

# *Holly Spring Azaleas for Niagara*



Colonel Pete Vines was an azalea hybridizer who lived in Fairfax, Virginia. He had a small nursery and sold named azaleas as well as his own hybrids. He called his azaleas the ***Holly Springs Hybrids***.

Pete named many of his creations but also sold unnamed hybrids just under number. Here, we offer some of the outstanding azaleas he introduced.

The azaleas offered in the Niagara Collection came to us courtesy of Jim Fry of the Long Island ARS Chapter. Nevertheless, other costs were involved once the plants arrived at the border. These azaleas are available for distribution to members at \$8 per plant. I have promised Jim to report back on how

the plants fare in our environment.

Evergreen azaleas in general are not well known in the Niagara area. There is confusion among the general public about the hardiness of evergreen azaleas. Typically they are recognized as attractive plants on sale at supermarkets at various times of the year, in great glorious colour. Purchasers grow the flowering plants in the home. When the flowers drop off they try to grow them outdoors. These hot-house, supermarket azaleas, are not cold hardy. They may be grown on in the home during a Niagara winter. They often are successfully grown, even in Montreal, if the room environment is kept very cool, say close to 10°C (50°F), if the plants are misted almost daily and if the plants are exposed to a bright east window, and if the soil is never allowed to dry out, yet is also damp but not wet!

Hardy ever green azaleas have very bright colours, do well in Niagara if provided with lots of bright light, are well watered but never drowned and never allowed to become dry. A few are offered every year at our Annual Plant Sale.

I have grown evergreen azaleas in my yards, in St. Catharines, since the mid 1970's. The decision to grow these plants (instead of the large flowered rhododendron lepidotes) was made by my dear spouse, Wanda, who much preferred the gentle sized flowers and the bright colours to the "colourful cabbages" with the large leaves. Forty years later, as one observer noted, the evergreen azaleas still provide a razzle dazzle blaze of colour.

While our collection has gradually included broad leafed rhododendrons (elepidotes) and a nice collection of small leafed rhododendrons (lepidotes) it is instructive to note that none of the original evergreen azaleas and only a few of the lepidotes have been lost due to careless watering or to the effects of Niagara's alternately cold and hot hostile (to rhododendrons) environment. Some of the evergreen azaleas are referred to as semi-evergreen. This is due to their losing leaves during the most harsh of winters. But the flower buds, on those I have grown have never been known not to flower since I planted them

Whether the Holly Spring azaleas will live up to the reputation of the evergreen azaleas that have been growing in my yards is a question that will be answered in the years to come. Certainly, I will have a good dozen of Holly Springs in my collection . . . . . assuming of course that there are some left after the sale at the Open House. At a cost of \$8 per plant, such a collection is little more expensive than a collection of annuals.

*Holly Springs  
Azaleas*

