

Letters & Comments

Azaleas and Blueberries

Dear Ms. Lasley:

The June, 1983 issue of *Alaska Farm and Garden* contained an article introducing two hardy azalea and two blueberry cultivars ('Northblue' and 'Northsky') that were developed at the University of Minnesota. All of these plants have been tested on a limited scale near Fairbanks. The test garden containing ten plants each of the two azalea cultivars is located on one of the hills surrounding Fairbanks where summer temperatures are slightly cooler and winter temperatures, milder than the city, itself. All but one of the two-year-old azalea plants winterkilled in 1979. The survivor recovered very slowly, produced a few side branches at the base of the stem, but did not survive a second winter.

The blueberry cultivars were considerably more successful with 80 percent of the plants surviving four winters. Both cultivars exhibited severe tip dieback during 1981 and 1982, but the plants have all recovered. Those plants on which the snow cover was removed, were

killed. Both cultivars have flowered and produced fruit since 1980. The fruit is similar in size to the wild blueberry (*Vaccinium uliginosum*) and has a sweet flavor. The fruit matures very late in the season (late August, early September), and in some seasons, fruit does not mature fully before snowfall. Both cultivars are very susceptible to browse damage by rabbits.

Both the azalea and blueberry cultivars should be tested more extensively throughout Alaska. Based upon my very limited tests, it appears that the blueberries might grow well as long as there is sufficient snow cover, but the azaleas do not seem to be hardy in the Fairbanks area.

Sincerely yours,
Patricia S. Holloway

