



US00PP23094P3

(12) **United States Plant Patent**
Harris

(10) **Patent No.:** **US PP23,094 P3**

(45) **Date of Patent:** **Oct. 2, 2012**

(54) **AZALEA PLANT NAMED ‘MNIHAR016’**

(50) Latin Name: *Rhododendron* sp.
Varietal Denomination: **MNIHAR016**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 147 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **12/807,009**

(22) Filed: **Aug. 25, 2010**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2012/0054930 P1 Mar. 1, 2012

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A01H 5/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **Plt./240**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **Plt./240**
See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A new and distinct variety of Azalea plant with spring and fall blooming, attractive, showy, single dark red flowers, easily propagated by semi-hardwood cuttings in late spring through summer, moderate growth rate under normal fertilization and moisture conditions; broadly-rounded and freely-branching in habit, grows well in containers, thrives in shade or sun and is hardy in Zone 7, is disclosed.

2 Drawing Sheets

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Genus and species: *Rhododendron* sp.
Variety denomination: ‘MNIHAR016’.

BACKGROUND OF THE NEW PLANT

The present invention is a new and distinct variety of ever-green Azalea of the genus *Rhododendron*. This new Azalea, hereinafter referred to as ‘MNIHAR016’, was discovered in 2004 in Lawrenceville, Ga. ‘MNIHAR016’ originated from a planned cross hybridization in 1999 between the female azalea plant ‘Conleb’ (U.S. Plant Pat. No. 10,581) and the male azalea plant ‘Jay Valentine’ (unpatented) in a controlled environment in Lawrenceville, Ga. The present invention has a unique combination of blooming period, growth habit, and cold hardiness.

The new plant was first propagated via semi-hardwood cuttings in 2004 in Dearing, Ga. and has been asexually reproduced by semi-hardwood cuttings in Dearing, Ga. for over six years. The new plant retains its distinctive characteristics and reproduces true to type in successive asexual propagations by semi-hardwood cuttings.

Plant Breeder’s Rights for this plant have not been applied for. ‘MNIHAR016’ has not been made publicly available or sold more than one year prior to the filing date of this application.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The following are the most outstanding and distinguishing characteristics of this new plant when grown under normal horticultural practices in Dearing, Ga.

1. Spring and fall blooming;
2. Attractive, showy, dark-red flowers;
3. Numerous single flowers;
4. Easily propagated by semi-hardwood cuttings in late spring through summer;
5. Moderate to rapid growth rate under normal fertilization and moisture conditions;

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6. Upright, broadly spreading to rounded, open to dense as the plant matures in nature;
7. Grows well in containers;
8. Thrives in shade or sun; and
9. Hardy in Zone 7.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

This new Azalea plant is illustrated by the accompanying photographs which show buds, flowers, immature foliage and mature foliage. The colors shown are as true as can be reasonably obtained by conventional photographic means. The photographs are of 4-years-old plants grown in filtered shade in September in 2009 in Dearing, Ga.

FIG. 1 is a close-up showing the stems and mature foliage.

FIG. 2 shows mature the foliage and growth habit of a 5-year-old plant.

FIG. 3 is a close-up showing flower buds and immature foliage.

FIG. 4 is a close-up showing flower size, form, and color.

DETAILED BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW PLANT

The following is a detailed description of the new variety of Azalea based on observations made of 4-year-old plants grown in a three-gallon containers according to wholesale commercial production conditions under full-sun and in an evaluation bed under semi-shade conditions in Dearing, Ga. in spring, summer, and fall in 2009. The colors of the various plant parts are detailed with reference to The Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart (2001).

Classification:

Family.—Ericaceae.
Species.—*Rhododendron* sp.
Common Name.—Azalea.
Commercial Name.—‘MNIHAR016’.

Parentage:

Female parent.—The azalea plant ‘Conleb’ (U.S. Plant Pat. No. 10,581).

Male parent.—The azalea plant ‘Jay Valentine’ (unpatented).

Growth:

Form.—Upright, broadly spreading to rounded.

Texture.—Medium.

Height.—152.4 cm to 182.88 cm.

Width.—242.84 cm to 304.8 cm.

Growth habit.—Freely-branching; begins open maturing to dense in nature as the plant matures.

Growth rate.—Moderate to rapid growth rate under normal fertilization and moisture conditions. In a period of five years from a rooted cutting the plant reaches a height of 76.2 cm and a spread of 167.64 cm. The growth rate normally averages about 11.1 cm per year; the plant reaches a height of 152.4 cm to 182.88 cm at maturity while maintaining a dense habit due to the abundant branch development.

Spring growth.—The date of initial spring growth is April 5, followed by continuous growth through fall.

Life cycle.—Perennial and evergreen.

Leaves:

Arrangement.—Alternate, simple and evergreen.

Shape.—Elliptic.

Apex.—Acute with a mucro.

Base.—Acute.

Margin.—Entire.

Length.—3.2 cm.

Width.—1.3 cm.

Venation pattern.—Pinnate; the mid-veins and laterals are impressed on the upper surface and the prominent on the lower surface.

