

Naming My Hybrids-101

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In a previous issue of *The Azalean*, I wrote about my new azalea hybrid collection and submitted names with descriptions. This article will deal with the naming process and filling out the application for name registration. Most of us have given names to some of our hybrids without really thinking about how this may confuse or even conflict with the standards as defined by the International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) for Rhododendron, which are administered in North America by the Registrar of Plant Names for the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), Mrs. Jay Murray, here in the United States.

Be Selective First

Before we dive into the basic standards, I encourage a look at what we propose to name. There are thousands of named cultivars, and a large number have never been officially registered. Too often our enthusiasm or love of one or more of our hybrids or a selected native specimen plant overwhelms the need to look at each plant objectively to see if it really is a superior plant. There are many great plants in the trade, but there are also many that should never have been introduced or named.

Recently I dug and destroyed 15 of my evergreen hybrids, because they all developed a high susceptibility to azalea petal blight, *Ovulinia azaleae*. Two of those plants I was hoping to name and introduce for their very low, mounding growth habit, small leaves, and very nice large flowers of copper-red. It was with a tear in my eye that I watched the fire consume them, but this was the right thing to do.

Okay, enough sentimentality, so I have developed, grown, tested, and evaluated an azalea for perhaps 10 to 20 years, and now I think it is worthwhile to introduce, so what is the process for registering the name? It can be simple or difficult, depending upon my skill level in interpreting the instructions and application. The instruction sheet and application are accessible through the American Rhododendron Society Web site and downloadable as Adobe Reader pdf files (1), or may be requested from the Registrar by mail (2).

Be Careful with Naming

Before I select a name, I must first do some homework. I write down a list of perhaps ten names that seem to fit my azalea. I look in all the reference material available to me such as *Azaleas*, by Fred C. Galle; *The Azalea Book*, by Frederic P. Lee; and, *The International Rhododendron Register and Checklist*, Second Edition (if you can locate a copy), to see if the name or names have been used before. Keep in mind that plant names must meet the requirements of the *International Code of Nomenclature for*

Cultivated Plants. Acceptance and approval is subject to the decision of the International Registrar.

I ran afoul with one name I wanted to use, because it contained a species name, so I had to change it from 'Cumberland Rose' to 'Cumberland Cheer'. Another name I wanted to use was already registered, so another change was needed, but two out of 15 was not bad for a first try.

Filling in the Application

Once I had the instructions and applications in hand, I studied them carefully to see what information was required. This makes some interesting reading on the cold winter days when my azaleas are sleeping. It is necessary so that I may plan when to start collecting the data as the selected azalea starts to leaf out and bloom. It will be too late after the azalea is past bloom, or the blooms have peaked and are declining.

"Planning is for dullards" is not a standard to be applied here, but often, nature will play tricks on me. In 2003, I was hoping to write the descriptions, but we had one of the most overcast months of June in years with a resulting color shift in the blooms: All the colors shifted down from the usual vibrant colors to something near pastels, or as I call them, "sherbet colors." Since any photographs I would take under these conditions would not represent the true standard colors, 2004 would be the next opportunity to capture the beauty of the blooms.

In June of 2004, I went a little crazy taking photographs and forgot I also needed to write down the information required for the descriptions. Call it an embarrassing senior moment or whatever, but things were delayed another year with only a little amount of information written. My copy of the RHS Colour Chart would stay in its protective box until 2005.

For the details of what information is requested, please get the instruction sheet and application form, but here are just samples of items to supply:

- Shape of typical flower trusses-five choices
- Leaf shapes-15 choices
- Leaf colors
- Leaf measurements
- Flower shape—from 10 choices, each requiring a description of the flowers and their color(s)
- Corolla (flower) measurements

All of these are illustrated in the instructions with information on selection. Sending in a photograph is helpful to assist the Registrar in judging the accuracy of the written descriptions.

I must also include what type of azalea mine is, ever-green or deciduous, the date it was hybridized or collected, the date it was grown to first full flower, the date it was named, and with each registration application my name and address. There is a check box to indicate if the plant was grown from an ARS Seed Exchange Packet. Other data requested is the date and where any written description was published previously, by whom it is sold, and if photographs are available. I chose to send Mrs. Murray a copy of a CD-R with the digital photographic (jpg) files.

