**Kalmia × Rhododendron is a myth**

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The article by Dick van Hoey Smith in the last *IDS Yearbook* (van Hoey Smith 2004) explores the origin of two supposed *Kalmia × Rhododendron* hybrids. He refers to our DNA sequencing work (Grant, Toomey & Culham 2004; Grant, Toomey & Culham 2005) which disproves the putative hybridity of *K. latifolia × R. maximum*. We showed that it is a variant of *R. maximum* with abnormally long petioles and a reluctance to flower. We named and registered it as *R.* ‘Kalamity’ (Grant, Toomey & Culham 2005). Van Hoey Smith has succeeded in delving much further than we did into the origin of *R.* ‘Kalamity’ and established that it was originally collected in the wild in North Carolina.

Van Hoey Smith (2004) also mentions the other supposed *Kalmia × Rhododendron* hybrid, reputed to be *K. latifolia × R. williamsianum*, and registered under the name ‘Everlasting’ (syn. ‘No Suchianum’). Unfortunately he does not refer to our same work, cited above, which also disproved that this was a *Kalmia × Rhododendron* hybrid. We showed that it was a *Rhododendron*, possibly derived from *R. brachycarpum*, with an abnormal, saucer-shaped corolla. The accompanying photograph shows it flowering on 20 April 2004 at RHS Garden Wisley.

While I and most other woody plant enthusiasts would like to see a genuine *Kalmia × Rhododendron* hybrid, these two plants are not evidence of such an achievement. Indeed, I think it is unlikely that such a cross will be achieved by conventional breeding. One of the reasons for this is the fact that *Kalmia* and *Rhododendron* are quite distantly related within Ericaceae, the former belonging to tribe *Phyllodoceae* and the latter to tribe *Rhodoreae*.

I hope that our work and this note will clear up any lingering confusion about the two plants and help dispose of the attractive but erroneous *Kalmia × Rhododendron* myth.

**References**


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