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Harris

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(54) ***AZALEA* PLANT NAMED 'MNIOCM'**

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

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See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A new variety of *Azalea* plant found as a seedling in a planned cross between the female *Azalea* 'Cherie' (syn. V12-4) and the male *Azalea* 'Indian Summer' is disclosed. The new variety has a unique blooming period and is extremely cold hardy. It is a compact, dense, and upright growing plant with attractive, red, hose-in-hose flowers.

3 Drawing Sheets

Genus/species: *Rhododendron* sp.
Botanical designation: 'MNIOCM'.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a new and distinct variety of evergreen *Azalea* of the genus *Rhododendron*. This new *Azalea*, hereinafter referred to as 'MNIOCM', was discovered in August 1981 in Lawrenceville, Ga. 'MNIOCM' originated from a planned hybridization between female *Azalea* 'Cherie' (syn. V12-4) (unpatented) and male *Azalea* 'Indian Summer' (unpatented) in Lawrenceville, Ga. The value of this new cultivar lies in its unique blooming period, growth habit, and cold hardiness.

Asexual propagation of the new plant by cuttings was performed in Dearing, Ga. The new plant retains its distinctive characteristics and reproduces true to type in successive generations by vegetative propagation.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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

1. Unique spring and fall blooming;
2. Large, single, hose-in-hose flowers;
3. Easily propagated by semi-hardwood cuttings in late spring through summer;
4. Fast growth rate under normal fertilization and moisture conditions;
5. Upright, dense, and compact nature;
6. Attractive, showy flower;
7. Grows well in containers;
8. Thrives in shade or sun; and
9. Hardy in USDA Zone 5b.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPHS

This new *Azalea* hybrid variety is illustrated by the accompanying photographs which show blooms and foliage of the plant in full bloom. The colors shown are as true as can be reasonably obtained by conventional photographic means.

FIG. **1**. shows stems and mature foliage.

FIG. **2**. shows mature foliage and growth habit of a seven gallon plant.

FIG. **3**. shows a close-up view of a mature inflorescence.

FIG. **4**. shows the plant in full bloom.

FIG. **5**. shows the re-blooming characteristic of the plant.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE NEW PLANT

The following is a detailed description of the new variety of *Azalea* based on observations made of a 3-year-old plant grown in a seven-gallon container according to wholesale commercial production conditions in Dearing, Ga. The colors of the various plant parts are detailed with reference to The Royal Horticultural Society Colour Chart.

Classification:
Family.—Ericaceae.
Species.—*Rhododendron* sp.
Common name.—*Azalea*.
Commercial name.—'MNIOCM'.
Parentage:
Female parent.—Gartrell hybrid *Azalea* 'Cherie' (unpatented).
Male parent.—Gable hybrid *Azalea* 'Indian Summer' (unpatented).
Growth:
Form.—Compact, dense and upright.
Height.—1–1½ feet.
Width.—3–3½ feet.
Growth habit.—Upright, dense and compact.

Growth rate.—Fast growth rate under normal fertilization and moisture conditions. In a period of six years from a rooted cutting, the plant reaches a height of 2–3 feet and a spread of 3–3½ feet. The growth rate is normally about 4 to 6 inches per year; the plant reaches a height of 4 to 6 feet at maturity while maintaining a dense habit.

Spring growth.—In 2004, the date of initial spring growth was March 16, in Dearing, Ga. After the initial spring flush, there was continuous growth through the fall. The average length of terminal growth of the initial spring flush is about 3 inches for a plant in full sun and about 2¾ inches when grown in shade. This growth, if not pruned, will begin to produce flowers starting in April. As the plant continues to grow through summer and fall, more flower buds are produced which mature and bloom until frost. 'MNIOCM' bloomed heavily until frost in December, 2003. The remaining growth produces about 2 to 4 inches of new growth.

Life cycle.—Perennial and evergreen.

Leaves:

Leaf arrangement.—Alternate, simple, evergreen.

Leaf shape.—Elliptic.

Leaf length.—⅞ to 1¼ inches.

Leaf width.—⅜ inch.

Leaf margin.—Entire.

Leaf base.—Acute to acuminate.

Leaf apex.—Acute to mucronate.

Petiole length.—⅛ inch.

Petiole color.—RHS 146D (yellow-green).

Mature leaf.—Upper leaf surface: Surface texture: Semi-glossy. Surface color: RHS 139A (green). Surface pubescence: Strigose. Surface pubescence color: RHS 155C (white). Midveins and laterals: Impressed on surface. Lower leaf surface: Surface texture: Matte. Surface color: RHS 146A (yellow-green). Surface pubescence: Strigose. Surface pubescence color: RHS 164B (greyed-orange). Midveins and laterals: Prominent on surface.

