



Second Chances

What's new in the world of rebloomers **By Helen Newling Lawson**

In 1995, there was a revolution in the plant world. That's the year Encore Azalea hit the market. Suddenly, a classic spring bloomer was also a fall bloomer.

We asked Buddy Lee, the noted plant breeder and horticulturist who developed Encore azaleas, if he had any inkling of how popular his introduction would be. In his understated way, he answered, "I'm pleasantly surprised ... but in the back of my mind I [thought]... if [consumers] could see azaleas bloom more times it would work."

▲ **Encore Azalea continues to introduce new options, such as Autumn Embers, to light up the spring and fall landscape.**

Credit: Encore Azalea

The nursery trade took note of his success. Now, more and more reblooming plants are introduced every year, and the great response continues. Kate Karam of Monrovia says, "They've become some of the most popular problem solvers in the garden."

Why are rebloomers such a hit? Lee puts it as simply as, "Anytime you add color at different times, people tend to want that."

Kevin Cramer of Van Belle Nursery believes, "... the rising interest in rebloomers has to do with ease of care and maintenance." Regardless of their level of gardening expertise, homeowners "desire the attractiveness and value of a beautiful outdoor space. Rebloomers are one solution to the [these] homeowners' wishes." In other words, if you want a beautiful yard without a lot of work, plants with a lot of flower power are one way to do it.

Many homeowners think that plants that flower multiple times give them more "bang for their buck." And they're not just cost efficient; they're energy efficient too (at least in terms of *your* energy). Why dig two holes when you can get twice the flowers from digging one?

Karam points to shrinking lot sizes and growing interest in container gardening as two more reasons for rebloomers' popularity. She says homeowners appreciate how "rebloomers put on a longer show in the same amount of space." She says even the classic perennial border, where gardeners typically choose plants for a sequence of seasonal blooms, can be "enhanced by a backbone of rebloomers that you can count on to flower without fuss."

Plant breeders know all of this, and are working hard to keep up with demand. But Lee says that while, "the bloom is part of it," repeat flowering isn't enough for breeders to bring it to market. Lee says he's focusing on ones that prove to be a "better, improved plant," including foliage and growth habit. He points to a recent Encore azalea introduction, Autumn Fire (*Rhododendron* 'Roblez'), as one example: In addition to intensely red, semi-double flowers, it has a manageable, compact size; strong, vigorous growth; and lovely bronze/red winter foliage.

Here's a roundup of just a few notable new reblooming introductions available now.

Date Night Crimson Kisses weigela (*Weigela* x 'Slingco1') – Newly introduced in 2015, this weigela from Van Belle Nursery's Bloomin' Easy collection is billed as a "true rebloomer," with bright red, bell-shaped flowers recurring all summer long (a light shearing after the first flowering is suggested, but not required). This selection is also notable for its compact form, maturing at about 3-4 feet tall and wide in a mounding shape. The bright red flowers contrast nicely with the rich emerald green foliage. It's not evergreen though, so this shrub is better suited to a mixed border than a foundation planting.

Veronica 'White Wands' and 'Enchanted Indigo' – Like inverted icicles, the white spikes of 'White Wands' bring cooling relief on a summer day. At about 15 inches tall, they are a perfect height for the middle of your border, and the continuous blooms from mid- to late summer will be as delightful to you as to the honeybees, hummingbirds, and butterflies that enjoy their nectar. 'Enchanted Indigo', an intense inky purple, provides the perfect counterpoint to the neutral white of 'White Wands'.

Boulevard Nubia and Daiyu clematis (*C.* 'Evipo079', 'Evipo083') – These two new clematis varieties offer a compact

Bottom left: Both 'White Wands' and 'Enchanted Indigo' veronica are from the Magic Show collection. Credit: Walters Gardens, Inc.

