



Rhododendron Glenn Dale Hybrid Azaleas

Nothing says spring like azaleas! One of the National Arboretum's most popular plantings, the Glenn Dale Azaleas draw thousands for annual spring viewing. Horticulturist Benjamin Y. Morrison worked for over 25 years to create this superior group of winter-hardy azaleas with large, colorful flowers suitable for the Washington, DC region. We present a small vignette of the 454 named introductions to entice you to grow these lovely spring treasures. Check our on-line photo gallery and be sure to make an April visit to the Arboretum part of your tradition too!



The south face of Mt. Hamilton at the National Arboretum in Washington, DC was planted with approximately 15,000 azaleas from Glenn Dale in 1946-47. In 1949, the Arboretum opened to the public for the first time during the azalea bloom.



Glenn Dale Hybrid Azaleas

Botanical Name:

Rhododendron Glenn Dale hybrids

Plants in the Glenn Dale azalea breeding program were initially assigned Bell or "B" numbers an old name for the Plant Introduction Station at Glenn Dale, MD. Plant Introduction (PI) numbers were assigned later. The first "B" number was assigned to 'Dimity' in 1937. and 'Satrap' received the last "B" number in 1951 and PI number in 1952.

Family

Ericaceae

Hardiness:

U.S.D.A. Zones 6b-8 (some hardy to Zone 5)

Development:

In the late 1920's B.Y. Morrison began an azalea hybridizing program at the USDA Plant Introduction Station, Glenn Dale, MD, with the goal of developing large-flowered landscape azaleas, similar to those which grew in southern gardens that would be winter hardy in the Washington, DC region and provide overlapping periods of bloom from April through June. Morrison used a wide variety of parent material, crossing cold hardy selections with early and late flowering colorful, large-flowered evergreen forms, that were not hardy in the mid-atlantic region. Among these were *Rhododendron kaempferi* (Kaempfer's azalea), *R. poukhanense* (Korean azalea), *R. indicum* and parent in more than 100 Glenn Dale hybrids, *R. mucronatum*, *R. phoeniceum* and Kurume hybrids, clones of the "Southern Indian" azaleas now known as "Belgian Azaleas", *R. simsii*, and the mysterious 'Vittatum', parent in over 100 Glenn Dale hybrids. The program lasted 25 years, involved hundreds of crosses and resulted in 454 new evergreen azalea cultivars. The hybrids were distributed from 1942 through 1954 to nursery growers, gardens and individuals across the United States.

Significance:

Prior to the introduction of the Glenn Dale Hybrids, commonly available azaleas were small flowered, bloomed over a shorter period of time, offered few color choices and were not always attractive year round. The Glenn Dale Hybrids represent the accomplishment of an ambitious mission: landscape azaleas hardy in the Mid-Atlantic (Zone 7) region, with colorful flowers of up to 4 inches wide, covering the mid April - mid June bloom gap, and for the sheer volume of cultivars produced. Almost all of the cultivars and many of the parents still exist.

The Glenn Dales also reflect Morrison's interest in flower character and quality: clean, pure colors; definite contrasts in patterned flowers; reflective or transmissive character; flower stalks (pedicels) strong enough to bear the weight of the flowers and the ability of the flower to fall off, rather than die and persist on the plant.

Morrison grasped the opportunity to incorporate a wide range of germ-plasm in the breeding program, using not only azaleas from important U.S. private and commercial sources but also plants or seed collected by plant explorers in Asia, especially China in the 1920's and later.



Glenn Dale Hybrid Azaleas

Description:

Height and Width: Range from 3 to 8 feet in height and width or larger after 10 years.

Habit: Varied; rounded shrubs may be broad spreading, low growing, upright or erect.

Foliage: Green in summer with a variety of foliage shapes and degrees of glossiness, sizes and downiness. Relatively evergreen in winter in the mid-Atlantic region, some with fall color.

