

# Glenn Dale Azaleas — Plants for All Seasons

Courtland Lee — Glenn Dale, Maryland

## Introduction

Several years ago I took a course in commercial horticulture at the University of Maryland. There I learned that to grow commercially acceptable azaleas they needed to have a certain stem diameter and a certain bushy habit of various heights. Trimming and chemicals were suggested to achieve this uniform behavior.

As a grower of many varieties of azaleas at Boxlee in Glenn Dale, Maryland, I knew I was in trouble. Having access to the then Frank White Garden (see nearly any early issue of *The Azalean*) as well as access to a number of public and private azalea gardens, I had been exposed to the many shapes, leaf textures, and growth habits of these vast collections. I learned that in the past many azaleas were named for their shapes and that knowledge of Japanese would be helpful, but I took Frank's word for it.

Although Frank had many Glenn Dales, and once had worked for Ben Morrison, he did not give Glenn Dales special preference. However, I have an historic house with some acreage in the namesake town of Glenn Dale, and I thought a collection of Glenn Dales would be fitting. At this same time Bill Miller and Dick West launched the Ten Oaks Project of reintroducing name-true Glenn Dale azaleas from the Ten Oaks Nursery near Clarksville, Maryland. These plants still had the original etched zinc tags with the names as they were distributed by Ben

Morrison in the early 1950s. This collection was a wonderful find.

So, with the Glenn Dales acquired from Frank White and the Ten Oaks, plus others, I was off to a good start in collecting and growing Glenn Dales. I confess I am a soft touch for almost any interesting azaleas. For example, strap-shaped flower forms such as the purple 'Seigai'; or the red 'Kin-no-sai' (syn. 'Polypetalum', a



Part of Boxlee's azalea garden's fall color show.  
(Photo by Courtland Lee)

Macrantha type); or dwarf bonsai types such as white or fancy 'Gumpo'; or dwarf or mini 'Saotome' cloned from witches' broom sports, and whose 10-year plants are only 1' in height. Frank White had some unnamed Satsuki azaleas that grew like a trained bonsai, although a pair of scissors had never touched them. My 'May Blaine', a Back Acres hybrid, also shows this characteristic.

## Special Plant Characteristics

I organized this Glenn Dale collection to try to keep track, over time, of the characteristics that attracted such a master breeder as Ben Morrison. To this day I am amazed at the wide variance in plant shapes, leaf textures,

flower colors, and fall leaf colors displayed by this remarkable collection. Take for instance 'Martha Hitchcock' (PI163955; 'Mucronatum' x 'Shinnyo-no-tsuki'), a wonderful white with reddish purple margins 3" across, early mid-season, broad spreading to 4'. There is a fine planting of a double row of mature 'Martha Hitchcock' at the Newton White Mansion, a public historic site near Glenn Dale, which

shows off the substantial nature of this fabulous cultivar. I occasionally play golf near there and these plants are gorgeous shrubs any time of year. In fact, the Glenn Dales are the official shrub of Prince George's County, Maryland. Then look at 'Fawn' (PI 163844; 'Lilacinum' x 'Willy') x ('Mrs. Carmichael' x 'Willy'), which has a white center with purplish pink margins 2-2.5" across, blooms mid-season, and has a broad spreading habit to 5' high. In my specimens I find

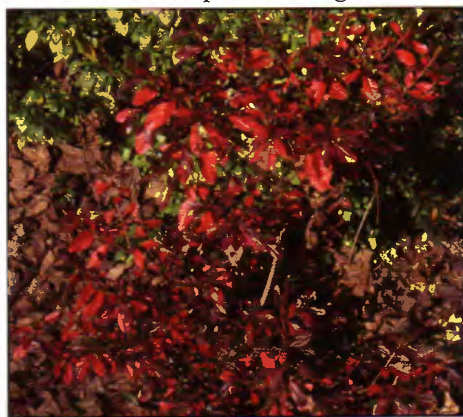
those two cultivars have very similar flowers, but the 'Fawn' is a round bushy plant, and the 'Martha Hitchcock' is a larger and more open plant. The differences are easily seen. Then throw in 'Luna' (PI 201896; *R. kaempferi* x 'Shinnyo-no-tuski'), which is vivid purplish red, with a darker blotch and white eye 3.5" across, late-blooming, with a spreading habit up to 5' high. My specimen of 'Luna' is a wonderful spreading almost creeping low plant as it spreads. I question whether it will reach 5' left to its own. It came from a cutting of the Ten Oaks collection. To simply classify each of these three Glenn Dale cultivars as flower

look-alikes will miss the genius of Ben Morrison whom I believe had a keen eye for “plant shape” as an important element to landscape selection. The leaf textures in these particular three examples are similar, but texture differs greatly in the Glenn Dales.

