

# Azaleas Various

Azaleas are not hard to grow. They are hardy & relatively trouble free. With a little TLC they will reward you with a blanket of colour in Spring & provide splashes of colour throughout the year. Azaleas make ideal tub specimens for patios, balconies or just about anywhere around the garden. Being in a pot means they can be moved from spot to spot to brighten up the Winter garden.

## Which variety to plant & where in the garden

Single flowering Azaleas are hardy & will tolerate full sun. They grow approximately 1.5 to 2m high & wide, therefore needing plenty of room in which to grow. These Azaleas flower from August to October, with many new varieties having a longer flowering period & will spot flower throughout most of the year.

Double flowering Azaleas & Kurume Azaleas prefer a semi-shaded & sheltered position under large trees or in the shade produced by walls or other such structures. Double flowering varieties may grow from 1 - 1.2m high by 1m wide. Kurumes generally have smaller flowers, but they are heavy bloomers making them ideal Azaleas for rockeries, pots or even Bonsai specimens. Most Kurumes grow from 50 - 70cm high by 50cm wide.

Azaleas can be planted at any time of the year, but it is best to plant them in Spring, making it easy for you to choose the flower colour you like as they are in flower. Azaleas have a tight root system, so it is important when transplanting to loosen the outside of the root ball to encourage quicker & better growth of the new roots. If this is not done, the Azalea may die due to the water running off & the surrounding soil being moist with the main root ball dehydrating slowly, eventually killing the plant. To help avoid this problem, the top of the root ball should be planted at the same level as the surrounding garden bed.

## Watering

Once Azaleas are established in the garden, they need only be watered once a week, unlike if they are grown in pots where they require more water. Azaleas in pots need to be watered every second day if they are in the shade & every day if they are in the sun. Of course, if there has been heavy rain, they require less water than usual but if strong winds have been blowing or if hot weather's been persistent, they will require more water.

## Soil Requirements

The soil should be of a sandy nature with plenty of organic matter & in the range of pH 6 to 5. If the pH is higher than this, add Iron Chelate or Sulphur to bring it back down. If the soil has a clay or shale consistency where drainage is poor, create a raised garden bed for your Azalea, well above the existing ground level.

*For best results, improve the soil by digging in Searles Azalea & Camellia Planting Mix plus add some Searles Azalea & Camellia Plant Food.*

## Mulching

Mulching of Azaleas is very important to protect their fine roots that are close to the surface, by keeping them moist & cool. It also gives the added benefit of not having to weed. Mulching should be renewed every Spring. Materials for mulching include pine needles, shredded bark, leaf mould & shredded leaves. For best results, mulch with Searles Mulch Plus.



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## Pruning

Very little pruning is required. Prune only if you wish to shape or keep the plant to a desired height. The best time to prune is after flowering. If you have any old plants that have become woody, they can be rejuvenated by cutting the plant back by two thirds & at the same time giving it a fertilize.

## Fertilizing

Once Azaleas have finished flowering fertilize them with Searles Flourish Azalea, Camellia & Gardenia Plant Food. This plant food gently acidifies soil, provides essential iron in chelate form and promotes strong growth and brilliant flowering. The trick for excellent flowering in the next season is to start feeding after the last flush of flowers right up to the next flowering season.

## Pests & Diseases

Lace bug may be found on the under side of the foliage, mostly in the warmer months. This insect sucks the green leaf juices leaving the leaves silvery & dry in appearance. Spray with Dimethoate.

Red Spider Mites are just about invisible. The leaves turn yellow with a rusty red discolouration on the under side. Spray with Searles Wettable Sulphur. Wettable Sulphur is a natural fungicide.

Leaf Miner is a very small yellow caterpillar which causes brown patches at the ends of leaves. Spray with Searles Pest Gun or Searles White Oil.

Die Back causes twigs to become leafless with dark patches on the stems. Cut the plant back to green stems and leaves, dispose of the dead wood and drench around the plant with Fongarid.

Petal Blight is a fungus spotting the petals which expand into a limp, soggy petal. In severe cases the bud will not even open. This can be controlled by spraying with Searles Mancozeb Plus.

## Iron Deficiency

If you have any of the following symptoms, your Azalea may be suffering from Iron deficiency:

- youngest/newest leaves become chlorotic (pale green to yellow) where the veins stay green,
- leaves sometimes curved or cupped upwards,
- slower growth or stunted plants,
- leaf drop and irregular stems dying.

Correct Iron deficient leaves with Searles Flourish Azalea Camellia & Gardenia Food. Apply at 2-3 week intervals, over the plant foliage and soaking the soil surrounding the roots.

For stubborn or extreme cases of Iron deficiency, also use Searles Iron Chelate in conjunction with Searles Flourish. It can be applied to both the plant foliage and the soil and is readily absorbed by the plant, even if the soil pH is higher than desired.

