

Here are answers to some gardening questions

A: If gardeners have questions about their favorite hobby at one time or another, so we'll get right to the point.

Q: How can I increase my pechysandra?

A: Right after a heavy rain or when you have deeply watered the bare areas where you want additional plants, cut off the top leaf cluster, with its entire stem, right to the top of the second leaf cluster. Take a pencil and plunge it down into the "mush" to a depth of at least 3 inches, at a 45-degree angle. Take one plant and plunge it into the tunnel, leaving just a little stem and the head sticking out. Hold the plant vertically and close the hole tightly to avoid air pockets. Water the bed very wet for three or four weeks. In two weeks or so, little white rootlets will grow and the new plants will continue to grow. This will also improve the area from which you took the cuttings and each



Marty Figley

plant that was cut will grow a new top, or several, making the old bed lush again.

Q: The hot, hot weather we had recently really did a number on my vegetable garden.

A: I hope you have been watering during these past few weeks, and continue to water as long as necessary. Most vegetables need 1 inch of water a week. Place a shallow pan or can in the vegetable garden to measure to be sure it gets that 1 inch of water.

Q: I never know if my potted plants are receiving enough water even though the water drains out of the bottom. How can I know if their thirst is satisfied?

A: Plunge the plants in a bucket of water and leave them there until no more air bubbles appear. This way, all the roots receive sufficient moisture.

Q: When is the best time to fertilize rhubarb?

A: This month is perfect, but don't do this as long as the weather is hot and dry. Sidedress about 18 inches from the crown with a fertilizer high in nitrogen or use an organic fertilizer. Water well, if necessary, then mulch with grass clippings or manure, or

cultivate to control weeds. Remove the tall stems of cream flowers to retain vigor in the plant.

Rhubarb can be planted in the spring or fall in a sunny spot with excellent drainage. Dig in plenty of "black gold" before planting and place bare-root stock so the buds are covered by no more than 1 inch of soil. Potted rhubarb can be planted now or in early fall. Stop harvesting your rhubarb now.

Q: There is something white on my roses, lilacs, phlox and beans. What is it and how can I get rid of it?

A: There are two types of mildew that afflict these plants. Downy mildew produces white patches on the leaves in wet weather. Powdery mildew turns the leaves a powdery white and occurs when it is hot and humid. A commercial fungicide recommended for use on these plants often helps to get rid of it. Or, grow the plants in a sunnier area and look for mildew-resistant plants next year.

Q: How much water should I give my hanging plants?

A: Hanging plants and potted annuals need feeding every two to three weeks with a water-soluble fertilizer at a

concentration of 1 tablespoon fertilizer per 2-gallon pail of water. Be sure the water runs through the hole in the bottom each time.

Q: My lawn may have grubs, which I would like to eradicate. Any advice?

A: Packaged in powder, beneficial nematodes, mixed with water and sprayed on the soil, will destroy the grubs very quickly. For long-term treatment, inoculate the shallow soil with milky spore disease, *Bacillus popilliae*. These products should be readily available at your nursery.

Q: Is it all right to apply mulch around woody ornamentals, perennials and established annuals now?

A: Yes, as long as the soil isn't dry. Mulches reduce weeding chores and conserve moisture. Use seed-free straw, grass clippings, pine needles, chipped or shredded bark, or cocoa hulls (although expensive). Apply organic mulches at least 2 to 4 inches deep around the plants over cleanly cultivated soil. Don't cover the crowns of very low growing plants.



Gardens that have been properly cared for reward with their beauty. **MARTY FIGLEY** based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 952-2047 on a touch-tone phone. Her fax number is (248) 644-1314.

Time for midsummer care of air conditioner

It was a late start to hot weather this year in our area, and as you know we have already had several days you could call "real hot." We have more on the way and even a possible long summer when the air conditioning for your home will take on a fair amount of hard work.

I know most of you prepared the unit during the spring season, but have you checked it out lately? It seems it was only a few weeks ago when the air was filled with pollen floating all over the place. Where did all that stuff go to?

Go outside and take a look at the condenser unit and you'll find the coil area all around the unit is coated with the stuff that affects so many allergy sufferers. Look at the plants, bushes and flowers that have grown



Joe Gagnon

and make sure there is at least 12 inches of space between them and the coil area.

If the condenser around the unit is anywhere close to what I have described, it's time for you to do a little midsummer maintenance.

Shut the air conditioning system off by virtue of the thermostat inside the house. Make sure you leave for an hour or so after you have performed the cleaning of the condenser coil outside.

Use your garden hose and wash down the coil area and trim any growth of plants, bushes, etc. In doing this you have just increased the performance of your unit and decreased the energy consumption by quite an amount.

The next step is to go to the furnace and remove, clean or replace the furnace filter.

A clean filter will allow more air to flow through the registers and even allow cooler temperatures to enter the rooms in the house, especially those farthest away from the furnace room.

Many homeowners aren't comfortable with temperatures in upstairs bedrooms and I recommend they block off a few of the cold air registers downstairs.

If the dryer vent line exits the home and blows hot air on the air conditioning condenser, I suggest you use the dryer only when the air conditioning unit isn't operating.

The 140-degree heat coming out of the vent line can put a big strain on the outside compressor.

The condensing unit outside is the heart of your air conditioning system and a very expensive component to replace. Taking care of it such as cleaning it and making sure it has plenty of space to breathe can add years of life to the product. It's your dollar and you would like it to make cents. Stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon can now be heard on WWJ-950 and WXYT-1270. He is a member and past president of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals. His phone number is (248) 455-7281.

Take care of transmitter for garage door opener

BY MORRIS AND JAMES CAREY FOR AP WEEKLY FEATURES

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