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Bergman

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(54) ***AZALEA* PLANT NAME 'SPRING FLING'**

(50) Latin Name: ***Rhododendron hybrida***
Varietal Denomination: **Spring Fling**

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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 38 days.

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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 'Spring Fling', characterized by its dark green-colored leaves that do not abscise during the cooling and forcing periods; uniform and outwardly spreading plant habit; freely branching habit; uniform and freely flowering habit; rapid flowering response; light pink-colored flowers with random red purple-colored and flecks; hose-in-hose flower form; and excellent postproduction longevity with plants maintaining good flower substance for about 32 days in an interior environment.

2 Drawing Sheets

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Botanical designation: *Rhododendron hybrida.*
Cultivar denomination: 'Spring Fling'.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present Invention relates to a new and distinct cultivar of *Azalea*, botanically known as *Rhododendron hybrida,* an evergreen greenhouse-forcing type *Azalea*, and hereinafter referred to by the name 'Spring Fling'.

The new *Azalea* is a product of a planned breeding program conducted by the Inventor in Alva, Fla. The objective of the breeding program is to create new *Azalea* varieties having uniform plant habit, profuse and uniform flowering response, dark green foliage, good foliage retention during the cooling and forcing periods, resistance to *Cylindrocladium* and excellent postproduction longevity.

The new *Azalea* originated from a cross-pollination made by the Inventor in January, 1995, in Alva, Fla., of a proprietary *Azalea* selection identified as code number YB-0343, not patented, as the female, or seed, parent with a proprietary *Azalea* selection identified as code number YB-0995, not patented, as the male, or pollen, parent. The new *Azalea* was discovered and selected by the Inventor as a flowering plant within the progeny of the stated cross-pollination in a controlled environment in Alva, Fla., in June, 1997.

Asexual reproduction of the new *Azalea* by terminal cuttings taken in a controlled environment in Alva, Fla. since September, 1997, has shown that the unique features of this new *Azalea* are stable and reproduced true to type in successive generations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The new *Azalea* has not been observed under all possible environmental conditions. The phenotype may vary somewhat with variations in environment such as temperature, daylength and/or light intensity without, however, any variance in genotype.

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The following traits have been repeatedly observed and are determined to be the unique characteristics of 'Spring Fling'. These characteristics in combination distinguish 'Spring Fling' as a new and distinct cultivar:

1. Dark green-colored leaves that do not abscise during the cooling and forcing periods.
2. Uniform and outwardly spreading plant habit.
3. Freely branching habit.
4. Uniform and freely flowering habit.
5. Rapid flowering response; plants begin flowering about 20 days after cooling treatment.
6. Light pink-colored flowers with random red purple-colored and flecks.
7. Hose-in-hose flower form.
8. Excellent postproduction longevity with plants maintaining good flower substance for about 32 days in an interior environment.

In side-by-side comparisons conducted in Alva, Fla., plants of the new *Azalea* differed from plants of the female parent selection in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new *Azalea* had hose-in-hose flowers whereas plants of the female parent selection had single flowers.
2. Flowers of plants of the new *Azalea* were light pink in color with random red purple-colored spots and flecks whereas flowers of plants of the female parent selection had white and red bi-colored flowers.

In side-by-side comparisons conducted in Alva, Fla., plants of the new *Azalea* differed from plants of the male parent selection primarily in flower color as plants of the male parent selection had coral pink-colored flowers.

Plants of the new *Azalea* can be compared to the plants of the cultivar YB871 Remembrance, disclosed in U.S. Plant Pat. No. 9,132. However, in side-by-side comparisons conducted in Alva, Fla., plants of the new *Azalea* differed from plants of the cultivar YB871 Remembrance in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new *Azalea* were more vigorous than plants of the cultivar YB871 Remembrance.
2. Plants of the new *Azalea* flowered earlier after the cooling treatment than plants of the cultivar YB871 Remembrance.
3. Plants of the new *Azalea* and the cultivar YB871 Remembrance differed in flower coloration.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

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

The photograph on the first sheet comprises a side perspective view of a typical flowering plant of 'Spring Fling'.

The photograph on the second sheet is a close-up view of typical flowers and leaves of 'Spring Fling'.

DETAILED BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION

The aforementioned photographs and following observations and measurements describe plants grown in Alva, Fla. with three plants per 15-cm containers, in a polypropylene-covered shade house during the winter and early spring and under commercial production conditions. During the production of the plants, day temperatures ranged from 13 to 37° C. and night temperatures ranged from 0 to 26° C. Plants were pinched at planting, pinched a second time about twelve weeks later, and then pinched a third time about twelve weeks after the second pinch. After sufficient flower bud development, plants were cooled at 3 to 5° C. for about four weeks to break flower bud dormancy. Plants were subsequently forced into flower under commercial production conditions in a polyethylene-covered greenhouse. Plants used for the photographs and description were about one year old.

In the following description, color references are made to The Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart, 1995 Edition, except where general terms of ordinary dictionary signification are used.

Botanical classification: *Rhododendron hybrida* 'Spring Fling'.

Commercial classification: Evergreen greenhouse-forcing type *Azalea*.

