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Head et al.

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(54) **AZALEA PLANT NAMED ‘RLH1-9P7’**

(50) Latin Name: *Rhododendron hybrida*
Varietal Denomination: **RLH1-9P7**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.**
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(58) **Field of Classification Search**
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See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A new and distinct cultivar of Azalea plant named ‘RLH1-9P7’, characterized by its relatively compact, upright to outwardly spreading and globose plant habit; freely basal branching habit; dense and bushy appearance; vigorous growth habit and rapid growth rate; evergreen, persistent dark green-colored leaves that do not abscise during the winter; freely flowering habit with remontant flowering during the spring, summer and autumn; large, non-persistent single to semi-double flowers that are hot pink in color during the spring and becoming more rose red in color during the summer; and excellent garden performance and temperature tolerance.

2 Drawing Sheets

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2

Botanical designation: *Rhododendron hybrida*.
Cultivar denomination: ‘RLH1-9P7’.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present Invention relates to a new and distinct cultivar of Azalea plant, botanically known as *Rhododendron hybrida*, commercially referred to as an evergreen Azalea plant and hereinafter referred to by the name ‘RLH1-9P7’.

The new Azalea plant is a product of a planned breeding program conducted by the Inventors in Long Creek, Oconee County, S.C. The objective of the breeding program is to create new compact evergreen Azalea plants having dense growth habit, large attractive flowers, flowers with good temperature tolerance, consistent remontant flowering habit, good garden performance and low and high temperature tolerance.

The new Azalea plant originated from a cross-pollination made by the Inventors in 1996 in Long Creek, Oconee County, S.C., of a proprietary selection of *Rhododendron hybrida* identified as code number RLH-1900-RP, not patented, as the female, or seed, parent with *Rhododendron hybrida* ‘Saybrook Glory’, not patented, as the male, or pollen, parent. The new Azalea plant was discovered and selected by the Inventors as a single flowering plant within the progeny of the stated cross-pollination in a controlled greenhouse environment in Long Creek, Oconee County, S.C. in 2000.

Asexual reproduction of the new Azalea plant by semi-hardwood stem cuttings taken in a controlled greenhouse environment in Long Creek, Oconee County, S.C. since 2005 has shown that the unique features of this new Azalea plant are stable and reproduced true to type in successive generations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Plants of the new Azalea have not been observed under all possible combinations of environmental conditions and cul-

tural practices. The phenotype may vary somewhat with variations in environmental conditions such as temperature, daylength and light intensity without, however, any variance in genotype. The following traits have been repeatedly observed and are determined to be the unique characteristics of ‘RLH1-9P7’. These characteristics in combination distinguish ‘RLH1-9P7’ as a new and distinct Azalea plant:

1. Relatively compact, upright to outwardly spreading and globose plant habit.
2. Freely basal branching habit; dense and bushy appearance; vigorous growth habit and rapid growth rate.
3. Evergreen, persistent dark green-colored leaves that do not abscise during the winter.
4. Freely flowering habit with remontant flowering during the spring, summer and autumn.
5. Large, non-persistent single to semi-double flowers that are hot pink in color during the spring and becoming more rose red in color during the summer.
6. Excellent garden performance and temperature tolerance.

Plants of the new Azalea differ primarily from plants of the female parent selection in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new Azalea are more outwardly spreading than and not as upright as plants of the female parent selection.
2. Plants of the new Azalea and the female parent selection differ in leaf color as plants of the female parent selection have bright green-colored leaves.
3. Plants of the new Azalea and the female parent selection differ in flower color as plants of the female parent selection have pale pink-colored flowers.

Plants of the new Azalea differ primarily from plants of the male parent, ‘Saybrook Glory’, in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new Azalea are more outwardly spreading than and not as upright as plants of 'Saybrook Glory'.
2. Plants of the new Azalea are more freely branching than plants of 'Saybrook Glory'.
3. Plants of the new Azalea have smaller leaves than plants of 'Saybrook Glory'.
4. Plants of the new Azalea and 'Saybrook Glory' differ in flower color as plants of 'Saybrook Glory' have red-purple colored flowers.

