

## *Rhododendron nakaharae*

By Adam Duell

This plant is available for purchase in the Spring 2023 Catalog.

*Rhododendron nakaharae* is a very compact creeping evergreen azalea. With a typical maximum height of around 1 foot it is most suitable as a ground cover, rock garden, or container plant. Its small size also means even well-established gardens can easily accommodate the introduction of these plants. The branchlets are densely covered in dark green glossy leaves. In turn, shiny brown hairs cover the branchlets as well as the upper and lower surfaces of the leaves. It flowers later than most evergreen azaleas with blooms opening from June through August. The flowers are brick-red to rose-red, 1.5 inches across, and quite large compared to the leaves which are 1/2" long. Flowers are borne in clusters of 2-3 and somewhat uniformly cover the plant.

*Rhododendron nakaharae* is native to Taiwan where it grows at elevations of 1000-2500 feet in grasslands. Despite its relatively low elevation, *Rhododendron nakaharae* is quite hardy and can tolerate summer heat and cold temperatures down to -5 F. It is an easy to grow species that prefers full sun or light shade. The compact creeping growth habit and late flower time make this a distinct evergreen azalea.

*Rhododendron nakaharae* was introduced to the United Kingdom in 1957 and the USA in 1960. Since then, it has often been used as a parent in hybridizing programs and it gives rise to low-growing, late-flowering cultivars. We grow two named selections here at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden: 'Mt Seven Star' and 'Mariko'. 'Mariko' was given The Royal Horticultural Society Award of Merit in 1970. It grows tightly with rose-red flowers. 'Mt Seven Star' is the English name for Mt. Chising in Northern Taiwan where the seed was collected. The leaves are a lighter green than 'Mariko' while the flowers are a bright cadmium red. Both forms are equally slow growing and will maintain a short compact form. In 1991 Polly Hill wrote "In the 18 years since I nurtured this tiny 'Mariko' it has grown to ten inches high by 26 inches wide." It is doubtful that *Rhododendron nakaharae* will ever outgrow its placement or need to be trimmed.

### References

Cox, Peter A. & Cox, Kenneth N.E. 1997. *The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species*. Glendoick Publishing, Perth, Scotland. pg. 102.

Hill, Polly 1991. "North Tisbury Nakaharae Azaleas," *The Azalean*, Dec 1991, pp. 71-73