

AZALEA + RHODODENDRON

Rhododendron spp.

A beloved staple of New England gardens, Rhododendrons and Azaleas offer easy care and year-round interest and beauty.

VARIETIES

Rhododendron Varieties

The history and development of modern day rhododendrons has led to wonderful and reliable varieties with somewhat complicated nomenclature. To simplify things, **we can think of grouping the major types of rhododendrons into categories of 'big leaf' and 'small leaf'.**

In general, the **large leaf varieties prefer shade.** Examples include 'Album', 'Boursault', 'Chionoides', 'Nova Zembla', 'Roseum Elegance'. The most shade tolerant Rhodies are large leaf varieties such as the native Rosebay Rhododendron and selections such as R. maximum 'Roseum' and R. maximum 'Independence'.

Small leaf varieties perform best in sun. Examples include 'Aglow', 'Olga Mezitt', 'PJM', 'Purple Gem'. While they grow more slowly than their large leaf relatives and are smaller in stature, their winter hardiness is a great attribute.

Azalea Varieties

Azaleas are grouped into evergreen and deciduous types.

The bright blooms of evergreen varieties cover the plant from top to bottom. Examples include 'Delaware Valley White', 'Hino Crimson', 'Girard's Fuschia', 'Johanna', 'Stewartsonian'.

In growth habit, deciduous Azaleas tend to be more upright than evergreen varieties and tend to flower somewhat later. They are valued for their fragrance and beautiful fall foliage color. Examples include 'Gibraltar', 'Lemon Drop', 'Mandarin Lights', 'Pink and Sweet'.

PLANTING

The acidic nature of New England's soil is well suited to Rhodies and Azaleas. In addition, they like the soil to be rich in organic matter.

Both Rhodies and Azaleas have shallow, fibrous roots. This makes them relatively easy to transplant if that need should occur. However, it is easy for them to dry out. **Regular watering is important, particularly in dry conditions.**

An eastern or northern exposure is ideal for Rhodies. This will keep the plants out of the strong summer (and winter) sun which can desiccate leaves. Planting locations with early morning or late afternoon sun or dappled sun throughout the day can minimize leaf sunburn. While Rhodies prefer shade from direct afternoon sun, they do require some sun in order to develop flower buds.

Small leaf Rhododendrons and Azaleas are more tolerant of sun and wind than large leaf Rhododendrons.

A 2" layer of mulch around the plant will help the soil remain cool and moist in summer and help insulate the roots in winter.

For step by step planting instructions and video demonstration visit our Planting Guide at mahoneysgarden.com/planting-for-success/

FERTILIZING

Rhodies and Azaleas are not heavy feeders. An organic fertilizer such as **Espoma Holly-Tone** can be applied in the spring.

PRUNING

Choosing a plant whose mature size will fit the space available will limit the amount of pruning you need to do.

If you do wish to reduce the size of the plant, pruning should be done immediately after flowering. Rhodies and Azaleas develop

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next year's flower buds later in the summer. Fall or spring pruning will remove the following year's flowers.

If rejuvenation pruning is in order, **do not remove more than one-third of the plant's leaf mass in any one year.**

The faded flowers of large leaf Rhododendrons are noticeable to some people. Once dried, a gentle twist with your fingers will remove them. You can also use hand pruners. Be sure not to remove the new leaf growth that begins to appear after flowering.

The faded flowers of Azaleas tend to drop off on their own and are quickly covered by new growth. Very little pruning is needed to keep them looking attractive.

WINTER PROTECTION

Drying winds and frozen ground deprive plants of moisture. **A late fall soaking of your Rhodies and Azaleas before the ground freezes will help them get through the winter.**

Large leaf Rhododendrons, in particular, can benefit from winter protection. An anti-desiccant spray, such as Wilt Proof, applied to the leaves in late fall will help minimize sunburn and wind damage.

COMMON PROBLEMS + SOLUTIONS

It is perfectly natural for Rhododendrons and evergreen Azaleas to lose some of their leaves over time. The leaves towards the inside of the plant will drop after a number of years as new growth limits the amount of sunlight reaching the interior of the plant. Leaf drop is more noticeable in some years than others.

You may also note that many Rhodie leaves curl when cold temperatures arrive. The lower the temperature, the tighter the curl. This self-defense mechanism reverses as temperatures warm.

Deer will browse on Rhodies and Azaleas. To minimize the damage, foliar sprays such as Plantskydd Deer Repellent can be applied. Heavy-duty plastic netting can also be used.

Brown circles on leaves likely indicate leaf spot fungus. Overhead watering should be avoided. When moisture remains on the leaves, it creates an environment in which fungus can develop.

Remember, a properly sited and well maintained plant is the best way to prevent disease.

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