

Enjoying Your Rhododendrons

and Azaleas

Rhododendrons and azaleas are best planted in early fall or spring, but can be planted nearly year round with extra care. Plants grown outdoors in most of the United States and Canada are generally classified in four categories: large-leaf rhododendrons, small-leaf rhododendrons, evergreen azaleas, and deciduous azaleas.

How To Select Plants Best

For Your Enjoyment

Select plants that show no signs of neglect by the retailer, especially inadequate watering, as evidenced by wilting or by brown edges or tips of leaves. Be sure plant size, shape, foliage texture and flower color fit your landscape needs.

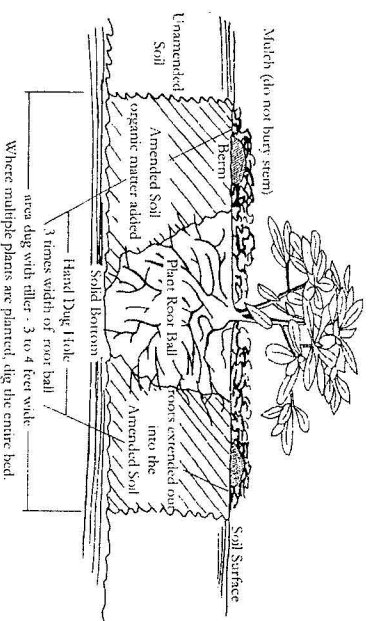
Where To Plant

All rhododendrons and azaleas grow best in a porous, moist, well drained, acidic soil, high in organic matter. Large-leaf rhododendrons and evergreen azaleas generally prefer a site protected from drying winds and hot summer/winter sun. Small-leaf rhododendrons and deciduous azaleas tend to be tolerant of more exposed planting sites.

Seek specific advice from nursery experts or ARS members in your area. Before choosing the site, consider the plant growth rate and how it will fit as it matures. Avoid planting in dry soils, too close to your foundation, under roof overhangs, or under trees with aggressive root systems or dense shade.

How To Plant

Side View of a Properly Planted Rhododendron or Azalea



1. Soil preparation: Dig the planting hole wider, but no deeper, than the root system of your plant. If your soil is poor quality, mix in peat moss, and/or fine pine bark, and good loam to the soil excavated from the hole (but limit organic additions to 25% to enable roots to quickly re-establish in the ground). In hot areas (USDA Zone 7 and warmer) it may be necessary to use 50% pine bark to increase soil drainage. If soil is poorly drained, plant in raised beds.

2. For plants in pots and burlap: Remove the container or root-wrapping material from your plant. Expose the root ends an inch (2.5 cm) or more by abrading with your fingers or a scratcher, or by washing with water before setting the plant in the hole.

3. Backfilling: Make sure the top of the root system ends up no lower than final ground level. Hold extended root ends up and gently pack the soil around the roots, and form a saucer or berm near the outer edge of the hole to hold water to irrigate the roots.

4. Mulching: Add 2 to 3 inches (5 to 7.5 cm) of bark mulch or other porous material to help control weed germination, conserve moisture, and hold the soil. Avoid covering the root crown at the base of the plant.

5. Watering-in: As soon as you finish backfilling and mulching, add enough water to thoroughly soak the soil and root system. This helps pack soil around the roots and assure rapid root growth into the surrounding ground.

Maintenance Recommendations

1. Watering: During the first year add water once or twice a week to avoid drying of roots and ensure proper establishment of the roots. Thereafter water only as soil conditions require. *Soil should not stay wet.*

2. Mulching: Maintain 2 to 3 inches (5 to 7.5 cm) of mulch.

3. Fertilizing: Most rhododendrons and azaleas require very little fertilizing. Seek advice from experts in your area.

4. Deadheading: Twisting off faded flower heads soon after blooming enhances bud-set the following year. Be careful not to damage vegetative growth shoots.

5. Pests and diseases: Healthy and vigorous plants tend to have few pest problems, but rhododendrons and azaleas can be susceptible to root weevil and leaf chewing insects as well as root disease problems. Consult with experts in your area for advice.

6. Pruning: Properly sited rhododendrons and azaleas need minimal maintenance. If branches must be trimmed, this is best done right after flowering finishes to enable the best regrowth and flowering the following year.