

Facility Notes

For the protection of the fragile plant environment, please note:

- No dogs, bicycles, play equipment, food or beverages
- Stay on the paths and boardwalks
- Please refrain from picking plants and flowers
- No smoking

Bloom time for the deciduous azaleas at Highstead runs from late April through July, depending on the species (see chart inside). Peak time for viewing the azaleas in bloom is usually mid-May. Please call ahead to make a reservation, and to check on the timing and condition of the flowers.



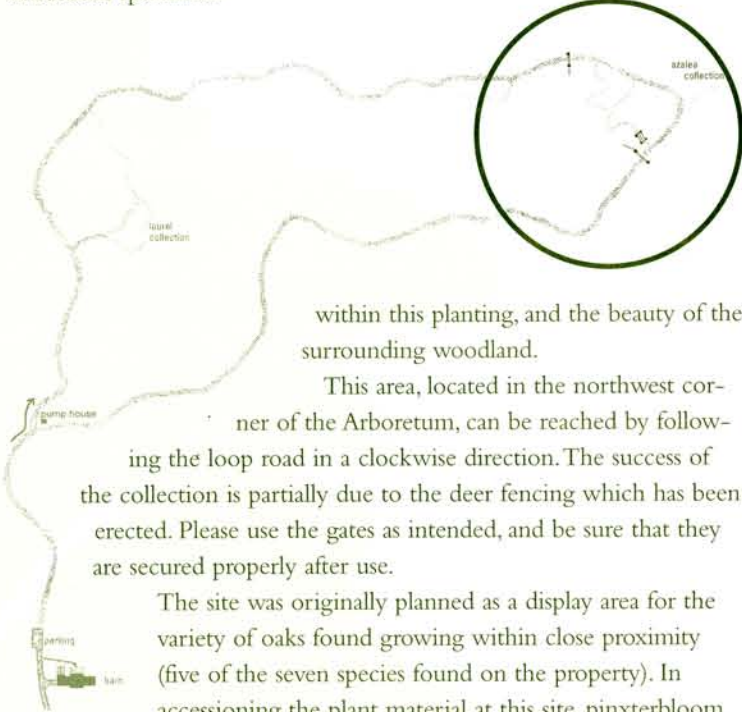
Individuals or groups interested in visiting Highstead may make arrangements by writing or calling:

Highstead Arboretum
 P.O. Box 1097
 Redding, Connecticut 06875-1097
 203-938-8809

Guide to the Azalea Collection

Deciduous Azaleas

The North American Deciduous Azalea Collection at Highstead is only a ten minute walk from the Barn, but visitors should be prepared to spend at least one hour viewing the azaleas, the many ericaceous specimens



within this planting, and the beauty of the surrounding woodland. This area, located in the northwest corner of the Arboretum, can be reached by following the loop road in a clockwise direction. The success of the collection is partially due to the deer fencing which has been erected. Please use the gates as intended, and be sure that they are secured properly after use.

The site was originally planned as a display area for the variety of oaks found growing within close proximity (five of the seven species found on the property). In accessioning the plant material at this site, pinxterbloom (*Rhododendron perichlymenoides*) was found to be growing natively and naturally. The accommodating soils and canopy resulted in the decision to introduce other azaleas native to Highstead and to North America.

The Collection at Highstead

Set on a site that was partially disturbed from the road cut, the azalea collection was begun in 1992. Planted in the dappled shade of a largely oak and maple canopy, the variety of soils at this location has allowed for a variety of species to be introduced. The gravel hillock to the right as you enter the gates is well-drained and supports those azaleas and ericaceous, companion plants preferring a well-drained, dry, acidic soil. Beyond this rise to the east is an ephemeral stream, providing the proper site for those azaleas preferring a moister soil. This location is also the most protected site on the property. All of the land surrounding is at a higher elevation, protecting the plants from the harsh winds and temperature extremes of a more open location. As a collection, this is an actively managed area, where plants are maintained through pruning, watering, mulching and fertilizing.

Looking at Deciduous Azaleas

Many plant collections, like Highstead's *Kalmia* Collection, have a short but extravagant peak-bloom period. The azalea collection is a more

subtle display, as fourteen species offer an extended procession of bloom that runs from late April to early August. Beyond the careful selection of azalea species and companion plants, a more naturalistic approach was employed, with mass plantings in beds with soft, undulating edges. Highstead's azalea collection presents the opportunity to appreciate the characteristics of deciduous azaleas found in North America (as compared to azaleas which have been introduced from Asia, and have become common to the home landscape). Many will be surprised to find the variety and richness of color and scent.

Azalea Species

In discussing azaleas and rhododendrons, many of us have clear and separate images of each as a plant. In the past, azaleas were a distinct genus, limited to deciduous shrubs whose flowers contained five stamens. Rhododendrons were mostly evergreen and had flowers with ten or more stamens. Over time, discoveries of new species have made the difference between these two groups less distinct.

Today, azaleas are considered a sub-genus of rhododendron. In other words, all azaleas are rhododendrons, but not all rhododendrons are azaleas.

The term *Rhododendron* comes from the Greek "rhodon" for "rose," and "dendron" for "tree," which suggests the effect when the rhododendron flower trusses are in full bloom. *Azalea* is also from the Greek, meaning "dry," referring to those azaleas whose habitat is dry rocky woodland.

Family Ties

Rhododendrons are part of the Ericaceae (heath family). This family of plants also includes *Kalmia* (mountain laurel), *Vaccinium* (blueberry), and *Gaultheria* (wintergreen). Fourteen of the seventeen North American azalea species are represented at Highstead. All native to North America, they are most notable for their floral display and scent, and fall color. Plans are under way to try the other three less hardy species in order to present as complete a collection as possible.

Resources

The following list is recommended reading for those interested in more information on azaleas. All are available for review in the library at the Barn. A source list for plant material is also available upon request.

Davidian, H.H., 1995, *The Rhododendron Species: Volume IV, Azaleas*, Timber Press, Portland, OR, 184p.

Dirr, Michael A., 1975, *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*, Stipes Publishing Co., Champaign, IL, 1007p.

Galle, Fred C., 1987, *Azaleas*, Timber Press, Portland, OR, 519p.

The Azalea Collection

A Self-guided Tour of the North American Deciduous Azaleas



