

President's Letter

Charlie Andrews—Cumming, Georgia

Does Your Garden Have Year-Round Interest?

With fall coming, now is a good time to remind everyone that spring is not the only time for azaleas and other flowering plants. My garden originally was one with just a big spring burst. In my neck of the woods, that occurred in April. Yours may be later or earlier. Still, after the big burst, there was not much else. It has taken me years to learn how to develop a garden for year-round interest.

Surely, everyone wants their garden to have something of interest at times other than in the spring. Being fond of azaleas and companion plantings, my first step was in learning that there are late-blooming azaleas. For evergreen azaleas, the Satsuki and related groups such as some Robin Hill Hybrids and others have bloom times that extend into late May and even early June. Reblooming azaleas provide a spring bloom and a late summer and fall bloom. As for the deciduous azaleas, by carefully choosing species and cultivars, one can have plants blooming from April until August (and even early September) in my area.

Many other plants make fine azalea companions. The later-blooming *Hydrangea paniculata* and *H. quercifolia* not only extend the hydrangea blooming season, but the drying flower heads remain attractive for a long time afterwards. Clethra adds mid-summer flowers and fragrance. Viburnums come in many wonderful kinds. My favorite is the double-file viburnum, *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum*, with flowers lined up on each side of the horizontal limbs. While they bloom about the same time as our flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), the berries slowly change from green to red to purple throughout the summer and fall. The attractive, veined leaves put on a multi-colored display in the fall. Other dogwood species, such as the kousa dogwood (*C. kousa*) and pagoda dogwood (*C. alternifolia*), bloom later than *C. florida*. Both evergreen and deciduous hollies provide berries long into the winter. Hardwood trees, such as hickory, sourwood, maple, and oak are a source for fall leaf color and their wonderful leafless winter outlines. This only touches the surface of what one can do to extend the garden season, but you get the idea.

Plants that bloom later than spring are not as easy to obtain. Why? We, the gardeners, are at fault. After being cooped up all winter, we are dying to get out when the weather begins to warm. That is when we go *en masse* to nurseries. People tend to buy plants when they are in bloom. A plant that blooms in July or August sitting next to a blooming one is not a hot seller in a nursery in April. Relatively few go back to the nurseries later in the summer when it would be blooming. Thus, later-blooming plants are produced in fewer numbers and are harder to find, but they are out there.

If you are stuck essentially with a spring garden, consider branching out. Think four seasons. Add year-round interest to that spring burst. Now is a good time to plan.

One thing ASA needs to do for its members is provide better information on cultivars and sources. We are working on it. In the meantime, if you have a question, let me know. You can reach me at president@azaleas.org.

~ *Charlie*



The Azalea Society of America, organized December 9, 1977 and incorporated in the District of Columbia, is an educational and scientific non-profit association devoted to the culture, propagation, and appreciation of azaleas which are in the subgenera *Tsutsusi* and *Pentanthera* of the genus *Rhododendron* in the Heath family (Ericaceae).

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