HOLLYHOCK SEED.—Saved from the finest and best flowers. 1s. per pkt.
The true OLD BATH COS LETTUCE SEED.—The best ever cultivated. 1s. per pkt.
GRIFFIN'S ALMA LETTUCE.—Stands the winter well, and requires no tieing. 1s. per pkt.
CINERARIA.—Extra fine quality, 1s. per pkt. POLYANTHUS, 1s. per pkt. ANTIRRHINUM, 1s. per pkt. SWEET WILLIAM, 1s. per pkt. DELPHINIUM FORMOSUM, 6d. per pkt. CALCEOLARIA, extra good, 1s. per pkt. TILEY'S EARLY MARROW CABBAGE has proved to be the finest flavoured in cultivation. 2s. per oz.
The Strawberries are sent package free, and the Seeds postage free.
Remittances are expected to accompany all Orders in Cash, or penny postage stamps.
Edward Tiley, Nurseryman and Seedsman, 14, Abbey Church Yard, Bath.

SPLENDID NEW STRAWBERRY "ECLIPSE" (Reeve).—Mr. Willis Reeve, of Apton Hall, Rochford, Essex, begs to intimate that he has appointed Messrs. Veitch & Son, of the Royal Exotic Nurseries, Chelsea and Exeter, his sole agents for the distribution of the above new and really fine Seedling Strawberry.
It is an early variety, coming in at the same time as Keens' Seedling, and is a most abundant bearer. It forces remarkably well, producing large and handsome fruit with a rich Pine flavour, which is a character rarely met with in any other forced Strawberry. In form it is large, conical, inclining to a cock'scomb shape, of a beautifully uniform light crimson colour, with firm and juicy flesh.
It was exhibited before the Fruit Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society on May 8, 1860, when it was highly spoken of, and requested to be shown again. It was accordingly a second time submitted to the Committee on the 14th of May last, and was then awarded a First Class Certificate for its superior merit. It has also received prizes at the Crystal Palace and Romford Exhibitions, and has been highly approved of by the most competent judges.
Strong plants will be ready for delivery after the 1st of September next at the under-mentioned prices:—
Per dozen .. .. 12s. | Per hundred £4 0s. 0d.
Prices to the Trade on application, and a list of those who have ordered and will be able to supply plants of it, will appear next week.
Messrs. Veitch & Son, in the full belief that the above Strawberry is a decided acquisition and improvement on all other varieties, have become the agents for its distribution.
It has been grown out of doors in the gardens of the Royal Horticultural Society during the past season, and has proved one of the most prolific and richest flavoured varieties in the Collection. The Fruit Committee highly recommend it as a valuable variety for a general crop as well as one of the best forcing Strawberries.
They are having a Coloured Plate prepared, which will be distributed to the Trade who order 50 Plants and upwards.
Orders for the above will be executed strictly in the rotation in which they are received.
Royal Exotic Nurseries, Chelsea and Exeter.—Aug. 31.

Vines from Eyes.

THOMAS RIVERS respectfully calls attention to his collection of VINES from Eyes in Pots. The largest in the kingdom, nine houses, each from 60 to 70 feet in length, being devoted to their culture. The plants are of various descriptions, from dwarf bushes in fruit and rods for planting in Vineries and ground or Curates' Vineries, to fine rods 8 to 10 feet in length, capable of bearing next season from 10 to 12 bunches each.
A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE is now ready, and will be sent post free on application.
Nurseries, Sawbridgeworth, near the Harlow Station.

Strong Vines from Eyes.

JAMES DICKSON and SONS have now ready for immediate planting, very strong Vines from Eyes in pots, with rods from 5 to 9 feet long, of all the leading varieties.
Also a large stock for fruiting in pots, with well ripened short jointed wood, with rods from 10 to 14 feet and very stout, of all the leading varieties.
An inspection of the above is invited, the stock consisting of nearly 2000 of such as cannot fail to give the greatest satisfaction. The Trade liberally dealt with.
The "Newton" Nurseries (close to the Railway Station), Chester.—Aug. 31.

Vines, Vines, Vines.

WILLIAM CUTBUSH, Jun., Barnet Nurseries, Herts, begs to invite an inspection of his fine Stock of Fruiting and other Vines in Pots, consisting of all the best varieties in cultivation. The following are remarkably strong and fine, from 8 to 12 feet in length, viz., Muscat Hamburgh, Muscat of Alexandria, Golden Hamburgh, Bowood Muscat, Lady Down's Seedling, Trentham Black, Buckland's Sweetwater, Black Hamburgh, &c. List and Prices on application. Also to his Stock of Specimen and Half-specimen New Holland Plants, Indian Azaleas, Stove Plants, &c.
W. C. Jun. would also especially call the attention of Mushroom Growers to his very superior Mushroom Spawn, for which he has the highest testimonials from the most eminent Gardeners in the United Kingdom, and which he can with the greatest confidence recommend. References on application.

NEW GRAPE, INGRAM'S HARDY PROLIFIC MUSCAT.—This is the most fertile and the best setter of all Grapes. The bunches are from 12 inches to 14 inches in length, having black oval berries, with the peculiar vinous flavour of the Hamburgh, yet more piquant, and combined with a slight spice of Muscat, so as to tone down the acid without satiating the palate. The flavour is new, and has been pronounced by one of the first judges of this country to be the finest flavoured of all Grapes. The fruit is such, that the more it is eaten the more it is liked. In this Grape we have the *gardener's friend* and the *gentleman's bonne bouche*. It is impossible to grow the Vine without producing fruit, and owing to its ripening in a much lower temperature than the Black Hamburgh, it is the very best sort for a greenhouse or Curate's Vinery, and in ordinary summers it, no doubt, will ripen against a wall in the open air. The footstalk of the berry is so stiff and strong that it cannot shank off. For those countries where the Vine is cultivated in large quantities in the open air and where they have now only coarse and tasteless kinds, this will be the greatest acquisition. It has been exhibited before the Royal Horticultural Society's Fruit Committee, and obtained a First Class Certificate; the fruit shown being cut from a Vine struck from a single eye that was only 14 months old from the time of putting in the eye till cutting the Grapes. The fruit this year will be ripe from the middle of May to the end of June, when intending purchasers are invited to call and judge for themselves. Plants are now ready, at 21s. and 42s. each: and a few extra strong at 63s. each.
Jno. Standish, Royal Nursery, Bagshot.

To the Trade.

NEPHRODIUM MOLLE CORYMBIFERUM,
ATHYRIUM FILIX FŒM. CORYMBIFERUM.
EDWIN COOLING having a large stock of the above, with other elegant and distinct Ferns, offers them to the Trade on liberal terms. Prices on application.
Edwin Cooling, Mile Ash Nurseries, Derby.

Caution to the Public.

ISAAC DAVIES begs to inform the Public that a Traveller of a London Nursery has obtained Drawings of his RHODODENDRON PRÆCOX from him under the specious pretext of soliciting orders for his plants; but in place of which he substitutes a Rhododendron from his employer's Nursery somewhat like it in foliage. To put purchasers on their guard he publishes the following names, being all the Nurserymen that have bought plants from him:—
Wm. Skirving and Thos. Davies & Co., Liverpool; Waterer & Godfrey, Thos. Jackson & Son, G. Jackman & Son, and W. Fletcher, Surrey; John Hally, Blackheath; Messrs. Ballantyne & Son, Dalkeith.
Larkfield Nursery, Wavertree, near Liverpool.

VARIEGATED and SCARLET GERANIUM CUTTINGS.
Bijou, the finest variegated out, 3s. 0d. per doz., 20s. 0d. per 100
Flower of the Day .. .. 2 0 ,, 15 0 ,,
Tom Thumb (true) .. .. 1 6 ,, 10 0 ,,
Named Scarlets of the finest sorts .. .. 2 0 ,, 15 0 ,,
Bijou plants, 6s. per doz.; large stock do., 18s. per doz.
PANSIES, all the choicest show flowers, 6s. per doz.
All orders to be accompanied by a remittance.
Henry Brown (late Charles Finch), Bounds Green, Colney Hatch, N.

New Fuchsias, Petunias, and Verbenas of this Season.

HENRY WALTON, Edge End, Marsden, near Burnley, begs to offer nice young plants of FUCHSIAS of the following varieties. Purchasers' selection, free by post, 12s. per dozen; H. W.'s selection 9s. per dozen:—Alarm, Always-ready, Ambassador, Annie, Bianca, Black Prince, Clara, Colleen Bawn, Comte de Hainaut, Comte de Preston, Coronal, Figaro, Forget not, General Borremans, Goliath, King of Purples, Lord Elcho, Mammoth, Madame Cornelissen, Masterpiece, Pioneer, President, Perseverance, Prince Leopold, Raphael, Rifleman, Robin Hood, Star of the Night, Striata, Solferino (Lemoine's), Triomphe Cornelissen, Venetia, Victor Emmanuel, and White Lady.
PETUNIAS, double and single, both English and Continental varieties, 9s. per dozen.
VERBENAS, English, Continental and American varieties, 6s. per dozen.
Orders to the amount of 5s. and upwards free by post. The Trade liberally dealt with.
Caladium Belleymei, nice plants, 7s. 6d. to 10s. 6d.
,, Wightii, ,, 10s. 6d.
,, Chantini, ,, 2s. 6d.
,, Neumanii, ,, 3s. 6d. to 5s.
,, Verschaffelti, ,, 3s. 6d.
,, Brongniarti, ,, 3s. 6d. to 5s.
Cyanophyllum magnificum, 5s. to 7s. 6d.
Bougainvillea spectabilis, 3s. 6d. to 5s.
,, Westeana, 3s. 6d. to 5s.
Begonias, select varieties, 12s. to 18s. per dozen.
Post-office Orders payable at Nelson, in Marsden, Lancashire.

Geraniums, Herbaceous and Alpine Plants, Orchids, Chrysanthemums, Hardy Variegated Plants, &c.

B. S. WILLIAMS begs to inform his friends and patrons that a PRICED and DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE of the above, to which are added supplemental Lists of Fuchsias, Stove, Greenhouse, and Hardy Plants, Ferns, Ornamental Foliage and Variegated Plants, Fruit Trees, &c. (which include the best new plants of the season,) is now published, and will be forwarded post free on application.
Paradise Nursery, Seven Sisters and Hornsey Roads, Holloway.

New Phalænopsis with Variegated Foliage.

B. S. WILLIAMS has great pleasure in offering for the first time strong Plants of Phalænopsis Schilleriana, which have just arrived in the finest possible condition. This beautiful species is quite distinct from all others in cultivation: the leaves are similar in form and equal in size to those of P. grandiflora; ground colour dark green, with irregular bands of white over the whole surface. Flowers flesh coloured; size, about two-thirds of those of P. amabilis, and produced in great profusion from strong branching stems, one of which may be seen at the Nursery, which has borne upwards of 160 flowers, a portion of which are still attached.
Price can be had on application.
Paradise Nursery, Seven Sisters and Hornsey Roads, Holloway.

Hyacinths, Tulips, &c.

JAMES GARAWAY and CO.
have just received from the
MOST CELEBRATED DUTCH GROWERS
their
FIRST IMPORTATION
Of the above and other Bulbs,
And are supplying the same, of
BEST QUALITY, AT THE LOWEST POSSIBLE PRICES.
CATALOGUES with full particulars on application.
James Garaway & Co.,
Durdham Down Nurseries,
Bristol.

Roses.

JOHN KEYNES, Nurseryman, Salisbury, begs to offer to Amateurs for the Autumn the finest Plants, both Dwarfs and Standards, in the kingdom.
CATALOGUES on application. Early orders solicited, as the stock is very limited.
Salisbury, Aug. 31.

Roses in Pots,

On their own Roots, now ready for sending out.
WM. WOOD and SON refer with pleasure to their immense Stock of the above, "the largest in the Kingdom."
If the plants are planted out now a season will be gained. Prices on application.
Woodlands Nursery, Maresfield, near Uckfield, Sussex.

NEW ROSE.—MADAME STANDISH is the hardiest of all Roses; those which stood out of doors during the whole of the late severe winter not having lost a bud, whilst most others were destroyed by thousands. The growth is very rapid; the foliage magnificent; colour, a clear pale pink; petals smooth, round, and finely imbricated; the form cannot be excelled, and it is a thorough Perpetual, being, in fact, one of the finest Roses ever offered. Plants now ready, 10s. 6d. each. Madame Standish must not be mistaken for Mrs. Standish, which was sent out by [illegible], of Lille.
John Standish, The Royal Nursery, Bagshot.

ROSES.—Grand National Rose Show, Royal Horticultural Society's Garden, Kensington Gore, July 4.
The FIRST PRIZE for 48 varieties was awarded to John Cranston, King's Acre Nurseries, near Hereford.

M. Common	H.P. Madame Knorr
H.B. Charles Lawson	,, Madame Vigneron
H.P. Alexandrine Bachmeteff	,, Maria Portemer
,, Anna Alexieff	,, Monsieur Joigneaux
,, ,, de Diesbach	,, Mrs. Rivers
,, Auguste Mie	,, Prairie de Terre Noir
,, Comtesse Cecile de Chabrillant	,, Prince Léon
,, Duchesse d'Orleans	,, ,, Imperiale
,, Duchess of Norfolk	,, Princesse Mathilde
,, Géant des Batailles	,, Reine des Violettes
,, Général Jacqueminot	,, Reine Mathilde
,, ,, Simpson	,, Sénateur Vaïsse
,, ,, Washington	,, Sophie Coquerel
,, Léon des Combats	,, Souvenir de Montceaux
,, Lælia	,, ,, de la Reine d'Angleterre
,, Lord Raglan	,, Triomphe de l'Exposition
,, L'Oriflamme de St. Louis	,, Victor Verdier
,, Louis Chaix	B. Acidalie
,, Louis XIV.	,, Louise Odier
,, Madame Boll	,, Sir Joseph Paxton
,, ,, Bonnaire	,, Souvenir de la Malmaison
,, ,, Charles Crapelet	T. Gloire de Dijon
,, ,, de Cambacérès	,, Madame Falcot
,, ,, Hector Jacquin	,, Narcisse

The above, together with all the leading new and old varieties, can be supplied in the autumn; DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUES of which will be forwarded Post-free on application.
Early Orders are respectfully solicited.

ROSES.—Grand Rose Show, Crystal Palace, July 6, 1861.
The FIRST PRIZE for 48 varieties was awarded to John Cranston, King's Acre Nurseries, near Hereford.

H.B. Paul Ricaut	H.P. Louis Chaix
P.M. Madame Edouard Ory	,, Madame de Cambacérès
D.P. Julie de Krudner	,, ,, de Masset
,, Mancory	,, ,, Hector Jacquin
H.P. Alexandrine Bachmeteff	,, ,, Vidot
,, Alphonse Karr	,, Mademoiselle Alice Leroy
,, Anna Alexieff	,, ,, Thérèse Appert
,, Arthur de Sansal	,, Maria Portemer
,, Baronne Hallez	,, Mathurin Regnier
,, ,, Prévost	,, Mrs. Rivers
,, Cardinal Patrizzi	,, Pauline Lansezeur
,, Caroline de Sansal	,, Prince Leon
,, Comtesse Cecile de Chabrillant	,, Reine de Danemark
,, Duchess of Norfolk	,, Souvenir de la Reine d'Angleterre
Evêque de Nîmes	,, ,, de Leveson Gower
,, François Arago	,, Triomphe de l'Exposition
,, Géant des Batailles	,, Virginal
,, Gen. Jacqueminot	B. Acidalie
,, ,, Simpson	,, Louise Odier
,, Jules Margottin	,, Souchet
,, L'Enfant du Mont Carmel	T. Gloire de Dijon
Léon des Combats	,, La Sylphide
,, Lælia	,, Narcisse
,, Lord Raglan	,, Vicomtesse Decazes

The above, together with all the leading new and old varieties, can be supplied in the autumn; DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUES of which will be forwarded post free on application.
Early orders are respectfully solicited.

The Gardeners' Chronicle And Agricultural Gazette,
August 31st, 1861, page 783.
The cautionary warning is in the middle column, just below halfway down.

Caution to the Public.

Isaac Davies begs to inform the Public that a Traveller of a London Nursery has obtained Drawings of his RHODODENDRON PRAECOX from him under the specious pretext of soliciting orders for his plants; but in place of which he substitutes a Rhododendron from his employer's Nursery somewhat like it in foliage. To put purchasers on their guard he publishes the following names, being all the Nurserymen that have bought plants from him:-
Wm. Skirving and Thos. Davies & Co., Liverpool; Waterer & Godfrey, Thos. Jackson & Son, G. Jackman & Son, and W. Fletcher, Surrey; John Hally, Blackheath; Messrs. Ballantyne & Son, Dalkeith.

Larkfield Nursery, Wavertree, near Liverpool.

So there were knock-off counterfeits of 'Praecox' being sold to the unwary the very year the hybrid was introduced, this not helped by Davies himself releasing two other selections from the cross - 'Praecox Rubrum' and 'Praecox Superbum' (though these could be 'Praecox' seedlings) - and other nurseries cashing-in on the popularity wave with the likes of 'Praecox Grandiflorum' and 'Praecox Major' to name but two.

Yet despite the plethoric horde of wannabes that were ultimately dumped onto the market, demand for the original hybrid remained undimmed:

> 'There is no better or more beautiful flowering shrub than R. Praecox in the months of February, March or April. It is perfectly hardy, and though often cut by frosts, there are many seasons when it gives a glorious display'.
> John Guille Millais, *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* 1917.

> 'For some reason, R. Praecox is more hardy than either of its parents. It is well known in many gardens and although the leaves are small it makes a handsome bush that is covered in the early spring with many pink-mauve flowers. And it is a lucky plant, for although it flowers early, it nearly always seems to choose a time to come into flower when there is little frost'.
> Frederick Street, *Rhododendrons,* 1965.

