



ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest. Email or mail your questions to:

info@sprigsandtwigs.net or

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Question this Week: I always get confused, what is the difference between Azaleas and Rhododendrons? ...Marie

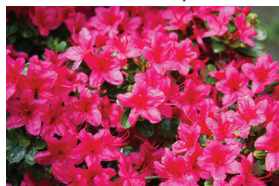
Linda's Answer:

That's a great question that has an answer with a "twist". While all Azaleas are Rhododendrons, all Rhododendrons are not Azaleas. How's that for an answer! Let me explain. Plants are described using a system called plant taxonomy that in multiple words describes similarities and differences among plants, classifies them, and names them (among other things). Plant classification completely describes each plant by ten different names; which are, from top to bottom:

- Kingdom
- Subkingdom
- Superdivision
- Phylum
- Class
- Order
- Family
- Genus
- Species



Rhododendron



Azalea

Rhododendrons and azaleas both belong to the same **Family**, which is called Ericaceae (or Heath Family). Rhododendrons and azaleas also are both botanically classified in the same **Genus** (and here's where the twist comes); that **Genus** is called Rhododendron! So that's how an azalea is actually a Rhododendron; but a Rhododendron is not an azalea!

Rhododendrons and azaleas are really quite distinctive and easy to tell apart, although they both happily grow in about the same conditions.

Azaleas generally:

- Have 5 stamens (male part of the flower), 5 lobes (petals of the flower) and 1 stamen per lobe,
- Can be either deciduous (lose their leaves each year) or evergreen,
- Are small to medium-sized shrubs,
- Have small elliptical-shaped leaves,
- Blooms all over the plant with trumpet or funnel shaped flowers,
- Blooms earlier in spring than Rhododendrons,
- Can have fall color to their foliage,
- Can tolerate more sun than Rhododendrons.

Rhododendrons generally:

- Have 10 stamens, 5 lobes and 2 stamens per lobe,
- Are always evergreen,
- Are shrubs that can grow into a small tree,
- Have either big or small thick leathery leaves that are always paddle shaped,
- Have bell shaped flowers that stick up above the leaves.

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 20 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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