



## Azalea Cultural Problems

### ***At what age do azaleas typically start developing problems?***

Often, after a short planting life or 1-3 years, you'll see half of the plant die out, girdling roots, spots, petal blight, poor flowering, and increasingly smaller leaves from year to year (a sure sign of decline).

### ***The administration wants the area under the azaleas constantly cleaned and cultivated. I heard that this was bad for them. Who is correct?***

Over cultivation kills azaleas because of their shallow root systems: Leave them ALONE!!! Cultivation, leaf blowing, and any fiddling with the azalea's very shallow root system will quickly cause decline and death.

### ***What should azaleas be mulched with?***

Give them a nice, acidic mulch of pine bark chunks.

### ***There tends to be a lot of weed and feed products blown into the azalea beds with leaf blowers. Does this hurt the azaleas?***

These products are not fabulous for your turf and they do not do the azaleas much good either. Rapid release fertilizers cause salts to build up around the azaleas shallow roots leading to a physiological "drought". Salts build up also increases the potential for root rot. Keep products away from azaleas and switch to a slow release fertilizer.

### ***Do de-icing salts on a walkway near azaleas bother the plants?***

De-icing salts do bother the roots creating a physiological drought and promoting root rot. Slow, deep watering in early spring can help to dilute this issue.

### ***Why do my azaleas have bright yellow leaves with bright green veins? Is this a variety?***

No, this is not a variety. It could mean a nutrient deficiency (see below) or it could be an INDUCED nutrient deficiency due to improper pH. Azaleas are in the blueberry family and want acid soil conditions, which is just the opposite of what they get when planted along concrete walkways and foundations. These areas of concrete leach and thus push the pH up, leading to yellow leaves with green veins.

***Why is there a discolored rim around the edge of my azalea leaves?***

Marginal yellowing can be caused by excess salt, low moisture in sandy soil, or can be caused by overwatering. A quick probe of the soil will tell you which way the moisture is leaning. Black or gray edges all around the leaf usually mean drought. If the tip of the leaf dies back, it is usually root rot. Alternate flooding and dehydration can also lead to the above symptoms.

***I want to plant some azaleas near a black walnut but I know black walnuts can cause problems for some plants. Can I go ahead and plant?***

Walnuts bug azaleas, so do not mix the two plants, or even use compost that may contain black walnut leaves or debris. If planted too near, expect to see wilt and slow death.

***They want me to add aluminum sulfate to blue Hydrangeas planted in a bed with azaleas. I am also adding acidifying fertilizer to keep the azaleas happy. Is this a good idea?***

This is a bad idea. Azaleas are also very sensitive to aluminum sulfate. Aluminum will build up in soil and be released in acidic environments. Woe to the bed where hydrangeas and azaleas co-habitate and the acidifying fertilizer is applied to the azaleas along with aluminum sulfate to hydrangeas to keep the blue bluer or turf greener nearby. This scenario(s) will often mess up your flower buds.

***Fall clean up was late this year and we dear headed the azaleas very late in the season. Will this cause any problems next year?***

If you dead head too late in the season you may disturb flower buds.

***I think my azaleas have multiple nutrient deficiencies but how do I tell?***

Nitrogen deficiency: Yellowy green color is like the universal choking sign for an azalea, but did you know that as nitrogen deficiency progresses, older leaves turn RED or develop reddish blotches before falling off. New foliage under these conditions will be smaller than normal and will be greenish yellow.

Phosphorous deficiency: Foliage will be darker than normal and a dull green with a reddish undersurface especially along the midrib. Lower leaves may die on more vigorous shoots, developing reddish purple blotches then turning an overall purplish brown. The dead ones cling for a few days and then fall off.

Potassium deficiency: Look for yellowing between veins of young foliage with marginal leaf scorch and necrotic tip lesions on just mature leaves. As the deficiency worsens, leaves turn bronze and die back is common with leaves rolled UPWARDS from margins and lots of leaf fall.

Calcium deficiency: Yellowing and stunting along with tip burn of just expanding foliage, TWISTED leaf tips, death of terminal and lateral buds.

Magnesium deficiency: Weird yellowing starting at leaf tips and leading into a gradual fade of normal green from leaf---veins eventually lose color too. May also see reddish-purple blotches

on UPPER leaf surfaces. Symptoms most common on upper leaves of plants with severe leaf drop from vigorous shoots.

Iron deficiency: Yellow leaves with bright green veins that then turn cream colored and finally white.

Boron deficiency: Necrotic areas through newly expanding leaves causes severe distortion with eventual death of terminal buds followed by death of lateral buds. Flowers are affected too with browning of interior on base of petals.

Copper deficiency: You may see a light green edge on young leaves followed by a bit of browning of main shoot tips---tips of side shoots may eventually die.