

# How to Grow and Manage Azaleas

C. M. Bezzo, Berlin, Ontario

**T**O see a good specimen of azalea during the looming period is to determine at once to possess one.

This accounts for the fact that, notwithstanding the reputation this plant has of being hard to grow, thousands are bought every year for the conservatory and the window garden. True, it is somewhat fastidious regarding what it eats and the way it drinks, but humor it in these little peculiarities and it becomes at once one of the most docile and accommodating plants to be found in the whole floral kingdom.

The azalea demands a soil of peat or wood-dirt. Peat is that soil which is found in swamps, the accumulations of hundreds of years of decayed vegetation. A good compost, or soil for this plant is made as follows: One quart of peat, wood dirt or leaf mold; one quart of loam made from rotten sods or good garden loam; one pint of clean sharp sand; one pint of thoroughly rotted cow or sheep manure; one ounce of hardwood ashes. We have given the component parts in their order of preference. Any further substitutions are not advisable. The manure used must be thoroughly decayed (about two or three years old is the best), and it may be allowed to dry, when it will pulverize and mix more readily with the other materials. Clay, hard soil or fresh manures are things the azalea will not tolerate; and unless the proper materials are obtainable much time and labor as well as disappointment will be saved by throwing the plant away. Persons living in the cities and larger towns may find it somewhat difficult to gather for themselves peat, wood dirt and leaf mold; but nearly all these, together with the various fertilizers, can be ob-

tained from almost any dealer in florist's supplies.

## POTTING

Having prepared the potting soil the next thing is to pot the plant. If the plant has come by express and has the ball of earth intact about the roots and is dry, stand it in a saucer of water and let it absorb all the water it can. By this process you are able to gauge how much water it has taken up. Note carefully the quantity of water the roots and plant will absorb, as this knowledge will be of considerable value when watering in the future.

Select a pot about one size larger (not more) than the plant has been growing in. Into this put about one inch of draining material. For this purpose charcoal is good, as it helps to keep the soil from souring, but pieces of broken crock, coal cinders or pebbles may be used. See that it is coarse enough to leave crevices through which the water may freely pass. A thin layer of sphagnum or moss, the kind used by florists, spread over the top of this material will prevent the earth washing down and blocking the drainage.

This careful preparation for draining off all surplus water is absolutely necessary. Owing to the peculiar root formation of this plant and the kind of soil in which it grows it is very liable to root unless all surplus water is drained away. Where good drainage has not been provided for, the water becomes stagnant and the earth sour, generating a low poison which is distasteful to some plants and sure death to others. Among the latter is the azalea.

Having made provision for the drainage, place in sufficient soil to bring the plant to the proper height in the pot, al-

lowing for about half an inch of space between the finished soil and the top of the pot. Press the soil down firmly.

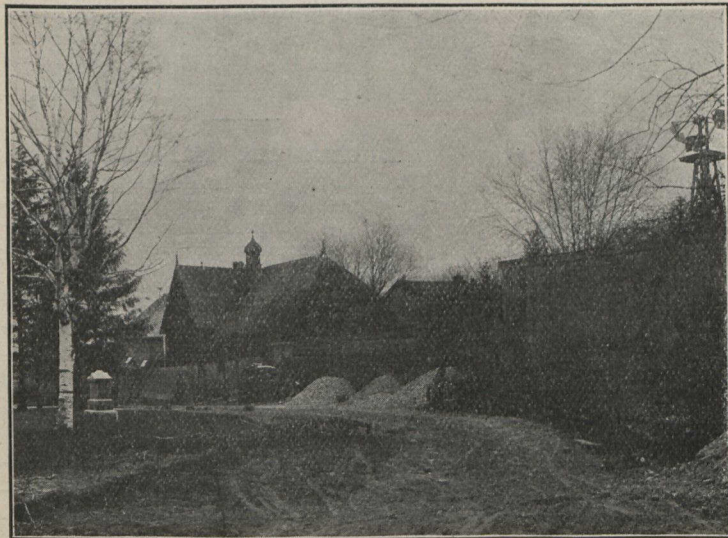
If the plant has the old earth about the roots, place it in the centre of the pot and fill in the space between the plant and the pot with the soil prepared for the purpose. The soil in this space must be packed quite firmly, else the water when applied will glide away from the roots into this loose earth and out through the drainage and be lost. Pack it firmly and raise it slightly at the outer edge, leaving a depression in the centre which will retain the water until it has a chance to penetrate to the roots of the plant.

If the plants are of the mailing size and with the roots denuded of earth, sift the earth carefully about them, pouring water on occasionally to settle. After potting set it away for about a week in a dark closet. Bring it gradually to the light and in about a week from the time it is brought from the closet it will be ready for direct sunshine.

## WATERING

The root formation of the azalea is somewhat peculiar and it is because of this peculiarity that so many failures are recorded. Unlike most other plants, its roots are a mass of fine fibrous threads all matted and tangled together, and the difficulty is to get water to penetrate this mass. Many deaths from thirst might be recorded and yet the owners water them every day; the water passing off between the pot and the ball of roots, leaving the inside quite as dry as before.

While watering from the bottom is not a method which we would recommend generally, the azalea is such an



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This cemetery is one of the best kept in Canada. The landscape effects are a credit to its superintendent, Mr. W. H. Foord.