

THE REGISTRATION OF RHODODENDRON CULTIVARS

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ABSTRACT. Popular interest in the genus *Rhododendron* as a garden plant has resulted in many thousands of names being coined for species and hybrid cultivars. As International Registration Authority for this group, the Royal Horticultural Society maintains a Register of these names. This paper will discuss something of the history and operation of the Register, as well as its potential uses, and will draw attention to the requirement for closer co-operation with Plant Variety Rights organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Plant registration is the procedure whereby new cultivar names are checked to ensure they conform to the internationally agreed rules governing their formation and the subsequent listing of those names in a comprehensive Register. Each Register covers a specified subject, in this case the genus *Rhododendron*, and seeks to take account of all cultivar names ever used in that group. *Rhododendron* registration is currently restricted to cultivar names, although grex names were formerly covered as well. Grex names have been omitted, and their use discouraged, since they had led to confusion in horticulture when the same name was used for the grex as a whole (i.e. all the progeny of a specified hybrid combination, wherever and whenever made) and for the best known or original clone of that grex (i.e. the vegetatively propagated progeny of one selected individual). It must also be emphasized that plant registration involves species cultivars as well as those selected from hybrid progeny.

Is registration really necessary at all? What reasons can one give to counter the accusation that plant registration is an example of unnecessary horticultural bureaucracy? Two factors might be advanced in its defence. One of these arises as a consequence of any group of plants being the object of popular attention over a long period of time—as is the case in *Rhododendron*. Large numbers of plants will have been selected as showing some desirable or useful character and not unreasonably growers want to give them distinctive names. As hybridizers set to work, the potential variation and the resulting number of named forms increases enormously and it becomes much harder for breeders and growers to be aware of all the names that are already in use and which will have appeared in a bewildering potential array of catalogues, books and periodicals. Consequently 'new' names will often not be new at all and threaten potential confusion for the amateur and professional alike. What they require is a horticultural version of *Index Kewensis*, covering rhododendrons wherever they are grown, and this is in large measure what the Register seeks to provide.

The second factor which justifies the existence of a central registration authority follows from the fact that it is not as well known as it should be

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amongst gardeners that they, like botanists, are governed by an internationally agreed code of rules and recommendations dealing with the formulation and publication of new cultivar names. This is the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants—last revised in 1980—and not to be confused with the Botanical Code, although the former is based upon the latter. Some growers have claimed that such rules are an unwarranted restriction on their freedom of action; for example, they may have a name which, for one reason or another, has great commercial value and want to re-use it when the original stock is exhausted or has become less popular. However displeased they may be that this is not permitted, they should reflect that the Code seeks to promote uniformity and accuracy in plant names and has been formulated by horticulturalists and botanists of wide experience, in the light of past sources of confusion. Ignorance of the Code, or an unwillingness to try and master what is admittedly a rather formidable looking document, will result in further cultivar names in latin form, which can so readily be confused with botanical epithets, and in others phonetically too similar to those already in use, as well as a variety of other such nomenclatural crimes! If the Registration Authority is given the chance to see these names before they are published, it can act as a safety net to prevent such transgressions reaching the printed page and to an extent remove some of the burden of responsibility from the grower.

INTERNATIONAL REGISTRATION AUTHORITIES

In an attempt to overcome these problems, various horticultural organizations throughout the world have agreed to act as International Registration Authorities for specific groups of plants. Their authority is conferred upon them by the International Commission for Horticultural Nomenclature and Registration, and Fig. 1 indicates how this commission is placed in relation to the various other commissions, associations and authorities involved with plant nomenclature.

At the head of the network lies the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS). On its horticultural side it has under its wing the International Society for Horticultural Science (ISHS), which was set up after the 14th International Horticultural Congress (IHC) in 1955 and is now the body organizing these Congresses. The ISHS has a number of specialist commissions, one of which is that for Horticultural Nomenclature and Registration (ICHNR). Until the late 1950's this was the sole body responsible for the formulation of the Horticultural Code and is still today the authority which appoints the IRA's.

