

Rhodos

the basics

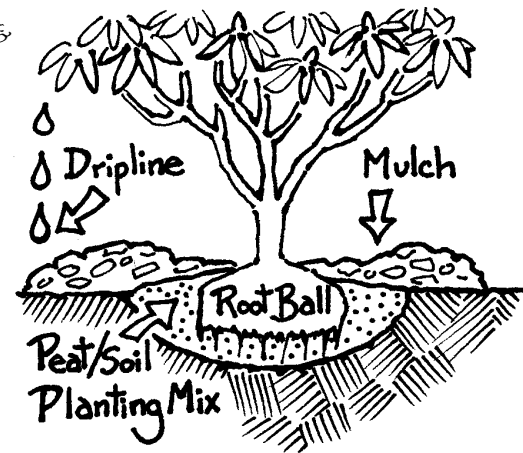
It's a simple fact: if you live on the West Coast you can grow great Rhododendrons! These plants are naturals here & fit into our rainforest setting as if they were born to it. Rhodos have three main requirements & if you can provide them your rhodos will be best on the block!

a rhodo's requirements

- 1 A constant supply of moisture. Our rainfall usually covers this point with the exception of the summer & early fall months when additional watering is a necessity.
- 2 Very good drainage. Drainage may have to be improved in areas where water stands without draining away within a few minutes.
- 3 Loose, well aerated acidic soil. Soil can be improved by adding peat moss & bark mulch to the planting hole & surrounding areas.

planting

To avoid future problems, choose rhodo varieties that will grow to the correct size for the space in which you want to plant them (see our 'RHODO REFERENCE GUIDE' for plant characteristics). Plant rhodos with the top of the rootball level with the soil surface: do not plant them any deeper! Dig your planting hole a similar size to the rootball, add peat moss & bark mulch & incorporate into the soil in the hole. Place your plant at the correct depth, fill around the plant with soil, firm in lightly (remember rhodos like loose soil!) & water in well.



light

Rhodos enjoy full sun or dappled shade in our climate. As a general rule the smaller the leaves the more sun your rhodo requires. Too much shade results in lanky growth & too few flowers. Some rhodo varieties that will tolerate shade well include 'Jean Marie de Montague' (red blooms), 'Bow Bells' (pink blooms), 'Purple Splendor' (purple blooms), 'Unique' (pink buds open to cream), & 'Snow Lady' (white blooms). See our 'RHODO REFERENCE GUIDE' for more information.

fertilizing

It will be easy to remember to feed your rhodos if you follow the old rule 'once before they bloom & once after blooming.' Use a fertilizer that has been designed for rhodos & other acid-loving plants such as EVERGRO 10-8-12 RHODO & AZALEA FOOD.

mulching

...is the secret to growing healthy rhododendrons! Use bark mulch, pine needles or leaf mould (ie. composting leaves) to help create the damp, cool soil that rhodos love. Mound mulch around each plant to the dripline but away from the main stem (see illustration below). For young plants the mulch should be 2.5 to 3.5cm (1" to 1.5") thick. For older established plants use up to 15cm (6") of mulch. Do not use peat moss or grass clippings. Apply mulch when you plant & then yearly in autumn.

deadheading

Should I or shouldn't I? Rhodos put a lot of energy into making seed. By deadheading (removing) the spent flowers you release this energy into improved plant growth & probably more flower buds for the next year. Plants look tidier too. SO DO IT!



to prune or not to prune

If care has been taken to choose the right rhodo variety for the planting sight, pruning should be unnecessary except to remove dead, diseased or damaged branches or to shape the plant. If old rhodos have become unsightly or overgrown they can be hard pruned to create new growth or pruned by removing one third of old growth each year over a three year period. Note that pruning rhodos results in fewer flowers. However, if a rhododendron has outgrown its position it is better to move it than to prune it.

why doesn't my rhodo bloom?

If your rhodo is failing to bloom assess the following...

