

Rhododendron

&

Azalea Basics

by Steve Henning, creator of
Henning's Rhododendron & Azalea Pages

rhodyman.net

What Are Rhododendrons?

Five Major Groups

Subgenus
Hymenanthus



Larger leaf
rhododendrons
elepidote

Subgenus
Rhododendron



Small leaf scaly
rhododendrons
lepidote

Subgenus
Tsutsusi



Evergreen
azaleas
elepidote

Subgenus
Pentanthera



Deciduous
azaleas
elepidote

Subgenus
Rhododendron
Section Vireya



Vireyas
tropical
lepidote

Growing Rhododendrons requires

- ◆ Variety for Climate, Location, Size, Habit
- ◆ Soil with Good Drainage & Acidic
- ◆ Proper Planting & Transplanting
- ◆ Appropriate for Sun or Shade
- ◆ Mulching
- ◆ Protection & Trouble Shooting
- ◆ Pruning, if necessary

Variety Considerations

- ◆ Climate (heat & cold hardiness)
- ◆ Location (sun or partial shade)
- ◆ Size (dwarf, low, medium, tall)
height is quoted at 10 years
- ◆ Habit (spreading, normal, upright)

Good Varieties: Rhododendrons



Boule de
Neige



Catawbiense
Album



Catawbiense
Boursalt



English
Roseum



Lee's Dark
Purple



Nova
Zembla



PJM

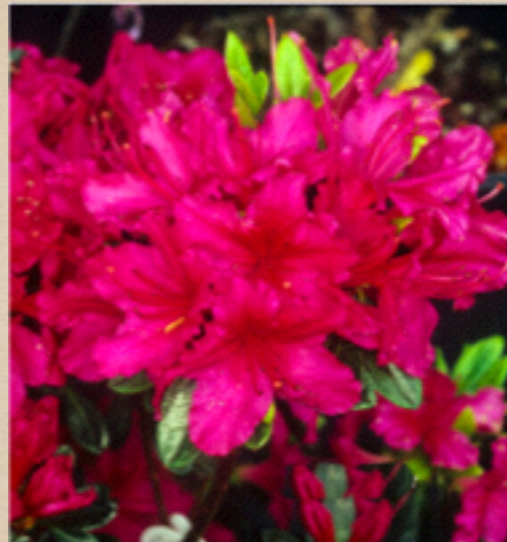


Roseum
Elegans

Good Varieties: Evergreen Azaleas



Elsie Lee



Girard's
Fuchsia



Girard's
Hot Shot



Girard's
Rose



