

DOWNNS PARK NATURE NOTES

AZALEA SHOW



Marylanders love azaleas. The colorful flowers seem to shout “It’s spring!” from many of our lawns. Gardeners appreciate how easily azaleas take to our climate and soil. In fact, rhododendrons and azaleas grow wild in the Chesapeake Bay region, and you can find two beautiful native species right here in the park.

The first to flower is the pinxterbloom azalea (above), which has a tongue-twisting scientific name – *Rhododendron periclymenoides*. The pinxters usually bloom in mid to late April in colors ranging from deep to pale pink. Most of our shrubs are two to three feet tall, but a few exceed six feet, and we are indeed lucky to have these old-timers around. The name “pinxterbloom” comes from the Dutch for Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter.



Next to bloom, in May, is the swamp azalea (*R. viscosum*). The mostly white flowers (left) have a strong, spicy scent – so strong that if you’re out for a jaunt on the Perimeter Trail, you might even be able to smell a swamp azalea before you see it. Our shrubs range up to about four feet in height, and, as their name indicates, prefer moist spots.

You can see these flowers and more on walks scheduled in April and May. On April 26, we’ll look for spring blooms, and on May 24, we’ll let our noses guide us to the scents that should be perfuming the trails. Stop by the Information Center for details and to sign up.

– Dave Cohn, naturalist volunteer