



Common Name: PLUMLEAF AZALEA

Scientific Name: *Rhododendron prunifolium* (Small) Millais

Other Commonly Used Names: none

Previously Used Scientific Names: *Azalea prunifolia* Small

Family: Ericaceae (heath)

Rarity Ranks: G3/S3

State Legal Status: Threatened

Federal Legal Status: none

Federal Wetland Status: none

Description: Deciduous **shrub** to 15 (4.5 m) feet tall, with hairless twigs. **Leaves** 1 - 3 inches (2.5 - 8 cm) long, $\frac{3}{8}$ - 1 inch (1 - 3 cm) wide, alternate, deciduous, oval with pointed tips and tapering bases, with no or short leaf stalks, hairy primarily on veins and margins. **Flowers** 1 ½ - 2 inches (4 - 5 cm) long, orange to red, funnel-shaped with 5 spreading petals and 5 long, showy

stamens; not fragrant. **Fruit** a pointed, elongated capsule, $\frac{5}{8}$ - 1 inch (1.7 - 2.2 cm) long, covered with short, pointed hairs.

Similar Species: Other orange-flowered wild azaleas (*Rhododendron austrinum*, *R. flammeum*, *R. calendulaceum*) flower April–May, and have hairy twigs and leaves. Sweet white azalea (*R. arborescens*) has white, fragrant flowers during the summer, and may be in flower or fruit at the same time as plumleaf azalea; its fruits are covered with knob-tipped hairs.

Related Rare Species: Florida flame azalea (*Rhododendron austrinum*) occurs on river bluffs and stream banks in southwest Georgia. Oconee azalea (*R. flammeum*) occurs in several counties in the lower Piedmont and upper Coastal Plain. Both species are ranked as rare or vulnerable throughout their ranges (G3S3).

Habitat: Moist hardwood forests in ravines, usually with beech, spruce pine, maple, and southern magnolia, and on wet, sandy stream banks.

Life History: Although capable of sprouting from roots, plumleaf azalea reproduces primarily by seed; it does not form thickets or colonies. As with most azaleas, its flowers are pollinated by bees and butterflies which are attracted to the nectar produced at the base of the flower (the flowers are odorless); the brilliant color of plumleaf azalea flowers also attract hummingbirds. Its seeds are tiny and have minute wings which possibly play a role in wind dispersal.

Survey Recommendations: Surveys are best conducted during flowering (July–August).

Range: Georgia and southeastern Alabama.

Threats: Logging and other clearing of hardwood slopes. Poaching.

Georgia Conservation Status: Fewer than 40 populations are known; several occur in state parks but most are unprotected.

Conservation and Management Recommendations: Avoid logging, clearing, and other mechanical disturbance on hardwood slopes. Safeguard location information and prosecute plant poachers.

Selected References:

Chafin, L.G. 2007. Field guide to the rare plants of Georgia. State Botanical Garden of Georgia and University of Georgia Press, Athens.

Foote, L.E. and S.B. Jones, Jr. 1989. Native shrubs and woody vines of the southeast. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon.

Godfrey, R.K. 1988. Trees, shrubs, and woody vines of northern Florida and adjacent Georgia and Alabama. University of Georgia Press, Athens.

NatureServe. 2008. NatureServe Explorer. Arlington, Virginia.
<http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>

Patrick, T.S., J.R. Allison, and G.A. Krakow. 1995. Protected plants of Georgia. Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Natural Heritage Program, Social Circle.

Weakley, A.S. 2008. Flora of the Carolinas, Virginia, Georgia, northern Florida, and surrounding areas. University of North Carolina Herbarium, Chapel Hill.
<http://www.herbarium.unc.edu/flora.htm>

Author of Species Account: Linda G. Chafin

Date Compiled or Updated:

L. Chafin, July 2008: original account

K. Owers, Feb. 2010: added pictures



©Carol and Hugh Nourse
Inflorescence

PLUMLEAF AZALEA
Rhododendron prunifolium

