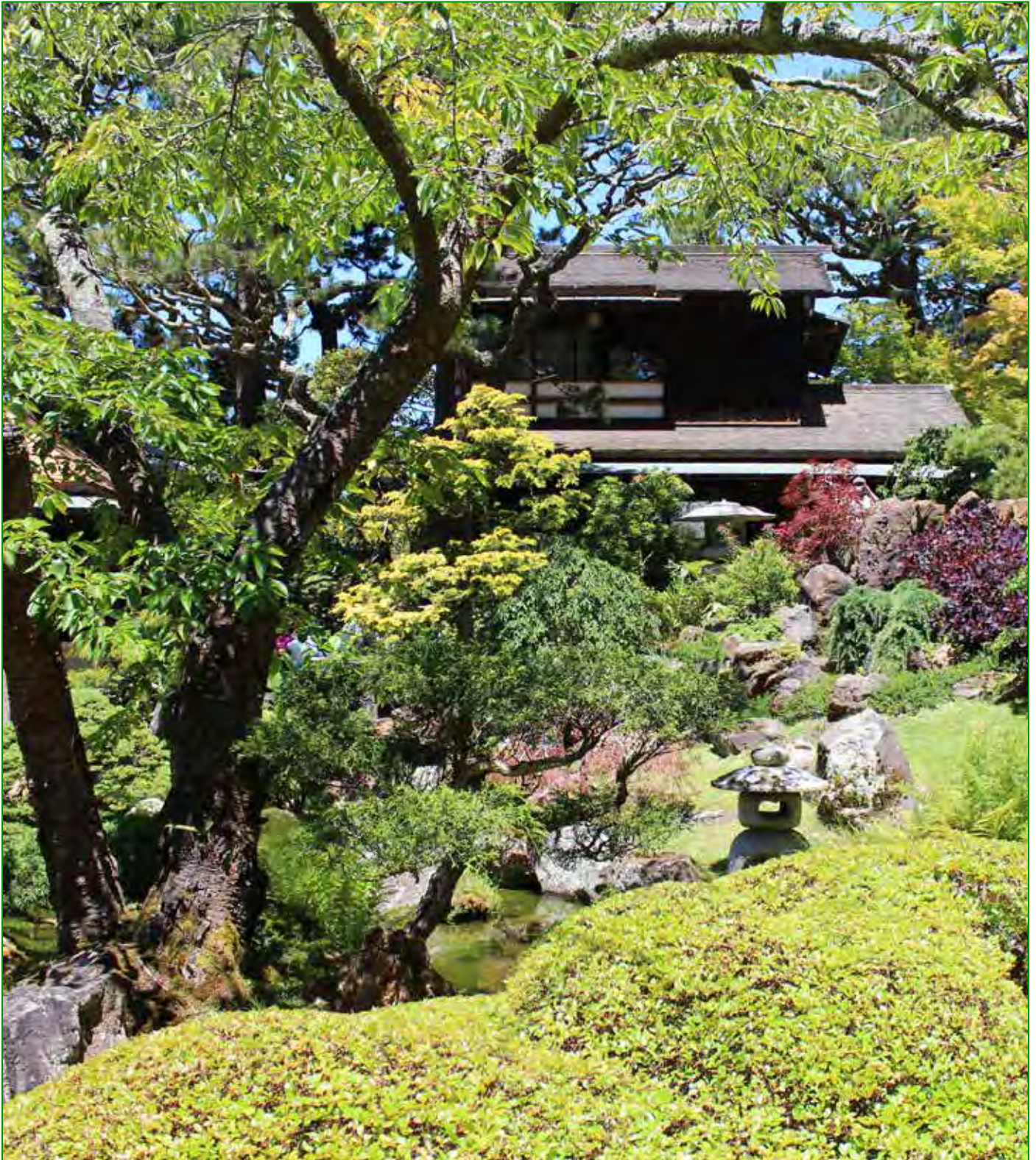


## EVERGREEN AZALEAS

These are hardy evergreen and semi-evergreen species of azalea which have

produced a huge number of hybrids. Whilst many have evolved from the United States and Europe, most such as the Kurume Hybrids, have originated in Japan.



