

How To Have Superb Azaleas

Azaleas are one of the most widely grown plants in the world, and deservedly so. They will make a wonderful impact in your garden as feature or border plants and are ideally suited to container growing too. There are colours to fit into any garden decor.

BRIEFLY:

Position: Semi-shade to Sun

Height: 30cm to 90cm *

Width: 30cm to 90cm *

* depending on variety.

Azaleas are easy to grow provided a few basic tips are followed. There are literally hundreds of varieties to choose from. Selection of different varieties can give you Azaleas in flower in your garden from March through to October.

Where to Plant?

Traditionally, Azaleas have been mainly planted in Easterly positions where they receive morning or filtered sun but many will grow and flower happily in much sunnier spots. The 'Sun Hardy' varieties are quite lovely and perform beautifully in the garden provided that a little extra care is given to mulching and watering. A well drained soil is essential, or else grow them in containers.

When to Plant?

Anytime at all when you see a plant you can't possibly resist. The best selection is available between March and October.

Prepare your Soil for Planting

As with any plant, you'll have better success if you prepare your soil before planting. Water your plant in the pot several hours before planting.

Azaleas like an acidic soil, pH 5.0 to 6.0. Garden Centres can test your soil pH level at no charge if you are not sure about yours.

Dig in some compost to improve the soil and Gypsum or similar to assist drainage in clay soils or water retention in sandy soils.

Dig a hole twice the width of the root ball and slightly deeper than its depth. Blend the soil you removed with **Planting Compost**, 2/3 compost to 1/3 soil and partially fill the bottom of the hole with compost enriched soil.

Remove your plant carefully from the pot and look at the root system. The roots may need to be loosened gently from the root ball to help them grow into the fresh soil. Place your plant carefully into the hole, positioning it with its best side to your advantage. Make sure that the top of the root ball is level with, or slightly below, the existing soil level. Fill compost improved soil back into the hole and firm down to exclude any air pockets.

Water straight after planting and add **Plant Starter** to help your plant to a better start in life by gently stimulating the root system.

N.B. Do not dig below the clay line in heavy soils as you may cause a drainage problem. Build up the soil level instead.

How Much Water?

Azaleas need good, regular watering in the drier months and particularly in Spring as new growth forms. Frequency of watering will depend on soil type, climate and position but once or twice per week should be enough in warmer times. Constant, even moisture is needed for formation of buds and prolonged flowering. Azaleas, with their fine root system, will really benefit from an efficient sprinkler system.

Feeding and Mulching

Azaleas are not heavy feeders. The main time to feed is early Spring, after flowering, with **All Purpose Plant Food** or **Azalea Food**, and again around January. As the buds and flowers begin to form, an application of **Seaweed** will be beneficial.

Azaleas have a shallow root system and should **not** be over-fed. Mulching with about a 5cm layer of **Organic Planting Compost or Mulch** is very beneficial as Azaleas do enjoy a cool root system.

Can You Prune Them?

Certainly, but it is not normally needed. If you wish to shape them or trim back an untidy shoot, then after flowering is the time.

Any Pests to Worry Them?

There are a few but if Azaleas are kept clean and growing then they are generally pest-free. Ask your Garden Centre if you have any concerns.

Grow Them in Containers

If you don't have a spot in your garden for Azaleas then try them in containers on patio, verandahs or decking. They really are versatile. Garden Centres have a range of containers to suit Azaleas and the pick of them is the squat terracotta planters. Team your Azalea with low growing seedlings like Lobelia and you'll have months of pleasure. As always, the Potting Mix is important as is careful watering. We recommend potting into **Professional Blend Potting Mix** and feeding with **Azalea Food**.

In recent years Azaleas have been used extensively as short-term, flowering indoor decoration and they really do perform well. A cool, well lit area is needed and regular 'rests' outside to re-flower.

The Varieties Available Include:

- **Indicas** - evergreen and the most popular. *Indicas* generally have larger leaves and flowers than *Kurumes* and flower progressively over a long period. Many of the newer varieties flower Spring and Autumn.
- **Kurumes** - also evergreen, with smaller leaves and are smothered in late Winter/Spring with small, colourful flowers.
- **'Sun Hardy'** - selected varieties that will tolerate full sun provided extra care is given. They are often larger growers with large single-type flowers.
- **Satsuki** - large, single flowers in late Spring.
- **Gumpo** - compact, dwarf Azaleas flowering around November. Ideal border or rockery plants.
- **Mollis** - lose their leaves in Winter but flower in Spring in dazzling colours. Grow in full sun.

Good Companion Plants Include: Daphne, Ericas, Camellias, Rhododendrons, Kalmia etc.

Azaleas fit in with almost any garden design. Plant as a massed feature, grow them as focal border plants or even grow taller varieties for background colour. Garden Centre can help with your selection.

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