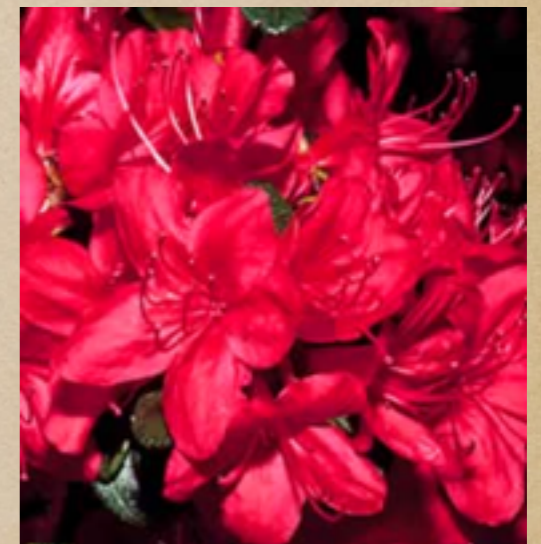
Koromo
Shikibu



Martha
Hitchcock



Purple
Splendor



Stewart-
sonian

Good Varieties: Deciduous Azaleas



Candy
Lights



Gibraltar



Klondyke



Millennium



Narcissiflora



Tri-Lights



Weston's
Innocence



Weston's
Lemon Drop

Size: Dwarf & Low



Tow Head
1', -15F



R. fastigiatum
2', -15F



Purple Gem
2', -25F



Dora Amateis
3', -15F

Habit: Spreading to Upright



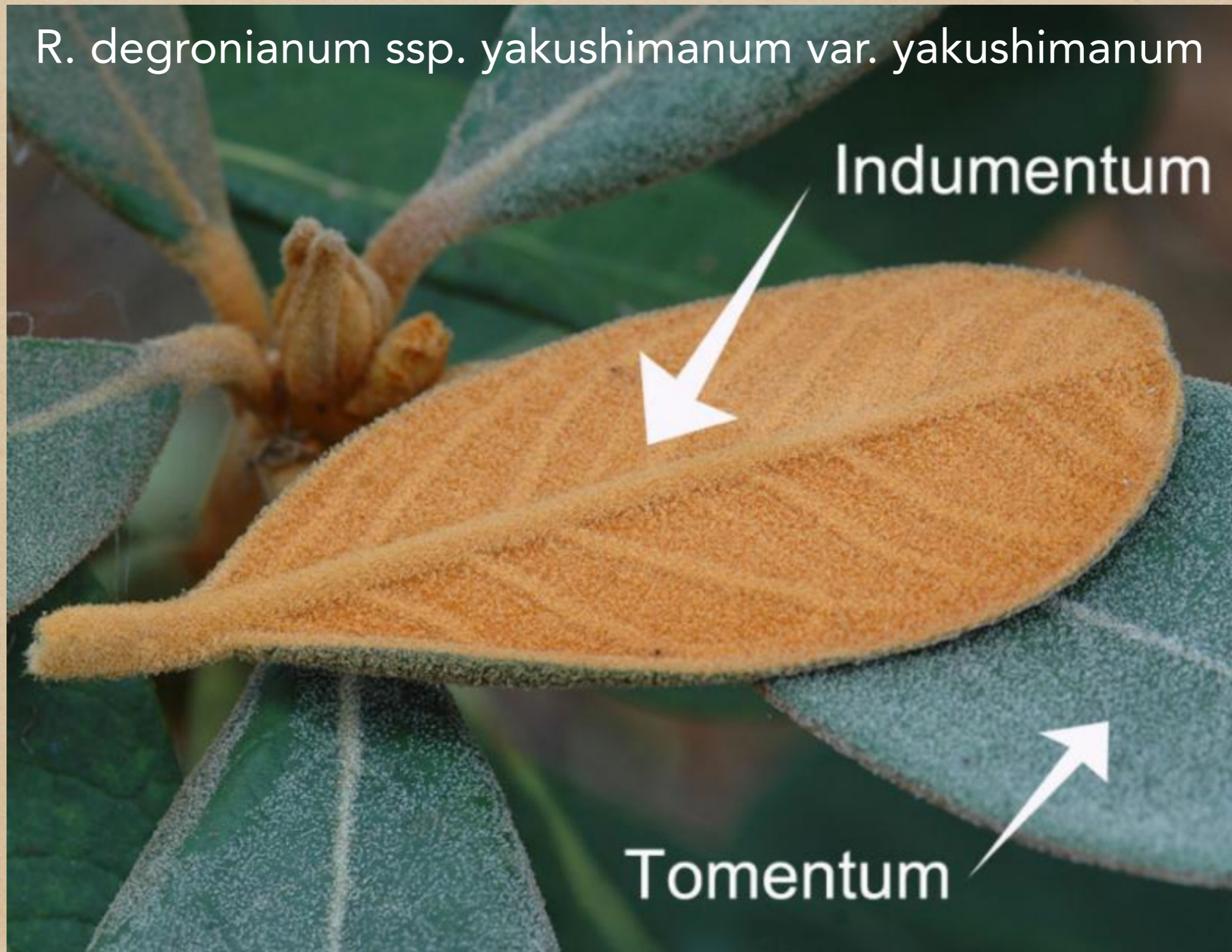
Gomer Waterer
Spreading Habit



PJM
Upright Habit

Indumentum & Tomentum

R. degronianum ssp. *yakushmanum* var. *yakushmanum*



R. degronianum ssp. *yakushimanum*