Parentage:

Female or seed parent.—Proprietary *Rhododendron hybrida* selection identified as code number YB-0343, not patented.

Male or pollen parent.—Proprietary *Rhododendron hybrida* selection identified as code number YB-0996, not patented.

Propagation:

Type.—By terminal vegetative cuttings.

Time to initiate roots.—Summer: About five weeks at temperatures of 24° C. Winter: About six weeks at temperatures of 24° C.

Time to develop roots.—Summer: About nine weeks at temperatures of 24° C. Winter: About eleven weeks at temperatures of 24° C.

Root description.—Fine, fibrous, and white in color.

Rooting habit.—Freely branching.

Plant description:

Plant form and growth habit.—Perennial, evergreen; uniform and outwardly spreading plant habit; broad inverted triangle; moderately vigorous growth habit. Densely foliated. Uniform and freely flowering habit with numerous hose-in-hose flowers per plant.

Branching habit.—Freely branching; about four primary lateral branches develop after the initial pinch (removal of terminal apex); numerous secondary and tertiary branches develop after the sequential second and third pinches.

Plant height, soil level to top of flowers.—About 22 cm.

Plant diameter, area of spread.—About 32 cm.

Lateral branch description.—Length: About 18 cm. Diameter at base: About 5 mm. Internode length: About 1.2 cm. Strength: Very strong. Texture, young: Pubescent, fine brown hairs. Texture, mature: Woody; pubescent, fine brown hairs. Color, young: Close to 144A. Color, mature: Close to 165A.

Foliage description.—Arrangement: Alternate, single. Foliage retention: Very good foliage retention on plants of the new *Azalea* that have been in a box for six weeks during the cooling treatment. Length: About 5.5 cm. Width: About 2.3 cm. Shape: Mostly elliptic. Apex: Cuspidate to mucronate. Base: Attenuate. Margin: Entire. Venation pattern: Pinnate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Leathery, tough, durable; pubescent. Color: Developing and fully expanded foliage, upper surface: Darker green than 147A. Developing and fully expanded foliage, lower surface: Close to 147B. Venation, upper surface: Darker green than 147A; towards the base, close to 146A. Venation, lower surface: Close to 146A to 146B. Petiole: Length: About 9 mm. Diameter: About 2.75 mm. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Pubescent. Color, upper and lower surfaces: Close to 146B to 146C.

Flower description:

Natural flowering season.—Spring after sufficient cool period. If forced, plants typically flower about 20 days after a four-week cooling treatment; rapid flowering response. Flowers persistent.

Flower arrangement.—Flowers arranged singly at terminals with usually about three to four flowers per apex; uniform and freely flowering habit. Flowers face upward to mostly outward. Flowers rotate and somewhat star-shaped.

Flower appearance.—Hose-in-hose flower form with a single whorl of petals and a single whorl of petaloids (transformed sepals); light pink-colored flowers with random red purple-colored spots and flecks.

Fragrance.—None detected.

Flower diameter.—About 5.3 cm.

Flower depth.—About 2.75 cm.

Postproduction longevity.—Excellent postproduction longevity; under interior conditions, plants maintain good flower substance for about 32 days.

Flower bud (before showing color).—Length: About 1.2 cm. Diameter: About 6 mm. Shape: Ovoid. Color: Close to 146A to 146B.

Petals/petaloids.—Arrangement: Hose-in-hose flower form; one inner whorl of about five imbricate petals and one outer whorl of about five imbricate petaloids (transformed sepals); petals and petaloids fused at the base. Petaloids variable in size and shape. Length, petals: About 4.2 cm. Width, petals: About

2.7 cm. Length, petaloids: About 3.5 cm. Width, petaloids: About 1.9 cm. Shape, petals and petaloids: Beyond fused base, roughly spatulate with rounded apex. Margin, petals and petaloids: Entire. Texture, petals and petaloids, upper and lower surfaces: Smooth, glabrous; velvety. Color, petals and petaloids: When opening and fully opened, upper surface: Close to 62A. When opening and fully opened, lower surface: Close to 62B to 62; random spots and flecks, close to 57A.

Sepals.—No sepals observed, all sepals transformed into petaloids.

Peduncles.—Length: About 1.2 cm. Diameter: About 2 mm. Angle: Mostly upright. Strength: Flexible; strong. Texture: Very pubescent. Color: Close to 144A.

Reproductive organs.—Androecium: Quantity of stamens per flower: About five. Anther size: About 3 mm by 1 mm. Anther shape: Oblong. Anther color: Close to 165C. Filament length: About 2.7 cm. Filament color: Close to 165C. Pollen amount: Moderate. Pollen color: Close to 158A. Gynoecium: Quantity of pistils per flower: One. Pistil length: About 2.7 cm. Style length: About 2.4 cm. Style color: Towards the apex, 65A; towards the base, 155D. Stigma shape: Rounded. Stigma diameter: Less than 1 mm. Stigma color: Close to 144A. Ovary color: Close to 147A; heavily whiskered.

Seed/fruit.—Seed and fruit development have not been observed.

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 0 to 38° C.

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 *Azalea* plant named 'Spring Fling', as illustrated and described.

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