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Rhododendron & Azalea Care



Soil Preparation for Planting Rhododendrons

Correct soil pH for the growing rhododendron bush is crucial. Between 4.5 and 5.5 on the pH scale is appropriate. A soil test is the best way to determine the pH of the soil and make amendments. Use **Baccto Sphagnum Peat Moss** mixed with existing soil to help lower the soils ph.

The Rhododendrons bush is best planted in groupings in prepared beds as opposed to individual planting holes. Caring for rhododendrons will be simpler if they are planted is moisture retaining but well-draining, loamy fertile soil with the proper pH. A 50% ratio of organic matter is encouraged as a soil amendment, as it provides aeration and drainage and allows the rhododendron bush to set higher.

Caring for Rhododendrons

Once properly located in the planting bed, water thoroughly and cover with an organic mulch which will break down to supply nutrients as it decomposes. Do not mulch with peat moss, as it is difficult to rewet after it has dried out. Proper mulching will decrease the need for future rhododendron care.

Rhododendron care includes two yearly fertilizations, which are best applied in fall following a hard freeze and in early spring. Use a fertilizer for acid loving plants, such as **Miracle Gro Azalea, Camelia, Rhododendron Plant Food**. The organic material you have worked into the soil previously will break down to provide some of the necessary nutrients. **PW Premium Continuous Release Plant Food** can also be used during mid-summer to help maintain vigor and healthy stems and leaves.

*Consistently moist soil is needed for proper rhododendron care, but too much water creates problems for the growing rhododendron. When leaves curl and twist, this indicates that water is needed immediately. The rhododendron bush should not be allowed to go through the stress of wilting. The fungus *Phytophthora* species causes one of the most common disease problems in the landscape for rhododendron and azalea. This fungus is a "water mold," and thrives in poorly drained or wet conditions. A wilted plant is usually the first sign of trouble. **Rhododendron leaves will curl inward and droop.***

Shade-loving annuals, such as impatiens, may be planted as a companion to the rhododendron to indicate when water is needed.

Growing healthy and long-blooming rhododendrons starts with properly amended soil and planting in the correct location. These steps ensure minimal effort when caring for rhododendrons. Once sited properly the rhododendron needs only adequate watering, pruning and deadheading of the flowers to encourage their abundant return.

Tips on Azaleas

Azalea's are best grown in acidic, organically rich, soil that is well-drained. They also like a area that gives them morning sun with afternoon shade. Generally azaleas with perform well on north or east facing slopes. Do not site plants within or near the drip line of trees in the walnut family (most rhododendrons/azaleas are sensitive to toxic juglones produced by roots of walnuts, butternuts, pecans and hickories).

Poor drainage inevitably leads to root rot, therefore raised beds/plantings should be considered in heavy clay soils and they benefit greatly from a mulch to help retain moisture and stabilize soil temperatures. Azalea's prefer an acid soil. Acidify soils as needed (plants generally like soil pH in the range of 5.0 to 5.5). Add sulfur or iron sulfate to soils to lower the pH. Add limestone or lime to soils to raise the pH. You can also do a light trim to shape after the bloom cycle.