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How to Grow Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*)

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Learn How to Plant, Grow, and Care for Mountain Laurel Shrubs

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

Last Updated: February 6, 2025



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TRY NOW

Discover mountain laurel, a beautiful
native shrub with glossy evergreen

leaves and exquisite flowers in pretty pinks and whites. Unlike many woody plants, it blooms in shaded landscapes! Beloved by pollinators, this shrub is also deer-resistant. Learn all about growing mountain laurel.

About Mountain Laurel

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Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) is native to the Eastern United States from New England south to Florida and west to Indiana. It's a flowering shrub that belongs to the Ericaceae (blueberry) family and is also known as spoonwood because the wood was traditionally made into utensils.

In the wild, mountain laurel can grow into a small tree, but it rarely reaches over 10 feet tall in the home garden, and breeders have developed smaller versions. Most cultivars are cold hardy in USDA zones 5 to 9; some are rated for zone 4.

There are so many excellent reasons to include mountain laurel in your landscape.

1. Unlike most flowering shrubs, it will grow in partial shade and dappled sun.
2. It's perfect for massed plantings along wood edges, shrubbery borders, and a living privacy hedge.
3. The glossy leaves are evergreen (similar to rhodys), so they stay green year-round.
4. Its pretty 5-sided cupped flowers bloom for several weeks—from late spring through early summer.
5. It's a native plant, so it's tough and requires little maintenance.
6. Native bees, butterflies, and pollinators love mountain laurel; it can release pollen when triggered by pollinator movement!
7. It's seldom bothered by deer.

Note: All parts of the plant are poisonous to humans and pets, so don't

eat it!



Wow! Mountain laurel alongside the Blue Ridge Parkway near Asheville, North Carolina. Credit: Cvandyke

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PLANTING

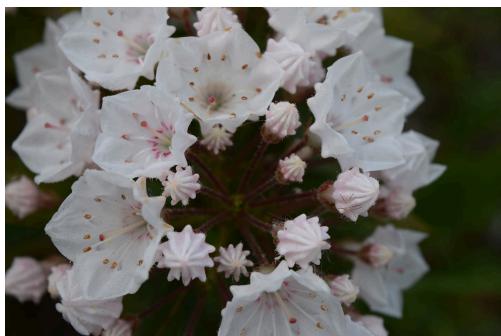
Before planting, choose a growing location that suits Mountain Laurel.

Depending on the cultivar, the shrub can grow between 4 and 15 feet tall and spread 4 to 8 feet wide.

- **Light:** Partial shade or dappled light. Morning sun and afternoon shade are perfect. Mountain laurels will survive in full shade, but growth will be slow and blooming poor.
- **Soil Requirements:** Moist soil. They tolerate many soil types but don't do well in heavy clay and prefer an acidic pH of 5-5.5.

When to Plant Mountain Laurels

Plant mountain laurels in late spring once the danger of frosts has passed. If planting in autumn, try to plant the shrub at least 4 to 6 weeks before the first frost to allow sufficient time for new roots to establish.



Pretty 5-sided cups with unique marketings. Credit: zwaan6

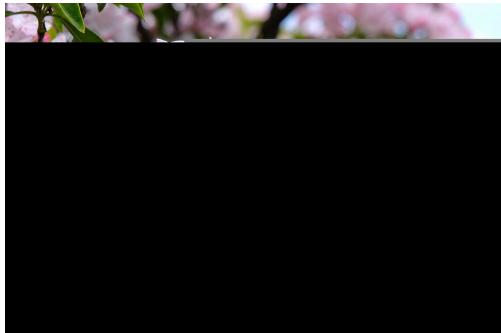
How to Plant Mountain Laurels

Mountain laurels are often purchased in one to three-gallon containers, even online. They're easy to plant and easy to care for.

- Remove all sod from an area twice as large as the hole you will dig.
- Make a bowl-shaped hole as deep as the root ball and twice as wide, and loosen the sides and bottom of the hole. Compacted soil on the bottom makes it difficult for roots to penetrate and for water to drain.
- Remove the mountain laurel from its container and prune any circling or girdling roots. If the shrub is rootbound, score the root ball to stimulate new growth in outward directions.

- Test fit the mountain laurel in the hole, checking for depth and ensuring no roots are bent over or circling the hole. The top of the root ball should be at ground level.
Enlarge the hole if necessary.
- Begin backfilling the hole with the native soil you removed, ensuring the shrub is vertical while filling—it's easy to plant them crooked. Step back and check.
- When the hole is halfway refilled, tamp the soil firmly around the roots to remove air pockets, then give it a good drink of water (but don't flood the hole). Keep filling the soil around the roots and firming it with your hands, watering again when complete.
- Spread mulch around the shrub, about 3 to 4 inches thick. Spread it evenly in a circle extending two feet from the base. Don't allow the mulch to touch the trunk; keep a few inches of separation. The final mulch job should look like a saucer, not a pyramid.

