

General Care of Azaleas & Rhododendrons

Soil & Location

Rhododendrons and azaleas are broadleaf evergreens requiring a well-drained, acidic soil (pH 5-6 range). An eastern exposure is the best site for these flowering shrubs. Both enjoy the morning sun for their foliage and flower growth, but prefer to keep cool in the afternoon shade. Azaleas will generally tolerate more sun than rhododendrons, but a light or filtered shade is preferable for both. This will help to retain moisture as well as keep the bloom color vivid. Avoid planting sites that will subject the plant to constant wind, because this will cause plant dehydration.

Plantings

Dig hole 2 times larger than diameter of pot and as deep as the pot. Prepare soil 1/3 topsoil and 2/3 Stauffers Premium Planting Mix. Fill extra depth of hole with soil mixture, smooth and tamp firmly to eliminate settling after planting. Remove plant from pot and score root ball vertically with a sharp blade or knife about a 1/2" deep, 4-5 places. This will allow the plants' fibrous roots to spread out. Place plant in hole with top of soil ball level or 1" above ground level. (Plants planted too deep will result in death) Then fill half the hole with soil mixture, then tamp firmly. Water thoroughly, then finish filling hole to ground level.

Water

Water is essential to both these plants. Plant roots should be moist but not soggy. It is important to water after planting, after flowering, through the summer, especially during periods of drought, and when new growth buds are forming in the fall, prior to dormancy. New and established plants should be watered by placing a garden hose at the base of the shrub, leaving it trickle slowly, so the soil can absorb the water. Usually it takes 10-15 minutes per shrub. Be careful of overwatering when a plant is in heavy clay soil.

Mulching

Mulching is a step that will make your job maintaining these plants a little easier, as well as improving the growing conditions. Mulch will help retain moisture and keep the shallow roots cool during hot summer months. An unmulched soil packs down, disallowing good water penetration, and dries out quickly. A layer of 2"-4" will be sufficient. Be sure not to pile mulch around the stems of plants.

Fertilizing

Azaleas and rhododendrons are a slow growing group and are light feeders. Fertilize during the months of February - Mid April. The first season after planting, a root stimulating solution should be used until the month of September (following directions of the manufacturer).

Winter Protection

These plants need winter protection to insure survival. Water thoroughly in the fall prior to dormancy. Protect from winter winds by using a temporary windbreak constructed of burlap and stakes to prevent plant dehydration, or by spraying foliage with an anti-transpiring spray. This can be especially important the first two winters. Heavy snow can be swept away using a broom.

Pruning

Pruning mostly consists of deadheading rhododendrons and pinching azaleas. Remove spent flowers from rhododendrons, careful not to damage the new growth buds below. Azaleas should be pinched to promote growth. Fingertips will be your best tool for this job. If heavier pruning is needed to remove diseased, damaged or dead branches, do so after blooming is completed. Azaleas can be cut anywhere along the branch. Rhododendrons should be cut just above the bud. Rejuvenating an older plant should be done over a period of 2-3 years, never removing more than 1/3 of the plant each year.