

Rhododendrons: Ten Steps to Success

1. Plant the rhododendron at the same depth or slightly higher (1-2") than it had been planted. The root balls of rhododendrons are not round, but more pancake like: wide and flat. Most root balls are only 8-12" deep.
2. Water thoroughly for the first two years after the plant has been transplanted, especially during the summer. Apply about 1/2" of water every week, or about half as much if the plant is well mulched. Slow soaking of the root ball with a trickling hose or soaker hose will insure the root ball is moistened.
3. Select a site that has excellent drainage or plant the rhodie in a raised bed. The roots need air as well as water. Rhodies like well-drained soil, high in organic matter.
4. Hand weeding is the best method of dealing with weeds near rhododendrons, as the rhodies are shallow rooted. Cultivating at the drip line or under the foliage canopy can injure feeder roots.
5. Insure your plants nutritional needs by preparing the soil with organic matter and checking for correct pH (5.5-6.0) Feed if the plant shows signs of need; yellowing leaves, dark mid-ribs, light green foliage. February or March is a good time to feed, with 10-8-8. Feed again in May or June. Be sure there is adequate rainfall to wash the fertilizer into the soil. Irrigate in May or June if there is not enough rainfall. A general rule of thumb is to apply one handful of granular water soluble fertilizer for each foot of growth. Spread it at the drip line. Do not apply fertilizer by the trunk.
6. When planting rhododendrons in the home landscape, make sure it is out from underneath the eaves so it receives rainfall and light. Also, planting them too close to a cement foundation exposes them to lime in the concrete which raises the pH. The best location is on the north or east side, away from the heat of reflected sun of the south or west and drying winds.
7. Select companion plants that do not compete for moisture. Many large trees spread their roots outward competing for moisture and nutrients. Choose trees whose roots go deep, like ash or oak. If planting near larger trees, plant at least 10' out from the trunk.
8. Protect the trunk from deep mulch or mechanical injury. Splits in the bark invite insects and disease.
9. Mulch to repress weeds, instead of relying on herbicides. Drift from herbicides can do irreparable damage to non host plants.
10. Avoid soil compaction near the root zone from foot, machine or auto traffic. Plant the rhodies in a bed away from sources of compaction.