

# Azaleas

Azaleas are members of the Rhododendron family. This ancient family of plants dates back 50 million years. Azaleas are indigenous to the northern hemisphere where they are usually found growing at the base of mountains in freely draining soil. There are many different types of Azaleas but the two main ones are Indicas and Kurumes.

Indicas come from China, they are evergreen and the largest and most popular varieties. They generally have larger leaves and flowers than Kurumes and flower progressively over a long time usually in spring. Many of the new varieties flower spring and autumn. A few Indicas will throw flowers throughout the year.

Kurumes come from Japan. They are also evergreen and much more cold hardy than Indicas. They have smaller leaves and are covered in masses of small flowers once a year in late winter and early spring.

## Other Azalea Groups

Satsuki - Originating in Japan, these have large, single flowers throughout the year, peaking in the spring.

Mollis - These are a deciduous family of Azaleas (they lose their leaves in winter). They have clusters of clear rich flowers on the ends of erect stems. They come in pinks, reds, oranges and yellows. Grow in full sun. Mollis azaleas are much admired because of their unusual colours but need cooler conditions than we experience around Perth.

## WHERE TO GROW ?

Azaleas, particularly the Indica varieties, prefer a semi-shaded position away from full sun and hot winds. Kurumes can be grown in full sun but are better sheltered from hot summer winds.

A morning sun, afternoon shade location will suit all types. Azaleas can also be grown in containers, they look great in terracotta pots and wooden tubs.

## SOIL

Azaleas grow best in moist well-drained, rich soil that is well mulched. Clay soil should be either avoided or opened up with organic matter such as animal manure and peat moss with coarse sand. Gypsum is an excellent clay breaker but it needs to be mixed thoroughly through the soil before planting. Sandy soils will dry out quickly and should be built up with compost, animal manure, Waldecks Pure Peat or peat moss.

Azaleas enjoy a similar level of acid soil conditions as Camellias and Rhododendrons with a pH of 5.5. to 6.5. If you bring in a small sample of your soil to Waldecks, we will do a free pH soil test for you. Lime is poisonous to Azaleas. Soil near areas of fresh concrete may have a high pH caused by the lime leaching out of the cement. If the pH is above 7 use powdered sulphur or a peat mulch to bring the soil down to a more acceptable acid level.

## PLANTING

When preparing the ground for new planting, dig in Waldecks Pure Peat in the proportions of 2 parts peat to one part original soil. Plant in a wide, shallow hole. Take care to place the Azalea slightly higher than the surrounding prepared soil. Firm in then water thoroughly to exclude all air pockets. Particular attention should be given to watering during the first summer when the plant is becoming established.

## **MULCHING**

Azaleas have shallow roots which are easily roasted in hot weather so mulching is almost an essential ingredient of success. A layer of mulch at least 5cm thick should be spread over the soil with new planting. A similar layer needs to be applied in spring to aid in keeping the roots cool during the hot weather. Keep mulch a few centimetres away from the trunk to prevent any problems with collar rot.

## **WATERING**

Due to their shallow root system, Azaleas will require regular water. Always aim to keep the ground moist but not permanently soggy.

## **FEEDING**

A light dressing of Apex Bloom around established plants as they are about to make their spring growth is beneficial. Another light feed in late summer will assist the formation of flower buds. As plants get older they require less fertiliser.

## **PRUNING**

Trimming is seldom needed as Azaleas are naturally neat and compact growers. If you wish to keep them to a certain size or shape they accept regular light trimming very well. This is best done after flowering but before new spring growth emerges.

## **PEST & DISEASES**

If you have any problems you are not familiar with, bring an affected part of your Azalea into your local Waldecks Garden Centre so that we can advise you on the best remedy.

Happy gardening From all of us at Waldecks.