

# It was a 'Festive' Occasion

William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

I had a good time at the 2015 ASA National Convention that was in Nacogdoches at the end of March. Notwithstanding the 20 hours of driving to get there, I enjoyed seeing my friends, the food was good, the speakers were excellent, the tours were interesting, and the activities were well planned. On top of that, I came away with some really nice plants.

In one of the gardens on the tour (Bill Elliott's garden), there was an azalea bed of "white with stripes" flowers that had attracted a crowd. The question was raised, is it 'Festive' or is it 'Geisha', and how can you tell for sure? No one had a good answer. 'Festive' and 'Geisha' are quite similar, the chances are good that the two have been mixed in the trade more than once over the last 60 years with potentially logarithmic consequences, and at least one nurseryman, who shall remain nameless, opined in Jerry Goodman's back yard in 1986 that he wouldn't have a problem giving someone 'Festive' if they asked for 'Geisha'.

On background, it is worth mentioning that I have two large plants of 'Festive', with which I am quite comfortable. I don't have 'Geisha', so I have had to rely on ASA images and 'Geisha' images provided by Dan Krabill. 'Festive' and 'Geisha' are two of the "white with stripes" Glenn Dale hybrids derived from 'Vittatum', a Southern Indian hybrid. One hundred and eighteen of the Glenn Dale hybrids have 'Vittatum' either as a seed or pollen parent or in the lineage of one of the parents. That means that almost 26% of the 454 Glenn Dale hybrids could carry or express the high variability trait for which 'Vittatum' is recognized. In both cases, the seed parent is 'Vittatum', and Morrison obtained the parent plant from Fruitland Nurseries in Augusta, Georgia in 1928. For a general comparison of 'Festive' and 'Geisha', see Table 1.

The Monograph 20 (revised) description for 'Festive' is: "Erect, somewhat spreading growth, to 6 feet. Leaves medium green, somewhat pointed. Flowers 2 to 2½ inches across, usually 2 to 4 in head, but heads sometimes clus-

tered, pure white with no blotch, freely sanded and occasionally striped with dull rose (between Spinel Red [RHS 58A, strong purplish Red] and Rose Color [RHS 63B, deep purplish Pink/vivid purplish Red]) effect from distance flesh white. Mid-April."

The corresponding description for 'Geisha' is: "Tall, erect to spreading habit, but not over 6 feet. Leaves me-



Photo William C. Miller III

▲ 'Vittatum' (Syn: 'Vittatum Fortunei'), a highly variable Southern Indian hybrid that Morrison acquired from Fruitland Nurseries in 1928. It was Morrison's goal to use it as both a seed and pollen parent with "everything available" to see if striped flowers would appear in the F1 generation.

▼ Table 1. Table showing that 'Geisha' and 'Festive' have only the seed parent in common. [For a discussion of the various numbering systems utilized by the Glenn Dale Station, see Miller, West, and Bullock, *The Azalean*, March 1992, Vol. 14: (1) 9]

Cultivar	Formula (seed parent × pollen parent)	Seed Lot	Bell No. ----- PI No.	White Flower with ... Stripes and Sectors/ Blotch?	Year Selected	Officially Distributed
'Geisha'	'Vittatum' × 'Miyagino'	B13571	B27445 141774	reddish Purple/ Yes, chartreuse	1937	1942
'Festive'	'Vittatum' × 'Ho-oden'	B13558	B32141 141779	purplish Red/ No, not really	1939	1948, 1949



Photo William C. Miller III

▲ 'Festive' (from author's garden, 2015) (L to R) Flowers 1 and 3 are typical white with striped and sectored flowers. Flower 2 is the irregular white margin sport. Flower 4 is the self-colored sport, the color of the stripe, which has been named 'Mike Bullard'. Flower 5 shows a typical white flower with a "sanding." Note the absence of a well defined blotch.

▼ 'Geisha' (from Dan Krabill's garden, 2012) Note the reddish Purple stripe and the well defined chartreuse (yellowish Green) dots in the blotch area.



Photo Dan Krabill

dium green. Flowers abundant, 1½ to 2 inches across, 2 to 4 in head, often massed, white, with chartreuse blotch, flaked and striped with Livid Purple [RHS 79D, moderate reddish Purple]. All self-colored purple branches should be removed."

