

Six Communities Receive "Azalea City" Designation Since Program Inception

In 2004, the Azalea Society of America launched its "Azalea City" program to recognize municipalities that promote and display azaleas.

Since the inception of the program, six cities have received the "Azalea City" designation: Nacogdoches, TX; McComb, MS; South Gate, CA; Tyler, TX; Palatka, FL; and Houston, TX.

In general, successful applicants for "Azalea City" status have shown a dedication to highlighting azaleas through proclamations for an Azalea Week, festivals, tours, and the prominent display of azaleas in public gardens and landscapes.

The certification is for five years and is contingent upon a continuing azalea emphasis in the community. There is no application fee.

Nacogdoches, Texas

Nacogdoches was the first city in the United States to earn the distinction of "Azalea City of America" by the Azalea Society of America. The East Texas city has also been selected to host the ASA's 2007 annual convention, which will be held March 29 to April 1.

Nacogdoches is home to Texas' largest azalea garden, the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden at Stephen F. Austin State University. With its acres of picturesque blossoms in every imaginable hue, the garden features more than 7,000 evergreen and native azaleas nestled in a loblolly pine forest alongside the historic Lanana Creek. The garden explodes with color in springtime and is the crowning jewel of the city's nationally recognized Azalea Trail which runs March 17-31, 2007.

The eighth annual Azalea Trail features more than 20 miles of self-guided driving routes through the oldest town in Texas, showcasing the flowering shrubs at their peak of color. Special events, including a gardening symposium, floral-design exhibit, photography contest, and plant sale are also planned each weekend during the Azalea Trail.

"The best way to enjoy our city's beautiful azaleas is to drive the designated trails that meander through the city," said Melissa Sanford, executive director of the Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"Along those trails you'll see the pride our residents take in their personal gardens, as well as the beautiful landscaping on the college campus, including the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden which just takes your breath away."

Barbara Stump, the primary designer of the Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden, said the acidic soil of the Deep East Texas piney woods is perfect for growing azaleas. The garden boasts both common and rare varieties, making it



Photo Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau

▲ The Ruby M. Mize Azalea Garden on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches is the largest azalea garden in Texas.

▼ More than 20 miles of driving trails through beautifully manicured residential districts are featured during the annual Azalea Trail in Nacogdoches, Texas.



Photo Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau

one of the most diverse azalea collections in the United States.

"The garden is designed in a naturalistic style to showcase the full range of azalea colors, as well as camellias in the winter, Japanese maple color throughout the year, and more than 1,000 other ornamental trees," Stump said.

For more information about Nacogdoches Azalea Trail events call the Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-888-OLDEST-TOWN or log onto www.visitnacogdoches.org.



Photo: McComb Visitors Bureau

▲ In McComb, Mississippi, area residents light their landscapes during the evening hours to showcase the azaleas.

McComb, Mississippi

Located in southwest Mississippi, McComb was designated an “Azalea City” on March 28, 2005. It was the second city in the United States to receive the designation.

McComb is home of the Pike County Azalea Festival. The two-week event runs from March 19–31, and it is a time honored tradition, according to Carmen Walsh, executive director of the McComb Visitors Bureau.

“Each day of the two week span is jam packed with special activities and events hosted by local businesses, civic groups and private citizens, in celebration of the glory and splendor of our native flora,” said Walsh.

During the festival hundreds of area residents and businesses add lights to their landscapes to showcase the native azaleas during evening hours. Guided bus tours of the lighted azaleas are also offered.

Art is also a major part of the festival. The Pike County Arts Council sponsors a Juried Art Show, and Festive Flower Shows are sponsored by the McComb, Magnolia, and Summit Garden Clubs.

The works of local artists are exhibited at local businesses throughout the festival. On one special evening, the McComb Main Street Association hosts Art A’la Carte to provide visitors with an opportunity to discuss their works with the artists.

Other activities include historic home tours, a 5K run, and golf tournament.

For more information contact the McComb Visitors Bureau at (601) 249-0116.

