

Tale from the Garden!

Beloved for their delightfully bright and long-lasting flowers, azalea shrubs make a dazzling statement in the spring garden. But there are also varieties that flower in early summer and early fall. You just need to have a little wander along the River Leven to behold some spectacular clusters of these showy blooms just beginning to blaze into colour. This lovely flower comes in a variety of shades, including pink, purple, white, and yellow. So, with a bit of planning, and a large enough garden, you can enjoy these delicious flowers for up to eight months!

The Azalea is a flowering shrub under the Rhododendron family. As such, this beautiful blossom is voluminous but is still a single stemmed flower. The name 'azalea' originated in Greece and means 'dry', a name given to it likely because of its quick-draining habit.



Initially, azalea was cultivated in Japan and China, and it was exported to Europe and North America, where it became extremely popular. For the home gardener, what's important to remember is that they fall into two types: deciduous and evergreen. Most evergreen varieties are native to Japan, with a few species each from China, Korea, and Taiwan. The deciduous species are native to eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, and North America. The azalea is also a highly popular plant for bonsai trees, as its beautiful flowers covering the little tree look stunning, while the leaves are smaller and perfectly suited for bonsai. Ancient artists and poets of both China and Japan have long celebrated the beauty of azalea flowers.



There are several stories about the origin of azalea. According to a Chinese folktale, an azalea appears when a cuckoo sings. As the story goes, there was a selfish king who ruled his land terribly, making his people angry. One day, a warrior assassinated the evil ruler, but before the king died, he transformed into a cuckoo. The cuckoo sang in an angry and resentful way until blood came out of his bill. According to the folktale, the blood of the cuckoo allowed the azalea to bloom vibrantly. At first, this beautiful flower was white, but the blood turns it into pink, and then red.

In another Chinese legend, an emperor who was famous for his numerous victories in war pined in loneliness, despite all his glory. One day, he was given some azaleas and was enchanted by their beauty. Afterwards, he planted this flowering shrub in his garden. Immediately, he found the one he had been longing for. From that moment, azalea was associated with luck, love, passion, and sudden happiness.

Symbolism and Meaning of Azalea

Because azalea is a widely known flower, it has numerous meanings that vary depending on the culture.

Temperance – In Victorian times, the azalea is a symbol of temperance. The flower is usually given to a person who is simple, modest, and kind.

Taking Care of a Person – In some cultures, azalea means taking care of yourself and the people around you. For this reason, the flower is an excellent get-well gift to tell the recipient that you want them to feel better. Additionally, it can also be given to someone you sincerely care about.

Wealth and Elegance – As a symbol of wealth and elegance, the azalea is often used as décor to make homes look more appealing. Aside from that, this beautiful blossom can also be given to an elegant person who you respect and love.

Abundance – Azalea symbolizes abundance and makes an ideal gift for a person who wants to be successful. By giving this flower, you are telling the recipient you hope that good things may come their way.

Passion – As a symbol of passion, azalea can express your strong emotions. As such, the flower is a great present for someone you love because it can express your desire to be with that person.

Homesickness – In China and Japan, the azalea is associated with the feeling of being homesick. Usually, the gorgeous blossom is given to parents or family members to tell them that you miss them and want to see them soon.

Fragile Love – Although beautiful, azalea easily falls off from its stem, even with a slight touch. For this reason, the flower is used to represent a fragile love that can still blossom and turn into a long-lasting relationship.

Death Threat – Azalea is poisonous. Because of this reason, some cultures use this flower to send a death threat. Usually, a bouquet of this flower is placed in a black vase to indicate the threat.

Aside from those interpretations, azaleas also have other meanings based on their colour.

White – White azalea symbolizes purity and is used in wedding receptions and other ceremonies. Aside from that, the flower can also be used as a symbol of restraint and civility.

Dark Pink – Dark pink azalea is a symbol of passion, love, and romance. As such, it can be an excellent gift for your special someone to tell that you love and care for them.

Red – Like the dark pink varieties, red azalea represents romance and passion, and is a great present for someone you truly love.

Purple – Purple azalea is a symbol of nobility and royalty. Usually, it is given to someone who has made an impact on your life as a way to express your gratitude.

