

HARDIEST AND BEST RHODODENDRONS
FOR COMMERCIAL PROPAGATION

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When Sylvester March called me on the telephone and asked me to talk on the "Hardest and Best Rhododendrons", I said sure, without giving it a second thought, and then it soon occurred to me that the best rhododendron are very seldom the hardest. So in preparing the talk this morning it seemed the only thing that was reasonable to do was to define the regions and then say these are the best rhododendron that are hardy in each of these regions.

I am going to use for this purpose the U. S. Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zone Map, prepared by Henry Skinner, which is much better and more accurate than the old map. We will have a quick look at novelties, all new rhododendrons introduced in the East within the last couple of years which are suitable for each of the principal hardiness zones in the principal parts of the United States starting at the Middle East climate and working up to the most severe.

Beginning with the Dexter hybrids, we will show a number of them. (Slides of each of the varieties were shown.)

Mrs. W. R. Coe. Dexter hybrids as a group are prominent among the new introductions in the last several years - larger flowers, clearer colors. Most of them are fragrant and they bloom earlier than the old standard ironclads. They all sell very readily. This is Mrs. W. R. Coe, one of the best Dexter hybrids. Mrs. W. R. Coe, not as hardy as many of the others, still is hardy in Zone 7A, which is the climate of Philadelphia and metropolitan New York. This is a glowing color, an unusual raspberry color, about four inches in diameter, twice the size of familiar clones. Good foliage. Introduced by Westbury Rose Company.

Belle Heller. Beautiful large white flower here, better than Mrs. P. D. Williams, introduced by Tony Shammerello of South Euclid, Ohio. It is highly satisfactory in a climate such as New York.

Skyglow. An unusual champaign color, very fragrant. Foliage is a little yellow but color is a great novelty. A Dexter hybrid, originated at Sandwich, Massachusetts, introduced by Warren Baldsiefen Nursery, Rochelle Park, New Jersey. Good for Zone 7A.

Tom Everett. Another Dexter hybrid, introduced by Jim Wells, Red Bank, New Jersey. Good, reliable rhododendron for years at the New York Botanical Garden under #205. Much better quality than old ironclads, not so hardy, but still quite satisfactory at metropolitan New York and in Philadelphia, and similar climates. Fifteen to twenty flowers to truss, good foliage, a very fine rhododendron.

Now we are going to step up one zone in hardiness, to Zone 6B, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Boston.

Scintillation. This is the first of the Dexter hybrid clone to be introduced. Up to this, only seedlings were available. This is a fine selection, almost a perfect rhododendron, introduced by Westbury Rose Company.

Here we have Wheatley, by Howard Phipps, introduced by Westbury Rose Company. It is a reliable rhododendron for Zone 6B. Remember now, these all are extending your blooming season on the early side. When the customers come into your nursery you have a very outstanding rhododendron that will bloom ten days before the commercial clones come in. All of them have much larger flowers, clearer colors, and many are fragrant.

Brown Eyes. Introduced by the Bosley Nursery of Mentor, Ohio, a Dexter hybrid in a different group. Mr. Bosley went up to Mr. Dexter's estate at Sandwich, Massachusetts, the year before he died and Dexter picked out a carload of rhododendron which he thought were his hardiest, and sent them to Mentor, Ohio. In the course of the next several years almost all died except 10 or 12 of these. Mr. Bosley picked out 8 or 10 and he is selling them now mostly under number. This is one that is available and he calls it Brown Eyes. All of this Bosley group are unbelievably floriferous. I have checked and 97% of the terminals have flower buds year after year. It is characteristic of this entire Bosley group of rhododendrons.

BD1020. Another Dexter now offered by Bosley. It doesn't have a very good habit, but it fills in nicely as it gets older, and you can see it has great clarity of color. There is nothing like it at all among the ironclad rhododendron.

Cheer. Cunningham's White hybrid, introduced by Tony Shammarello. It blooms May 5th, before the Dexter hybrids. It is very valuable for extending the season on the early side.

