
In Praise of Greenwoods on the East Coast

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(THE AZALEAN for the winter 1982-83 included an article by the hybridizer of Greenwood azaleas, which described the varieties he was growing for retailers and concluded with a request for ratings of quality for members of the group and information on their heat and cold tolerance in other localities. This is my more-than-somewhat-belated and roundabout response.)

In 1974 the modest shipping list of Island Gardens of Eugene, Oregon, was divided into five groups. From the nine items in Group 2—New Hardy Evergreen Azaleas, I ordered 'Katie' (described as "another dark orchid hose-in-hose but this blooms late") and 'Puff Pink' (described as "a pale pink with double carnation form, medium growth, late blooming"). A couple of years later I noted on the index card for 'Katie' "blooming profusely, great!" I was even more delighted with 'Puff,' which is still among my favorites.



Right: 'Star Ruby'
Far Right: 'Sleigh Bells'



Above: 'Misty'
Right: 'Annette'



In 1975 and 1977 I ordered a few more of the "new hardy evergreen azaleas", and then disaster struck—Island Gardens no longer shipped. Fortunately, just about that time Holly Hills began offering several of the group, which by then I knew were Greenwoods, hybridized by Mr. William Guttormsen of Canby, Oregon. As years went by, I also acquired Greenwoods from Hass Nursery, Stubbs Shrubs, Gordon Severe, and particularly, George Harding. In 1989 Ronnie Palmer, who had early on become a Greenwood fan and shared his collection with Mr. Harding, was able to supply another dozen varieties from his Azalea Hill Gardens and Nursery in Pine Bluff.

Last year disaster struck again—I learned that Mr. Guttormsen was going out of business and frantically asked Eleanor Stubbs for help in getting some of those on my still-extensive "want list." She very graciously agreed.

Because of Eleanor's busy schedule and my time-out for foot surgery, the two boxes of beautiful plants did not arrive until almost the middle of December. The plants were obviously "behind" in hardening off as compared with my other azaleas, but were promptly planted in the little, totally exposed area I had prepared by digging up some of my grass. Our winter was unusually mild—the only one I can remember when most mums survived. All the new plants came through beautifully, and whenever we had a sunny day I grabbed my fiberglass-handled shovel (a good investment for someone who used to break two or three wooden handles each year) and started turning over more sod so that the babies would have more room.

Spring was a little later than last year but much kinder and gentler because we didn't have that series of once-a-week cold snaps that froze zillions of azalea and apple blossoms. The azalea season began before the middle of April with 'Tina,' a true

dwarf Greenwood with rosy pink flowers. Following shortly were its siblings 'Genie Magic' and 'Pink Annette'. My biggest 'Genie' is about three feet wide and barely a foot high. It is fun to watch the beautiful foliage being hidden as bud opening starts around the edges and gradually spreads upward. The color begins close to that of 'Stewartstonian' and the plant I acquired as 'Forest Fire' (which is neither a deep pink as described in *Azaleas* nor tiny as described in *Hybrids and Hybridizers*) but later becomes more subdued. The foliage of 'Pink Annette' is definitely similar to that of its 'Coral Bells' parent. Its very long-lasting blossoms are hose-in-hose with enough petaloids to look rosebuddy; their color is a little brighter than that of Shammarello's 'Hino Pink'.

Meanwhile, 'Red Beauty' and 'Tami' opened as solid masses of rose red and pink. The two are entwined with each other and a gooseberry that is trying to take over the whole space. 'Tami' is supposed to be fragrant, but the bumblebees are more attracted to the gooseberry.

Another early bloomer was 'Greenwood Wendy,' a new plant from Eleanor. It is one of the four selections from Mr. Guttormsen's latest cross of 'Albert-Elizabeth' x 'Hino Crimson' that "take after Momma" in coloring and is a single with completely overlapping petals (English translation of "lobes very well imbricated") that starts with a good deal of pink and gradually becomes lighter. It looks as if the habit will continue compact and very attractive. Also from the cross is 'Candy,' a beautiful ruffled double. 'Pink Petals,' another sibling, is a possibly even more ruffled double, well deserving the description luscious, fantabulous and all those other extravagant adjectives strewn about by a certain West Coast nurseryperson. It, too, looks as if it will stay quite low.

