



Rhododendrons & Azaleas

Rhododendrons and azaleas are well adapted to the Puget Sound area and are deservedly popular hallmarks of spring.

Planting:

Rhodies and azaleas require well-drained soils and light conditions from part shade to full sun, depending on variety. The deciduous azaleas are best in full sun.

All rhodies and azaleas have fibrous root systems located near the surface. They love being planted with lots of added organic matter, but be careful not to create a bathtub effect by creating an enriched pocket in a tight, poorly drained soil. More of these plants are killed by water logging than by any other cause. It's fine to mound them. Nearly all our native soils are acid, and this is generally fine for them.

Water & Fertilizer:

Rhodies and azaleas do best with some summer water during drought. Plant them together in drifts and consider a drip watering system or soaker hose to maximize watering efficiency. Planting in drifts also makes a big impact.

Rhodies and azaleas can be fed in small doses with a balanced slow-release granular fertilizer around St. Patrick's Day, Memorial Day, and Independence Day. Don't feed them after mid-August.

Pests and Diseases:

Our most common troubleshooting questions about rhodies and azaleas relate to root rots, root weevils, and a disease called rhododendron powdery mildew.

Phytophthora root rot can result from poor drainage (wet feet). It makes rhody leaves curl and hang vertically like cigars. The only reliable cure for root rot is improved drainage.

Root weevil adults are insects that can chew notches out of leaf edges from late April thru October. They're nocturnal and hide in crevices at the base of plants during the day. To control them, clean up debris from around the plants and prune off overhanging branches and lower leaves that touch the ground. Keeping plants healthy is always the first line of defense. You can use Bonide Systemic Insect Control spray in accordance with the directions beginning in April and thru October. Sticky barrier like Tanglefoot applied on paper tape wrapped around the trunk of the shrub will prevent weevils from crawling into the canopy. Beneficial nematodes have also been used effectively in control of weevil larvae. You can try laying a plank near the base of plants and collect the weevils from underneath it by hand during the day until they're fewer in number.

Powdery mildew may cause serious harm in some situations. Symptoms rarely include any powdery white coating on the leaves. Rather, the first symptoms are usually yellow blotches visible on the upper leaf surfaces. Often there are corresponding brown or purple patches on the underside. Affected plants may drop most of their leaves, carrying only the spring growth through each season, with a resultant decline in appearance and vigor. The disease has been most noted in yellow and orange evergreen varieties. The classic powdery mildew often seen on deciduous azaleas in late summer is unrelated and less serious.

The most important measures relating to the control of powdery mildew are the growing conditions. Clean up debris from around plants and cut out dead growth. Take whatever steps are practical, even including transplanting, to increase light and air circulation around affected plants. A garden fungicide, sprayed according to directions, in the spring as new growth emerges, is helpful. The best overall advice when it comes to preventing rhododendron powdery mildew is to choose a bright, not hot, site with good air circulation.



VALLEY NURSERY, INC.

Great Plants • Great People

Poulsbo, WA 98370
360-779-3806
www.valleynurseryinc.com

Handout #165
Rev. 2/18/06