

# How should we label Satsuki Azalea?

## Introduction

With a number of competitions and exhibitions requiring exhibits to be labelled, how should we label our Satsuki Azalea? What is the basis of labelling an exhibit correctly? Does it matter?

The following is a brief synopsis of the proper form for labelling Satsuki Azalea based on information from “The Hillier’s Manual of Trees & Shrubs” 6<sup>th</sup> edition written by Hillier’s Nurseries (Winchester) Ltd and “Azaleas” Revised and Enlarged Edition written by Fred C Galle.

Many of us have been labelling our Satsuki in a variety of styles and trying to be correct, here I will try and show how and why we should label our Satsuki Azalea for a show using the normal nomenclature and classifications. These are laid down in two internationally recognised codes:



“International Code of Botanical Nomenclature”



“International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants”

Both codes define a variety of structural and presentational styles for naming plants, here the discussion is limited to that which influences our azaleas.

## The History

*RHODODENDRON* belongs to the family *Ericacea* which is a very large and diverse range of plants consisting of over 800 species, which geographically originate from the northern hemisphere with a large presence in the valleys and gorges of China, Tibet and Burma.

It is widely held those Satsuki Azaleas are natural crosses between *RHODODENDRON indicum* and *RHODODENDRON tamarae*.

*RHODODENDRON indicum* is the current name of the small dense bush that is small leaved, semi-evergreen and rarely larger than a medium bush. The name is synonymous with and predates *R. marcanthum*, *Azalea indica* *A. decumbens*, *A. danielsana*, *A. indica* var. *decumbens*, *A. lateratia*, *A. indica* var. *variegata* and *A. marcantha*. It grows in the wild, south of Tokyo on Honshu as well as Shikoku, Kyushu, Kuchierabujoma, Tokora and Yakushima in the past. It is a widely variable shrub with red, pink, purple to scarlet and occasionally white flowers, which open normally in June. One wild clone is known to have had a red striped white flower.

*RHODODENDRON tamarae* is the current name of a low compact bush, which is small leaved, evergreen and small and clump forming in nature. The name is synonymous with and predates *R. eriocarpum*, *R. tamurae* and *R. indicum* var. *eriocarpum*. It grows in the wild on the islands south of Kyushu including Yakushima, Erabu, Tanegashima and Tokora in the past. It is a widely variable shrub with red to scarlet flowers late.

Historical records shroud the origins of Satsuki Azalea in mystery, although as indicated at the start it is believed that the original plants were natural crosses. Specific breeding and refinement bring us the Satsuki Azalea, as we know it today. The natural plants range overlap today only on the island of Kyushu.



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These original hybrids and their progeny have been crossed and developed to provide the variety that we see today. In recent times, other lines have been introduced such as those from the Belgium Indian Hybrids and this continues with the western horticulturists using satsuki in their hybrids.

That is a brief and abridged history of the Satsuki Azalea and this will now be used to inform the labelling of our trees for shows.

## Labelling

We are all used to seeing Satsuki Azalea labelled as *R. indicum* in some formulaic ritual to those that know. It is unfortunate that this has been adopted, because applying the rules clearly indicates that this is wrong; our Satsuki Azalea are a natural hybrid and they are collectively recognised as such.

Applying the rules, we would start with ***RHODODENDRON – ericacea*** which would cover all rhododendron and azaleas including our Satsuki Azalea.

Moving on in detail we should label our Satsuki Azalea as ***Rhododendron x Satsuki Azalea (R. indicum x R. tamarae)*** and where known this would be appended with the cultivar name. If we have a Gyoten, the full label becomes ***Rhododendron x Satsuki Azalea (R. indicum x R. tamarae) ‘Gyoten’***.

Following the convention that requires both the common and botanical name to be on the label we get:

***Rhododendron x Satsuki Azalea (R. indicum x R. tamarae) ‘Gyoten’***  
Satsuki Azalea ‘Gyoten’

Moreover, should a Judge challenge the label refer them to the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature and the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants; they will find that the label follows the rules precisely.

The only area that could possibly be challenged is the hybrid title “Satsuki Azalea” and this is because it is not Latinised, as is the botanical tradition; but given its Japanese roots, this is unrealistic.

So the next time you prepare show labels remember that you will need some larger labels for your Satsuki Azalea and smile knowingly as the Judge looks perplexed.



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