

Today, My Favorite Linwood Hardy Azalea Is....

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This is the second in a series of “favorite azalea” articles. In the lead article, the Glenn Dale ‘Ambrosia’ was featured as my favorite Glenn Dale Hybrid.¹ Picking one azalea from 454 Glenn Dale hybrids was a difficult task. One would think that selecting a favorite from a comparatively small hybrid group would be easier, but that isn’t necessarily so. After considerable thought, I am pleased to report that today my favorite Linwood Hardy azalea is ‘Opal’.



Photo Charles E. Fischer

▲ Figure 1—Mr. Charles William Fischer, Sr. (left) and Dr. Charles W. Fischer, Jr., at a formal event at the flower shop in Atlantic City (since closed) in the 1970s. They are grandfather and father respectively of Mr. Charles Eugene Fischer, President of Fischer Flowers, who is the fifth generation Fischer to head the flower shop that bears their name.

▼ Figure 2—Aerial view of the Fischer Greenhouses at the Oak Avenue location in Linwood, New Jersey, circa 1920s or 1930s. With an estimated 20,000 sq. ft. of growing area under glass, Fischer developed a reputation for azaleas and African violets.



Photo Charles E. Fischer

The Beginning

In 1951, Dr. Charles W. Fischer, Jr. of Fischer Greenhouses, a producer of florist azaleas in Linwood, New Jersey (established in 1876), initiated a project to develop hardy, greenhouse forcing azaleas that could be grown in the field [See Fig. 1].² The cost of maintaining tender plant material in greenhouses over the winter was becoming too expensive. Initial results, however, were disappointing [See Fig. 2]. Three quarters of the seedlings under evaluation were winter killed and the remainder did not meet Fischer standards. In the meantime, in 1953, G(eorge) Albert Reid joined Fischer and took over the project [See Fig. 3]. By 1957, a number of promising candidates had been identified, and by 1959, many double, semi-double, and hose-in-hose forms had been selected. When Reid retired in 1967, Fischer kept those Linwood varieties that best suited the commercial community’s requirements. At this point, Reid took a slightly different tack. Now, Reid’s goal was to produce large flowering, fast growing, long blooming, compact plants that were easily forced, “hardy,” and suitable for use in the landscape. [See Fig. 4]

As a group, the “Linwood Hardies”(as Fischer called them) are described by Galle as “... a heterogeneous conglomeration of azalea crosses including back and sibling crosses” involving Kurume, Kaempferi, and tender forcing varieties.³ The records are incomplete and many of the plants were distributed under number for testing. Many of them were eventually named for family and friends. As far as I know, they all have been registered with the Royal Horticultural Society, or at least they appear in the International Rhododendron Register and Checklist (IRRC).⁴ Galle lists 49 Linwood Hardies, which includes the S series (See Table 1).

Azalean Articles and the ASA Mail List

The first article in *The Azalean* about the Linwood Hardy Hybrids appeared in the January 1980 issue and was written by Frank B. White, Jr., one of the ASA’s founding fathers.⁵ White recommended the Linwoods because they were all double or hose-in-hose, had vivid and pure colors, and flowered in early or mid-season. He liked their growth habit and their good winter foliage color, and, last but not least, he had them for sale at Azalea Acres Farm, his nursery in Lanham, Maryland. Frank White was a first class marketer/promoter, and I cannot think of anyone who has had a greater impact on the popularity of azaleas in the Washington DC metropolitan area. A sequel to White’s article appeared in the following issue of *The Azalean*. It summarized George Harding’s experiences with the Linwood Hardy Hybrids.⁶ George had them planted on his wind-swept “hill,” a ¾-acre test plot adjacent to his home in Germantown, Maryland, where they were fully exposed to the elements. If a plant performed, i.e., survived and bloomed on his hill, that plant

Table 1. List of named and unnamed S series Linwood Hardies with brief Galle descriptions in series number order.

S #	Cultivar Name	Galle Description³	IRRC Page#⁴
S1	‘John Brockett’	vivid purplish red 61D, double	682
S2	‘Evelyn Hart’	pale purplish pink 68B, double, hose-in-hose	426
S3	‘Dimsdale’	deep purplish pink 68A, hose-in-hose, frilled	347
S8			
S10			
S13	‘Doctor Thomas McMillan’	deep purplish pink 68A, double hose-in-hose,	357
S15			
S26	‘Theodore S. Stecki’	vivid purplish red 61D, double, hose-in-hose	1357
S43	‘Thomas Rose’	moderate red 47C, double, hose-in-hose, ruffled	1361
S44			
S50			
S51			
S52			
S53			
S54	‘Lotta Burke’	deep pink 52C, hose-in-hose, frilled	815
S55	‘Edward W. Collins’	deep pink 52C, double hose-in-hose, ruffled	392
S56	‘Lorna Carter’	strong purplish red 54B, hose-in-hose	814
S57	‘Doctor James Hitchner’	pale purplish pink 68B, hose-in-hose, ruffled	355
S58			
S59			
SX2	‘Walter Kern’	deep purplish pink 68A, double, hose-in-hose	1432
SX8	‘George School’	vivid purplish red 55A, hose-in-hose, ruffled	500
SX10			



