

Azaleas, Camellias, and Rhododendrons

Azaleas, Camellias and Rhododendrons could be considered the royal family of the shade garden. Each group has nearly 3,000 named varieties of different color, flower form, and growth habit. For all the diversity found within these species there is much they have in common. Their basic growing requirements are very similar.

SOIL: Fast-draining acid soil that also retains moisture is best. Soil high in organic matter has these properties. If your soil needs improving, work in liberal amounts of Sloat Planting Mix or EB Stone's Azalea/Camellia/Gardenia mix. Adding Sul-Po-Mag will help acidify your soil as well as provide additional minerals to keep your plant's leaves green. (We do not recommend peat moss as it is difficult to re-wet once it dries out.)

SUN: Sun tolerance varies between species and varieties. Too much sun can cause burning in the center of the leaf, though most can take full sun in cooler, coastal areas. Too much shade can inhibit flowering and cause plants to be "leggy". The best location is in filtered shade under tall trees, or on the north or east side of the house. Southern Indica azaleas, Exbury azaleas, small leafed Rhododendrons and sasanqua camellias can handle the most sun.

PLANTING: Plant your rhododendrons, azaleas, and camellias with the top of the rootball slightly above the soil level. You don't want the trunk to get buried beneath the soil. The roots of these plants grow very close to the surface; they will benefit from a mulching of Micro Bark or Forest Mulch Plus to keep them cool and moist. Where the soil is clay, some gardeners have forgone the planting hole altogether and instead, planting is done by placing the rootball on top of amended soil and mounding up and around the roots with a 50/50 mix of Azalea/Camellia/Gardenia mix and Microbark.

FERTILIZER: Use an acid food once when growth

begins in the spring at half the recommended rate. Too much food will push leafy growth ahead of the flowers! Feed again immediately after flowering according to directions. Feed monthly thereafter until August. During late fall and early winter, you can use a 0-10-10 formula to help build next spring's flower buds as well as bolster the plant's immune system and cold hardiness. Yellowing foliage can be corrected by applying extra iron or Sul-Po-Mag.

PRUNING: Frequent, light pinching or shearing of tip growth after blooming will encourage bushy, compact growth. Extensive pruning will sacrifice spring flowers but sometimes it is required to revitalize leggy plants. Never cut a branch back to bare wood on azaleas or rhododendrons, it will usually no resprout. Prune old flowerheads and remove spent flowers to keep plants clean.

CONTAINERS: Camellias are outstanding container plants, as are azaleas and dwarf varieties of rhodies. Gallon-sized plants need 12" to 14" containers. Five-gallon plants require 16" to 18" containers. You can use azaleas and camellias in mixed planters with other compatible plants such as fern, hosta, cyclamen, primrose, and heuchera for larger, more stunning creations. Use Sloat Organic Potting soil or EB Stone Azalea/Camellia/Gardenia mix. Contrary to popular belief, gravel in the bottom of the container is not hole keeps the soil in and bugs out. This is all you need. *Note: You may want to use pot feet to keep your planter elevated above the deck or patio rather than have it sit in a water-filled saucer. Feed using Maxsea Acid Food as directed.*



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