The modern Code, under which all IRA's are bound to act, is today regulated by a composite body, with representatives drawn from horticulture, forestry and agriculture, which incidentally serves to emphasize the wide application and consequent importance of cultivar nomenclature. Eight representatives are delegated respectively from the ICHNR, the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO-UN), and together these form the ICNCP—the International Commission for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants. The Horticultural

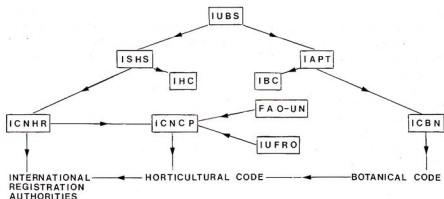


FIG. 1. The Interrelation of Organizations concerned with Botanical and Horticultural Nomenclature (see text for explanation).

Code is ultimately a specialized extension of the Botanical Code and dovetails with it in most respects. The latter is formulated by a parallel Commission for Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN), whose various committees sit between and during International Botanical Congresses (IBC) and are part of the organization represented by the International Association of Plant Taxonomists (IAPT), itself also a part of IUBS.

The first Registration Authorities were appointed following the 14th Horticultural Congress and it was at this time that the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) accepted responsibility for *Rhododendron*, together with *Narcissus* and perennial delphiniums. The Society was no stranger to registration, having operated an unofficial *Narcissus* Register since the early years of this century and its responsibilities have now grown to include five other important groups—namely dahlias, *Dianthus*, conifers, lilies and orchids.

The registration scene as a whole has grown as well, and from the original seven groups covered in 1956 there are now c.60 genera, or groups of genera, included in registration schemes. The IRA's represent a wide cross-section of organizations in ten countries from New Zealand and Australia to South Africa, India and West Germany. One must, however, pay tribute to the horticultural fraternity in the United States, where almost 60% of the Registers are established—although not all are as active as perhaps they should be. Many authorities are amateur, private Societies with specialized interests—such as the Heather Society of Great Britain or the American Paeony Society. In some cases, the Register is operated by a dedicated individual from his own home, whilst at the other extreme there are government bodies such as the U.S. National Arboretum, which holds the *Viburnum* Register. Although ornamental groups form the majority of those covered some economic ones are also included, such as the Mango Register held by the Division of Horticulture and Fruit Technology of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute.

There is no central finance available for registration schemes and each organization has to decide for itself how the cost of printing forms,

sending letters and publication costs, let alone the Registrar's time, is to be funded. In the case of many amateur Societies the labour may be devoted free of charge, but the professional organizations must usually regard it as a service to the horticultural community which, if it is fortunate, breaks even on publication costs. Some of these costs can be met by charging a fee for registrations and most authorities do this; each new *Rhododendron* registration, for example, costs the princely sum of 50p and it is perhaps time this was increased. On the other hand, one always has to bear in mind that to increase it significantly might well act as a deterrent to would-be registrants, so defeating the whole point of the exercise. The Orchid Register is a glowing exception to these financial strictures, the health of the industry being such that it can cheerfully stand a £5 registration fee, and with about 2,000 entries a year it is able to maintain itself on a fairly even financial course, with a high standard of publication. This in turn feeds back on itself in a readiness to conform to what is a very well-ordered system and demonstrates that there is a clear relationship between the activity of the registration authority and the behaviour of potential registrants.

