

## ***Rhododendron austrinum* Florida Flame Azalea<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

Florida flame azalea is well-noted for its vivid display of yellow-orange, slightly fragrant, clustered blooms appearing in spring, before the new leaves emerge. Well-suited to mass plantings in natural woodland settings, Florida flame azalea makes a traffic-stopping showing whenever it is in full bloom. It is usually quite a surprise in flower since it generally goes unnoticed during the rest of the year.

### **General Information**

**Scientific name:** *Rhododendron austrinum*

**Pronunciation:** roe-duh-DEN-drun oss-TRY-num

**Common name(s):** Florida flame azalea

**Family:** *Ericaceae*

**Plant type:** shrub

**USDA hardiness zones:** 6B through 9 (Fig. 1)

**Planting month for zone 7:** year round

**Planting month for zone 8:** year round

**Planting month for zone 9:** year round

**Origin:** native to Florida

**Uses:** mass planting; specimen; container or above-ground planter; trained as a standard; attracts hummingbirds

**Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

### **Description**

**Height:** 6 to 10 feet

**Spread:** 4 to 8 feet

**Plant habit:** vase shape; upright

**Plant density:** moderate

**Growth rate:** slow

**Texture:** fine

### **Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate

1. This document is FPS503, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date October, 1999. Reviewed June, 2007. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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Figure 1. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Leaf type:** simple

**Leaf margin:** entire

**Leaf shape:** ovate

**Leaf venation:** pinnate

**Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous

**Leaf blade length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Leaf color:** green

**Fall color:** yellow

**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** yellow-orange

**Flower characteristic:** pleasant fragrance; spring flowering

**Fruit**

**Fruit shape:** elongated

**Fruit length:** .5 to 1 inch

**Fruit cover:** dry or hard

**Fruit color:** brown

**Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

**Trunk and Branches**

**Trunk/bark/branches:** not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems

**Current year stem/twig color:** brown

**Current year stem/twig thickness:** thick

**Culture**

**Light requirement:** plant grows in part shade/part sun

**Soil tolerances:** clay; acidic; loam; sand;

**Drought tolerance:** moderate

**Soil salt tolerances:** poor

**Plant spacing:** 36 to 60 inches

## Other

**Roots:** usually not a problem

**Winter interest:** no special winter interest

**Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

**Invasive potential:** not known to be invasive

**Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

## Use and Management

Florida flame azaleas are rather straggly and upright when very young but will spread out, the large, medium green leaves causing the branches to gently cascade down to the ground. A single specimen should be allowed at least six feet of spread to develop into the cascading form. These make a dramatic effect planted in mass three to five feet apart as part of a shrub border.

Rich, moist, acid soil in light shade with some direct sun, protected from harsh winds, is an ideal location for Florida flame azaleas. Azaleas grow best in filtered shade from tall trees, but will bloom poorly when in root competition with trees. Plants are very sensitive to drought. The soil must be open and porous, yet able to retain water well. A thick mulch is recommended to help ensure adequate moisture retention and root growth. Locate the plants so that they can receive frequent irrigation. Roots are located in the top several inches, even in sandy, well-drained soil.

Pruning is seldom necessary except to control shoots that extend above the normally mounded shape. Since plants bloom on the previous year's growth, any desired pruning should be done in spring after flowering. Pinching new shoots when they are several inches long increases branching and flower display.

The cultivar 'My Mary' has 2.5-inch-wide, single, fragrant yellow flowers.

Propagation is by seed sown in late fall on moist peat moss or by softwood cuttings taken in late spring.

Mites.

## Pests and Diseases

Problems include iron deficiencies from too high a soil pH and mushroom root rot from over watering or poorly drained soil.