

Rhododendron - Care Guide

Dead Heading

What you need to do is gently snip out the seed pod with a pair of scissors taking great care to avoid cutting any of the new growth at the same time. It is best to do this as soon as the flowers are over. If the seed head breaks off easily in your fingers no seed is being set so you are wasting your time and you can move on to another plant. You can very easily prove the effectiveness of what you have done as those twigs without a seed pod on them will produce double the amount of new growth as those which still have the seed pod present.

Dead Heading - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/Ys0v8mia9hs?rel=0>

Pruning

This is quite simple as far as smellies are concerned - DON'T! As has been explained already you will not improve the shape of the erect growing smellies by pruning as they simply re-grow a leader. Even more to the point is the simple fact that rhododendrons with smooth or peeling bark seldom if ever reshoot after having been pruned.

Pruning - Video Tip

Generally Rhododendrons should not be pruned.

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/3-vxF13n6Wc?rel=0>

However there are some exceptions to the rule!

Dwarf Rhododendrons For Smaller Spaces - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/sOYYZn0Ea0Q>

Weed Killing

It is a good idea to use weedkiller around the base of newly planted plants in subsequent years. It removes competition from grass and weeds for scarce water and nutrients in a dry summer but it also avoids the worst excesses of mowers and strimmers because you can actually see where the plant is. However, you must be very careful indeed of spray drift and shelter or protect the plant as you go with a dustbin or bucket. Smellie rhododendrons are very susceptible to spray drift from tiny droplets of spray moving on the wind so never spray in windy or even breezy conditions.

Pests And Diseases

A. Topping the list for rhododendrons is, of course, **honey fungus** – otherwise known as the bootlace fungus.

Gardeners tend to assume that they have been unfairly selected to be the recipients of this life threatening disease. However, in reality, all wooded areas have it. Wherever there are decaying roots or stumps or where the roots of a plant are damaged perhaps in a gale, this naturally occurring fungus will jump into a live plant and kill very quickly. Honey fungus kills by invading the soft tissues of the plant below the bark and preventing the movement of water and proteins up and down the stem. A plant garotte if you like. The disease generally strikes in early summer when part or all of a plant will die in a matter of a few days. If you lose a rhododendron to honey fungus do not plant another in the same place.

Camellias do not seem to get the disease so plant one of these in the infected area instead. If prevention is your objective use copper sulphate

in the planting pit or Armillotox if this chemical is still permitted in use. Like all chemicals of this sort it is very difficult to know if it has worked or if nature has just been kind!

B. Powdery Mildew

This is characterised by whitish mildew patches which then turn purplish brown but our smellies are seldom affected.

C. Bud Blast or Bud Drop

If a rhododendron drops its buds it is very probably the result of stress of some sort. Bud blast is a rhododendron disease but it affects Rh. ponticum and large flowered hybrids not smellies. If you see bud drop in your scented rhododendron it may just be that the plant is over flowering and nature is getting things back into balance or it may just be the effects of an early frost or, more probably, it is the plant saying that soil or weather conditions are such that it cannot support the amount of buds it has produced.

D. Weevils

Weevils may eat the leaves of scented rhododendrons but generally they prefer smoother leafed types. Again this is a naturally occurring problem in the garden which is unlikely to be life threatening.

E. Bark Split

This can be a serious problem with smellies in cold winters. Imagine a downpipe on your house which freezes and then splits. The same principle applies to the stem of a tender smellie rhododendron. The worst effects can arise when out of season frosts strike just when the sap is rising. Bark split may not kill the plant completely but probably will. Binding the stem with hessian matting is probably a waste of time but you could use a fleece to cover a particularly choice plant if you see the forecast of a later frost and remember to take action.

Drought Issues - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/U0ziM1AH4fc>

Honey Fungus - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/uURc8-LM9yQ?rel=0>

Maintenance - Fallen Tree - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/TvtRgdFXRSs>

General Pictures



Rhododendron 'Polar Bear'



Rhododendron 'Polar Bear'



Rhododendron yakushmanum



Rhododendron yakushmanum



Rhododendron 'Elizabeth' & Magnolia leavigata

Rhododendron propagation

How to collect, store and plant woody shrub and tree seeds

Further reading on the Caerhays website:-

The Age of Rhododendrons

Rhododendrons in Old Park, Caerhays

RHS Lecture - The Smellies

Further reading and images in the Caerhays Garden Diary - Rhododendrons

Planting Out Rhodies - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/jLHK6orO-tA>

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