> 'A famous old early flowering hybrid that is spectacular in mild springs. The flowers are not frost hardy.'
> Kenneth Cox, *Rhododendrons & Azaleas: A Colour Guide,* 2005.

And Ken Cox is assuredly correct, for despite a slew of reports to the contrary, the corollas are definitely not immune to frost. But they do indeed seem to have a knack for opening in spells when the infamous 'Jack' has departed for points further to the north. The secret to success and thwarting his return however, is not a protective canopy of branches overhead, as this would merely draw-up a plant and ruin its compact framework in all gardens outwith the southern counties, but a steep slope nearby, down which cold air may drain away even on still nights.

Mature bushes of 'Praecox', grown in near full sun, will usually peak around 1.5 to 1.7m high, but 2m is not unusual in shadier locales and very old plants, left to their own devices, may even top 3m. The shrub has a tight, upright habit that may become willowy with age and the supporting branch structure will most certainly be permanently on view, for the foliage is nearer semi-deciduous than evergreen despite a percentage of the leaves persisting through the winter. Glossy dark green above, these ovate-shaped blades are also very thin. They vary between 2.5 and 6cm in length, 1.5 to 2.7cm in width, are pale green and lepidote below, with some forms reportedly sparsely bristly on the abaxial surface. Just two to four corollas are carried in each loose flower truss, but there is usually a cluster of buds at the branch tip so a compound inflorescence is the norm. Purplish-crimson when they first emerge and broadly funnel-shaped, the blooms open rosy-purple, violet-purple or pinkish-mauve depending on which clone is being grown - all now hopelessly muddled-up courtesy of the nursery trade - the corollas unmarked by blotch or spots, and darker on the outside. Individual dimensions are 2.5cm long by 4cm across at the mouth, but as thousands will fill the arc of branches with colour, such measurements are thoroughly meaningless. Yet if the weather remains mild and the nights frost-free, that sheet of bloom will be the most sublime harbinger of a spring that is shortly to come.

The parentage of R. 'Emasculum' may be the same as that for R. 'Praecox', but the two plants are definitely different from one another - not chalk and cheese fundamentally disparate, but contrastive.

Bloom time for 'Emasculum' is two to three weeks later, the inflorescences populated by only one or two corollas and their hue pale lilac-purple rather than rosy-purple, though each is slightly larger. Most obvious is the complete lack of stamens - hence the epithet - although these have not been aborted in the corollas of the award clone (suggesting a label mix-up or a post-lunch, late afternoon presentation to the floral committee). The foliage is a little smaller, maxing-out at 4.5cm long rather than 6cm, but still elliptic-ovate in shape, dark glossy green above, and with a dense wash of dark brown scales below. Retention of the leaves through winter is also good, but the shrub's habit is far more columnar and several sources have reported poor root development, regardless of soil type.

Given the number of differing clones of *R. dauricum* in UK circulation - even in the latter half of the 19th Century - such inconsistencies would be expected, even if the only form of *R. ciliatum* available at the time the pollination took place, were those plants grown from Hooker's 1850 Sikkim introduction. More intriguing is the fact that the dissimilarities might support the contention made by W. J. Bean and his ghostwriters that 'Praecox' was actually *dauricum* x *ciliatum* rather than *ciliatum* x *dauricum*.

Unfortunately however, 'Emasculum' itself is shrouded in mystery.

It was first listed in the 1927 catalogue of R. Veitch & Sons, but information on who actually made the cross is lacking, though both Veitch and the Waterer nurseries have been suggested as possible candidates. William Watson, curator at Kew between 1901 and 1922, suggests that Veitch raised the plant in their Coombe Wood nursery, either alongside another selection from the same capsule, 'Amoenum', or actually under the same label. However, that still means the given parentage is open to challenge as 'Amoenum' too is as equally bereft of a credited hybridiser, putting its parental equation in doubt.

What is not up in the air, is the worth of the hybrid itself. Because widely planted en masse in gardens across the whole of the UK, from the end of March into early April, mature bushes of 'Emasculum' are festooned with a riot of bloom.

R. ‘Emasculum’



R. ‘Praecox’



R. ‘Emasculum’



R. ‘Praecox’



R. ‘Emasculum’

R. 'Praecox'

R. ‘Princess Alice’

edgeworthii x *ciliatum*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H4	May	1.4m x 2m

Named for Alice, Grand Duchess of Hesse and by the Rhine, who was the third child and second daughter of Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and Empress of India, and her consort, Albert, Prince of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha - take a breath! - this Veitch hybrid from the 1850s garnered an FCC from the RHS in 1862 and has since been duplicated by countless others - Edmund Loder; James Mangles; the list is long if not endless - with the glut of these unregistered seedlings now inevitably mixed-up in the nursery trade. On the other hand, four hybrids have been logged with the *IRRC* where the parentage equation has been reversed, namely ‘Cowbell’, ‘McNabil’, ‘Princess Helena’ and ‘Tinkerbird’, though even on a good day, none meet or surpass FKW’s criteria for inclusion in this text.

‘Princess Alice’ has deep pink flower buds that open white, initially with a flush of rose-pink, which are lined pink along the lobe ridges on the reverse. A pale, mustard-yellow blotch of speckles and spots will be found on the dorsal, the intensity of the colouring varying from corolla to corolla, with some clones sporting an intrusion of muted crimson-brown within the fan. The funnel-campanulate blooms are also sweetly scented, but not in the same league as ‘Fragrantissimum’ or that plant’s doppelgängers, ‘Lady Alice Fitzwilliam’ and ‘Sesterianum’. A trio are gathered in each truss, the arrangement open rather than loose, as each is held on a stout flower stalk. The blooms are around 7.5cm wide at the mouth, have quite deeply cleft lobes and come with exserted stamens and style. Their foil, the foliage, is dark green and glossy, the blades quite thick and somewhat rugose, elliptic-obovate in shape, with each around 10cm long.

The habit of ‘Princess Alice’ is often described as dwarf and lax, but in reality mature bushes will be found to be around 1.4m high, spreading to 2m or more, the branch structure far more upright and tidy than its aforementioned straggly stepsisters. The hybrid is considered hardy down to -12ºC, which is midway between the RHS’s redefined H4 and H5 minima, so it can be grown outdoors against a protecting wall in the milder gardens of southern England and in open woodland glades along the west coast, but a conservatory or greenhouse will be its domicile elsewhere. Placement in full sun when out in the open will be rewarded by a much more compact specimen and a bevy of fragrant blooms during May, but under glass, without some added overhead shade, such an intensity of light will cause the leaves to burn.


R. ‘Princess Alice’


R. ‘Princess Alice’

R. ‘Princess Alice’

R. ‘Princess Anne’


R. ‘Princess Anne’


R. ‘Princess Anne’

R. ‘Princess Anne’

keiskei x *hanceanum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Late April-May 0.6m x 2.5m

R. ‘Princess Anne’ is an out-and-out stunner, disparaging negative comments by competing nurserymen - who really should know better - notwithstanding. But only if the original and award-winning Reuthe clone is planted in your garden. For there are several lesser selections doing the rounds, which may be seedlings or knock-offs, and it is these decidedly inferior copies - in both flower and form - that should be the targets of any vitriol or criticism.

The directed pollination was made at the Reuthe firm’s old Foxhill Nursery in Keston during the early 1950s, some years before the move to the Crown Point site off the A25 Sevenoaks Road in Ightham, with the pairing registered as a straight *keiskei* x *hanceanum* cross and no mention of ‘Yaku Fairy’ or ‘Dwarf Form’ made with regard to the seed parent, nor ‘Nanum’ in relation to the pollen provider, so any doppelgänger linkage with Robert Ticknor’s 1971 cross ‘Shamrock’, has to be ruled out.

The AM and FCC gifted plant has 4 or 5 funnel-shaped corollas in each compact and domed truss, individually 5cm long by up to 3cm across. They open towards the end of April, continue into May, and are a pale greenish-yellow in tone, virtually translucent at the lobe margins, with the hue slightly paler in the throat. Stamens and style are exserted, the latter longer than the former, their filaments and tube white. These are set against leaves that are mid green in colour and elliptic-ovate in shape, so they have an apex tapering to a pointed tip that ends in a distinct mucro and a rounded base. The blades may be up to 7.5cm long by as much as 2.5cm wide and are often convex in profile. Bronzy when they first extend, as well as over winter - though few are discarded or damaged - they have a reticulate upper surface and a scaly lower one.

Mature specimens of ‘Princess Anne’ will form a wide spreading mound, this rarely more than 0.6m high but easily 2m or more across that will be densely filled with leaves and become a near unbroken sheet of yellow when in bloom. Ersatz clones are often taller growing, only hold their foliage for twelve months rather than twenty-four, and though some may boast up to ten corollas in each truss, these are less substantial so more easily damaged if hit by heavy rain. The sham facsimiles may also be darker in the throat, rather than fractionally paler.

A noted problem is leaf burn at the blade tip or along the margins, but this is usually caused by the application of too much chemical fertiliser rather than an excess of sunlight. Leaf spot is the plant giving you a visual hint to improve its drainage.

The hybrid is of course named for the late Queen Elizabeth’s only daughter, although it is also marketed under the synonym ‘Golden Fleece’. Whether the Princess Royal is fully aware of her close relationship with Jason and his Argonauts is a propinquity yet to be established. A widely-grown golden-yellow Slocock hybrid has also been registered under the ‘Golden Fleece’ epithet, but the chances of confusing one with the other are remote, given that that plant’s parentage is ‘Goldworth Orange’ x ‘Yvonne’. But if history and human endeavour has taught us anything, it is never to say never.

R. 'Prostigiatum'
prostratum x *fastigiatum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 April-early May 0.3m x 1.5m

The R. 'Prostigiatum' cross was made by Edward Magor at Lamellen, Cornwall, in 1916, when pollen from *R. fastigiatum* was placed onto the style of *R. prostratum,* although the *IRRC* entry doesn't quite see it that way and lists the seed parent as *R. saluenense* ssp. *chameunum* Prostratum Group. This is down to the 1996 Edinburgh Revision Classification of Genus *Rhododendron,* where *R. prostratum* was sunk under that taxon, though the epithet was maintained horticulturally under the RHS 'Group' system. Regrettably, the synonymy imposed by the two botanists responsible for that re-evaluation - James Cullen and David Chamberlain, in *A Preliminary Synopsis of the Genus Rhododendron,* published within Volume 36 of *Notes from the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh,* in 1978 - took no account of the fact that *R. prostratum* was a tetraploid with 52 chromosomes, while both *R. saluenense* ssp. *chameunum* and *R. saluenense* ssp. *saluenense* were diploids with 26. Scientific evidence - documented in an article titled *Understanding Polyploidy: Insights into the Evolution and Breeding of Azaleas,* this written by Thomas Ranney and Jeff Jones, and published in the Winter 2008 edition of *The Azalean,* for instance - has now shown that in the wild a tetraploid cannot successfully breed with its diploid parent and that any seed from such a mating that does germinate will result in a sterile mule - a triploid with 39 chromosomes. Because of this incompatibility, the tetraploid must now be considered to be a new species: an 'abrupt speciation'. In consequence, *R. prostratum* has herein, and in Volume 5, been returned to specific status (with updated field reporting requiring varietal rather than subspecies ranking to be applied to *R. chameunum* and *R. saluenense*).

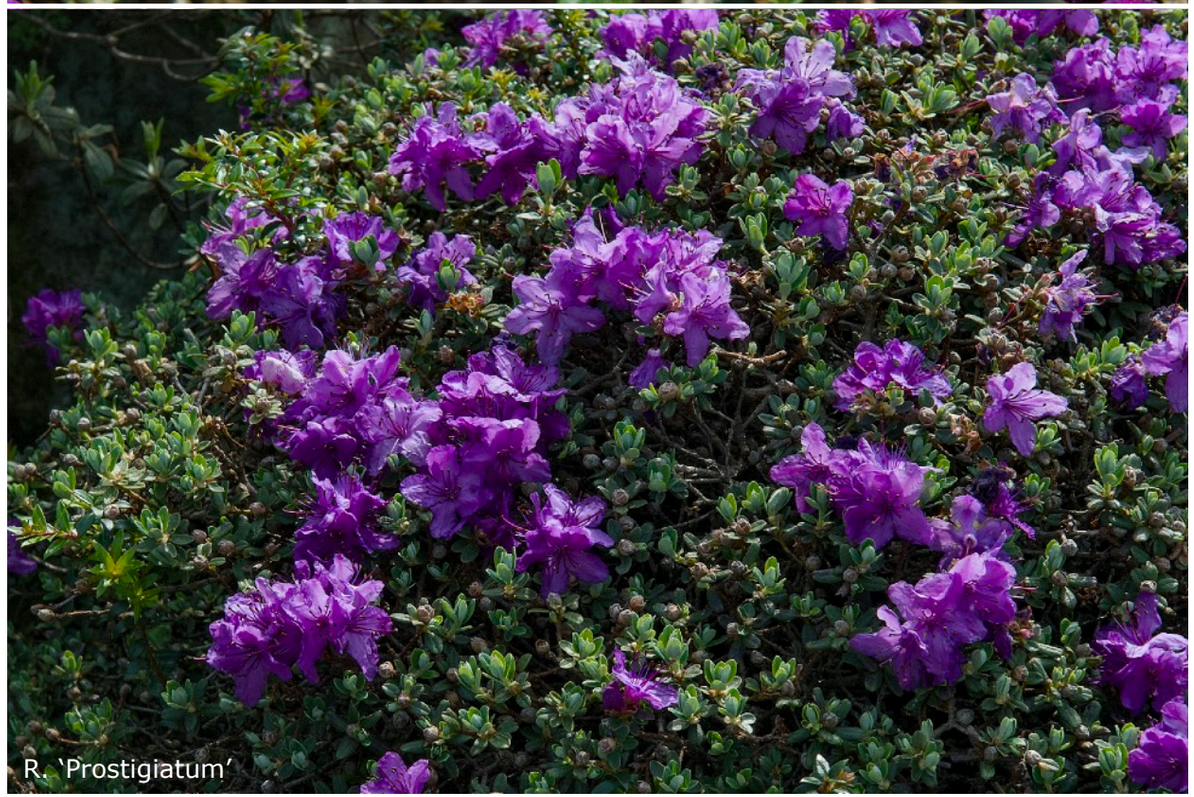
The Ranney-Jones paper - like others - states that 'it is possible to hybridize across ploidy levels', especially if using different parent species, but 'success is generally low and the resulting hybrids will most likely be sterile or highly infertile'.

In the case of R. 'Prostigiatum', the diploid *R. fastigiatum* was successfully used to pollinate the tetraploid *R. prostratum,* but the number of seedlings Edward Magor actually managed to germinate from the pairing would probably have been totalled on one hand. Moreover, not a single hybrid has to date been registered with 'Prostigiatum' listed as one of its parents, or with the hybrid present in the mix, even though the dwarf shrub combines and surpasses the best features of both its parents.

The 'Prostigiatum' leaves are tiny: bright green and glossy ovals or ellipses no more than 8mm long by 5mm wide; lepidote both above and below; the scales pale grey at first then turning cinnamon-brown with age. That foliage cloaks a twiggy, compact shrub, rarely more than 0.3m high even when mature, but which spreads out considerably further. It is also very slow growing. Yet covering most of this mound for a week or two in April are a phalanx of alluring deep purple flowers, the corollas just 2.5cm across and held in pairs or trios, their exserted stamens and style flushed purplish-red. But the blooms are quickly shed, which is one of the hybrid's few faults.

Edward Magor introduced his cross in 1924 and it immediately secured an Award of Merit from the RHS. The shrub, moreover, is the perfect subject to feature in a rock garden, especially if a raised-up nook is available to bring those stellar flowers closer to eye level. And even more especially, because for once, his use of the condensed naming formula to generate the epithet does not induce uncontrollable waves of nausea when the combination is spoken out loud.


R. 'Prostigiatum'


R. 'Prostigiatum'


R. ‘Quaver’


R. ‘Quaver’

R. ‘Quaver’
leucaspis x *sulfureum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4-5 Mid March-early April 1.3m x 2.5m

Lionel de Rothschild’s parental pairing was never going to win any awards in the hardiness stakes, nor for its ease of cultivation, but the blooms of this Exbury beauty finally won-over the members of the RHS Floral Committee in 1968 when they gifted a yellow-green clone of ‘Quaver’ an Award of Merit. The flowers are carried in a loose truss of between four and six widely funnel-shaped corollas, each 2.5cm long and wide, which may be cream through primrose-yellow in hue depending on which of the distributed clones was purchased, for as usual, they all reside under that one epithet. The best forms exhibit a deeper yellow pigmentation in the corolla throat and have a style and stamen filaments that are similarly flushed, with the anthers inheriting their chocolate colouration from the seed parent. Note too that the corollas are held by a deeply-lobed calyx, each ciliate arm of which may be up to 0.8cm long.

‘Quaver’ is a low-growing shrub, but it is not a dwarf, having a dome-shaped tight habit that can hit 1.3m high and spread-out to twice that measure in time. It is well-clothed with dark green, elliptically-shaped foliage however, the leaves glossy above, glaucous and with pitted, dark brown scales below, the blades around 6.5cm long by 3cm wide. New growth is bronzy at first and up-close, the leaf margins will be found to be fairly hairy.

