

## **Azaleas: Southern Flare Through the Summer**

Azaleas are getting ready to start blooming. With the wet and cold winter don't be surprised if you see leaf galls on them. Galls are swollen, cauliflower-like growths on the leaves caused by a fungus. This disease is most common on azaleas that grow in humid areas with little air circulation. In the early stages of the disease, the galls are pale green, pink or white. When the galls mature, they turn brown and become hard. They won't kill the plants, but they don't look good on the plants. There are no chemical control methods. When purchasing azaleas, inspect the plant to be sure they do not have galls. If galls are observed on established plants, pick them off and throw them away. If there are not too many to remove, prune the plant after it blooms to get rid of the galls. Galls left on the plants or on the ground near the plants may cause your plants to have galls next year. Make sure your azaleas have good air circulation, so the foliage can dry rapidly. When planting new azalea beds this spring allow for adequate space between the plants, so they will not be crowded as the shrubs mature. Here are some of the cultural requirements that you should consider when buying azaleas:

1. soil drainage
2. soil acidity
3. proper spacing
4. mulching
5. fertilization
6. pruning
7. insect and disease control

Azaleas prefer a moist, but well-drained organic soil.

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