

Hybridizers: Leave Your Legacy

James Thornton—Conyers, Georgia

In his book *Azaleas*, Galle wrote of “Hybridizers and Introducers”: “Horticultural books all too frequently ignore the work of numerous people who have made fine plants available to us.” I would like to amend his statement to say: “Horticultural writers and societies all too frequently ignore the work of numerous people who have made fine plants available to us.”

Galle goes on to write that some of the blame lies with growers for failure to record and register their plants. I agree, but would add that growers also are not making their work known to plant societies.

But wait, I am getting ahead of myself by not letting you know where I’m heading. You see, I recently found that other than Galle’s list, we have no other source of information available to us about our present day azalea hybridizers. In fact, I am afraid, as in the past, hybridizers’ work, records, and plants will fade away; be known only to a few; or, more often than not, be renamed.

I would like to correct this by asking ASA hybridizers to provide information to develop a new list profiling current work. Initially the listing will include information from “active” hybridizers, but in the future, I will also try



Photo Maarten van der Giessen

▲ ‘Spring Fanfare’ (‘Sunbeam’ x (‘Hiawatha’ x *R. austrinum*)) is one of the many deciduous hybrids created, selected, named and documented by Dr. Gene Aromi.



Photo Bob Stelloh

▲ The azalea pictured is the creation of Malcolm Clark. Its name is unknown, but research by Bob Stelloh may someday find it. In the meantime, Bob has labeled it “UTG#1” for one of its parents, ‘Utage-no-hana’, which Malcolm loved to use as a parent plant in his hybridizing program.

▼ The hybrid ‘Sandy Dandy’ is an example of the work in progress by Joe Klimavicz.

▼ This unnamed yellow deciduous hybrid azalea is the work of James Thornton.



Photo Joe Klimavicz



Photo James Thornton

to obtain information from “inactive” hybridizers as well as those who have passed away.

Once the information is compiled, it will be published in *The Azalean* as well as the ASA Web site. The information will be updated periodically.

Here is the information I need to get us started:

Part 1—Biographical Information

Submit your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and ASA chapter affiliation. If you do not have an e-mail address, please submit an address of someone who can relay messages to you.

Include a brief history of why and how long you have been hybridizing, what is your ultimate goal in making crosses, and what are your favorite plants to use in crosses.

Describe your environment. Do you have an operating nursery (wholesale or retail), farm, subdivision lot, greenhouse, or cold frame?

Describe plant disposition. Are plants sold (retail or wholesale), used as donations, distributed through a commercial wholesaler, or tested by an outside organization?

Most importantly, provide custodian information to ensure that your records and plants become a part of the ASA history. Is there someone who is assembling and maintaining your hybridizer information? Are the plants being collected and preserved as a group? It is extremely important that this information is recorded. There are several examples of why I harp on the importance of maintaining a written record of hybridizer work.

One rather sad but true story relates to a well-known hybridizer who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. He no longer remembers he ever had an interest in azaleas. Since no one has data about his plants, his work has been lost.

Another case can be made about the grower of the yellow deciduous plant. At present, no one, other than me, knows anything about its history. That’s because it’s mine! As the saying goes, “Physician heal thyself.” After this article I promise to mend my ways. I will tell you that it is a seedling of ‘Admiral Semmes’ and it is very fragrant.

On the other hand, years ago the late Dr. Gene Aromi and Maarten van der Giessen teamed up to preserve Dr. Aromi’s plants and records. Today his creations live on for us to enjoy.

On an even more positive note, the hybrid ‘Sandy Dandy’ is a good example of the work in progress by Joe Klimavicz. Joe cites his work as fun, and rightly so, but he is no less the professional when growing and selecting hybrids. From the basement to the backyard, on a half-acre subdivision lot, Joe pollinates, propagates and perpetuates his top-of-the-line hybrids. His 99 percent less than the “Klimavicz standard” become throw aways in the dump. No doubt his creations and meticulous records will remain true to their name for a long time and invaluable to all of us.

By the way, ‘Sandy Dandy’ is a cross of ‘Leopold Astrid’

x ‘Girard’s Fuchsia’. It is yellowish-white with yellowish-green blotch, pink center and ruffled single bloom. (Note: Joe is a featured speaker at this year’s convention.)

Having said all of this, I hope it prompts you hybridizers to respond to this survey.

Part Two—Plant Information

Complete the form on the following page, making copies as required to list the plants in your collection. Use the abbreviations shown on the form, such as (E) for evergreen or (D) for deciduous. At minimum, include the plant name or identifier and whether it is being evaluated (EV), is to be registered (TBR), or is already registered (R).

Does this seem like a difficult task? Think about it: Your invaluable work could go by the wayside simply because we, the ASA, didn’t have the data to share with future azaleaphiles.

As Galle said, it took “enormous effort, often frustrating” to make his list. Frankly, I believe it was because the input relied on the response from the hybridizers at the time. Will this happen with today’s growers? I hope not. It’s up to you to leave your legacy.

If you have any questions, please contact me. You may submit your profile by e-mail or regular mail to the following address:

Jim Thornton
884 June Drive
Conyers, GA 30094
Ph: 770-483-1593

E-mail: jimpatsy@comcast.net

The deadline is July 30, 2008. After that time, a list of responders will be published in *The Azalean*. You will be asked to validate data before it is available for use. Images are welcome.

References:

Fred Galle *Azaleas*
James Darden *Great American Azaleas*
<http://www.azaleas.org/azenter.html>
<http://www.azaleas.org/azentersec.html>
<http://www.rhododendron.org/plantregistry.htm>

Acknowledgments:

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Jim Thornton is an occasional contributor to *The Azalean*. He is a co-founder and the first president of the Oconee Chapter. He has served as a director, vice president, and president of the Azalea Society of America. Jim presently is the membership and public relations chair of the Oconee Chapter.

Please fill out one numbered form for each of your plants, following this example:

Plant e r Jubilant I,u m Mrs Carmichael x Willy
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower S 2" m 7 near vivid purplish red (74A)
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 1 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 2 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 3 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 4 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 5 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 6 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 7 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Plant 8 _____ x _____
 Type Status Name/number Habit Height Seed parent Pollen parent

Flower _____
 Form Width Season Zone Color

Please use these standard abbreviations:

Type: evergreen • deciduous • azaleodendron

Status: evaluation • to be registered • registered

Habit: compact • loose • mounding • spreading • creeping • upright

Height: dwarf/groundcover (<1') • low (1'-3') • medium (3'-6') • tall (>6')

Form: single • double • semi-double • hose-in-hose • double hose-in-hose • spider

Season: very early • early • midseason • late • very late

Color: use RHS Colour Chart numbers, and/or NBS-ISCC color names (NBS Spec. Pub. 440 or Galle *Azaleas* p. 43-44)