Plants of the new Azalea can be compared to the plants of 'Robleg', disclosed in U.S. Plant Pat. No. 15,227. In side-by-side comparisons conducted by the Inventors in Long Creek, Oconee County, S.C., plants of the new Azalea differed primarily from plants of 'Robleg' in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new Azalea were more compact and uniform in plant shape and required less pruning to maintain a more uniform shape than plants of 'Robleg'.
2. Plants of the new Azalea were more freely flowering than plants of 'Robleg'.
3. Flower petals of plants of the new Azalea were more undulate and ruffled than flower petals of plants of 'Robleg'.
4. Plants of the new Azalea and 'Robleg' differed in flower color as plants of 'Robleg' had white-colored flowers.
5. Plants of the new Azalea flowered during the spring, summer and autumn whereas plants of 'Robleg' only flowered during the spring and autumn.
6. Plants of the new Azalea were more cold hardy than plants of 'Robleg'.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The accompanying colored photographs illustrate the overall appearance of the new Azalea plant showing the colors as true as it is reasonably possible to obtain in colored reproductions of this type. Colors in the photographs may differ slightly from the color values cited in the detailed botanical description which accurately describe the colors of the new Azalea plant. Plants used in the photographs were ten years old.

The photograph on the first sheet is a top perspective view of a typical flowering plant of 'RLH1-9P7' grown during the summer.

The photograph on the second sheet is a close-up view of a typical flowering plant of 'RLH1-9P7' grown during the spring.

DETAILED BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION

The aforementioned photographs, following observations and measurements describe plants grown during the spring and summer in 5.7-liter containers in a shadehouse in Seneca, S.C. and under cultural practices typical of commercial Azalea production. During the production of the plants, day temperatures ranged from -5°C . to 40°C . and night temperatures ranged from -25°C . to 35°C . Plants used for the detailed description were two years old. In the following description, color references are made to The Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart, 2007 Edition, except where general terms of ordinary dictionary significance are used.

Botanical classification: *Rhododendron hybrida* 'RLH1-9P7'.

Commercial classification: Evergreen Azalea.

Parentage:

Female, or seed, parent.—Proprietary selection of *Rhododendron hybrida* identified as code number RLH-1900-RP, not patented.

Male, or pollen, parent.—*Rhododendron hybrida* 'Saybrook Glory', not patented.

Propagation:

Type.—By semi-hardwood stem cuttings.

Time to initiate roots, summer.—About 25 to 30 days at temperatures of 27°C . to 30°C .

Time to initiate roots, winter.—About 35 to 45 days at temperatures of 16°C . to 17°C .

Time to produce a rooted young plant, summer.—About 60 to 70 days at temperatures of 27°C . to 30°C .

Time to produce a rooted young plant, winter.—About 80 to 100 days at temperatures of 16°C . to 17°C .

Root description.—Fine, fibrous; initially white in color becoming light brown with development; actual color of the roots is dependent on substrate composition, water quality, fertilizer type and formulation, substrate temperature and physiological age of roots.

Rooting habit.—Freely branching; dense.

Plant description:

Plant form, plant and growth habit.—Perennial and evergreen flowering shrub; relatively compact, upright to outwardly spreading and globose plant habit; vigorous growth habit; rapid growth rate; freely flowering habit with numerous single to semi-double flowers.

Branching habit.—Freely branching habit with lateral branches potentially developing at every node; dense and bushy appearance; pinching (removal of terminal apex) enhances lateral branch development.

Plant height, soil level to top of flowers.—About 28 cm.

Plant diameter, area of spread.—About 51 cm.

Lateral branch description.—Length: About 14 cm.

Diameter at base: About 3.5 mm. Internode length at fully developed upper leaf axils: About 1 cm.

Strength: Strong. Aspect: Upright to outwardly spreading. Texture, developing: Pubescent, fine rusty brown-colored hairs. Texture, mature: Woody; glabrous. Color, developing: Close to 146B to 146C.

Color, semi-hardwood: Close to 146B to 146C becoming close to 165A with development. Color, mature: Close to N199B.

