

QA1060

We recently bought a home in where the landscaping around the pool area had been neglected other than watering since mid-summer 2004. There are some very healthy looking beds of carnations, cannas and large crape myrtles. They would be lovely in the spring and summer except they have been overrun with Bermuda grass. It spread from our yard into the beds.

How may I save these lovely plants and get rid of the grass in my beds? - M. R.

In the near future clean out your beds. That is, remove all the dead plant tops and any debris. After this is done mulch the entire beds with 3-4 inches or more of a good organic mulch like pine bark mulch. This will reduce some weed problems itself plus help hold in moisture. It also gives any bed a "finished" appearance and improves the soil.

For the Bermuda grass that does come through this spring many gardeners have done the following. They use a product that contains the active ingredient glyphosate. You can find them at your favorite retail garden center under several labels. These products are absorbed by green foliage and should be used during the "active" growing season. You may decide to try it and if you do, apply on a non-windy day. A small hand spray bottle or sponge applicator will work well for controlling the application. When you apply any of these products use some sort of protection to keep it off of your desirable plants.

Another group of weed control aids to try are the 'Fusillades'. These can be sprayed directly on 80+ plants without harming them yet control the Bermuda. They are available at retail garden centers.

Both Fusillades and Glyphosates don't contaminate the soil. They do take time to do their job so don't be impatient. I think they do a great job when used correctly. Treat your Bermuda sprouts when they are two to three inches long. Please read and follow label directions.

I dearly love Ming Aralia but have managed to kill several. The last one was six feet tall when we purchased it and one by one it dropped its branches.

I now have two plants almost devoid of leaves and know I will have to throw them out soon also. What can I do to keep them alive and whole? - A. B.

I, also like Ming Aralias but do find them to be rather difficult to grow in my home over a long term. Aralia is a common name for a group of plants called Polyscias. The Polyscias most likely to be commonly called 'Ming Aralia' is *P. fruticosa*. It requires the following to do well:

1. Very bright filtered light. No direct hot sunlight.
2. Water well and keep rather evenly moist. Allow approximately one half inch of the soil to dry before watering again. Through the dormant season like now allow the top to dry one inch deep. Make sure the soil drains WELL. They do not like "wet feet".
3. Don't allow the temperature to drop below 65F. Warmth is essential but it does not like temperatures above 85F.

4. Keep out of hot and cold air drafts.
5. High humidity. Try setting your plants in decorative trays or pans on one to two inches of pebbles. Fill with water to the bottom of your Aralia container. Make sure the bottom is not sitting in the water. NOTE: The application to all their leaves of an "Anti-Transpirant" like Cloud Cover would also help.
6. When needed, fertilize with a premium quality long lasting houseplant fertilizer according to label directions.
7. Watch out for spider mites. They can build their numbers rapidly in low humidity situations. Get them under control quickly with a product that contains Kelthane or other approved miticide. Mealy bugs may also be a problem at times. If you find them, treat with a product labeled for mealy bug control on houseplants according to label directions.

Good Luck and let me know how you come out.

I have two questions that I need some help with. First. What should I do with my potted Amaryllis I received for Christmas? It has finished blooming and its leaves are thirty inches or so long. Second question, I have a six-year-old lilac that has never bloomed; yet it puts out beautiful green leaves each year. I have done everything I know to do for it to get blooms but to no avail. I have just about decided to dig it up this year if it does not flower. - A. L.

I have done two different things with my potted Amaryllis. One year after an orange variety we received quit blooming I cut the bloom stalk off near pot level. I placed it in a bright light area and watered as needed until all dangers of frost passed. I then placed it out of doors along with several of my houseplants. Through most of the spring and summer it was grown like a houseplant. Near the end of the summer for about 60 days it was kept on the dry side. After this, feeding and normal watering was resumed. It was returned indoors before the first fall frost and bloomed the next holiday season. Yours sounds rather large so you may want to repot it before you begin this type of culture. The next year we received another and enjoyed it also. I decided to plant both outside in a raised southern exposure bed that was mulched very heavily and see what happens. They survived our relatively mild winter and bloomed. We are now into their second winter with them if, you can call what we have had so far this year a winter.

Most lilacs have a hard time blooming in our area because it doesn't get cold enough for them to set flower buds. Young lilacs may not bloom for several years after planting. Give it two more years and see what happens. You may also want to purchase locally a specific named lilac variety 'Lavender Lady' that is suppose to bloom here.

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