The official descriptions are useful but they have their limitations. Reported sizes are for ten-year-old plants, and a 40-year-old plant would be considerable larger than six feet. One also has to develop a sense for acceptable cultivar variation in color and flower characteristics from plant to plant, from garden to garden, and from year to year. Viewed another way, your 'Geisha' might not look exactly like my 'Geisha' due to the effect of any of a number of environmental influences.

Sporting is not a well understood phenomenon, and the official descriptions do not report all of the possible color arrangements a 'Vittatum' derivative may present. A "white with stripes" cultivar could produce (1) self-colored white flowers, (2) self-colored flowers the color of the stripe, (3) flowers with irregular white margins, and (4) bordered flowers (a colored border with a white or slightly tinted eye). By far, the most common sport seen on both plants is the self-colored flower the color of the stripe. And, in the case of 'Festive', the Red, self-colored sport has been named 'Mike Bullard', a Pennington hybrid.

Morrison's recommendation to remove self-colored branches had nothing to do with his personal preferences. Some have incorrectly speculated that Morrison didn't like sports. Rather, his suggestion was a practical matter for the benefit of the nurserymen who would be propagating these plants for sale to the public. The early removal of atypical branches, prior to taking cuttings, meant that the resulting



plants would most likely be consistent with the official description. And, it wouldn't be necessary for the nurseryman to grow the new plants on to a size where the sports could be rogued out by inspection.

In conclusion, a side-by-side comparison of self-colored sports (the color of the stripe) would probably make the identification process easier. It fundamentally comes down to one being asked to distinguish purplish-red from reddish-purple, recognizing the acceptable limits of variability. The other diagnostic factor is making a judgment on the organization of the dots in the blotch area. In other words, 'Festive' is purplish Red (or Red) and has no blotch (or not much of one). 'Geisha' is reddish Purple (or Purple) and has a distinctive chartreuse blotch.

With the 'Festive' and 'Geisha' question put to rest, can anyone tell 'Herbert' from 'Purple Splendor'?

## References

1. Undated and unpublished working paper found in the files at the Glenn Dale Plant Introduction Station ("Bell Station") that describes Morrison's extensive evaluation of 'Vittatum' as a seed and pollen parent.
2. West, R. T. and Miller III, W. C., *The Glenn Dale Azaleas - Revised 1996*. The Azalea Works, Bethesda, MD 1996. Available on the Internet at [www.theazaleaworks.com](http://www.theazaleaworks.com).
3. Miller III, W. C. And West, R. T., *The Bell Book: A Companion to Agriculture Monograph 20*. The Azalea Works, Bethesda, MD 1996. Available on the Internet at [www.theazaleaworks.com](http://www.theazaleaworks.com).
4. West, R. T., Miller III, W. C., Bullock, B. L., *The Massed Glenn Dale Azaleas on Mt. Hamilton: A Valuable Collection at the National Arboretum, The Azalean*, March 1992; Vol. 14 (1): 8-13.

**William C. Miller III** is a recipient of the Brookside Gardens Chapter's Frederic P. Lee Commendation (1988), and is twice the recipient of the ASA's Distinguished Service Award (1995 and 2002). He was chairman of the ASA's Glenn Dale Preservation Project, and a co-chairman of Dick West's Ten Oaks Glenn Dale Project. He is past president of the Brookside Gardens chapter, a former vice president of the ASA, a past member of the ASA board of directors, past co-chairman of the ASA's membership committee, past chairman of the ASA's public information committee, a long time ASA member, and a frequent contributor to *The Azalean*.

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Calvin & Linda Hill  
203 Westover Dr.  
Hartsville, SC 29550-8035

### Louisiana

Yan Chen  
21549 Old Covington Highway  
Hammond, LA 70403-0533

Gina Hebert  
21549 Old Covington Highway  
Hammond, LA 70403-0533

Sally LeBourgeois  
4705 Southshore Drive  
Metairie, LA 70002-1432

Jason Stagg  
21549 Old Covington Highway  
Hammond, LA 70403-0533

### Southern California

Tim Walsh  
2050 Irving Drive  
Eureka, CA 95503-7022

### Texas

Robert Thau  
128 FM 254 N  
Jasper, TX 75951

### Vaseyi

Paul & Penny Kahkola  
1423 Bethvale Drive  
Greenback, TN 37742-3441

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