ALABAMA RHODODENDRON
Rhododendron alabamense Rehd.
Synonyms: *Azalea alabamensis* (Rehder) Ashe
Family: Ericaceae (heath)
FNAI Ranks: G4/S2
Legal Status: US-none; FL-Endangered


Gil Nelson
Rhododendron alabamense


Rhododendron austrinum Gil Nelson

Field Description: Shrub, 1.8 - 3.7 m tall with hairy young **twigs** that become hairless in summer. **Leaves** 2.5 - 7.6 cm long, simple, alternate, deciduous; hairs on both surfaces scattered except dense on midveins; leaf margins entire with short straight hairs. **Flowers** fragrant, appearing before or with new twig growth, white with yellow blotch on the upper lobe. **Winter buds** hairless except for short straight hairs on the margins of the bud scales.

Similar Species: Pinxter flower (*Rhododendron canescens*) has densely hairy twigs, leaf stalks, and flower parts; its flowers are pale pink. Hybrids with Alabama rhododendron have pink flowers with yellow blotch on the upper lobe.

Related Rare Species: Orange azalea (*Rhododendron austrinum*), state-endangered, is the only orange- or yellow-flowered azalea in FL; it flowers March - April. Winter buds are hairy, and leaf margins have tiny teeth with short, spiky, transparent hairs that point toward the leaf tip. Also see Chapman's rhododendron (*Rhododendron chapmanii*) in this guide.

Habitat: Upland hardwood forests and on bluffs and banks of streams in the FL Panhandle.

Alabama rhododendron ***Rhododendron alabamense***

Best Survey Season: Spring; March - April, otherwise difficult to identify.

Range-wide Distribution: Alabama rhododendron: FL, AL, GA, TN. Orange azalea: FL, GA, AL.

Conservation Status: Only a few populations of Alabama rhododendron are known in FL and only one occurs in a conservation area. More than 50 populations, in 13 counties, of orange azalea are known; most of these are protected.

Protection and Management: Avoid logging, fire, or other disturbance in upland hardwood forests. Do not remove wild azaleas from their habitats.

References: Coile 2000, Foote and Jones 1989, Godfrey 1988, Nelson 1996, Ward 1979, Wunderlin 1998, Wunderlin and Hansen 2000a.