If the requirements for swift drainage and dappled shaped are taken as read, the primary consideration to be met is shelter from low temperatures, especially as the flower buds begin to swell in early March and are easily damaged. Mature specimens awash in bloom through the second half of March into early April will swiftly loose their visual appeal if the display is regularly hit by even a degree or two of frost and then directly struck by strong early morning sunlight. For any open corollas will be ruined along with any still developing buds, plus more serious injury could result from bark split. So outwith the mildest gardens of southern England and those sites along the west coast voluptuously favoured by the Gulf Stream, ‘Quaver’ will need the most protected spot available if it is to succeed long-term outdoors and its floral display be enjoyed for anything more than a day or two pre an icing.

R. ‘Quiver’

R. 'Quiver'

ciliatum x *lutescens*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 Early April 1.3m x 2.5m

R. 'Quiver' is possibly the most overlooked and neglected hybrid that Lionel de Rothschild ever introduced, and unjustly so, for not only is it one of the most floriferous rhododendrons ever bred, but up-close, those blooms - small, creamy-white funnels that are initially flushed with pink - are sublimely beautiful. Yet it is absent from nearly all the standard texts and even when listed - in the *IRRC* or *The Rothschild Rhododendrons,* for instance - those entries are basic bare-bones. However:

The match was made at Exbury in 1937, pollen from *R. lutescens* placed onto the style of *R. ciliatum,* and the pairing produced a low-growing shrub that forms a mound twice as wide as it is high. The habit is upright and ascending, the branches of a mature plant forming a crisscrossing structure covered in a cloak of dark green, elliptic-lanceolate leaves that mirror those of the pollen provider in shape, length and eciliate margins. Four through seven corollas emerge from each terminal flower bud, forming a loose usually flat-topped truss, and so many inflorescences open across a mature plant that the bush appears to be covered in snow.

'Quiver' was introduced by Edmund de Rothschild in 1950, but appears then to have fallen off the radar of most rhodophiles: for it completely escaped the attention of the RHS floral awards committee members, as well as the hybridising fraternity; has possibly never been propagated by any of the specialist nurseries; and consequently, is rarely found in gardens, even those with major collections.

Two cultivation-related reasons might also be responsible for that latter quandary as a lack of hardiness means the shrub can only thrive in the mildest of UK gardens, while the early April bloom time requires that a frost-free site be provided if the flowers are to be savoured for any length of time. But set in such a sheltered environ, with dappled shade provided in southern England, 'Quiver' will be an annual delight.


R. 'Quiver'


R. 'Quiver'

R. ‘Radmosum’

keleticum Radicans Group x *racemosum*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H6	May	0.3m x 1m

A dwarf twiggy shrub for the rock garden.

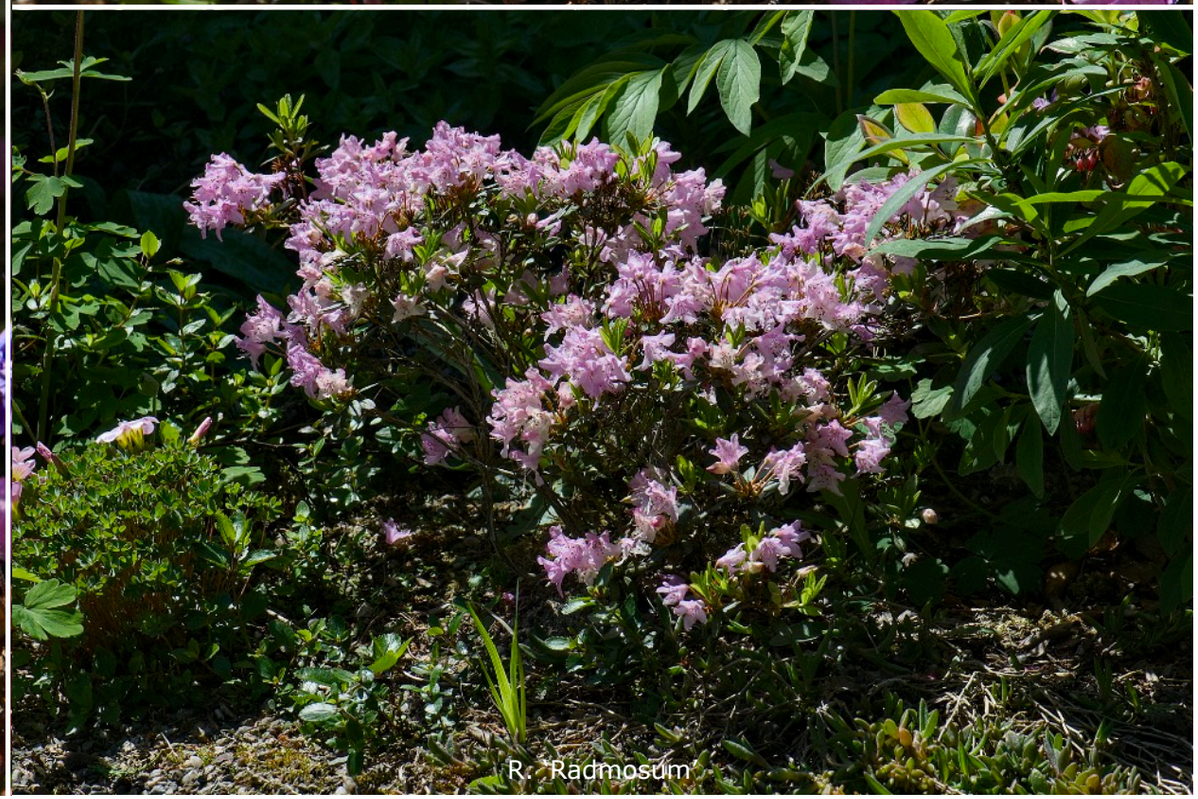
T. C. Thacker of Knowle Nurseries in Warwickshire introduced this cross in 1946, which in many UK gardens will today be found residing under an ‘Alpine Gem’ label. That cross - also made by Thacker, but in 1942 - opens yellow blooms, shaded pink, has a *brachyanthum* x *ferrugineum* heritage and so is graced with a far less vertically-challenged habit to the ground-hugging and prostrate R. ‘Radmosum’, which boasts a purplish-pink flower display. Kenneth Cox was one of the first to formally make this observation in his 2005 book *Rhododendrons And Azaleas: A Colour Guide*, reporting that he had never seen a specimen of the real ‘Alpine Gem’. Likewise. However, labelling disparities apart, the actual plants, growing in gardens up and down the land, are free flowering and fully hardy, upright to around 0.3m high, with a spread of around 1m. In northern locales, an open position sans any overhanging branches will produce the best specimens, while shade from a rockery’s hard furnishings or a wall is desirable in southern gardens, without which, excessive heat and strong sunlight will prove detrimental.



R. ‘Radmosum’



R. ‘Radmosum’



R. ‘Radmosum’

The ‘Ramapo’ Pride

minus Carolinianum x *fastigiatum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 April-early May 1m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Carefree	Weldon Delp	1975	1993
Grape Jam	Weldon Delp	1974	1996
Purple Gem	Guy Nearing	before 1940	before 1958
Ramapo	Guy Nearing	before 1940	1940
Teardrop	Weldon Delp	1975	1991

Pennsylvanian nurseryman and hybridiser Guy Nearing (1890-1986), ‘the last of the legendary American pioneers in the study of rhododendrons’ to quote Doctor David Leach (*In Memoriam: The Remarkable Mr Nearing,* in *JARS,* Volume 40, Number 3, 1986), has an even fifty rhododendron hybrids logged-in with the *IRRC,* although very few of these have made it across the pond into British gardens. Luckily, the remarkable ‘Ramapo’ has. Which for those with gardens that in winter resemble the inside of a freezer, is a godsend indeed. For this *minus* Carolinianum Group x *fastigiatum* hybrid is rated hardy down to -32ºC and is reputed to have survived a freeze that dropped the mercury another four degrees below that figure.

The pairing was probably made in the 1930s or earlier, with the hybrid introduced in 1940, and when in flower, the best specimens can sport an unbroken sheet of violet-blue. Individually the corollas are quite small, and only two or three wide-open funnels are carried in each truss, but they are set against the perfect foil - oblong through elliptic leaves that are dark purplish-green when mature, grey-blue when they first emerge, with each no more than 2.5cm long. A mounding habit that in time will produce a bush up to 1m high by 2m across, will take twenty years to top 0.6m, and the hybrid revels in a full sun placement, where it can take gale force winds in its stride and shrug-off the maritime chills of the UK climate without batting a hair. So cultivation is usually without problem, providing the drainage is swift, because ‘Ramapo’ dislikes anything close to permanently wet roots.

‘Purple Gem’ is a second selection from Guy Nearing’s cross that has somewhat darker flowers than its sister seedling, but is not as hardy, while another well-known American hybridiser, Weldon Delp, repeated the combination in 1974/1975, with three clones released into commerce - ‘Carefree’, ‘Grape Jam’ and ‘Teardrop’. Knowledgeable rhodophiles will point out that the 1974 ‘Grape Jam’ cross used ‘Achiever’ as the seed parent, not a member of *minus* Carolinianum Group, but as the entry at the very bottom of page 17 in the *A - Lel* Volume of the *IRRC’s* Second Edition shows, Mr Delp’s registration was in fact a 1952 selection made from that very same taxon.



R. ‘Ramapo’



R. ‘Razorbill’

R. ‘Razorbill’

spinuliferum x unknown

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April-early May 1m x 2m

‘Razorbill’ is pretty close to unique within the world of rhododendron hybrids as it has tubular, upward-pointing flowers that are - to quote the hybridiser - ‘most unusual’ (Peter Cox, writing in his *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988, which was co-authored with his son Kenneth). Others might go as far as adding ‘if not plain weird’. Each of those corollas is around 2cm long, its five-lobed mouth just 1.5cm across when fully expanded, though with six through fourteen cylinders bunched together in a conical truss, and bud set usually prolific, any individual lack of size is swiftly mitigated. Their colour is rose-pink flushed deep pink, or pale purplish-pink, and they open during April with barely a single branch tip devoid of a cluster.

The leaves are equally quirky, ovate in shape but crinkled, between 2 and 5cm long by 1 through 2.5cm wide, dark green and rugose above, scaly below, with hairy margins. Habit is initially upright-ascending, but older plants spread out wider than they grow high, yet maintain a compact structure unless set in too much shade.

The full ‘Razorbill’ parentage remains unknown, for as Peter has reported, ‘it appeared as a chance seedling in a pan of *R. camtschaticum*’ at Glendoick and as that species is unable to breed with any other current member of the Genus, *spinuliferum* x ‘unknown’ is the best guesstimate available. Gifted both an Award of Merit and a First Class Certificate by the RHS - in 1978 and 1983, respectively - and being hardy and free-flowering from an early age, if a conversation piece is needed to complete your garden’s panorama, this is the plant to go for.

Ornithologists will know that the epithet is borrowed from *Alca torda,* thus making ‘Razorbill’ another of Glendoick’s “Birds”.



R. ‘Razorbill’

R. ‘Razorbill’

R. ‘Rose Mangles’

The ‘Rose Mangles’ Pride

cinnabarinum x *maddenii*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4-5 May 2.5m x 4m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Chalice	S. R. Clarke	before 1932	1932
Cinnmadd	E. J. P. Magor	before 1958	before 1958
Full House	George Johnstone	before 1958	before 1958
Hethersett	James Mangles	before 1884	1962
Kit Corynton	E. G. W. W. Harrison	before 1971	1971
Nonesuch	G. M. Adams-Acton	before 1958	before 1958
Peach Queen	James Mangles	before 1884	before 1884
Rose Mangles	James Mangles	before 1884	before 1884
Rose Queen	James Mangles	before 1884	before 1904
Royal Flush	J. C. Williams	before 1926	before 1958
Souvenir de Littleworth	James Mangles	before 1884	before 1924

Because of its association with Lionel de Rothschild’s ‘Lady Chamberlain’ pride, the 1920s J. C. Williams hybrid ‘Royal Flush’ is probably the best known *cinnabarinum* x *maddenii* hybrid. Others include George Johnstone’s ‘Full House’ and Edward Magor’s ‘Cinnmadd’, but it was James Henry Mangles (1832-1884), who was the first rhodophile to make the cross, though when exactly pollen was transferred to style is not known. James’ brother Harry (*d.* 1908), and sister Clara (*d.* 1931), moved many of the plants from his Valewood estate to their own nearby home in the Parish of Seale and Sands - then called Hethersett, but today known as Littleworth Cross - shortly after their older brother’s death, so preserving much of his hybridising work, including the progeny of this pairing.

In *Rhododendrons and the Various Hybrids,* John Guille Millais reports that the seedlings were grown-on in the cool greenhouse at Littleworth Cross for many years and that they were around fifty years of age when the second edition of his book was published in 1924, so the match was most likely made in the 1870s. The largest specimens were then around 2.5m tall and some had been named: ‘Rose Mangles’, with rich pinkish-red blooms; ‘Primrose Queen’, whose pale yellow flowers would be awarded an AM in 1962 under the name ‘Hethersett’; ‘Peach Queen’, yellowish-pink; and ‘Souvenir de Littleworth’, rose-pink becoming paler. Millais also writes that the corollas of each member of this quartet were ‘a brilliant scarlet colour to half-way down their exterior’, had leaves that were ‘somewhat similar to *R. cinnabarinum* but longer and not so blue in tint’ and their habit was ‘somewhat straggling and loose, breaking from the base in several main stems with many upright shoots’. He advises that ‘the plants are somewhat tender in the Home Counties although perfectly hardy in the west’, which mirrors the currently accepted rating of -12ºC.

A fifth selection, ‘Rose Queen’, whose rose-pink corollas are tinged orange at the base of the throat, was not listed by Millais even though it had been gifted an AM in 1904.

Of the five, only one has been distributed commercially, ‘Rose Mangles’, and it is an absolute cracker. The corolla pigmentation is very similar to that of ‘Polyroy’, but the rounded as opposed to pointed lobe tips, rule out any chance of a misidentification.



R. ‘Hethersett’



R. ‘Rose Mangles’

R. ‘Rose Mangles’

R. ‘Rose Mangles’



R. ‘Russautinii’



R. ‘Russautinii’

The ‘Russautinii’ Pride

russatum x *augustinii*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6 Mid April-mid May 1.5m x 2.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Azamia	John Barr Stevenson	1934	1947
Blue Wonder	Dietrich Hobbie	before 1967	1967
Russautinii	Sir John Ramsden	before 1936	1936

‘Russautinii’ was introduced in 1936 from a *russatum* x *augustinii* pairing made by Sir John Ramsden, most likely in the late 1920s. Unlike either named parent, it sets both terminal and axillary flower buds, with the latter found in the upper leaf axils, though their presence is somewhat hit-and-miss, like the corolla colour, and dependent on which clone is being grown, as again, a number were distributed. Funnel-shaped flowers, four or five to each fairly tight truss, are around 5cm across at the mouth and their hue may be almost blue on the best clone, but more often lavender-blue, bluish-purple or violet. Some fade to white in the centre, while the intensity and colour of the two rays of spots and speckles found on the dorsal lobe varies considerably. All have a downy tube within and stamen filaments that are coloured to match the corollas. The style is more often pinkish-red.

The foliage follows *R. augustinii,* with the blades elliptic through oblong-elliptic in shape, up to 5cm long, and dark green in tone. They are held for two years, which provides the shrub with a fairly dense mantle of leaves despite the upright habit. However, leaf spot is an acknowledged problem.

All the clones flower prolifically from a very young age, although the quality of bloom is contingent on the selection, and they are hardy enough to thrive in any UK garden where the soil is right for rhododendrons.

As indicated in the table above, the species combination was later duplicated by Roza Stevenson at Tower Court, Ascot, who introduced ‘Azamia’ in 1947 - though of course, her husband’s name appears on the *IRRC* registration entry - and by the German hybridiser Dietrich Hobbie, whose ‘Blue Wonder’ joined the ranks in 1967.

R. ‘Ruth Lyons’
davidsonianum x *triflorum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H5-6 April 2.5m x 2.5m

It will probably come as a something of a surprise to many UK nurserymen and rhodophiles that ‘Ruth Lyons’ can no longer be regarded as a named selection of *R. davidsonianum*. Viewed from a distance, the consensus opinion on a plant in full bloom will put this change in status down to nothing more than a temporary mental aberration on the part of the registrar, but up-close, the mustard-orange-coloured spots and speckles on the dorsal lobe give the game away. For R. ‘Ruth Lyons’ is a seedling from R. *davidsonianum* that was raised in the Oregon nursery of James Elwood Barto, and its pollen is thought most likely to have came from *R. triflorum*.

Mrs Ruth Lyons herself takes up the story:

‘About 1935, Mr Lyons and I were browsing around the Barto place, looking at his many seedlings, when we were attracted to the row of *R. davidsonianum,* which were in bloom. Mr Lyons found a plant that had been broken off but had one small shoot with a single pink blossom. The plant was not for sale at the time. We made regular trips back to look for unusual things and kept a close watch on the little pink *davidsonianum* seedling. Later, we were able to obtain the plant. Placed in a choice location in our garden, it grew into a symmetrical, upright plant with a vigorous growth habit.

‘The plant blooms profusely in April. The terminals have from ten to twelve clear, rich pink flowers that are rhodamine-pink, 4cm long by 3cm wide, which do not fade. Some flowers have six petals. The leaf has a definite groove down the main rib and is quite stiff, about 5cm in length. The plant grows vigorously and the leaf is more V-shaped with possibly more substance than a regular *davidsonianum*. It blooms well in sun or shade, but partial shade is ideal. Good drainage with plenty of humus is required.

‘Ruth Lyons isn’t widely distributed, since it is not easy to propagate from cuttings. All our efforts to raise seedlings have resulted in plants of a lavender colour’.
Journal American Rhododendron Society, Volume 25, Number 3, July 1971.

The *IRRC* entry, submitted by Mr Lyons in 1961, reads ‘derived from *davidsonianum,* possibly crossed with *triflorum*’.


