

Azaleas Are Spring Showoffs

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO CREDIT: Linda Steber

Azaleas are spring showoffs! Few shrubs in the landscape can rival azaleas for eye-catching flower power when they are in full bloom.

In March 2017, I toured several sites along the Azalea Trail sponsored by the River Oaks Garden Club. It was a dreary and rainy day. Even though the prime flowering period for most of the azaleas had passed, the remaining azalea flowers provided ample glints of colors to lighten up a rather drab day.

Fast forward to this year's Azalea Trail and yes, it was cloudy and rainy (since it's still March). However, the azaleas were in their prime blooming period.

Azaleas in the Galveston County area are just coming into their prime blooming period. It would be difficult to ig-

nore azaleas blooming in landscapes that are otherwise just coming out their winter sleep. Azaleas are spring showoffs!

Few shrubs in the landscape can rival azaleas for flower power when they are in full bloom. Although the floral display may be relatively short with many of our



March 13, 2019



Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>.

News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.



traditional azaleas, such as the Indica azaleas, it ensures the continued popularity of this time-honored Southern shrub.

Surprisingly, azaleas will grow and bloom in many different light intensities all the way from filtered shade to bright sunny exposures. However, they will not bloom in deep shade. There is no secret formula to growing azaleas except for giving them proper care. This care means being careful in preparation of the planting bed, proper fertilization, pruning and special attention to water requirements.

Azaleas can certainly be planted in the spring. This is the time of the year when garden centers have the best selection and gardeners can see potted plants in bloom. Spring-planted azaleas may take a little longer to become established than those planted in the fall or winter.

Fall and winter months would be the best time to plant. Fall and winter planting encourages root growth before spring bloom and shoot growth commence. Summer planting really should be avoided by most gardeners, although you can be successful planting at that time by providing extra care (primarily watering).

Before purchasing azaleas, make sure you ask what the mature size of the plants you intend to buy will be. Depending on the cultivar, azaleas may mature at less than 2 feet up to 10+ feet. Don't purchase a type of azalea that will grow too large for the spot where it will be

planted. Large, mature azaleas like the Indicas require from 4-to-8 feet of space between each plant; smaller azaleas may be planted 2 feet apart.

Azaleas require good drainage but also need an even supply of moisture. Uniformity in soil moisture is important for good azalea growth and establishment in a landscape setting.

If you find that a plant's outer roots are matted together when you take it out of its container for planting, be sure to cut through the matted root layer with a sharp knife. This is a very important step to promote development of a vigorous root system after transplanting into the soil. It is also very important to never plant azaleas too deep! Set the plants into their planting holes so that the top of the root ball is at the same level or slightly higher than the soil line of the planting bed.

After planting, water thoroughly and place 3-to-4 inches of mulch (shredded pine bark or pine needles) around the plant. Mulching serves several purposes. In addition to conditioning the soil, it also helps retain moisture and stifles the growth of weeds and grasses.

The first two years that the azalea is in the garden are the most critical for its survival. The young plant requires consistent soil moisture during this time when the feeder roots are developing and spreading. During dry spells, keep them well-watered but not soaking wet.

Azaleas should be fertilized with a specialty fertilizer made for azaleas. There are many excellent commercially prepared brands on the market. Fertilize azaleas once soon after blooming has stopped in the spring, and repeat a 4-6 weeks later. No other feeding should be done after May. Azaleas do best in soil that have a slightly acid pH. Acidifying the soil periodically may be required if the leaves turn yellow on the plant.

Pruning can be done any time up until the flower buds start to form in midsummer. Pruning after bud formation commences will reduce flower production in the following spring. Plants can be safely pruned up to one-third or more of their height at one trimming. Azaleas should be kept trimmed to avoid leggedness and to promote lush green foliage.

Upcoming Programs

Tomato Stress Management. 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., Saturday, March 23

Snake Sense for Homeowners. 1:00 - 3:00 p.m., Saturday, March 23.

All programs conducted at the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located at 4102-B Main Street (Carbide Park) in La Marque. No fee but pre-registration requested (phone: 281-309-5065; e-mail galvcountymgs@gmail.com).

