

## Growing Rhododendrons from Seed

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden      2525 S 336th St      Federal Way, WA 98003  
PO Box 3798      Federal Way, WA 98063      253-838-4646 office

These instructions have been prepared to assist you in the successful propagation of rhododendron seed, and to encourage maximum growth of your seedlings. Growing rhododendrons from seed is a slow process, taking about two years before a plant is large enough to be planted outside. However, with a little patience, there are few gardening pleasures greater than seeing your seedlings bloom for the first time.

### Material

New or very clean 4-inch pots

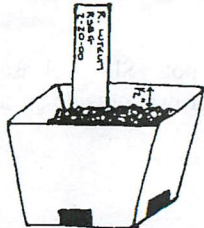
Plastic pot labels

Plastic flat with no holes

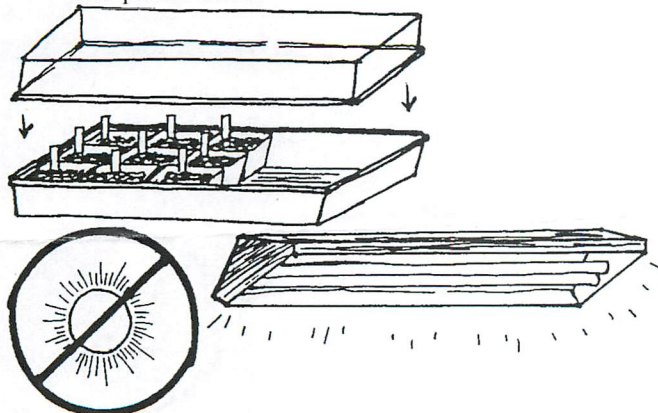
Clear plastic dome

Sterile seedling soil mix (coconut fiber or 50% peat moss, 50% perlite mix)

1. Place seed in the refrigerator in an airtight container until you are ready to sow. Rhododendron seed is short lived at warm temperatures, often dying within a few months. Refrigerated seed will keep for at least one year and often much longer.
2. Moisten the soil mix thoroughly. Many mixes need to be soaked in a bucket of water for 30 - 45 minutes to wet throughout. Mix should be moist but not soggy.



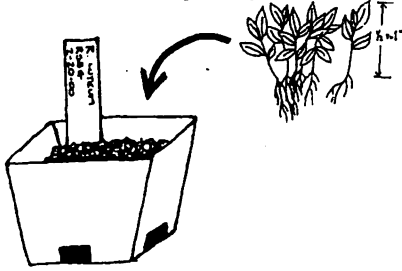
3. Fill 4-inch pots with soil mix, leaving about 1/2 inch of space at the top. Do not firm the mix down in the pots. It needs to be light and airy for success.
4. Make labels for the seed you are sowing. A soft lead pencil works the best and lasts the longest on plastic pot labels. Mark each label with the following: Name of Plant & where the seed came from, lot no. etc.
5. To sow seeds, work in an area without drafts. Rhododendron seeds are very small and light and can easily be blown away. Sow seeds thinly on the surface of the soil. It is often a good idea to use no more than 1/2 of the seed. Save the rest in case you need to re sow later. Label and place the pot in a clean flat and cover with a clear plastic dome.



Keep the flat in a warm spot, 70-75° is ideal, with bright light. A fluorescent light fixture hung about 6 inches above the dome lid works best. Do not place where direct sun will shine on the flat.

7. Seedlings will start appearing in 2-3 weeks. Some may take as long as 6-8 weeks to start germinating. If 8 weeks have passed, and the seed has not germinated, sow the remaining seed. It is important that the soil stays moist. Water with a 20-20-20 fertilizer at 1/2 the recommended strength every 2 weeks. You can use a misting bottle to gently spray the seedlings with fertilizer water. If you notice mold forming, it can be removed with tweezers and an appropriate fungicide can be used. If you cannot tend your seedlings for a couple of weeks, 1/2 inch of water can be placed in the flat. The water will wick up the drainage holes and keep things moist while you are away.

8. Keep the seedlings under the plastic dome cover until they are about 1/2 to 1 inch tall. Keep the soil moist. Once the seedlings reach 1/2 to 1 inch tall they are ready to be transplanted. Fill a 4-inch pot with a good well-drained potting soil.



Potting Soil: 2 parts fine fir or pine bark 1 part peat moss  
1 part perlite or pumice

Carefully separate the seedlings and lightly firm each (or several - which will have to be thinned as the plants grow) into a 4 inch pot. Keep under the lights and keep them moist.

9. Once the plants reach about 2-3 inches tall they can be moved outside into a bright shady location if there is no chance of frost. Seedlings this size will need cover and protection for the first winter.
10. When the plants are about 5-6 inches tall, the seedlings can be transplanted into 6-inch pots. Slow-release fertilizer or organic fertilizer can be mixed with the soil at this time. This size can be grown outside in a protected location year round. During winter protect the pots from severe freezing.



11. After the plants have filled the 6-inch pots, they are large enough to be planted into the ground. It may be best to create a small nursery bed to grow the rhododendrons on for 2 to 3 years before transplanting into the landscape. Most species will reach a blooming size in 7 to 10 years, but some, particularly large leaf types, may not reach blooming size for 15 to 20 years. Fortunately, most of these species have fantastic foliage to enjoy until that time.

12. Enjoy your rhododendrons!

