



## Ericaceous (lime hating) Plants

An acid loving or ericaceous plant refers to the type of soil in which these plants like to grow. Ericaceous plants require an acidic soil (pH < 7) or ericaceous compost in which to thrive. These plants are also known as calcifuges, or lime-hating plants (lime being alkaline)

Common examples of ericaceous plants include rhododendron, camellia, azalea, pieris, summer-flowering heathers and even Japanese maples (acer) among others. This also applies to blueberries.

If you try growing ericaceous plants in alkaline or chalky limey soils, they start to produce yellow leaves – a condition known as lime-induced chlorosis, don't grow or flower well and usually, finally die. The main reason for this is that they need plenty of iron and other soil nutrients that become insoluble or 'locked up' in the soil at high pH, so the plants can't absorb them.

If your soil is alkaline clay, you could try digging a large hole, lining it with plastic sheeting, making some drainage holes in the plastic, and then filling with a lime-free soil. However, this doesn't always work very well and is a bit of a risk.



## Container Growing

It can be very difficult to manipulate your soil to grow these in borders if you do not naturally have acidic soil. Instead, it is much easier to grow ericaceous plants in large containers or pots and will often thrive where ericaceous compost can be replaced when necessary to provide optimum growing conditions.

Growing ericaceous plants in containers also allows you to grow them in the right place in the garden. Most of the plants listed (apart from blueberries) prefer a position in light shade or out of direct sunlight – especially early morning sunlight, which can cause the flower buds and flowers to turn brown and drop off.



## **Feeding**

Whereas many plants can be fed with a general-purpose fertiliser, ericaceous plants really do much better if fed with a specific ericaceous plant fertiliser. These plants love feeding on iron and magnesium to give them stronger roots, healthier blooms and bigger flowers.

Always mix the Rhododendron, Azalea and Camellia Liquid Concentrate Plant Food with rainwater, as they hate hard water from the domestic tap. Alternatively use granules mixed into the compost for controlled release over 3 months.

Top dress around plants using ericaceous compost. Take care not to dig this in around your plants, as you may cause damage to the roots. Instead mulch around the plant stems with the compost, covering an area of soil on the ground that corresponds to the area that the leaves, stems and branches occupy above ground.

As with many shrubs water well for at least one year following planting to ensure plants become established