

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.

Warning: Bamboo May Appear in Living Room

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,
Thank you for your column in the Montecito Journal. I live on Coast Village Road in a south-facing apartment. I recently purchased a black bamboo plant and I would like your advice on its care.

The patio seems like such a hostile environment that only cactus would survive. Will my bamboo? The guys at the garden center say “no problemo.”

Thanks,
JB Johnson

Dear JB,

I guess the answer to your question depends on whether you are growing your black bamboo (*Phyllostachys nigra*) in a container or in the ground.

If you’re planning on growing your bamboo in a container, you might want to start with as large a pot as



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possible as long as it looks proportional to the plant. Also, if the plant is already somewhat pot-bound, be sure to choose a new pot that will afford the bamboo a few inches of space all around or you will be repotting again in a short time. Keep in mind, plain terra cotta will dry out faster than a

glazed or plastic pot.

If you are keeping it in a black plastic nursery container and don’t want to repot right now, slip the thing container and all, into a larger planter to keep the black plastic from baking in the hot sun of your southern exposure. Black bamboo should be able to take full sun, but the reflection against a bright wall may dangerously dry out the plant. Keep it evenly moist.

Planted in the ground, your bamboo will be more forgiving of drying out since the extensive roots will be more insulated in the soil. If you water regularly, it will stay moist longer than the soil in a container. Remember, this type of bamboo is a runner not a clumper and if planted in the ground, sooner or later you’ll have shoots coming up in your living room.

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

When I transplant citrus trees (small 5 gallon size) they never seem to recover from the shock. They don’t die, but they don’t thrive either. Any advice?

Signed,
Citrus-ly Challenged

Dear Challenged,

Based on the limited info you provided in your letter, only one thing came to mind regarding your citrus issue. I’ve noticed that citrus trees from the nursery are almost always grown in some kind of heavy, yet well-draining DG-like medium (decomposed granite).

The good news is that citrus trees like this porous, weighty soil and do well in it.

The bad news is that apart from it requiring 12 burly men to carry even a 15 gallon specimen, you’d have to be Houdini to get that sucker out of the container in one piece. If you’re not extremely careful, the DG can fall away from the roots leaving you with a fraction of the original root-ball or none at all. If this happens, the plant will have a hard time recovering from the trauma.

In situations like this, I’ll often slice down through the sides of the plastic container and very gently coax it off of the plant instead of trying to yank the tree straight out of the pot.

Once established in its new home, regular feeding during the warm months and proper watering should allow your citrus to thrive.

FoxFarm, a Work of Art

I’ve recently discovered FoxFarm, a new brand of fertilizers, planting mixes and potting soils that’s being sold at many of our area’s nurseries and garden centers. I’ve tried the Ocean Forest All Natural Potting Soil



Citrus trees from the nursery are often grown in well-draining, heavy, decomposed granite.

with my container annuals, the Big Bloom Natural & Organic Plant Food on my orchids and the Grow Big Soil Based Formula to green up my forest of rescued, potted ficus trees.

I have to admit, I was a little timid about buying the Light Warrior Seed Starter and the Tiger Bloom Vicious Bloomer, but feel confident that the Happy Frog line of potting soil and soil conditioners might remain in my future.

Seriously, so far I have seen remarkable results. But I’m also thinking, even if the stuff’s a sham, the artwork on these products is indeed amazing and well worth the price.

Relative of the Snapdragon

This is one of my favorite plants. For the past few years I’ve been planting summer drapdragon (*Angelonia angustifolia*) for summer-into-fall color. Not an actual snapdragon, but a distant relative, this perennial is best thought of and used as a summer annual. I’ve had them survive through the winter and have cut them back in the spring, but usually I’ll just replace them with fresh plants in spring and start over.

The 14-18 inch tall flower stems, which are thinner than “regular” snapdragons are made up of about a dozen 1-inch snapdragon-like flowers. The flowers are available in pink, plum, purple, white, and purple with white among others.

Grow them in full sun and keep moist until established. After that they’re somewhat drought tolerant. These guys are really easy to grow in beds or in large containers and if you’re good to them and feed them monthly, you’ll get plenty of blooms. Oh yeah, like “snaps,” you can cut them and bring them inside. *My*

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