

## ***Azaleas Could Be Suffering***

During the holidays one of the last things we take notice of are the plants in our yard. As people started taking down lights and removing decorations from outside, I had numerous calls about azaleas that were turning yellow and losing leaves. I reviewed many samples that were brought in and have come to several conclusions.

First of all, the extended drought in the Fall has taken its toll in several ways and especially on azaleas. They are fairly shallow rooted plants; dry weather will affect them more severely. The lack of moisture available to the plant keeps the plant from having the ability to pull extra nutrients out of the ground. Iron is one of the main elements that falls short due to the dry conditions. Yellow leaves start at the bottom of the leaves and progress upwards towards the top of the plant. Many of these leaves will turn bright yellow and hang on rather than dropping off. This problem will occur more in plants that have not been fertilized on a regular basis. I believe this causes most of the problems we see. The first step to help correct this situation is to add a good slow release evergreen food such as Holly Tone as well as a supplement of Iron from a product such as Ironite. This is something I would recommend that you apply as soon as possible so they can be taken up during the Winter and color can return to the plant by Spring. There is no problem applying these even during the cold weather.

The second problem that I am seeing on azaleas, as well as other evergreens, is some over wintering insects that have continued to work due to the mild weather we have been experiencing. I highly recommend a good spraying of a horticultural oil spray under the leaves as much as possible to help check this problem. This is a very safe and inexpensive application that can save many problems in the early Spring. Mother Nature has given us much needed water relief in recent days that will continue to help with the overall drought situation. Take advantage of any of these milder days to get out in the yard and address some of these issues, and your plants will reward you in the Spring. Enjoy the garden!

*Mark*