

Best of Questions and Answers from 2015 Clinics

*A preschool teacher planted a few **strawberry plants** last year at school. This year she noticed that there are many more. Should she keep the old plants, or get new ones?*

Go with the new plants and remove the old ones to the number that you want. Suggestion - consider alpine strawberries in the future as they don't have runners and will remain where they are planted – they also seed themselves. They may be grown from seed, or plant starts.

Customer has a hot south facing balcony, what plants would be best and how should I care for them? I sometimes go away for a few days so watering could be a problem and I want low maintenance.

All Mediterranean types would be well suited. Herbs like thyme, oregano, rosemary and lavender love sun and will tolerate short periods of drought. Plant in well-drained soil and water when pot becomes dry. Do not chemically fertilize. A little soil amendment is OK but not manure.

What is wrong with my plum tree? (Shows branch with warty, lumpy growths about five inches long.)

The problem is caused by black knot disease and is very common; often trees still bear fruit. Prune and dispose of infected branches before March 1st every year; cut out knots on large branches to 7 or 8 cm beyond the growth. Spray damaged trees with lime sulphur (100ml to a litre of water) when tree is dormant. Spray again when it is in full bloom and when petals fall (use lime sulphur at 20ml per litre of water at this time).

*The gardener brought a sample of his *Euonymus alatus* (Burning bush) which had **numerous tiny insects crawling about on the undersides of the leaves**. There were also a few small oval yellowish scales attached to the undersides of the leaves and a single cottony white deposit on one leaf.*

This appeared to be cottony camellia scale with a new hatching of crawlers. The white deposit is an egg mass. The adult scale insects have a waxy coating that is resistant to any pesticides. Normally native lady beetles, lacewings and parasitic wasps keep the population of scale insects under control so damage is minimal and no treatment is needed.

What's been cutting these circles into my rose leaves? (provides sample of leaves)

These are made by leaf cutter bees. They're harmless, and valuable pollinators. Once a year, when they build their nests, they take some circular pieces of leaves. They don't damage the entire leaf, and you don't need to do anything....just leave them alone. When they build their nest, their leaf-cutting days will be over for the season.

The gardener brought in a branch from a Photinia. The new growth was covered in red spots that had coalesced into large black spots. The leaves were wilted and stunted. She said that most of the new leaves are falling off and the plant is not thriving. The plant is in partial sun and she waters with sprinklers.

Photinia Leaf Spot disease is caused by a fungus, *Entomosporium maculatum*, which overwinters on diseased leaves and shoots. It is disseminated by splashing water and thrives in cool wet weather. Bright sun reduces spore survival. It affects young leaves the worst. Prevention includes planting resistant varieties, good spacing for air circulation, avoid overhead watering, avoid excessive fertilization, watering or pruning all of which encourage succulent new growth. Clean up and destroy fallen leaves and mulch under the shrub. Often the problem recurs every spring and is very difficult to control if the shrub is severely affected necessitating removal of the shrub.

A gardener was concerned about tip burn on the new growth of his Pieris. The shrub was appropriately sited in part sun and there had been no exposure to fertilizers or other chemicals. The winter was mild and there had not been any frosts since the new growth started. The gardener had not provided any supplemental water and the shrub was not mulched. He noted that the soil dries easily in that part of his garden.

There was no evidence of insect damage. We felt the most likely cause was dryness during the long dry, sunny spell in February when the new growth was emerging. We suggested monitoring the soil water supply and supplementing as necessary and applying a good mulch to conserve soil moisture.

The gardener was wondering why her hydrangea bush (macrophylla type) was not flowering. It was well situated in appropriate soil and was receiving adequate water. It appeared otherwise very healthy. She was cutting it back every spring as it was getting too large for her space.

We reviewed how hydrangea (in this case, the “mop head” variety) forms flower buds the previous season towards the top end of the canes. Thus she was pruning off the flower buds in spring. We also discussed the size of Hydrangeas and how the overall size of the bush can be reduced by up to 1/3 of the old canes. This should be done not as in “haircut” pruning, but cutting selected canes down completely to ground level – thinning the plant. There are new varieties available which might be more suitable.

The gardener had a Harry Lauder contorted hazelnut tree that had been in a pot for 8 yrs. It was doing poorly so was transplanted into the ground last year. The first year it was in full sun, this year is getting only part sun. The tree has very few leaves this year but is producing a lot of suckers.