Flowers: Colors range from white to red and orange-reds, pink to purples, may include chartreuse markings or be solid or patterned. Flowers are 2-4 inches in diameter and occur as singles, semi-doubles, doubles and hose-in-hose. The hybrids are classified as early, early and late midseason, or late blooming groups and generally bloom from early April through early June; earlier in warmer zones.

Culture:

These acid loving plants perform best under high or dappled shade with well drained soils enriched with organic compost or humus and a soil pH of 4.5-6.0 and good air circulation. Mulch with shredded pine bark, oak leaves, or other mulch that resists compaction and permits air and water to pass through. Protect from winter sunshine in colder climates to avoid desiccation. Summer pruning before mid-July will increase the number of shoots and the number of blooming branches the following spring, later pruning will reduce bloom. Control petal blight fungus promptly by removing blighted flowers and/or using a recommended fungicide.

Propagation:

Root from softwood to semi-hardwood cuttings (late spring through early fall) under mist or plastic, low rates (0 - 3000 ppm) of IBA or other rooting hormone, in 4-6 weeks. Also propagated by grafting, layering, and tissue culture. Protect newly rooted cuttings in winter.

Landscape Use:

Naturalized, formal or informal gardens, along the edges of woods; foundation plantings with shade. Depending on desired effect, allow four to six feet for the spread of most azaleas, or plant more closely for initial impact and transplant later to avoid crowding.

Availability:

Many are readily available from mail-order firms, retail and wholesale nurseries. Some cultivars are rare or available only from specialty nurseries. Several outstanding, but lesser known, cultivars were selected for redistribution beginning in 2007.

References:

Since the 1953 publication of Morrison's official history and description, *The Glenn Dale Azaleas*, Agriculture Monograph No. 20, USDA (no longer in print), parentage, cultivar data, modern color designations and analysis of the USNA Glenn Dale azalea collection have been published in *The Azalean*, the Journal of the Azalea Society of America, *Azaleas*, by Fred Galle, Timber Press, 1987, and both *The Bell Book*, A Companion to Monograph 20, 1994 and *The Glenn Dale Azaleas, Revised*, 1996 of Azalea Works, Bethesda, MD, among others.



'Glacier' Glenn Dale Hybrid Azalea

Rhododendron 'Glacier' is considered one of the most attractive, year-round, of the Glenn Dale hybrid azaleas. Blooming in the spring, it is distinguished by extremely attractive lustrous dark green foliage, and large shining white 2 ½ inch flowers with a greenish throat. Grows vigorously up to five feet in height in 20 years. Blooms midseason.

Parentage:

Rhododendron 'Malvatica' [Malvaticum] × 'Yozakura' 'Glacier'
(NA 66868; PI 160073; Bell # 32537)

Description:

Evergreen; vigorous, erect to spreading growth, up to 5 feet. Very handsome lustrous, dark green leaves. Flowers 2 ½ to 3 inches across, usually borne 2 to 3 in a head, shining white with a faint green tone. Late April Introduced 1947.

Culture:

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'Martha Hitchcock' Glenn Dale Hybrid Azalea

Rhododendron 'Martha Hitchcock' is an outstanding and extremely popular Glenn Dale hybrid azalea. In spring this vigorous shrub is covered with large 2 ½ to 3 inch diameter flowers of brilliant magenta crimson with a white center and darker blotch. The garden effect is striking. Broad-spreading and fast-growing, it must be controlled by pruning unless given plenty of space. Blooms midseason.

Parentage:

Rhododendron mucronatum [Indica alba] × 'Shinnyo-no-tsuki'
(NA 70556; PI 163955; Bell # 39513)

Description:

Broad spreading evergreen shrub; will eventually reach 5 feet in height in 20 years. Leaves medium green, hairy. Flowers 1 to 3 per head, 3 inches across, white margined with magenta [RHS 72A, strong reddish Purple]. Strongly growing shoots usually produce self-colored flowers. Do not remove, as laterals give flowers with correct pattern thereafter. Early to mid-May. Introduced 1948.

Culture:

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