

RHODODENDRONS & AZALEAS

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“Large leaf” Rhododendrons

- Rounded, generally as wide as tall
- Moderate numbers of large flower clusters in May – June
- Growing season: Prefer half day sun, half day shade
- Winter: Avoid full sun and open northwest winter wind
- Moderate growth rate

“Small leaf” Rhododendrons

- Broad vase shape, taller than wide
- Large numbers of smaller flower clusters in April-May
- Growing season: Full sun to $\frac{3}{4}$ shade
- Winter: Will tolerate some winter sun & wind
- Moderate growth rate

Evergreen Azaleas

- Semi-evergreen
- Flat-topped, rectangular, wider than tall
- Large numbers of flower clusters throughout the plant in May
- Growing season: Prefers $\frac{1}{2}$ day sun, tolerates shade
- Winter: Avoid full sun and open northwest wind
- Slow growth rate

Deciduous Azaleas

- Broad oval to vase shape
- Moderate numbers of flower clusters at ends of branches in May-June
- Growing season: Full sun or $\frac{1}{2}$ day shade
- Winter: Sun or shade, winter wind acceptable
- Moderate to fast growth rate

THE CARE & FEEDING of RHODODENDRONS & AZALEAS

Site – Avoid planting under black walnut due to juglone toxicity $\frac{1}{2}$ sun (AM preferred)

- $\frac{1}{2}$ day sun (AM preferred), $\frac{1}{2}$ day shade during growing season. Larger the leaves, the more shade that's require
- Well-drained (NEVER wet or boggy), coarse, highly organic soil
- Avoid hot box sites (where summer temps can rise above 90° F.)
- Avoid open, windswept northwest winter wind-facing sites (most important for large leaf rhodies) OR against open south winter walls where reflected heat can cause wild winter temp swings

Soil Preparation

- Soil must be acidified, ideally to a pH of 4.5-5.5
- Must be coarse, high in organic matter and well-drained.
- Create an artificial mix that will be used to plant - 2 parts shredded pine bark, 1 part topsoil, 1 cup sulfur.
- Do not use peat moss (unless your soil is quite sandy and dries out very rapidly).

Planting

- Remove plant from container and presoak for at least 5 minutes
- to wet root ball.
- If roots are tangled, make vertical slits. Even if roots are not tangled, “rough up” soil ball. White root tips should be showing all over the root ball.

- Dig a shallow depression 2-3 times wider than the diameter of the root ball.
- Incorporate the pine bark/topsoil/ sulfur mix into this hole.
- The root ball should be 1/3 to 1/2 above the finished grade.
- Fill 1/2 way with the bark/topsoil mix, then water.
- Mound the balance with bark/topsoil mix so that the top of the root ball is even with the surrounding grade. Water.
- If top heavy, may need to “spearstake” until plants are established.

Mulching

- Buffers soil temperatures year ‘round, reduces weeds and soil compaction, retains moisture, and adds organic matter as it decomposes.
- We recommend: shredded pine as the very best mulch for acid-lovers. Second choices: Pine needles, shredded leaves or organic compost. Place mulch 2-3” deep, but never touching trunk or stem tissue.
- Extend the mulch at least to the dripline, and well beyond is better.
- Replenish as needed to maintain a consistent level.

Watering

- Water deeply and then allow the plants to dry slightly between watering, especially if they are in shade.
- Hand watering with a watering wand or similar device is preferred. Concentrate on watering the soil ball the first year and less on the surrounding soil.
- Sprinkler systems are NOT an appropriate way to water rhododendrons and azaleas.
- Avoid flooding. Of the 4 classes, deciduous azaleas are the most tolerant of “wet” sites.

Fertilization

- An organic granular fertilizer like Espoma’s “Holly-Tone” (3-4-4 plus 5% sulfur) is a great non-burning choice @ 1 cup per plant.
- Avoid applying quick acting water-soluble fertilizers before bloom as they may cause flower buds to abort.
- Avoid high nitrogen fertilizers, especially for plants located in deep shade- This will encourage foliar growth at the expense of flowers.
- Apply 1/2-1 cup of sulfur per plant annually (any time of year since it is not a fertilizer, but an acidifying agent). Mulch must be pulled back and sulfur applied directly to the soil surface.
- Avoid fertilization after mid-July to allow plants to harden properly.

Pruning/ Deadheading

- Light pruning (for shaping) should be done right after flowering as soon as the new leaf and stem growth has expanded. Cuts should be made immediately above a set of leaves.
- Deadhead large leaf rhododendrons and deciduous azaleas as the flowers fade. Hold the stem under the flower with thumb and forefinger, gently snapping the spent flower head off.
- Small leaf rhododendrons and evergreen azaleas tend to be prolific, so deadheading can be time-consuming and tedious.
- If you have the time and inclination, do it as you will be rewarded with more bloom the following year.

Disappointing/ or no bloom?

- Plants are too young or not well established.
- Too much nitrogen, excessive foliar growth.
- Too much shade.
- Profuse bloom previous year (mainly large-leafed rhodies and deciduous azaleas), but not deadheaded.
- Cold temperature damage in the winter.
- Any combination of the above.