Venation color (both surfaces).—RHS 144B (yellow-green).

Immature leaf.—Upper surface: Color: Matte, RHS N144A (yellow-green). Pubescence: Strigose, moderate amount; color is RHS N155A (white) to RHS 159B (orange-white). Lower surface: Color: Matte, RHS 146C (yellow-green). Pubescence: Strigose and scabrous, moderate amount mainly along mid-vein; color is RHS N155A (white) to N155A (white).

Mature leaf.—Upper surface: Color: Matte, RHS 147A (yellow-green). Pubescence: Strigose, low to moderate amount; color is RHS 164D (grey-orange). Lower surface: Color: Matte, RHS 147B (yellow-green). Pubescence: Strigose, low amount; color is RHS 164B (greyed-orange).

Petiole.—Length: 0.5 to 0.6 cm. Diameter: 0.1 cm. Pubescence: Strigose, length is 0.15 cm; color is RHS 175A (greyed-orange) maturing to RHS 164B (greyed-orange). Color: Begins as RHS 144C (yellow-green) and matures to RHS 144B (yellow-green).

Stems:

Form.—Densely branched at buds.

Young stems (1-year old and younger).—Color: RHS 144B (yellow-green) maturing to RHS N199C (grey-brown). Pubescence: Strigose RHS N155D (white) to RHS 165A (greyed-orange).

Second-year stems.—Stem and pubescence color: RHS 197A (greyed-green) without pubescence present. Length: 11.1 cm on average. Diameter: 0.3 cm. Pith: Solid and uniform. Internode length: Average 0.8 cm.

Flower buds:

Arrangement and form.—Tight; borne in groups of one, two or three, groups of two or three are most prevalent, sheathed by a pair of modified leaf bracts which are 2.5 cm in length, 1.5 cm in width, persistent and RHS 147A (yellow-green) in color.

Shape.—Ovate.

Apex.—Acute.

Base.—Rounded.

Length (at tight bud).—1.6 cm.

Diameter (at tight bud).—0.6 cm.

Bud scales.—Length: 1.3 cm. Width: 0.8 cm.

Color (of scales).—Immature scales are RHS 145D (yellow-green) and mature to RHS 144B (yellow-green) with areas of RHS 149D (yellow-green).

Texture.—Scabrous; strigose and tomentose pubescence RHS 164A (greyed-orange) and RHS 164B (greyed-orange) in color.

Pedicel.—Length: 0.5 cm. Diameter: 0.2 cm. Texture: Strigose pubescence that is RHS 164B (greyed-orange). Color: RHS 45A (red).

Calyx.—Form and arrangement: Composed of 5 sepals in a cup-shape. Length: 0.6 cm. Width: 0.6 cm. Color: RHS 144A (yellow-green). Pubescence: Strigose; RHS N155A (white) in color. Sepals: Shape: Lanceolate and broadly elliptical. Apex: Cuspidate to Obtuse. Base: Fused; joined at base to form a cup. Margin: Entire with some lobulate. Color: Upper RHS 144A (yellow-green), Lower RHS 144A (yellow-green). Length: 0.4 cm. Width: 0.3 cm.

Flowers:

Type.—Perfect, single flowers.

Shape.—Open funnel-shaped.

Flowering habit and period.—Borne on the current season’s growth; five weeks beginning in late March in Dearing, Ga.; flowering resumes in late August and continues until frost which can be as late as November or December.

Lastingness of flowers on the plant.—4 to 6 days in the sun; 4 to 7 days in the shade; flowers are self-cleaning.

Fragrance.—Absent.

Diameter.—7.0 cm.

Depth.—5.0 cm.

Petals.—Quantity per flower and arrangement: 5 imbricate petals that are fused at the base and remain fused up to 3.2 cm. Shape: Obovate. Apex: Rounded. Base: Fused. Margin: Entire to undulate. Texture (both upper and lower surfaces): Glabrous. Length (of petals without spots): 5.5 cm. Width (of petals without spots): 3.2 cm. Length (petals with spots): 5.6 cm. Width (petals with spots): 3.1 cm. Color: upper surfaces are RHS 45A (red); lower surfaces are RHS 45A (red); the upper surface of the spots are RHS N34A (orange-red) and lower surface of spots are not visible.

Reproductive parts:

Pistil.—Quantity and form: Single, non-petaloid. Length: 5 cm. Diameter: 0.075 cm. Stigma: Color: RHS 187B (greyed-purple). Diameter: 0.15 cm. Style color: RHS 45B (red). Ovary: Pubescent, Tomentose RHS N155A (white), with 5 locules.

Stamens.—Number: 6 to 10 per flower; non-petaloid. Length: 3.2 cm to 3.8 cm. Color: RHS 45C (red). Filament: RHS 45C (red); 3.7 cm in length. Anther: RHS 46A (red); 0.2 cm in length by 0.1 cm in width. Pollen: Abundant; RHS 155D (white).

Fruit:

Maturity.—The capsule matures in about 6 months in Dearing, Ga. and the fruit set is low and contains about 100-300 non-winged seeds.

Length.—1.3 cm.

