

“Favorite Flowers of the Chesapeake Master Gardeners”

Encore Azalea by Sandra Koppen

Rhododendron ‘Conles’ Encore Autumn Empress

Common name: Evergreen azalea

Family: Ericaceae

Azaleas can be found throughout Virginia from Hampton Roads to the Blue Ridge mountains. My first remembrance of seeing masses of azaleas was while touring the Azalea Gardens, now Norfolk Botanical Gardens, many years ago.

I have planted them everywhere I lived, where their colorful blooms were always a welcomed sight in the spring. My first Encore azalea was a rooted off shoot of one of my Mother’s azaleas. What a surprise when I realized it was a hybrid azalea, known as Encore, which bloomed on into summer and fall. They are particularly favored for their multi-season blooming. Encore azaleas are a patented hybrid and are available in 31 varieties and many colors. They were originally developed in the 1990’s by Robert E. “Buddy” Lee, a plantsman from Independence, Louisiana. The Encores are the result of Mr. Lee’s planned cross hybridization between a series of azaleas and *Rhododendron oldhamii* ‘Fourth of July’.

They can be planted in the fall in groupings of Encores and traditional azaleas and do well with perennials and other evergreen shrubs in beds or foundations plantings. They can also be grown in containers. They bloom best in light shade to full sun (4 to 6 hours). This particular cultivar, Autumn Empress, has large medium pink flowers and dark green foliage in summer which turns bronze in the fall. Soil conditions should be slightly acidic and organically rich and well drained. Do not plant near walnut, butternut, pecan, or hickory trees.

Zone 6 to 9

Height: average of 4 feet

Spread: average of 3 feet

Sun and part shade

Moderate water

Evergreen

Tolerates rabbits

References:

Missouri Botanical Gardens

EncoreAzalea.com

Azalea Society of America

Photo Courtesy of Encore Azalea

