



"At the Beach, Brighton," acrylic on canvas 30" x 40"

Kathleen Elsey
Summer Open Studio

Saturday, August 30 & Sunday, August 31

11:00 a.m. — 5:00 p.m.

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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.

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

This may be a long-shot, but I'll ask you anyway. I keep seeing a plant around town that has gray rosette-shaped, seemingly succulent leaves. It has a beautiful magenta or pinky-purplish poppy-like flower held high above the plant on long stems. I don't seem to remember seeing this plant before and now I find it all over the place. I know this is random but, any idea what plant I'm talking about?

Yours truly,
Mystified On The Mesa



Chilean rock purslane is very easy to grow and thrives in well-drained soil in full sun to bright shade, as evidenced by this one with blooms held high

Dear Mystified,

I think I know what plant you're talking about. It's probably the same plant that I keep seeing everywhere. It's called Chilean rock purslane (*Calandrinia grandiflora*) and is native to, uh, well, Chile.

The gray-green leaves can be around 8 inches long and the flowers, which individually last only a day, are borne in clusters on wiry stems that can reach 2 to 2 1/2 feet tall before nodding over a bit.

This baby is very easy to grow and thrives in well-drained soil in full sun to bright shade. When grown in the ground it should be allowed to dry out slightly between watering or the leaves turn yellow and fall off. I have a huge stand of it growing in a large, rectangular terra cotta pot in full sun on my patio. In the summer it dries out and gets droopy in a day so I often water it daily. Regardless of this watering regimen, the thing rocks.

Mine flowers all summer and on into the fall and when the blooming stems are finally spent I either cut them down or remove that entire section of the plant back to the edge of the container



Each Chilean rock purslane flower lasts only for a day but many will follow

as the stems start to trail and get leggy by then. In no time, new shoots sprout from the old stems and the plant flushes out again. This one's a winner! Two green thumbs up.

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I was wondering. How come every time I plant a Pride of Madeira it gets to a certain size and then the leaves look wilted and shortly afterward the whole thing dies out. I put them on a drip system with my other drought-tolerant



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plants and water them once or twice a week. I even cut off the big flower spikes when they're done blooming. What the blazes am I doing wrong?

Signed,
Short On Pride

Dear Short,

I think there may be two separate issues going on here. First of all, you do not say how long your Pride of Madeira (*Echium candicans*) are living before dying down. These are majestic and fast-growing additions to a garden but they are not especially long-lived. If you're losing them after five or six years it could be that they're simply "done."

You might want to think of it in terms of the "dog years" equation. That is, if one dog year is equal to seven human years then think of one "echium year" as around fifteen years for a human. That way, when your plant is six years old it's really already ninety in human years. Or, if your rottweiler is ten, then your Pride of Madeira would be, uh, well, you figure it out.

The other thing is this. In my experience, these plants are extremely drought tolerant. In fact, I think you

are probably watering yours much too often. I find that after a newly planted echium becomes established, it needs little, if any additional water. If it is in a garden near other plants that are irrigated, my guess would be that it will find the water if it needs it. It is for this reason that when planted in or near a lawn, they grow big and fast and then die out fast.

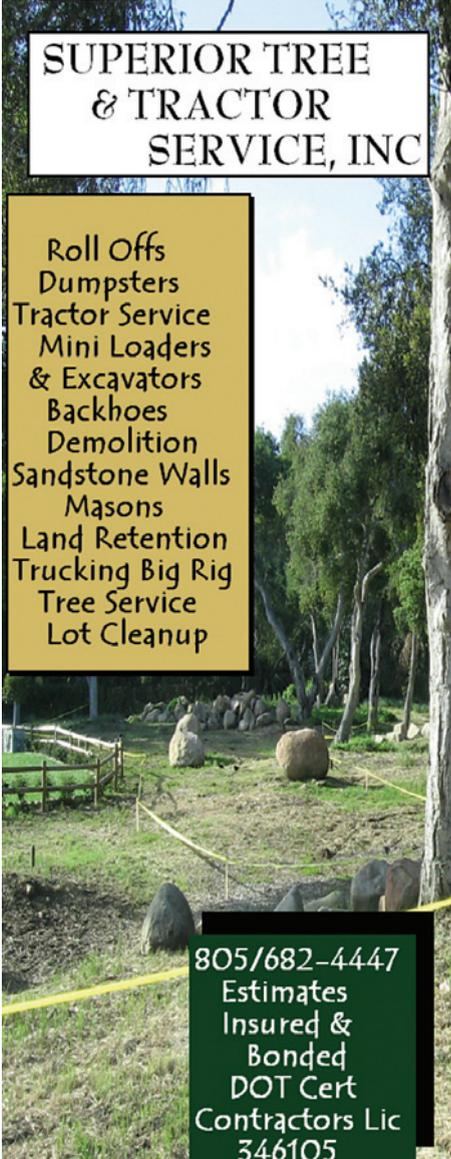
The upside is that your echium will reseed enthusiastically and by the time you are ready to chop down a dead or woody overgrown one, there are likely to be scads of volunteer seedlings around or beneath it to quickly grow up and take its place. *My*



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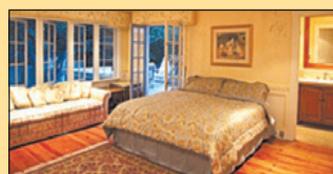


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