Exbury form



Ken Janeck



Kiochiro Wada form

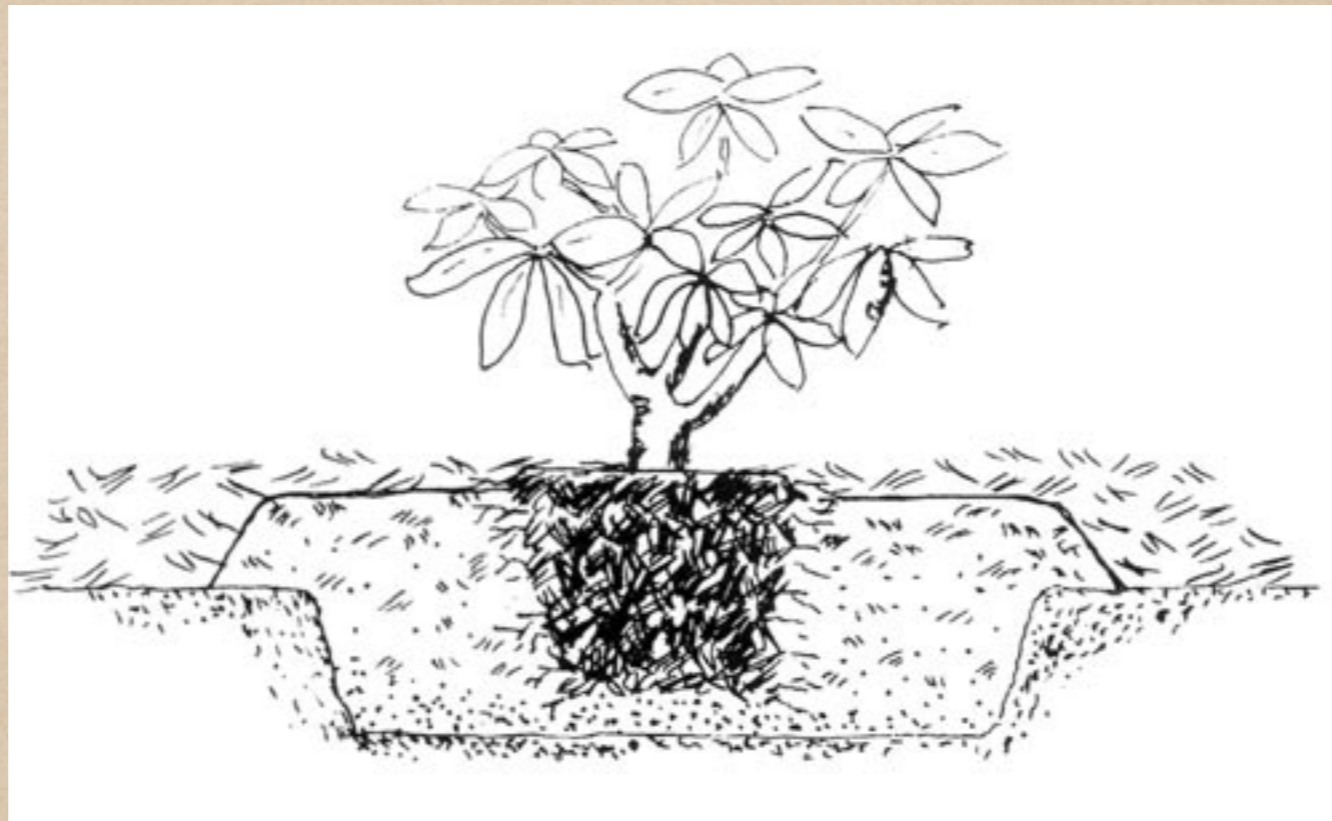


Mist Maiden

Soil

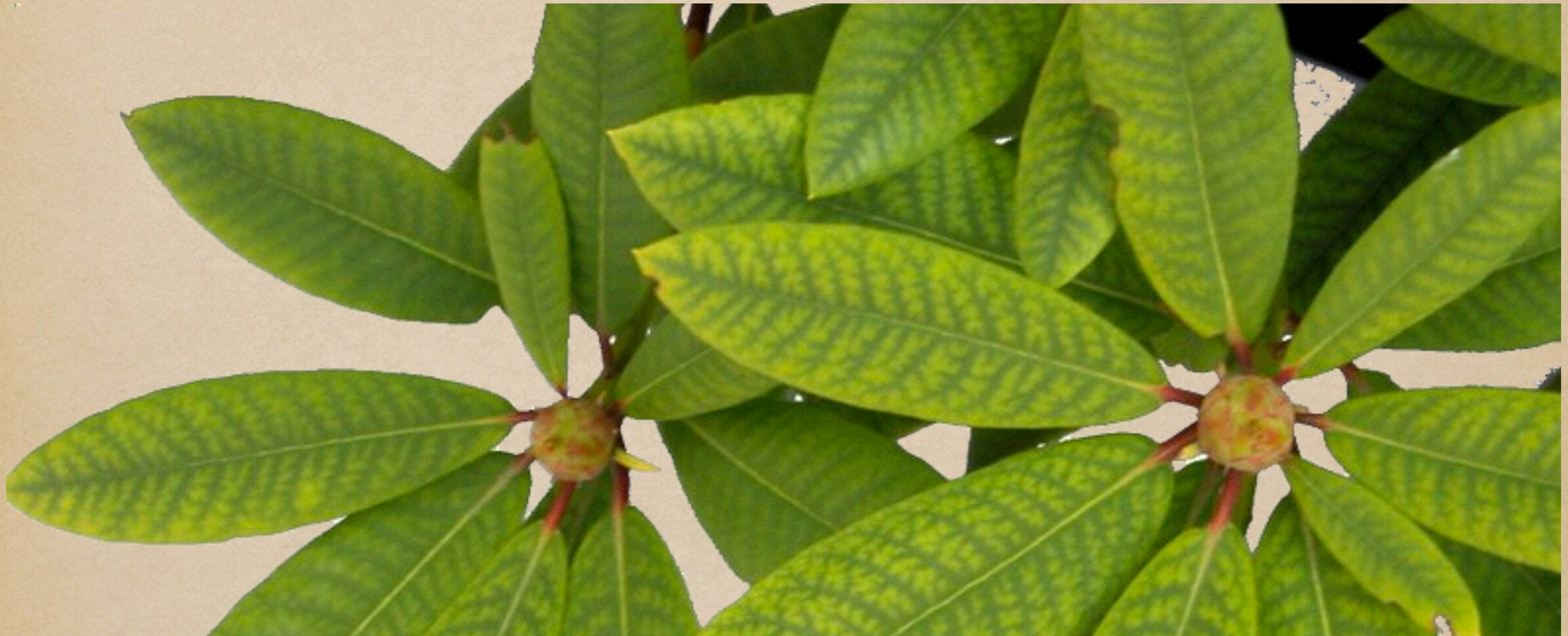
- ◆ Acidity - A pH of 4.5 to 6 is ideal
Use Sulfur or Iron Sulfate to lower pH.
Never use Aluminum Sulfate.
- ◆ Good Drainage
Dig a hole 12 inches deep and fill with water. After it drains, fill again. Then, if it drains in one hour, drainage is good.

Soil: Raised Bed for Poor Drainage



- ◆ If drainage is fairly good, use a 4 to 6 inch hole and mound 4 to 6 inches.
- ◆ For poor drainage or if pH is a serious problem, use a 8 to 12 inch mound on top of soil.