We reviewed cultural needs for the plant especially the need for adequate and consistent watering for a newly planted tree in a very dry year. Soil and light conditions appeared adequate. After the clinic, we researched the problem and considered that the tree could also be infected with Eastern Filbert blight which has become widespread for commercial hazelnut growers in the Fraser Valley.

Corylus avellana contorta is very susceptible and there are no resistant varieties. The gardener did not mention any changes to the bark which would be seen with this disease. Most trees sold here are grafted onto a different root stock which would produce copious suckers if the grafted plant is weakened or dying.

My container-grown tomato leaves are turning yellow and then brown. What should I do?

This could be caused by many things: overwatering, under watering, lack of drainage, insufficient nutrients for the plant. Tomatoes need large, deep containers and lots of sun. If it is very hot, it's best not to use black pots as the roots should remain cool as they do when grown in the garden. Tomatoes are heavy feeders so when grown in containers they require rich soil amended with organic fertilizer and benefit as well from bi-weekly fertilizing with a fish or kelp-based fertilizer.

A gardener is living in a house only a few years old. The contractor planted a number of Japanese maples. Three years ago one tree began to have branches that died, now over 2/3 of the tree branches are dead. The same process is now happening to all the other trees. He noted that the house is located at the bottom of a slope and the yard is always quite wet.

The trees appeared to have been planted appropriately at grade and in favorable soil and light conditions. There have been no chemicals used anywhere on the property and no physical or mechanical damage. They have been appropriately watered during dry spells. The most likely diagnosis in this situation is *Verticillium* wilt. We discussed the disease and noted the only management is to remove affected trees and replace with something different as the disease organism remains in the soil and will affect new maples as well. He might like to have the diagnosis confirmed by an arborist before he removes all his trees.

An elementary school teacher wanted to sprout some vegetable seeds for his class. He had heard that he should place them between damp paper towels in a plastic bag hung in a window.

We recommended beans as a suitable vegetable. They will sprout well between damp paper towels. Hanging the plastic bags in the window would risk the seeds being overheated or burned. S/b grown in containers with drainage – children tend to overwater and suffocate seeds. An opportunity to talk about how plants need oxygen in their roots.

I'm buying Rhubarb, how do I grow it?

Rhubarb is a heavy feeder so it's a good idea to amend the planting area with lots of compost or manure. Do not bury the crown, plant it at the same height as it was in the container. Don't harvest stalks the first year. The plant will die down in the fall and come back from the crown in the spring, mulch with compost in the fall. Do not ingest rhubarb leaves as they are high in oxalic acid; it's OK to compost them. Harvest sparingly the second year early in the spring; the stalks will get woody later in the season. You can harvest a normal crop the third year. Add compost and/or manure to rhubarb annually.

How to prune a very large, leggy old azalea.

Consider a 3 year plan to reduce and rejuvenate. Is the legginess recent - consider changes in the plants environment - has the entire garden become over grown and leggy? As azaleas bloom on old wood, right now, remove any dead or obviously ugly or crossed limbs. Apply a good azalea fertilizer and mulch around the roots for this winter. After next years' blossoms are spent, cut back approximately 20 percent of the total limbs, or the total size of any limb. Mulch and fertilize, and cut back again after blossoming. This client did not know that buds form over the summer for the next year's blossoms.

Where and how should I plant my bare root Italian plum?

Customer has a sunny south facing front yard where he wishes to plant the tree. We recommended that he begin with the future in mind...consider how large the tree will grow; consider what it will eventually shade or be shaded by; consider where its roots will be and what it may be in competition with over time. We advised he take into consideration fences, lawn, sprinklers, and building structures. That being said, we recommended preparing a hole just barely deeper than the depth of the root system and twice as wide, by loosening the soil on all sides, preparing a small mound in the center to rest the roots over/around and watering the hole well prior to planting. He was instructed to find the first root and be sure to leave the 'hip' of the root just above the soil line when back filling the hole with the local soil. We also recommended that he clear the grass away from the base of the trunk at least 18in in all directions, and to water deeply once a week

A gardener had a fig tree called 'Peter's Honey' which had been planted by a professional company. It is a beautiful tree and is loaded with figs every year but they don't mature until Nov-Dec by which time they have rotted in the rain or frozen. She wanted to know how she could get the figs to mature earlier.