THE PREPARATION AND USES OF A REGISTER

To do the job thoroughly a newly appointed IRA has to undertake a massive research operation to extract all the names used for cultivars in its group. It is necessary to comb all the specialist books, journals and especially catalogues to extract these names and constantly one wishes that nurserymen and libraries took greater care to preserve the seemingly ephemeral publications emanating from the professional growers, as this task could then be better accomplished. The need to include *all* names ever used must be strongly emphasized, as it has been the practice in some Registers to discard names after a period of time and make them available for re-use. This is not a practice which can be condoned—especially in a group like *Rhododendron*, where individuals can be very long lived, much longer lived indeed than their originators. A particular cultivar may die out in the trade, or in particular countries, but it is rarely possible to be sure that any plant is extinct and not to be found somewhere in an old garden or collection. Furthermore, once a name has appeared in print it is there to cause potential confusion for evermore if another plant is allowed to take up the same name. In addition, the current interest in the history of gardens and garden plants, and their conservation, is resulting in many old plants being rediscovered and old texts being brought to light and discussed. Once again one wants to avoid confusion between these old names and all new raisings. It is sometimes claimed that in very popular groups finding suitable new names can be difficult. This would seem to be more of a reflection on the poor ingenuity of a few modern growers than a real problem and the flow of new and acceptable names into many large registers demonstrates that this is indeed the case. The specialist may argue that he is well aware that the new plant is not the same as the old one with the same name, but the nomenclature is not for specialists alone and should be clear and precise for all users.

This is not to say that the Registers must ignore duplicated or otherwise illegitimate names if they have already passed into circulation. To do so would give a misleading impression, and Registers generally include such names, although where they have been coined after the appointment of the IRA, they are clearly stigmatized for what they are. The same also applies to new names, which though acceptable and being in circulation, have not been formally sent for registration.

The ruling concerning duplication of names extends to the whole of the genus *Rhododendron*—in other words that is the cultivar class as defined by the RHS as IRA. Thus, although the Register clearly marks an azalea cultivar as such, this or any other subgroup is not distinguished for registration purposes. The experienced grower will have no difficulty in assessing whether he has an azalea before him or not, but most members of the average gardening public would be unable to make this distinction, and of course unless qualified the name alone on paper is indistinguishable.

A list of names in itself would satisfy the essential requirements of the Register, but would be a very dry document of limited appeal, and most Registers also try to include some information about the parentage, the raiser, the relevant dates, and the essential characters of the plant. This makes the Register a valuable source of reference even if, as is inevitable, some of this information is no longer available for the older or little known cultivars. Traditionally the Register descriptions have concerned themselves with flower characters, especially flower colour, but this has tended to obscure other useful characters which might be employed to identify or distinguish between cultivars and today a broader based description is usually requested.

This request is made on a printed registration form (on which all applications should be made) and to make it easier for registrants who may not be familiar with the requirements of plant descriptions, the various items of information are individually listed. Despite this, some registrants are still too lazy to do the job properly, only filling in the parts *they* think are important. This is to be regretted, since in many cases the Register account will be the only widely available description of that plant and for it to be incomplete reduces its value for future reference. In using a Register description one must always bear in mind that they are not usually based on more than a single example, held in the hand of the registrant as he completes the form (or worse still held only in his memory!). Consequently dimensions, flower numbers and similar measurements must be treated with at least a degree of caution. Flower colour too is a difficult character to communicate successfully, but standard colour charts are the obvious answer to this problem; the RHS 1966 Colour Chart being widely used for this purpose. It is, therefore, disappointing to have to report that stocks of this invaluable key are exhausted and the cost of reprinting so great that it cannot at present be contemplated by the Society. This useful standard looks like becoming the exception rather than the rule just as it had gained wide popular use—especially amongst registrants.

A photograph or herbarium specimen can act as a useful check on the information given and as reference for the future, and both of these are requested on the *Rhododendron* registration form. Neither is as yet

mandatory for a registration and regrettably very few of either are received.

In recent years the listing of the raiser of any plant has become a more detailed procedure, the tendency being for the various operations involved in raising a new plant to be undertaken by a range of individuals, all of whom, rightly, want recognition and credit for their cooperative work. For this reason a distinction is now made between the individuals who (a) hybridized the parents, (b) grew the seed on to flower, (c) named the particular selection, (d) introduced it to commerce, (e) sent the name for registration! A list of all the names and addresses of those who had had a part in creating a new plant is published with the Register and this provides a further useful source of information, besides providing the avenue through which to determine the country of origin for any particular cultivar.

