



US00PP15227P2

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

(10) **Patent No.:** **US PP15,227 P2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Oct. 12, 2004**

(54) **AZALEA PLANT NAMED ‘ROBLEG’**

(50) Latin Name: *Rhododendron hybrid*
Varietal Denomination: **Robleg**

(75) Inventor: **Robert Edward Lee**, Independence, LA (US)

(73) 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 30 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **10/741,939**

(22) Filed: **Dec. 22, 2003**

(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** **A01H 5/00**

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

(58) **Field of Search** **Plt./238**

Primary Examiner—Kent Bell

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A new and distinct variety of *Azalea* plant named ‘Robleg’, characterized by its unique blooming time, dense and globose growth habit, dark green glossy foliage, and attractive large single white flowers.

1 Drawing Sheet

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Genus species: *Rhododendron hybrid*.
Varietal denomination: ‘Robleg’.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a new and distinct variety of evergreen *Azalea* of the genus *Rhododendron* and a member of the Ericaceae family. This new *Azalea* variety, hereinafter referred to as ‘Robleg’, was discovered by Robert Edward Lee of Transcend Nursery in August, 1998 in Independence, La. ‘Robleg’ originated from a controlled breeding program in Independence, La. The objective of the breeding program was to create new *Azalea* varieties which have unique blooming periods, bloom colors, bloom forms, bloom sizes, and growth habits. ‘Robleg’ originated from a cross made by Mr. Lee in April, 1996 of the cultivar ‘Watchet’ (unpatented) as the female, or seed, parent with the proprietary hybrid seedling, number 2-72 (unpatented) as the male, or pollen, parent.

Asexual propagation of the new plant by cuttings has been under Mr. Lee’s direction at the same location. The new plant retains its distinctive characteristics and reproduces true to type in successive generations. The plant cannot be reproduced true from seed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The following are the most outstanding and distinguishing characteristics of this new cultivar when grown under normal horticultural practices in Independence, La.

1. The unique spring, summer, and fall blooming.
2. A white flower color White Group 155D with dotting color Yellow-Green Group 145D.
3. Large, single flowers ranging in size from 3" to 3½" in diameter.
4. Dark green glossy foliage.
5. Easily propagated with semi-hardwood cuttings in late spring through the summer.
6. Fast growth rate under normal fertilization and moisture conditions.
7. Dense and globose in nature.
8. Good specimen plant.
9. Desirable in planters.

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10. Makes a very good hedge or screen.
11. Very good foundation plant.
12. Does well as an understory plant in a woodland garden.
13. Hardy to Zone 7.
14. Attracts butterflies.

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 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.

Distinctive Characteristics

TABLE 1

Characteristic	‘Robleg’	‘Watchet’	‘May Blaine’	R.oldhamil ‘Fourth of July’
Height (Mature)	4–5'	2–3'	3–4'	8–10'
Width (Mature)	3–4'	3–4'	3–4'	6–7'

TABLE 1-continued

Characteristic	'Robleg'	'Watchet'	'May Blaine'	R.oldhamil 'Fourth of July'
Flower Diameter	3-3½"	3½-3¾"	2½-3"	1¾-2¼"
Flower Form	Single	Single	Double	Single
Flower Color	White G.155D	Red G.49B	Red-Purple G. 73C	Red G. 39A
Flowers per Terminal Bloom Period	2-3 April Late July > Frost	1-2 May	2-3 May	2-4 Late June > Frost
Petal Number	5	5	12-16	5
Hardy Zone	7	6	7	7
Stamen number	5-7	10	0-8	7-10
Stamen Type	Non-Petaloid	Non-Petaloid	Some Petaloid	Non-Petaloid

The female, or seed parent, of 'Robleg' 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 Wycoff, 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 'Robleg' is the product of the pollination of the cultivar 'May Blaine' (unpatented) by the cultivar 'Fourth of July' (unpatented). 'Robleg' differs from 2-72 primarily in flower color. This proprietary hybrid seedling, number 2-72 was crossed with 'Watchet' to produce the new cultivar 'Robleg'. The parentage of the new variety can be summarized as follows:

'Watchet' ('May Blaine' × '2-72')

