

Azalea indica

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Azaleas bring a sunburst of color into the house, from scarlet to apricot to white. A member of the Rhododendron family and originating from China and Thailand, they are dwarf shrubs that can grow up to 1.5 ft in height and width.

Azalea indica, or the Indian azalea, is by far the most popular. It has rich green leaves of up to 1.5 in. long with hairy undersides and the flowers are open and bell-shaped. It is forced into flower for winter color and can bloom up to three times in one year.

Azaleas are usually bought when in flower. Pick one with a mass of buds, rather than blooms, so that you can enjoy the spectacular show of flowers, whether single or double, on top of the little flat bush. It should be watered by the immersion method. After flowering, keep watering and place it outside during the summer. This variety is not frost-hardy, so the plant must be brought into the house when summer is over.

LIGHT AND TEMPERATURE:

A pot-grown azalea loves cool temperatures. It likes good light and small amounts of direct sunshine. A north or east facing window is ideal.

WATER AND SOIL:

Keep the soil wet, but not soggy, at all times using rainwater or distilled water. Remember, azaleas hate lime. An occasional spray with rainwater helps to prolong the life of the blooms. Pick off faded flowers promptly. After the first season and when the plant has outgrown the pot, repot again in spring. Always use lime-free compost and keep the azalea in the garden or a shaded patio throughout summer.

FERTILIZE:

If you feed the plant every 2 weeks it should flower again in three months. In spring, after the danger of frost has passed, take the pot outside and place it in a shaded, cool place. Keep the soil wet all season before bringing it indoors in autumn.

PROPAGATION:

Cuttings of healthy young shoots around 3 in. can be taken in summer and rooted in a heated propagator in the middle of summer at temperatures of 70-75°F. Use only lime-free compost, and keep moist with rainwater or distilled water.

COMMENTS:

Shriveled or yellowing leaves or a short flowering period are the most common complaints. Always water azaleas thoroughly, soaking the entire pot at least once each week. Water with soft water. Too much sun will cause flowers to wither and drop off, as will too little humidity and too much hot, dry air. Keep azaleas well away from radiators.