R. ‘Ruth Lyons’


R. ‘Ruth Lyons’

R. ‘R. W. Rye’

R. ‘R. W. Rye’
chrysodoron x *johnstoneanum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4 Mid March-early April 1.5m x 2.5m

Robert W. Rye was the head gardener at Lochinch and Castle Kennedy, just outside Stranraer in southwest Scotland, when John Dalrymple (1879-1961), the 12th Earl of Stair, was adding to the rhododendron collection and creating his own hybrids after surviving a four-year stint as a prisoner of war between 1914 and 1917. Their relationship is said to have been fiery on occasion, but clearly there was respect as well, for the hybrid that Lord Stair chose to name for his employee, is the finest he ever created.

The match placed pollen from *R. johnstoneanum* onto the style of *R. chrysodoron,* neither species having a hardiness rating that would allow their cultivation outdoors along the east coast unless well very protected, the latter especially so as it is only hardy to -5ºC. Their progeny must be equally cosseted, though Peter and Kenneth Cox report that the hybrid survives against a north wall at Glendoick most years and is only occasionally lost (*The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988). In milder climes, along the west and south coasts, ‘R. W. Rye’ will develop into a bush around 1.5m high with a spread extending out to around 2.5m, sometimes more, and from mid March through until early April, providing any frost is held at bay, it will host a mass of primrose-yellow, tubular-funnel-shaped flowers.

These are carried in an open truss of four, the corollas darkening in tone within the throat. They are five-lobed, the petals deeply cleft, widely spread and often reflexed. The stamen filaments and style are flushed to match, but the latter, twice as long as the former and declinate, may sometimes - even within the same inflorescence - be tinted pinkish-red. The leaves are dark green and glossy, elliptic in shape and quite stiff, with a convex V-shaped profile. At least two clones have been distributed, for many specimens will display hairy leaf margins. The blades are only retained on the bush for one year, but the open, upright habit is graced with branches that are often plum-coloured in maturity.


R. ‘R. W. Rye’


R. ‘R. W. Rye’


R. ‘R. W. Rye’


R. ‘Saffron Queen’


R. ‘Saffron Queen’

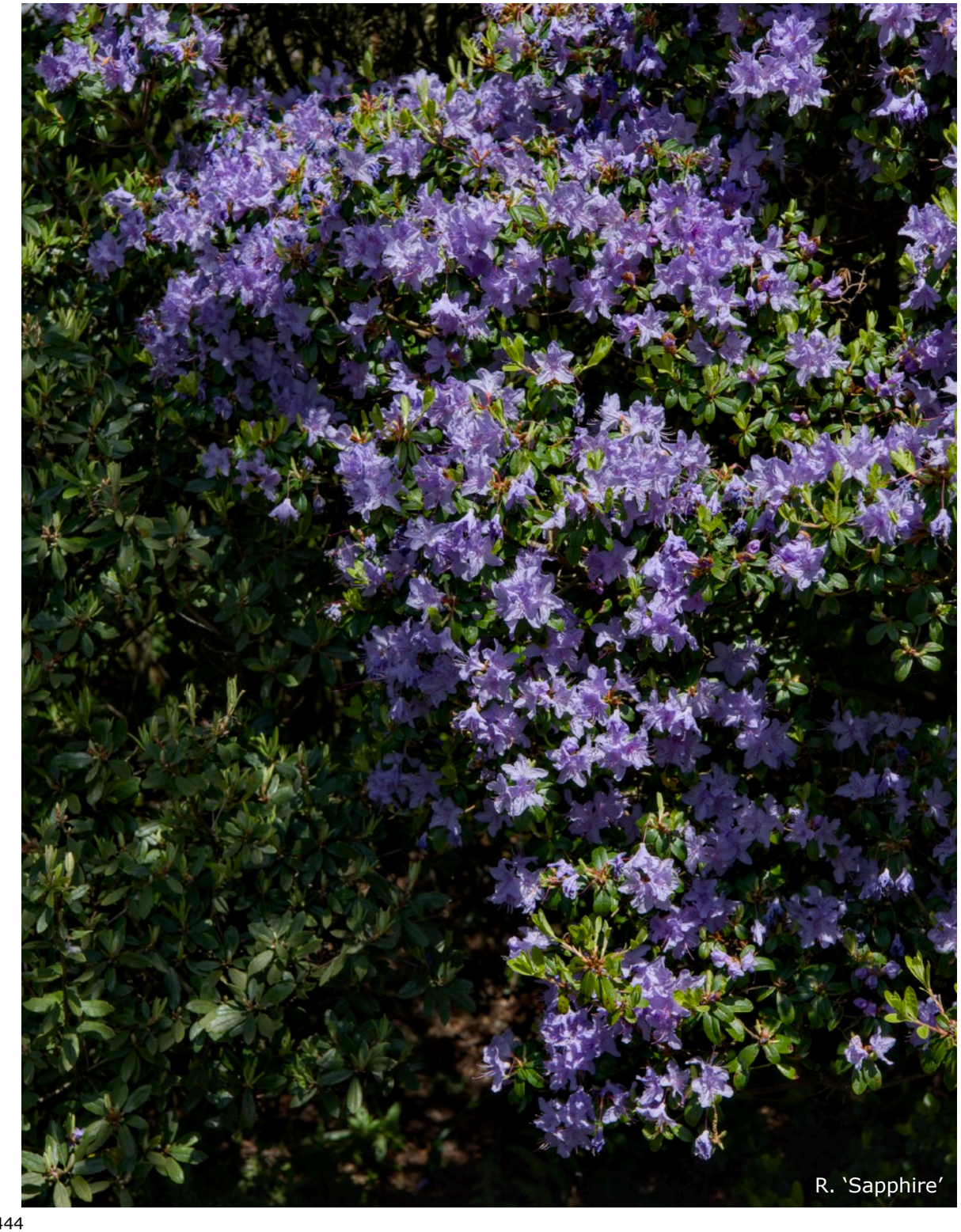
R. ‘Saffron Queen’
xanthostephanum x *burmanicum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H4 April-May 1.7m x 2.5m

While perfectly suited to the Gulf Stream-moderated climate at Caerhays in Cornwall, ‘Saffron Queen’, the J. C. Williams *xanthostephanum* x *burmanicum* pairing introduced in 1948 following its Award of Merit showbench success, is regrettably not hardy enough to survive a “Beast from the East” winter event in most UK gardens unless additional frost protection can swiftly be put in place. So outwith those favoured havens along the western seaboard and the scattering of such locales in the south - where the -10ºC minimum is never breached (climate change notwithstanding) - this fabulous yellow-blooming hybrid is condemned to an existence under glass in a pot. Luckily, the cultivar so ensconced, is relatively tolerant of a regular secateur prune to restrain its leggy nature, though the joy of its copper-brown, peeling bark will be lost from such attrition unless unknowingly, you plumbed for the other clone distributed under the same epithet, which is lower-growing and devoid of such such alluring flaking.

The sulphur-yellow blooms, spotted darker on the dorsal lobes, are carried in a loose truss of 8 or 9 funnel-shaped corollas, each of which is around 4.5cm long and wide. Too much sun will quickly bleach their hue, so despite an open position in the garden being best for the shrub’s overall deportment, a placement in dappled shade in the southern counties would be an expedient compromise. The foliage is a glossy mid-green in tone, the blades lanceolate through oblanceolate in shape and up to 9cm long by 3cm across, with a scattering of brown scales on their underside. Free-flowering from a young age, mature bushes will spread to around 2.5m in width and 1.7m in height and offer a dazzling wash of bloom from mid April into May.


R. ‘Saffron Queen’

R. ‘Saffron Queen’



R. ‘Sapphire’

The ‘Sapphire’ Pride

‘Blue Tit’ x *impeditum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H7 Late April-early May 0.6m x 1.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Mayfair	Waterer (Knap Hill)	1931	before 1968
Sapphire	Waterer (Knap Hill)	1931	before 1968

Knap Hill nurseryman Frank Knight was given a button-hole sprig of ‘Blue Tit’ when it was first exhibited by J. C. Williams in 1931 and on his return to Surrey from the RHS Horticultural Halls in London, he used it to pollinate *R. impeditum,* with the ultimate result ‘Sapphire’, and a later-flowering sister seedling ‘Mayfair’.

Or at least, so goes the widely circulated story that was originally published in Volume 94 of the RHS *Journal,* and then repeated in *Bean’s Trees & Shrubs,* with that parental combination also quoted by a host of other expert authors. But not by Peter and Kenneth Cox in their 1988 *Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids* and later volumes, or by the leading authority on such matters, the RHS’s *International Rhododendron Register and Checklist,* the second edition of which was published in 2005 and shows the cross to have been a ‘Blue Tit’ x *impeditum* pairing. Which clearly implies that said sprig went first into a propagator, and only once rooted, was it then pollinated by the dwarf *Lapponica*.

Ho-hum.

‘Sapphire’ is the better known of the two hybrids so fathered and was introduced by the Waterers in the 1960s. It has small, funnel-shaped corollas, each 2cm long by 3cm wide, held in compact globular trusses of 4 or 5 that are pale purplish-blue in tone, shading paler towards the throat. The influence of that second dose of *R. impeditum* genes is clear, not only in the small, dark green and glossy, elliptic leaves, each barely more than 1.5cm long, but in the semi-dwarf habit, rounded at first but spreading with age, even though the bush is decidedly ‘open’ from the get-go, a probable genetic contribution from *R. augustinii*. It is fully hardy however, shrugging off temperatures down to -21ºC or lower with barely a murmur and covering itself with bloom year after year.

The second selection, ‘Mayfair’, opens its flowers two weeks later than its sibling, these being pale lavender blue in colour with up to seven corollas in the truss, and bears leaf blades that are bluish when young and darker than those of ‘Sapphire’ when mature. The habit is reportedly denser too, and the shrub slightly taller-growing to around 1m in height.

R. ‘Sarled’
sargentianum x *trichostomum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late May-June 0.6m x 2m

The ultimate accolade that can be gifted upon a rhododendron hybrid is the expert judgement that it is a better plant than either of its parents. Collingwood Ingram’s ‘Sarled’ secures just such a recommendation hands down, even though the hybridiser himself was loathe to admit such:

> ‘To fertilise artificially any species of the Anthopogon Series is a very tricky job, and in order to mate *R. sargentianum* with *R. trichostomum* I was obliged to go down on all fours and employ a watchmaker’s glass to see what I was doing. I cannot honestly say that the seedlings derived from this effort have proved any more beautiful than either of their parents, but I can say they are very definitely more vigorous and consequently easier to grow and propagate.’
> *Some Of My Rhododendrons,* Collingwood Ingram, V.M.H.,
> *The Rhododendron And Camellia Year Book 1967*.

With regard to the hybrid’s beauty, the photograph opposite surely speaks for itself, while any number of doyens have concurred on the cultivar’s ease of cultivation and strong constitution.

‘Sarled’ was first exhibited in 1942 and originally distributed through until the late 1960s by Miss Hilda Davenport-Jones, matriarch of Washfield Nurseries, Hawkhurst, Kent, which was just down the road from ‘Cherry’ Ingram’s garden at Benenden, though it is regrettably now closed, like scores of other once-thriving ‘cottage’ emporiums (along with more than a few major players as well). A wider distribution began in the 1970s after the cross received an Award of Merit from the RHS midway through the decade and mature specimens will today be found in many of the major UK rhododendron gardens.

Around 0.6m high, though spreading much wider, the habit remains compact into old age, the bushes well filled with aromatic foliage despite each of the narrow leaves being less than 2cm long. They are a bright glossy green in colour, scaly above and below, elliptic through obovate in shape, with a pointed apex and distinct mucro. The flowers open towards the end of May and are initially pink in the bud, but turn a pure creamy-white when fully expanded. Seven daphne-like corollas are held in each open truss, with the long tubes often arranged like spokes on a wheel, punctuated by the wide flare of the funnel. And not only are the blooms long-lasting, they are often produced with profligate abandon so a sheet of white covers the entire shrub.

Collingwood Ingram’s epithet is one of the few pronounceable conglomerations to result from the Bayley-Balfour condensed naming formula that usually produces totally unpronounceable contortions. The leading ‘Sar’ is obvious, but the concluding ‘led’ comes from *R. ledoides,* which post the mostly warranted wholesale synonymy imposed by the Edinburgh Revision is unofficially known as *R. trichostomum* Ledoides Group (at least, in horticultural circles). Of course, had the hybridising fraternity been as tied to those set-in-stone, warts-and-all, nomenclature systems that the botanists uphold, then ‘Sartrich’, ‘Sartomum’ or some other hideous meld would be filling the pages of the *IRRC* instead of ‘Satan’s Breath’, ‘Heil Hitler’, ‘Chink’ or ‘Sambo’, which for the latter trio would have been no bad thing. Thankfully however, this Balfourian legacy was abandoned by virtually all the UK’s more commercially-savvy rhodophiles within minutes of its publication.


R. ‘Sarled’

R. ‘Sesterianum’

The ‘Sesterianum’ Pride

edgeworthii x *formosum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H4 April-May 2.5m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Fragrantissimum	W. Rollinsson & Sons	before 1868	1868
Helena	Sir John Ramsden	before 1934	1934
Lady Alice Fitzwilliam	Fisher, Son & Sibray	before 1881	1881
Oekonomierat Stoll	Zahradnik	before 1880	before 1880
Purity	Hybridiser Unknown	before 1908	before 1908
Sesterianum	Firma S. Rinz	before 1862	1862

For those blessed with gardens that have a mild and moist microclimate courtesy of the Gulf Stream, ‘Sesterianum’ - along with ‘Fragrantissimum’ and ‘Lady Alice Fitzwilliam’, the two far better known cultivars derived from the various pollinations of *R. edgeworthii* by *R. formosum* made from the mid 1850s onwards - should be sited in dappled shade in the Southwest of the UK and the lower half of Wales, and in full sun further north, certainly from Cumbria upwards into Scotland. Because if not, like its first mentioned doppelgänger, when left to its own devices, ‘Sesterianum’ will develop into an incredibly leggy and thoroughly untidy mess, although if the terminal vegetative buds are pinched and the secateurs applied every few years or so, an acceptable, fairly ‘compact’ specimen should be achieved. Failing that, or where climatic circumstances dictate, like the other two shrubs, Sebastian Rinz’s hybrid can be trained along a wall just as you would a fruit tree, or even woven through and around the lattice framework of a gazebo, pergola, pagoda, arbour or arch - it can be that leggy.

Yet bushes of ‘Sesterianum’, dishevelled or spruce, begin opening their drop-dead gorgeous flowers from a young age. These are carried in open trusses of two to four widely funnel-shaped corollas, each 5cm long by 6.5cm across, pure white, or white variably flushed with pink or rose, or with the lobes lined in the same hue. And of course, they are deliciously and strongly scented, the fragrance often equated with nutmeg. The foliage is equally beautiful, glossy, dark green and rugose, scaly and hairy, the leaf shape lanceolate through oblanceolate. Blade retention usually spans just a single year, two at most, so the branch structure will always be visible, open and airy, just less so if the correct site placement is chosen from the off. On a negative note, rust fungus and powdery mildew can be problematical in some areas.

‘Sesterianum’ was gifted a First Class Certificate by the RHS in 1862, probably around the same time that ‘Fragrantissimum’ germinated at the Rollisson’s Springfield Nursery in Upper Tooting, London. The pairing was likely made by one of William Rollisson’s sons, George or William, who had continued the business after their father’s death in 1842, with the plant first exhibited and introduced in 1868, and again, its flowers deservedly received an FCC, the poor habit simply not considered.

‘Lady Alice Fitzwilliam’ was introduced by the Fisher, Son & Sibray Nursery in 1881, has 2 to 3 widely funnel-shaped and highly fragrant corollas in each truss, these white, with a faint yellow blotch and pink lines on the lobe tips outside. The foliage differs in being elliptic through obovate-lanceolate in shape, but is otherwise the same. Habit is straggly at best, but again, this was not considered when its own FCC was gifted in 1881.



