If you are looking for new additions for your garden, consider Encore® azaleas. They were developed by plant breeder Robert E. “Buddy” Lee in the early 1980s. He crossed traditional spring-blooming azaleas with the late blooming Taiwanese azalea, *Rhododendron oldhamii*, to develop an azalea that would rebloom in summer and fall. Encore® azaleas were officially introduced in 1998. Today the Encore® Azalea website lists twenty-five varieties. Azalea lovers will find much to like about them.

Encore® azaleas are evergreen. They even attract butterflies. But the greatest appeal is that their blooming season does not end in the spring. They bloom from four to six months or longer in some areas. The blooms may not be as profuse as traditional azaleas but the extra blooming time is worth the difference.

Growing requirements are the same as for other evergreen azaleas. They require a slightly acidic, well-drained but moist organic soil. Soil moisture can be maintained with pine straw mulch. Fertilize at the beginning of spring. In our area a 15-0-15 general lawn and landscape fertilizer is all that’s needed. If a second application of fertilizer is needed, apply it before August.

Blooms are heavier on plants on sites that receive more light. Morning sun and afternoon shade is probably the best. Although these azaleas perform well in full sun to light filtered shade, a minimum of four to six hours of direct sunlight per day is required for good bloom development. If the area in which they are planted is too shady, the blooming cycle may be skipped or significantly reduced.
If pruning is desired to control size, it should be done immediately after the spring blooming cycle. Dead-heading old flowers is not necessary.

Encore® azaleas may be grouped by size: small, medium and large. Plants in the small group grow from two and a half to three and a half feet high and have a spread of three to three and a half feet. They are used as accent plants or in small spaces or along borders. They are also a good choice for use as container plants. The small group includes Autumn Angel, Autumn Bravo, Autumn Cheer, Autumn Chiffon, Autumn Coral, Autumn Princess and Autumn Ruby.

Medium plants grow from three to four and a half feet high and have a spread of three to four and a half feet. They are especially suited as a low level backdrop for layering in gardens and work very well when grouped together as small hedges. The medium group includes Autumn Amethyst, Autumn Carnation, Autumn Carnival, Autumn Debutante, Autumn Embers, Autumn Empress, Autumn Rouge, Autumn Starlite and Autumn Sundance.

Large plants grow from four and a half to five feet high and have a spread of four feet. They can be used as specimen plants or background plants in gardens. They can also be planted as hedges for property separation. The large group includes Autumn Belle, Autumn Monarch, Autumn Moonlight, Autumn Royalty, Autumn Sangria and Autumn Twist.

As Encore® azaleas continue to grow in popularity, additional varieties are added to the lists. The new addition for 2010 was Autumn Lilac. It has rich lavender blooms, accented with purple freckles. We can only hope to see many more additions like this.

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