



Fact Sheet

Rhododendrons

There are nearly 1000 species of Rhododendrons available, the true species in the main are grown by collectors. Most gardeners these days prefer to grow hybrids as these are much more showy.

There are many varieties of rhododendrons from dwarf types to large trees, many with fascinating leaf formations but all of which provide spectacular colour.

Rhododendrons prefer a light well drained soil enriched by rotted organic matter in the form of compost, pea straw or leaf litter (in nature rhodos grow naturally under tree canopies, therefore application of leaf mould replicates that environment.) The soil should be slightly acidic with a ph of 5.0-6.0. Test soil prior to planting, if it is too alkaline add peat moss or sulphur powder to reduce alkalinity.

Mulch annually with either bark (chips or composted) or pea straw, this helps the shallow fibrous root systems by reducing evaporation, maintaining a more even soil temperature and keeping the roots shaded.

Rhodos prefer partial shade, ideally morning sun afternoon shade with protection from hot northerlywinds which will dry out and scald leaves.

Fertilise with organic matter which also improves soil structure and retains moisture. Compost with the addition of a complete fertiliser, such as Gro-Plus Camellia & Azalea food. The best time to do this is in Autumn where plants can take up nutrients and store the minerals over winter allowing flowers and new shoots to develop. Don't use lime or fresh manure. The plants are shallow rooted therefore are very easy to transplant. They make excellent container specimens, however use an acid potting mix, NOT garden soil as this will compact.

Prune immediately after flowering if necessary to reduce wayward growth. Remove faded or spent flowers.

Rhododendron comes from the Greek rhodon-rose, and dendron-tree. They are distributed throughout Asia, Europe, North America, Malaysia & China where about half of all known species originated.

Rhodos in Containers

Rhodos grow extremely well in tubs, half barrels and fern pots.

In containers, use a good quality growing media - we recommend Stoneman's Acid Potting mix - and water regularly, as they are prone to drying out quickly due to their fibrous root system. This is especially so with the porous terracotta pots.

Place the pots in a prominent position while flowering, then move to a less focal spot and allow it to grow and set flower for the following year. Fertilise with slow release fertiliser like Osmocote for acid loving plants.

Fact: *Rhododendron lochae* was the only species native to Australia, until the recent discovery of a second species.

Did you know that:

- * The first rhododendron was introduced into England from the European Alps in 1656.
- * Azaleas, rhododendrons, deciduous mollis azaleas, vireyas are all classified under the Rhododendron group of plants.
- * Rhododendrons can be propagated by cuttings of new seasons growth (i.e. the growth that comes on after flowering) taken between Australia Day and Anzac Day.
- * The mountain regions of Australia such as the Dandenongs in Melbourne and The Blue Mountains near Sydney produce the most stunning displays of rhodos in the country.
- * Tasmania has a very active and stimulating Rhododendron Society that is always eager to attract new members. If you would like to further your interest in rhododendrons and wish to learn more in the process, contact the Society on 6249 2509 after 5pm.