Leaf description.—Arrangement: Alternate; simple. Leaf retention: Very good winter leaf retention has been observed on plants of the new Azalea. Length: About 4.2 cm. Width: About 1.75 cm. Shape: Elliptic, oblong to oblanceolate. Apex: Acute; mucronulate. Base: Cuneate to attenuate. Margin: Entire; ciliate. Venation pattern: Pinnate; reticulate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Pubescent; coriaceous, tough. Color: Developing leaves, upper surface: Close to N137A. Developing leaves, lower surface: More green than 137B. Fully expanded leaves, upper surface: Close to N137A to N137B; venation, close to 146A to 146B. Fully expanded leaves, lower surface: Close to 146B; venation, close to 146B to 146D. Petioles: Length: About 9 mm. Diameter: About 2 mm. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Pubescent. Color, upper and lower surfaces: Close to 146B to 146C.

Flower description:

Flower appearance and arrangement.—Single to semi-double iridescent flowers arranged upwardly to outwardly in clusters at terminals and sub-terminals; single whorl of five petals fused towards the base surrounding one to eight petaloids; petaloid development is typically observed on summer flowers. 5

Natural flowering season.—Spring, April to May, and then remontant flowering during the summer and autumn, July to October or until frost in USDA Hardiness Zone 6b. 10

Flowering habit.—Freely flowering habit with usually about two to three flowers per cluster.

Flower longevity.—Flowers are durable and long-lasting; depending on the temperature, flowers last about five to ten days on the plant, dependent on ambient temperatures; flowers not persistent. 15

Fragrance.—None detected.

Flower diameter.—About 6.5 cm to 10.5 cm.

Flower depth.—About 5 cm. 20

Flower buds (before showing color).—Length: About 1 cm. Diameter: About 5 mm. Shape: Ovoid. Color: Close to 144A.

Petals.—Length: About 5.5 cm. Width: About 3.75 cm. Shape: Broadly ovate to orbicular; roughly spatulate. Apex: Rotund or occasionally emarginate; undulate. Margin: Entire; undulate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Smooth, glabrous; rugulose; waxy to velvety in appearance. Color: When opening, upper surface: Close to N57B to N57C; central spots and speckles, close to 60A. When opening, lower surface: Close to N57B to N57C. Fully opened, upper surface: Close to N57B to N57C; central spots and speckles, close to between 53A and 60A; during the summer, color shifts to closer to 53B to 53D with spots and speckles, close to 53A to 53B; petaloids developing during the summer are similar in color. Fully opened, lower surface: Close to N57B to N57C. 25 30 35

Sepals.—Arrangement: Five in a single whorl, fused at the base forming a campanulate to star-shaped 40

corona. Length: About 1.4 cm. Width: About 3.5 mm. Shape: Lanceolate. Apex: Acute. Base: Fused. Margin: Entire; ciliate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Pubescent. Color, upper surface: Close to 144B. Color, lower surface: Close to 144A.

Peduncles.—Length: About 1 cm. Diameter: About 3 mm. Angle: Mostly upright to outwardly. Strength: Strong; flexible. Texture: Pubescent. Color: Close to 144A to 144B.

Reproductive organs.—Androecium: Quantity of stamens per flower: During the spring, about eight to ten; in the summer, some or all are transformed into petaloids. Filament length: About 3.7 cm to 4.7 cm. Filament color: Close to N57B. Anther shape: Porandrous with four oblong, tubular to lunate-shaped pollen sacks basifixed to the filament. Anther length: About 3 mm. Anther color: Close to 183A. Pollen amount: None observed. Gynoecium: Pistil length: About 4.5 cm. Stigma shape: Round to flattened (capitate). Stigma color: Close to 59A. Style length: About 4 cm. Style color: Close to N57A. Ovary color: Close to 139A.

Fruits and seeds.—Fruit and seed development have not been observed on plants of the new Azalea.

Garden performance & temperature tolerance: Plants of the new Azalea have been observed to be very tolerant to rain, wind and temperatures ranging from about -25° C. to 45° C. Plants of the new Azalea are adaptable for USDA Hardiness Zones 6b to 9.

Disease & pest resistance: Plants have not been observed to be resistant to pathogens and pests common to Azalea plants.

It is claimed:

1. A new and distinct cultivar of Azalea plant named 'RLH1-9P7' as illustrated and described.

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