

New Azalea Species Discovered in South Carolina

[Article compiled from information from Mike Creel and the cited publication, Ed.]

With the publication, in late 1999, of the description of *Rhododendron eastmanii* by Dr. Kathleen Kron and Mike Creel in the Missouri Botanical Garden's NOVON, a completely new azalea species was added to the annals of azalea knowledge. The abstract of this article states:

A new species of deciduous azalea, *Rhododendron eastmanii*, has been discovered in South Carolina, U.S.A. This azalea can be distinguished from the other members of *Rhododendron* sect. *Pentanthera* by its distinctive morphology, flowering time, and fragrance. It is presently known only from Orangeburg and Richland Counties in South Carolina.

The common name of the species is May White. It prefers near-neutral soils, blooms in mid-May with leaves fully expanded, has extreme fragrance that carries quite a distance — equaling or exceeding that of tea olive — more intense than other east coast species, but is not stoloniferous.

The Alabama Azalea, *R. alabamense*, appears to be the same color — white with a yellow blotch — but blooms much earlier and before the leaves are fully expanded or with the expanding leaves. It is usually stoloniferous and has a sweet moderate fragrance. It seems to have no preference for neutral or circumneutral (near-neutral) soils.

Before the discovery and describing of *R. eastmanii* (from Richland and Orangeburg Counties), any white azalea with yellow blotch in South Carolina was identified “mistakenly” as *R. alabamense*. This might be the case on near-neutral sites and soils in other states, Tennessee for example. Mike Creel does not believe there are any Alabama azaleas indigenous to South Carolina, but rather, that those mistakenly called Alabama azaleas in Newberry, Fairfield, Calhoun, Hampton, Dorchester and Berkeley Counties are in reality the lime-loving May White. A study is underway in South Carolina of plant species of federal concern in calcareous and chert formations of the South Carolina coastal plain. *R. eastmanii* is one of the nine target species that state botanists are seeking. A number of new sites seem to offer great potential for the new azalea species having established populations there.

Creel provided this easy-to-use identification scheme for recognizing May Whites in the field: Bloom time (mid-May), state of leaf emergence (fully expanded), soil pH (circumneutral), fragrance (extreme), and habit (non-stoloniferous), are the best immediate determinants. However, if you are working with herbarium specimens some additional technical indicators are needed.

Kron and Creel are co-authoring an article to appear in a forthcoming *Journal*

American Rhododendron Society on this new azalea species. Again from the NOVON article, there is a reference to a strategy to protect such limited populations, since one of the two known sites of occurrence is threatened by urban development: “To discourage inappropriate collection by azalea enthusiasts, Mike Creel is developing a collection of rooted cuttings and select seedlings that will be introduced to the public through nurseries in the near future.” When this happy day arrives, THE AZALEAN will announce the particulars.

Why is the azalea's species epithet *eastmanii*? Because South Carolina highway engineer Charles Eastman noticed the first of the two populations when out working on a new right-of-way for Highway 20. The azalea's typical peak bloom time is around May 10, the new South Carolina state holiday of Confederate Memorial Day.

Further Reading

Kron, Kathleen A. and Mike Creel, 1999. “A New Species of Deciduous Azalea (*Rhododendron* section *Pentanthera*; Ericaceae) from South Carolina. NOVON: *A Journal of Botanical Nomenclature*. 9(3): 377-380. [This article contains detailed botanical drawings to aid in precise identification. The journal is published by the Missouri Botanical Garden, Ed.]

Azalea Calendar

July 9: Annual cutting exchange, Northern Virginia Chapter. Contact: Frances Louer, 703-754-2824 or louerp@gte.net.

July 9: Annual cutting exchange and picnic, Ben Morrison Chapter. Contact: Joe Miller, 301-862-4936 or pscsm@olg.com.

August 27: Annual plant auction, Northern Virginia Chapter. Contact: Frances Louer, 703-754-2824 or louerp@gte.net.

September 7-9: 3rd International Symposium on Japanese Gardens at the Montreal Botanical Garden, organized in cooperation with the International Association of Japanese Gardens, Inc., the Garden Society of Japan, and the Japanese Garden and Pavilion Foundation. The Montreal Botanical Garden is the site of a 10-year-old Japanese garden created by Ken Nakajima. Worldwide experts will be speaking. Contacts: Marie-Andree Camirand, 514-872-0607 (for brochure and to register), or go to website: www.ville.montreal.qc.ca/jardin/en/japonais/symposium.htm.