Forcing greenhouse azaleas

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Currently most growers force "prepared" azalea plants that were purchased from specialists. This was not the procedure 20 years ago, when most growers then sheared, shaped and conditioned azaleas for subsequent forcing. Since the azalea is an expensive crop to grow, commercial growers either stopped raising the crop or drastically reduced production in recent years. At the present time the azalea appears to be making a limited comeback.

Assuming that today's grower is starting with a budded ready-to-force azalea, growers should remember the following details:

1. Know the variety/cultivar and its specific or unique requirements.

2. Carefully check with the supplier and determine previous fertility applications. Visually check pot surfaces for slow release fertilizers, either prilled or tablet form. If present, remove it.

Note–too many azalea crops are killed or ruined by excess fertilizer. Azaleas are light feeders relative to most greenhouse crops.

3. Maintain adequate light during forcing.

4. Keep media moist at all times.

5. Promptly remove by-pass shoots (vegetative shoots forming directly below the flower bud) during forcing, as these shoots may cause bud blasting. A slight sideways, twisting motion will do it.

6. Pay close attention to forcing temperatures.

References

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