Elie. Another Shammarello, valuable for early bloom, but I think it is only fair to say it is not suitable everywhere, where Cunningham's White and its hybrids tend to open florets in the fall in some climates, and the balance of the buds are lost to winter cold. For example, Cunningham's White hybrids are not satisfactory at Washington, D. C. for this reason. The best comment I can make is if Cunningham's White is satisfactory for you, these will be also, and will give color in early May, not available from any other rhododendrons. Elie blooms about May 10th.

Spring Glory. Another of Cunningham's White hybrids from Mr. Shammarello. Very attractive, highly satisfactory rhododendron for Zone 6. In Zone 7 probably it would have a tendency to bloom partially in the fall.

I don't want to put you fellows off on these because in a warmer climate than your zone, they tend to bloom in the fall. If you are in Zone 6 you will find they are highly satisfactory and they will sell very readily at a time when you don't have color for any other rhododendron.

Tony. Shammarello hybrid, blooms later, about May 20th, and about a week earlier than any red heretofore available. Boule de Neige hybrid. There is no problem about this opening florets in the fall. Satisfactory in Washington, Zone 7, just as it is in Zone 6, anyplace that is cold hardy. We are recommending this for Zone 6 or anyplace else where the climate is similar to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Boston.

David Gable. Gable hybrid introduced simultaneously by Warren Baldsiefen Nursery, Rochelle Park, New Jersey, and by Joseph Gable, Stewartstown, Pennsylvania. Some of Mr. Gable's rhododendrons are primarily for the connoisseur. This is one that is highly commercial, full truss, large flowers, very early blooming, handsome foliage, and vigorous plant. It is very fine for Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Boston.

Now we are going to step up to Zone 6A, which is the climate of Morgantown, West Virginia, Altoona, Pennsylvania, and Waterbury, Connecticut.

Pink Perfection. Introduced by De Wilde's Rhodo-Lake Nursery, Shiloh, New Jersey. It has large flowers, clear color, good foliage, and good growth habit. It is a first rate rhododendron.

Pink Cameo. Shammarello hybrid. Blooms about May 20th, and it seems to be satisfactory anywhere in Zone 6A.

King Tut. Another Shammarello hybrid, good habit and exceptionally showy. Those of us who have more than casual interest in rhododendron knows that our friend supplies the King type and this carries its good characteristics.

Here we have Pink Dawn. This is another Shammarello hybrid, a midseason bloomer. These Shammarello hybrids may have to be moved up another half zone with further testing, perhaps in the 5B instead of 6A. I am placing them tentatively in 6A, because I am trying to be conservative in evaluating the hardiness of all these rhododendron this morning. You fellows have to put these out in the nursery and you are not like a hobbyist who will protect them and give them preferred sites, so I feel in the zone for which these are recommended you can line these out in the field and you are not going to have any trouble. All the same, this is a very conservative listing and they probably deserve to be a little hardier than the categories I am putting them in this morning.

This is Pinnacle, another Shammarello hybrid, very outstanding, midseason bloomer, one of the most impressive of all the new introductions of rhododendron in the last several years - Pinnacle. This

I feel will be a good rhododendron in commercial use 50 years from now.

Pioneer. This is an entirely different type of rhododendron, is very early blooming, a scaly-leaved rhododendron. It was introduced simultaneously by Joe Gable and Warren Baldsiefen, at Rochelle Park, New Jersey, and I believe now offered for sale by Sherwood Hill Nursery at Brewster, New York. It has been a great commercial success. It blooms very early in April. This hybrid has small leaves, compact cushion-like growth habit, which doesn't show too well in the picture. When it is mature it is about four feet. It is an ideal foundation plant for single story houses. It has myriad trusses of clear pink flowers. It is a fine plant for 6A and for Waterbury, Connecticut, a little colder than we have been talking about. These are propagated early in July.