Width.—0.6 cm.

Color.—RHS 147B (yellow-green).

CULTURE

'MNIHAR016' grows well in a wide range of conditions and tolerates sun to shade. 'MNIHAR016' prefers moist, well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter and responds well to mulching and medium applications of fertilizer. 'MNIHAR016' does best in soil with a pH of 5.0 to 5.5 and is propagated with semi-hardwood cuttings in late spring through the summer. Azaleas root in five to six weeks with high 80% plus percentage of rooting, tissue culture is also an effective means of propagation for azaleas.

DISEASES AND INSECTS

Lace bugs, root weevils, and spider mites can be a problem. Fungal and bacterial pathogens have not been observed, but no resistance testing has been performed and no claim to abnormal resistance to pathogens can be made.

COMPARISON WITH PARENTAL AND COMMERCIAL VARIETIES

In Table 1, the 'MNIHAR016' is compared to parental varieties 'Conleb' (U.S. Plant Pat. No. 10,581) and 'Jay Valentine' (unpatented) and lists the differences between the varieties.

TABLE 1

Characteristic	'MNIHAR016'	'Conleb'	'Jay Valentine'
Plant Height (Mature)	152.4 cm to 182.88 cm	121.92 cm to 152.4 cm	121.92 cm
Flower Diameter	7 cm	6.5 cm	6.25 cm to 7.62 cm
Flower Form	Single	Single to semi-double	Single
Flower Color	Dark Red	Red	Deep Red
Bloom Period	Late-March to Late April and late August until frost	April and late July until frost	April
Hardy Zone	7	7	7
Stamen Number	6 to 10	0 to 9	5
Stamen Type	Non-petaloid	Petaloid and Non-petaloid	Petaloid

When 'MNIHAR016' is compared to the commercial variety 'Roblen' (U.S. Plant Pat. No. 16,248), 'MNIHAR016' has a broader, more rapid, and open growth habit (76.2 cm and a spread of 167.64 cm in five years), while 'Roblen' has a height of 91.44 cm and a spread of 60.96 cm in six years. Additionally, 'MNIHAR016' produces dark-red flowers, while 'Roblen' has bright red flowers.

I claim:

1. A new variety of Azalea plant named 'MNIHAR016' as herein shown and described.

* * * * *



FIG. 1



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

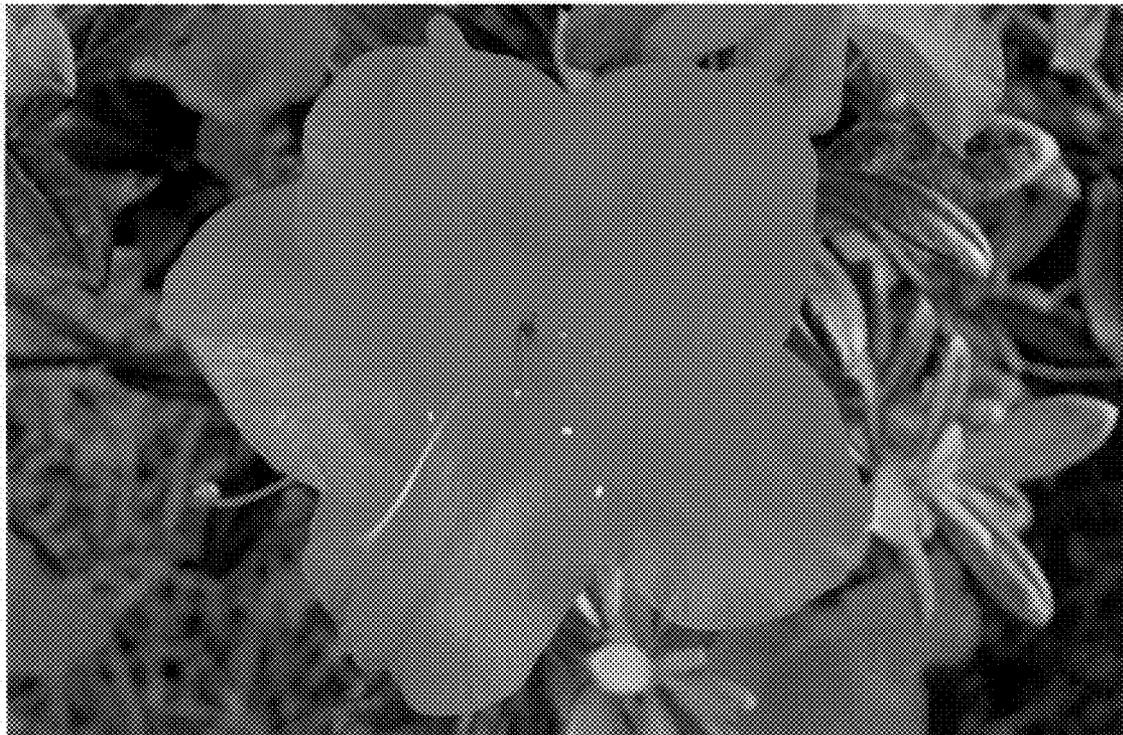


FIG. 4