



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

Rhododendron simsii¹

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Introduction

Profuse springtime blooms in shades of white, pink, red, or salmon, so plentiful and large as to completely hide the foliage, make Formosa Azalea a favorite landscape shrub in the south (Fig. 1). This large, spreading evergreen Azalea is most impressive when used in mass plantings but makes an attractive specimen planting as well. Plant in mass on four to six-foot centers.

General Information

Scientific name: *Rhododendron simsii*

Pronunciation: roe-duh-DEN-drun SIM-see-eye

Common name(s): Formosa Azalea

Family: *Ericaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 8 through 10 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 8: year round

Planting month for zone 9: year round

Planting month for zone 10: year round

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: mass planting; specimen; attracts butterflies; cut flowers; foundation

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 10 to 12 feet

Spread: 8 to 10 feet

Plant habit: round



Figure 1. Formosa Azalea.

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: slow

Texture: medium

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: evergreen
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: no fall color change
Fall characteristic: not showy

Flower

Flower color: red; white; pink; salmon
Flower characteristic: spring flowering; winter flowering

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated
Fruit length: .5 to 1 inch
Fruit cover: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristic: inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: not particularly showy; typically multi-trunked or clumping stems; can be trained to grow with a short, single trunk
Current year stem/twig color: brown
Current year stem/twig thickness: thin

Culture

Light requirement: plant grows in part shade/part sun
Soil tolerances: acidic; clay; loam; sand;
Drought tolerance: moderate
Soil salt tolerances: poor
Plant spacing: 36 to 60 inches

Other

Roots: usually not a problem
Winter interest: plant has winter interest due to unusual form, nice persistent fruits, showy winter trunk, or winter flowers
Outstanding plant: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: not known to be invasive
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Use and Management

Rich, moist, acid soil in light to medium shade, protected from winds, is an ideal location for Formosa Azaleas. Plants grow fine with several hours of direct sun but grow best in filtered shade from tall trees. Formosa Azalea is more tolerant of adverse conditions, including drought, than other Azaleas but the soil must be open and porous, yet able to retain water well. It tolerates sun better than other Azaleas. A thick (3 inches deep) mulch is recommended to help ensure adequate root growth. Roots are located in the top several inches, even in sandy, well-drained soil.

Pruning is seldom necessary except to control shoots that extend above the normally mounded shape. Since plants bloom on the previous year's growth, any desired pruning should be done after flowering. Pinch new growth in the spring to increase branching and flower display the following year.

The cultivar 'Vittatum' has white flowers, striped with lilac-purple.

Propagation is by cuttings.

Problems include iron deficiencies from too high a pH, spider mites, mealy bugs, and thrips.

Pests and Diseases

Bacterial blight can be a problem for Formosa Azalea.

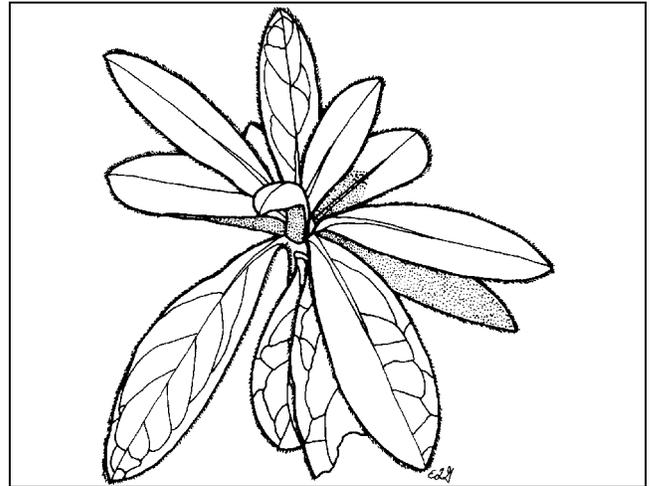


Figure 3. Foliage of Formosa Azalea