

I understand from Neiel Drain of the Canterbury Horticultural Society that you visited Christchurch and were keen to obtain a packet of this seed.

Yours Sincerely,
Pete J. Cadigan
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Enclosed with the packet of seed was a sheet of growing instructions headed "THE ABSOLUTELY UP-TO-DATE METHOD OF GROWING RHODODENDRON AND AZALEAS FROM SEED (in case you failed last year reread the directions.)" I thought, this seems very familiar, and it was: it was signed "Good luck! George Ring and friends".

George Ring, a long-time member of the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, has distributed his and friends instructions to Washington, D.C. area members of the ARS, and I have followed them with considerable success for several years. It is a great credit to their expertise that their instructions have been adopted half-way around the world and undoubtedly many places in between.

Reference

1. Galle, Fred C. *Azaleas*. 1985. Timber Press, Portland, OR. □

The ABSOLUTELY UP-TO-DATE METHOD of Growing Rhododendrons and Azaleas From Seed

(In case you failed last year; reread the directions.)

Using fluorescent lights, rhododendron and azalea seed planted from November to February will produce plants large enough to set outside in late spring or early summer. Soak a mixture of 75% sphagnum peat and 25% sand or perlite; squeeze out excess water. (Peat varies greatly even within one brand. A fairly fresh sphagnum is desirable). Place mixture in wooden or plastic box about five inches deep with good bottom drainage. Firm to level and sow seeds on surface. Dust with Captan or benlate, or spray mist with captan or benlate solution. Do not cover seeds with medium. Place plastic or glass over flat. At 70 degrees F germination will usually begin in two weeks or less, but some seed may take as long as two months.

Now place flat 11 inches from fluorescent lights. One four-foot fixture with two tubes provides space for three large flats. This allows 15 or more watts of fluorescent light per square foot. Leave light on 16 to 24 hours per day.

Transplant seedlings when large enough to handle—at the two-leaf or four-leaf stage. Space one inch or more apart, using same medium as above or a medium of 1/3 peat, 1/3 perlite, 1/3 compost. Water lightly with very dilute solution of fertilizer. Nutro, Peters 15-45-5, or fish emulsion will produce rapid growth. Cover seedlings with glass or plastic for a few days until seedlings are stable. If using compost, soil borne fungus may appear; if so, dust with captan and admit more air. Transplanted seedlings should be watered regularly with very dilute fertilizer solution. Daily watering is necessary if growing in low humidity of heated house. Temperature under lights may vary from 65 to 80 degrees F; 72-76 degrees F is optimum, with five degree drop at night. Keep medium damp at all times but NOT soaking wet. **Almost all seed growing problems can be traced to keeping them too wet.**

If your seedlings are really lusty you may want to thin and transplant a second time indoors. Seedlings should be moved outside from late April (after the last spring frost) to July. They must harden off before the onset of winter. Protect them from wind and sun in cold frame or lath house during the first summer and winter. The weaklings will be thinned out by the coming spring, and the sturdy survivors will be ready to go into nursery beds.

Seed sources: your own crosses or collecting; National ARS Seed Exchange in March offers rare and unusual hybrid and species seed from U.S. and abroad; Potomac Valley Seed Exchange in January offers seed in limited quantity donated by Chapter members; H. L. Larson, 3656 Bridgeport, Washington 98486; F. W. Schumacher, Sandwich, MA 02563.

Good luck!

George W. Ring and friends
University of Canterbury—Grounds Department