



## Mountain-Laurel *Kalmia latifolia*

*Alex X. Niemiera, Professor, School of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Virginia Tech*

### Summary:

Foliage: Dark green elliptic leaves; evergreen

Height: About 12 feet

Spread: About 8 feet

Shape: In youth, an upright oval; with age, it assumes a gnarly, picturesque form

Main features: In flower, this broad-leaved slow-growing evergreen plant is no-less-than spectacular; in the right setting, the entire plant is covered in whitish-pink or pinkish white flowers. Individual flowers are particularly attractive; they are about three-fourths of an inch in diameter and concave with a most delicate appearance. Swollen flower buds, just before opening, are whitish-pink or pinkish-white ribbed domes that almost rival the beauty of the open flowers. The culture of this plant is relatively exacting. Plants require a well-drained moist acid soil with ample organic matter. Plants do best if grown in part shade. Mountain-laurel has a well-deserved reputation of being difficult to establish in a garden/landscape setting. Amending the planting hole soil (backfill) with organic matter increases transplant success. Another recommendation to increase transplant success is to dig a hole only half as deep as the soil ball and then place the plant into the hole and cover the protruding root ball with a highly organic soil. If you have clay soil, then you might consider constructing a raised bed to grow this species. There are many cultivars that vary in flower color, plant size, and resistance to leaf spotting diseases (see Additional Information section).

### Plant Needs:

Zone: 4 to 9

Light: Best growth/appearance in part shade but will tolerate full sun to full shade

Moisture: Moist to average; will tolerate some drought when established

Soil type: Absolute requirement for well-drained soil

pH: Acid

### Functions:

Mountain-laurel is certainly worthy of specimen status, in mass, in a border, and planted randomly under tree canopy for a natural look.

### Care:

The culture of this plant is relatively exacting. Plants require a well-drained moist acid soil with ample organic matter. Plants do best if grown in part shade. Mountain-laurel has a well-deserved **reputation** of being difficult to establish in a garden/landscape setting. Amending the planting hole soil (backfill) with organic matter increases transplant success. Another recommendation to increase transplant success is to dig the hole only half as deep as the soil ball and then place the plant into the hole and cover protruding root ball with a highly organic soil. If you have clay soil, then you might consider constructing a raised bed to grow this species.

**Additional Information:**

There are numerous cultivars (over 80) in the trade that primarily vary in bud and flower color. Bud colors include light to dark pink, and red: flower colors include white, light and dark pink, and bi-color. There are also compact dwarf forms as well as cultivars that are resistant to leaf spot diseases. Since flower color choice is a matter of personal preference, consult web sites for cultivar pictures. If you like dark red-pink, 'Sarah' is an exceptionally beautiful cultivar that has dark red-pink buds and flowers.

