

## Grandfather Mountain Welcomes Iconic Blooms

Written by Kellen Short  
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The vivid fuchsia blooms of the Catawba rhododendron are beginning to emerge at Grandfather Mountain in Linville, revealing a spectacular annual show sure to impress even the most seasoned observer. "Out of all the diversity we have here on the Mountain — numerous trees, all the wildflowers — this set of shrubs in the heath family are the gems of the Mountain," said Naturalist Mickey Shortt Jr. "They are the showiest, the brightest, the ones that we turn our heads to look back at."

To showcase and describe the beauty and significance of the plant, Grandfather Mountain will host the Remarkable Rhododendron Ramble from June 1-16. These short, guided strolls held at 1 p.m. daily allow visitors to observe the ostentatious blooms and learn from naturalists about their history, characteristics and roles they play in the Mountain's ecological communities. The programs are free with the cost of admission.

The Catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) has leathery, dark green leaves that are generally broader and shorter than other rhododendron varieties, and the flowers bloom in flashy tones of lilac and magenta. The species was first named and catalogued by French explorer André Michaux in the late 1700s.

While the Catawba rhododendron is the leading act, the mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) and flame azalea (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) will quickly join the procession of shrubs blooming on the Mountain. Visitors also will be able to see the white to creamy-pink flowers of the rosebay rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) in late June and into July.

Some rhododendrons are already blooming at lower elevations on the Mountain.

"The Catawba rhododendron blooming seems to be a little earlier than last year," Shortt said. "The bloom show is getting underway."

But the wide range of elevation available on Grandfather Mountain — a nearly 1,000-foot change from base to peak — provides viewers with a longer window of opportunity to see the rhododendron in bloom.

The attraction is now operating under its extended summer hours from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily.

The Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation established to preserve Grandfather Mountain, operate the nature park in the public interest and participate in educational research activities. For more information, call 800-468-7325 or plan a trip at [www.grandfather.com](http://www.grandfather.com).

Photos:

Rhodo1: The Catawba rhododendron (as pictured in a previous year) provide an outstanding pop of color with the peaks of Grandfather Mountain in the background. Helen Moss Davis | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.

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Rhodo2: The Catawba rhododendron will soon present this scene to visitors at Grandfather Mountain. Helen Moss Davis | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.

Rhodo3: The Catawba rhododendron blooms annually in flashy tones of lilac and magenta. Helen Moss Davis | Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation.