



## AZALEA

Azaleas are grown in vast numbers and many varieties for winter colour indoors. The plants are woody, with masses of rich, dark green leaves. The flowers, single or double, come in many shades of white, pink, orange or red.

### **Light And Temperature**

Azaleas need at least four hours of bright, indirect sun every day, and cool room temperatures. Night temperatures ranging between 40-55F or 5-16C with day temperatures not higher than 68F or 20C are generally considered ideal for an azalea grown indoors. The blooms should last from two to four weeks. A cooler room will prolong the bloom period. Keep the plant out of warm drafts and direct sunlight. A tray of pebbles filled with water and placed under the pot will improve humidity.

### **Water**

Water azaleas regularly. It is a fibrous and shallow-rooted plant, and will not tolerate drought for long. An extremely dried-out azalea with limp, drooping leaves, should be immersed in water until air bubbles cease, then drained and returned to the windowsill. Check your azalea daily to see if it needs water. Heft the pot: the heavier it is, the wetter the soil. Look at the trunk: the waterline on it should be visible about half an inch above the level of the medium. Finally, touch the soil. It should be neither dusty nor sodden, but cool and damp.

### **Fertilizer**

When in bloom the azalea does not need fertilizer.

### **Repotting**

Remove the azalea from its pot and with a clean, sharp stick or trowel crumble away some of the peaty medium from the top and sides of the root ball. An indoor azalea should be slightly pot-bound, but it is important to loosen the root ball slightly when repotting. With the stick or a knife, sever any roots that are girdling the root ball. Lightly prune all around to invigorate old roots and encourage new ones.

Use a pot an inch or so wider at the top. An "Azalea pot" is ideal; its shallow shape accommodates the azalea's roots better than a standard pot can. Add some clay chards or turface clay chips and potting soil at the bottom of the pot and with the stick pack in more firmly around the entire root ball. The potting medium should be about 1 part peat, 1 part sand, and 1 part potting soil.

## **Maintenance**

When all the blooms have finished, prune the leaves and branches lightly shape. Take off about an eighth of old branches, cutting just above a side shoot. Pruning encourages new floral and vegetative growth. Keep the azalea on the warm side of the range to force the buds open and to encourage new roots just after repotting. Keep it on the cool side of the temperatures recommended above before setting it out in the spring and after bringing it indoors in fall. In spring after the frosts are past, plunge the azalea up to its pot's neck in a protected (indirect light or dappled shade) spot in the garden – under a tree, or perhaps nestled in among English Ivy. It should not receive direct sun. A light bark mulch over the soil surface will help retain moisture in the root ball. Keep it moist. Fertilize about once a month with an acid fertilizer if possible. Twist the pot every now and then to keep its roots from striking out into the surrounding garden. The azalea may need a little less water after flowering, but continue to check it daily. After repotting, it will send up more new growth, which should be left to grow, as it will produce next year's flowers.

Before autumn's first frost, bring the azalea in and stop feeding it. It should have set some soft young flower buds, which need cool nights and warmer days to develop. A cool area can provide the proper environment. When the buds are full, bring the azalea into a slightly warmer room to encourage them to break.

Give this small shrub with its pretty fluted flowers and dark evergreen leaves the care it needs, and it will bloom each winter for many years to come.