

## **What you might not know about rhododendrons**

### **Part 2**

If a rhododendron gets too big and it needs to be reduced, it is recommended that you do so over a two to three year period of time to reduce stress and to get an idea of the responds that the plant might have to the work being done. I have taken plants all the way to the ground and had them come back and become a very good plant that can be maintained to the space that it was originally intended. This can happen to several proven varieties and most of them are going to be in the medium to large category. This can happen because there are dormant nodes located under the bark that are ready to produce new growth, remember it is all about the energy of the plant and how it will be directed when pruning the plant. All rhododendron should be pruned with hand held tools. Once in awhile we will see that someone has take the forbidden shears to the plant which will create a nightmare, to say the least.

When producing a landscape design it has to be understood that some owners of that landscape will properly maintain the investment and others will just look past it as they walk by. So with that there are some great stand alone varieties that can hold up with lots of ignoring by the owner. Anah Kruschke is a purple and medium leafed variety that will withstand just about anything after it is established, some of the other names our readers might want to look up for their own garden are Unique (cream), Dora Amateis (white), Hotie (yellow), Ramapo (light purple), Elizabeth Hobbie (red), Chionoides (white), Lem's Storm cloud (deep red) and Daffinoidies (purple). Each of these have a different bloom, leaf style and growth habit, something for every garden.

Enthusiasts suggest that rhododendrons be pruned just after blooming and after the new growth emerges from the bud point. By removing the spent bloom from the plant, energy is provided to the leaf system. Some growers leave the spent blooms on the plant to reduce the amount of growth the shrub will produce thus reducing the maintenance of the plant, now if we were going to sell the plant right away it might be a different story.

If you time the removal of the spent blooms just right they will be hardened off just enough the section being removed will snap off, until they are ready they will bend, twist and resist. Removing the growth that takes place after this spring push will result in energy being directed to achieve what you want, being careful to not eliminate next year's bud that is at the base of the spent bloom.

Planting and fertilizing rhododendron has some basic guidelines that if followed, will produce wonderful plants for years to come. Always plant with some shade but be aware that some versions will do fine in the full sun as long as they get enough water. Mulch is key in that it assists with retaining the needed moisture and insulates the root zone during the winter months. Remember well drained does not mean dry, too wet and too dry will create stress on any plant and with the rhododendron too wet will create root rot. I usually do not fertilize my plants because they do not need it and if they need it, the plant will let you know by other signs such as the leaf color and size of the growth, in any case a special fertilizer for acidic loving plants is necessary and I will only give about 1/2 the manufacturer's directions...a little more often is better than a whole bunch once in awhile.

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