South Gate, California

The City of South Gate was designated an “Azalea City” on September 20, 2006. In 1965 the city adopted the

azalea as its official flower and implemented an annual Azalea Festival in celebration of the plant.

Now in its 41st year, the festival is a well established community event that attracts residents of all ages. Each year an “Azalea Queen” is chosen from among senior citizens who have demonstrated excellence in community service.

Co-sponsored by the City of South Gate, the event receives support from the Parks & Recreation Department taking advantage of the City’s many outstanding facilities centrally located at South Gate Park. The next Azalea Festival will run from March 18 to March 25 ending with the Azalea Parade.

Tyler, Texas

Designated as an “Azalea City” in January 2007, the City of Tyler has an abundance of unique attractions and events, but one of the most popular is the Annual Azalea and Spring Flower Trail.

The annual celebration features eight miles of beautiful home gardens filled with colorful azaleas, dogwoods, tulips, wisteria and red buds. This year’s event is set for March 16 to April 1.

“Visitors to our city can view these wonderful plants during their peak blooming season and experience the beauty and vibrant colors that only an East Texas spring can provide,” said Justin Turner of the Tyler Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The eight-mile driving tour begins at 500 S. Broadway (Hwy 69/Business Route) and E. Houston St. From there, visitors can follow the posted Azalea Trail signs as they

“This is a great opportunity for young people to learn about our city and all it has to offer the visitor. Many of these young people go on to be great ambassadors for our city.”

—Justin Turner

Tyler Convention & Visitors Bureau

tour one of Tyler’s most attractive residential areas. For the more industrious visitor, walking is a great way to enjoy the trail and allows the opportunity to take pictures.

On each weekend beginning March 16, visitors have the chance to meet the “Azalea Belles,” high school co-eds who serve as official greeters to the beautiful flower city. The “Azalea Belles” are dressed in antebellum style fashion and are available for photographs and to answer questions about the City of Tyler.

“This is a great opportunity for young people to learn about our city and all it has to offer the visitor,” said Turner. “Many of these young people go on to be great ambassadors for our city.”



Photos: Tyler Convention & Visitors Bureau

The Tyler Convention and Visitors Bureau awards prizes in four categories to homeowners along the trail. The awards are Best Display of Azaleas and Spring Flowers, Best Landscaped Yard, Best of Show (a combination of the first two) and the President's Azalea Trail Award. This year awards will be given to homeowners on two trails so there will be two awards in each category, with only one President's Award.

Homes are judged on a number of different qualities such as unique landscape styles, floral display, garden architecture, and use of garden plants. Houses are judged by a committee of Chamber volunteers, and judging takes place the weekend prior to opening day.

Other events include the Azalea Trail Arts and Crafts Fair, Historic Tyler on Tour, McClendon House Tours, Azalea Quilt Show and Sale, Rose City Kiwanis Antique Show and Sale, Apache Belle Spring Show, living history demonstrations, a plant and cut flower sale, and historic home tours.

There are several other events planned for this spring including the Spring Fling Plant Sale, Old School Cruizers Auto Show, Spring Home Garden Tour, and the Four Winds Renaissance Faire. Several public gardens are open during

- ▲ In Tyler, Texas, high school co-eds dress in antebellum style fashion and are available for photographs and to answer questions about the city's Azalea Trail.
- ▼ Tyler's Azalea Trail features eight miles of beautiful home gardens filled with colorful azaleas, dogwoods, tulips, wisteria and red buds.



the early spring for tours such as Ms. Lee's Daffodil Garden, the Tyler Municipal Rose Garden (Azalea Section), and the Ina Brundrett Azalea Garden on the Tyler Jr. College Campus.

Visitors may obtain trail maps and information at the Visitors Information Center located in the Chamber of Commerce, 315 N. Broadway from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. For a complimentary visitors packet please call (800) 235-5712 or visit www.tylerazaleatrail.com.

Palatka, Florida

In January 2007, Palatka, Florida joined the distinguished ranks of "Azalea Cities" as designated by the ASA.

