

# AZALEA

## ADD SOME STRIKING COLOUR TO YOUR GARDEN MAKEOVER

*Azaleas* are a much loved flowering shrub, which come in a wide range of colours and potential heights. Most varieties are *long flowering* and many are suitable for growing in tubs. Azaleas are relatively easy to grow and long lived if given reasonable care. Our cultural notes should ensure excellent results.



### POSITION

A semi-shaded position, with morning sun, results in better quality flowers and a longer flowering period. Dew or frost followed by sun in the morning can cause burn or fading of the flowers.

### ACIDITY AND SOIL CONDITIONS

Azaleas require a pH of around 5.5 or in other words, an acidic soil. Good drainage and a light soil are essential. Heavy soil can be lightened by the addition of peat moss and coarse river sand. The addition of compost is also beneficial.

### PLANTING

Azaleas are shallow rooted. Their roots feed close to the soil surface. When planting, a shallow half moon shaped hole should be dug up and ideally, peat moss mixed with existing soil. The top of the root ball should be at the same level as the surrounding soil surface when planted. It is advisable with a pot grown Azalea to lightly tease out the roots around the outside of the root ball on planting to help establish the plant in your garden.

### MULCHING

A light mulch in late spring is beneficial for Azaleas. *This stops the plants from drying out quickly in summer.* As Azaleas are shallow rooted, care must be taken not to mulch too heavily. It is therefore advisable to *remove the previous year's mulch* before applying another mulch layer.

### FERTILISING

Fertilizing should commence in August to September and into *spring after the flowers have finished* and continue until early January or until next years flowers buds have set. In October, an application of **THRIVE AZALEA AND CAMELLIA GRANULAR FERTILIZER** or **GARDEN GOLD** is recommended. (Osmocote trees/ shrubs also). This should be repeated in January.

### WATERING

Over watering generally kills Azaleas more than anything else does. If in doubt as to watering, feel the soil *about 10cm (4 inches)* down around the plant to see if it is dry. In summer, regular watering will be required, particularly on hot days. However, during the cool months of the year, a thorough soaking once a week should be sufficient. In winter and spring watering of the foliage should be avoided as this can encourage petal blight.



## LEAF FALL

Azaleas have spring and summer foliage. Spring leaves appear at flowering time on the new growth. They are thinner and larger than summer leaves and short lived. These leaves fall in autumn, often turning orange, crimson or yellow. ***This is quite normal and should not cause concern.*** The summer leaves remain on the plant towards the top of the branches and is set closely together.

## PRUNING

The new spring growth on Azaleas can be pruned to maintain the attractive shape of the plants. ***Best done October/ November.*** If pruned they may continue to grow a few more inches than the branch. This extra growth should be realized when pruning to shape the Azalea.

## INSECTS

***Red Spider, thrips and lace bug*** are the most common type of pests that attack Azaleas. All can be controlled using **FOLIMAT**, **MALATHON**, **LEBAYCID** or **CONFIDOR**. The result of attack by these pests, which all suck on the underside of the foliage, is a ***silvering or speckled appearance*** on the top of the foliage.

To control Red Spider properly it is necessary to ***spray twice at two-week intervals.*** Red Spider can be identified by looking for fine webs and small brown spots under the foliage. Spray with **NATRASOAP** fortnightly until controlled.

Azaleas may also be attacked by White Fly; tiny white insects that fly out in clouds from the plant when foliage is brushed. **FOLIMAT**, **MALATHON**, **CONFIDOR** or **NATRASOAP** will control these also. Azalea leaf miner may be troublesome occasionally. It rolls the end of the end of the leaf under. Control is by use of **MALATHON** sprayed thoroughly under the foliage.

## DISEASES

***Azalea Petal Blight*** can ruin a spectacular display of flowers. It is at its worst in damp weather, causing flowers to collapse and turn to a mushy consistency. Hand removal of affected buds when the plant is in flower will control this problem. Over watering or poor drainage may cause root rot. This is the most common cause of death in Azaleas. The plants droop and rapidly die because of this soil borne fungus. **FONGARID** or **ANTI-ROT** used as directed will help to control this disease but this is a temporary measure. Subsoil drainage ***must be installed*** where this is a problem and/or the amount of water given to plants adjusted.



## TUB CULTURE

**PREMIUM** **POTTING MIX** or the **PROFESSIONAL** blend are ideal. Remember to be careful when watering as pots dry out in hot weather. However, watering in winter can be overdone. Evaporation may dry out the top layer of the soil but as the plant is dormant and using little water, the subsoil stays moist. ***Do not over-plant!*** Small plants placed in larger pots than required have large areas of soil not being used. This soil stays moist longer and will cause root rot to develop. Potted plants are restricted in their search for food. Light applications of Thrive ***soluble fertilizer*** are desirable once a month through summer to keep your plants healthy. Azaleas must have good drainage and thus the potting mix is most important.

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