And speaking of height, my tallest Greenwood is 'Star Ruby,' one of the

plants from Island Gardens. Growing more than five feet tall in deep shade (less from now on because half of my last peach tree broke off), it has glowing bright-colored flowers that sometimes seem almost the "screaming" orange of 'Queen Wilhelmina' and other times closer to true red.

Planted nearby is 'Bolero,' another plant from Island Gardens. When 'Bolero' got a couple feet tall, it decided to take a hike right and left. It has by far the greatest wingspan of any of my Greenwoods—more than eight feet—and would be even wider if one of the branches hadn't bumped into a rhododendron and turned upward again. 'Bolero' is particularly attractive when the coral-rose blossoms droop from the weight of rain, exposing white ribs that give a two-tone effect. The only complaint I have against the plant is that one year it concealed a hornets' nest into contact with which—as Sir Winston might have phrased it—my fat knee came.

'Misty' looks somewhat like a hose-in-hose 'Parfait' with a less prominent blotch. It blooms just about the same time as 'Su-Lin,' a beautiful red hose-in-hose that looks at first glance like a single because the sepals-turned-petals are so short. 'Su-Lin' shouldn't be planted next to her sister 'Crimson Crest', since when they open they are just a blip apart on the color chart. It looks fine in front of a drift of plants I received as 'Jet Fire' but which are obviously mislabeled since they are an unfiery deep lavender pink rather than red. They look as if they belong to the Greenwood family, however, so they'll stay.

'Silver Streak' would provide a nice color break almost anywhere in the Greenwood patch except right under 'Star Ruby'. A fascinating feature of 'Silver Streak', apart from its small leaves margined in white, was the variation in size of bloom between plants and even on the same plant (on a foot-high plant the range was three inches to barely half that). Its color, like that of 'Deep Purple' on

which it sported, is a gorgeous purple, redder than those of 'Dauntless' and 'Blue Danube'. It is close to the shade of the Schroeders' 'Purple Pride' but much slower to sunfade. A couple of my six plants seem to be trying to sport back to solid-colored big leaves. I plan to keep a special watch over them, mindful of the times a white-flowering stem sprouted from the base of a red dogwood, provided an eyecatching two-color tree for a few years and eventually crowded out the less vigorous red graft.

Between the listings in Galle's revised *Azaleas* and Eleanor Stubbs' account of the Greenwood hybridizing program in *THE AZALEAN* for September 1987, 24 whites are noted, with blooming periods from late April to late May. Although I think way too many white azaleas have been named, I can't cite any of my white Greenwoods that definitely should have been put in the discard pile. Some, such as 'Snow Mound,' are noteworthy because their winter foliage is an attractive dark green rather than the yellowish green characteristic of white azaleas. (Those dark green leaves of 'Snow Mound' are apparently tasty as dessert for rabbits who first munch on a Gable H12G across the pathway—or maybe they are the entree and 'Garda Joy' the dessert.) 'Star' is noteworthy because of its distinctive curved petals. 'Winter Hawk' opens as an incredible mass of crinkly, yellowish hose-in-hose blossoms that turn pure white. 'Sleigh Bells' is the perfect companion for 'Greenwood Orchid'. And on and on. (By the way, hybridizers, since you can't possibly top 'White Jade' for beauty, why not try to develop whites with resistance to acid rain—using 'Dorothy Rees' as the worst-case example?)

Another of the new plants from Eleanor was tagged 'Greenwood Duet,' which I assume is a renaming of 'Clipper' since it matches the description of having both white and pink

semidouble and double blossoms. It made me wonder if just one of the those forms must be used for cuttings.

