

IN THE GARDEN WITH MR. GREENJEANS

by Randy Arnowitz



Randy – Mr. Greenjeans – resides in a potting shed with 200 orchids and his golden retriever “Peaches.” He enthusiastically welcomes your gardening questions; address them to greenjeansmr@verizon.net.

Clearing Out The Garden Shed

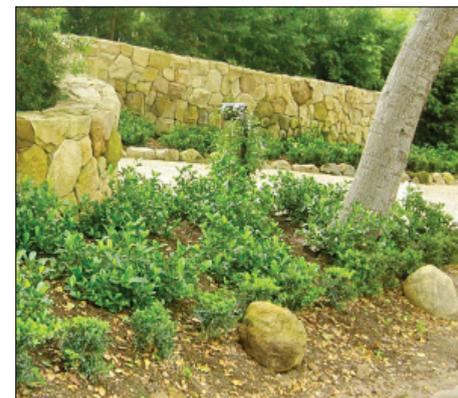
I’ve been loving all this rain. I actually lie awake at night visualizing the plant and tree roots rejoicing as all the accumulated salts in the soil are being leached out of the soil and away from those roots.

I don’t get out much.

But really, did you ever notice that you water, water, water all spring, summer and fall but the rain just makes everything look so much better. Radiant even. You can almost hear the plants going, “aaahhhh.” I love that.

Speaking of all this rain, it’s probably a bad idea to traipse around in your garden beds right now while the soil is wet because it can compact the soil and damage the soil structure. Here’s a suggestion though, for something you can do for your garden until it dries up enough to get back out there to play in it. Clean out your garden shed.

Wait, hear me out. What I’m going to say next is going to surprise you. It will shock you. Okay, here goes. Throw out *every* product in your garden shed that is not earth-friendly. Toxic rose sprays: dump them and find a safer alternative. Lawn fungicide: lose it and take a look at why you have fungus in your lawn, if indeed you really do. Systemic plant poison: goodbye. If you can’t pour it on your oatmeal you shouldn’t be pouring it on your plants.



Gardenias, like azaleas, are acid-loving and may not be the best choice for under oaks

I am here to absolve you of your garden guilt. Think of me as the Dr. Phil of hazardous waste disposal and I am giving you permission to get all that toxic stuff off your property and out of your life forever. Now is the time to lessen your exposure to all of this junk, so put it in boxes and haul it up to UCSB Environmental Health & Safety Community Hazardous Waste Collection Center at (805)882-3602 or <http://www.ehs.ucsb.edu/units/envhlth/ehrs/hazardouswaste/communityhazardouswaste/HHW%20Residential%20Flyer.pdf>

The reason you can do without these chemicals is that 99.9% (or more) of all the problems you will face in your garden are related to, if not caused by cultural mismanagement. In other words, most of those problems are preventable. When plants are compromised, just like people, they are susceptible to all kinds of bad things, such as bugs, pests and other unhealthful situations that a healthy plant would normally survive or fend off.

A few questions to ask yourself

Are you growing plants in the wrong places? Maybe your shade plants are getting too much sun or your sun-loving plants are in too much shade. For example, if your clivias (*Clivia miniata*) are yellow and sad-looking, they may not be sick or in need of a poison remedy. It could be they’re getting too much sun. Even a half hour of direct summer sun can damage and turn a deep-shade loving clivia to toast.

Similarly, if you’re fighting a losing battle keeping your azaleas green and profusely flowering, more food, iron and water might not be the answer. Azaleas thrive in rich, well-drained,



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Roses like these thrive with an earth-friendly food-and-spray regimen



Lavender is a foolproof and problem-free choice for our soils and climate, and there are many varieties to choose from

acid soil. Santa Barbara is not generally famous for any of these. Consider planting your azaleas in amended, raised beds, choosing a more appropriate drought-tolerant plant... or moving back east.

• Are you watering properly? Too often? Not often enough? It's my experience that, "over-watered" usually refers to the *frequency* of the watering, not the *amount* of water. It's important to give your garden *enough* water, but in general, (and of course, there are exceptions) most plants, once established do best if kept "evenly moist." This means that down there where the roots live the soil should not be allowed to dry out completely. On the other hand, you should not water when the soil is already wet or soggy. The only way to know this is by rolling up your sleeves and digging in. If

you have a moisture meter, throw it away with your chemicals and use your fingers. You have ten of them; they don't need batteries and they're much more reliable than those gadgets.

By growing a chemical-free garden you may have to settle for less-than-perfect roses or some rogue aphids and snails now and then. Earth-friendly methods are certainly more labor intensive and you'll need to wash those aphids off with a hose and make late night forays into the garden to collect the snails.

But look at it this way: you'll have a lot more butterflies, hummingbirds and earthworms there to keep you company. *My*

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