R. ‘Sesterianum’



R. ‘Sesterianum’

R. ‘Fragrantissimum’

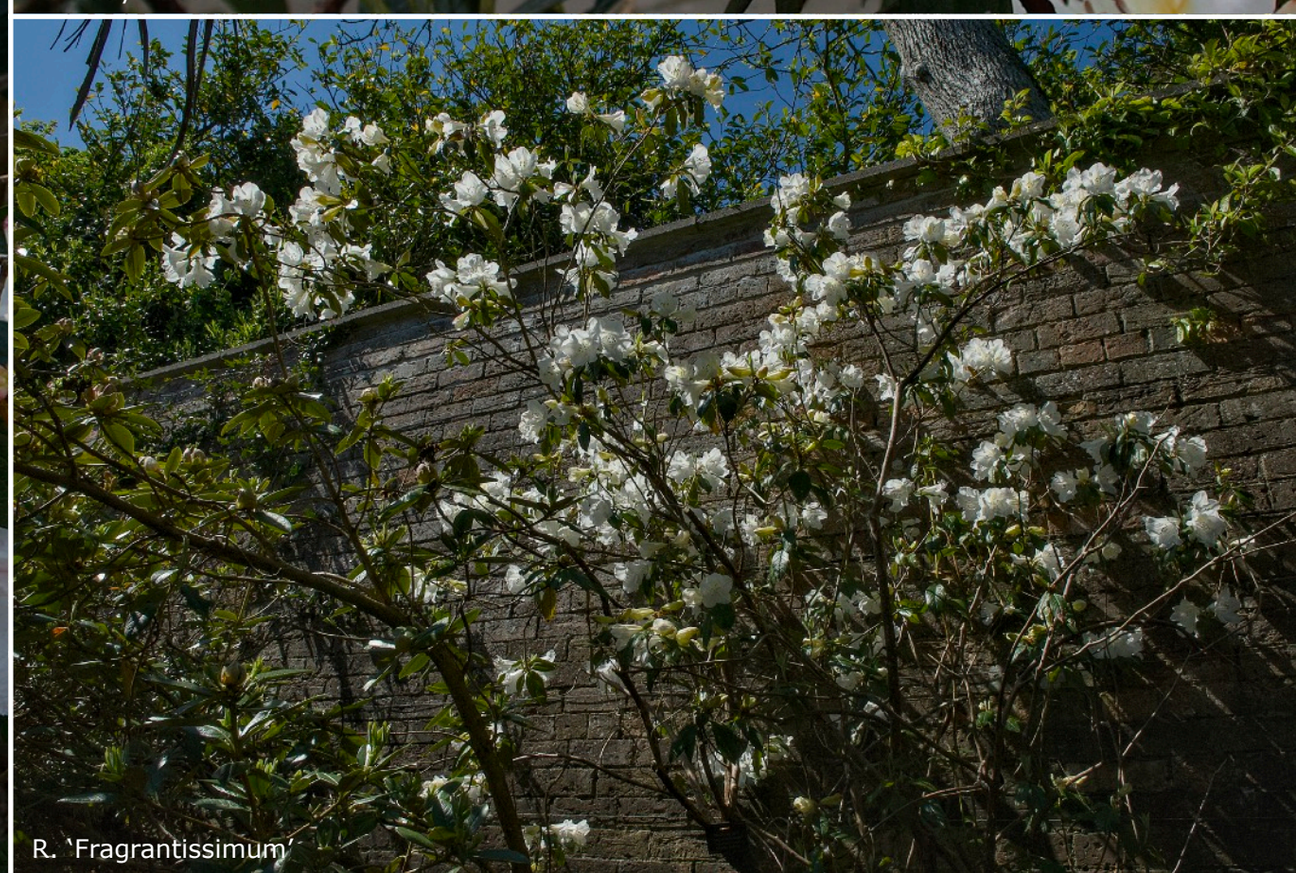




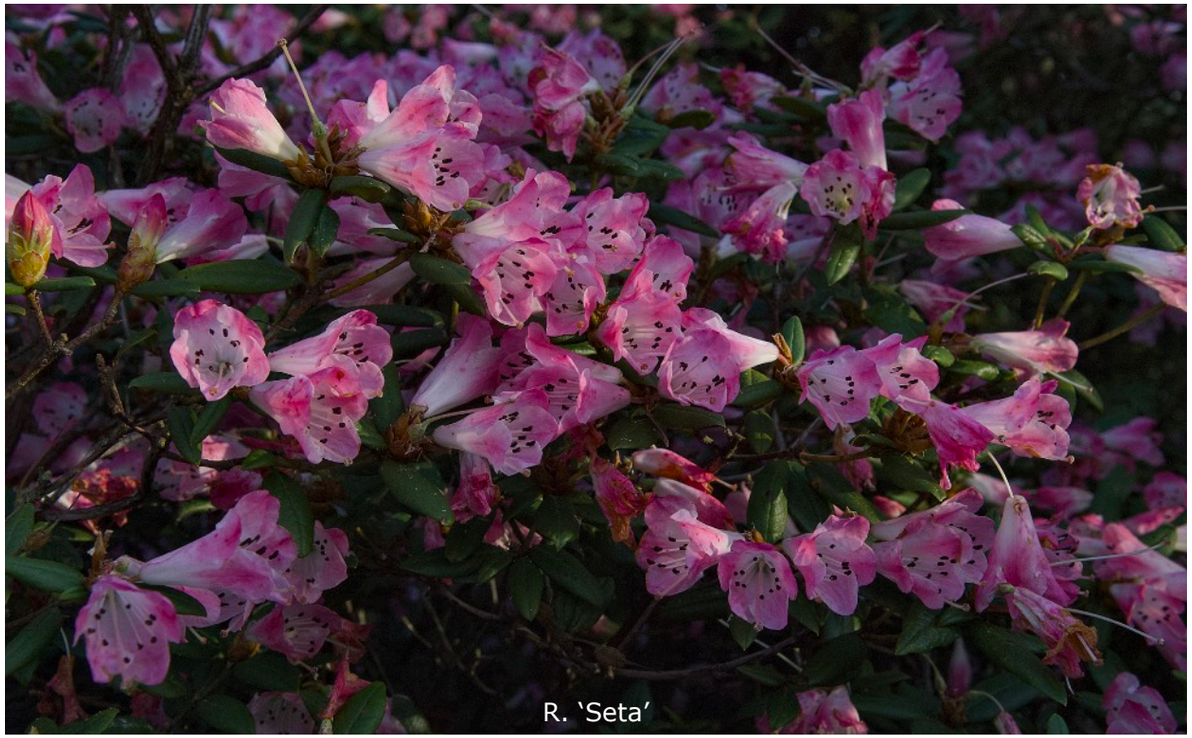
R. ‘Lady Alice Fitzwilliam’



R. ‘Fragrantissimum’



R. ‘Fragrantissimum’


R. ‘Seta’


R. ‘Seta’

R. ‘Seta’

spinuliferum x *moupinense*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 February-March 3m x 3m

Probably the most popular and widely planted cross featuring either species used in the parental combination, ‘Seta’, Henry McLaren’s 1928 *spinuliferum* x *moupinense* pairing was introduced in 1933 after winning a showbench Award of Merit from the RHS. It later secured a First Class Certificate in 1960, but can only be grown successfully in a minority of UK gardens, not because the cross lacks hardiness - the H5 rating means it can cope with winter lows down to -15ºC - but because ‘Seta’ begins opening its fabulous blooms in February, or sometimes even earlier if the weather is mild, and then, during March, sends out its new growth. And as we all know to our cost, Jack’s favourite times to strike are in February and March, ruining the flowers and writing-off those young shoots if temperatures drop below zero.

So a word of warning:

If the flower buds are hit any time after they begin to expand or when fully unfurled, then only the floral display will have been lost for that year, which in the grand scheme of things is no great shakes. But if the vegetative buds are struck year after year after year, and the frost is heavy enough to not only decimate the immature branchlets, but cause bark split as well, then the shrub itself will be lost. So a sheltered woodland site with few penetrating spring frosts is an essential requirement for outdoor cultivation unless local conditions can provide an alternative - the temperature uplift provided by a major urban conurbation, for instance, or millions of litres of slightly warmer seawater rushing in close-by along the tidal reaches of a substantial river like the Thames, to take the edge off any cold snap every twelve hours. And if that permits the hybrid to thrive and allows its blooms to light-up your garden in possibly the year’s dreariest month, then go for it. Because ‘Seta’ is an out-and-out one-of-a-kind gem.

The flowers open from both terminal and axillary buds, with up to seven tubular-funnel-shaped corollas carried in each emerging upright cluster. Individually they may well be just 3.5cm long and 2.5cm across at the mouth, but they are produced in such quantity that a mature bush will be turned into a pink-and-white dome of colour from head to foot. White or pinkish at the base, shading to crimson or deep pink on the lobes, and usually striped deep pink on the outer surface, those hues are dependent on which clone has been purchased and planted, the award-clone, or the one more widely distributed by the nursery trade. Equally, the stamen anthers could be chocolate-coloured, with the style greenish-white and topped by a crimson stigma. But more often, not.

The foliage is quite stiff, the blades lanceolate through ovate to elliptic. Each could be up to 4.5cm long by 2.3cm wide and will usually have recurved margins and be slightly ciliate-hairy. Dark green above and matt, below they are puberulous and covered with golden-brown scales.

As a young plant, ‘Seta’ is upright and sparsely branched, though free-flowering. With age, however, the habit gets much better, as the shrub ‘bushes-up’ and develops into a 2m high and wide erect, but straggly clump, the oldest shrubs adding another metre to those maximums. And while poise and decorum may decidedly be lacking, when adorned in the most glorious outpouring of colour February outdoors in the UK is ever likely to see, minor quibbles about the supporting framework can be given the short shrift they truly warrant.

R. ‘Seta’

R. ‘Shamrock’

R. ‘Shamrock’

keiskei x *hanceanum* Nanum Group

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 Mid March-April 1.2m x 2.5m

Fortuitously, March 17th was the date on which Robert Ticknor’s *keiskei* x *hanceanum* ‘Nanum’ cross first opened its bright yellow-green flowers: Saint Patrick’s Day. And as no true Irishman would be caught out and about on that day of feasting and celebration without a sprig of another yellow-flowering plant in his buttonhole - *Trifolium dubium* - the choice of ‘Shamrock’ for the epithet was clearly a no-brainer. Of course, had the hybrid flowered just one day earlier or later, its moniker - if Irish Christian feast day associations were maintained - might have been one linked to ‘Finian the Leper’ or ‘Fridianus’.

A pause.

For considered thought or a Wiki search…

And on we go:

Horticulturalists wedded to the Edinburgh Revision would argue that Ticknor’s pairing merely repeats the combination first made by the Kent-based nursery firm of G. Reuthe Ltd in the 1950s, this resulting in the AM and FCC-awarded ‘Princess Anne’, but the flowering times of the two are substantially different - mid March to April for ‘Shamrock’, as opposed to late April to May for ‘Princess Anne’ - and so too their ultimate heights - 1.2m for the former, rather than 0.6m for the latter. The *IRRC* registration shows that the stigma of a ‘dwarf form’ of *R. keiskei* received pollen from a member of *R. hanceanum* Nanum Group to conceive ‘Shamrock’, but the morphology of the Oregonian hybridiser’s named selection casts doubt on that account. This could be down to the ‘Nanum’ tag, which as documented in Volume 5, is often wrongly applied to taller growing plants such as ‘Canton Consul’. Moreover, the really dwarf ‘Yaku Fairy’ forms of *R. keiskei* var. *ozawae* were not available when the cross was made in 1971. So despite the mirrored parentage and some shared genetic features, a side-by-side comparison of two mature specimens of ‘Shamrock’ and ‘Princess Anne’ will quickly confirm why they cannot be associated within the same pride.

And so, to that morphology:

Seven to nine tubular-funnel-shaped corollas emerge from each of the ‘Shamrock’ flower buds, these individually 2.3cm long by 3cm across with wide-spreading flat lobes. They are yellow-green in tone, with the dorsal lobe spotted darker in the throat. Foliage is elliptic in silhouette, apiculate at the tip and wedge-shaped at the base, the blades up to 5cm long by 2.5cm wide, though they may also remain no more than 2cm in length by 1cm in width. They are olive green in colour above and matt, with a wash of yellowish-brown, moderately distant, scales below. Habit is compact but wide spreading, with a mature plant topping the 1m height mark and extending out to at least twice that distance, yet always with a dense cloak of leaves obscuring the branch scaffolding. Flowering is prolific from a young age, but takes place more often in early to mid April in UK gardens, rather than on the day when Christianity first arrived in Ireland.

Note that leaf spot can be a problem in some locales, but otherwise ‘Shamrock’ is fully hardy and easy to grow.



R. ‘Shamrock’



R. ‘Shamrock’


R. 'Songbird'


R. 'Songster'

The 'Songbird' Pride

russatum x 'Blue Tit'

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H6-7 April 0.7m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Songbird	Sir James Horlick	around 1954	1957
Songster	Sir James Horlick	around 1954	around 1957

'Songbird' resulted from Sir James Horlick's only lepidote pairing, all his other *IRRC*-registered hybrids having an elepidote parentage, and it produced one of the finest low-growing 'blue' flowering rhododendrons ever introduced, indeed many rhodophiles would list it as the best of them all. Pollen from 'Blue Tit' - presumably the J. C. Williams plant rather than Edward Magor's clone? - was placed on the style of what must have been a very good form of *R. russatum,* for the genetic heritage gifted by the seed parent corrected all the faults of its male consort: pale, chlorotic foliage, susceptible to leaf spot; lanky shoots and yellowish new growth; poor flower bud set if grown anywhere other than in full sun. In the process, those same genes also upped the corolla count and significantly deepened the flower colour, though compared singly, the blooms are smaller.

They open from terminal and axillary buds and form compound inflorescences with as many as twenty funnel-shaped or rotate-campanulate corollas in each truss, the blooms deep violet-blue in colour and individually 2 to 2.5cm across at the mouth. Flushed to match, the stamen filaments are also densely grey-white hairy at the base and topped by golden-brown anthers, these often appearing to glow within the surround of the corolla lobes. The long style may also be tinted to complement the flowers, but equally may be shot-through with white to produce a perfect contrast, both states concurrent on the same plant, indeed on adjacent corollas. The leaf blades are dark green and glossy, scaly above, paler, with scattered brown scales below. Elliptic through obovate in shape, obtuse at the apex, but with a distinct mucro, each is around 2cm in length. Habit is compact and dense, the semi-dwarf shrub usually no more than 0.6m high, easy to grow and free flowering from a young age. If 'Songbird' has a fault, the only criticism that has been levelled is its tendency to flower in the autumn, so denuding the spring display.

A number of specimens adorned with a 'Songbird' label seen in some rhododendron gardens open to the public have a habit far distant from its tightly clad and semi-dwarf norm, these exhibiting an open deportment and a branch framework that is well over 2m in height. They also bear much paler flowers, which are larger, along with leaf blades that are near oval in shape. Given their number, mislabelled plants they are not; rather, incorrectly or nefariously supplied substitutes, and certainly not the real deal.

'Songster' is a second selection from the Horlick pairing, with paler flowers mirroring those of 'Blue Diamond'. Peter and Kenneth Cox report that these are more susceptible to frost than those of 'Songbird', and that the habit of the sister seedling is poorer (*The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Hybrids,* 1988).

R. ‘Songbird’

R. ‘Lochinch Spinbur’

The ‘Spinbur’ Pride

spinuliferum x *burmanicum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H3-4 April 1.6m x 2m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Lochinch Spinbur	John Dalrymple (Lord Stair)	before 1950	1957
Spinbur	John Dalrymple (Lord Stair)	before 1950	1950

John Dalrymple, the 12th Earl of Stair, made this *spinuliferum* x *burmanicum* pairing at Lochinch Castle, his ancestral home near Stranraer in southwest Scotland. Today, tourists and rhodophiles alike know the estate grounds as Castle Kennedy Gardens, a wonderland of old hybrid rhododendrons and species set on a narrow, wooded isthmus between two lochs, with the most fabulous avenue of Monkey Puzzle trees to be found anywhere in the UK. It is also one of the mildest locales in the British Isles, favoured with a near frost-free climate that allows the more tender species from Subsection *Maddenia* to prosper and thrive, and large-leaved rhododendrons to attain their full potential.

Two selections have been registered from the cross: ‘Spinbur’, introduced in 1950; and in 1957, the Award of Merit clone, ‘Lochinch Spinbur’, which has bigger and better flowers. Those blooms are composed of 4cm long tubular-funnel corollas, carried in a loose truss of five, coloured white, but heavily suffused pink, with a touch of yellow in the throat. Foliage is dark green and glossy, distinctly veined, and narrowly elliptic in shape. The habit is upright, then spreading, producing a medium-sized plant that rarely exceeds 2m in height or width even after twenty years.



R. ‘Lochinch Spinbur’



R. ‘Lochinch Spinbur’

The 'Tree Creeper' Pride
ozawae 'Yaku Fairy' x *glaucophyllum*
Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread
H6 Late April-May 0.5m x 1.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Himmelberg	Wolfgang Reich	1999	2010
Quail	Peter & Kenneth Cox	1993	2000
Tree Creeper	Peter & Kenneth Cox	1993	2003

'Tree Creeper' is a 2003 addition to Glendoick's flock of birds, a second selection from the *R. keiskei* var. *ozawae* 'Yaku Fairy' x *glaucophyllum* pairing that father and son, Peter and Kenneth Cox, made in 1993, 'Quail' being the first introduction from the match, which arrived at the start of the new Millennium. Both plants are free-flowering almost to the point of excess, smothering themselves in a blanket of bloom, but 'Tree Creeper' has ditched the reddish-pink hue of its sister seedling for pink and cream, the former shade flushing the outside of the corollas, the latter within, giving a two-toned effect, and it is this that makes it special.

Four through six funnels populate each flat topped truss, these individually 2.5cm long by 3.5 cm across, and 5- or 6-lobed. They are held in place by a small green calyx at the end of a reddish-purple pedicel. The leaves are broadly ovate in outline, almost 5cm long by 2cm wide, with recurved margins, the blades mid green in colour and scaly on both surfaces. Habit is dense and compact, with an ultimate height between 0.4 and 0.5m, but spreading out much wider, so 'Tree Creeper' is perfect for a spot in a raised bed or a rock garden, especially if the surrounds offer part shade or a northern aspect, this preserving the delicate blend of hues in the flowers for longest.

Certhia familiaris, named by none other than the rhodo-not-so-savvy Carl Linnaeus in 1758, would be the European honoree for the epithet, though given Peter and Ken's extensive seed collecting trips to the Far East, six other members of Genus *Certhia* and one from Genus *Salpornis*, might also be the intended recipient, as all are equally two-toned: brownish above and whitish below.


R. 'Tree Creeper'


R. 'Tree Creeper'

R. ‘Tree Creeper’

R. ‘Wee Bee’

The ‘Wee Bee’ Pride

campylogynum x *ozawae* ‘Yaku Fairy’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5 Late April-May 0.5m x 1.5m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Frechdachs	Wolfgang Reich	1993	1999
Too Bee	Warren Berg	1972	1983
Wee Bee	Warren Berg	1972	1987

‘Wee Bee’ is Warren Berg’s pièce de résistance, a commercial standard across the rhododendron world and suitable for virtually every garden where temperate members of the genus can be cultivated, only the coldest of locales excepted. And if the soil isn’t right, stick it in a pot. For this is one spring flowering gem no rhodophile should be without.

