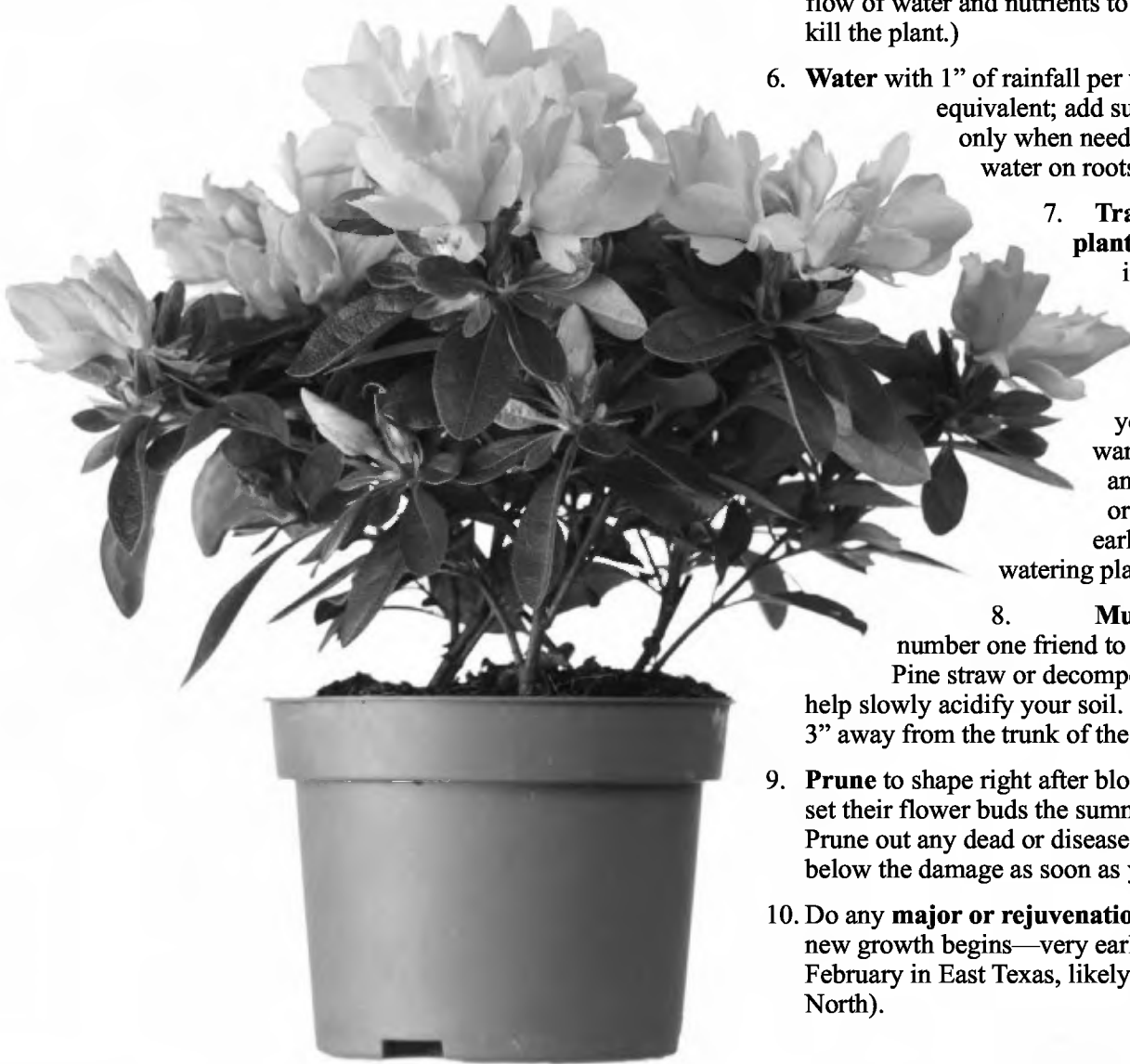


Top 10 Tips for Azalea Growing

Editor's Note: Information from the ASA website and personal experience.

Fall and winter are times of re-examining our gardens and taking stock of what worked and what did not. For many in the Southern US we can plant new azaleas in the fall, which is the best time to allow roots to settle before serious summer heat. Our Texas Chapter hands out these Top 10 Tips to new members and those who buy azaleas at our plant sales, always recommending they consult the longer versions of these “tips” on the ASA website under **Azalea Basics>Azalea Care**. There you will find a very detailed discussion, with an excellent planting diagram, by Caroline Beck, NVA Chapter.

1. **Test soil for pH**; azaleas need slightly acid soil (pH 5.0 to 6.5). Bring soil sample to your county extension offices for testing if unsure.



2. **Plant varieties that are adapted to our climate** (USDA 8b in Nacogdoches) and adapted to your microclimate—even Southern Indicas don't like being planted by a concrete driveway or brick wall (even if you irrigate and there is some relief from west sun).
3. **Plant in loose, well-drained soil** (50% organic matter).
4. **Plant high**, not in a well—to avoid fungus problems. While they look like little trees, they cannot stand in a “bowl” of water.
5. **Fertilize** shortly after bloom (and after last frost date); add a second, lighter application about September, or at least 6 weeks before first frost date. Sprinkle fertilizer in a ring around the plant, at the “drip line”, never at the base of the trunk. (If you do this, it is corrosive, and can interrupt the flow of water and nutrients to the crown, and can kill the plant.)
6. **Water** with 1” of rainfall per week or its equivalent; add supplemental watering only when needed. Avoid standing water on roots.
7. **Transplant when plants are least stressed**, in the coolest seasons possible—fall is best, early spring (before April) second best. If you must transplant in warm weather, do it on an overcast day, a day or so after rain, and early or late in the day, watering plants thoroughly.
8. **Mulch** is your number one friend to keep soil moist. Pine straw or decomposed pine bark help slowly acidify your soil. Keep mulch 3” away from the trunk of the plants.
9. **Prune** to shape right after blooming, since azaleas set their flower buds the summer after flowering. Prune out any dead or diseased wood to an area below the damage as soon as you spot it.
10. Do any **major or rejuvenation pruning** before new growth begins—very early spring (late February in East Texas, likely March-April up North).