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Head et al.

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(54) **AZALEA PLANT NAMED ‘RLH1-2P8’**

(50) Latin Name: *Rhododendron hybrida*
Varietal Denomination: **RLH1-2P8**

(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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(58) **Field of Classification Search** **Plt./240**
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 ‘RLH1-2P8’, characterized by its compact, upright, 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 ruffled dark pink-colored flowers that are not persistent; double flower form; and excellent garden performance.

2 Drawing Sheets

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Botanical designation: *Rhododendron hybrida*.
Cultivar denomination: ‘RLH1-2P8’.

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 ‘RLH1-2P8’.

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 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, in 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 *Rhododendron hybrida* ‘Watchet’, 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-

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2P8’. These characteristics in combination distinguish ‘RLH1-2P8’ as a new and distinct *Azalea* cultivar:

1. Compact, upright, 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 ruffled dark pink-colored flowers that are not persistent.
6. Double 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 double flowers whereas plants of the female parent selection have semi-double flowers.
5. Plants of the new *Azalea* and the female parent selection differ slightly in flower color.

Plants of the new *Azalea* differ from plants of the male parent, ‘Watchet’, in the following characteristics:

1. Plants of the new *Azalea* are more upright than plants of ‘Watchet’.
2. Plants of the new *Azalea* have double flowers whereas plants of ‘Watchet’ have single flowers.
3. Flowers of plants of the new *Azalea* are dark pink in color whereas flowers of plants of ‘Watchet’ are light coral pink in color.

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 broader and more freely branching than plants of 'Robleg'.
2. Plants of the new *Azalea* were more freely flowering than plants of 'Robleg'.
3. Plants of the new *Azalea* had double flowers whereas plants of 'Robleg' had single flowers.
4. Plants of the new *Azalea* had larger flowers than plants of 'Robleg'.
5. Plants of the new *Azalea* flowered during the spring, summer and autumn whereas plants of 'Robleg' flowered only in the spring and autumn.
6. Flowers of plants of the new *Azalea* were dark pink in color whereas flowers of plants of 'Robleg' were white in color.

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 'RLH1-2P8' grown in a container.

The photograph on the second sheet is a close-up view of a typical flower of 'RLH1-2P8'.

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* 'RLH1-2P8'.

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.—*Rhododendron hybrida* 'Watchet', 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 double flowers.

Branching habit.—Freely branching habit with about six to eight 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 30 cm to 45 cm.

Plant diameter, area of spread.—About 35 cm to 40 cm.

Lateral branch description.—Length: About 5 cm to 20 cm. Diameter at base: About 2 mm to 4.5 mm. Internode length: About 3 mm to 19 mm. Strength: Strong. Aspect: Upright and outwardly positioned. Texture, developing: Setulose pubescence. Texture, mature: Woody; pubescent. Color, developing: Close to 178C. Color, semi-hardwood: Close to 144A; becoming closer 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 2 cm to 5 cm. Width: About 1 cm to 2.9 cm. Shape: Oblong to elliptic. Apex: Subacute to rounded; mucronulate. Base: Cuneate to attenuate; slightly oblique. Margin: Entire; slightly revolute; ciliate. Venation pattern: Pinnate; reticulate. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Pubescent; coriaceous, tough. Color: Developing leaves, upper surface: Darker than 139A. Developing leaves, lower surface: Close to 138A. Fully expanded leaves, upper surface: Darker than 136A; venation, close to N144C. Fully expanded leaves, lower surface: Close to 137C; venation, close to 144D. Petiole: Length: About 5 mm to 8 mm. Diameter: About 1 mm to 1.8 mm. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Pubescent. Color: Developing leaves, upper and lower surfaces: Close to 144B. Fully expanded leaves, upper surface: Close to 144B. Fully expanded leaves, lower surface: Close to 145A.

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.—Double flowers arranged in clusters at terminals and sub-terminals with usually about one to three flower buds and two to three flowers per cluster; uniform and freely flowering habit; flowers face upward or outward.

