

Rhodies: nature's spring spectacular

By Susan Tauber-Hyke
special writer

THEY'RE absolutely beautiful. "So showy, so lovely." "Exotic, exciting, extraordinary."

The promoters of these remarks? Rhododendrons — those evergreen plants dubbed "nature's spring spectacular" because of their gorgeous, colorful flowers that bloom in spring.

The rhododendron lovers are Lilo Dare of Birmingham, Ivan Frankel of Bloomfield Hills, Leslie Johnson of Oakland Township and Toni Pallazolo of Garden City.

"I love rhododendrons. They stay green in the winter and are beautiful themselves even without their flowers," Johnson said.

Johnson has more than 100 varieties planted on the hillsides surrounding his modern home. He marvels at the flowers, which grow in bunches called trusses. "The flowers last for one month and are as beautiful as orchids."

ALL GARDENERS can join the ranks of lovers of "rhodies," as rhododendrons are affectionately called. Azaleas are included under the heading of rhodies. Just pay attention to the following advice on how to buy, plant, fertilize and care for them.

"Decide first where you want to plant them. Rhodies are beautiful near a building's foundation and do best in north, northeast and east beds," said Pallazolo, who treats her rhodies to her leftover black coffee.

"Avoid planting them where they will be exposed to harsh winds and strong sun. Oak, fruit trees and conifers make good covers for rhodies. Don't plant them near maple and elm trees, however,



The white-flowered Mrs. Tom H. Lowinsky is a good rhodie to ask your local nursery to order for you. It grows well in this climate.

because they have strong surface feeding roots that compete with rhodies' surface roots."

Frankel, who has more than 300 rhododendrons, said to plant them "where there's good drainage and where the soil is acidic with a pH of 5.5."

Dan Ingram, assistant tree and shrub manager at Bordine's Better Blooms in Rochester Hills, said soil test kits are available at garden nurseries. "Test the soil in the summer for fall planting and in the fall for spring planting."

He suggested garden sulfur for increasing soil's pH if it's too acidic



This is an unusual rhododendron named Blue Ensign. There aren't many blue-hued rhodies, an evergreen plant that bursts with color in spring. Rhododendrons are plentiful in Leslie Johnson's expansive Oakland Township garden.

(below pH 5). Lime and peat moss reduce the alkalinity if soil is too alkaline (above pH 6).

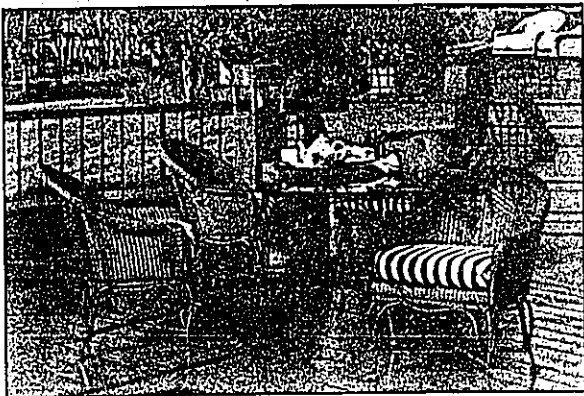
"**ASK ADVICE** about what you are buying before purchasing it," Johnson added. "Some rhodies love the sun, some love shade. Some can grow as large as oak trees. Some bloom earlier in the spring than others. A good time to buy them is when their buds are just opening up so you can check the color."

"Rhododendrons are expensive plants," said Barry Margolis, president of Margolis Nursery near Canton. "It's important to shop carefully, ask questions and inspect the plants. You want to purchase a good, healthy plant with a nice green color and good texture."

Ingram suggested looking beyond the leaves. "Look at the branching

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Casual outdoor furniture aglow with color



From Lloyd/Flanders comes all-weather wicker furniture in a range of colors. The "Vintage" collection is shown in one of the season's popular greens.

By Janice Tigar-Kramer
special writer

ONE LOOK at the exciting selection of outdoor furniture available today and you'll wonder where to put it — inside or out.

What's making news in the outdoor furniture industry this season are nostalgic furniture styles, faux finishes and colorful fabrics that give casual furniture buyers more choices than ever before.

Whether we're weary of the high-tech look in the office or continuing the trend called "cocooning," consumers are staying home more and want their environment to reflect their individual taste.

So, as we exchange matching sets of indoor furniture for more casual, eclectic pieces, we're also letting our imagination lead the way in the selection of outdoor groups.

"Ten years ago, the only fabric colors available for casual furniture were

yellow and green," said Mary Anne Chila, manager of Casual Concepts in Rochester. "Today the sophistication of outdoor furniture makes decorating possibilities endless. Indoor decorating schemes can easily be carried outside."

IF IT'S color you want on the patio, in the sunroom or around the hot tub, you won't have to look far for an overwhelming selection of furniture and fabrics.

Most of the major casual furniture makers offer 50 to 100 fabric colors and six to 20 frame finishes, making the purchase of outdoor furniture more like selecting custom indoor pieces. And since higher-end outdoor furniture is mostly special-order today, expect to wait four to six weeks for delivery.

"The outdoor furniture available today is far from common," said Rob Whitcomb, sales manager for Terrace Casuals in downtown Farmington. "Good casual furniture is built to last

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