



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Rhododendron obtusum*¹

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Introduction

Profuse blooms in shades of white, pink, red, or salmon, so plentiful as to completely hide the attractive foliage, make Kurume Azalea a favorite landscape shrub, blooming in fall, winter and/or early spring (Fig. 1). This dwarf evergreen Azalea has small, one-inch, hairy leaves and will slowly reach a height of three to four feet, providing a more compact form than its larger, mounding cousins. Foliage often droops to the ground, blending nicely with a low-growing ground cover such as Dwarf Jasmine or Mondo Grass. Planted in groups of three or more three to four feet apart, Kurume Azalea makes a nice accent during flowering. In some years, flowers appear in late fall in Florida, and can give five months of bloom. In other more northern areas, flowering occurs in May.

General Information

Scientific name: *Rhododendron obtusum*

Pronunciation: roe-duh-DEN-drun ob-TOO-sum

Common name(s): Kurume Azalea

Family: *Ericaceae*

Plant type: shrub

USDA hardiness zones: 7 through 10A (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: year round

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; container or above-ground planter; attracts butterflies; cut flowers; accent; foundation

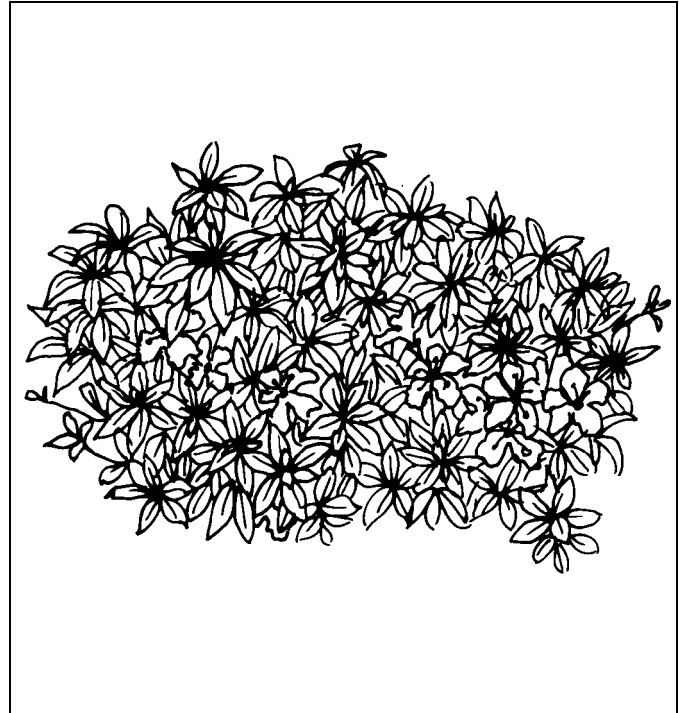


Figure 1. Kurume Azalea.

Availability: generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

Description

Height: 3 to 8 feet

Spread: 4 to 6 feet

Plant habit: round

Plant density: dense

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Growth rate: slow

Texture: fine

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire

Leaf shape: elliptic (oval)

Leaf venation: pinnate

Leaf type and persistence: evergreen

Leaf blade length: less than 2 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; fall 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: plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more

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 shade, protected from harsh winds, is an ideal location for Kurume Azaleas. Plants grow fine with several hours of direct sun, but grow best in filtered shade from tall trees. Plants are very sensitive to drought and the soil must be freely draining. 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 in late spring. Pinch emerging shoots in late spring when they are three to four inches long to increase the number of flowers for next year. One or two fertilizations each year will promote good growth and keep leaves dark green.

A few of the available cultivars include: 'Appleblossom', single flowers pink with white throat; 'Christmas Cheer' - red hose-in-hose flowers on dwarf plants; 'Coral Bells', single pink flowers, low spreading growth, not tolerant of freezing; 'Delaware Valley White', single white flowers, spreading growth, very cold hardy; 'Duc de Rohan', medium salmon flowers; 'Fashion' has salmon colored flowers and blooms from November through March in Florida; 'Hexe', violet red flowers, low, spreading growth; 'Hinode-giri', vivid red single flowers, very cold hardy; 'Redwing', deep red flowers; 'Snow' - pure white hose-in-hose flowers, vigorous grower reaching four to seven feet tall.

Propagation is by cuttings.

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

Pests and Diseases

Bacterial blight may be a problem for Kurume Azaleas.