

Evergreen Azalea (*Rhododendron* species)

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Summary:

Foliage: Evergreen broadleaf

Height: 3 to 8 feet (depending on cultivar)

Spread: 4 to 8 feet (depending on cultivar)

Shape: Upright, spreading

There are hundreds of evergreen azalea cultivars which vary in hardiness, size, form, flower color, time of flowering, and foliage. The primary attractive feature of azaleas is the very attractive and showy flower display in spring.

Plant Needs:

Zone: 5b to 9 (depending on cultivar)

Light: Partial shade

Moisture: Moist to average

Soil Type: Sandy to loam to clay loam

pH Range: 3.7 to 6.5

Functions:

Suggested uses for this plant include massing, border, and foundation plant.

Planting Notes:

Plant azaleas in a site that has afternoon shade to protect plants from the hot summer sun. Do not plant in poorly drained or heavy soils. Plant in well-drained, acid soil.

If drainage is a problem, plant in raised beds, or install drainage tile to drain water away from plants. Evergreen azaleas should be primarily selected on the basis of their hardiness (tolerance to low winter temperatures), so consult local garden center personnel to determine what azaleas are suitable for your plant hardiness zone.

Care:

Spread a good, organic mulch to control weeds, maintain soil moisture, and protect tender shallow roots.

To maintain form and size, pinch off soft, new shoots of vigorous growing plants soon after flowering.

Problems:

Iron chlorosis (leaves turn yellow between veins, but veins remain green) is a problem in high pH soils.

Some common insect problems are the azalea lacebug, aphids, leaf miners and tiers, scale insects, and whitefly.

Common diseases are Phytophthora root and crown rot, Ovulinia petal blight and powdery mildew.

Alternatives:

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Kurume Azaleas:

`Pink Pearl' has pink flowers.

`Flame' has orange-red flowers with a dark blotch.

`Snow' is the most reliable of the white- flowered Kurume hybrids.

Girard Azaleas:

`Girard's Scarlet' is a low-growing azalea with red flowers.

Comments:

Most evergreen azalea cultivars are hybrids. The most important cultivar selection criterion is hardiness. Thus, before purchasing an azalea, you must determine if a particular azalea cultivar is hardy in your area. For information on particular azaleas, consult the Azalea Society of America (<http://www.azaleas.org/index.html>) and the American Rhododendron Society (http://www.rhododendron.org/searchazalea_intro.htm). U.S. azaleas are deciduous and will not be discussed in this publication. Azaleas can be differentiated from rhododendron in that azaleas have small, relatively thin leaves, flowers with 5 or 6 stamens (rhododendron have 10), funnel-shaped flowers (rhododendrons have bell-shaped flowers), and small leaved rhododendrons have scales on the back side of the leaves whereas azaleas do not. Flowering time varies. By combining early, mid-season, and late bloomers, the seasonal show can be extended dramatically.

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