

Azaleas

Azaleas are slow growers but do live for quite a few years; some specimens in Japan are over 100 years old. They are not as difficult to grow as one may have heard. Provide the correct condition and viola, winter colour is yours.

Azaleas are native to many areas including Asia, Europe and North America. In Chinese culture the azalea is known as the "thinking of home bush". In Sao Paulo, Brazil, the azalea is one of the symbols of the city.

They are flowering shrubs making up the genus Rhododendron. Originally classified as a different genus of plant, now they are recognised as two of the eight sub-genera of Rhododendrons. One major difference between Azaleas and the rest of the Rhododendron genus is their size. Another is their flower growth. Rhododendrons grow their flowers in spikes, while most Azaleas have terminal blooms (one flower per flower stem).

Azaleas prefer growing in semi shade or light, filtered shade. The soil needs to be moist, well drained, composted and acidic. Because they belong to the Erica family, Ericaceae, they have a sensitive and root shallow root system, therefore needing a well-mulched layer for protection.

Prune lightly to encourage bushy growth, immediately after flowering.