Two events showcase azaleas in Palatka. The 61st Annual Florida Azalea Festival runs March 3 and 4 in historic downtown Palatka. The event features a Shriners' parade, and participants are encouraged to decorate floats with azaleas. Other activities include an antique show, sailboat regatta, dog show, musical entertainment, car show, arts and crafts, fashion show, and barbecue cook-off.

Old-fashioned family fun is featured at the 11th Annual Azalea Days set for March 10 and 11 at the Ravine Gardens State Park near Palatka. Local nurseries sell blooming azaleas and a wide variety of yard plants, and craft vendors provide an array of hand-crafted items. The event also features an art show, educational programs, and musical entertainment.

Wagon tours of the 1.8 mile ravine loop give visitors a close look at some of the 100,000 azaleas in 64 varieties that enliven the park. The blooming azaleas resemble a patchwork quilt blanketing the ravine walls with color.

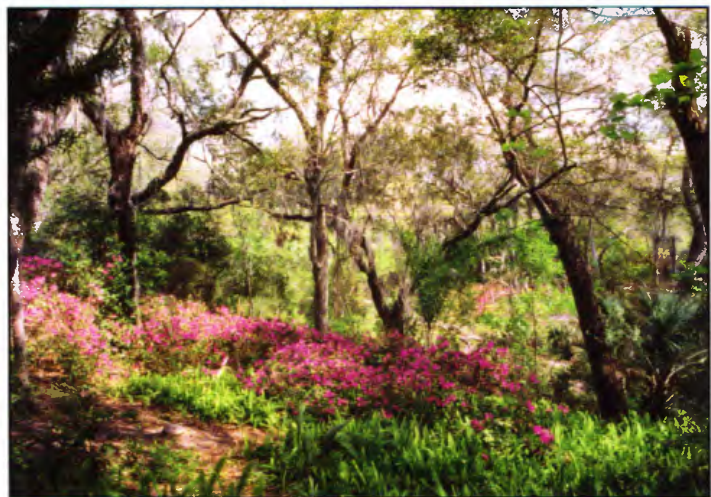
Other Palatka attractions include two historic districts containing 77 properties having historical significance and some 30 outdoor murals depicting the historical, cultural, and natural riches of Palatka. The City is centrally located in Northeast Florida within an hour or so drive from Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Daytona, Orlando, Ocala, and Gainesville.

For information about the Florida Azalea Festival, call (386) 329-0195 or go to www.flazaelafest.com. For information about Azalea Days at Ravine Gardens State Park call (386) 329-3721 or visit www.floridastateparks.org/ravinegardens.

Houston, Texas

Houstonians celebrate the arrival of spring each year with the opening of the Azalea Trail. This year will mark the 72nd annual Azalea Trail hosted by the River Oaks Garden Club. Held the first Friday through Sunday in March (2-4), the trail offers guests seven different homes and gardens to enjoy.

Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, Rienzi, and the Forum of Civics Building are perennial favorites, while the remaining four are private homes and gardens of River Oaks Garden Club members. The trail, with its rich history, has been instrumental in establishing and increasing the popularity of azaleas in the Houston area.



Photos Ravine Gardens State Park

▲ Ravine Garden State Park near Palatka, Florida, hosts the annual Azalea Days celebration.

▼ The park features more than 100,000 azaleas in 64 varieties.



Photos Ravine Gardens State Park

The city eagerly anticipates this annual rite of spring. This year will be especially memorable as it coincides with the Azalea Society of America's designation of the City of Houston as an Azalea City of America, the largest recognized Azalea City in the country. This distinction was the result of the combined efforts of the City of Houston, the River Oaks Garden Club, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Azalea Trail will officially open at 10:45 a.m. on Friday, March 2 with a ribbon cutting at the residential entrance to Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, the early American decorative arts center of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH).