Azaleas are a major feature at the Japanese Tea Gardens in San Francisco; as much for their form, as for their flowering. Azaleas are kept clipped all year round, creating neatly presented shapes that create interest and order.

Evergreen azaleas will thrive in full sun provided that their roots are kept moist. Nevertheless, shelter from cold winds and partial shade is preferable since too much sunlight can bleach their flowers. They tend to flower in early to late spring when their foliage may be obscured by their massed blooms. Individual flowers are normally single, but some varieties possess 'hose-in-hose' blooms. That is, one flower inside another. Average height is 0.6-1.2m.

The evergreen azalea hybrids include:

- Indica
- Kurume
- Gable
- Satsuki
- Kaempferi
- Kyushu
- Vuykiana
- Shammarello
- Oldhamii
- Glenn Dale

Many other groups are classified according to the nursery, garden or locality where they were developed.

## Indica Hybrids

The Indica or Indian hybrids are small evergreen shrubs which are sometimes tender. They are mostly derived from *R. indicum*, *R. mucronatum*, and *R. simsii*.

Flower colours include white and shades of pink, red, mauve, and purple. Single flowered Indica hybrids are usually quite hardy, and have a tall upright habit - growing to 3m tall. The foliage tends to remain fairly dense. Flowering generally begins around early spring and lasts for about three weeks. Double and semi-double Indica varieties are available in a wide range of flower sizes, shapes and colours (pink, red, mauve, and purple) and some are striped or flecked.

Indica hybrids vary considerably in their degree of hardiness, height and competitiveness. These plants also show wide variation in the length of the flowering season. Some carry odd blooms for all but the hottest months and have peak flushes in spring or sometimes autumn, while others have only a spring flush. Generally, these plants do better in warmer temperate climates where there is less likelihood of frost. The Indicas are mostly from Belgium and include: Southern Indicas, Belgian Indicas, Rutherford Indicas, and Kerrigan Indicas.

## Kurume Hybrids

These are derived mainly from *R. kaempferi* and *R. kiusianum*. They are small, slow-growing, compact evergreen shrubs. Again, some may be tender in colder areas, but generally they are the most frost-hardy of the evergreen azaleas. They tend to be twiggy than Indicas with smaller leaves and denser foliage. Whilst normally smaller in size than the Indicas, the Kurume hybrids also display great variation in height and spread. Many Kurumes are miniatures or dwarfs but some varieties can reach up to 3m tall.

Flower colours include white, pink, scarlet to purple, and as with Indicas, they may also be striped or flecked. They usually have a mass of flowers in spring creating a spectacular show. They often flower so profusely that their dark green oval leaves may be completely obscured. Many are good for hedging and topiary, for example, The azalea Kurume hybrid *R.* 'Best Pink'. In contrast, the Indicas are less suited to hedging because of their more open growth habit. Kurumes look spectacular when dwarf varieties are planted close together in a woodland landscape producing a patchwork of colour.

Some of the hardiest, and consequently more popular, varieties of Kurume hybrids include:

- *R.* 'Coral Bells' - the flowers contain one blossom inside another producing the appearance of semi-double flowers. They are a vivid pink colour. They require a semi-shaded aspect to avoid leaf scorch and die-back of stems.
- *R.* 'Hino-Crimson' - these plants have bright red flowers. Plants are compact, low growing, with small leaves and dense foliage. They are one of the hardiest of the Kurume varieties.
- *R.* 'Hinodegiri' - this is the variety from which Hino-crimson was originally selected. It is very similar but the red coloured flowers are not as intense red as those of Hino-crimson.
- *R.* 'Pink Pearl' - this variety has large, semi-double, pale pink flowers. The plant itself has low and spreading form.

- *R.* 'Snow' - these plants produce large, single white flowers. They are regarded as being the most reliable of the white flowering Kurume Hybrids.

