AZALEA PLANT NAMED ‘ROBLEJA’

Latin Name: Rhododendron hybrid
Varietal Denomination: Robleja

Inventor: Robert Edward Lee, Independence, LA (US)
Assignee: Plant Development Services Inc., Loxley, AL (US)

Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 165 days.


Primary Examiner—Kent Bell

ABSTRACT

A new and distinct variety of Azalea plant named ‘Robleja’, characterized by its unique blooming time, upright, dense and globose growth habit, and attractive single to semi-double flowers which change from pink to white.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

This new Azalea hybrid variety is illustrated by the accompanying photographic prints in which:

1. The photograph at the top of the sheet is a close-up showing flower, foliage, and stem color as well as flower size and form.
2. The photograph at the bottom of the sheet shows the upright, dense and globose growth habit of a young three gallon plant.

The colors shown are as true as is reasonably possible to obtain by conventional photographic procedures. Colors in the photographs may appear different than actual colors due to light reflectance. The colors of the various plant parts are defined with reference to The Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart. Description of colors in ordinary terms are presented where appropriate for clarity in meaning.

BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANT

The following is a detailed description of the new variety of Azalea based on my observations made of 2 year old plants grown in 3 gallon containers in wholesale commercial production practices, in greenhouses, and in established landscape plantings in Independence, La.
TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>‘Robleja’</th>
<th>‘Watchet’</th>
<th>‘Conlreb’ PPW10,581</th>
<th>‘Roldhamil Fourth of July’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height (Mature)</td>
<td>4–5’</td>
<td>2–3’</td>
<td>4–5’</td>
<td>8–10’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Width (Mature)</td>
<td>3–4’</td>
<td>3–4’</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td>6–7’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower Diameter</td>
<td>2–3”</td>
<td>3½–3½”</td>
<td>2½-2½”</td>
<td>3½–2½”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower Form</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flower Color</td>
<td>Red Pink</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Red G. 49B</td>
<td>Red G. 44A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowers per Terminal</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>2–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloom Period</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Late June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petal/Petaloid</td>
<td>Frost</td>
<td>Frost</td>
<td>Frost</td>
<td>Frost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petal Number</td>
<td>5–13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5–14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardy Zone</td>
<td>5–8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0–9</td>
<td>7–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamen Number</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Petaloid</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Petaloid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The female, or seed parent, of ‘Robleja’ is the Azalea ‘Watchet; a moderate pink, single, late blooming, low compact grower. ‘Watchet’ is an unpatented Robin Hill hybrid developed by Robert Gartrell in Wyaco, N.J. Mr. Gartrell started his hybridization in 1937 to produce hardy, late blooming azaleas. ‘Watchet’ is the result of a cross between the Satsuki Hybrid ‘Amagasa’ (unpatented) and the Robin Hill Hybrid ‘Lady Louise’ (unpatented). The male, or pollen, parent of ‘Robleja’ is the Azalea hybrid ‘Conlreb’ U.S. Plant Pat. No. 10,581 which was the result of Mr. Lee’s planned cross hybridization between the Azalea ‘Watchet’ and Rhododendron oldhamii ‘Fourth of July’ (unpatented). ‘Robleja’ differs from ‘Conlreb’ primarily in flower color.

Robert Edward Lee’s hybridization program was conducted with emphasis on species that are not commonly found in the genetic make-up of the present day hybrids. The ‘Fourth of July’ cultivar which Mr. Lee obtained from Dr. Thornton in 1981 is a heavy summer and fall blooming plant, not like the Rhododendron Species Foundation form. The flower buds form on new growth and start blooming about July 1. Mr. Lee used this cultivar to cross with existing hybrids which have a tendency to bloom in the fall and which are also fairly hardy. As expected the resulting seedlings are heavy summer and fall bloomers with very impressive spring blooms also.

Classification:
Botanic: Rhododendron hybrid ‘Robleja’.
Form: Upright, dense, and rounded.
Height: 4–5’.
Width: 3–4’.
Growth habit: Upright, dense and globose. Fast growth rate under normal fertilization and moisture conditions.
Growth rate: In a period of six years from a rooted cutting the plant reaches a height of 3 feet and a spread of 2 feet. The growth rate is normally about 6 to 8” per year, the plant reaches a height of 4 to 5’ at maturity while maintaining a dense habit due to the abundant branch development.