'Puff' was spectacular this year. Now 21 years old, the large plant bloomed so profusely that only a few isolated leaves were visible. 'Dolores,' 'Linda Jean,' and 'Mona Lisa' are some of the other lovely big pink Greenwoods. 'Tat' is a three-inch double pink to which Mr. Guttormsen assigned highest ratings for flower and habit. The three plants I acquired as 'Tat' are a little disappointing because the habit is not as attractive as that of the other Greenwoods.

Not at all disappointing is 'Pink Cloud,' which is probably closer to lavender than that of 'Linwood Lavender'. Its beautiful four-inch double blossoms are of the flat two-layer form (or five plus five as the registration probably shows), while most of the newer Guttormsen double introductions are of the rosebud form. As May drew to a close with a record-breaking streak of over 90-degree days 'Pink Cloud' was one of quite a few Greenwoods still hanging in there and providing a graceful segue into the Satsuki season.

And now about hardiness. I live west and slightly north of Washington, D.C. Just a few miles away is Dulles Airport, where wintertime thermometer readings are often ten or 12 degrees lower than the "official" Washington readings taken at National Airport on the Potomac River. The tempering effect of a wide expanse of water often results in lower summertime readings at National than Dulles.

My house, facing west, is on a slight rise. Although the woods in front are exposed to an almost constant northwest wind, I started filling them with rhododendrons and azaleas. Then one drizzly Sunday I went to check one of the plants and spotted a brown VW backed into the driveway next to the tree with the "no trespass-

ing" sign. The motor was running, the door was open, and the driver was grabbing. I yelled and she got away before I could get close. Since then the only azaleas that go in front are extras that bloom too early or get too big to tote to the May sale of Friends of Homeless Animals. The backyard slopes down a bit. With mature azaleas along the fence acting as a partial windbreak, it almost seems to be in a different temperature zone from the front.

When plants from the first two Island Gardens shipments were still in front of the house, we had the brutal 1976-77 winter, which pretty well killed off all the region's camellias and crape myrtles that managed to survive the very bad winter seven years earlier. As I recall, the temperature stayed below freezing for more than a month; I know jackhammers were necessary to open a grave in the middle of February 1977. Many other bad winters, including at least one when the mercury dipped to minus 13 degrees have come along since then (remember the plane that crashed into the icy Potomac one January?). The winter of either '81-'82 or '82-'83 killed two of my big deodar cedars. In September 1983 I put all my small potted azaleas to the lee side of the remaining cedar for wintertime protection and lost many of them when January cold killed the tree. I blame winter weather for the demise over the last 15 years of slews of rhododendrons (including five 'Sapphos' near where the VW was parked and at least six of the eight varieties that came in the shipment with 'Katie' and 'Puff'), all my Carlas except 'Sunglow' and 'Pink Cloud,' many Linwood "hardies" and Back Acres, and several Harris hybrids.

Over those 15 years we've also had some record high temperatures, many of them during severe drought. Three years ago I was tickled that lack of a late bud-killing freeze meant I would finally get a chance to try to identify some of my untaged azale-

as, but the heat, very low humidity, and a constant searing wind turned the blossoms into limp formless masses by midmorning. Three plants of 'Delos' looked so pitiful that in a fit of botanical anthropomorphizing I started cutting off the blossoms to lessen the struggle of the poor things to draw water from their roots.

During those summers, particularly in the third straight drought year, I was wary about watering for fear of exhausting the well (the only way I know to measure the depth of my well water involves calling the company that keeps replacing the pump; they would send three plumbers to pull out a piece of PVC pipe that probably weighs at least ten or 15 pounds). Consequently, I lost a lot of unmulched Glenn Dales near an enormous spreading evergreen which would be long gone if it did not have catbird nests in it. I also lost all the Glenn Dales planted in the "shelter" of a big limbed-up larch. I don't know if the larch needles intercepted what little rain fell or its roots drew all moisture from the soil or there was a combination. The larch is gone, and plants near its stump are thriving.

