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(54) *AZALEA* PLANT NAMED ‘RLH1-4P19’

(50) Latin Name: *Rhododendron hybrida*
Varietal Denomination: **RLH1-4P19**

(75) Inventors: **Robert Harold Head**, Seneca, SC (US);
Lisa Jones Head, Seneca, SC (US)

(73) Assignee: **Head’s Select, Inc.**, Seneca, SC (US)

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **Plt./238**

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See application file for complete search history.

Primary Examiner—Annette H Para

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—C. A. Whealy

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A new and distinct cultivar of *Azalea* plant named ‘RLH1-4P19’, characterized by its compact, upright, outwardly spreading and globose plant habit; freely branching habit; dense, bushy and vigorous growth habit; evergreen and persistent dark green-colored leaves that do not abscise during the winter; freely flowering habit during spring and from summer until frost in autumn; large purple-colored flowers that are not persistent; single star-shaped flower form; and excellent garden performance.

2 Drawing Sheets

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Botanical designation: *Rhododendron hybrida*.
Cultivar denomination: ‘RLH1-4P19’.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present Invention relates to a new and distinct cultivar of *Azalea* plant, botanically known as *Rhododendron hybrida*, an evergreen *Azalea*, and hereinafter referred to by the name ‘RLH1-4P19’.

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, good foliage retention during the winter, consistent summer reblooming qualities and cold hardiness.

The new *Azalea* plant originated from a cross-pollination made by the Inventors in 1996, 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 a proprietary selection of *Rhododendron hybrida* identified as code number RLH-19-PAF, 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 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 environmental conditions. The phenotype may vary somewhat with variations in environment such as temperature 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 ‘RLH1-4P19’. These characteristics in combination distinguish ‘RLH1-4P19’ as a new and distinct *Azalea* cultivar:

1. Compact, upright, outwardly spreading and globose plant habit.
2. Freely branching habit; dense, bushy and vigorous growth habit.
3. Evergreen and persistent dark green-colored leaves that do not abscise during the winter.
4. Freely flowering habit during spring and from summer until frost in autumn.
5. Large purple-colored flowers that are not persistent.
6. Single star-shaped flower form.
7. Excellent garden performance.

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

1. Plants of the new *Azalea* are more freely branching than plants of the female parent selection.
2. Plants of the new *Azalea* are more freely flowering than plants of the female parent selection.
3. Plants of the new *Azalea* have larger flowers than plants of the female parent selection.
4. Plants of the new *Azalea* have single flowers whereas plants of the female parent selection have semi-double flowers.
5. Flowers of plants of the new *Azalea* are purple in color whereas flowers of plants of the female parent selection are pink in color.

Plants of the new *Azalea* differ from plants of the male parent selection in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new *Azalea* are more upright and more freely branching than plants of the male parent selection.
2. Plants of the new *Azalea* have darker purple-colored flowers than plants of the male parent selection.

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 in Long Creek, Oconee County, S.C., plants of the new *Azalea* differed from plants of ‘Robleg’ in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new *Azalea* were more freely branching than plants of 'Robleg'.
2. Plants of the new *Azalea* were more freely flowering than plants of 'Robleg'.
3. Flowers of plants of the new *Azalea* were purple in color whereas flowers of plants of 'Robleg' were white in color.
4. Plants of the new *Azalea* flowered during the spring, summer and autumn whereas plants of 'Robleg' flowered only in the spring and autumn.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

The accompanying colored photographs illustrate the overall appearance of the new *Azalea* plant. These photographs show 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.

The photograph on the first sheet comprises a side perspective view of a typical flowering plant of 'RLH1-4P19' grown in a container.

The photograph on the second sheet is a close-up view of a typical flower of 'RLH1-4P19'.

DETAILED BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION

The aforementioned photographs and following observations and measurements describe plants grown in Long Creek, Oconee County, S.C. in 5.7-liter containers, in a polypropylene-covered shade house during the late summer and under commercial production conditions. 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 photographs were five years old and plants used for the 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* 'RLH1-4P19'.

Commercial classification: Evergreen-type *Azalea*.

Parentage:

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

Male, or pollen, parent.—Proprietary selection of *Rhododendron hybrida* identified as code number RLH-19-PAF, 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, close to 155C, in color becoming closer to 159C and eventually 164A with development.

Rooting habit.—Freely branching; dense.

Plant description:

Plant form and growth habit.—Perennial and evergreen flowering shrub; compact, upright, outwardly spreading and globose plant habit; freely branching habit; dense, bushy and vigorous growth habit; moderate growth rate; freely flowering habit with numerous showy single flowers.

Branching habit.—Freely branching habit with about four to six basal branches developing on one year old plants; pinching (removal of terminal apex) will enhance lateral branch development.

Plant height, soil level to top of flowers.—About 35 cm to 50 cm.

Plant diameter, area of spread.—About 30 cm to 40 cm.

Lateral branch description.—Length: About 5 cm to 20 cm. Diameter at base: About 2 mm to 5 mm. Internode length: About 3 mm to 19 mm. Strength: Strong. Aspect: Upright and outwardly positioned. Texture, developing: Pubescent, fine greyed orange-colored hairs. Texture, mature: Woody; pubescent, fine greyed orange-colored hairs. Color, developing: Close to 145B. Color, semi-hardwood: Close to 145A becoming close to 165A to 165B with development. Color, mature: Close to 165A.

