



“Prune like a Pro!” 2021

Azalea (Azalea)

TITLE: Azaleas are classified in the genus *Rhododendron*. (Because azaleas are closely related to rhododendrons, it is sometimes difficult for a layperson to distinguish between the two.)

Description: Spring in the south brings a colorful profusion of flowers from azaleas that appear to drift across the landscape like colorful clouds. Pruning is needed mostly for larger growing cultivars when they outgrow their intended space. Pruning can help produce more compact growth. It is not necessary to prune azaleas annually. The Encore™ series of azaleas offer blooms twice a year, spring and fall – and need little, if any, pruning.

Objective(s): Proper pruning can help produce more compact growth and maintain the natural graceful form of this flowering shrub.

WHAT: Azaleas are a mounding plant. The overall effect is to reduce the size of the plant without destroying its symmetrical shape.

WHY: Keep the natural mounding shape of the shrub. Also, prune the center to increase airflow and sunlight into the center – in order to keep azaleas healthy.

WHEN: The timing of pruning azaleas is important if you desire spring flowers. The best time to prune azaleas is within 6 weeks after flowers have faded. If you prune in the late summer or fall, the shrubs will not produce the customary spring flush of flowers.

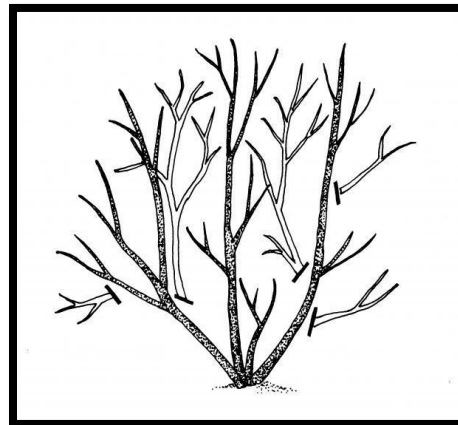
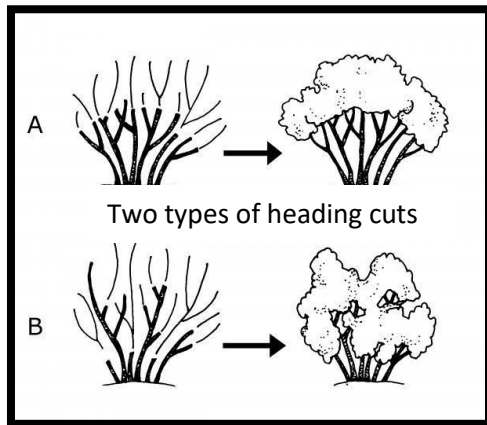
WHERE: Azaleas prefer cool, partially shaded sites, such as the filtered shade of pine trees. Heavy shade will result in poor flowering and weak growth. They grow best in acid (4.5 to 6.0 pH), well-drained soils. Azaleas planted beneath hardwoods with shallower roots must compete for nutrients and water. Azaleas exposed to full sun are more susceptible to lace bugs.

HOW:

- **Never** take hedge trimmers and shear an azalea!
- Begin by removing the four D’s (dead, damaged, diseased, dysfunctional) branches.
- Make heading cuts on the tall limbs that are at the top of the plant. Cut these by reaching down inside the plant and removing the limb/stem from a major branch
- Make thinning cuts more deeply into the bush to increase airflow and sunlight into the center of the shrub.
- Overgrown azaleas can be drastically pruned in late February by cutting down to about one foot in height. By spring, the shrubs will be covered with lots of new growth (but no flowers).
 - Shape the new stems so that the center stems are a bit higher than the outer stems and remove weak/spindly growth.
 - It will take several years for a renovated azalea shrub to completely recover.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Never shear an azalea. Instead, make heading and thinning cuts.
- Pruning is NOT required annually.
- Prune with a purpose; don't prune if the shrub looks good.
 - Encore™ azaleas bloom twice a year, spring and fall – and need little, if any, pruning.
- Inspect regularly and immediately remove any of the Four D's
- Prune within 6 weeks of faded flowers, as next year's buds start to form
- When pruning, cut tall limbs far into the center of the shrub – not just to the desired height.
- Maintain the natural mounding shape of the shrub
- Overgrown azaleas can be renovation pruned, and will take several years to fully recover.



Thinning cuts:
Shrub
branches
removed at
their point of
origin.

Additional Resources / References:

"Prune Azaleas Now", NC State Extension, <https://lenoir.ces.ncsu.edu/2016/06/prune-azaleas-now/>

"Azalea Care", Clemson Cooperative Extension, Home & Garden Information Center, <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/azalea-care/>

"Selecting and Growing Azaleas", University of Georgia Extension, Bulletin 670, https://secure.caes.uga.edu/extension/publications/files/pdf/B%20670_5.PDF

"Proper Shrub Pruning", University of TN Extension, <https://eastern.tennessee.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/62/2020/02/Proper-Shrub-Pruning.pdf>

"Best Management Practice for Pruning Landscape Trees, Shrubs, and Ground Covers", University of TN, publication 1619, <https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/documents/pb1619.pdf>

Knox County Master Gardeners website: www.knoxcountymastergardener.org

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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