With few exceptions the Greenwoods have come through these ups and downs. Most of the exceptions were small plants moved just before drought struck.

The other exception was 'Silver Streak'. Plants with variegated leaves are generally, I understand, less hardy than their counterparts with solid leaves (a common sight each spring at local nurseries is the block of 'Silver Sword' unsold because a cold spell that barely affected other varieties has turned their blossoms brown). After losing several 'Silver Streak' plants over winter despite planting them in protected situations,

I moved the only survivor out into the open a couple of years ago. The other five little plants that bloomed so beautifully this year came from a nursery where last spring they looked so awful that four were consigned to the horticultural equivalent of a remainder bin and the other to a Dumpster. Probably all azalea lovers subscribe to the "nothing ventured" creed as far as hardiness is concerned, so I'll continue to adopt 'Silver Streak' plants even though they may live to bloom only occasionally and will probably never get to a respectable size.

Although I suspect—and veteran azalea collectors are, I am sure, shocked at the very notion—that several of my Greenwoods are impostors, I consider the group very worthy. Most are unusually attractive year round. The compact habit of Greenwoods grown in the sun makes them great for camouflaging the ugly lower stems of deciduous azaleas. In turn, the deciduous varieties provide height and color variation. Most of the deciduous azaleas interplanted with my Greenwoods are yellow, but this year I added several whites from that adjective West Coast person. The plants also share space with a couple of tree peonies, some leucothoes, and name-brand mountain laurels. In summer the spotlight is taken by hostas, astilbes, yellow-flowered dwarf daylilies, etc. (abbreviation of a Latin term for stuff-I-buy-and-then-try-to-find-a-place-to-put). The daylilies are planted in bands of metal edging to prevent their encroaching into azalea root space; the hostas and astilbes are planted in cages made of half-inch hardware cloth to prevent their becoming expensive tidbits for whatever varmints tunneled to and ate so many of their predecessors. (And speaking of tunneling, never stand

there looking up in amazement at how fast that beautifully barked volunteer sycamore is growing; look down and, when you see how all those yam-colored roots are invading your azalea beds at the same great speed, run for the chain saw!)

The first time I recall seeing Greenwoods for sale in this area was about six or eight years ago when a nursery in Beltsville, Maryland, began offering 'Star Ruby'. My luscious 'Pink Petals' came from the same Virginia nursery that had 'Silver Streak'. Other varieties that have become available locally include 'Blazon,' 'June,' 'Pink Cloud,' and 'Torchlight'. I urge fellow Easterners who come across Greenwoods to try them. You'll like them.

Now, attention kind strangers Out West who have plants of 'Baby Rosebud,' 'Bingo,' 'Caliente,' 'Calusa,' 'Candice,' 'Cantico,' 'Capri,' 'Chiffon,' 'Clipper' (if not the same as 'Greenwood Duet'), 'Confetti,' 'Crystal,' 'Deseronto,' 'Diablo,' 'Disco,' 'Dorian,' 'Estrellita,' 'Fire Chief,' 'Gemini,' 'Geronimo,' 'Kachina,' 'Laser,' 'Lindean,' 'Lunar Sea,' 'Marianne,' 'Marvee,' 'Montezuma,' 'Orbit,' 'Paleface,' 'Paluna,' 'Pawnee,' 'Pink Fancy,' 'Pink Rosebud,' 'Pollyanna,' 'Red Blaze,' 'Redland,' 'Salishan,' 'Snowman,' 'Star Fire,' 'St. Helens,' 'Sundance,' and the real 'Greenwood Cherry,' 'Jet Fire,' and 'Satanta': It's time to start saving those little boxes your checks come in. Then on a Monday next June you can take cuttings of those beauties, seal them in a plastic bag with a wet paper towel wrapped around the stems, and mail them to me in the boxes. Please and thank you. (I have some grass left, and I'll keep the shovel handy.)

Bob, You're charging me what for this classified? □