**Rhododendron austrinum Florida Flame Azalea**

Edward F. Gilman

**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

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

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1. This document is FPS503, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date October 1999. Reviewed February 2014. Visit the EDIS website at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu).

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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, acidic 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.

**Pests and Diseases**

Mites.

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