

# Book Review: *Satsuki Azaleas* by Robert Callaham

Bob Stelloh — Hendersonville, North Carolina

Callaham, Robert Z. 2006. *Satsuki Azaleas for Bonsai and Azalea Enthusiasts*. Passumpsic, Vermont: Stone Lantern Publishing. 233 pages. Paperback. ISBN: 0-9767550-1-7.

Bob Callaham is good at collecting information. In *Satsuki Azaleas* he has collected a potpourri of descriptive information about Satsuki azaleas and techniques for growing, training, and displaying them as bonsai. Although the book is flawed by non-standard conventions, unusual organization, a lack of careful editing, and a lack of reader-friendly formatting, overall it is a good collection of Satsuki information. While much of the book discusses bonsai techniques related to Satsuki, this review focuses on the information provided about azaleas.

About half of the book's 233 pages include descriptions of bonsai techniques and explanations of Satsuki terminology for flower size, color, color patterns, forms, and leaf descriptions, along with a comparative description of Satsuki bloom time. The other half is detailed descriptions of 1,691 different Satsuki azaleas. The descriptions include information from the various sources mentioned below.

Since much of the literature covering *Satsuki azaleas* is written in Japanese, it is not readily available to Westerners. Other Satsuki information appears in a number of other sources. By compiling and presenting information from many of these sources, and augmenting it with Callaham's own experience and observation of Satsuki azalea bonsai, *Satsuki Azaleas* makes a significant contribution to Satsuki literature. The major sources include transla-

tion by Koso Takemoto of material from the 1992 *Satsuki Dictionary* and two other Japanese sources; translation by Tatemori Gondo of material from the 1997 *Satsuki Dictionary*; and excerpts from *The Brocade Pillow* by Ito Ihei, *The Azalea Book* by F. P. Lee, *Azaleas* by Fred Galle, *The Azalean* articles by Jim Trumbly, and Nuccio Nurseries catalogs.

The newspaper columnist James Kilpatrick once observed, "Half the writer's art consists of not letting the reader stumble." The book falls short here, due to the intermixture of bonsai techniques and azalea information; an inconsistent treatment of chapter headings and subheadings both in the text and the table of contents; insufficient editing; and the non-standard naming, color, and formatting conventions used.

Perhaps the most important of these is the naming convention, wherein the author forsakes the carefully considered and well documented standards required by the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* and sometimes uses his own spacing, capitalization, and punctuation to, in his words "...ease the reading, understanding, and pronouncing of lengthy names of cultivars." This adds to the already confused state of Satsuki nomenclature by resulting in, for example, 'Waka Ebisu' rather than the accepted name 'Wakaebisu'.

Another departure from carefully established convention is color nomenclature. Here, Bob mentions "...I transformed reddish orange to orangish red, purplish red to reddish purple, etc." and later, "...dark blotch was changed to strong blotch, dark red to deep red, darker pink to deep-

er pink, etc. For these reasons, words attributed to an author may differ slightly from the original."

The lack of careful editing is evidenced by a few blank pages; duplication of a few paragraphs, tables and images; some spelling, spacing, punctuation and grammatical errors; and inconsistent formatting of chapter headings and subheadings. The

## 212 | Cultivar Descriptions

Waka Ebisu [young goddess] (parentage unknown: TG; its white jiai sport is Shiro Ebisu: RZC): deep yellowish pink with deep pink dots in (prominent: RZC) blotch, (slight green throat: RZC); lobes rounded, (two-ranked, slightly wavy: RZC); flowers hose-in-hose (see 2<sup>nd</sup> image below)(Galle 208); 2-2.5 in.; (3 in.: RZC; early:-Watanabe, midseason to late; leaves broader toward tip, not shiny: RZC); popular landscape and container plant. (Galle) Flowers futae, leaves small, round: TG. (Rokkaku'79a 477; '79b 154; '83 872; '92 810; Watanabe'04 541)



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inconsistent formatting makes it hard to notice the major subject has changed until you realize it from the text—that's a stumble.

The book uses different font faces and sizes to attribute text to different sources, and for other purposes. This makes the descriptions "busy" (see example on previous page) and more difficult to decipher, compounded by having described the formatting conventions on page 15, when the cultivar descriptions begin on page 117. As an example of the "other purposes," I wondered why some cultivar names are shown in all capital letters beginning on page 17 (a stumble!). Eventually, a footnote on page 117 explains that these cultivars may be available from Nuccio Nurseries.

Information about historical use of Satsuki in Japan, use and care of Satsuki in the garden, and proper selection of the stems to be cut for propagation—a particularly important topic for Satsuki—would make a more complete book on Satsuki.

On the plus side of the ledger, *Satsuki Azaleas* collects a wealth of Satsuki information into one book. Most useful to Satsuki fanciers are the descriptions for 1,691 Satsuki, including Callaham's descriptions of the 96 new pictures in the 2004 *Satsuki Dictionary*. While an accurate and complete description is best—but not yet available anywhere for most azaleas—the next best is to know when there are differing descriptions for the same cultivar. This book does that well, by presenting the sometimes conflicting descriptive detail from different sources as they occur. About 150 of the descriptions are augmented with small color pictures, which are much more useful than text to show the subtle details of flower color, color patterns, and form that distinguish many of the Satsuki cultivars from each other.

Other parts of the book of interest to Satsuki enthusiasts include a detailed and well-illustrated discus-

sion of Japanese terms for flower form; a similar discussion of leaves with a table of the 37 cultivars with *rinpu* (rolled) leaves and a table of the 13 cultivars with variegated leaves; a discussion of color patterns; and a discussion, table, and extensive appendix about Satsuki bloom time from different sources. And the descriptions and many pictures of bonsai techniques are interesting, even if you don't work at creating or maintaining bonsai.

I'm glad I bought my copy of *Satsuki Azaleas*. It is a worthwhile book on Satsuki, and I will probably refer to it more often than some of my other azalea reference books.

*Bob Stelloh is the treasurer and webmaster of the Azalea Society of America. After a career in computer programming, he has interests in color, azalea names and standards, along with gardening and searching out native azaleas.*

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