A sister seedling from the same seed pod that produced ‘Too Bee’ - indeed its official synonym is ‘Not Too Bee’ - ‘Wee Bee’ is the result of a *campylogynum* x *keiskei* pairing made in 1972 that at the time was written down as ‘Patricia’ x ‘Yaku Fairy’. In longhand, Jim and Betty Caperci’s magnolia-purple-flowering *R. campylogynum* Charopoeum selection ‘Patricia’ - named and introduced in 1959 - received pollen from *R. keiskei* var. *ozawae* ‘Yaku Fairy’, or at least the American equivalent of such. Because the Japanese nurseryman Koichiro Wada had supplied genetically identical rooted cuttings propagated from a plant gathered on Mount Kuromi, Yakushima Island, to both Berg, and the English horticulturalist Barry Starling, at roughly the same time, with Barry swifter on his feet in naming and registering his clone after it secured an Award of Merit in 1970.

‘Wee Bee’ is a low-growing dwarf shrub that barely reaches 0.5m in height, but will spread out almost three times as wide. Its compact framework is covered by a dense cloak of small, olive-green matt leaves, elliptic in shape, 3cm long by 1.4cm wide, which are barely visible when the plant is in flower.

Profuse, prolific and profligate are words seemingly invented simply to describe the mass of bloom that covers this hybrid from late April into May, when carried in lax trusses of three through five - individually just 3cm long by 4cm wide - hundreds upon hundreds of widely funnel-shaped corollas hide the blades under a blanket of reddish-pink, the hue strongest at the wavy lobe margins, paling towards the throat. Note however that the darker tone overlays a base of white, which is slowly revealed as the flowers age, the original pigmentation often remaining only in the two rays of spots and speckles on the dorsal, while everywhere else, it is just a redolent flush, though the outer surface of the tube preserves the primary shade longest.

Its sister seedling ‘Too Bee’ has slightly darker blooms that are not so wantonly produced, making ‘Wee Bee’ the star.



R. ‘Wee Bee’



R. ‘Too Bee’

R. ‘Wren’

R. ‘Wren’

ludlowii x *ozawae* ‘Yaku Fairy’

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 Mid April-early May 0.2m x 1m

R. ludlowii is one of the most beautiful yellow-flowering dwarf species with the genus, but it is an absolute nightmare to cultivate long term and only a handful of green-fingered UK rhodophiles have succeed in growing it well, though with no disrespect to those individuals, it would appear that location is everything. So, in an attempt to package all that is best in the species into an easier-to-flourish package, between 1962 and 1976, Peter Cox or his father, Euan, of Glendoick Gardens, Perth, made some seven pairings with the other dwarf lepidote rhododendrons that they grew. As seed parents, *R. chryseum, R. hanceanum* ‘Nanum’, *R. viridescens* and *R. hypolepidotum* delivered ‘Chikor’, ‘Euan Cox’, ‘Swift’ and ‘Woodchat’. As pollen parents, *R. fletcherianum, R. lutescens* and *R. keiskei* var. *ozawae* ‘Yaku Fairy’ conceived ‘Curlew’, ‘Goosander’ and the hybrid featured here, ‘Wren’.

Look down the list of registrations and you will discover that only two other hybridisers worldwide have to date, tried to incorporate *R. ludlowii* into their designs: Warren Berg, to produce ‘Honey Bee’, using *R. hanceanum* as the seed parent; and David Leach, using *R. minus* Carolinianum in the same role, naming his selection ‘Tow Head’.

‘Chikor’, ‘Curlew’, ‘Euan Cox’ and ‘Goosander’ are staples of any rhododendron rock garden, with ‘Curlew’ - the easiest to grow; the most popular; and a commercial standard wherever rhododendrons are grown - found in pots and containers of all shapes and sizes, as well as being a favourite front-of-the-border subject. ‘Wren’ has flowers that are just as good, but the shrub is a touch more temperamental to grow.

Pure yellow in tone with a fan of crimson spots on the dorsal, the ‘Wren’ corollas are produced singularly, in pairs, or with up to four flowers emerging from each bud on stiff, red-flushed and ascending pedicels, each bloom gripped by a small, but deeply lobed calyx imbued with the same hue. Bud set is often more than generous, with the blooms then forming a solid sheet of colour across the shrub. Small leaves, elliptic in shape, with slightly recurved margins decorate the prostrate and creeping framework, those blades deep green and glossy, but turning bronzy-red in the winter. A mature plant, at around twenty years of age, will have formed a mound around 0.2m high and spread out to around 1m.

But there’s a rub:

Attaining such seniority can induce senescence: a loss of vigour and verve; reduced flower bud set; the plants visibly appearing to languish.

The cross is also choosy as to locale, hating a position that soaks-up too much heat or one where the drainage is anything but perfect, and applications of fertiliser - out of a bottle or via slow-release pellets - cause more harm than good. So forsake them. But nonetheless, take the gamble that it’ll be happy where you site it in the ground, for when in bloom, ‘Wren’ is simply a masterpiece in miniature.



R. ‘Wren’



R. ‘Wren’


R. ‘Yellow Hammer’

R. ‘Yellow Hammer’
sulfureum x *flavidum*

Hardiness	Flowering Period	Height & Spread
H5-6	April	2m x 3m

Pilgrimages to such venues over a multi-decade span has revealed the fact that no self-respecting, open-to-the-public, rhododendron garden across the entire length and breadth of the UK, would dare be without a mature specimen of ‘Yellow Hammer’ prominently placed close to their visitor entrance, for the shrub’s presence is nigh on ubiquitous at virtually all these establishments from Land’s End to John o’Groats.

In fact, the hybrid originates from one of them, Caerhays Castle, a locale fairly close to the aforementioned geographic feature at England’s southwestern tip, with the garden set just a stone’s throw back from Porthluney Cove on Cornwall’s riviera coast. The directed pollination was made during the 1920s by J. C. Williams and on the surface, his *sulfureum x flavidum* combination might not bode at all well for winter hardiness given the H2-3 rating of its seed parent, yet remarkably, ‘Yellow Hammer’ has been found to survive winter lows down to -18ºC, although out-of-the-blue sudden plunges can inflict damage. The standard advice - namely, ‘to prune after flowering’ and ‘pinch yearly’ - paints a picture of the shrub’s leggy mien that ‘willowy’ - the politest and most oft used adjective to describe the impenetrable tangle of bare stems that develop over time - doesn’t adequately portray. And any faint hope that the foliage might fill in the gaps, can immediately be dashed, for the leaves - dark green and glossy ellipses just 3.5cm long by 1cm wide, scaly above and below - simply don’t cut it, with the branch tip whorls barely held across a single year and their semblance to a mortuary case after a hard winter categoric, though they do usually rally in the spring.

So if L de R had been involved in the breeding, ‘Yellow Hammer’ might well have been a candidate for one of his bonfires.

If not for its one saving grace: the flowers.

Produced from terminal and axillary buds, each one holding a pair of corollas that often form a compound truss with their fellow blooms, throughout much of April, ‘Yellow Hammer’ is nothing less than a sea of colour. Individually, the tubular-campanulate trumpets may only be 2cm long with a mouth less than 1.5cm across, but they are produced in such quantity that the effect, especially when backlit, is ethereal: a veritable haze of empire-yellow. And rarely does a year go by without a second, equally extravagant display lighting up the woodland in early autumn.

A modicum of dappled shade will extend the life of the deeper corolla hues, but allow that canopy to shut out too much light and the result will be to draw the stems up to 3m or more, the criss-cross scaffold of bare branches then a certain disfigurement. Swift drainage must also be maintained.

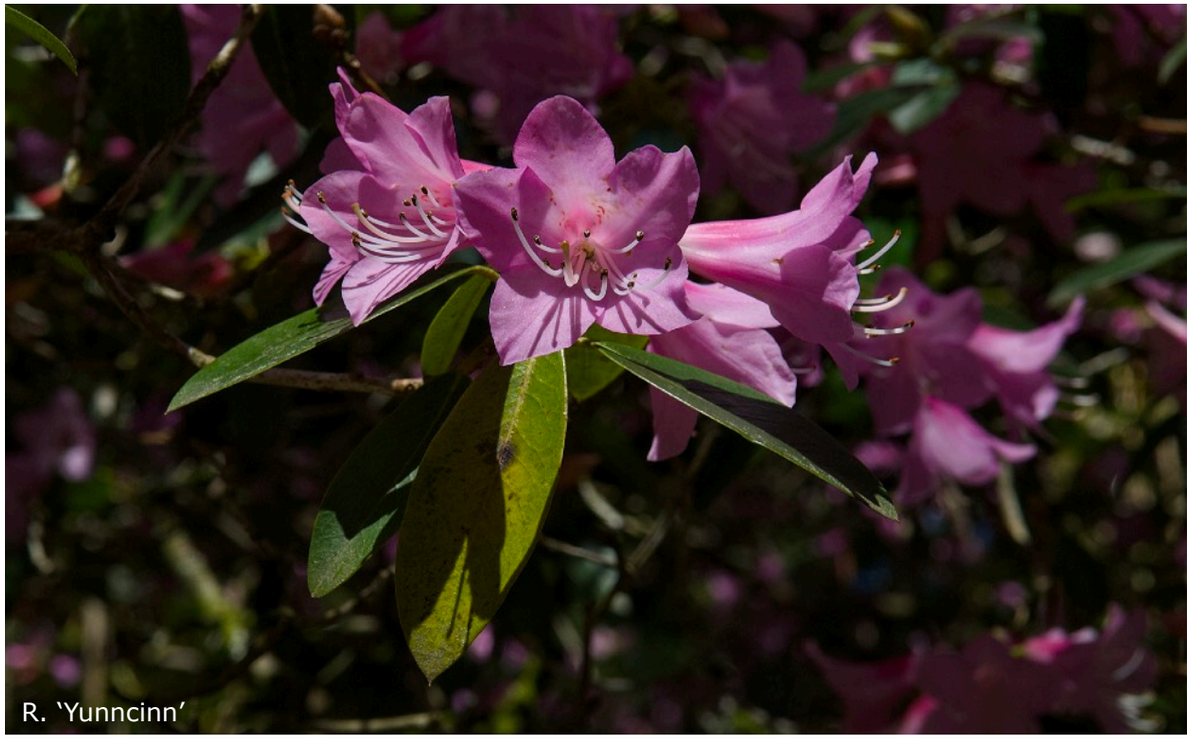
Unfortunately, repeating a predictable story, a number of clones of ‘Yellow Hammer’ exist and have been widely distributed in the nursery trade, the tendency towards legginess varying between them. In fairness, this is hardly noticeable across the bevy of specimens encountered at Arduaine, Muncaster, Windsor and all points north, south, east and west, nor in the hue of their blooms en masse. But prospective purchasers should beware nonetheless.

And a final point for the genetically uneducated: to save any potential hybridiser from wasting their time on match making, note that the shrub is sterile, failing in pairings as a seed or pollen parent with all the various lepidote polyploids available, though its own chromosome count is currently unknown.

R. ‘Yellow Hammer’

R. ‘Yellow Hammer’

R. ‘Yellow Hammer’



R. ‘Yunncinn’



R. ‘Yunncinn’

The ‘Yunncinn’ Pride

yunnanense x *cinnabarinum*

Hardiness - Flowering Period - Height & Spread

H5-6 April-May 3.5m x 6m

Doppelgängers

Epithet	Hybridiser	Pollinated	Introduced
Ernestine	Lionel de Rothschild	before 1937	1937
Yunncinn	E. J. P. Magor	1916	1924

‘Yunncinn’ in bloom is simply stunning.

A mature bush, pushing towards 4m in height with a spread of 6m, covered from head to toe in a blaze of pink will stop you in your tracks and take your breath away. That sheer opulent sweep of bloom, one of the unalloyed joys of the rhododendron flowering season in UK gardens.

Or at least, at the few who have a long-established specimen.

Edward Magor’s 1916 *yunnanense* x *cinnabarinum* pairing is probably the best hybrid either of these two species ever birthed, and in combination, a clear improvement on both parents. Moreover, unlike the vast majority of *R. cinnabarinum* crosses, ‘Yunncinn’ is not an out-and-out magnet for the powdery mildew fungus, though equally, neither is it totally resistant. Yet not a single specialist nursery currently holds stock of the hybrid, despite the fact that rooting cuttings is a cinch provided the stems have not begun to brown.

Contained within Edward Magor’s 1920 submission for *The Rhododendron Society Notes* is the following description:

> ‘Nine corollas in a loose truss, rather tubular campanulate but opening widely at the mouth, violet-rose, darker on the outside, with two lines of reddish-brown in the interior, 3cm x 5cm, filaments and style violet-rose to white, stigma greenish, stamens light brown’.

Yet E. J. P. believed the ‘Yunncinn’ cross was inferior to another of his 1916 pairings, this an *oreotrephes* x *cinnabarinum* hybrid, and he wrote that those ‘Oreocinn’ blooms were ‘one of the most pleasing flowers in the garden and considerably more attractive than ‘Yunncinn’, which was in flower at the same time’.

Up-close and allowing for individual taste that may be so, but their creator never saw a fully mature specimen swathed in thousands of blooms, a sight that would probably have changed his mind. And in an unscientific corroboration, fewer specimens of ‘Oreocinn’ will be found growing in UK rhododendron gardens today, than those of ‘Yunncinn’.

Both plants of course have been lumbered with an Isaac Bayley Balfour combo epithet, and while not the most unpronounceable formulations of the bunch, the adoption of such names likely went a long way to putting the kibosh on their desirability when competing against ‘Elena’ or ‘Youthful Sin’ - hybrids from Lionel de Rothschild and Henry McLaren that reversed the parentage equation - or with the likes of ‘Rose Mangles’ and ‘Lady Chamberlain’. But imagine the ‘Yunncinn’ appellation replaced with ‘Pink Explosion’ or some other equally catchy handle. My bet? Its position on the rhododendron popularity chart would be right up amongst the top ten.

R. ‘Yunncinn’

R. ‘Yunncinn’

R. ‘Yunncinn’

Photographic Acknowledgements:

Details of where each of the plant portraits was photographed is set out below, along with the website details of those collections visited. Thanks is again extended to each establishment for allowing images taken in a private-use capacity, to be reproduced here. Gratitude is also due the institutions, organisations and individuals who allowed the portrait photographs of historical and noted figures associated with the genus to appear alongside the text.

Key: AL - above left; AC - above centre; AR - above right; BL - below left; BC - below centre; BR - below right; L - left; R - right.

American Rhododendron Society:
https://www.rhododendron.org/index.htm
p. 21-AL - Halfdan Lem, photographed by Ted Van Veen, image included in *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story,* (Binford & Mort Publishing, 2001); p. 21-ACL - Hjalmar Larson, photographed by Gwen Bell, image included in *The Pacific Coast Rhododendron Story,* (Binford & Mort Publishing, 2001); p. 21-ACR - Weldon E. Delp, photograph by Dr. Homer Salley, published in the *Journal American Rhododendron Society,* Volume 49, Number 1, within his article *The Delp Hybrids: Part I, A Passion for Rhododendron Hybridizing;* p. 278-L - Joseph Benson Gable, photograph published in *Hybrids And Hybridizers: Rhododendrons and Azaleas for Eastern North America,* by Philip A. Livingston and Franklin H. West (Harrowood Books, 1978); p. 301-BL - Anthony M. 'Tony' Shammarello, photograph published in *Hybrids And Hybridizers: Rhododendrons and Azaleas for Eastern North America,* by Philip A. Livingston and Franklin H. West (Harrowood Books, 1978).

Arduaine Garden, Oban, Argyll:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/arduaine-garden
p. 33; p. 41; p. 42-AR, BR; p. 332; p. 333-R; p. 380; p. 382-BL, R; p. 383-BR; p. 392-BL, AR; p. 440; p. 441-BR; p. 442-BL, BR; p. 446; p. 447-AR; p. 454-AL; p. 466.

Arnold Arboretum:
https://arboretum.harvard.edu/
p. 15-AC - Alfred Rehder. Photo by Bachrach, from the Archives of the Arnold Arboretum.

The Azalea Society of America:
https://www.azaleas.org/wp-content/uploads/azalean/28/1/articles/An_Azaleaphile_Salute_-_Dr._John_Lewis_Creech.pdf
p. 180-AC - John Creech, *c.* early 1980s, a USDA Directors Portrait, this hung in the hall at the US National Arboretum and was featured in *An Azaleaphile Salute,* the William C. Miller appreciation of Dr Creech for the ASA that was published in the Spring 2006 edition of *The Azalean.*

Bartram's Garden, Southwest Philadelphia:
https://www.bartramsgarden.org/john-bartrams-and-peter-collinsons-differing-views-on-native-americans/
p. 49-R - John Bartram, illustration by Howard Pyle.

Baumschule H. Hachmann:
https://www.hachmann.de/
p. 21-BR - Hans Hachmann, photograph posted online at the Hachmann Leidenschaft Rhododendron website.

Benmore Botanic Garden, Argyll:
https://www.rbge.org.uk/visit/benmore-botanic-garden/
p. 81-AR, BR; p. 91-BR; p. 94; p. 95; p. 107-AR; p. 111-BR; p. 115; p. 121; p. 203-AL, BL, R; p. 270-BR; p. 271-AL, AR; p. 394-L, BR; p. 396-BL, AR, BR; p. 397; p. 420-BR; p. 468-AL, BL; p. 469; p. 470; p. 471.