The application instruction sheet has illustrations that do help in identifying the various flower parts and how to measure them. A 10-X hand lens helps to see leaf hairs, hairs on the flower parts, and glands if present. Measurements may be given in English or metric units, but stick with one throughout the description. When it comes to giving the cold hardiness of the flower buds and the shrub, you may use the Fahrenheit or Celsius scales. Height and habit of the azalea shrub must be entered, and the expected age at which it would (or did) reach those dimensions.

At the end of the application, you may write in special characteristics of the azalea that may be important. The main object is to give the Registrar as much detail as possible in the limited space. If you happen to be more adventurous than me and you run out of room, attach a separate sheet. I chose to resurrect my old Royal 470 typewriter since my handwriting is not all that good, and the numerous applications of correction fluid almost embarrassed me. It is surprising how different a computer keyboard is from a typewriter. Perhaps I will upgrade my computer Adobe programs and be able to type directly into a pdf form page.

Color Designation

One of the most important factors in judging flowering plants is the color name used in the descriptions. The current standards are the Royal Horticultural Society Colour Charts (RHSC, 3) and the Inter-Society Color Council-National Bureau of Standards (ISCC-NBS). Both of these present some interesting problems, and we are very fortunate to have Don Voss and others willing to assist in the color-naming process. If you can locate a copy of the book, *A Contribution Toward Standardization of Color Names in Horticulture*, by Robert D. Huse and Kenneth L. Kelly, edited by Donald H. Voss, 1984, it has the conversion charts from the RHS numbers to the ISCC-NBS color names.

My article in the Summer 2005 issue of *The Azalean* was edited by Barbara Stump and Don Voss, and he inserted the ISCC-NBS color names for clarity. We all felt this was necessary, because the RHS Colour sheet names would have no meaning. You would think 'pink' is clear enough, but the charts have pink under the group name of Red-Purple, and I think most readers would be scratching their heads trying to figure out what that means. Don inserted Light Purplish Pink before the RHSC Number 68D that makes it clear.

The RHS Colour Charts are expensive to purchase, but for the serious plant breeder they are necessary. The 2001 edition also presented some major changes from the previous 1995 edition. Because the use of four-color printing process created color patch instability in the red-purple and blue ranges, and to improve the range in the dark purple and orange-red ranges, 76 new color sheets were added that utilize a letter 'N' prefix to designate those colors that are inexact in comparison with the previous color charts. The information booklet with the 2001 RHS Colour Charts states, "Any written references to these [new] colours must include the letter N."

The color chart is formed into 221 sheets, grouped into four fans. Each numbered sheet has a group name, and four color patches A-D. A round hole centered in each patch allows you to compare the color patch with the color of the bloom parts or leaf top and bottom. Use the chart under northern light outside: typical indoor lighting is inappropriate. The fans should always be kept in the box to protect them from fading under full sun.

Conclusion

As you can see, if you intend to name an azalea and register it, do some homework, and then make sure the plant is worthy of a name. A very good friend has put off registering the names of several of his beautiful hybrids simply because he does not want to go to the trouble. I have been successful in convincing him to do it with my help, and I know many gardeners will desire these clones for their gardens. Though the plants are rhododendrons, with some having dinner-plate sized trusses, the process is the same. I just know there are some of you who have a secret plant with wonderful attributes needing a name, so do it and reward the rest of us. You will find many fine people in the ASA willing to help you.

Joe Schild has been an avid grower, propagator, and breeder of azaleas for nearly 35 years. He has owned and operated a niche nursery specializing in the species for over 14 years. Joe is the founding president of the Tennessee Valley Chapter-ARS, and past president of the ASA. He says he is better known as an azalea nut and chases the natives' bloom each year with many fellow enthusiasts. He is a frequent contributor to The Azalean.

References

1. The American Rhododendron Society, Name Registration. URL: <http://www.rhododendron.org/registration.htm>
2. Murray, Jay W. ARS Registrar of Plant Names, 21 Squire Terrace, Colts Neck, NJ 07722; telephone: 732-946-8627; e-mail: arsreg@yahoo.com
3. Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart, 2001. Contact the Royal Horticultural Society, PO Box 313, London, SW1P 2PE. URL: <http://www.rhs.org.uk>
4. Schild Jr., Joseph E. 2005. "New Azaleas with a Cumberland History." *The Azalean*. 27(2): 29-34.