'May Blaine' is a light purple, double, late-season blooming, Back Acres Hybrid developed by B. Y. Morrison in Pass Christian, Miss. The cultivar 'Fourth of July' originated from a *R. oldhamii* seed lot collected in 1968 by Dr. Hsu of Taiwan University. The seeds were collected at 850 meters elevation on Mount Tai Tun in Taiwan. Soon after this John Patrick of Oakland, Calif. was visiting Taiwan collecting plant material of the Taiwanese *Rhododendrons*. He obtained a number of seedlings from Dr. Hsu and grew them in Oakland, Calif. In 1972, Dr. John T. Thornton of Franklinton, La. obtained one of the *Rhododendron* seedlings from Mr. Patrick. Dr. Thornton noticed in the next few years that this particular *R. oldhamii* plant was a perpetual bloomer from late June until frost on new growth. This plant produces two flushes of growth containing flowers. The second flush of growth overlaps the first flush producing a plant which blooms continuously. This differs from the species *R. oldhamii* which blooms from mid-May until mid-June and sporadically through the summer. Dr. Thornton subsequently named this plant *R. oldhamii* 'Fourth of July' in 1973.

The azalea 'Fourth of July' seems to be hardy to about 10 degrees F. (zone 7). Temperatures below this cause dieback, but the plant readily recovers and blooms profusely the following summer. *R. oldhamii* is less hardy at zone 8.

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:

Botanical: *Rhododendron* hybrid 'Robleg'.

Form: Dense, and rounded.

Height: 4-5'.

Width: 3-4'.

Growth habit: 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.

Foliage: Alternate, simple, evergreen, pubescent, elliptic, and varying in size from 1¾" to 2¾" long and ⅝" to 1¼" wide. The margins are entire, with a petiole ⅜" to 7/16" long. Midveins and laterals are impressed on the upper leaf surface and prominent on the underside. The base of the leaf is cuneate to attenuate and the apex is acute to mucronate. The upper surface of the immature leaves is glossy, pubescent, and is Yellow-Green Group 144A and the underside is Yellow-Green Group 146D, pubescent, and matte. The upper surface of the mature leaves is closest to Yellow-Green Group 147A, glossy and slightly pubescent and the underside is Yellow-Green Group 146B, matte, and pubescent. The immature petioles, midribs, and veins are Yellow-Green Group 146C. New growth is pubescent. These hairs are initially soft and white and cover both sides of the leaf with a higher concentration on the petioles and veins. They are slightly curled, flat, and range in length from 1/64" to 1/32". As the growth matures much of the leaf pubescence is lost; however, the stems, petioles, and leaf veins retain this pubescence which becomes more setaceous and darker in color (Brown Group 200B) through the growing season. The reduction of pubescence makes the leaf appear darker than Yellow-Green Group 147A.

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 ¼" to ⅝"; when grown in light shade the internode length is ⅜" to ¾". 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 $\frac{1}{2}$ " 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 $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " long, persistent, and Yellow-Green Group 147A. The pedicel is $\frac{5}{16}$ " to $\frac{7}{16}$ " long, pubescent, and Yellow-Green Group 145C. The calyx is $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{3}{8}$ " 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 White Group 155D.

Flowers: Perfect, single, White Group 155D (upper surface and undersurface), glabrous, open funnel shaped, 3 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ " in diameter by $2\frac{1}{4}$ " to $2\frac{1}{2}$ " in depth, borne on current season's growth, non-fragrant; they last on the plant in the garden 5 to 6 days. There are five petals which are fused at the base, elliptic to obovate, and have wavy margins. These petals are $1\frac{3}{4}$ " to $2\frac{1}{4}$ " long, 1" to $1\frac{3}{8}$ " wide, and have rounded apices and entire margins. Three out of five petals are dotted with Yellow-Green Group 145D. There are 5 to 7 non-petaloid stamens which are $1\frac{1}{4}$ " to $1\frac{1}{2}$ " long. The filaments are White Group 155C, the anthers are

Greyed-Orange Group 167D, and the pollen matures to Yellow Group 11B. The pistil is single, non-petaloid, $1\frac{1}{2}$ " to $1\frac{3}{4}$ " long and Yellow-Green Group 145D. The ovary is densely glandular-setose and has five locules. The capsule matures in about 5 months, in Independence, La., to about $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " long; it has a persistent style, is Yellow-Green Group 145D, 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 'Robleg', as illustrated and described.

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