Berliner Grabmale Retten, Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg:
http://www.berliner-grabmale-retten.de/grabmal-peter-simon-pallas/
p. 51-AR - Peter Simon Pallas, headstone in the Berlin-Kreuzberg cemetery, image posted on the website and courtesy of berliner-grabmale-retten.de.

Biblioteca Digital del Real Jardín Botánico:
https://bibdigital.rjb.csic.es/
p175 - the *R. indicum* entry in *Hortus Academicus Lugduno-Batavus,* published in 1687.

Biodiversity Heritage Library:
https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/89135#page/10/mode/1up
p. 178-R - Ernest Wilson, *c.* 1913, author photograph from Volume 1 of *A Naturalist in Western China,* published by Methuen & Co. Ltd, London; p. 182-R - Doctor John Creech, packing young azalea seedlings in sphagnum moss, Mount Takakuma, April 1961, from the USDA publication, *Ornamental Plant Explorations in Japan, 1961;* p. 185-A - Domoto Brothers, Bobbink & Atkins, Cottage Gardens and Dreers catalogues.

Bodnant Garden, Tal-y-fan, Conwy:
https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wales/bodnant-garden
p. 17-R - Henry Duncan McLaren, Lord Aberconway. Photo (c. 1905) published online within the article *The McLaren Family of Bodnant Garden*.

Branklyn Garden, Perth:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/branklyn-garden
p. 347-BL, AR, BR; p. 377-BR; p. 430-BR; p. 445-R; p. 458-AR; p. 459; p. 462.

Brodick Castle Garden, Isle of Arran:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/brodick-castle-garden-country-park
p. 324-BL; p. 350; p. 351-BL, R; p. 352-L; p. 354; p. 355; p. 369-L; p. 371; p. 393-AL, BL, BR; p. 413-AL; p. 414; p. 415; p. 442-AL; p. 443.

Castle Kennedy Gardens, Stranraer:
https://castlekennedygardens.com/
p. 456; p. 457-BL, R.

Centrum Agrarische Geschiedenis, Leuven, Belgie:
https://cagnet.be/item/B00004035
p. 70-ARR - Louis Benoît van Houtte, stained glass window at the National Agricultural Institute of Gentbrugge, Ghent.

Marc Colombel:
http://www.rhododendron.fr/slide_showes.html
p. 21-BC - Jim Barlup, in one of his propagating tunnels, photograph taken by and used courtesy of Marc Colombel.

Combined Universities of Cornwall:
https://prezi.com/7aaxbfmpxcjb/where-are-we-a-brief-history-of-the-penryn-campus/
p. 16-BC - Richard Gill in the garden at Tremough. Image posted online in *A brief history of the Penryn Campus,* by Sarah C. Jane, Archivist and Special Collections Officer, Combined Universities of Cornwall.

Crarae Woodland Glen, Inveraray, Argyll:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/crarae-garden
p. 467.

Crazy Nepal Honey:
https://www.themadhoney.net/
p. 51-BR - A recent advertising image for 'Mad Honey', photo published on and courtesy of the Crazy Nepal Honey website.

Crown Estate, Windsor:
https://www.thecrownestate.co.uk/windsor/parkland/windsor-great-park/
p. 21-BL - Thomas Hope Findlay.

DNA Learning Center, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, New York:
https://dnalc.cshl.edu/view/16266-Gallery-10-Thomas-Hunt-Morgan-portrait-1920.html
p. 27-BRR - Thomas Hunt Morgan, photo dated May 30th, 1920, originally taken for the California Institute of Technology.

Exbury Gardens, Hampshire:
https://www.exbury.co.uk/
p. 82-BR; p. 83; p. 102-R - Lionel Nathan de Rothschild, photo published in *The Rothschild Rhododendrons: A Record Of The Gardens At Exbury,* by C. E. Lucas Phillips & Peter N. Barber, 1967; p. 104-AR; p. 106; p. 108-AL; p. 111-AR; p. 122-AL, BL; p. 139; p. 140; p. 141; p. 142-L, AR; p. 143-AL, AR, BL, BR; p. 144; p. 145; p. 146; p. 147; p. 148; p. 149; p. 150; p. 151; p. 152-BL, BR; p. 153; p. 154; p. 155; p. 220-BR; p. 221-AL, AR, BL, BR; p. 222-AL, AR, BL; p. 223-AL; p. 241-L, AR, BR; p. 242-BL; p. 244; p. 245; p. 246; p. 247; p. 318-L; p. 319; p. 346-BR; p. 357-AR; p. 364-AR; p. 368-BL, AR, BR; p. 372-AL, BL; p. 386; p. 387-R; p. 391-AL, AR, BL, BR; p. 427-AL, BL; p. 450-BL.

Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois:
https://news.feinberg.northwestern.edu/2017/06/12/mitochondria-behind-blood-cell-formation/
p. 26 - Mitochondria, free-floating within human blood cells, illustration featured in the article *Mitochondria Behind Blood Cell Formation,* by Nora Dunne, uploaded on June 12th, 2017.

Find A Grave:
https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59898846/rolla-kent-beattie
p. 180-AL - Rolla Kent Beattie, photo added to the online memorial page for Mr Beattie by Leo James in October, 2010.

Fine Art America:
https://fineartamerica.com/featured/theodor-boveri-american-philosophical-society.html
p. 27-ARR - Theodore Heinrich Boveri, posted online at Fine Art America, and reproduced courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

Geneanet:
https://gw.geneanet.org/lacroixmichel?lang=fr&n=faurie&oc=0&p=urbain
p. 178-ALL - Urbain Jean Faurie.

Genetics, Oxford Academic:
https://academic.oup.com/genetics/article/160/1/1/6089046
p. 27-BRL - Walter Stanborough Sutton, posted online at Genetics, and reproduced courtesy of the Archives of the University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, KS.

Georg Arends Förderkreis E.V., Wuppertal:
https://www.georg-arends.de/wochenende-der-offenen-tuer/
p. 272-BR - Georg Adalbert Arends (1863-1952), working in his nursery at Wuppertal, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany.

Glendoick Gardens Ltd, Perth:
https://glendoick.com/
p. 21-AR - Peter Cox, in one of the nursery greenhouses at Glendoick; p. 158; p. 159-AR, BR; p. 273; p. 302; p. 303-BL, R; p. 314-BL, R; p. 315-L, BR; p. 323; p. 346-BL; p. 367-AR, BR; p. 373-ARR - Euan Cox, *c.* 1950; p. 374; p. 375; p. 395-BL; p. 412-BR; p. 458-BR; Back Cover-AR.

The Historical Marker Database:
https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=84685
p. 50-ALR - André Michaux Historical Marker, in Bakersville, Mitchell County, North Carolina, photograph by Tom Bosse, June 21st, 2015.

The Hobbie Rhododendron Park, Westerstede:
https://hobbie-rhodo.de/Park/Geschichte_des_Parks
p. 20-AC - Dietrich Hobbie, photograph courtesy of Birgit Hobbie.

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation:
https://www.huntbotanical.org/
p. 180-AR - Benjamin Yoe Morrison; p. 250-R - Benjamin Yoe Morrison, *c.* 1941.

John Innes Centre:
https://www.jic.ac.uk/
p. 30 - E. K. Janaki Ammal.

Inverewe Gardens, Poolewe, Wester Ross:
https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/inverewe
p. 360-AL, BL, R; p. 431-R.

Lakeland Horticultural Society, Holehird Gardens:
https://holehirdgardens.org.uk/the-society
p. 104-BR; p. 123; p. 128-BR; p. 129; p. 136-AL; p. 156-AR, BR; p. 157; p. 161-BL, R; p. 189-BL; p. 206-BL; p. 328-R; p. 329; p. 330; p. 331; p. 334-BR; p. 363-AR, BR; p. 364-BR; p. 365; p. 395-R; p. 400-AR, BL, BR; p. 426-AR; p. 432-L, BR; p. 444-L; p. 461-AR, BR; p. 463-AR, BR.

Lamellen Estate, Cornwall:
https://www.lamellenestate.co.uk/
p. 16-AC - Edward J. P. Magor, photo published in *Journal American Rhododendron Society,* Volume 58, No. 3, 2004; p. 22-ARR - Edward J. P. Magor, photo taken at the time he was establishing the garden at Lamellen, *c.* 1910, published in *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias 2012*.

Rosemary Legrand:
p. 138-ALL - George Hyde *c.* 1942, photo taken by the Royal Studios of Wimborne Minster, and published in *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias 2014;* p. 282-AR - George and Evelyn Hyde on Battlestone Hill, RHS Wisley, photo taken by Rosemary Legrand and published in *Rhododendrons, Camellias & Magnolias 2014*.

Leo Cooper Ltd:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Cooper_(publisher)
p. 20-BL - Eric G. W. W. Harrison, the gardener in 1978. Author portrait from *Gunners, Game & Gardens: An Autobiography,* published in 1978.

Library of Congress:
https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/md1465/
p. 251-AL, BL, AR, CR, BR - the U.S. Plant Introduction Station at 11601 Old Pond Road, Glenn Dale, Prince George's County, Maryland. The photographs were taken in 1996 by Walter Smalling, Jr., and are reproduced herein courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., 20540, while the site plan was produced in 1930 by the Facilities and Engineering Branch of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

Logan Botanic Garden, Stranraer:
https://www.rbge.org.uk/visit/logan-botanic-garden/
p. 168; p. 169-BL, R; p. 338-BL; p. 366-L; p. 381-BR; p. 382-AL; p. 383-L, AR; p. 392-BR; p. 402; p. 408-BR; p. 409-R; p. 423; p. 441-BL, AR; p. 447-BR; p. 448; p. 449-L, AR, BR.

The McManus: Dundee's Art Gallery and Museum:
https://www.mcmanus.co.uk/
p. 373-ARL - Euan Cox, 1920, Oil on Canvas, by Harrington Mann (1864-1937).

The Mill Hill Preservation Society, London:
http://www.mhps.org.uk/collinson/pch-gallery.asp
p. 49-BRR - Peter Collinson, courtesy of the MHPS Peter Collinson FRS website.

Muncaster Castle Gardens, Ravenglass, Cumbria:
https://www.muncaster.co.uk/
p. 5-Title Page; p. 7-Contents; p. 98-L, AR, BR; p. 99-AL, BL, R; p. 132-BR; p. 194; p. 207; p. 338-AL; p. 339; p. 356; p. 357-BR; p. 398; p. 399-AL, BL, BR; p. 404-R; p. 405; p. 406; p. 407; p. 416; p. 422-AR, BR; p. 424; p. 425-AL, BL; p. 434; p. 435-BR; p. 436; p. 437; p. 465.

Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin:
https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en
p. 28-AC - Erwin Baur, posted online at The Virtual Laboratory - https://vlp.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/people/data?id=per369 - reproduced herein courtesy of the Museum für Naturkunde.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration:
https://www.nasa.gov/
p. 182-AL - Kyushu, Japan, as seen from the International Space Station on October 17th, 2015, posted on and courtesy of the Gateway to Astronaut Photography of Earth portal at https://eol.jsc.nasa.gov/ ; p. 210-Inset - Landsat photograph of Yakushima Island, taken on May 25th 2002; p. 224-L - the Japanese Archipelago, photograph taken by the NASA OrbView-2 satellite on April 30th, 1999.

National Portrait Gallery, London:
https://www.npg.org.uk/
p. 11-ARR - William Henry Sykes, by John & Charles Watkins, albumen carte-de-visite, *c.* 1860s; p. 13-ARL - Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, by Henry Joseph Whitlock, albumen carte-de-visite, *c.* 1860s, given to the gallery by Phyllis Cunnington in 1962; p. 20-AR - Sir James Nockells Horlick, photo by Bassano Ltd, half-plate glass negative, 10 December 1924, given to the gallery by Bassano & Vandyk Studios in 1974; p. 49-ARR - Henry Compton, a mezzotint by Isaac Beckett, after John Riley, *c.* 1680-1685.

Nymans Garden, Handcross, West Sussex:
https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/nymans
p. 45-AR, BR; p. 58; p. 59-BL, R; p. 64-R; p. 74-AL; p. 345-BR; p. 421; p. 450-AL; p. 451.

Pick Your Image:
https://www.amazon.com/Vintage-photo-Edmund-Rothschild-smiling/dp/B01B5F3RQM
p. 138-ALR - Edmund de Rothschild, photograph taken by Desmond O'Neill, Camera Press, London, and posted on the Amazon UK website. Used herein courtesy of PickYourImage.

Public Domain:
p. 13-ARR - Robert Fortune; p. 15-AR - John Guille Millais, from the Ruthven Deane photo collection, published in 1910; p. 17-AL - Sir Edmund Giles Loder, portrait by H. J. Hudson, reproduced in the book *Edmund Loder: a memoir* by Sir Alfred Pease; p. 17-AC - Sir John Frecheville Ramsden, 6th Baronet, reproduced in the book *Poverty Is Relative,* by Meriel Buxton; p. 25 - Chloroplasts visible within the cells of *Plagiomnium affine laminazellen,* photograph taken by Kristian Peters, Fabelfroh, available via Wikimedia Commons; p. 27-ARL - Gregor Mendel, photo available via Wikimedia Commons; p. 28-AL - Carl Correns, *c.* 1910, photo by Mondadori, held by Getty Images, available via Wikimedia Commons; Carl Wilhelm von Nägeli, photo courtesy of the University of Zurich, available via Wikimedia Commons; p. 29-ARR - Robert Remak, lithograph by Georg Engelbach (1817-1897), made before 1865, image available via Wikimedia Commons; p. 50-AL - William Bartram, oil on canvas by Charles Wilson Peale; p. 53 - The Verschaffelt Nursery, Ghent, Belgium, *c.* 1854, lithograph from Volume 1, of *L'Illustration Horticole,* author unknown; p. 70-ARL - Philipp Franz von Siebold, the Christoph Roth bronze bust on a red marble plinth, Würzburg, Lower Franconia, Bavaria, Germany, available via Wikimedia Commons; p. 71 - a bird's-eye view of Dejima, copied from a woodblock print by Toshimaya Bunjiemon, *c.* 1780, and published in the book *Bijzonderheden over Japan,* by Isaac Titsingh, 1824-25, courtesy of Wikipedia Commons; p. 178-ALR - Charles Sprague Sargent, *c.* 1905, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; p. 210 - Japan, natural location map with side map of the Ryukyu Islands (herein covered by Yakushima Landsat inset), courtesy of Wikimedia Commons; p. 417-R - page 783 of *The Gardners' Chronicle And Agricultural Gazette,* August 31st, 1861, courtesy of the online Biodiversity Heritage Library.

Ray Wood, Castle Howard, North Yorkshire:
https://www.castlehoward.co.uk/visit-us/the-gardens/the-woodland-garden
p. 9-Overview; p. 36; p. 37-AR; p. 186-BR; p. 189-AL; p. 192-AL; p. 197; p. 200-BR; p. 204; p. 205; p. 206-AL; p. 228; p. 229; p. 234-L, BR; p. 235; p. 324-R; p. 345-AL, BL; p. 370.

ResearchGate:
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/CJ-Maximowicz-1827-1891_fig3_315516847
p. 177-BRL -Karl Maximovich, photograph published in the paper *Korean Type Specimens of Vascular Plants Deposited in Komarov Botanical Institute,* courtesy of the National Institute of Biological Resources, South Korea.

The Rothschild Archive:
https://family.rothschildarchive.org/people/105/portraits?gallery=Portraits
p. 16-L - Lionel Nathan de Rothschild (1882-1942).

Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh:
https://www.rbge.org.uk/visit/royal-botanic-garden-edinburgh/
p. 60-BR; p. 66; p. 67-AR, BR; p. 68-BL; p. 77; p. 78-L, BR; p. 79-AL, BL, R; p. 82-AR; p. 87-BR; p. 91-AR; p. 92; p. 93; p. 96-L, AR, BR; p. 97-AL, R; p. 110-AR; p. 113; p. 119-AL; p. 126-AR, BR; p. 130; p. 131; p. 132-AL; p. 134-AL, AR, B; p. 135; p. 176-R - Robert Fortune; p. 308-BL, R; p. 420-BL; p. 426-BR.

Royal Botanic Garden, Kew:
https://www.kew.org/
p. 16-AR - J. C. Williams; p. 75-BL, BR; p. 76-AR; p. 124-AL, AR; p. 177-BRR - Charles Maries; p. 389-BR.

Royal Botanic Garden, Wakehurst Place:
https://www.kew.org/wakehurst
p. 37-BR; p. 137; p. 325; p. 326-AR, BR; p. 343-R; p. 348-AR; p. 347; p. 353; p. 362; p. 376; p. 378; p. 379; p. 384-AR; p. 385-AL, BL; p. 403-AR, BR; p. 454-BL; p. 460.