## DECIDUOUS AZALEAS

### Mollis Hybrids

These are deciduous small shrubs derived from *R. molle* and *R. japonicum*. The flowers often appear before the foliage on the tips of stems. These flowers are trumpet-shaped, 6-7cm across, and appear in early spring. Colours include white, yellow, and orange. Growth is generally upright. Foliage is more open than with Indica and Kurume Hybrids, and the leaves tend to be larger. They generally prefer more sheltered conditions than Indicas or Kurumes, and full sun in temperate climates. There are numerous hybrids, for example, *R.* 'Brilliance'.

The foliage of Mollis azaleas can be very attractive when it becomes richly tinted in shades of yellow, orange, red and brown before dropping in the autumn.

Other deciduous azaleas include: the Ghent Hybrids, Ilam and Melford Hybrids, the Knap Hill and Exbury Hybrids, the Occidental Hybrids, and the Rustica Flore Pleno Hybrids.

There are many other less utilised groups of azalea. Of note, are the evergreen Satsuki Hybrid azaleas which bear large single flowers throughout the year which culminates in a dramatic spring floral display.



A border of lower growing azaleas in front of taller growing rhododendrons and other plants, provides a wonderful edge to a path.

## TROPICAL (VIREYA) RHODODENDRONS

These rhododendrons are often epiphytic (grow on trees non-parasitically) and need excellent drainage. Their foliage is normally glossy green. Most are small to medium shrubs often growing little more than 1-2m tall.

In their natural environment, these plants are subject to reasonably bright light, warm midday temperatures and cold nights (to 0°C) in the cloudy forests of mountain tops. As such, they are cold sensitive types, mostly native to the tropics. Many will however still grow

in colder climates if protected from frost. Vireya varieties need protection from temperatures above 27°C and below 8°C. The Vireya Rhododendrons include the only naturally occurring Australian rhododendron, *R. lochae*. This is an epiphytic shrub to 1m or taller with pendulous red flowers. It is found in limited areas of some Queensland rainforests in Northern Australia.

Problems have been noted if Vireya Rhododendrons are grown in the ground or in plastic pots. Most epiphytic types prefer a well-drained, coarse, rich organic growing medium. Perfect drainage is essential. The use of terracotta pots reportedly provides the best environment for the roots as the porous pot structure aids in the removal of excessive moisture. Do not use saucers though. Large pots are also best avoided as this can cause stress in the plant. When these plants are stressed, it can result in increased flowering and affect growth habit.

In the ground, they are best planted in raised garden beds, where they are either in light shade all day or at least from mid-morning onwards. Vireyas will grow, albeit not as well, in cool climates - perhaps under the eaves of a house or under the canopy of large trees where the light is filtered and there is some protection from extreme cold. Excessively shaded places can simply remain too cold for the plants to ever show any appreciable growth.

Cultivars must be propagated by cuttings. There are now hundreds of cultivars, all based on cross-breeding species and existing varieties. Some worth noting include: 'Sweet Wendy', 'Simbu Sunset', and 'Robert Withers'.

## AZALEODENDRONS

This relatively small group consists of hybrids which fit somewhere between the evergreen and deciduous azaleas. They are very hardy, semi-evergreen shrubs which are of small to medium size and are hybrids of deciduous azaleas and rhododendrons. Most flower in late spring to early summer.

Examples include:

