

# Azalea Planting Guide

Azaleas are very easy to grow if a few cultural requirements are met. The main needs of an azalea are an acid soil that is well draining, ample organic matter and adequate water during dry periods.

Grow most azaleas with an eastern and northern exposure or in partial shade under trees. Do not plant in dense shade as the growth will become spindly and the plants will not flower. A few varieties are sun tolerant and should be used in those locations where the afternoon sun is strong.

Plant your azaleas in a mixture of compost or azalea planting mix and your existing soil. This will provide them with the high organic matter that they prefer. If the azalea plants are root-bound it is important to make 3 vertical slits along the roots to keep the roots from becoming tangled. Make your hole at least one and a half times as deep as the plant and twice the diameter of the root ball. Fill the hole with your soil mixture to a level where the top of the root ball will sit even with the surrounding soil and firm the soil well. Water in thoroughly. Mulch the area around the plant with pine needles or hardwood mulch.

Fertilize azaleas after they bloom in the spring. Use a composted manure like Sustane which is turkey litter, for best results.

Pruning should occur after blooming and only enough to shape the plant. Do not prune during the summer and fall as you will cut off the next year's flower buds.

Keep azaleas well watered during the dry months. They are shallow rooted plants and can dry out easily. A good layer of mulch will help keep them moist.

There are many evergreen varieties to choose from. Some are dwarf growers to just 2 feet tall, the mid-size plants reach a height of 3 to 4 feet and the tall growers can be 5 feet and up. Newer varieties also have extended blooming periods beyond the usual few weeks in the spring. Most deciduous azaleas will grow 12 to 15 feet tall.