Soil: Chlorosis



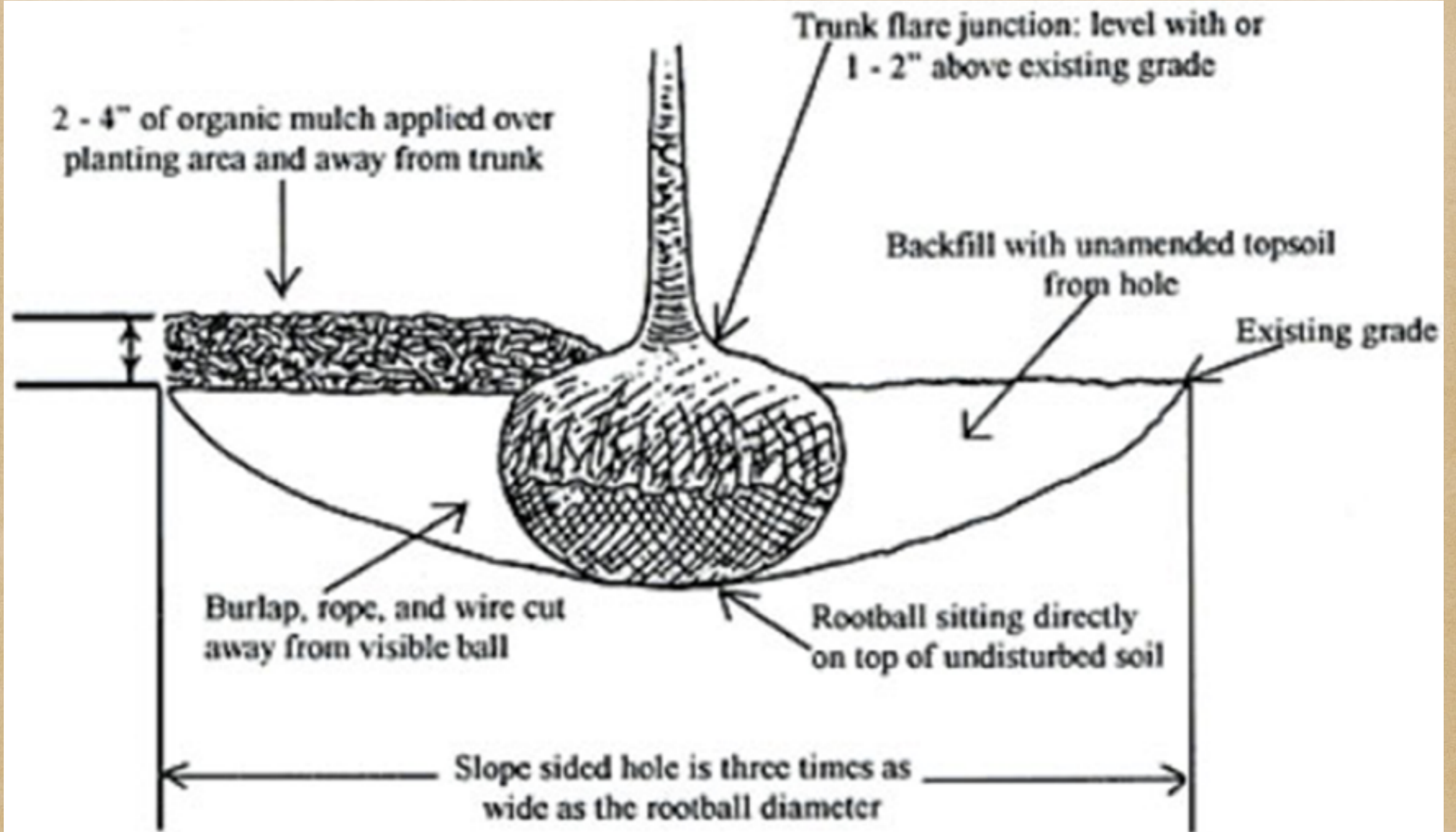
If pH is too high (alkaline) the leaves will look chlorotic, meaning they will have a yellowish leaf with green veins.

To raise the pH on chlorotic plants, use 1 tablespoon of sulfur per square foot. Sulfur is slow acting, but long lasting.

Proper Planting & Transplanting

- ◆ Balled & Burlapped is Best.
- ◆ Containerized is OK, BUT make sure the plant won't be root bound.
- ◆ Always plant higher than it was before.
- ◆ Fertilizing is usually not necessary.