Flower appearance.—Flowers rotate and rose-like; double flower form with an outer whorl of five petals and a center whorl of ten petals and an inner whorl of five to ten petaloids (transformed stamens) of varying sizes and shapes.

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 9 cm to 10 cm.

Flower depth.—About 5 cm to 6.5 cm.

Flower bud (before showing color).—Length: About 1 cm to 1.7 cm. Diameter: About 6 mm to 11 mm. Shape: Ovoid. Color: Close to 143C.

Petals.—Arrangement: Double flowers have an outer whorl of five petals, fused at the base forming a wide funnel-shaped corolla and a center whorl of ten petals. Length, outer whorl: About 4 cm to 4.5 cm. Width, outer whorl: About 4 cm to 4.7 cm. Length, center whorl: About 3.5 cm to 4 cm. Width, center whorl: About 3 cm to 3.7 cm. Shape: Broadly ovate to orbicular. Apex: Rotund, slightly revolute to involute; undulate and ruffled. Margin: Entire; slightly revolute to involute; undulate, ruffled to crisped. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Smooth, glabrous; rugulose; waxy to velvety in appearance. Color: When opening, upper surface: Close to 61D; spots and speckles, close to 61B. When opening, lower surface: Close to N57D. Fully opened, upper surface: Close to N57D; spots and speckles, close to 61B. Fully opened, lower surface: Close to N57D.

Petaloids.—Arrangement: Single inner whorl of five to ten petaloids, fused at the base, variable in size and shape. Length: About 3.5 cm to 4.2 cm. Width: About 1.5 cm to 2 cm. Shape: Lunulate to piano-convex; unevenly bisected. Apex: Rotund. Base: Cuneate to attenuate. Margin: Entire to lobulate; undulate, wavy to crisped; slightly involute to revolute. Texture, upper and lower surfaces: Smooth, glabrous; rugulose; waxy to velvety in appearance. Color: When opening, upper and lower surfaces: Close to 61D. Fully opened, upper and lower surfaces: Close to N57D.

Sepals.—Arrangement: Five to six in a single whorl, fused at the base forming a campanulate to star-shaped corona. Length: About 4 mm to 4.5 mm. Width: About 3.2 mm to 4.5 mm. Shape: Orbicular to ovate. Apex: Obtuse to rounded. Base: Rounded and fused. Margin: Entire; ciliate. Texture, upper surface: Lightly covered with sericeous pubescence. Texture, lower surface: Densely covered with sericeous pubescence. Color, upper and lower surfaces: Close to 144B.

Peduncles.—Length: About 2 mm to 2.5 mm. Diameter: About 2.8 mm to 3.2 mm. Angle: Mostly upright. Strength: Strong. Texture: Pubescent. Color: Close to 144D; at maturity, close to N167A.

Pedicels.—Length: About 8.5 mm to 12 mm. Diameter: About 1.9 mm to 2.4 mm. Angle: Upright to outwardly. Strength: Strong. Texture: Pubescent. Color: Close to 63A; at maturity, close to 144B.

Reproductive organs.—Androecium: Quantity of stamens per flower: About five to ten. Filament length: About 2.8 cm to 3 cm. Filament color: Close to 61D. Anther shape: Porandrous with four oblong, tubular to lunate-shaped pollen sacks basifixed to the filament. Anther length: About 1.8 mm to 2 mm. Anther color: Close to N167A. Pollen amount: Moderate. Pollen color: Close to 11D. Gynoecium: Pistil length: About 3.8 cm to 4.7 cm. Stigma shape: Round to flattened (capitate). Stigma color: Close to 59B. Style length: About 3.6 cm to 4.5 cm. Style color: Close to 63A. Ovary color: Close to 132A.

Fruits.—Quantity per plant: About three to five. Length: About 8 mm to 11 mm. Diameter: About 7 mm to 8 mm. Texture: Slightly rugulose to scabridulose; glandular, setaceous. Color: Close to 137B; at maturity, close to 165A.

Seeds.—Quantity per fruit: About 200 to 500. 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 'RLH1-2P8' as illustrated and described.

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