

Growing hints for acid-loving plants

Position:	Filtered shade is preferable, with summer sun off the plants by mid-morning (i.e. 10am). Protection from summer's hot westerly winds is vital. Too much shade will make plants leggy with few flowers. An easterly to south-easterly position is ideal.
Watering:	Good drainage is vital, they will not tolerate wet feet. Being shallow rooted, if not well mulched they will dry out quickly in summer. They may suffer sunburn damage to leaves if the root zone dries out.
Mulching:	Mulch with pine needles, composted leaves or Canberra Organic Mulch to a depth of 75mm, keeping the mulch back from stems. Water the ground well before mulching.
Soil:	A light crumbly soil with plenty of organic matter added as in the note above worked into the soil. As they are acid-loving plants, no lime must come near the root zone. Treat heavy clay with Multicrop Liquid 'Ground Breaker' to increase water penetration.
Feeding:	These plants usually find nutrient in the rotted organic matter. At planting time water in with Multicrop Seaweed Plant Nutrient and for the first few months to promote new roots and each spring and autumn. When flower buds start developing feed with Neutrog Seamungus , an organic fertiliser of pelletised seaweed and chook poo (from free-range hens). Multicrop EcoFish is also recommended as a natural organic liquid fertiliser.
Pruning:	Regular pruning is not necessary unless a certain shape is desired or the plants are espaliered on a fence or frame. A light trim after flowering (removing no more than one third) will stimulate new growth and subsequently more flowers. Dead-head all plants immediately after flowering or they will go to seed at the expense of next season's flowers.
Growing in containers:	All these plants, with the exception of some native plants, are suited for growing in containers. Chose a pot that is wider than higher with plenty of drainage holes. Preferably, one that does not taper in at the top [these make it impossible to remove the plant for repotting]. Place a piece of terracotta over the holes in the base of the pot and use premium grade potting mix. Do not use saucers under the container, as these inhibit drainage and can cause root rot, a real plant killer. If you must use a saucer, fill it with pebbles and place the container on top of the pebbles. Always raise the container up off of the ground to assist in good drainage. The potting mix must never dry out and in the summer this may mean daily watering. If plants are under eaves they may not get rain even if it is heavy, so check them regularly.
Final helpful hints:	If the leaves are turning yellow between the veins give a tonic. This usually indicates lack of magnesium and can be corrected with Iron Chelates or Epsom Salts (dissolve a heaped tablespoon to a 9-litre watering can of water) and thoroughly soak the root zone. Plants in pots may require this tonic several times a year. Always make sure that the potting mix in containers is moist or the ground is moist before applying fertilisers.

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