Strictly speaking, sending a new cultivar name for registration is not all a registrant should do. To be valid the name has to be published with a description in some readily available publication. This is effected in many cases by the publication of annual supplements to the Register (as with *Rhododendron*) but in those Registers where supplements are not produced registrants should bear this point in mind. In fact the registration form does ask for details of publication because, although such names ought not to appear before they are registered, this is not always the case. That it should be is clearly important, because usually the registrant will be unwilling to change something that is already in print and being grown by the gardening public, if, subsequent to publication, the name is found to be unacceptable.

It might be considered that Registration Authorities are only doing half the job by checking the distinctness and acceptability of the cultivar name alone. Should they not also be assessing the plants themselves to weed out those which are identical or very similar to others already raised and thus remove another source of confusion? Such cases can easily arise when selections are made from popular crosses by several different growers, and in the carnation world it is clear that on some occasions a particular cultivar has sported in more than one establishment to produce identical 'new' forms. Certainly where an IRA is aware of very similar or identical plants being submitted, it can and should refuse to accept more than one name, but to attempt to do this for all applications is just not feasible when one considers the considerable space, time and labour that would be involved in maintaining and recording a trials ground. Many rhododendron growers will also have waited a long time for a new cross to flower, and would be unlikely to acquiesce in another lengthy delay in distributing their plants. Furthermore, what characters would be considered sufficient to differentiate two cultivars? Flower colour may be identical in two clones, but one may be more floriferous or have greater disease resistance than the other. Unfortunately, desirable as such a scheme might be, it is impractical on the scale that would be required.

In consequence, the ball remains firmly in the raiser's court to consider carefully whether the new plant he has raised really requires a name of its own. Simply creating a new plant does not automatically justify giving it a new name or a name at all for that matter. It is, of course, very

tempting, particularly if one sees friends and competitors commemorating themselves and their endeavours with personalized names for their new raisings, but all raisers should be really critical in assessing the merits of every plant they are considering christening. Does it really represent an advance? Is it really a new colour? Does it have characters which will make others want to obtain it?

If a grower has raised a large family of hybrids, he could always consider applying a group or grex name to this collection. Here one does come up against a problem, because it has been recent policy to discourage the use of grex names. This may have been a mistake, since, apart from the fact that a grex name is a convenient shorthand way of referring to one of these plants when it is used for further hybrid production, it might satisfy the grower that his efforts have been recognized. Perhaps rather more specific rules should be laid down concerned with the form of grex names so that they are readily recognized as such. In other words, some part of the name must clearly imply the group nature of the taxon. If growers continue to name any and every seedling, they must remain their own worst enemies, cluttering up lists and catalogues with unremarkable plants.

The possibility of reserving names in advance has been raised by a number of registrants. Generally this is not allowed, since it would further complicate the registration procedure, but it is sometimes permitted to transfer a name if the original stock has proved unworthy and been entirely destroyed, none of it having been distributed. Name reservation should hardly be necessary, since the time required to process a registration is very short and can easily be left until the plant's worth is known, without delaying its distribution or publication. If a plant is being distributed for testing under a variety of conditions before being named, a reference number could easily be used until such time as the plant's worth is known.

The end result of all this activity is the Register and the first Rhododendron Register was published by the Society in 1958, compiled by Dr H. R. Fletcher only 3 years after the Society's appointment as IRA. Regular, mostly annual, supplements have been published in the *Rhododendron Yearbook* and its successors. Any first Register will inevitably have omissions and usually acts as a stimulus to those who find some of their own plants are missing—although so often they must have known of its preparation! A considerable body of extra material has now accumulated over and above the c.2000 names which have been registered since the 1956 edition, which itself contained around 10,000 entries and is now out of print. A new edition is clearly needed and it is hoped to provide one in the near future.