Bayou Bend, with its fourteen acres of beauty, is the largest of the featured gardens. Built in 1927-1928, Bayou Bend offers a combination of formal and natural gardens anchored by azaleas. The gardens are accented with flowering trees, shrubs, and thousands of tulips. Rienzi, the European decorative arts center of the MFAH, is a five-acre estate and garden which showcases azaleas along with many varieties of spring blooming bulbs in naturalized settings.

The Forum of Civics Building, home of the River Oaks Garden Club, features five gardens of different styles, all showcasing the azalea.

In addition, each of the four private homes featured represents different garden and architectural designs offering the best of Houston's estates.

The River Oaks Garden Club also has experts on hand during the event to answer visitor's questions about azaleas and other topics specific to the Houston area. These topics often include local plant ideas, fertilization and watering, and the increasingly popular topic of organic gardening. These experts play a vital role in the educational responsibility that the Garden Club and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, have to the community.

Taking part in the Azalea Trail is a tradition enjoyed by thousands every year. This event helps to educate, enlighten, and entertain Houstonians of all ages about the beauty of the azalea. Houston invites everyone to help welcome in spring at this year's 72nd annual Azalea Trail. Go to www.riveroaksgardenclub.org for hours, ticket prices, and other information.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Houston, Texas

www.riveroaksgardenclub.org

McComb, Mississippi

Ph: (601) 249-0116

Nacogdoches, Texas

Ph: (888) OLDEST-TOWN or
www.visitnacogdoches.org

Palatka, Florida

Ph: (386) 329-0195 or www.flazaelafest.com

South Gate, California

Ph: (323) 563-9502

Tyler, Texas

Ph: (800) 235-5712 or www.tylerazaleatrail.com.

How to Become a Certified Azalea City

One of the principal goals of the Azalea Society of America is to promote the appreciation of azaleas in public and private landscapes. To help achieve that goal, we put an Azalea City program into place in early 2004 to find, recognize, and certify those municipalities that promote and display azaleas as Azalea Society of America Azalea Cities.

We invite you to explore the requirements to be recognized and certified as an official Azalea City. In general, successful applicants for Azalea City status will have shown a dedication to highlighting azaleas through proclamations for an Azalea Week, festivals, tours, and the prominent display of azaleas in public gardens and landscapes.

When you become certified as an Azalea City:

- we will provide you with a news release package appropriate for local media;
- an Azalea Society member will present your representatives with an official certificate suitable for hanging in a prominent location; and
- we will document your certification as an Azalea City in our quarterly journal, *The Azalean*.

You could reasonably expect the certification and accompanying publicity to result in increased tourism. The certification period is for five years, contingent upon a continuing azalea emphasis in your municipality. At this time, there is no fee for application and certification as an Azalea City.

The ASA welcomes all municipalities to apply for official designation as an Azalea City. To aid your

municipality with their application, please carefully read the following guidelines before filling out the application. While we do want you to receive our official designation as an Azalea City, we have certain requirements to qualify. Since we wish any municipality receiving our Azalea City designation to consider it a distinct honor and recognition by a national association, we bestow that designation only after careful consideration of your application.

Each section of the Guidelines correlates to the same section in the application.

Section A: This section requires the legal municipality name, County/Parish, State, mailing address, and the name and title of the application maker.

Section B: In this section, please provide a narrative of how, when, and where your municipality has promoted and/or celebrated Azaleas in public and private spaces over the past three years, or how your municipality is striving to rejuvenate or begin an interest in azaleas, designate a week to celebrate azaleas, plant or re-plant azaleas in public spaces, encourage new interest by the public to use azaleas in their private landscapes, and/or encourage gardens and arboreta to celebrate azaleas. Proof of your narrative is covered in Section C.

Section C: In this section, please itemize and summarize your exhibits of proof. They may be, but are not limited to, copies of Municipal Proclamations, newspaper clippings with source citations, magazine articles, photographs with captions and source citations,

• *Continued on next page.*

and/or any records showing the intent, follow-up and implementation of a municipal program with lasting endeavor. Copies of a taped television or radio interview by a local electronic broadcast media may be used as additional proof. Copies of all your forms of proof must accompany the application.

