PLATE II
Porch Azalea (Rhododendron obtusum kaempferi)
THE AZALEA BORDER

Work has gone forward steadily in the last two years since suggestions were made in November, 1946, regarding possible changes in some of the landscape planting at the Arboretum. The bulk of the necessary drudgery of clearing up is now done, and new reconstruction work has been started.

Opposite the Administration Building the border close to the marsh has been cleared of overgrown colonies of shrubs of various unrelated sorts, and in their stead a plantation chosen chiefly from the Ericaceae is being assembled. The heaths belong to a beautiful family; it is hard to think of a single member that has not some special distinction and elegance; from the flat and fragrant mats of mayflower (Epigaea repens) to the tall rhododendrons and sourwoods. The position for this planting is ideal, as many of the heath family enjoy having their toes in or near water, and the gentle slope from the marsh level up to the road gives an excellent place to those which prefer drainage in addition to moisture. The tall species, such as the laurels and evergreen rhododendrons, will not be found in this plantation which is only the forerunner of a series of azalea groups. In order to give the plants the rooting medium and food they like, many loads of peat have been added to the border, and in the open and sunny spaces between the punctuating trees new colonies have been set out, so that in the future, when the plantation reaches maturity, colours will harmonize and give interest from earliest spring to latest autumn.

Immediately inside the entrance the quiet open view over the marsh is maintained by low ground-hugging shrubs like bearberry, low blueberry and pachistima, ending in a higher mass after the first vista has been enjoyed. The earliest of the deciduous rhododendrons, known formerly as azaleas, start the procession with rhododendrons, mucronulatum, dauricum and canadense. The crinkled petals of mucronulatum, when they first appear, look as though they had been ill packed during the winter in a small valise, but they soon lose their wrinkles in the sun and air and show their deep maroon brown dots at the centre of the tremulous wind-swept flowers. These early and somewhat difficult shades are kept together as they do not agree with the pink, orange and red sorts. The lavender species bloom early, and where they thrive, as they should in their new position, they are a heartening sight to eyes seeking flower and colour after the long blank of winter. Some of the best of the old shrubs have been kept among the azaleas as dividing marks on what might otherwise be an overlong uninterrupted parade.

There are islands and tufts of Shadbush (Amelanchier) and later on clumps of Labrador tea and leatherleaf will be added among the huckleberries and tall growing blueberries. The pink azaleas begin with the earliest, the deceptively fragile looking Appalachian mountain Vaseyi, which is hardy in the far north and flowers generously each year if given proper food. After the Vaseyis have made their appearance the Schlippenbachs from China spread their large pearly
pink petals. This Chinaman has taken kindly to our country and is never dull or dowdy. After the flowers wither the new buds appear tightly folded in their scales awaiting the next spring. During the summer the oak-like leaves are healthy and give character to the plant, and in the autumn they colour brilliantly from pinkish orange to deep maroon. After the Schlippenbachs come colonies of eastern American species, arborescens, with its deep red stamens lifting themselves from the pale pink flowers, and viscosum, the latest and sweetest and tallest of our native sorts. The nudiflorums and roseums follow, but bloom earlier than the viscosums. Enkianthus and good Phellodendrons make a definite break between the native pink species and their hybrids. Some of the older plantations of Sumach have been kept, and these are intended to act as a division between the American hybrids and the equally native Rhododendron calendulaceum and their fellows in the orange scarlet and yellow shades.

The first years of this new plantation will not be as attractive as the later ones, since many older plants have been used which had to be neglected in the past. Some will look ungainly as they have been taken from crowded masses and this has meant hard pruning in order to give them a fresh start. As the marsh meadow border develops, further little tufts and wisps of the smaller Ericaceae will be tucked into the bays and hollows of the long line, and a walk next to the meadow will be made, so that the plants may be looked at from the marsh and from above on the level of the Meadow Road.

The work done would not have been possible without the enthusiastic and understanding help of all who are vitally concerned in the welfare of the Arnold Arboretum.

Beatrix Farrand