

## RHODODENDRON & AZALEA NOTES

### WHEN TO PLANT

Rhododendrons and azaleas are best planted in early fall or spring, but can be planted nearly year round with extra care.

### WHERE TO PLANT

- In a porous, moist, well-drained, acidic soil, high in organic matter such as wood chips, compost and peat (mushroom manure is not suitable because of lime in the mixture).
- Do not plant in dry soil, too close to foundation, under roof overhangs or under trees with aggressive root systems or dense shade.
- Test if the chosen site is suitable, by digging a hole wider and deeper than the root ball and filling it with water; if it does not drain completely within 10—15 minutes, don't plant a rhodo there.

### HOW TO PLANT

- 1) Dig planting hole wider, but no deeper, than the root ball of the plant.
- 2) Make a mud-pie in the hole, mixing dug out soil with wood chips and peat moss and mix well with water.
- 3) Remove plant from pot or burlap, expose root ends if root bound and place into mud-pie.
- 4) Make sure top of root ball is level or slightly above the surrounding soil; if root ball sinks deeper, add more wood chips into hole, mix and try again; this is critical – if planted too deep, plant will suffocate and die.
- 5) Pack down the soil by stepping on root ball thus getting rid of all the air-bubbles that formed.

### MAINTENANCE

- **WATERING:** During first year, water once or twice a week to avoid drying of roots; thereafter, water only as soil conditions require. Soil should not stay wet.
- **MULCHING:** Use peat mixed with wood chips, compost, bark, etc. (no mushroom manure!) and spread around the plant; avoid covering the root crown at the base of the plant.
- **FERTILIZING:** Fertilize in May and June but not after July 15<sup>th</sup>; use a Rhodo fertilizer around the plant, away from the trunk, and as far out as the drip line. If leaves are yellow, add some Epsom salts.
- **DEADHEADING:** Break off faded flower clusters to encourage flower buds for next year.
- **PRUNING:** If necessary, prune in late winter or immediately after flowering. Leggy branches may be sawed back to a more desirable shape. In younger plants, pinch the terminal shoots as they start in spring which will encourage branching and produce compact plants.

### RHODODENDRON DISORDERS

- Notching around the edges of the leaves is usually caused by root weevils which are hard to control. The adults can be caught at night by spreading a white sheet around the plant, shaking the plant and killing the weevils.
- Holes in the leaves can be caused by caterpillars. Pick them off when you see them.
- Spots on the leaves may be caused by a physiological problem and are not harmful unless they spread like mad.
- Dead leaf margins or tips may be caused by drought or over-fertilization.
- Brown patches can mean sunburn.
- Tiny white or yellow flecks on top of leaves can mean white flies or lacewings.
- Circles of red or brown dead tissue may be virus diseases for which there is no treatment.
- Phytophthora shows a reddish stripe along the mid-rib of a leaf, starting at the tip and working down into the stem. This is due to soil that is too wet and not suitable for rhodos.
- Powdery mildew shows the upper surface of the leaf with white patches which go right through. The plant may defoliate and die. Condition is due to warm moist climate.