### Fall Leaf Color

Second to plant shape, I have come to notice fall leaf color. One Glenn Dale has special interest in that I think it shows Ben Morrison named some of his cultivars for fall leaf color. ‘Ember’ (PI 163801; (*R. kaempferi* x ‘Mucronatum’) x ‘Shinnyo-no-tsuki’) is an example: this flower is a frilled 3” deep purplish pink, with a darker blotch with a yellow undertone, that blooms across mid-season, on a broad spreading plant that grows to 4’ high. In sending out this plant as part of the Ten Oaks Project, the red flower looked to me to be nothing unusual, and my first plant died. However, I replanted, and one fall I looked at the plant with new respect. The leaves were an extraordinary bright red, almost a glowing ember, giving the garden a fall boost (see photo below). Could ember be the red glow (fall leaf color) after the fire (bloom)?

Generally I find predominately white flowers have yellow fall leaf color and red flowers have a red leaf fall color. The second fall leaf champion is ‘Oriflamme’, a gorgeous spectacular white spring flower and yellow-green fall leaf color, although I don’t think it was reflected in the cultivar name (see photo at right).



‘Ember’ displaying deep red fall color November 2003. (Photo by Courtland Lee)

One of my most interesting plants is the ‘Silver Sword’ sport of ‘Girard’s Rose’, introduced in 1980 by Meivogel. Not only does it have a variegated leaf (white margin), but also the fall color is a distinct reddish purple, one of the few to have leaf color mentioned in Fred Galle’s *Azaleas*.

Here in Glenn Dale for the mid-winter blues, I am growing some of William Ackerman’s cold-hardy camellias. These camellias have a rich glossy green leaf color, and one unnamed variety bloomed in early January 2004 after a warmer than usual fall. It was sensational to see the blooms out the window in early January. Growing these cold-hardy (Zone 7) camellias adds a welcome diversity, but they are less tame than the azaleas, growing quickly to fairly large sizes. Again I return to the wonderful plant shape of the Glenn Dales and their usefulness in the garden landscape. ‘Dream’ (PI 160047; *R. simsi* x ‘Mucronatum’) is a frilled 2 3/4-3” strong purplish pink that blooms early with a spreading habit to 6’ that has reliably bloomed under a dogwood, under a tulip poplar. Try that with a rose. My soil is about pH 6.5, and needs little attention. In a shady environment, I find a light mulch of pine bark makes a good weed-preventer.

### Conclusion

I discovered the charm of the Glenn Dales late even though I have lived in Glenn Dale, Maryland, for nearly 30 years. They are a superb group of plants with a wide variety of landscape uses. They like acid soil, tolerate heavy shade, take a number of light ground covers well, and last for years. To quote Frank White, “Once you get them started, you can’t kill them.” Nonetheless, I watch for rodent holes, particularly in hot dry times. Varieties bloom here from early April (‘Festive’, ‘Geisha’, ‘Dayspring’) to late June (‘Galaxy’, ‘Sagittarius’, ‘Warrior’).

I will end with the 1980 ASA “eye-catcher/good-doer” poll of the Glenn Dale hybrids from 100 growers in 20 states that was printed in the April



‘Oriflamme’ turns a warm yellow in the fall. (Photo by Courtland Lee)

1981 issue of *The Azalean* and referenced in Galle’s *Azaleas*, p. 237:

The most highly rated 18 cultivars, receiving 70 or more nominations were:

‘Ambrosia’	‘Geisha’
‘Boldface’	‘Glacier’‡
‘Buccaneer’‡	‘Glamour’
‘Copperman’	‘Helen Close’
‘Dayspring’‡	‘Martha
‘Delos’	Hitchcock’‡
‘Dream’	‘Refrain’
‘Fashion’	‘Treasure’
‘Festive’	‘Sagittarius’
‘Gaiety’	

The second ranking eleven with 10-19 nominations were:

‘Aphrodite’	‘Greeting’
‘Ben Morrison’†	‘Louise Dowdle’
‘Campfire’	‘Moonbeam’
‘Fawn’	‘Surprise’
‘Gorgeous’	‘Zulu’
‘Grace Freeman’	

‡ The four most highly rated Glenn Dale hybrids.

