

Rhododendron - 'The Smellies'

Rhododendron - The Smellies - Background Information

RHS Lecture by Charles Williams ("The Smellies")



There are about 650 species of rhododendrons growing in temperate climates but I intend here to refer to just a few of them. They are all later flowering, suitable for smaller gardens because they do not grow very tall, and very deeply scented because they rely on insects for pollination and these insects can only thrive in late spring or early summer. We refer to them as the `smellies' and, as you would soon tell if you get close to one in flower, they certainly live up to their reputation. Before we get too carried away though these plants are all short lived and tender. The very act of flowering so prolifically seems to stunt their growth and limit their life span. While they thrive in Southern English counties they need full shelter from the wind and especially the east wind. To other parts of the country they are therefore patio plants or plants for the cool conservatory. They

are not house plants as such but many of our mail order customers here at Burncoose order them to grow on in their greenhouses and then bring them into the house for the 3 weeks or so when they are actually in flower.

I have made some sweeping generalisations but it is now probably best to turn to the plants themselves and point out their key characteristics for identification purposes before moving on to talk about how to look after these plants for best effect.

There are two types of rhododendrons. Those with scaly leaves which we call LEPIDOTE and those with non scaly leaves which we call ELEPIDOTE. All our subjects today are non-scaly and can therefore be crossed with each other. Scaly and non scaly cannot.

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