Immature leaf.—Upper leaf surface: Surface texture: Dull. Surface color: RHS 144A (yellow-green). Surface pubescence: Strigose. Surface pubescence color: RHS 155C (white). Lower leaf surface: Surface texture: Matte. Surface color: RHS 146B (yellow-green). Surface pubescence: Strigose. Surface pubescence color: RHS 155C (white). Immature petioles and midveins: Petiole color: RHS 144A (yellow-green). Midvein color: RHS 144A (yellow-green). Petiole pubescence: Strigose. Petiole pubescence color: RHS 155C (white). New growth pubescence: Strigose. Length of pubescence: 1/32 to 1/16 inch; numerous on mid-vein and petiole, more so as the leaf matures.

Stems:

Form.—Densely branched.

Young stems.—Stem color: RHS 146D (yellow-green). Stem pubescence: Strigose. Stem pubescence color: at point of attachment individual hairs emerge RHS 155C (white) and mature to RHS 164A (greyed-orange); hairs distal from stem are RHS 164B (greyed-orange). Stem length: 3 to 6 inches. Stem diameter: 3/32 to ⅛ inch.

Second-year stems.—Stem color: RHS N200A (brown). Stem pubescence: Glabrous and rugose. Stem length: 3 to 6 inches. Stem diameter: 3/16 inch.

Pith.—Solid and uniform.

Internode length.—⅛ inch to 1 inch; grown in both full sun and light shade.

Flower buds:

Buds.—Tight; borne in groups of two or three sheathed by a pair of modified leaf bracts.

Bud shape.—Ovate and acuminate.

Bud size.—½×¼ inch.

Bud scales.—Distal portion pubescent, individual hairs emerge RHS 155C (white) and mature to RHS N167C (greyed-orange).

Bud color.—RHS 144B (yellow-green) and RHS 145D (yellow-green).

Bud sheath.—Bud sheath length: 7/16 to 17/32 inch, persistent. Immature sheath color: RHS 139A (green). Mature: As the buds swell, the bud sheath matures to RHS 145C (yellow-green), and RHS 45A (red), falls off and reveals the flower color of RHS 47A (red).

Bud pedicel.—Pedicel length: 3/16 inch long. Pedicel color: RHS 144A (yellow-green). Pedicel pubescence: Villous. Pedicel pubescence color: RHS 164D (greyed-orange).

Calyx.—Calyx shape: Cup-shaped, 5 imbricated sepals, persistent. Size: ¼ to 7/16 inch long. Color: RHS 145A (yellow-green). Pubescence: Villous. Color of pubescence: RHS 155C (white).

Flowers:

Flower type.—Perfect, hose-in-hose.

Flowering habit.—Borne on the current season's growth.

Lastingness of flowers on the plant.—4–6 days in the sun; 10–12 days in the shade.

Length of flowering period.—3 to 4 weeks in April in Dearing, Ga., flowering resumes in September and continues until frost which can be as late as November or December.

Peduncle length.—⅛ to ¼ inch.

Peduncle diameter.—⅛ inch.

Flower shape.—Open funnel-shaped.

Flower diameter.—2 to 2.5 inches.

Flower depth.—1½ inches.

Petal number.—10, fused at the base and remain fused up to 1 inch from the base.

Petal pubescence.—Glabrous.

Petal shape.—Elliptic to obovate with rounded apices and entire margins.

Petal size.—1½ inches long by 1 inch wide.

Petal color.—Upper and lower surfaces: RHS 53C (red). Spots on upper surfaces of 3 of the five petals: RHS 53A (red).

Sepals.—Ovate to lanceolate.

Sepal number.—5.

Sepal color.—RHS 145A (yellow-green).

Sepal size.—⅛ inch long×⅛ inch wide.

Reproductive organs:

Ovary.—Tomentose.

Placenta arrangement.—5 locules.

Pistil.—Single, non-petaloid.

Pistil length.—1¼ to 1½ inches long.

Stigma color.—RHS 58A (red-purple).

Style color.—RHS 58B (red-purple).

Stamen number.—5, non-petaloid.

Stamen length.—1 5/16 to 1 9/16 inches.

Stamen color.—Filaments: RHS N57A (red-purple). Anthers: RHS 176A (greyed-orange).

Pollen color.—RHS 155D (white).
Fragrance.—None.

CULTURE

'MNIOCM' grows well in a wide range of conditions and tolerates sun to shade. It prefers moist, well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter and responds well to mulching and medium applications of fertilizer. It does best in soil with a pH of 5.0 to 5.5. It is propagated with semi-hardwood cuttings in late spring through the summer.

DISEASES/INSECTS

Lace bugs and spider mites can be a problem.

COMPARISON WITH PARENTAL CULTIVARS

The female, or seed parent of 'MNIOCM' is the Gartrell hybrid *Azalea* 'Cherie' (syn. V12-4) (unpatented) which has orange-red, double flowers and is a late blooming *azalea*. 'Cherie' is the result of a cross between 'Jimmy Coover' (unpatented)×'Glamour' (unpatented) and the pink blooming Robin Hill hybrid 'Lady Louise' (unpatented).

