

Tips to help rhodies grow

By Susan Tauber-Hyke
special writer

When planting rhododendrons, dig a hole twice as wide and almost as deep as the plant's root ball. Keep the soil on the roots since they are very delicate. Plant just above ground because of the shallow root system.

Add peat moss and pine mulch to the soil. Build a mound of loose dirt around the plant, then add 2 to 4 inches of mulch above the ground, being careful not to put the mulch around the neck or stem of the plant.

Lilo Dore of Birmingham uses shredded leaves from oak and beech trees for her 20 rhododendrons. She even adds coffee grounds. "I don't do anything by the book but it seems to work," said the avid rhododendron and wildflower enthusiast.

"Never cultivate the soil around the plants," warned Ivan Frankel of Bloomfield Hills. "This can harm the surface roots. Use your fingers to loosen the soil if it needs it."

LESLIE JOHNSON of Oakland Township doesn't bother planting his rhodies in the ground. His are planted on top. "I soak the root ball overnight in water in a large wheelbarrow. I take the burlap off if it comes off easily and scrape the ball sides gently so the roots

are exposed to the pine bark. Then I dump a bag of ground pine bark on the ground and make a depression in it for the plant."

After that, he adds his mulch to build up the mound around the plant, waters it everyday during the growing season and then once a week.

The next step is fertilizing in early spring and after flowers bloom. Rhododendron growers recommend a variety of fertilizers, such as Osmacote, Fertell and Miracid.

"Remember, too," added Dore, "to carefully pick off dead flowers during the blooming season so your rhodies will give you the prettiest flowers for the longest time possible."

IN WINTER, give rhododendrons a thorough soaking so they don't dry out. Protect young plants with burlap. Toni Pallazola of Garden City uses cut evergreen boughs for protection.

There are certain problems to watch for with rhododendrons.

"If the plant has yellowing or wilting leaves, black spots with yellow rings or chewed leaves, contact a garden nursery or your county extension service for advice," said Dan Ingram of Bordine's Better Blooms, Rochester Hills.

Plant's bounty: hardy, lovely

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structure. The branches shouldn't be too close together. Because of the dark, green color, it's easy to see if the plant is insect-free. Also, be particular about what type you are buying and where you want to plant it."

"Check the plant's rating, too," added Frankel. "Rhodies are rated according to how hardy they are. H1 is the hardest rating; H2 can be grown in a locale that's

protected. H3 and H4 aren't recommended for our climate."

He and Ingram recommended several hardy rhododendron varieties for local gardeners to plant. The list consists of different PJMs, such as April White, Weston Pink, Aglow and Black Satin; English Roseum, America, Album, Elegans, Nova Zembla, Roseum Elegans, Boule de Nègre, Caractacus, Parsons Gloriosum, President Lincoln and Ramapo.

PRESENTING HOME & GARDEN II

SPRING'S SUNSHINE provides the perfect spur for getting in the spirit of sprucing up the house and yard.

This second home and garden section of the season is intended to lift your spirits and get you into the swing of things. It's written especially for suburbanites in an easy-to-understand style.

The special section appears today, Thursday, May 7, in all Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. As always, we enjoy hearing your reaction!

— Bob Sklar
Assistant Managing Editor

O&E representatives Jayne Mooney and Rhonda Sharpe coordinated advertising. Graphics illustrator Gwen Dietrich designed the cover.

Direct queries to Bob Sklar: 953-2113.

On the cover: Artist Gwen Dietrich of Canton Township spent 50 hours depicting the detail in "Tomatoes," a colored pencil drawing. The idea behind the network was to take an everyday object and make it interesting, to render its rich color and abstract internal shapes. "I wanted to look at all the elements in the life of a tomato from seed to fruit, the lush color, the abstract shapes when you cut into it, the different environments in which it's found, how lyrical the tomato is on the vine," Dietrich said.

Harken back to 1950s

Yearn for the 1950s? You'll love the necessities sold at the Game Room Gallery at the Michigan Design Center in Troy.

Though new to the design center, the Game Room Gallery is part of a 32-year-old company called Mikhail Darafcev, Inc., originally a supplier of bar equipment, such as counters, stools and pool tables. New marketing ideas by baby boomer and company owner Paul Darafcev resulted in a new line: Pepsi-Cola paraphernalia and other memorabilia reminiscent of the good 'ol fifties.

At Game Room Gallery you'll find Pepsi-Cola furniture with a diner counter and stools, reproduction Pepsi vending machines, pool tables, Pepsi clocks and vintage slot machines. (The Darafcev line is the only licensed Pepsi furniture).

Besides detailed reproductions, the company takes special orders — they'll gladly find an authentic Wurlitzer jukebox or Pepsi machine and even have it restored.

Michigan Design Center is open only to wholesale buyers, so you need an interior designer or contractor to visit the showroom. For information, call the Game Room Gallery at 649-4263.

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Credits: Bob Sklar coordinated this special section with assistance from staff member Keely Wygonik and special writer Janice Tigar-Kramer.