Royal Horticultural Society, Wisley:
https://www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley
Front Cover; p. 17-BL - John Barr Stevenson, photograph published in the *Rhododendron Yearbook 1950;* p. 17-BC - Roza Stevenson, photograph by Pearl Freeman, published in the *Rhododendron and Camellia Yearbook 1968;* p. 20-BC - Francis Hanger, image posted online at the RHS Gardens Club web site; p. 43-BL, R; p. 44; p. 45-BL; p. 57-L, BR; p. 74-AR, BR; p. 76-AL, BL, BR; p. 85-BL; p. 86-BR; p. 87-AR, BL; p. 89-AL, AR; p. 104-L; p. 107-BL; p. 108-BL; p. 109-R; p. 110-AL; p. 114-AL; p. 128-AR; p. 162-AL, BL; p. 164-BL, AR, BR; p. 170-BR; p. 171-AL, BL; p. 186-AL, AR, Bl; p. 187-AL, R; p. 188; p. 189-BR; p. 191; p. 192-AR; p. 195; p. 196; p. 199; p. 200-L; p. 201; p. 202-L, BR; p. 206-R; p. 218-R; p. 220-BL; p. 222-BR; p. 223-BL, R; p. 230-BL, R; p. 231; p. 232; p. 236-AL, AR, BR; p. 238; p. 239; p. 249; p. 254-AR; p. 258; p. 259; p. 260-BR; p. 261-AL, AR; p. 262-AR, BL, BR; p. 263; p. 264; p. 265; p. 266; p. 267; p. 268; p. 269; p. 270-BL; p. 272-AL, BL; p. 275; p. 276; p. 277; p. 278-BR; p. 281; p/ 283; p. 284; p. 285-L, AR, BR; p. 286; p. 287; p. 288; p. 289; p. 290; p. 291; p. 292-BL, BR; p. 293-AR, BL; p. 295; p. 296-AL, AR; p. 297; p. 298; p. 299; p. 300-L, BR; p. 301-R; p. 305-BR; p. 306-L, BR; p. p. 307; p. 310; p. 311-BR; p. 316; p. 317-AR, BR; p. 410-AL, BL; p. 411; p. 430-BL, AR; p. 433; p. 452; p. 453-AR, BR; p. 455; Back Cover-BR.

Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Perth:
https://www.rsgs.org/
p. 11-ARL - Frank Kingdon-Ward.

Royal Society, London:
https://royalsociety.org/journals/
p. 15-AL - John Hutchinson, photograph from Volume 21, Issue 21, of the *biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society,* published in November 1975.

Savill Garden, Windsor Great Park:
https://www.windsorgreatpark.co.uk/en/experiences/the-savill-garden
p. 56-BL, BR; p. 62-L, BR; p. 88-AL; p. 107-AL; p. 118-AL; p. 173; p. 187-BL; p. 189-AR; p. 190-AL, BL; p. 192-BL; p. 198; p. 200-AR; p. 209; p. 219; p. 220-AL, AR; p. 230-AL; p. 233; p. 234-AR; p. 236-BL; p. 240; p. 242-AL, R; p. 243; p. 248; p. 254-AL, BR; p. 255-AL, BL, R; p. 256; p. 257; p. 260-AL; p. 261-BL, BR; p. 274-AR, BR; p. 293-AL, BR; p. 294-BR; p. 296-BL, BR; p. 304-BL, AR, BR; p. 305-L; p. 311-AL; p. 320; p. 327-L, BR; p. 340; p. 341-AR, BR; p. 342-BL; p. 344-BR; p. 384-BR; p. 401-AR, BR; p. 412-BL, AR; p. 419; p. 464-L; Back Cover-AL.

Sheffield Park, Uckfield, East Sussex:
https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/sussex/sheffield-park-and-garden
p. 62-AR; p. 63-BR; p. 85-AR; p. 86-AL, BL; p. 87-AL; p. 88-AR. BR, BR; p. 89-BL, BR.

Sir Harold Hillier Gardens, Ampfield, Romsey:
https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/hilliergardens
p. 35; p. 38; p. 39-R; p. 40-AL; p. 42-L; p. 45-AL; p. 47; p. 54; p. 55-AR, BL, BR; p. 56-AL; p. 60-L; p. 61; p. 623-AL, AR, BL; p. 64-BL; p. 65-AL, BL; p. 68-BR; p. 69; p. 74-BL; p. 75-AL, AR; p. 80; p. 81-BL; p. 85-AL, BR; p. 86-AR; p. 97-BL; p. 105-AL, BL, R; p. 107-BR; p. 108-AR, BR; p. 109-AL, BL; p. 110-BR; p. 111-AL, BL; p. 112; p. 114-AR, BL;, BR; p. 116; p. 117; p. 118-BL, R; p. 119-BL, R; p. 120; p. 122-R; p. 124-BL, BR; p. 125-AL, AR, BL, BR; p. 126-L; p. 127; p. 128-AL, BL; p. 132-AR, BL; p. 133; p. 136-AR, BR; p. 160-B; p. 163-AR, BR; p. 166-L; p. 167; p. 171-BR; p. 190-R; p. 192-BR; p. 202-AR; p. 208; p. 226; p. 227; p. 237; p. 254-BL; p. 279; p. 321; p. 334-BL; p. 335-L, BR; p. 336; p. 337; p. 342-AL; p. 344-AR; p. 358; p. 359; p. 388; p. 390-AR, BR; p. 408-AR; p. 409-L; p. 413-BL; p. 428; p. 429-AR, BR; p. 435-AR; p. 438-AL, BL; Back Cover-BL.

Louis de Smet 1881 Nursery Catalogue:
p. 84-inset - the catalogue image was posted online and is used herein courtesy of the Antiquariaat Jan Meemelink website in the Netherlands, although this appears to no longer be functional.

Spektrum der Wissenschaft Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Tiergartenstraße 15-17, 69121 Heidelberg:
https://www.spektrum.de/lexikon/biologie/renner-otto/56246
p. 28-AR - Otto Renner, posted online and courtesy of Spektrum.de.

Telegraph Media Group Limited 2004:
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/4292138/Edmund-de-Rothschild.html
p. 20-BR - Edmund de Rothschild, photograph courtesy of The Telegraph Online.

University of Glasgow, Our Heritage:
https://www.universitystory.gla.ac.uk/
p. 22-ARL - Isaac Bayley Balfour.

Valley Gardens, Windsor Great Park:
https://www.windsorgreatpark.co.uk/en/experiences/the-valley-gardens
p. 31-BR; p. 78-AR; p. 110-BL; p. 136-BL; p. 142-BR; p. 152-AL, AR; p. 165-AL, BL, BR; p. 170-BL, AR; p. 193; p. 260-AR, BL; p. 262-AL; p. 270-AL, AR; p. 271-BL, BR; p. 280; p. 311-AR, BL; p. 312; p. 313; p. 343-L; p. 344-BL; p. 348-BR; p. 361-AR, BR; p. 420-AL, AR; p. 439-AR, BR.

Donald H. Voss:
http://donaldhyatt.com/RobinHills/history.html
p. 292-AR - Robert Derby Gartrell, photo posted on *The Robin Hill Azaleas* website, hosted by Don Hyatt and written by Donald Voss.

Charles Vuylsteke (1844-1927):
p. 73-L - the 1995 Marc de Brujin bronze bust of Charles Vuylsteke, set in the municipal park at Lochristi, posted online and courtesy of the Onze-Vlaamse-Regio website, though this appears to no longer be functional; p. 84-BC - the 1995 Marc de Brujin bronze bust of Charles Vuylsteke, set in the municipal park at Lochristi, posted online and courtesy of the Waasland Tourist Information website, but again, this appears to no longer be functional.

G. Donald Waterer:
p. 13-BR - the original plant of R. 'Pink Pearl' around 1890, and Charlie Rose, the Bagshot nurseryman entrusted with its care, photograph reproduced in *The Rhododendron Story,* edited by Cynthia Postan, and published by the Royal Horticulture Society, in 1996; p. 101-AL - Anthony Waterer Senior, on the main drive at Knap Hill, *c.* 1895, image published in *Nurserymen to the World,* by E.J. Wilson, 1989; p. 101-AC - Anthony Waterer Junior (far right), on the Rhododendron Walk at Knap Hill, image published in *Nurserymen to the World,* by E.J. Wilson, 1989; p. 103-AR - Gomer Waterer (far right), at a John Waterer & Sons exhibition at Regent's Park, before 1914, image published in *Nurserymen to the World,* by E.J. Wilson, 1989. All reproduced herein courtesy of Donald Waterer.

WKSU Public Service Radio:
https://www.wksu.org/news/feature/exploradio/39487
p. 20-AL - David Goheen Leach, photographed by Jeff St. Clair.

Index of Plants:

Azaleodendrons:

Broughtonii Aureum 45
Fragrans 34
Galloper Light 45
Gemmiferum 40
Glory of Littleworth 40
Gowenianum 37
Hardijzer Beauty 40
Martha Isaacson 45
Odoratum 34
Smithii Aureum 45
Torlonianum 39

Deciduous Azaleas:

Adriaan Koster 74
Aida 85
Albacore 104
Alice de Stuers 74
Altaclerense 74
Annabella 104
Anneke 156
Apelles 85
Arctic Regent 142
Ariadne 85
Arneson Gem 104
Aurantiacum 55
Aurora 105
Avon 105
Ballerina 105
Basilisk 106
Bartholo Lazzari 56
Beaulieu 107
Beaulieu Manor 142
Ben Lomond 159
Berryrose 107
Brazil 107
Bridesmaid 92
Bright Forecast 107
Bright Straw 108
Buzzard 108
Calder 108
Canasta 108
Cecile 109
Cézanne 142
Choptank River Traveller 160
Christopher Wren 74
Citroen 143
Clarice 109
Coccineum Speciosum 57
Cockatoo 109
Colin Kenrick 110
Comte De Gomer 75
Comte De Papadopoli 75
Corneille 85
Coronation Lady 110
Corot 143
Croceum Tricolor 59
Crown Supreme 144
Daviesii 60
Dawn's Chorus 110
Dawn's Glory 143
Delectable 146
Delicatissimum 94
Devon 110
Diorama 161
Doctor M. Oosthoek 75
Don Quixote 148
Dracula 111
Drury Lane 139
Edison 62
Edwina Mountbatten 111
Eisenhower 111
Elsie Pratt 162
Embley Crimson 163
Emile 62
Exbury Salmon-Orange 111
Exquisitum 96
Fénelon 86
Fireball 112
Florodora 75
Frans Van Der Bom 76
Freya 86
Frills 113
Frilly Lemon 114
Frome 114
Gallipoli 114
Gauche 143
Gena Mae 164
General Trauff 63
George Reynolds 114
Gibraltar 115
Ginger 116
Gold Dust 117
Golden Eagle 118
Golden flare 165
Golden Horn 118
Golden Lights 166
Golden Oriole 118
Golden Sunset 119
Grandeur Triomphante 63
Guelder Rose 63
H H Hunnewell 119
Homebush 119
Hora 86
Hotspur 120
Hortulanus H. Witte 76
Hugo Hardijzer 76
Igneum Novum 64
Il Tasso 86
Invincible 149
Irene Koster 98
Janet Baker 122
Josephine Klinger 65
Kathleen 122
Kestrel 122
Klondyke 123
Knap Hill Apricot 124
Koningin Emma 76
Koster's Brilliant Red 77
Lapwing 124
Le Havre 150
Lemonora 78
Madame Bovary 151
Maja 63
Marion Merriman 125
Mary Poppins 169
Mécène 87
Milton 87
Mrs L. J. Endtz 79
Mrs Oliver Slocock 81
Murillo 87
Narcissiflorum 67
Norma 87
Orange Truffles 125
Oregon Trail 152
Orpheus 68
Oxydol 125
Persil 126
Phébé 88
Phidias 88
Pink Delight 128
Praxitèle 88
Quentin Metsys 88
Racine 89
Raphael de Smet 89
Rousseau 154
Royal Command 128
Royal Lodge 128
Satan 128
Scarlet Pimpernel 130
Silver Slipper 132
Silverwood 170
Spek's Orange 82
Strawberry Ice 132
Sunte Nectarine 134
Superbum 97
Sword of State 152
Sylphides 136
Teniers 89
Tinsmith 152
Toucan 136
Tunis 137
Umpqua Queen 136
Velasquez 89
Westminster 97
White Lights 171
White Swan 136
Willem III 68

Evergreen Azaleas:

Addy Wery 186
Adonis 186
Adorable 254
Advance 254
Aizen-no-tsuki 218
Ambrosia 254
Amoenum 186
Angelus 254
Asahiryn 187
Atalanta 226
Audrey Wynniatt 230
Autumn Glow 283
Aya-kanmuri 187
Azuma-kagami 187
Banzai 188
Beattie 284
Bengal Beauty 300
Bengal Fire 228
Beni-fude 189
Betty 230
Blaauw's Pink 189
Blue Danube 231
Bride’s Bouquet 255
Buccaneer 256
Campfire 278
Chanticleer 258

Christina 294
Colleen 260
Commodore 260
Crinoline 260
Dear Grandad 285
Diamant Pink 274
Diamant Indigo 275
Diamant Rosy Red 276
Diamant Rot 277
Diamond Lavender Brilliant 274
Early Beni 292
Eddy 233
Elsie Lee 301
Esmeralda 189
Elizabeth 260
Eucharis 261
Eureka 189
Evelyn Hyde 285
Everest 261
Fawn 261
Fedora 236
Gaiety 262
Geisha Blue 272
Geisha Lilac 272
George Hyde 285
Gosho-zakura 219
Greta 292
Gretchen 236
Gumpo Fancy 220
Gumpo Pink 220
Gumpo White 220
Hachmann’s Rokoko 302
Hana-asobi 190
Harbinger 262
Hatsu-giri 190
Hershey’s Red 304
Hikkasen 192
Hino-crimson 192
Hinodegiri 192
Hinode-no-taka 192
Hinomayo 193
Hydie 288
Ima-shojo 196
Ima-zuma 197
Ivette 236
Iwatokagami 198
Jeanette 236
Johann Strauss 237
John Cairns 238
Kathleen 240
Kirin 199
Kiritsubo 200
Kogetsu 220
Kojo-no-odorikaraka 200
Kokinran 200
Lily Marleen 295
Louise 241
Louise Dowdle 262
Lullaby 262
Mahler 296
Malvaticum 201
Margaret George 305
Margot 306
Marie 242
Martha Hitchcock 264
Matsuyo 221
Maxwellii 308
Merlin 266
Midori-no-tsuki 222
Mother's Day 202
Mucronatum309
Nancy of Robin Hill 293
Naomi 242
Niagara 268
Novelty 270
Old Faithful 279
Opossum 314
Orange Beauty 242
Palestrina 244
Pekoe 248
Pine Marten 315
Pooh-Bah 316
Prins Bernhard 296
Prinses Juliana 296
Psyche 203
Rankyoken 204
Rashomon 206
Robin Hill Frosty 293
Robin Hill Gillie 293
Rosebud 280
Rosemary Hyde 289
Salmon Beauty 206
Satrap 270
Satschiko 273
Seikai 206
Sherbrooke 293
Shinnyo-no-hikari 222
Shiryu-no-homare 223
Silver Fountain 290
Silver Moon 270
Sir William Lawrence 249
Stewartstonian 281
Takasago 207
Tebotan318
Valentine Surprise 291
Vespers 270
Vida Brown 208
Viking 271
Vuyk’s Rosyred 297
Vuyk’s Scarlet 298
Witchery 271
Yamoto-no-tsuki 223
Yaye 223
Yoro-zuyo 209

Lepidote Hybrids:

Alison Johnstone 324
Anna Baldsiefen 326
Apricot Lady Chamberlain 391
April Chimes 327
Arctic Tern 328
Ashcombe 332
Augfast 334
Azurika 334
Biskra 335
Blue Chip 384
Blue Diamond 338
Blue Tit 340
Bluebird 344
Bo-peep 345
Brambling 346
Bric-à-brac 346
Chiffchaff 347
Chink 348
Chrysomanicum 350
Cilpinense 352
Cinnkeys 356
Crane 377
Cream Crest 360
Crossbill 361
Curlew 362
Dora Amateis 364
Duchess of Sutherland 366
Egret 367
Eleanore 368
Electra 369
Elena 372
Emasculum 418
Euan Cox 373
Exbury Lady Chamberlain 388
Fragrantissimum 447
Ginny Gee 376
Harry Tagg 380
Hethersett 435
Hydon Mist 384
Intrifast 385
Lady Alice Fitzwilliam 447
Lady Berry 386
Lady Chamberlain 388
Lady Rosebery 389
Lady Rosebery Dalmeny 390
Lady Rosebery Etna 391
Laerdal 392
Lindcil 393
Lochinch Spinbur 456
May’s Lemon 394
Merganser 395
Mozari 396
Muncaster Bells 398
Night Sky 400
Olga Mezitt 401
Patty Bee 402
Perseverance 404
Phalarope 408
Pink Gin 410
Pintail 412
Polycinn 413
Polyroy 413
Praecox 416
Princess Alice 422
Princess Anne 424
Prostigiatum 426
Quaver 427
Quiver 428
Radmosum 430
Ramapo 431
Razorbill 432
Rose Mangles 434
Russautinii 438
Ruth Lyons 439
R. W. Rye 440
Saffron Queen 442
Saint Breward 342
Saint Tudy 343
Salmon Trout 391
Sapphire 444

Sarled	445
Sesterianum	446
Seta	450
Shamrock	452
Snipe	408
Songbird	454
Songster	454
Spinbur	456
Too Bee	460
Tree Creeper	458
Wee Bee	460
Wren	462
Yellow Hammer	464
Yunncinn	468

About the author:



Julian Taylor-Whall was born in Lowestoft at the end of November, 1957. He received a grammar school education before beginning a three-decades-long career with the BBC at Television Centre in West London. During that time he worked on many of the now classic shows made in the production facilities there, the studios at Lime Grove and Elstree, and at the Television Theatre. He retired early in 2008, moving to a small village in West Cumbria, just outside the Lake District National Park.

Twenty years earlier, in late April 1988, on a day when the hills of Torridon and Applecross were hidden in cloud, a visit to the nearby Inverewe Gardens offered an alternative distraction. By chance, it took place at the peak of the flowering season, during a particularly profligate year for bloom, and turned into an encounter never to be forgotten. Thus did the species and hybrids of Genus *Rhododendron* become yet another enduring passion, along with music, film, photography, and concocting the occasional science fiction novel.

- above -
Observed in the woodland at Muncaster,
any resemblance to the author is emphatically denied.

- back cover -

R. ‘Iwatokagami’	R. ‘Euan Cox’
R. ‘Sunte Nectarine’	R. ‘Hardijzer Beauty’







