



Celebrating 22 Years!

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:
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QUESTION THIS WEEK:

We have two rhododendrons that have partially bloomed the past three years in late October/early November. The flowers do not fully display, but at least half the buds do start to open. The other rhododendrons around our house wait until spring to show their colors. Do you have any thoughts about what we are seeing?... Greg, Old Lyme

Linda's Answer:

Dear Greg,

There are two primary environmental factors that affect plant growth and flowering of plants, temperature and daylight/darkness length. Many plant species have day length 'switches' that determine when they grow leaves, stems, etc. and when they flower. Photoperiodism is the term used to describe the plants reaction and response to the relative lengths of daylight and darkness.

In the past, scientists believed that daylight length determined whether a plant would form flowers. Over time, that proved not to be true. It is the amount of uninterrupted darkness that determines the formation of flowers on most types of plants. A plant that requires a long period of darkness is termed a "short day" (or long night) plant. Short-day (long night) plants form flowers only when daylight is less than 12 hours and darkness is greater than 12 hours a day. Rhododendrons and many spring and fall flowering plants are short day (long night) plants. Your rhododendrons are blooming now in response to the increasing length of darkness at this time of year that is similar to the length of darkness in the spring when they normally bloom.

Many of our summer blooming flowers and garden vegetables are "long day" (short night) plants. These bloom only when they receive less than 12 hours of darkness each day.

The very cold air and heavy frosts we have experienced this fall are responsible for stopping the complete opening of the flowers. Your partially opened flowers will freeze this winter and fall off. They will not form new flower buds for next spring blooming. Thank you for your great observation and question.



Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 22 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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