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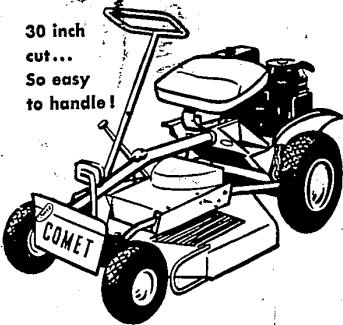
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Tips on Gardening

By Betty Frankel

AZALEAS
Azaleas are among the most beautiful of the flowering shrubs. Whether the blossoms are pure white, pale pink, or a more vivid pink or flame color, they have a dramatic intensity that is equaled by few other plants. The reputation of many famous southern gardens is built on the azaleas that clothe a hillside, are scattered through a light woodland, or are mirrored in a reflecting pool. This beauty does not have to be confined to the south, because there are many types of azaleas that grow well in the northern parts of the country. In fact, there are lovely azaleas that grow wild from Maine to Florida. Others are native to eastern Asia and southern Europe. Many hybrids have been developed from these wild types and most of these possess considerable hardiness.

BOTANICALLY azaleas are a type of rhododendron; but practically speaking, the term refers to those forms that lose their leaves in the winter and a few small-leaved evergreen plants. They belong to the heath family; and like most plants in this group, prefer acid soil. The soil texture is important too. A soil rich in humus and fibrous material that retains moisture is needed. However it must be well drained because azaleas will not thrive in heavy, soggy soil.

When planting azaleas, the soil can be conditioned by the addition of acid peat, compost or other organic material. Oak leafmold, oak or hemlock saw-

dust or rotting wood, or sphagnum moss can be mixed with the soil to increase the acidity. Another means of doing this is to apply chemicals such as aluminum sulphate and sulphur. There are also fertilizers that have been compounded to acidify the soil.

TO INSURE vigorous plants with maximum bloom, fertilizer of this acid type should be applied twice a year. Make the first application early in Spring and the second in early summer before the middle of July. Never cultivate the soil around azaleas because they have very shallow roots that are easily damaged. It is better to spread a mulch to conserve moisture. Acid peat or oak leafmold is good for this purpose.

The best location for azaleas is one sheltered from the mid-day sun, but they grow best with some direct sunlight for a portion of the day. They do well in the filtered sunlight beneath tall trees or in partial shade, but they do not grow in dense shade. They are very tolerant of exposure to wind, and this is not the problem it is with rhododendrons.

Since azaleas form a shallow, dense ball of fibrous roots they are easy to transplant. Unearthed plants are very small they should be moved with a ball of earth around the roots. Often potted plants are available. Although they are best moved when they are dormant and have no leaves, they can be moved successfully even when they are in bloom. Because of this it is possible to go to a nursery at this season and select the particular flower color and shape that is most pleasing to you.

THE FUNKSHELL azalea, a native of the Blue Ridge Mountains is the hardest na-

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Floors Come Into View

With the return of the area rug to home decorating popularity, wood floors are coming into view again. As a result, an important home improvement project on the agenda for many households is the refinishing of wood floors.

"Improved wood stains add a touch of floor color and bring out the grain, texture and natural beauty of the wood," points out Anne Cain, color consultant for Rez Wood Stains, Inc.

It makes little difference how old the wood is. When un-

derneath scuff marks, scars or layers of paint are sanded off, the original personality of the wood will reappear.

Every species of wood takes a stain in a different manner. The finished look depends on the color of the stain, how much is applied, the type of wood, its grain and texture. Oak is the most popular flooring because of its durability, rich, warm color and countless combinations of grain and texture. However, many people prefer the softer, more uniform texture of maple floors. Older homes will often have pine floors.

Any of the three flooring styles — strip, random-width plank or parquet — can be personalized through the application of liquid wood stains.

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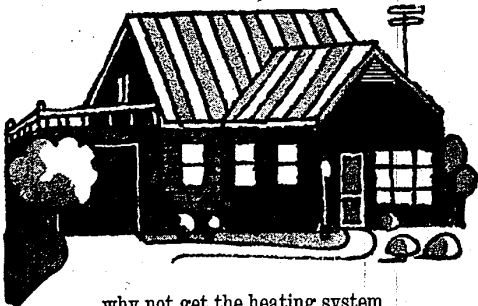
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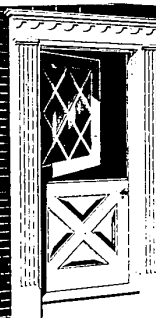
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