A lot of fellows say, "I can't propagate these scaly leafed hybrids, they don't seem to root." The cuttings have to be taken in different seasons, early in July and they root as readily as evergreens and azaleas. There is no problem at all.

I am going to step up to Zone 5B, which is Youngstown, Ohio; Scranton, Pennsylvania; and Worcester, Massachusetts.

BD1016 - Another Dexter hybrid, introduced by Bosley of Mentor. This is the hardiest single hybrid I know of. Of the hundreds I have tested on the trials, this is the hardiest, probably harder than the parent. This comes very, very close to being as hardy as any standard ironclad that has been in the nursery industry for 100 years, but it is far better. It has a flower almost twice the size. It has fragrance and good habit of growth.

BD1009 - Another of the extra-hardy Dexters introduced by Bosley of Mentor, a very beautiful plant.

Now we are going to come to the coldest zone, 5A, of which I can speak with a first-hand knowledge. This is the climate of Augusta, Maine; Concord, New Hampshire, and my own trial grounds at Brookville, Pennsylvania. This is a climate that routinely experiences 20 degrees below zero.

Ramapo. This is probably sold in larger quantities than any rhododendron, introduced in the last 100 years, another scaly leafed. It looks like a blue flowered azalea. The nursery that handles it sells out every spring. It is a Nearing hybrid and not introduced formally by anyone as far as I know. It is now offered for sale by the Westbury Rose Company and Warren Baldsiefen Nursery in Rochelle Park, and several others.

Windbeam. Another Nearing hybrid in the scaly leaf group, small leaves, early blooming, emphatically evergreen over winter. It might grow to five feet at maturity. Pale pink flowers aging white. Hardy to 25 degrees below zero, and comes through beautifully at 32. This is available from Warren Baldsiefen and Westbury. Again, these scaly leaf hybrids need to be propagated early in July.

Conewago. Another of the scaly leaf hybrids, produced by Joe Gable. It is very attractive, early blooming, and hardy anywhere Rhododendrons will grow but has a defect of only being partially evergreen over winter. It was introduced simultaneously by Joseph Gable, and Warren Baldsiefen. This, incidentally, is hardy. In an older plant they are just smothered with rose-pink flowers that make a good showing. I think there is one near Joe Gable's place near Stewartstown.

LaBars' White. This is a fine form of catawbiense album introduced in 1961 by LaBars' Rhododendron Nursery, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. This has superior habit, fine foliage, dead white flowers, freely produced. This is probably hardier than any hybrid rhododendron. If any of you fellows are from Vermont or New Hampshire, this will grow for you when no hybrid will grow at all. This is a very fine ornamental, and takes care of itself. It doesn't need to be pampered.

MR. HOOGENDOORN: Isn't this a catawbiense?

MR. LEACH: It is a selected form of catawbiense and Russ Harman found it in the mountains, I believe, of North Carolina.

Sefton. There is nothing new about this, but it is a fine, hardy Rhododendron which lives after 25 degrees below zero. It has a unique plum color and comes after the midseason blooms have gone. It has large blossoms of distinctive color. It has seemed to sell out quickly. The only source I know for it at the present time is Westbury Rose Company. This is in bloom when all the others have gone.

Finally, Lady Armstrong - another first rate rhododendron rarely seen. Anthony Water brought it over in 1876. Again, I don't know why this isn't freely available, because it is one of the better rhododendron I have in my place. This particular picture was taken by Life Magazine photographer who came out to get a picture. Out of literally hundreds he thought this was one of the most handsome and attractive on the place. It is very free blooming; looks like this every year. Possibly there are other sources, but I know Westbury has it and I believe possibly Sherwood Hill Nursery has it. I am not too sure about the latter, but I think it certainly deserves to be a lot more popular than it is. It is a first-rate Rhododendron in every way and the newer introductions have not displaced it.

Thank you. You have been very patient, and my time is up.

MODERATOR MARCH: Our next speaker will be Mr. Richard Fillmore from the Department of Botany, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. He will speak on Rooting a Sport of Cephalotaxus.