



## *Bucks Country Gardens*

### **Rhododendrons And Azaleas: A Basic Planting Guide**

Rhododendrons and Azaleas are valuable landscape plants that boldly display some of the most beautiful blooms in nature. Anyone who has observed these breathtaking flowers will gladly provide the extra efforts required to properly plant and care for these shrubs. And the truth is that proper planting is ESSENTIAL for successful growing of rhododendrons and azaleas.

#### **WHERE TO PLANT**

Rhododendrons and azaleas, in general, grow best in a location receiving filtered sunlight, or partial shade. However, several azalea varieties, along with the dwarf rhododendrons, Impeditum and Ramapo, will grow and flower quite well in full sun situations. Thus, with a few exceptions, the best places to plant most varieties of rhodos and azaleas would be on the East or North sides of buildings, or where they would be afforded shade from trees, etc. AVOID planting rhodos where they will be in full sun during the winter months.

#### **HOW TO PLANT**

It must be understood that rhodos and azaleas require particular soil conditions for optimum performance: the soil must be MOIST, WELL-DRAINED, ACIDIC and HIGH IN ORGANIC MATTER. A light sandy loam topsoil would be the ideal soil for rhodos, and if you have this type of soil, planting will be easy. However, most of the soils in this area are heavy-clay types that are not well drained. It is possible to grow rhodos and azaleas in these soils by following these instructions: (Please see illustrations on the back)

1. Dig a shallow hole – about 8” deep and 30” across, regardless of size of your plant. Do not remove the soil from the hole, but simply loosen it thoroughly. A spading fork works superbly for this technique.
2. Add peat moss and shredded bark – approximately 1/2 bushel (about 1 cubic foot) of each. (Sphagnum peat is the best kind to use.) A smaller amount of coarse sand may also be needed in heavy clay-type soils.
3. Mix the peat & bark with the soil – you will be creating a pile of a very loose, friable mixture. Add 1/2 pound (about 1 cup of Iron Sulfate (Copperas) and mix thoroughly.
4. Scoop out enough soil from the center of the pile to accommodate the rootball of your plant. Place the rootball in the soil mound and fill in around it AS SHOWN. Create a saucer to facilitate watering, and thoroughly water the entire soil mound.
5. Mulch the planting hole with shredded bark at a depth of 3-4 inches (thinly at the stems, thicker as you go away from the plant).

MULCHING is very important, and may need to be redone annually because rhododendrons and azaleas have very shallow roots near the soil surface, that must be insulated from summer heat and winter cold. The mulch helps maintain moisture and retards weed growth. Again, avoid mulching against the trunks and stems of these shrubs.

1. Loosen existing soil about 8 inches deep by 30 inches wide.
2. Add peat moss and shredded bark; mix thoroughly.
3. Add iron sulfate to the soil, peat and bark mixture; mix thoroughly.
4. Plant your new rhododendron or azalea (Scoop out enough of the mixture, position the rootball, backfill, form saucer, water thoroughly, and mulch).