

## GARDENIAS

Gardenias have been grown by the Chinese for over a thousand years. They were named after the Scottish naturalist Alexander Garden (1730 – 1791). Gardenias are not the easiest shrubs to grow, but the exquisite white, fragrant flowers make up for the extra attention gardenias require.

Gardenia (*Gardenia jasminoides*) is also known as Cape Jasmine and is an evergreen shrub that typically grows to a height of 3 to 8 feet, depending upon the cultivar. Spread is usually about the same as the height. The foliage of well-fed shrubs is glossy, dark-green, 2 to 4 inches long and half as wide. Depending on the cultivar, the flowers can be either single or double and from 2 to 4 inches in diameter. They are waxy, white, and very fragrant.

Gardenias are primarily grown for their fragrant flowers and handsome foliage. They should be planted where people will notice the fragrance. The flowers open over a long period of time, from May through June, and sporadically throughout the summer. Gardenias are considered deer resistant.

Gardenias require considerable maintenance. Fall is the best time for planting. They are best planted in light to partial shade; preferably with morning sun and afternoon shade. Gardenias resent root disturbance. Smaller cultivars will also grow well in containers and placed where their fragrance can be enjoyed.

Gardenias prefer acid (with a pH of less than 6.0), moist, well-drained soils. Add organic matter, such as compost or ground composted pine bark or pine straw to the planting bed and till into the soil before planting. Mulch plants with a 2 to 3-inch deep layer of pine straw, compost or ground bark.

Fertilize gardenias lightly in the spring once frost has passed with a well-balanced, extended-release, acid-forming, azalea fertilizer. Fertilize the shrubs again 6 weeks later to encourage extra flowers or faster growth of young shrubs. By well-balanced, this means to look for nutrients in the ratio of 2-1-1.

Complete, acid-forming organic fertilizers are also excellent choices for use on gardenias, for spring and early summer fertilization. They are typically not as nutrient rich, and because of both the low nitrogen content and their inability to burn the roots, they can be mixed lightly into the soil in the fall at planting to enhance root growth.

Do not fertilize gardenias in the fall. Doing so will stimulate tender growth, which may be killed if the temperature in winter drops below 15 degrees. Gardenias are cold-sensitive and during severe winters can be killed to the ground. They often regenerate

in the fall, however.

Products containing iron may be applied during the growing season, if needed to correct the yellowed new foliage caused by an iron deficiency. This may occur if gardenias are limed or are planted near a new concrete foundation.

Clemson University Extension, *Gardenia*

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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