The volume of new entries to the Register each year has varied from a low of 55 in 1970 to a peak of 200 in 1976, and has been consistently high during 1979–82. The majority of these, 75% or more, originate in the States, with lesser numbers from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Canada. This would seem to indicate a heavy bias to rhododendron growing in temperate English speaking countries and, although this may indeed reflect a general trend, it seems likely that there

is a language barrier preventing rhododendrons from other countries, such as Japan, being widely known, at least to the Registrar!

In several of the major source countries the IRA has a very helpful arrangement with local Societies who collect together new registrations to send over in batches. They are able to filter out obviously ineligible names and send registration fees 'en bloc'—offering the IRA a considerable saving in currency conversion charges. They also have the advantage of being on the spot, being aware of who is actively involved in breeding work, seeing what is coming to the shows and thus able to chivy tardy registrants into activity. In this connection special mention must be made of Ed Parker, the American Registrar, whose tireless efforts and eagle eye have unearthed many new names and spotted numerous errors and inconsistencies.

As a further encouragement for potential registrants, who at present merely receive a photocopy of their officially completed registration form, the RHS is preparing a formal registration certificate for each new registration. It is hoped that this will prove a popular and worthwhile addition to the registration procedure.

REGISTRATION AND THE NEW CLASSIFICATION

No account of *Rhododendron* registration at the present time would be complete without some mention of the new classification of the genus and how this will affect registration. It is clear that the majority of registrants in at least this country and in the United States are interested and willing to operate and to try and understand the new system. This is perhaps not too surprising when one considers that these people represent the innovators in their own field and are thus possibly more disposed to be receptive to progress being made in a closely related discipline. It might also be said that up until now far too much has been made of the changes presented in the new system—and many of these are only in taxonomic rank—and too little attention paid to the general overall similarity between the old and the new.

There has been some doubt about the RHS's view of the matter, but two points clearly demonstrate the current position. Firstly, the new names and classification are to be used in registration from now on. At the last *Rhododendron* Conference C. D. Brickell proposed a slight horticultural modification to the Edinburgh classification, allowing for the retention of some names which, although they represent horticulturally important entities, cannot be maintained as distinct botanically when a range of wild material is considered. This 'Group' system will be used when necessary in the Register, although for a short period the old names will also appear in brackets for reference.

The second point reiterates a statement made in the last RHS *Rhododendron Species Handbook* (1980) where it is indicated that the new revision, in perhaps the horticulturally slightly modified form, would form the basis of subsequent editions.

To further facilitate the changeover, the RHS has produced an alphabetical checklist of all the Balfourian species names accepted in the current *Species Handbook* giving a cross reference to their new names (if any) and their position in the new classification.

PLANT VARIETY RIGHTS

Finally, attention must be drawn to a new problem, which is of growing importance and urgently needs attention. Registration with an IRA does not give any legal protection in the use of a plant name and Registration Authorities can only hope to lead by persuasion and example, as it is essentially a voluntary procedure. It does help if other bodies, local Societies for example, refuse to award plants which are not registered, or stigmatize such names in publications; but a commercial grower who has spent considerable time and money on raising new material, especially if it has good sales potential, wants stronger legal protection for that investment. This is open to him through the Plant Variety Rights Organizations (PVRO's) which now exist in many developed nations under the umbrella organization known as UPOV—the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. At present protection has to be sought in each nation separately, but in principle it is hoped to co-ordinate legislation to give wider protection as a result of one application. PVR gives, for a specified period, absolute rights to the name for the plant and in its propagation. The fees involved are very considerable and clearly this can only involve potentially successful varieties and for this reason it is all the more important that co-ordination between PVR organizations and IRA's is improved.