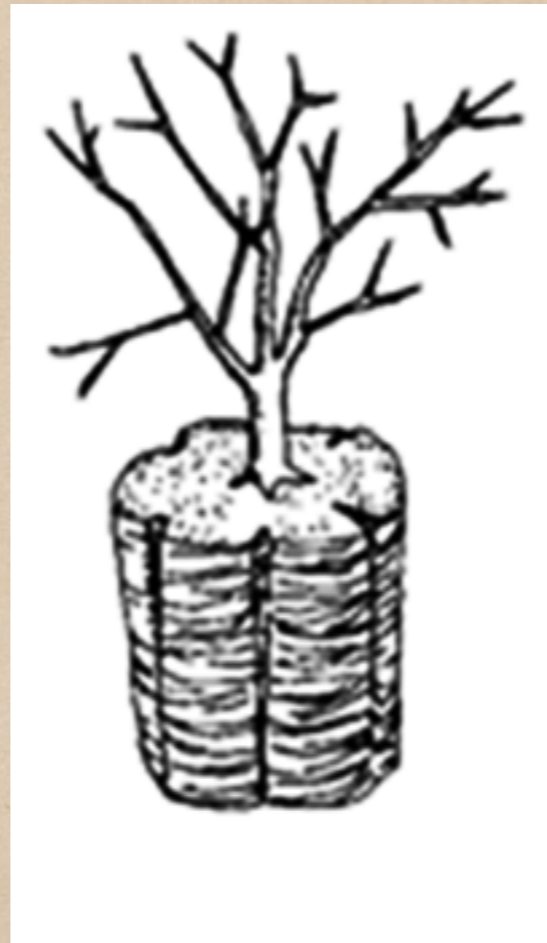
Planting: Balled & Burlapped



Planting: Containerized



If Plant Is
Root Bound



Make
Vertical Cuts



& Spread
Out Roots

Partial Shade

- ◆ 4 to 6 hours of morning sun is good
- ◆ High shade with filtered sun is good.
- ◆ Deep shade can cause no flowers.
- ◆ Full sun can cause sunburn and or insect problems.
- ◆ Some varieties like full sun or full shade.

Good Varieties for Sun (& Shade)



Boule de
Neige



English
Roseum
(not shade)



