

Azaleas

Everything you need to know about Azaleas

Azaleas are a common flowering shrub found across many landscapes. So we've put together a guide about azaleas. This includes where they come from, what they look like, and where they enjoy being planted. Besides simply being pretty to look at, azaleas can also symbolize remembrance of home and a desire to one day return to it.

Native habitat

Azaleas are either species or hybrids. Hybrids are crosses between other species or hybrids and will not grow from seed. These are usually reproduced by cuttings taken from the mother plant. Most deciduous azaleas are hybrids, native to many parts of North America. There are evergreen varieties native to North America, such as plumleaf azalea (*Rhododendron prunifolium*), but most evergreen azaleas are Asian, native to China, Japan and Korea.

Cultural Requirements

Evergreen azaleas require partial shade and protection from direct sun and wind. Most deciduous azaleas prefer full sun to partial shade. In shaded locations, deciduous azaleas flower less and are more vulnerable to fungal infections. Both types prefer well-drained, humus-rich, acidic soil, but deciduous varieties require little to no water during the winter months. Evergreen azaleas rarely require pruning, but if shaping is desired, pruning should be done immediately after flowering. Deciduous varieties require pruning if they become leggy. During the winter months, evergreen azaleas require protection from wind and rain and additional watering if conditions are dry. Deciduous azaleas don't typically require special winter care.

Hardiness

Most evergreen azaleas will not tolerate climates that endure freezing winters. Hardiness varies greatly for both evergreen and deciduous varieties depending on species and cultivar, but most azaleas do best in U. S. Department of Agriculture zones 4 to 9. Evergreen varieties do better in warmer climates, while deciduous azaleas are generally tougher and more versatile than evergreen varieties in the cooler regions of these hardiness zones.

Growth & flowering

Deciduous azaleas grow in an upright habit and tend to be taller than evergreen azaleas. Deciduous varieties range in mature height from 8 to 15 feet tall. Evergreen varieties tend to grow to 6 feet or less with a mound-like shape. Deciduous azaleas generally bloom tubular flowers with long stamens that extend beyond their petals, while evergreen azaleas bloom in a variety of forms, including strap-like, star-shaped or round petals. Deciduous azaleas bloom bright colorful flowers beginning in the spring and the foliage offers a colorful autumn show before it falls. Their flowers may be white, purple, pink, red, orange or yellow. Evergreen azaleas bloom in all of these colors except yellow. Both types of azaleas may also bloom bi-colored blooms. Evergreen azaleas bloom in the spring and many varieties also bloom a second time in the fall. Deciduous azaleas typically have large leaves that may be up to 6 inches long. Evergreen azaleas rarely have leaves that are longer than 2 inches. The leaves of both types are typically solid green, but some varieties of each may have white or yellow mottling or edges. Evergreen azaleas typically keep most of their foliage year round, but deciduous plants lose all of their leaves in the fall, with new growth forming in the spring.