Section D: In this section give the names and addresses of up to five public or private gardens or arboreta that promote or celebrate azaleas in your municipality in the form of spring festivals, tours, special speakers, plant sales or any other way which offers the appreciation of azaleas.

Section E: To qualify as an official Azalea City, your municipality must have at least three active members in the Azalea Society of America, residing within the corporate limits of your municipality. This qualification is required to ensure the continuing goals of the Society are met and provide a pool of members for an educational basis within your municipality. Our Society Secretary may be able to provide confirmation of current members residing within your municipality to qualify, or you may submit new members to qualify. If you have a municipal library, you may wish to submit that entity as an annual member to ensure the public availability of the ASA Journal, *The Azalean*.

To submit new members in the spaces provided, please enter their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses, the required annual membership fee of \$25 USA by check or USPS Money Order per member, and enclose with the application. Do not send cash. Members receive our quarterly journal, *The Azalean*, the opportunity to attend National Meetings and Conventions, join and/or form local chapters, participate in plant sales, flower shows and enjoy all the benefits of membership. Articles about your special municipal azalea celebration may be offered for publication in *The Azalean*.

Fees and submission: There is no fee for this application or certification as an Azalea City. Electronic applications by fax or E-Mail will not be accepted. All applications and proofs must be sent by US Postal Service mail. Allow 60 to 90 days for a reply on acceptance or denial.

If denied, all materials submitted by you will be held for a period of ninety days, or until we receive your written appeal with additional exhibits of proof, if needed. If accepted, all materials submitted will be placed in permanent records.

Azalea City recognition is for a period of five years and is subject to annual review by the committee and resident members in your municipality. Near the end of the term, you will receive a letter with a re-certification application. This process ensures the ASA that your municipality has an on-going active program of azalea celebration and appreciation.

We encourage you to download, read and understand the Azalea City application at: www.azaleas.org/azaleacity.html. We appreciate your interest, and we look forward to receiving your completed application to arrive for our consideration, and hopefully, for certification.

Old Wives' Tale: Azaleas Have Five Stamens

Don Voss—Vienna, Virginia

The notion that azaleas have five stamens and rhododendrons have ten dates back to Linnaeus. The six Linnean species of *Azalea Pentandra* (five stamens) *Monogynia* (one pistil) are now classified as follows:

Linnean name	Current name
<i>Azalea indica</i> L.	<i>Rhododendron indicum</i> (L.) Sweet
<i>A. pontica</i> L.	<i>R. luteum</i> Sweet
<i>A. lutea</i> L.	<i>R. periclymenoides</i> (Michaux) Shinnery
<i>A. viscosa</i> L.	<i>R. viscosum</i> (L.) Torrey
<i>A. lapponica</i> L.	<i>R. lapponicum</i> (L.) Wahlenberg
<i>A. procumbens</i> L.	<i>Loiseleuria procumbens</i> (L.) Desvaux

This group includes one species of evergreen azalea (*indicum*), three deciduous azaleas, a lepidote rhododendron, and a *Loiseleuria*. It is a poor basis for statements regarding the number of stamens found in azaleas, in particular the evergreen azaleas. The deciduous azaleas (*Rhododendron* subg. *Pentanthera*) have five stamens. But the evergreen azaleas of *Rhododendron* subg. *Tsutsusi* vary in their stamen count. A number of species important in horticulture, together with their stamen counts(1), are listed below:

eriocarpum	c.9
indicum	5
kaempferi	5(-6)
kiusianum	5
macrosepalum	5(-7)
mucronatum	10
nakaharae	10
ripense	10
scabrum	10
simsii	(8-)10
tashiroi	10(-12)
tosaense	5(-10)
yedoense	10

References:

1. Stamen counts from Chamberlain, D.F. and Rae, S.J. 1990. A Revision of *Rhododendron*: IV Subgenus *Tsutsusi*. *Edinb. J. Bot.* 47(2):89-200]