

## **Satsuki Azalea (Rhododendron Indicum) Bonsai Care**

### **About The Satsuki Azalea**

Satsuki azaleas are a variety of rhododendron, with tiny deep green leaves and prolific blooms. They are an iconic species of bonsai and are strong, resilient growers.

### **Placement**

Over the spring and fall, Satsuki azalea need full sun to create strong flower buds with tight internodes and to build up the kind of resources that continue to perpetuate the species' iconic floral display.

As a bonsai, Satsuki azalea has some of the greatest capacity to grow in partial, or even full shade in some varieties and cultivars. The larger the leaf and overall size of the Satsuki azalea bonsai, the more heat they can tolerate.

### **Watering**

Satsukis love water. The fine root system that takes in moisture exists primarily in the upper 30% of the containerized environment where water-conductive roots exist.

Satsuki azaleas benefit from periodic shallow waterings where the dry surface is hydrated but the tree is not thoroughly saturated and soaked in the watering.

Every other watering, thoroughly saturate a Satsuki azalea until water comes out of the drainage holes in the bottom. In between these waterings, only moisten the surface of the plant to hydrate the fine roots without saturating the shin (are right below the trunk in the rootball) or middle-to-bottom portion of the container to avoid water-related issues.

### **Fertilizing**

Satsukis are a enjoy acidic environments, so an acidifier and pelletized fertilizer are recommended. Add a couple of pellets every month during the growing season. Avoid fertilizing during winter months.

### **Pruning & Trimming**

Satsuki azalea bonsai respond with a different kind of growth depending on when you prune them in the spring. Pruning is necessary to maintain the health of the tree. Lack of pruning will result in more woody twigging that conducts very little water and causes the branches to become more leggy and weak.

- Pruning in the early spring before the plant begins to grow will result in a few strong shoots emerging from the cut site.

- Pruning in the middle of spring right as the buds around the leaf mass begin to show their soft fleshy green new growth will result in a larger number of smaller, finer twigs around that cut site.

- Pruning later into spring when the azalea has a fully-produced leaf mass will result in an abundance of tiny weak shoots around that cut site.

If you have a fully refined Satsuki azalea and you want it to flower within the year, wait to prune until the tree begins to flower and remove the flower buds as you thin down the branches to a designed length.

### **Repotting**

Satsuki azaleas are typically cultivated in a specialty soil called Kanuma, which is an incredibly soft, acidic, volcanic soil. This soil accommodates the fine, soft, steel wall-like root system that Satsuki azaleas utilize for their water conductivity and nutrient uptake.

Here's a breakdown of the repotting process:

1. Kanuma soil needs to be delicately handled to avoid breaking it down, as this can cause areas where oxygen cannot penetrate, resulting in root rot. During the repotting process, clean off the compacted surface of the Kanuma and focus on inspecting the shin to make sure it is in good health. Remove any black pockets inside the root system that may indicate root rot.

2. Wash the trunk with a very soft bristle brush to get rid of algae and debris and avoid transferring debris to the freshly repotted container.

The best time to replace Kanuma is when you have a three millimeter to six millimeter particle size.

### **Diseases, Insects & Other Pests**

Satsuki azaleas suffer from a variety of pests such as leaf miners and spider mites. Aphids feeding on its soft, fleshy growth is an inevitable issue.

Flower rot can be catastrophic to the floral display of your Satsuki azalea. Keeping the foliage and flowers dry by sheltering the tree when it is in flower is a great way to prevent this rot from occurring.

Satsuki azaleas are very sensitive to the application of chemicals, so if you plan on using insecticide to reconcile insect issues, make sure the chemicals in it are registered for the use on plants in the Rhododendron family.

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