

Planting an Acid-Loving Shrub

If you are like most gardeners, you sometimes long to grow a shrub that does not naturally thrive in the conditions found in your yard. Azaleas, rhododendrons, mountain laurel, blueberries, heathers, and heaths all belong to a group of plants native to soils that have the unique combination of being humusy yet fertile, moist yet well aerated, and very acidic. We group rhododendrons and azaleas

together because they historically come from the same natural habitat, and enjoy the partial shade and acid based soil culture.

Rhododendrons and azaleas prefer locations with good light, but need protection from strong, direct sun and from forceful, drying winds.

1. planting

When planting rhododendrons and azaleas in the ground or in a pot, we recommend using planting compost and working it in to your soil. Adding these soil amendments will help in holding moisture and improve drainage. When planting in the ground, dig a hole twice as wide as the root ball and one half again as deep. The top of the root mass should be slightly above the soil level at the time of planting; soil will settle after watering. Being surface rooting, more of these plants die from being planted too deep than from all other causes.



4. pruning

Prune AZALEAS after bloom, removing weak or dead wood and whatever trimming is required to keep plants shapely. One good pinching or pruning of new growth will create more branches and bushiness for later bud setting.

Prune large flowered RHODODENDRONS in early spring at bloom time if needed. Early spring pruning will sacrifice some flower buds, but is the best time for extensive pruning. Plants' energies will be diverted to dormant growth buds; which will then be ready to push out early in the growing season. Tip-pinch young plants to make them bushy; prune older, leggy plants to restore shape by cutting back to branch, leaf whorl, or to a cluster of buds. Take off faded flower head taking care not to injure new growth.

Always clean up spent flowers as they perpetuate diseases.

2. watering

Rhododendrons and azaleas need a soil that is moist, but not soggy, throughout the year. They are not deep-rooted; make sure the entire shallow root zone is moistened when watering. Check the soil with your finger to determine how deeply any water has penetrated. Generally a deep soaking once a week is sufficient, unless you live east of Hood River, then 2-3 times per week or more if excessively hot. Use an irrigation basin around each plant and slow deep soaking or low sprinklers to cover ground beneath the plant. Avoid overhead watering as wet flowers fade much faster.

3. feeding

We recommend Organic Rhododendron and Azalea Food. Fertilize when growth starts in the spring after bloom.

5. pest & diseases

CHLOROSIS (caused by alkaline soil, lack of iron, or overwatering) can be treated with chelate iron. ROOT WEEVILS (notching on leaves) for treatment we recommend Beneficial Nematodes, sticky tape at the base.

Azaleas and rhododendrons can suffer from sunburn, windburn or winter burn. This is caused by too much sun, planting against a house with reflected heat, lack of proper watering or harsh winter weather.