- **'Azaleoides'** (*R. nudiflorum* x *R. ponticum*) - a slow-growing, dense shrub with slender stems. Leaves are oblanceolate with a dark green upper side and a pale green to glaucous underside. The flowers which present in early summer as rounded trusses are funnel shaped, highly scented, and white with a purple to lilac fringe and faint speckling inside. This plant is regarded as the first recorded hybrid and was the result of an accidental cross in London around 1820.
- **'Broughtonii Aureum'** (*R. maximum* x *R. ponticum*) - also known as 'Norbitonense Broughtonianum'. This is a small shrub with a rounded habit. The leaves are elliptic to oblanceolate measuring some 7-10cm in length. They are dark green on the upper side and paler on the underside, and can become bronze in winter. The early summer flowers are compact, with a broad funnel shape, and are a deep cream to yellow colour with pale brown markings.
- **'Gallop Light'** - this is a very attractive dense bush which produces loose trusses of flowers in late spring. The flowers are cream to salmon pink coloured with a bright yellow blotch, and are funnel shaped.
- **'Gemmiferum'** - this is a loose shaped shrub with an open habit. The leaves are leathery, elliptic to obovate, with dark green uppers and paler beneath, measuring 3-5cm. The flowers which emerge late spring to early summer are compact funnel shaped, and rose- coloured with a crimson blush.
- **'Glory of Littleworth'** - this is a very appealing semi-evergreen, erect shrub. The leaves are oblong to lanceolate measuring some 7-11cm in length and are often curled and undulate: waved. The fragrant flowers appear in late spring and are funnel shaped with a cream colour becoming milk white with a copper coloured blotch.
- **'Jill Dolding'** - this is a small upright semi-evergreen bush with 9cm long oblanceolate leaves. The leaves turn a deep purple on the upper side over winter. The funnel shaped flowers appear as open trusses in late spring, and are purple to lilac with orange and red spots.
- **'Smithii Aureum'** (*R. maximum* x *R. ponticum*) - also known as 'Norbitonense Aureum'. This is a small shrub similar to 'Broughtonii Aureum'. The main difference is that the leaves are oblanceolate, 7-9cm long, and glaucous beneath. The leaves become a deep purple colour in winter. Also, the flowers are a paler yellow occurring late spring to early summer.



Think about scale when planting rhododendrons. Use larger rhododendrons in bigger gardens for a bigger splash of colour; and smaller ones in tiny gardens.

## RHODODENDRONS

The evergreen rhododendrons make up the largest group of species. As well as the hybrids there are many species types of rhododendron which are commonly grown. One of the first species known to be grown outside of its native country was *R. hirsutum* which was introduced into the UK from Europe in 1656. Other species were taken to the UK by Sir Joseph Hooker in 1849-51. These included *R. campanulatum*, *R. campylocarpum*, *R. falconeri*, and *R. thomsonii*. As with hybrid rhododendrons there is much variety amongst the natural species. They vary from tiny prostrate alpines to trees with huge leaves. Dwarf species make excellent rock garden plants. Some of the more popular groups are outlined below. Most

rhododendron species do not flower until well established.



The Rhododendron Gardens at Olinda, in the Dandenongs, Victoria (near Melbourne). This is a huge garden with a massive collection of Rhododendrons, open daily all year round.

Major groups of rhododendrons, other than azaleas, which are useful in small gardens include:

- **Rock Rhododendrons** - these are smaller plants with large numbers of smaller but very colourful flowers, and smaller leaves.
- **Vireya Rhododendrons** - these are tropical species already discussed which are generally small plants between 60cm and 1.5m tall, with glossy green leaves, and showy flowers which are sometimes fragrant.
- **Hybrids** - these plants are more suited to temperate climates. They comprise named cultivars that have been selected and bred to produce large and colourful flowers.

Generally, the leaves of hybrids are larger than those of rock rhododendrons and are not glossy like those of the vireyas. Rhododendron cultivars are usually referred to by their cultivar name only, and are known by the various styles that are easy to recognise. Alpine rhododendrons, for example, have small leaves, small flowers, a twiggy dense habit, and are very free-flowering. Rhododendrons from areas that have high rainfall are often fragrant and also tend to have large leaves.



Low growing rhododendrons like this are often used in rockeries, alpine gardens, or as foreground plants in large garden beds.

The alpine species and hardy hybrids will thrive in exposure to full sun and wind. They are also extremely resilient to atmospheric pollution. These plants do well following an annual mulching in autumn to a depth of 8cm, which serves to protect and nourish the root system. This is preferable to breaking up the topsoil with a fork.

The earliest rhododendron hybrids date back to around 1825 with the introduction of *R. arboreum*. Since then



Butchart Gardens on Victoria Island in British Columbia (Canada), is a major international tourist destination, with a wonderful collection of rhododendrons and azaleas