† ‘Ben Morrison’ was registered and introduced by the USDA Plant Introduction Station only after Morrison’s death. It was included in the list of material Morrison propagated but did not register.

I wonder what the results would be if plant shape, leaf texture, and spring fall leaf colors were added as criteria. I find *all* my Glenn Dales are “eye-catchers/good-doers” with an extraordinary diversity in shape, leaf texture and shape, fall leaf color, and, of course, bloom.

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# McComb, Mississippi, Awarded Azalea City Status

Buddy Lee — Independence, Louisiana

The City of McComb, Mississippi, was certified as an official ASA Azalea City as of March 28, 2005. The award generated a lot of excitement for the closing days of the McComb Azalea Festival. The meeting and luncheon was held on Thursday March 31 at the Icehouse, which is located in the historic district and is a very popular meeting site. The meeting was well attended with more than 125 people present. Louisiana Chapter members Margie Jenkins and Bill Bode were there and Margie gave a very informative talk on azaleas. Later we toured the Freeman Garden, which is a popular azalea garden destination in that area of Mississippi. The azalea bloom in McComb area was a little past peak, but still spectacular.

2005 marked the 47th annual Lighted Azalea Festival sponsored by the McComb Garden Club. The idea of having a lighted azalea trail came

from Reverend Earl B. Emmerich, who while serving as a missionary in Korea, had seen the traditional lighting of the cherry blossoms in Japan. Today, over 300 homes and businesses in Pike County light their trees, shrubs, and plants each night from March 13 through April 3 and the Pike County Chamber of Commerce has added additional events. For more information, visit the city's Web site at [www.mccombms.gov](http://www.mccombms.gov) or the chamber Web site at [www.pikeinfo.com](http://www.pikeinfo.com) or call 1-800-399-4404.



Shown above, at the March 31, 2005, award ceremony (left to right) are Bill Bode, ASA president Buddy Lee, McComb City Planner George Rummel, Margie Jenkins, and Ms. Vickie Webb. Each city to achieve the Azalea City designation receives this attractive plaque, illustrated with both an evergreen and a deciduous azalea.

(Photo by LeWair Coker of McComb)

## Book Review — continued

to chance! The chapter on plant disorders is profound and draws one's attention to plant observation to a much higher level. The chapters on cultural requirements, propagation, and landscape uses all guide one along with easy to understand instructions.

Chapter 4, written by Don Hyatt, a well-known former teacher and current president of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, is an excellent reference for anyone interested in learning how to add natives to the landscape. True to his generous sharing spirit, both of knowledge and plants, Don carefully separated the

natives according to color and then listed various cultivars in each shade! He also provided an approximate Sequence of Bloom Chart for his species, along with a Hardiness and Adaptability List, Fragrance lists and Size charts! Great!! One can easily feel prepared to delve into natives after a quick read of this informative, concise chapter.

How I wish I'd read this book 30 years ago when I first pushed a shovel into dirt! It would have saved me many, many hours of unnecessary labor and helped me avoid countless mistakes over the years! I highly recommend *Success with Rhododendrons and Azaleas* to anyone interested in these beautiful plants.

## Glenn Dale Azaleas—continued

*Courtland Lee is a geologist by training. He has been a staff consultant to the US House of Representatives on mineral resource issues and is currently proposing the Patuxent River Agate as the state gemstone of Maryland. Examples of this agate are on display at the 10-acre Boxlee Azalea Farm in Glenn Dale, Maryland, an historic site in its own right. At Boxlee, he runs a part-time propagation nursery that includes the Glenn Dales and the Ten Oaks Glenn Dale project, many from Frank White's fabulous collection. Boxlee is open for sales on Saturdays in April and May.*