



The Green Thumb

By GEORGE ABRAHAM

Cut off seed pods? I'm often asked if it's necessary to cut off seed pods on lilacs, mountain laurel, rhododendrons, etc. Let's answer by taking lilacs first. If you can easily reach the seed pods and have the time, you can cut the pods off, mainly for show. If the pods are left on, lilacs are so vigorous, they can still produce a crop of blossoms

next year, in spite of the drain from seed development. In other words, with lilacs it makes no difference if you cut them off or leave them on — except it's more stightly when they are removed. As for azaleas, rhododendrons, mountain laurel and others, we think it's a fine idea to cut these off to help prepare these plants for next year's crop of blooms. As most of us

know, seed pod development needs a lot of the plant's energy. If these plants are allowed to set seed, most of the plant's energy will go into seed production, instead of flower production. Nature isn't stupid. If left unchecked, she produces seeds first and flowers last. That's her way of keeping a species perpetuated, or well populated.

However, in your garden or around your house, you are more interested in producing handsome blooms than having a large number of plants. So you can snip off those seedpods now to let more building material go into flowered development for next year.

home gardeners. Right now you see a lot of long canes coming up from the base of some plants. Early this summer many complained that their yellow roses (and white ones) bloomed to a red, and they asked if roots "tangled" with each other to produce the change? I'll try to explain what's been happening. First, roses do not change colors in

wholesale lots. True, many do mutate (as do other plants) but what's happened is this: since roses are budded on understocks, the top or budded part dies, leaving the understock to carry on. Many roses are budded on an understock known as Dr. Huey (a maroon red), an old variety commonly used for budding roses. Winters, or disease or insects, kill the top or budded rose (white, yellow, etc.) and the understock (very vigorous) takes over. If you like the maroon red, somewhat large and semi-double flowers, you can leave the "wild" rose in the garden. If you haven't the space or taste for the flowers, I'd dig up the bush and plant a new one this fall or next spring.

GREEN THUMB CLINIC:
A reader writes: "The tip of our blue spruce is brown. What can be done?"
Answer: Cut the tip out (down into live tissue) and burn it. Next spring you can spray with Sevin, starting in late April and early May.

It's Time To Work On Bulb Beds

Late summer or early fall is an ideal time for planting or renovating iris beds. And, while you're at it, plant some hardy bulbs such as tulips for spring flowering. Most irises need digging and dividing every three to five years. Use a spading fork to dig up rhizomes (fleshy roots). Cut older, outer end from new, growing rhizomes with a sharp knife. Replant clean, disease-free roots and discard the rest. Iris should not be planted too deeply — cover rhizome with no more than one inch of soil. New plantings do best in a sunny spot where soil is well-drained, insect-free and well-supplied with organic matter. If your soil is poor or heavy, add humus such as leaf mold or peat moss. Space plants to suit your needs, but remember the closer rhizomes are planted, the sooner they'll have to be dug and separated. Keep beds free of weeds or grass and well watered during dry spells.

SPRING flowering bulbs like tulips or daffodils require similar treatment. They will get smaller and less vigorous over the years, so you'll have to dig and separate them periodically or add new ones to keep up desired flowering. Plant bulbs at uniform depth — about two to three times maximum diameter — to insure that all flower at same time. Plant shallower than this if your soil is particularly heavy or you plant in November or later.

Although daffodils and many other bulbs may be left in the ground year-round, tulips will rot in areas of mild winters and must be dug up and replanted in early spring. Tuberosus begonias, dahlias and glads should always be dug and stored.

DUST bulbs when storing with a fungicide-insecticide combination. During spring and summer iris glads and other bulbs are most often bothered by thrips and leaf mining insects. A short-lived insecticide like Spectracide (Diazinon) will give good control of these pests. If problems recur, spray again at two week intervals.

In areas where ground freezes, mulch bulbs with a few inches of clean straw or pine bark. At spring bloom fertilize lightly with a low nitrogen, complete fertilizer such as 5-10-10. After plants blossom and wither the foliage will also begin to yellow. However, it is important not to cut this foliage until it has completely died back. The strength from foliage returns to bulb and recharges it. If you cut foliage prematurely, you rob bulb of next year's energy.

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