The male, or pollen, parent is the Gable hybrid 'Indian Summer' (unpatented) which has yellowish pink flowers and is a fall blooming *azalea*. 'Indian Summer' is a fall blooming clone of *R. kaempferi*.

In Table 1 below, the instant plant is shown in comparison with the parental cultivars.

TABLE 1

Characteristic	'MNIOCM'	'Cherie'	'Indian Summer'
Height (Mature)	4–6 ft.	3–5 ft.	8–10 ft.
Width (Mature)	3–3½ ft.	Not available	Not available
Flower Diameter	2–2½ in.	2 in.	Not available
Flower Form	Single/hose-in-hose	Double	Single/hose-in-hose/semi-double
Flower Color	Red	Deep reddish orange	Yellowish pink
Flowers per Terminal	2–3	Not available	Not available
Bloom Period	April; September to frost	Not available	Fall
Petal Number	10	Not available	Not available
Hardy Zone	5b	6	5
Stamen Number	5	Not available	5
Stamen Type	Non-petaloid	Petalod	Non-petaloid

What is claimed is:

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

* * * * *

FIG. 1

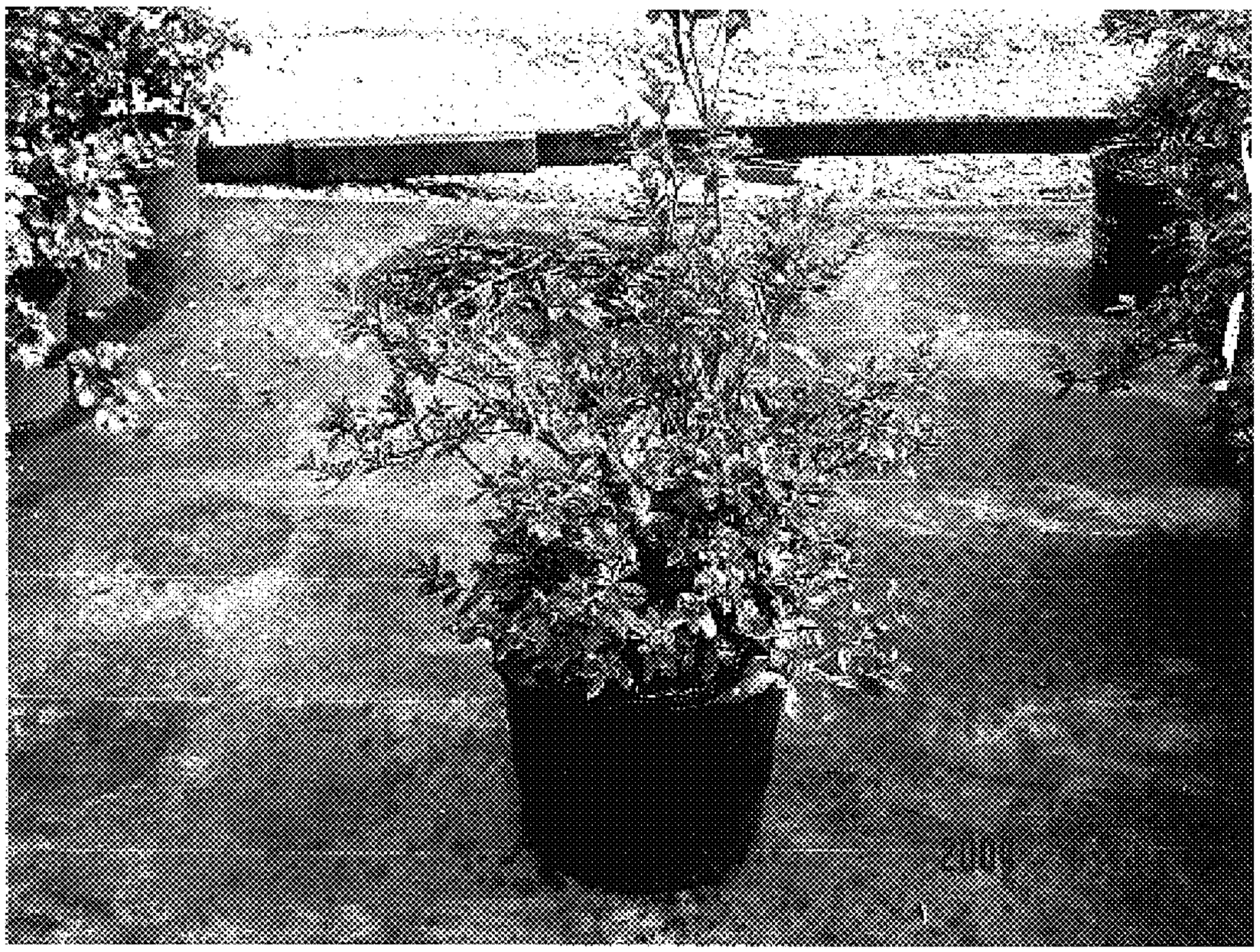

FIG. 2

FIG. 3

FIG. 4

FIG. 5