

## EVERGREEN AZALEAS

Evergreen azaleas are a large subgroup of rhododendrons so broad that they are often treated as a separate group altogether. They tend to be smaller shrubs than regular rhododendrons, with much smaller, glossier leaves. Evergreen azaleas usually bloom in reds, pinks, and whites. Azaleas can be used as small hedges, topiaries, bonsai, or border shrubs.

**Latin name:** *Rhododendron spp.*

**Type:** evergreen shrubs

**Exposure:** partial sun

**Growth rate:** slow-moderate

**Hardiness:** Variable.

**Size:** 1-3ft tall & wide

**Soil:** Well drained, acidic.

**Growth Habit:** Variable. Generally rounded.

### Where should I plant my azaleas?

Evergreen azaleas need partial shade. This will probably be one of the most critical things you do that will determine the success of your plants. Be sure that there is protection from hot afternoon sun. Too hot of an area can kill an azalea quickly. Try to keep them out of areas with reflected heat, and locations they may receive a lot of wind, as this can dry the foliage out quickly. Drainage is also an important factor as azaleas will not do well in waterlogged areas.

### How much water will my azaleas need?

For the first year or two, water will be very important in establishing your azaleas. While this is true for all plants, azaleas tend to suffer a bit more from lack of water than others, especially in the hot summer months. The water issue will be even more important if your plants are planted in late spring or summer. Take care not to overwater though, just be sure to supply ample water when the weather creates a demand.

### When should I fertilize and prune my azaleas?

The care will be about the same as for Rhododendrons – avoid fall pruning, and be sure to fertilize in the spring. Evergreen azaleas are best sheared right after bloom to shape and compact. They don't take severe pruning as well as regular Rhododendrons though. Fertilize in the spring after the frost is over with an acidic fertilizer. Fertilizing in late summer or fall will encourage tender new growth that will not usually survive through the first few freezes.

### I have an old azalea which doesn't do much anymore – what can I do?

Azaleas get old too, just like everything else. After a few decades of growth, the plants will reach maturity and slow their growth quite a bit if they aren't worked with. Where as a young plant may put out 6" of growth a year, a mature plant may only push out ½"-1" yearly. Eventually, the plant just gets tired out and won't bloom well anymore. What you need to do is prune. Prune extremely hard, taking off ⅓ or more of the plant. What this will do is make the plant revert back to a younger state, and so it will start growing and blooming like it used to. Prevent this 'old age' by pruning or shearing every year or so.

### I've seen a small lavender-purple azalea around, which one is it?

You would have a hard time finding a purple azalea. What you probably saw was a dwarf rhododendron. If in doubt, look at the foliage. If it is glossy, deep green, and has small hairs on the leaf, it is actually an azalea. If it is a Rhododendron, you'll find the leaves to be more of a dull blue green with an occasional brownish underside, and they sometimes have a spicy scent.

### Are there any problems I should be aware of?

Like Rhododendrons, azaleas can be affected by root rot, root weevil and cultural problems like nutrient deficiency and burning. In recent years azaleas and rhododendrons are also prone to damage from the introduced azalea lace bug. Planting your azaleas in the proper location and using proper care can help to prevent most of these problems. If something does happen though, ask for a diagnosis so you can determine the right course of treatment.