



Mountain-Laurel *Kalmia latifolia*

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Summary:

Foliage: Dark green elliptic leaves; evergreen

Height: About 12 feet

Spread: About 8 feet

Shape: In youth, an upright oval; with age, it assumes a gnarly, picturesque form

Main features: In flower, this broad-leaved slow-growing evergreen plant is no-less-than spectacular; in the right setting, the entire plant is covered in whitish-pink or pinkish white flowers. Individual flowers are particularly attractive; they are about three-fourths of an inch in diameter and concave with a most delicate appearance. Swollen flower buds, just before opening, are whitish-pink or pinkish-white ribbed domes that almost rival the beauty of the open flowers. The culture of this plant is relatively exacting. Plants require a well-drained moist acid soil with ample organic matter. Plants do best if grown in part shade. Mountain-laurel has a well-deserved reputation of being difficult to establish in a garden/landscape setting. Amending the planting hole soil (backfill) with organic matter increases transplant success. Another recommendation to increase transplant success is to dig a hole only half as deep as the soil ball and then place the plant into the hole and cover the protruding root ball with a highly organic soil. If you have clay soil, then you might consider constructing a raised bed to grow this species. There are many cultivars that vary in flower color, plant size, and resistance to leaf spotting diseases (see Additional Information section).

Plant Needs:

Zone: 4 to 9

Light: Best growth/appearance in part shade but will tolerate full sun to full shade

Moisture: Moist to average; will tolerate some drought when established

Soil type: Absolute requirement for well-drained soil

pH: Acid

Functions:

Mountain-laurel is certainly worthy of specimen status, in mass, in a border, and planted randomly under tree canopy for a natural look.

Care:

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Additional Information:

There are numerous cultivars (over 80) in the trade that primarily vary in bud and flower color. Bud colors include light to dark pink, and red: flower colors include white, light and dark pink, and bi-color. There are also compact dwarf forms as well as cultivars that are resistant to leaf spot diseases. Since flower color choice is a matter of personal preference, consult web sites for cultivar pictures. If you like dark red-pink, 'Sarah' is an exceptionally beautiful cultivar that has dark red-pink buds and flowers.

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