Photo Dr. Franklin West

▲ Figure 3— G(eorge) Albert Reid, the developer of the Linwood Hardies (1909-1986).

▼ Figure 4—Al Reid in his garden at Linwood, New Jersey, with his original plant of 'Opal', October 1974.



Photo Dr. Franklin West

was both heat and cold hardy. More recently, there was an article by Carolyn Beck about Ted Stecki and 'Theodore S. Stecki', the S series Linwood Hardy Azalea that Reid introduced in 1982 to honor his friend.⁷

The Linwood Hardies have been the topic of discussion on the ASA Internet mail list over the years. However, there is no indication that the earlier postings from the original entity were forwarded to the successor system, which is azaleas@yahoogroups.com. Fortunately, my physical files contained a hard copy of a posting from former ASA member John R. Mackenroth whose father was employed at Fischer from 1966 through 1980. That e-mail is presented here in its original form [See Fig. 5]. Understand that it is presented as posted, and no effort has been made to correct for the rules regarding the enclosure of cultivar names in single quotes or his liberal use of double quotes. The Mackenroth posting is valuable because it provides insight into the origins of 'Linwood Pink', 'Linwood Pink #1', 'Linwood Pink #2',

Subject: [AZ] More on re-use of plan
Date: Sat, 2 Nov 2002 18:19:14 UT
From: John R Mackenroth <jrm1213
Reply-To: azaleas@azaleas.org
To: azaleas@azaleas.org

In the mid 1960's Fischer Green
 four varieties of "Linwood Hardy
 patented as Linwood Pink.

By 1972 "C-28" was found to be
 production. In it's place seedling
 "C-28" is registered as "Linwood
 "Linwood Pink # 2".

When Al Reid decided to name so
 Linwood Pink". It is now known as

Also in the 1960's Fischer sold
 "Linwood White". The selections so
 and "H-11".

My father, Azaleas grower for
 that it would be better to grow on
 White" and continued the propagat.
 "H-5" and "H-11" which were event
 "Garden State White" respectively
 "Improved Linwood White" and later

While traveling on the Eastern
 1970's I stopped at a small nurser.
 have been Daly's Nursery, I don't
 white azalea which looked to be L.
 believed that the variety original

Another variety I have never se
 sold until around 1968 as "Garden

My father says that it was uncor
 production. That was before the
 regulator and chemical pinching as

One last note : Fischer sold Af
 number of different varieties as

▲ Figure 5— Original e-mail posted November 2, 2002, by John R. Mackenroth whose father was emp

'Improved Linwood Pink', 'Linwood Pink Giant', 'Linwood White', 'Garden State White', 'Improved Linwood White', and 'Linwood Luster'. Mr. Mackenroth states that four Linwood Hardies were patented: 'Linwood Pink No 1', 'Doctor Curtis Alderfer', 'Nellie', and 'Doctor Thomas McMillan III'.

'Opal', an Excellent Mid-Atlantic Performer

While I'm fond of bi-colors like 'Janet Rhea' (N-4+, a sport of N-4 and a sister of N-3)³, my favorite Linwood Hardy is 'Opal' (L-1) [See Fig. 6,7]. The formula for 'Opal' is (A-3) X (K-28). A-3 is an un-named Fischer seedling and K-28, according to Galle, is "...a hardy 'Macrantha' from Bobbink and Atkins."⁽³⁾ According to the IRRC, K-28 is identified as 'Mrs L.C. Fischer' (parentage unknown) which was introduced by Bobbink and Atkins around 1940.⁴ While 'Opal' is an OK pink double, the thing I like most about it is that it is an extremely reliable fall bloomer. If you discount

... names and how it was done in Linwood.

...@juno.com>

...houses in Linwood, New Jersey patented
Azaleas". The selection "C-28" was

...not hardy enough and was dropped from
...ng "K-2" was sold as Linwood Pink. Now
...Pink #1" and "K-2" is registered as

...ome varieties he dubbed "K-11" "Improved
...s "Linwood Pink Giant".