In 2001, the date of initial spring growth was March 8, in Independence, La. After the initial spring flush there was almost continuous growth until that fall ending November 5, also in Independence, La. When grown in full sun, the internode length of this plant is ¾” to 3”; when grown in light shade the internode length is ¾” to 1”. As would be expected a plant grown in shade results in a taller, less dense plant with larger leaves.

The average length of terminal growth of the initial spring flush is about 5” for a plant in full sun and about 7” when grown in shade. This growth should not be trimmed since it will produce flowers starting in late July. As the plant continues to grow through the summer and fall more flower buds are produced, which mature and bloom until frost. This remaining growth produces about 4” to 5” of height. As cool weather approaches, some of the flower buds become dormant. These buds bloom in April of the next year.

Stems: The young stems are Yellow-Green Group 146C and densely clothed with spreading white glandular hairs. During the second growing season they become Greyed-Green Group 197B, glabrous and rugose. The pith is solid and uniform. Young and older stems are densely branched.

Buds: Tight buds at ½” are ovate and acuminate Yellow-Green Group 146D with a hairy pubescence Brown Group 200B. The buds are borne in clusters of 2 to 3, and are sheathed by a pair of modified leaf bracts which are from ½” to ½” long, persistent, and Yellow-Green Group 147A. The pedicel is ½” to ¾” long, pubescent, and Yellow Green Group 144B. The calyx is ½” to ¾” long, Yellow-Green Group 144B, funnel shaped, persistent, and pubescent. The five imbricated sepals are lanceolate and joined at the base to form a cup. As the buds swell the bud sheath matures to a Greyed-Orange Group 165A, falls off, and reveals the flower color Red-Purple Group 62B.

Flowers: Perfect, single to semi-double, glabrous, open funnel shaped, 2” to 2½” in diameter by 1½” to 2½” in depth, borne on current season’s growth, non-fragrant; they last on the plant in the garden 5 to 6 days. Flower color is Red-Purple Group 62B upper surface and Red-Purple Group 62D under surface. After 3 to 4 days the flower changes to White Group 155D (upper surface and under surface). There are five true petals which are fused
at the base, elliptic, and have wavy margins. These petals are 1¾" to 2¼" long, ¾" to 1¾" wide, and have rounded apexes and entire margins. Three out of five petals are dotted with Purple-Violet Group 80C. There are 5 to 8 non-petaloid stamens which are 1½" to 1½" long. The filaments are Red Group 49D, the anthers are Greyed-Orange Group 167B, and the pollen matures to Yellow Group 11B. The 0–8 petaloid stamens are from ¾" to 1¼" long, ¼" to ½" wide, and odd shaped. The margins are entire and the apexes rounded. The pistil is single, non-petaloid, 1¾" to 1½" long and Red Group 49B. The ovary is densely glandular-setose and has five locules. The capsule matures in about 5 months, in Independence, La., to about ½" to ½" long; it has a persistent style, is Yellow-Green Group 146B, and contains from 100 to 400 nonwinged seeds. Normally fruit set is not heavy. There is a 2 to 3 week flowering period in April in Independence, La. Flowering resumes in July as the new buds mature and continues until frost which can be as late as November or December in Independence, La. Azaleas blooming at this time of year attract butterflies in profusion.

Culture: Grows well in a wide range of conditions, tolerates sun to shade. Prefers a moist, well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter. Responds well to mulching and medium applications of fertilizer; prefers pH 5.0 to 5.5. Very little pruning is needed; adaptable to container and above ground planters; makes a good foundation plant or informal hedge with excellent foliage and flower contrast. Ideal for coastal regions and warmer parts of Piedmont. Propagated with semi-hardwood cuttings in late spring through the summer.

Pests: Lace wing and spider mites can be a problem.

I claim:

1. A new and distinct variety of *Azalea* plant named 'Robleja' as illustrated and described.

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