Foliage description.—Arrangement: Alternate; simple. Foliage retention: Very good winter foliage retention has been observed on plants of the new *Azalea*. *Length:* About 3 cm to 6.5 cm. *Width:* About 1 cm to 2.5 cm. *Shape:* Oblanceolate to elliptic. *Apex:* Subacute; mucronulate. *Base:* Cuneate to attenuate. *Margin:* Entire; slightly revolute; ciliate. *Venation pattern:* Pinnate; reticulate. *Texture, upper and lower surfaces:* Pubescent; coriaceous, tough. *Color:* Developing leaves, upper surface: Between 137A and 139A. Developing leaves, lower surface: Close to 138A. Fully expanded leaves, upper surface: Close to 139A; venation, close to 138B. Fully expanded leaves, lower surface: Close to 137C; venation, close to 151A. *Petiole:* Length: About 6 mm to 10.5 mm. *Diameter:* About 1 mm to 1.6 mm. *Texture, upper and lower surfaces:* Pubescent. *Color:* Developing leaves, upper and lower surfaces: Close to N144D. Fully expanded leaves, upper surface: Close to 138B. Fully expanded leaves, upper surface: Close to 151A.

Flower description:

Natural flowering season.—Spring, April to May, and then re-flowering during the summer and autumn, July to October, until frost in South Carolina.

Flower arrangement and appearance.—Single star-shaped flowers arranged in clusters at terminals and sub-terminals with usually about one to three flower buds and three to six flowers per cluster; uniform and freely flowering habit; flowers face upward or outward.

Flower appearance.—Flowers rotate and rose-like; single flower form; flowers with a single whorl of five petals.

Flower longevity.—Durable and long-lasting; flowers last about five to ten days on the plant and about three to five days as a cut flower; flowers not persistent.

Fragrance.—None detected.

Flower diameter.—About 7 cm to 8 cm.

Flower depth.—About 4 cm to 4.5 cm.

Flower bud (before showing color).—Length: About 1 cm to 1.5 cm. Diameter: About 5 mm to 7 mm. Shape: Ovoid. Color: Close to 137D.

Petals.—Arrangement: Single star-shaped flowers have a single whorl of five petals, fused at the base forming a wide funnel-shaped corolla. Length: About 3 cm to 3.5 cm. Width: About 3 cm to 3.5 cm. Shape: Broadly ovate to orbicular. Apex: Rotund; undulate. Margin: Entire; undulate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Smooth, glabrous; rugulose; waxy to velvety in appearance. Color: When opening, upper surface: Close to N81A; spots and speckles, close to 71A. When opening, lower surface: Close to N81A. Fully opened, upper surface: Close to N78A; spots and speckles, close to 71A; color becoming closer to N78B with development. Fully opened, lower surface: Close to N78A; color becoming closer to N78B with development.

Petaloids.—Quantity: None to rarely one petaloid present. Length: About 2.5 cm to 3.5 cm. Width: About 1 cm to 1.5 cm. Shape: Obelliptic to obovate. Apex: Obtuse; may be plaited. Margin: Entire; undulate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Smooth, glabrous; rugulose; waxy. Color: When opening, upper and lower surfaces: Close to N81A. Fully opened, upper and lower surfaces: Close to N78A; color becoming closer to N78B with development.

Sepals.—Arrangement: Five in a single whorl, fused at the base forming a campanulate to star-shaped corona. Length: About 1.5 cm to 2 cm. Width: About 3.5 mm to 4 mm. Shape: Lanceolate. Apex: Subulate. Base: Truncate. Margin: Entire; slightly revolute; ciliate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Densely pubescent. Color, upper and lower surfaces: Close to 143C; central blotch and streaks, close to 60D.

Peduncles.—Length: About 2 mm to 4 mm. Diameter: About 3 mm to 4 mm. Angle: Mostly upright. Strength: Strong. Texture: Pubescent. Color: Close to 145A; at maturity, close to 164A.

Pedicels.—Length: About 1.5 cm to 2 cm. Diameter: About 1.5 mm to 2 mm. Angle: Upright to outwardly. Strength: Strong. Texture: Pubescent. Color: Close to 60D; towards the base, close to 145B; becoming closer to N144A with development.

Reproductive organs.—Androecium: Quantity of stamens per flower: About ten. Filament length: About 3.5 cm to 4.5 cm. Filament color: Close to 67B. Anther shape: Porandrous with four oblong, tubular to lunate-shaped pollen sacks basifixed to the filament. Anther length: About 2.5 mm to 3 mm. Anther color: Close to N186C. Pollen amount: Abundant. Pollen color: Close to 158B. Gynoecium: Pistil length: About 4.5 cm to 5 cm. Stigma shape: Round to flattened (capitate). Stigma color: Close to N79B. Style length: About 4.4 cm to 5.9 cm. Style color: Close to 61B. Ovary color: Close to 143B.

Fruits.—Quantity per plant: About three to five. Length: About 8 mm to 10 mm. Diameter: About 4 mm to 5 mm. Texture: Slightly rugulose to scabridulose; glandular, setaceous. Color: Close to 146C; at maturity, close to 165A.

Seeds.—Quantity per fruit: About 50 to 200. Length: About 1 mm to 1.5 mm. Diameter: About 0.2 mm to 0.3 mm. Color: Close to 165B.

Weather/temperature tolerance: Plants of the new *Azalea* have been observed to be very tolerant to rain and wind. Plants of the new *Azalea* have been observed to tolerate temperatures from about -25° C. to about 40° C. and are suitable for USDA Hardiness Zones 6 to 9.

Disease/pest resistance: Plants have not been observed to be resistant to pathogens and pests common to *Azaleas*.

It is claimed:

1. A new and distinct cultivar of *Azalea* plant named 'RLH1-4P19' as illustrated and described.

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