GROWING



Kalmia latifolia 'Hoffman's Pink',
pink mountain laurel in flower.

Credit: Alex Manders

Growing Mountain Laurel

Watering: Like any new shrub or ornamental tree, newly planted mountain laurels will need watering weekly for the first summer if sufficient rain hasn't fallen.

Fertilizing: Native mountain laurels don't need to be fertilized; they're quite happy to scratch out a living in whatever soil they're planted in.

Deadheading: Deadheading mountain laurels (snapping off spent flowers) can benefit smaller varieties when you can reach the flowers.

Pruning: Light pruning will force a more bushy, compact form. Mountain laurels grow more open, airy, and leggy without pruning. Perform any pruning shortly after they bloom, as mountain laurels bloom on last year's growth.

Propagating Mountain Laurel

Most gardeners purchase mountain laurels from the nursery.

While this shrub can be propagated by cuttings or seed, it's such a slow grower that it's impractical for the home gardener. It may take years for the shrub to begin to flower!

From Cuttings

If you already have a plant, take 6- to 8-inch cuttings in the fall. Remove the

bottom leaves and dip them into a rooting hormone powder, and then plant in small pots (4-inch diameter) filled with peat moss, perlite, and builder's sand. Cover with plastic bags and keep out of the sun in a warm place (75°F) for about 6 months until roots are well established. Keep well misted (take off plastic bag to mist). Plant in the spring after there is no chance of frost.

By Seed

This process is also very slow. Cut off the seed pods after flowing; dry pods for a few weeks in a paper bag. Next, transfer to a plastic bag with a moistened paper towel and leave them for 6 weeks. Then, plant in small pots with peat and place under grow lights (about 75°F). Mist regularly. In a month, seeds will germinate. Thin to one seedling per pot and let grow for the season until roots form. After all danger of frost has passed, plant in the ground.

Types



Intricate mountain laurel flowers. Credit: Marting LaBar

- ‘Sarah’ is a variety with deeply pink blooms leaning towards cherry. It’s a smaller variety, often reaching only 5 to 7 feet tall, and perfect for tight spaces.
- ‘Kaleidoscope’ blooms in red with white fringes, a stunning display. A midsize variety, it reaches 8 to 10 feet tall and wide when mature.
- ‘Snowdrift Mountain’ lives up to its name, with all-white blooms. This smaller variety is perfect for containers and typically grows only 3 to 4 feet tall.
- ‘Minuet’ has a unique coloring, white blooms have a center ring of maroon for a striking display. It’s a

dwarf cultivar ideal for small spaces and containers.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

Mountain laurel is susceptible to leaf spot, blight, wood borers, scale, white fly, and lace bugs.

- Leaf Spot: This common disease appears as large foliar spots in humid or crowded conditions. Prune to allow more air flow and discard older leaves before new growth appears.

- Whiteflies
- Scale
- Borers: Female clear-winged moths may lay eggs on shrub twigs in May and June. Their caterpillars bore into the bark. Prune out and destroy infested branches in early spring, before May.

WIT AND WISDOM

- Deer don't bother mountain laurels often, browsing only for a taste or when nothing else is available. If you have deer problems, these browse-resistant shrubs can be planted closer together to form a living hedge that a lazy deer won't bother crossing.
- All parts of this plant are toxic to people and some livestock. Keep it away from play areas or pastures.
- Mountain laurel foliage is highly flammable and can produce flame lengths of 100 feet when the shrubbery burns. Explore fire-resistant

cultivars if you live in a dry area

prone to fires.

- Mountain laurel is the state flower for Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

SHRUBS AND TREES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture. [Read More from Andy Wilcox](#)

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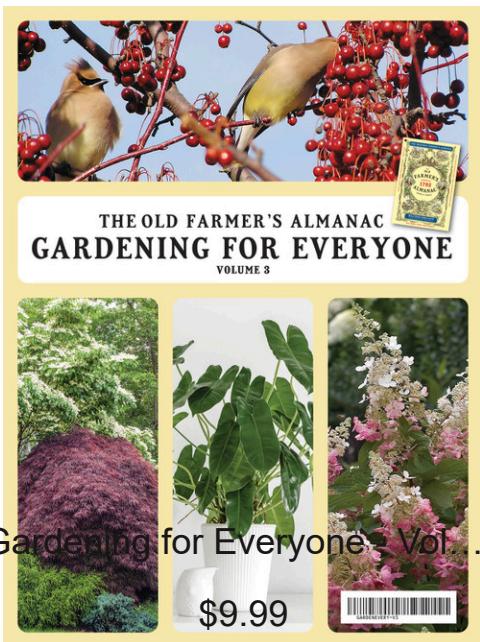
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