



Evergreen Azaleas

By Kathie Carter
Cooperative Extension/ Botany Plant Sciences Dept.
University California Riverside



Introduction: Evergreen azaleas are spectacular flowering shrubs for winter and early spring in Southern California. Botanically, azaleas are species of *Rhododendron* and are in the *Ericaceae* family. Evergreen azaleas are planted by the thousands in Southern California, whereas rhododendrons are not adapted to the area and require much more special care. There are over 800 species and over 10,000 named varieties of azaleas. Botanists have grouped these plants into evergreen and deciduous shrubs. There are more than a dozen species and hybrid groups of evergreen azaleas. Nuccio's Nurseries in Altadena, CA is a leader in producing evergreen azaleas adapted to Southern California.

Varieties: The Indica (or Indian) hybrids are the evergreen azaleas best-suited for Southern California. Within the Indica group are Belgian Indica hybrids and Southern Indica hybrids. The Southern Indica hybrids are best suited for full sun planting and are sometimes referred to as "sun azaleas". All of the Indica hybrids have limited cold hardiness but tolerate temperatures down to about 20 to 25° F. Belgian Indica hybrids grow as lush, full branched shrubs to about 4' tall and as wide. They usually have double or semi-double flowers and tend to bloom again in the fall.

History: Evergreen azaleas are native to Japan. Japanese artists have depicted the graceful, distinctive blossoms and petals for centuries. In the spring, there are beautiful azaleas blooming around the Japanese countryside. No other flowering shrub has contributed more to the gardens of America than the azalea. Several azalea species have been domesticated and appear in public and home gardens.



Landscape Use and Planting: When the proper evergreen azalea varieties are selected, gardens can have color from October through June. Sun tolerances differ among the azaleas species, so be certain to select Southern Indica selections for sunny locations. The different varieties also offer many colors to choose from and double and semi-double flower forms. Plant azaleas with the root ball slightly above the soil surface. Azaleas have many surface roots and perform best when organic mulch is applied 2 to 4 inches deep around them. This modifies soil moisture changes and prevents new plantings from drying out.

Irrigation: Azaleas do not tolerate water logged or completely dry soil conditions. Irrigation should be scheduled to keep the soil uniformly moist. If mulch is applied and sprinkler irrigation is used, be certain to irrigate thoroughly enough to move water through the mulch and into the soil to the depth of the plants' root systems.

Fertilizer: Fertilize after growth has started in the spring, summer, and fall with a 2-1-1 ratio fertilizer with minor nutrients at about 1.5 pounds of N per 1,000 square feet of planted area. If possible, select an acidifying fertilizer that has slow release N.

Pruning: Prune azaleas with frequent pinching of the tips. This will cause a compact plant with lots of flowers. Prune out dead wood to keep the plant healthy. Heavy pruning should be done when the plant is past the peak bloom. Avoid fall and winter pruning because this can reduce flowering.

Pest Management: There are a few pests and diseases that are troublesome on azaleas. Check here for information on [Azaleas Pests and Diseases](#).

Bibliography:

Nuccio's Nurseries, Altadena, Ca. <http://www.nucciosnurseries.com/azalea.htm> Dec. 2006.

Sunset New Western Garden Book, Lane Publishing Co. Menlo Park, Ca. 1979.

Wyman's Gardening Encyclopedia, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. N.Y. 1977.

1-2-06