Winter Care

- Apply ¼ cup superphosphate after September 1 to maximize winter hardiness.
- If the fall is dry continue watering regularly so plants are well hydrated, whether they are established or new.
- Top mulch off if it has decomposed or otherwise disappeared.
- Apply antidessicants to evergreen types, esp. large-leaf rhodies.

Large leaf Rhododendrons:

- **'Capistrano'** - 5', 5' - Frilly clear yellow flowers, very dark green foliage. -15° F.
 - Midseason
- **'Haaga'** - 4', 4' - Wavy-edged, deep purplish-pink. Really flower bud hardy to -29° F.
 - Late
- **'Janet Blair'** - 6', 6' - Pale mauve-pink, fragrant. Nice plant habit. -15° F.
 - Mid-late
- **'Nova Zembla'** - 5', 6' Dark red with black throat markings. Glossy leaves. -25° F.
 - Mid.
- **'Scintillation'** - 4', 5' Purplish-pink with wavy edges. Great foliage plant. -15° F.
 - Early-midseason
- **'Spring Dawn'** - 6', 4' Rounded, rosy-pink with yellow throat blotch. Dense, vigorous plant. -20° F.
 - Midseason.

Small leaf Rhododendrons:

- **'Olga Mezzitt'** - 5', 5' Peach flowers bloom 7-10 days after 'PJM'. Dark reddish fall/winter coloration. -25° F.
 - Early-midseason
- **'PJM'** - 5', 5' Lavender-purple flowers. Nice green summer foliage, mahogany-purple fall/winter color. -25° F.
 - Early
- **'PJM Elite'** - 5', 5' Pinkish-purple flowers, slightly pink being the differentiator from 'PJM'. Mahogany fall color, too. Slightly taller, faster growing than 'PJM', last to bloom. -25° F.
 - Early.
- **'PJM Landmark'** - 5', 5' Deep rose pink to the point of being *almost* red. Opens deep, deep pink. Glossy foliage is mahogany over the winter. -25° F.
 - Early
- **'Planeview Appleblossom'** - 5', 5' A pale pink branch sport of 'PJM' that blooms at the same time!
- **'Sugar Puff'** - 3', 3' Pale, pale pink buds open to soft white with a hint of pink at the edges. Fine-textured foliage with nice reddish-brown stems. -15° F.
 - Early-midseason.

Semi-evergreen Azaleas:

- **'Bixby'** - 2', 3' Deep rose-red flowers in tight clusters. Mushroom-shaped plant with small dark green leaves. Almost black in winter snow. -20° F.
 - Midseason.
- **'Elsie Lee'** - 3', 3-4' Semi-double pink flowers with lilac undertones. Plant is upright, but broad.
 - Midseason.
- **'Herbert'** - 3', 4' Dark purple-pink, "double" flowers with a dark throat blotch and ruffling. -10 F.
 - Early-midseason.
- **'Karens'** - 4', 4' Bright lavender-purple in clusters. Unusually flower bud hardy, plant is tolerant of alkaline soil. Lower leaves drop off over the winter, with the leaves right under the flower buds persisting. -25° F.
 - Midseason.
- **Poukhanense compacta** (Dwf. Korean azalea) - 3-4', 4-5' Pale lilac-orchid flowers are spotted on upper petals. Flowers are lightly fragrant. *May* assume orange and red fall color in sunny sites, but quite shade tolerant. -18° F.
 - Midseason.

Deciduous azaleas:

- **'Gibraltar'** - 4', 5' Large, fragrant flowers of intense orange with frilled edges. Great fall multi-color potential when grown in full sun. -25° F.
- **'Mt. St. Helens'** – 3', 4' Multi-colored coral, pink and yellow with a large yellow throat blotch, lightly scented. -25° F.
- **Northern Lights** – A series bred specifically for their flower bud hardiness which reaches -35° F. More upright and vase-shaped than spreading, good fall color potential when grown in sun. Also, tolerates alkaline soils.
 - **Examples:** 'Northern Hi-Lights' 4-5', 4' Creamy white with bright yellow upper petals.
 - **'Tricolor'** – Deep rose buds open soft pink with white overtones and a yellow throat blotch.
- **'Pennsylvania'** - Aka 'Weston's Pennsylvania' 5', 5' Summer-blooming in July/August with pink flowers that have an orange blotch, good fragrance. Copper-yellow fall color. Hybrid with native parents, one of which is
- **Swamp Azalea.** Compact plant habit and powdery mildew resistant. -20° F.
- **Swamp azalea** – R. viscosum. 4', 4' White/very pale pink fragrant late spring/summer flowers. Potential for yellow, orange, purple fall color. Loose, upright shrub great for naturalizing in wet soils.
- **Swamp azalea 'Pink Mist'** 5', 5' White flowers tinged with the faintest hint of pink in June-July. Powdery mildew resistant. -20° F.
- **'Weston's Innocence'** – 5', 5' Sweetly scented, small white flowers in early summer (July). Mildew-resistant. Burgundy red fall color. Hybrid with parents: Swamp & Sweet Azalea. -20° F.