...d three varieties under the name of
...old as "Linwood White" were "H-5", "H-9"

...Fischer from 1967 through 1980, decided
...ne variety under the name of "Linwood
...ion of "H-9". Al Reid continued to grow
...ually registered as "Linwood White" and
... "H-4" was initially offered by Al as
...r registered as "Linwood Lustre".

...Shore (of the Chesapeake) in the late
...ry owned by a man named Daly. It may
...remember. He was growing a double
...inwood "H-9" as "Daly Double". He
...ted in Linwood.

...een is seedling "C-37" which Fischer
...State Crimson".

...ntrollable so he removed it from
...use of Cycocel and Off-Shoot as growth
...gent.

...rican Violets world wide and offered a
..."Edna Fischer" over the years.

2002, on the ASA mail-list by former ASA member
...loyed by Fischer from 1966 through 1980.

the Encore® Hybrids, and the newer multiseason bloomers coming down the pike, there are only a handful of cultivars that reliably bloom in the fall in the Washington metropolitan area. The majority of those are selections of *Rhododendron kaempferi* like 'Dorsett', 'October' (aka 'Indian Summer'), 'Two-Season Red', and 'Armstrong's Fall', and their colors are variations of the same orangey-red hue. If conditions are optimal, 'Koromo-shikibu' and a number of Glenn Dale Hybrids will throw a flower here and there... but nothing like the mass of color that is 'Opal'. It is so floriferous in the fall that it is hard to believe that there will be any buds left to bloom in the coming spring.

The Hybridizing Continued

In retirement, Reid continued hybridizing and established his own nursery operation. One of his interests was to develop additional fall bloomers like 'Opal'. In 1973, Reid crossed 'Opal' X 'Nellie'. This was designated the "S" series



Photo William C. Miller III

▲ Figure 6—'Opal' blooming in the author's garden on May 6, 2013.

▼ Figure 7—'Opal' blooming in the author's garden on October 23, 2016.



Image scanned by William C. Miller III

Photo William C. Miller III

(See Table 1). Unfortunately, no fall bloomers emerged, but in the opinion of Ted Stecki, some of them turned out to be real "eye catchers."⁸ Twenty-three seedlings resulted from the S series. As before, they were doubles, hose-in-hose, and double hose-in-hose flowers. Depending on whose descriptions you use, the colors were light pink, dark pink, various shades of salmon, moderate red, vivid purplish red, and strong purplish red. Reid also performed crosses that led to the T series and the V series, but no information about these two groups has been found.

Due to poor health, Reid discontinued his nursery operation in 1983. In the early 80s however, Ted Stecki, his friend and fellow nurseryman (at Hillhouse Nursery), volunteered to help Reid sell the new S series plants, and after Reid's death in 1986 from emphysema, Stecki set about making all of the Linwoods available through Hillhouse Nursery [See Fig. 8]. That was the last that I heard about the Linwood Hardies commercially.



Photo Sue Lapolla, Ted Stecki's daughter.

▲ Figure 8— Theodore S. Stecki (1936-2016).

The Future for the Linwood Hardies

With the passing of Ted Stecki on November 26, 2016, after a lengthy and debilitating illness, it is not clear that any individual has come forward to maintain the availability of the Linwood Hardies. Further, my impression is that the S series was in the process of being distributed when Al Reid died. Twelve of the 23 S series azaleas were named by Reid, and there is no evidence that Ted Stecki named any of the S series or evaluated and named any of the T or V series plants.

I suspect the Linwood Hardies are not widely available in the market today. However, an Internet search reveals that 'Opal' is, in various sizes, available from White's Nursery (Deb and Mike White) in Germantown, Maryland. They don't ship, but they have a nice webpage at <http://www.whites-nursery.com/index.html> from which a list of their inventory can be generated.

'Opal' and the Linwood Hardies may yet survive as a result of the Azalea Society's Legacy program where an effort is being made to "Help ensure the continuation of knowledge of azalea hybridizers and their plants and maintain true specimens of their cultivars."⁹ Without that focus, the Linwood Hardy Hybrids will join the many thousands of azaleas that are listed in the IRRC... but are not available anywhere.

While one might argue that 'Opal' is just another pink double, I submit that its tendency to reliably bloom in May and October in the mid-Atlantic region is an extraordinary quality that warrants its selection as my favorite Linwood Hardy Azalea.

References and Notes

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Note: A-3, K-28, L-1, N-3, N-4, and N-4+ are working names or breeder's names that were used to identify/manage plants prior to introduction and the formal (cultivar) naming process.

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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, the longest serving member of the ASA's Editorial Advisory Board, and a frequent contributor to *The Azalean*.

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