Figs are very easily grown; though 'Peter's Honey' may be a prolific producer, it might not be suitable for our climate. Gardener might want to try an early maturing variety such as 'Desert King' – very reliable on the coast and let the “professional company” know that the tree is inappropriate for the area as well. Reputable garden centres should carry vars. that will produce a crop; neighbours who have fig trees (that produce an edible crop) will be happy to share a cutting. Stick it in the ground or in a pot, and it will grow into a fig tree.

I want to grow Interlaken grapes. Can I create an espalier with these grapes? What do I need to know - what advice do you have?

Grapes are easy to grow and great for home gardeners. Interlaken are seedless, hardy, medium-sized, and grow in tight clusters; an excellent eating grape. Grape vines should be grown in full sunlight in well-drained soil, and require

support. There are numerous ways to train vines or canes of grapes into an espalier against a south or west-facing wall or on a fence.

Good references: Cass Turnbull, "Guide to Pruning". Richard Hallman (Google him) - he offers many excellent workshops on pruning, espalier etc.

At the entrance to townhouse an area with raised beds and a weeping Japanese Maple, what more can be planted to keep a Japanese garden theme and make a visual impact.

Ornamental grasses, mugo pine, black mondo grass, Japanese blood grass, "baby's tears", Scotch or Irish moss. Add a pebble stream bed and a stone ornament or a lantern.

What is a non-rampant climber for a sunny site; evergreen & fragrant?

Trachelospermum jasminoides aka 'Star Jasmine'. It is not actually a jasmine but the flowers have a lovely jasmine scent. Grows well in large containers or in the garden.

Several gardeners were planting new cedars or replacing ones that had died because of drought or spider mites. They were purchasing balled and burlapped trees and wanted instruction about planting procedures, use of bone meal and fertilizers.

We recommended against use of bonemeal, fertilizer or other amendments in the planting hole. Thoroughly soak the soil before planting; hole s/b no deeper than the root ball but twice as wide. Remove burlap and any wire or plastic to ensure correct planting depth and keep the roots from growing around and around themselves (called "girdling"). It is ideal to spread the roots and remove any that

are dead or damaged. "Native" soil (the soil where the trees will be grown) should be used around the tree. Plant and backfill with native soil and water in well. We stressed the importance of consistent watering for at least the first year in the ground. Spreading a mulch over the area but not up against the trunk is helpful to conserve moisture. Do NOT pile the soil up around the shrubs, rather make a well so that water will flow in.

How should asparagus be planted - when and how deep?

Asparagus is a heavy feeder. Incorporate plenty of organic matter in soil as well as sand if soil is humus-rich.

Check package instructions, but usually crown 3" or 4" below soil level. If planting from seed (it's easily grown) follow directions – West Coast Seed catalogue is a good resource, or online.

Do not harvest for first couple of years which allows the plant to grow (like rhubarb). Rather than harvesting every stalk, leave a few of the ferny fronds each year. Top-dress with manure or compost every couple of years.

We are looking for plants to attract Hummingbirds. What would you suggest?

Hummingbirds prefer open fluted flowers that face upwards or sideways; it takes more energy for them to sip nectar from flowers that face downward. Here are a few suggestions though hummingbirds will go to many, many flowers.

Campsis radicans - trumpet vine

Crocosmia

Digitalis - foxglove

Echinacea - coneflower

Fuchsia – annual and perennial

Heuchera - coral bells

Lonicera - honeysuckle

Mahonia

Monarda – bee balm

Also, *Penstemon*, *Phlox*, *Weigela*, hollyhocks, *Nicotiana*

West Coast Seeds has a Hummingbird Mix of flowers you can try as well.

11 maple trees planted at the same time 6 years ago, all doing well, but the 6 on one side of the driveway are smaller than the 5 on the other side. Reviewed soil condition, exposure, potential for environmental damage, pests. All trees look equally healthy. Further investigation revealed that the north side of the driveway is at the bottom of a slope, so those trees might get a bit more water. The irrigation is directed toward the trees (not necessarily toward the full root spread) and runs for 20 minutes.

The irrigation system may be the problem. The root area (which extends to the drip line – the outside of the widest branches of the tree) needs to be well watered about once a week. Watering in small amounts too often causes roots to grow to the soil surface – they are then easily overheated or burned in hot weather.

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