Bottom right: Boulevard Nubia clematis blooms from both leaf axils and stems, so that the exceptionally dark red flowers cover the plant from the ground up. Credit: Poulsen Roser for Monrovia

▼ Like all good dates, Date Night Crimson Kisses weigela can be counted on to come back and is low maintenance, too. Credit: Bloomin' Easy







habit (up to 6 feet tall) in addition to reblooming, making them perfect for large containers, to mask leggy companions, or to adorn a short pillar. Nubia has dark red flowers and Daiyu blooms are dark pink.

Katrina African iris (*Dietes* x ‘Nola Alba’) – This selection rarely sets seedpods, allowing it to spend its energy on producing lovely white flowers touched with gold from spring until late fall. The evergreen foliage keeps interest going year round. Discovered in Louisiana, it tolerates the poorly draining soil and heat and humidity you’d expect there. A portion of sales is donated to the America’s Wetlands Foundation, helping restore wetlands in Louisiana.

Gardenias Heaven Scent (*G. augusta* ‘MADGA I’) and Pinwheel (‘PIIGA-I’) – Both of these gardenias are repeat bloomers, allowing you to enjoy their beauty and fragrance from late spring through summer. Heaven Scent has a tight, compact, upright form that allows it to fit well into container combinations. Pinwheel has angled petals that twirl around the center for a fun, lively look that does indeed resemble a spinning pinwheel.

Agastache ‘Mango Tango’ – Pollinators love it and deer don’t. Those two reasons alone should be enough to recommend agastache (also known as anise hyssop, thanks to its aromatic foliage). But the color is what had me searching for this selection last summer: an arresting shade of peachy orange that will remind you of orange sherbet (and might make your mouth water just looking at it).

Autumn Fire Encore Azalea (*Rhododendron* ‘Roblez’) – The breeders at Encore Azalea aren’t resting on their laurels (not to mix horticultural metaphors) – they continue to put out new introductions. Autumn Fire is one of the hottest of these, and not in name only. A dwarf selection, reaching just 2½ feet tall and 3 feet wide, its semi-double intensely red flowers guarantee it won’t be overlooked. Purple-bronze winter foliage adds another season of interest.

Bloom ‘N Again azaleas – This collection, from Gardener’s Confidence, offers even more options for repeat-blooming azaleas. Pink Explosion (‘MNIHAR018’) and Love U Lots (‘MNIHAR018’) are two of the newer varieties. 🌸

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Left to right: The compact size and fragrance of Heaven Scent gardenia makes it a perfect choice for a patio container. Credit: GardenersConfidence.com

Agastache is one of the easiest perennials to grow, and the rewards are as plentiful as the blooms: deer-resistant, drought-tolerant, and pollinator pleasing. Credit: Walters Gardens, Inc.

Buddy Lee, the plant breeder who brought us Encore Azaleas, received the Distinguished Service Award from the Azalea Society of America in 2007. Credit: Encore Azalea

Facing page: Katrina African iris is particularly suited to the heat and humidity of Southern gardens. Credit: Doreen Wynja for Monrovia

Care for Re bloomers

A few tips and techniques can help you get maximum flowering from your rebloomers.

Some plants may rebloom better after deadheading or a light shearing after the first wave of flowering. Know the specific care requirements for your particular plant.

The same goes for fertilizing – many rebloomers appreciate a little feeding after their first flowering.

Kate Karam of Monrovia also points out, “Keeping roots cool also helps keep the plant from shutting down during the high heat of summer and the flowers coming. A 2-3-inch layer of mulch at the beginning of the season (topped off with more as it breaks down) is really helpful.”

Buddy Lee gave us his own tips for success with Encore Azaleas. He recommends planting in well-draining acidic soil and four to six hours of good sun for best bud set and bushy growth. Fertilize just after spring blooming with an acid-plant fertilizer, but he warns against fertilizing too heavily, in the fall, or when the plants are dehydrated. Finally, he says, “Some consumers think they have to prune them every year,” but “the best thing” is to leave them unpruned unless you need to cut back for size.