

# Crowd-Sourcing Answers to Azalea Queries

*By Various Members of the Azalea Society*

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The following azalea questions were submitted to the ASA “Ask Us” online form and were answered by various members of the Society. We are sharing those queries we think will be of most interest to the membership at large. (Submissions were edited for length and clarity.)

**Question:** The leaves on my azalea turned an orange-red color then brown. Most of the leaves have dropped off the plant now. The plant continued to bloom, but the flowers were noticeably paler than the other azaleas next to them. Is it too late to treat whatever ails it or should I just remove it? FYI, these were planted by the builder 14 months ago.

~ Mary W., Brunswick, MD

**Answer:** It is possible that it isn't a disease. The loss of leaves at this time of year and the poor color quality of the flowers suggests an environmental issue. When it was planted by the builder, did he break up the root ball or did he plant it just as it came out of the pot? If it wasn't planted properly, it would be expected to struggle.

Can you describe the area that it is planted in? Is it near the foundation of your house? Is there a nearby downspout coming off your house? Does the area drain well? You don't want a situation where there is a lot of standing water. Too much water and the roots will rot. Do you have a lawn service which could have sprayed something?

If the builder didn't plant your azalea correctly, what you are experiencing could be the expected result. Azaleas are relatively inexpensive. You can always get a replacement.

~ ASA

**Answer:** Late frosts/freezes can sometimes damage leaves and cause similar leaf changes that end in the leaves falling down.

~ ~ ASA

**Question:** Can someone help us diagnose what is wrong with our azalea? Leaves curling up, brown areas, etc.?

~ Deborah H., Anacortes, WA

**Answer:** Looks like it got hit by a late frost. I see that Anacortes had cold enough overnight temperatures on April 10-11. Wait for the foliage to

brown out or pick up only the worst leaves. But remember that there are flower buds probably on the plant now, so exercise caution when cutting. I like to cut the petiole string that connects the leaf to the branch. New foliage will develop but wait several weeks. Maintain 2-4" of organic mulch at all times and water when the soil feels dry if you insert a finger into the soil to a depth of 4" (that is where most azalea roots usually are).

I could not check sunlight from the submitted pictures, but they prefer morning sun or dappled sun. I assume the soil is well-draining, although it appears to be somewhat rocky. Have you done a soil test ever? Just something to consider if you ever have the time and money.

I had a worse winter event than yours and my azaleas took about 1 to 1.5 months to either leaf out or to develop new growth from the base. The late frost damage should be assessed well into summer. Sometimes bark split occurs and the ends of branches receive enough water for spring, but then they die in the summer months due to inadequate moisture levels due to the winter damage.

~ ASA

**Question:** I just bought five bushes and I want them to get bigger, so I don't know if I should prune them when they are small?

~ Anthony P., Woodbridge, VA

**Answer:** If you want them to get bigger, I wouldn't prune them. Now, if there is something about their current shape that you don't like, a little pruning might be justified. You don't have to prune them annually. Some folks never prune them since they prefer the natural plant size and shape.

If you are going to prune, do it as soon as conveniently after they bloom. Next year's flowers will begin to develop this summer. If you wait to prune in the fall, you will cut away next year's flowers.

~ ASA