

Garden Centers Offering Azaleas in Abundance

Daniel E. Mullins*

Sunday, March 30, 2003



The year's best selection of evergreen azaleas is available right now. Nurseries and garden centers will be offering them in bloom for the next few weeks.

There is one major advantage to selecting and purchasing azaleas while they are flowering. It is easier to obtain the most desirable color or shade to compliment your specific landscape.

Though the flower color is important, also consider the mature size of a particular cultivar or variety. Azaleas can range in size from the dwarf cultivars such as Gumpo that only reach a height and width of about 2 feet, to the large growing Southern Indian Hybrids that reach a height and

width of 8 to 10 feet.

The mature size should be closely matched to stay in scale with the surroundings. Where mass plantings are desired in limited space consider the Kurume cultivars such as Coral Bells, Snow, Hino-crimson, Hershey's Red, Christmas Cheer and Salmon Beauty. The Southern Indian Hybrids provide a remarkable display, but should be used only where there is plenty of room for them to grow. Cultivars of these large growers include Formosa, Elegans, Fielder's White, Gulf Pride, Judge Soloman, Pride of Dorking and Southern Charm.

There are dozens of other cultivars providing different colors and mature sizes. Fashion is an especially well adapted cultivar within the Glendale group that reaches approximately 5 feet in height and produces salmon colored flowers. It flowers during the spring and tends to bloom to some degree again in the fall. The Encore azaleas include new cultivars that are said to flower all during the warm season.

The number of choices that are available sometimes result in confusion when purchasing azaleas. This process can be simplified once you know the mature size and flower color of a cultivar. Before buying, read the accompanying tags and ask questions at the nursery or garden center. Or, visit the UF-IFAS webpage on azaleas for Florida at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY_MG019

Azalea Growing Tips

- Choose planting sites that receive partial shade under pines or scattered hardwoods. Azaleas perform poorly in hot, bright locations that receive direct sunlight. Dense shade also reduces plant growth and flowering.
- Well drained, acidic, organic soils are best for growing azaleas. Prepare the entire area to be planted by incorporating organic amendments such as peat, compost or pine bark.
- Dig each planting hole no deeper than the root ball and twice as wide. Azaleas should be transplanted with the top of the root ball slightly higher than the surrounding soil.
- Apply mulch at a depth of 2 to 3 inches around new transplants using bark, pine needles or other coarse material. Pull the mulch away from the base of stems in order to prevent collar rot.
- Water frequently for the first 2 to 3 months in order to establish plants on the new site.

Garden Centers Offering Azaleas in Abundance

- Fertilize 4 to 6 weeks after transplanting with an "Azalea - Camellia" fertilizer.

Question of the Week: My neighbor's Indian Hawthorns are flowering now and mine show no sign of blooming. Is there a fertilizer that I can use to make them bloom?

Answer: Through a discussion it was determined that the plants were pruned last fall, which removed developing flower buds meant for spring bloom. Most early flowering plants including azaleas, camellias, forsythia, wisteria and Indian Hawthorne, if pruned after mid-June, might not have time to re-grow and set flower buds for the following spring.

**Daniel E. Mullins is Horticulture Extension Agent in the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Santa Rosa County. Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Extension, Leon County: Many of the azaleas in our area are the large Southern Indian hybrid types. It is best to plant them where there is plenty of room for them to mature.*

[\[Back\]](#)