Yellow – Aside from friendship, yellow azalea also symbolizes happiness and positive energy. For this reason, this lovely blossom is often given to a friend.

Uses of Azalea throughout History

As mentioned, the azalea is poisonous, so it doesn't have medicinal or gastronomical uses. Even so, people from ancient times have used this flower for various purposes, including the following:

In Gardens – Because of its beauty and vibrant colours, azalea is planted to create beautiful flower beds.

In Arts and Literature – In China, the azalea is known as 'sixiang shu', which means 'thinking of home' bush, referring to the role of the flower as a symbol of homesickness and home. The flower was often portrayed in poems written by Du Fu, a Chinese poet and politician of the Tang dynasty. Along with his elder contemporary and friend Li Bai, he is frequently called the greatest of the Chinese poets.

Azalea in Use Today

Today, a potted plant or bouquet of azaleas are given to express heartfelt emotions. The flower is also used as decor for various events, including weddings. Aside from those uses, the azalea is also the national flower in Nepal. Additionally, São Paulo, in Brazil, uses this flower as one of their symbols.

When to Give Azalea

Azalea has many positive meanings which make it an excellent flower to present to your loved ones.

Valentine's Day – As a symbol of romance, love, and passion, the red azalea is a great alternative to roses. When given to your special someone, the flower will express your love and affection.

Get Well Gift – Azalea means taking care of a person, and the yellow variety can be given to someone who is feeling unwell. The flower will not only brighten the person's day. It can also tell the recipient that you want them to get well soon.

Housewarmings – Yellow azalea is a symbol of happiness and positive energy. When given as a housewarming present, you're letting the recipient know that you wish them joy and happiness. Aside from that, this flower will not only bring positive energy to the home. It can also make any room look elegant.

Have you ever had that feeling of home-sickness? Or of missing family & yearning to see them again? I'm sure during the past year many of us will have had moments like that.

Having a Church family is unlike anything else & going to church is one of the things I've missed most during lockdown. Ever since the UK government imposed a coronavirus lockdown, many of us have been surprised to discover that it's the little things – not the extravagant or the particularly earth-shattering – that we've missed the most. Since Easter, we've been able to return back to church for the first time in months. I did it because I've been wanting to build up a bit of discipline on my Sunday mornings & thought that the intentional rigour of getting myself to physical church service would make for a great start. I won't lie – there was certainly a lot of inertia. After I put my name down, I began to have second thoughts - I wouldn't be able to watch the livestream

whenever I wanted or pause the preacher at my convenience! Instead, it meant things like getting myself there in the car, giving a bunch of personal details for the church's register & observing the stringent social distancing practices on-site. On the flip side, however, I also found myself looking forward to the service all week. I was going back to church!

Stepping into the sanctuary, it all felt so ... familiar. It was almost like coming home after being away at college! I recognised most of it; only the furniture had been shifted around a little!

But having been accustomed for so long to softly singing at Youtube recordings, I was unprepared for what transpired during worship. As we stood together, I caught a real glimpse of Paul's words in Ephesians 5 v19 'Speak to one another with psalms, hymns & spiritual songs. Sing & make music in your heart to the Lord.' We were speaking to one another (be it behind masks & in our heads) with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. We were singing and making music from our hearts to the Lord. We could hear & take the words that were spoken into our inner thoughts. And what did I learn that weekend?

When everyone in the room, wants to be in that room, it's a different room.

Because that week, everyone who was there had put aside their comfort and convenience and made the choice to go the house of the Lord. It was as close to being a pilgrim as I've ever come. I believe that 'intentionality' was why that time of worship was just so special. As we drew near to God, He was faithful to His word and drew near to us. Even though we were all standing so far apart from each other, I had never felt so close and united to my church and congregation before. That 'home-coming' & being able to physically worship with my church family again was the most memorable part of the service.

In Conclusion, the azalea is a reminder of 'thinking of home' & celebrating being 'back home'.

All in all, the azalea is a beautiful blossom with positive meanings. Its beautiful hues add a splash of colour in any garden and is a welcome addition in any floral decoration.