

Mountain Laurel

Kalmia latifolia



We all enjoy the June 1st trip to the mountains to see the Mountain Laurel! While we are there lets take notes on how it grows so we can grow some at home also.

Brrr.... I really should have remembered my sweater. The air is chilly up here even though the sun is shining brightly. I know another place at a lower elevation where laurel grows in deep shade as well.

Shh! Listen! I hear running water! The bank is steep here but there is moss and moist soil under the surface leaves. The laurel is not growing in a bog or desert; but where there is even moisture and good drainage.

Mmm, sniff, sniff. Don't you just love the smell of woods soil? It is mostly dead leaves and moss and under that is sandy loam. There is no heavy clay here. I expect the soil is acidic like most of our mountain soils.

What are the lessons we learned? How can I mimic this at home in the valley?

- A cool shady area, good moisture, good drainage, and organic acidic soil seem to sum up the needs.
- The North or East side of the house or near an evergreen tree would provide shade. We can add peat moss for organic matter and it will be acidic as well. Sand would be good if the soil is heavy. Will water drain from the planting hole? Perhaps a soil test would be good if we aren't sure if the soil is acid or alkaline. We can add sulfur if we need to make it more acid.
- Mulch... There are a variety of choices; pine bark, hardwood, leaves, pine needles. Any of them would be good but we must remember to mulch to help keep the moisture even and the roots cool.
- Water we will need to make sure that it gets at least an inch a week if it doesn't rain especially if it is a dry area... Perhaps if it is often damp we won't need to once it is established.

Now to choose the variety... This may be the hard part. There are tall and dwarf varieties, and colors from red to white and much in between. The choice is yours! HAPPY GROWING!!!