The declared policy of UPOV is that PVR depends on an accurate and stable nomenclature, that the cultivar name must enable the variety to be identified and must be different from any existing variety in the same group. Unfortunately, and with the notable exception of the British PVRO, no authority has consulted the Registers held by the Society and consequently names have been accepted which an IRA would never have allowed. In some cases these contradict the nomenclature aims set out by UPOV itself. Clearly, and not unreasonably, growers would be reluctant to submit to two sets of registration procedures, and it might be acceptable to the IRA's to receive notification of new names via the PVRO's, always provided some agreement could be reached on the grounds for rejecting names.

This leads on to a second aspect of the relationship between the two registration bodies—the use of 'code names'. These are names compiled usually with the first few letters of the grower's name tacked onto a series of other letters, with a result that may or may not be meaningless or unpronounceable! This in itself would not be a great problem, but very often (? always) when the plant comes to be sold to the public these code names are supplanted by an intelligible fancy (cultivar) name—of a type other growers see fit to send for PVR in the first place! In consequence the plants end up with two names and the most important of these—the popular name used by the gardening public—is never vetted by an IRA or the PVRO. It is to be hoped that further consideration of these matters by UPOV will result in some acceptable solutions.

In the meantime the objectives of the IRA's continue to be the maintenance of stability and uniformity in cultivar nomenclature, and to encourage the co-operation and support of the growers in registering their new plants.

QUESTIONS

G. Ring: I wonder whether any other plant societies are concerned about supplies of the RHS colour chart and whether there are any plans to reprint it?

Leslie: I have not heard anything specific from any other societies. The EEC may produce a standard colour chart but I have not heard anything definite.

A. Mair: If, as Dr Leslie indicates, there are no more colour charts, surely, with a minimum order guaranteed and orders in advance, such a chart could be provided by some commercial concern. I feel that if a need can be established then it should be proceeded with.

Leslie: I certainly hope to make that recommendation to the RHS.

A. Mair: I feel that I have chanced on a good cultivar. Coming from the other side of the world to the International Registration Authority for rhododendrons and not being a professional rhododendron grower and/or hybridizer, what should I do?

Leslie: Well, you simply fill in a form and send it to me with all the information on it that you wish to give us.

Unidentified Speaker: Would it not be better to send it to the Australian Rhododendron Register?

Leslie: Not necessarily. As the International Registration Authority we are the only people who have a consolidated international register. Obviously we are keen to co-operate with the local societies, particularly if they can act as a funnel for registration from those countries.

R. M. Withers: When the Australian Rhododendron Society was formed we appointed a registrar through whom it was agreed that all registrations from Australia should be submitted to the International Registration Authority for approval and that is what the Society does now.

Leslie: That is right. But if I receive one directly I will send a copy of it back to the Australian Registrar if he has not already received one.

H. E. Salley: How long after a name has been submitted to you should we expect to get approval?

Leslie: A reply should have been made within two weeks of receipt of the letter. If it goes through an agent or society in the originating country then it may take a little longer.

A. Hall: I understood Dr Leslie to say that the RHS was producing a new cross-reference list for the new classification.

Leslie: This is available now through the RHS.

Unidentified Speaker: Is it not the case that registrations from the United States have to go through Mr Parker of the American Rhododendron Society?

Leslie: I do not think that they have to go through Mr Parker.

G. Ring: The present American system collects more information than that on the RHS form. Mr Parker fills in the RHS form from the American Form.

Mrs L. L. Newcomb: Is it possible to reserve a name?

Leslie: No.

Mrs Newcomb: If a grower has a plant that shows promise then the grower may distribute it to see how it performs. Can a name be reserved through Mr Parker and the RHS until I am ready to release it to the trade?

Leslie: Mr Parker may well do this but, as Registrar for two or three other groups, I do not allow it if it comes to me.

G. Ring: I think that Mr Parker has given information out as to whether a particular name has been used but this does not amount to reserving it.

H. E. Salley: I am concerned about the compilation of a list of registered names. I am working on a book on hybrids and want to indicate by an asterisk those names that are not registered and to leave without an asterisk those that I believe are registered.

Leslie: We do in fact do just that. We do have a very large number of additional names that are not registered. These will be in any new edition of the register.