- 1 Water...vital for bud set.
- 2 Fertilizing...once pre-bloom & once post-bloom.
- 3 Light...rhodos won't set flower buds well if light levels are too low (ie. too much shade!).
- 4 Planting depth...planting your rhodo too deep can cause it to stop blooming.



rhododendron companions

Good companion plants for rhododendrons should enjoy the same soils & growing conditions that favour healthy rhodo growth. They also should help to 'complete the picture' adding colour, texture & variety to create a successful rhododendron planting.

trees

When choosing trees take into account their decorative value in all respects: bark, foliage, blossom & autumn colouring. Avoid very large growing trees that create dense shade. If your garden has a lot of existing large evergreen trees choose shade tolerant rhodos. Some suggestions are Jacquemonti Birch, Robinia 'Frisia', Pissardi Plum, Japanese Maples, Katsura & Dogwoods.

shrubs

When combining shrubs with rhodos look for contrasting colours & textures, flowering times & of course ultimate size. For example, a splash of gold or deep purple foliage contrasts beautifully with deep green rhodo foliage. Also, earlier & later blooming shrubs fill in before or after the rhodos bloom. Some suggestions are evergreen & deciduous Azaleas, Pieris japonica, Eleagnus, Camellias, Daphne odora, Kalmia, Magnolias, Skimmia, Viburnums, Enkianthus, Heaths & Heather, Sarcococca humilis, Hydrangeas, Aucuba, Witchhazel, Dwarf Evergreens, Cotinus 'Royal Purple', Physocarpus 'Diabolo' & 'Dart's Gold'.

groundcovers

Many groundcover plants can provide a luxurious carpet between rhododendrons & also perform the duty of stifling weeds while rhodo plantings fill in. Choose plants that will not interfere with the very shallow root systems of rhodos. Some suggestions: Bunchberry, Epimedium, Wintergreen, Lamium varieties, Periwinkle, Dwarf Lingonberry, Sarcococca humilis, Rubus calcynoides, Evergreen Ferns, Wild Gingers (Asarum varieties).

perennials, ornamental grasses & bulbs

These can provide colour & complement rhodos from early spring through late fall. Pockets of spring bulbs look charming planted between rhodos. Some suggestions: Pulmonaria, Galium (Sweet Woodruff), Lady's Mantle, Hardy Geraniums, Bergenia, Hellebores, Hostas, Solomon's Seal, Hardy Ferns, Tiarella, Heuchera, Campanula varieties, Euphorbias, Astilbe, Luzula Grass, Carex grasses, Blue Fescues, Hakonechloa 'Aurea', Japanese Blood Grass, Tulips, Narcissi, Anemone blanda, Cyclamen neapolitanum & more!

rhodos in rockeries

Use dwarf growing varieties that reach no more than 90cm (3ft) high. There are many dwarf rhodos to choose from. For example 'Baden Baden' (red), 'Shamrock' (greenish-yellow), 'Ramapo' (pinkish-violet), 'Brickdust' (orange-rose), 'Snow Lady'.

rhodos for large gardens

Sometimes we want rhododendrons that will grow tall to create a screen or be in scale in a big garden. Here are a few suggestions: 'Anna Rose Whitney' (deep rose pink), 'Lem's Monarch' (light pink edged with dark pink), 'Purple Splendor' (purple with a black blotch) & 'Roseum Elegans' (rosy-lilac).

about indumentum

A number of rhodos have a feature called indumentum that can be exploited by the clever gardener. On these varieties the undersides of the leaves are coated with a soft velvety fuzz. Orange, bronze, fawn or silvery white in colour, indumentum contrasts handsomely with the green upper surface of leaves. It also appears along the stems & topsides of leaves on new growth of some rhodo varieties. The effect can be striking, especially when rhodos are planted where they can be viewed from below. A few varieties with attractive indumentum are 'Fred Peste' with orange indumentum; 'Hansel' with orange on stems & topsides of leaves; 'Ken Janeck' with pale orange fuzz on the leaves' undersides & white on the stems; 'Mist Maiden' with soft fawn indumentum.