

DECIDUOUS AZALEAS (EXBURY AZALEAS)

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Deciduous Azaleas are often the forgotten member of the Rhododendron family, as they really don't fit the general profile of the group. You've probably seen their incredible floral displays of oranges, yellows and reds. They can be confusing because they look like an azalea flower, but the plant looks very different. These plants are very tough and versatile (much more so than the evergreen types), and make a valuable addition to your landscape.

Latin name: Rhododendron spp.

Type: deciduous shrubs

Exposure: Full to partial sun

Fall color: usually bright red

Growth rate: slow-moderate

Hardiness: At least -10F, some to -45F.

Size: 4-6' tall x 3-4' wide (at least)

Soil: Well drained

Growth Habit: Upright, vase shape.

Bloom Time: around May

What colors do deciduous azaleas come in?

Usually much warmer colors than evergreen azaleas, deciduous types are famous for their orange and yellow tones. Also available are reds and whites, with many intermediate tones such as peach and apricot. Deciduous azaleas are also very good at producing bi-colored blooms, often red and white, or several differing shades fading together. As the number of hybrids increase, so does the color range.

What kind of sun exposure is acceptable?

Full sun is actually okay for these varieties. Part shade may be advisable if there are a lot of reflective surfaces or pavement nearby. Too much shade will adversely affect blooming.

What kind of soil do I plant with?

Deciduous azaleas, like other Azaleas and Rhododendrons, need a well drained, non-compacted acidic soil. The biggest problems often faced by deciduous azaleas are root rot and other complications caused by poor soil. This is probably the most important factor you can monitor to ensure a successful plant.

What about fertilizing and pruning?

As with the rest of the Rhododendrons, be sure to prune immediately after bloom to prevent cutting off next year's buds. Deciduous azaleas, unlike the rest of their group, do better with minimal pruning. General thinning and a minor amount of shaping are sufficient.

Fertilize in the spring with other plants, and a shot of phosphorous in fall is good for root establishment. While not nearly as picky as other rhododendrons about soil acidity, deciduous azaleas will still prefer an acidic soil, so fertilize accordingly.

How much should I water my deciduous azaleas?

They are not as water intensive as the evergreen azaleas. You still need to water well the first few years, but avoid overwatering, especially in cooler weather, as this can rot or stunt the plant's growth.

DECIDUOUS AZALEAS

Variety	Color	Group
Apricot Surprise	Orange-apricot	Northern Lights
Arneson's Little Gem	Yellow, edged in glowing red	Arneson
Cannon's Double	Cream-Pink, Double!!	Exbury
Centennial	Yellow	Mossman
Double Delight	Yellow (Light) Double!!	Exbury
Fireball	Red (Bright!)	Exbury
Fragrant Star	Snowy White	Briggs
Gibraltar	Orange (Dark)	Exbury
Golden Lights	Yellow	Northern Lights
King Red	Red Ruffled	Kehr
Klondyke	Golden Yellow	Exbury
Lemon Lights	Lemon Yellow	Northern Lights
Mandarin Lights	Mandarin Orange blend	Northern Lights
Mary Poppins	Reddish-Orange	Knap Hill
Mount St. Helens	Rose-Pink with Orange highlights	Girard
Northern Highlights	White with Yellow blotch	Northern Lights
Orchid Lights	Orchid-Purple (Light)	Northern Lights
Rosy Lights	Rose-Pink (Dark)	Northern Lights
Spicy Lights	Apricot	Northern Lights
Strawberry Ice	Pink-Peach with Yellow blotch	Exbury
Western Lights	Clear Pink	Northern Lights
Weston's Lollipop	Pink, light pink/yellow flare	Weston
White Lights	White with a slight Golden streak	Northern Lights
Yellow Cloud	Yellow- very bright	Knap Hill - Hyatt

Colors can vary quite a bit from bud to flower drop. So keep in mind that flowers may undergo many color changes as they age.

So what's the deal with the groups?

This is only really important for people with extra time on their hands or who are fascinated by random facts (you know who you are). Deciduous Azaleas are pretty much all hybrids, and come from a number of different species (*Rhododendron molle*, *calendulaceum*, *occidentale* (Western Azalea), and others). Different breeders use different combinations, and so we have several distinct series that are made up of plants from similar parent stock, and with similar characteristics.

Exbury Azaleas are one of the oldest (early 1920's) and most well-known groups, and "Exbury" has become a general moniker for deciduous Azaleas in general. Very few of the types we carry anymore are true Exbury Hybrids, but some of them still are still popular. Exbury Azaleas were hybridized from *Knap Hill* hybrids from the Knap Hill nursery of Anthony Waterer (like the popular *Spiraea*). Girard hybrids are American hybrids (the other two are English).

Mollis Azaleas were being developed about the same time as the Exbury hybrids, but used different species for hybridization. "Mollis Azalea" is also sometimes used to describe Deciduous Azaleas in general, in the same way that "Exbury" is. We don't see nearly as many Mollis varieties anymore, mainly because there are now better varieties to use.

The "new kid on the block" is the *Northern Lights* series, which was introduced in the late 70's by the University of Minnesota and continues to grow as new varieties are introduced. Northern Lights hybrids are derived from crosses between the original lines of the Mollis Azaleas and *Rhododendron prinophyllum*, an exceptionally cold hard Azalea species. Northern Lights hybrids tend to be highly improved varieties when it comes to flowering and vigor, and are substantially more cold hardy than Exbury and similar hybrids (their flower buds will withstand temperatures of -30° to -45°F, which greatly extends the growing range). Most of the varieties that we currently carry are from this series.