Nova
Zembla



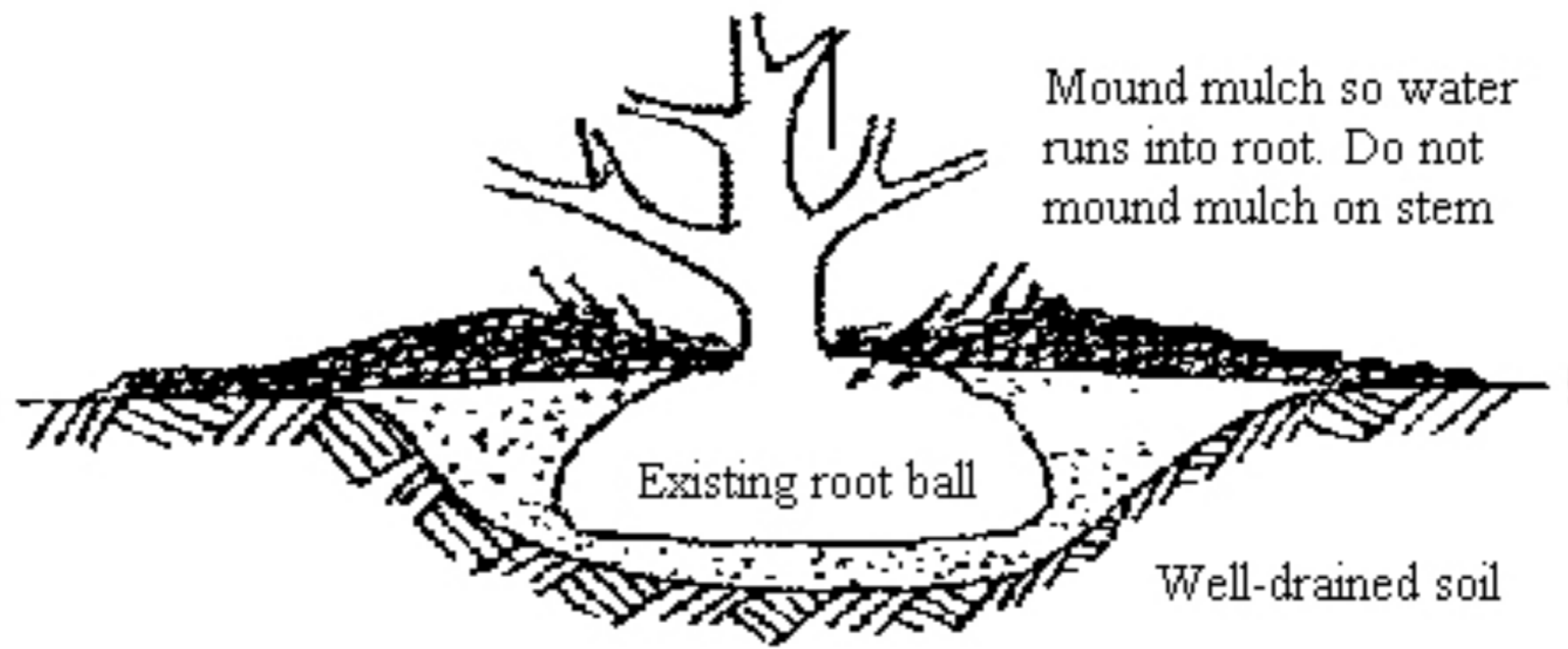
PJM

Mulching

- ◆ Keeps roots cool, conserves water.
- ◆ Conifer mulches (bark/needles) are usually acidic.
- ◆ Apply 2 to 4 inches deep.
- ◆ Keep 2 inches back from stem/trunk.
- ◆ Top off periodically, natural fertilizing.
- ◆ Do not use peat moss as mulch.

Mulching

Mulch
To improve the health of your plants



Protection & Problems

- ◆ Protect from winter sun and wind.
- ◆ Protect from deer in the winter.
(repellants, netting, and fences)
- ◆ Healthy plants resist pests.
- ◆ Tolerate some chewing, avoid spraying.
- ◆ Indumentum prevents some problems.



For serious deer problems, an 8 foot deer fence is best. Either steel or plastic fences designed for deer work. For less serious problems, repellants will work for a while. It is best to change the repellant periodically.

Problems: Not Really



Natural Cold Response



Natural Heat Response

Curling in AM can also be from dry soil or root rot.

Problems: Weevils



Chewed leaf edges are caused by black vine weevils and strawberry root weevils. They feed at night, live in ground during the day.

Problems: Leaf Necrosis



Causes of Brown Edges are:

- 1) Winter Damage from dry winds while roots are frozen
- 2) Drought Damage
- 3) Damage from chemical fertilizer

Problems: Leaf Yellowing



Chlorosis is caused by an iron deficiency. This can be caused by a high pH, wet soil, or a magnesium deficiency.



Uniform yellowing is caused by a nitrogen deficiency. Organic nitrogen such as cottonseed meal is best.

Problems: Lace Bug



When you see leaf problems, always check the underside of the leaf for the cause.

Lace bug occurs on plants in too much sun.



Problems: Black Stems



Azalea bark scale & sooty mold on bark.
Pink eggs and young crawlers are present in the
scale that has been broken open.

Problems: Dieback



Individual branches dying back can be caused by borers or by drought or a prolonged winter when the ground is frozen.

Pruning

- ◆ Remove dead branches anytime.
- ◆ Pruning is usually not necessary
- ◆ Pruning right after blooming is best.
- ◆ Summer pruning removes next year's buds.
- ◆ Cut up to $1/3$ on severely overgrown plant
- ◆ Repeat each year until it is what you want.

Deadheading



Grab the flower near its base and twist the flower sideways and break it off in this spongy area.

Special Rhododendron Topics

- ◆ Native
- ◆ Fragrant
- ◆ Indumentum
- ◆ Toxicity
- ◆ Unusual Forms
- ◆ Strange Relatives
- ◆ Companion Plants

