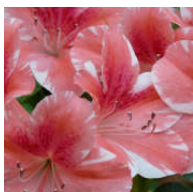


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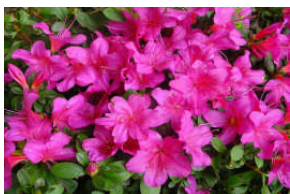
## *Azaleas*

Most people associate the azalea with spring garden colour but in Auckland's mild subtropical climate many azaleas start flowering in the autumn and continue to flower to some degree right through the winter and then put on their fabulous spring show for which they are so famous.



Azaleas are actually classified botanically as separate species of rhododendrons. There are azalea species from many parts of the world but most of the autumn flowering varieties come from Asia and Japan and are among the evergreen azaleas classified as *Azalea Indica*.

These have hairy oval or teardrop shaped leaves on dense, branching plants that vary in height from about 30 cm. to nearly 3m. Flowers can be single or double in shades of white, pink, red, magenta, cerise and purple.



Flower sizes vary greatly dependent on the variety from tiny little star-like trumpets only a few centimeters across to dramatic blooms almost the size of an orange and these are often fragrant.

The distant ancestors of our modern Azaleas were mostly natives of deciduous woodlands and mountainsides often found near clearings. Thus they prefer strong dappled light or good morning sun but will tolerate full sun happily when soil moisture and humidity are continual.



None flower well in full shade. The word Azalea is from the Greek *azaleos* meaning "dry" alluding to the ability of some varieties to withstand hot, dry conditions. But there is a catch here. Azaleas much prefer constant conditions to extremes.

Thus an azalea planted in full sun in a somewhat heavier soil that is mulched and stays constantly dry/moist will probably perform better than a shrub planted in part shade that dries out in summer and gets soggy in winter. This is because Azaleas create a network of fine, shallow roots very near the soil surface from which they feed.