

Plant Health Care Recommendations for Azalea & Rhododendron

Azalea and Rhododendron are included in a single genus (*Rhododendron*) which represents over 900 species of plants and many thousands of cultivated varieties. Rhododendron and azalea are the most popular group of plants used in the landscape. These shrubs display a wide diversity of flower color, foliage traits, growth habits and flowering dates. By carefully selecting varieties, it is possible to have azalea and Rhododendron blooming in your garden from late winter through summer. They are typically used in foundation plantings, naturalizing as well as specimen plantings in the landscape. Common companion plants include dogwood, redbud, silverbell, Stewartia, holly, mountain laurel and fringe tree.



Azalea and Rhododendron thrive where there is partial shade, but some varieties will tolerate full sun or dense shade. Flowering is most prolific if plants receive at least partial sun. Protection from strong wind is critical to prevent desiccation and winter injury especially on evergreen varieties. Azalea and Rhododendron require acid well-drained soils. Nutrient deficiencies and root disease commonly occur on soils which are alkaline and poorly drained.

Azalea and Rhododendron are susceptible to a large number of pests. Leaf feeding pests including lacebugs, whiteflies, mites and weevils not only weaken the plant but reduce the attractiveness of the foliage. Scale and borers can infest branches and stems.

Phytophthora root rot is the most destructive disease affecting this plant group. Root disease commonly occurs on plants subjected to soil moisture extremes (too wet or too dry). Some azaleas are susceptible to a fungus which transforms leaf tissue into large pink galls. Warm moist weather conditions during bloom can predispose plants to a flower blight disease. Canker disease fungi can cause dieback of stems and branches especially following periods of low temperatures or drought.

Azalea and Rhododendron are favorite food sources for deer. Rodents may feed on bark tissues below the soil or mulch line resulting in girdling and death

Recommended Monitoring for Azalea and Rhododendron

Timing	Treatment
Winter	Inspect plants for deer and rodent damage. Apply deer repellents as necessary to reduce browse.
Late Winter	Sample soil for nutrient and pH levels especially if deficiency symptoms are evident. If plants exhibit decline, sample roots or root collar for <i>Phytophthora</i> root rot and nematodes. Apply horticultural oil for overwintering pests (whiteflies and scale). Prune out any winter injured (dead) stems. Excavate mulch from root collars. Add additional mulch to root zone as needed.
Early Spring	Apply first fungicide soil treatment on plants with <i>Phytophthora</i> root rot. Apply fungicide spray treatment to suppress leaf gall on susceptible varieties. Inspect for lacebug, whiteflies, mites and foliage feeding caterpillars. Treat as needed. Install pheromone trap for borers.
Mid Spring	Monitor for lacebugs, whiteflies, mites, borers and foliage feeding caterpillars. Treat as needed. Apply preventative fungicide treatment for leaf gall and flower blight as necessary. Apply fertilizers and soil treatments to adjust pH as needed based on soil test results. Corrective pruning can be performed on early blooming varieties.
Late Spring	Monitor for lacebugs, whiteflies, mites, scale crawlers and foliage feeding caterpillars. Treat as needed. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to reduce moisture stress and prevent root disease. Inspect mulch levels and adjust as necessary. Hand pick any leaf galls and remove from property. Remove dead flower heads from Rhododendron. Corrective prune late blooming varieties.
Early Summer	Monitor for lacebugs, whiteflies, mites, scale crawlers. Treat as needed. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to reduce moisture stress and prevent root disease. Remove any dead flower heads and corrective prune any late blooming varieties.
Mid Summer	Monitor for lacebugs, whiteflies and mites. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to minimize moisture stress and prevent root disease. Apply second fungicide soil treatment on plants with <i>Phytophthora</i> root rot.
Late Summer	Monitor for lacebugs, whiteflies and mites. Treat as needed. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to minimize moisture stress and prevent root disease.
Early Fall	Inspect plant for evidence of deer browse. Begin applying repellents before deer injury becomes severe. Inspect irrigation and soil moisture levels to reduce water stress and prevent root disease.
Late Fall	Apply fertilizer and soil treatments to adjust pH as needed. Erect burlap screens to protect from winter injury. Apply repellents as necessary to reduce browse. Ensure adequate soil moisture levels prior to onset of winter to minimize injury. Remove any mulch from stems to reduce risk of disease and rodent injury.