

Rhododendrons and Azaleas



Planting Rhododendrons and Azaleas

Rhododendrons and azaleas absolutely require an acid soil. Soil in the southern half of Ohio and for the most part in the eastern states is naturally only slightly acid or alkaline. The acidity must be increased before rhododendrons and azaleas will really thrive. Fine pine bark soil conditioner added to the soil will give the best result. (Note: take care to purchase “fine” pine bark soil conditioner, **NOT** pine bark nuggets)

Peat moss is also a natural acidifier but the process used to harvest it is threatening to the environment and the ecosystem where it is farmed. Therefore we recommend using the fine pine bark soil conditioner instead of peat. We believe it has the added benefit of being more acidic than peat moss also.

Mix a liberal quantity of fine pine bark soil conditioner with the soil in the bed. You can purchase 2 or 3 cubic feet bags of this conditioner at most large garden centers.

Use one-half fine pine bark soil conditioner and one-half soil (thoroughly mixed) when planting individual rhododendrons or azaleas

When planting, entirely **remove** the burlap from the earth balls about the plants and see that there are no large lumps of soil to form air pockets under or around the plant. The top of the ball should be 2 or 3 inches higher than the level bed. **Care should be taken not to get the plant too deep.** Flood the bed well with water to settle the soil. Tamp the newly planted soil around the root ball but avoid packing it or compacting it tightly about the roots. Be sure to remove all nursery labels and wires.

Where to Plant:

Rhododendrons and azaleas make handsome additions to foundation plantings. They do best in our locality when used on north and east exposures. They are also ideal for naturalistic plantings in wooded areas.

Do not plant either rhododendrons or azaleas in a location where they will get an extreme amount of whipping from winter wind, or, where the summer sun reflects an extreme amount of heat from buildings or pavements. If you are in doubt about the location, contact **A Guy & His Dog Landscaping**.

Rhododendrons and azaleas have a shallow fine root system and are easily damaged by dry spells. Frequent watering during such dry spells is necessary.

Watering in the summer and fall helps prevent winter injury. The flower buds also benefit from this watering as they are formed about this time.

Plantings put in after September and some of the tender varieties will benefit by evergreen branches (such as a discarded Christmas tree) laid over the roots and worked in around the branches of the plant. A windbreak made out of burlap placed around -- not over -- is also beneficial.

It is normal for rhododendron leaves to curl when the weather is below freezing. Brown specks on the underside of the leaves are generally caused by Lace Wing Flies. They can be easily controlled by insecticidal soaps.

Important - fertilize rhododendrons and azaleas each Spring with Miracid acidifier and add topdressing of fine pine bark soil conditioner. Cottonseed meal and soybean meal are also excellent fertilizers when available. Care should be taken to use these fertilizers in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations in order to avoid over-feeding and possible injury to your plants.