
Seedlings - Freddie's Method

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When it comes to raising seedlings there are as many methods as there are growers raising them. Fred has been growing azalea (and rhododendron) seedlings for over 20 years and has changed, added to and experimented until he now has a method he finds the most successful. His small greenhouse produces approximately 30,000 that he transplants and moves on to completion. He does not end up with anywhere near 30,000 plants but does not weed out or eliminate any himself. By exposing them to the elements, nature takes care of sorting them out.

The benches in his 24' x 8' greenhouse are filled 2" deep with pumice from Crater Lake¹. Heat cables are placed on top of the pumice and set for 65 degrees to 72 degrees F. The cedar flats² are filled with a mixture of 2/3 bark and 1/3 pumice that has been sifted through a 1/4" screen³. Flats are then set on top of the cables and contents are wet down well. The seed is then sprinkled on top of the screened medium.

In about 12 days the seeds should begin to sprout. At about 18 to 20 days he sprays once a week with a weak solution of 20-20-20. The timer for watering is set for one minute a week from December through February. If humidity is high, the water is turned off completely.

When the plants have three or four leaves, he transplants them into cedar flats filled as above with 2/3 bark and 1/3 pumice. A flat holds 60 to 80 plants.

Plants are left in greenhouse for approximately three months, then sprinkled with 14-14-14 and moved into the lath house for the winter. All seedlings are raised outside in the field to check for hardiness. Raising in hoop houses or greenhouses is not a true test for hardiness.

Plants in the greenhouse start with one minute of mist a week, then as summer comes on it is increased accordingly. Plants in the lath house start with one minute a day in May; this is increased to four minutes or more when it is 80 degrees F. and over.

Transplanting into the field is done in the spring or early fall. Growth will occur whenever it is over 32 degrees F. Roots, buds and plants grow all winter. Fred uses 0-25-25 in February and April and then 16-16-16 (which includes all micro ingredients) in the amount of one tablespoon to each gallon pot, one cup for four-foot or bigger plants. After blooming he applies 16-16-16 again. Since he uses bark and sawdust he needs to use more nitrogen before planting. When he plants a section he mixes in 21-0-0, Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate) and iron. He then spreads 16-16-16 over the section prior to planting. After the plants are in the ground he sprays with 20-20-20 Peters Solution (one tablespoon per gallon of water). Spray onto the plants until it drips off the leaves. He does this every 20 days. After the plants are in the field about a year they start to bud.

You may have noticed throughout these instructions on how Fred grows from seed that he tries to get them out of greenhouses and hoop houses as soon as they are about three months old. If they do not survive then he feels they are not hardy enough to propagate. Fred is also very particular about preparing his

seed. He screens them very carefully and keeps them at the freezing point until he is ready to use them.

References

1. Pumice from Crater Lake is clean, a good size, available locally and worth the \$30.00 per yard cost.
2. Flats made with cedar hold moisture better than plastic.
3. After sifting Fred fills half of the flat with the large pieces of bark he sifts out and then fills the top half with the sifted portion. The large bark pieces retain the water and encourage root growth. □