



RHODODENDRON PINK



RHODODENDRON CREAM



RHODODENDRON RED



RHODODENDRON PONTICUM



AZALEA EVERGREEN PINK

As I am sitting here typing with the sun streaming through the lounge window I have time to think about my garden. This year of all years I cannot help feeling how lucky we have been with the weather, so far this year.

At the end of last year the weather men (and ladies of course!) were predicting a long harsh winter ahead. Despite these warnings, I like many were unprepared for what was due to hit us at the beginning of December. We were not alone, even nature seemed to be caught off guard. At the end of November we still had deciduous trees and shrubs with leaves, someone had forgot to tell them that Autumn was about to come to an abrupt end. The fact that many plants had not gone into full dormancy and the subsequent below zero temperatures caused many fatalities amongst the plant community. In Surrey we had several days when temperatures dropped down to and hovered around -10c during the day, not surprisingly this was too much for some of our more tropical friends.

I have been asked many times why we sell plants, such as acacias, that suffer with low temperatures, however you have to put this into context this was the first time in decades that temperatures had fallen this low in December. The year before the low temperatures hit in January with many fewer problems and historically the lowest temperatures tend to hit in February.

In reality most trees that are evergreen (excluding many conifers) can be susceptible to cold, varying from leaf damage to death in extreme temperatures. Nature has developed the trick of dropping leaves to protect plants against low temperature damage, most evergreens being native to much warmer climes. I have of course a vested interest but I must say that at times I find it difficult to understand why we are all happy to spend a lot on decorating our houses but find it difficult to treat the garden in a similar way.

WHO SAYS IT ALWAYS RAINS ON BANK HOLIDAYS?

Looking at this spring, after a slow start, we have enjoyed on many occasions unprecedented warmth and sunshine. I cannot remember a recent spring where almost without fail the trees and shrubs have specie after specie performed in such an outstanding way. Flowering of most plants has been amazing!

The reason for this is not just the weather this year, but also the heat last summer helping flower formation (long before you or I would see anything). You might be surprised to hear that even the cold weather would have benefitted some!

Currently in the nursery and on garden centres you will find that the time has now come for the Rhododendron and Azalea family to come into their own. This group is one of the most colourful amongst the flowering shrubs.

Do not be put off by the many exaggerated claims that you can only grow them in acid soil. With a bit of care and attention they will grow in virtually all but the chalkiest soils, if necessary create planting pockets in your soil line with weed control material and backfill with ericaceous compost. I tend to find that the biggest problem is not watering on a regular basis, with erratic watering leading between drought and flood, which people do not realise can then cause the plant to collapse months later as the damage shows through.

That's enough of my ramblings for now!

Sit back enjoy the sun and make the most of your garden before the inevitable change in weather!

BUT DO NOT FORGET TO WATER REGULARLY YOUR PRIZED PLANTS!

For more information or help with your planting contact The Big Plant Centre at Pantiles, Alnmers Road, Lyne, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0BJ or call 01932 872195 or visit the website at www.bigplantcentre.co.uk.



AZALEA EVERGREEN



AZALEA MOLLIS YELLOW