Native Rhododendrons



R. catawbiense, Mountain Rosebay – 5', -25F.

R. minus, Carolina rhododendron – 4', -15F.

R. maximum, Great Laurel – 5', -25F.

Native Deciduous Azaleas



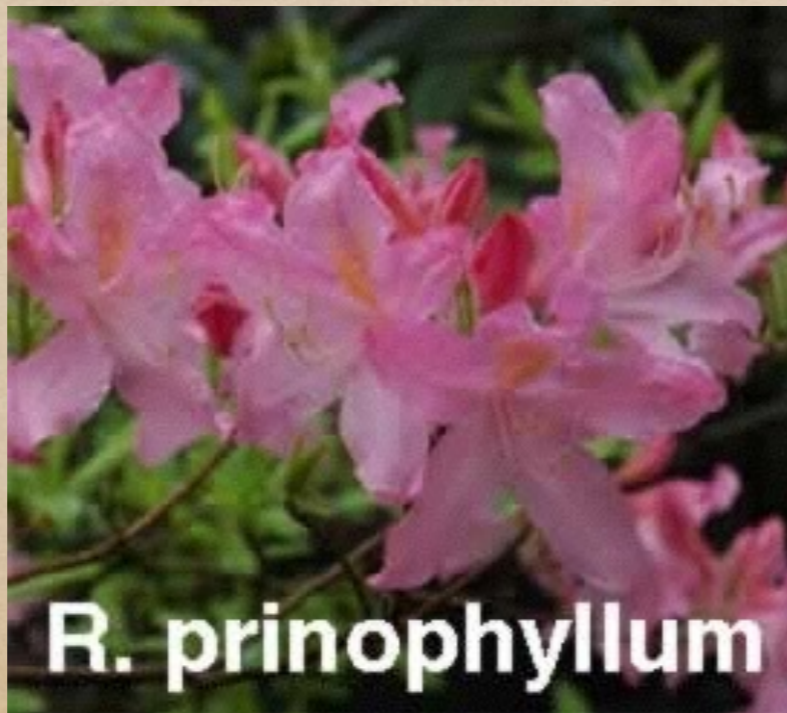
R. canescens

5', -5F, Fragrant



R. periclymenoides

5', -15F, Fragrant



R. prinophyllum

5', -25F



R. viscosum

5', -20F, Fragrant

Fragrant Azaleas



Koromo Shikibu



Candy Lights



Klondyke



Millennium



Narcissiflora



Weston's Innocence

Fragrant Rhododendrons



R. mucronulatum



Caroline



Janet Blair



Rhona Pink



Tom Everitt



Wheatly

Toxicity



In 401 B.C., 10,000 Greek soldiers were poisoned by honey from *R. luteum*.

A poison found in rhododendron nectar, produces low blood pressure, shock and even death.

Strange Relatives



From Alaska



Azaleodendron



Between Rhod. & Azal.



In Arctic, was Ledum

Unusual Forms



Homebush



R. linearifolium
'Macrosepalum'



R. spinuliferum



R. ponticum 'Variegatum'



R. Sinogrande

Companion Trees



- ◆ Black Gum
- ◆ Dawn Redwood
- ◆ Ginkgo
- ◆ Japanese Maple



- ◆ Magnolia
- ◆ Red Bud
- ◆ Red Oak
- ◆ Sweet Gum



Companion Shrubs



- ◆ Hydrangea
- ◆ Mountain Laurel
- ◆ Oregon Grape
- ◆ Pieris
- ◆ Viburnum
- ◆ Witch Hazel



Companion Perennials

- ◆ Astilbe
- ◆ Bleeding heart
- ◆ Fall-blooming crocus
- ◆ Fall-blooming cyclamen
- ◆ Fern
- ◆ Gentian (Gentiana)



Companion Perennials



◆ Heuchera

◆ Hosta



◆ Japanese iris

◆ Ligularia



◆ Primrose

◆ Trillium



References

- Henning's Rhododendron & Azalea Pages: rhodyman.net/rhodyn.php
- Rhododendron Basics by Harold Greer: <http://frasersouthernrhodos.ca/what-rhododendrons-require/>
- Native azaleas: donaldhyatt.com/natives.html
- Rhododendron & Azaleas Photos: hirsutum.info/
- Planting Guide: rarefindnursery.com/index.php/tree-and-shrub-planting-guide
- American Rhododendron Society: rhododendron.org
- ARS On-line Store: ARSStore.org
- Azalea Society of America: azaleas.org
- Custom Propagation: vanveennursery.com



Now, Do You Dig
Rhododendrons & Azaleas?