

The Evergreen Azalea Cultivar ‘Bobbi Gail’

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This article announces the introduction of *Rhododendron* ‘Bobbi Gail’, a 2-1/2 to 2-3/4 inch (6-7 cm), single white azalea with a faint purplish tinge and occasional reddish purple (77B) stripes and sectors. [1] Self-colored flowers (77B) occur but are not common. Usually with two flowers per head, petaloidy is rare, and seven is the usual number of stamens. Stamen filaments are white, the anthers are light brown, and a foliaceous calyx (146D) is present. Sepals are 9/32-11/32 inches (7-9 mm) long and yellowish green (146D) with a slightly darker margin (144A). The color of the spotting in the region of the blotch is variable with age, from grayed-purple (186D) to grayed-orange (164B), and the petals have heavy substance. The leaf shape is elliptic, the apex is acute, the base is cuneate, the margin is entire and the leaf color is green but slightly yellow (137C). In ten years, the plant is 33 inches (84 cm) tall and 54 inches (137 cm) wide.

Origin

In 1947, Ben Morrison, acting director of the U.S. National Arboretum since 1938, initiated the work that was to become known as the Belgian-Glenn Dale hybrids. [2] Morrison’s original plan called for 25 introductions, and he felt this new group would be sufficiently distinctive that they would not conflict with the Glenn Dale clones that were still being introduced. The series of crosses, between an unnamed Belgian-type azalea and several introduced Glenn Dale hybrids, resulted in approximately 1,200 individuals from which only five cultivars were released in 1962.

This story is about B42321-285, one of those candidates that did not survive the evaluation process to be named and introduced as a Belgian-Glenn Dale hybrid. [3] It was

▼ ‘Bobbi Gail’, a previously unnamed Belgian-Glenn Dale hybrid dating back to 1947.



▲ View showing the foliaceous calyx.

▼ Flowers showing typical color and flower form characteristics. Note the uncommon example of petaloidy on the right.



rediscovered by the author in the woods at Glenn Dale in the spring of 1990. The Bell number indicates that it was derived from Florist’s Pink x ‘Treasure’, the same cross from which all of the finalist Belgian-Glenn Dale hybrids were derived. [4]

Other Details

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration meteorological records for the Glenn Dale station indicate that ‘Bobbi Gail’ has survived extreme temperatures as low as -11 degrees F on January 27, 1987 and 18 degrees F on April 1, 1969. [5]

The name ‘Bobbi Gail’ was submitted to Mrs. Jay



▲ Landscape view with a yardstick in the foreground demonstrating "wider-than-tall" plant habit and the "off white with purplish tinge" garden effect.

Murray, North American Registrar of Plant Names, by e-mail on August 10, 2005 to determine that the proposed cultivar name was available and that it conformed. She replied by return e-mail on the same day that it looked good to her and that she would reserve the name. Registration is planned.

'Bobbi Gail' was exhibited for the first time in the 2006 Brookside Gardens Chapter's 27th annual azalea show where it won a blue ribbon for Best-in-Class, a green ribbon for Best-in-Section, and was a finalist for Best-in-Show. It is named for Mrs. James B. McCeney (Bobbi), a family friend who, with her husband Jim, is a long-term member of the Brookside Gardens Chapter of the Azalea Society of America.

For classification purposes, 'Bobbi Gail' should be considered a USDA hybrid.

Introduction and Availability

The formal introduction of 'Bobbi Gail' will take place at the 2008 Tilden Azalea Mart sponsored by the Brookside Gardens chapter of the ASA at 8 a.m., May 10 at the Tilden Middle School, 11211 Old Georgetown Road, Rockville, Maryland. A limited number of plants will be available for purchase at that time.

I give special thanks to Jane Kinzie of Kinzie Farms, Inc., a member of the Brookside Gardens chapter, who performed the propagations for me. While the nursery does not ship, it is well within the "drop-in zone" of the 2009 ASA National Meeting that will be sponsored by the Northern Virginia chapter. For more information on the availability of 'Bobbi Gail', contact the nursery at 301-365-4226 or visit the Kinzie Farms Web site at: www.kinziefarms.com.

Endnotes and Acknowledgments

[1] Royal Horticultural Colour Chart (1986 ed.). London: The Royal Horticultural Society. The color designations used in this article correspond to the 1986 Royal Horticultural Colour Chart produced in association with

the Flower Council of Holland, Leiden, the Netherlands.

- [2] Miller III, William C., The Belgian-Glenn Dale Hybrids, *The Azalean*, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp 33-35, 1984. Recently it has come to light that the crosses were performed by Dr. John Creech in 1947 at Morrison's direction. February 7, 1962 memorandum from Dr. Ackerman (at Glenn Dale) to Dr. Skinner (at the U.S. National Arboretum), it states that Dr. Creech made the crosses "during some of his earlier work at this station in association with B. Y. Morrison."
- [3] A Bell Number was a working number assigned to crosses and a means of individual plant identification utilized prior to naming and the assignment of a plant introduction number. This was the 285th individual from that cross. It was removed from further consideration in 1954 when 44000-series Bell numbers were assigned to plants still under evaluation.
- [4] The author was unsure how to treat the name Florist's Pink as it is not always clear what constitutes a cultivar name. In the Belgian-Glenn Dale article published in *The Azalean* in 1984, Florist's Pink was enclosed in double quotes which at the time seemed to befit its status as a working name but not a cultivar name. In registration papers submitted by the USDA in 1962, Florist's Pink was characterized parenthetically as "unnamed forcing double pink Belgian azalea" without single or double quotes. It should be noted however that 'Treasure', the pollen parent, did not appear in single quotes in the registration papers either. In discussing my concerns with Don Voss, he advised against the use of double quotes since they might be mistaken for single quotes. In summary, Florist's Pink is not an accepted cultivar epithet but is a name of convenience used for an "unnamed forcing double pink Belgian azalea of unknown provenance" that was utilized as a seed parent in Morrison's Belgian-Glenn Dale project.
- [5] Special thanks to Susan E. Bentz, Horticulturist, U.S. National Arboretum, Glenn Dale, and Emily Becker, Assistant State Climatologist, Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Science, University of Maryland, College Park, for their advice and assistance in obtaining and interpreting the Glenn Dale temperature data.
- [6] Special thanks also to Don Voss for his advice and for his assistance in developing a proper description.

William C. Miller III is a recipient of the Society's Distinguished Service Award and the Brookside Gardens Chapter's Frederic P. Lee Commendation. He is a past president of the Brookside Gardens chapter, a former vice president of the Society, a past member of the ASA board of directors, was co-chairman of the ASA's membership committee and chairman of the public information committee, is a long-time ASA member, and is a frequent contributor to *The Azalean*. Recent azalea introductions were 'Brookside Delight' in 2002, 'Landon Pride' in 1997, and 'Seattle White' in 1995.