Lorapetalums, New Competition for Our Azaleas

Cheryl Naylor is a Master Gardener volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County. http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu

March 2004 Spring Special

*Loropetalum chinense*, a member of the witch hazel family and sometimes called the fringe flower, has been around a while in its green leafed, white flowering form. The relatively recent introductions of the pink flowering, burgundy leafed cultivars (*Loropetalum chinense* var. rubrum) have become very popular. These plants are even rivaling the popularity of our commonly-planted azaleas. But, until recently, little cultural and descriptive data was available.

The rubrum cultivars, originating in Japan, flower profusely in the spring and sporadically throughout the year. These evergreen shrubs perform best in the lower and coastal South. In our area, flowering usually begins in late February to March, when the leaves have turned dark reddish purple.

Loropetalum varieties are readily available at nurseries and at the garden centers of our local marts and depot stores. ‘Burgundy’ has been recorded as growing up to 14’ tall, while ‘Blush’ is 4-6’ tall and 4-5’ wide. ‘Ruby’ is more compact at 3-5’ tall. Do not be misled when you see knee-high or smaller loropetalums of any variety at the nursery centers. These fast growers do not stay small for long. The plant needs little to no pruning except to shape as desired. Taller varieties can be limbed up to resemble a small decorative tree. But, regardless how you want to use them in the landscape, you need to give these plants room to grow. They’re not plants to be placed under windows on the front of your house.

Loropetalum, which has few pests, prefers slightly acidic, well-drained soil and regular water. It performs best in light shade to sunny locations, although it is best to avoid full exposure to our hot afternoon sun. Loropetalum is often used as an accent or specimen plant, in a mixed shrub hedge, in mass plantings or in the back of a flower border.
Lorapetalums

####