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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.

Hi, High Hibiscus

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I love hibiscus shrubs with their large, showy blooms and was wondering if I could grow one in a container or big pot on my deck? If so, how large should the pot be and how often should I water and feed it? Thanks for the info.

Signed,
Cindy on Sinaloa

Dear Cindy,

Hibiscus can be a vigorous grower, so after a few seasons the plant may begin to get root-bound in a container. Therefore, when choosing a pot, the larger the better. If you're starting out with say, a 5-gallon size plant you might want to use a 15-gallon size or bigger container. Likewise, if you begin with a 15-gallon size plant, it's best to go with a pot that's quite a bit larger than a 15-gallon size.

As far as how often to water, poke your finger in the soil to check first and water it before it gets too dry. But, on the other hand don't water it when it's already soggy.

During the warm months you can feed your hibiscus every few weeks with a water-soluble plant food like fish emulsion or conservatively sprinkle some granule-type food like GroPower or a Dr. Earth product on top of the soil and let it dissolve in with each watering.

When choosing a hibiscus for a container, try to find a variety with a more compact growing habit. Also, in the spring or after the first bloom you can cut it back by a third or so, to keep it in proportion to the pot and through the growing season



In a container, hibiscus needs plenty of water and food

pinch it back occasionally to keep it tight.

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I like to use catmint as a border in my perennial garden but it gets quite large and sprawling. I never know when to cut it back. If I forget to trim it, it gets very "hay-stacky," yet sometimes when I cut it down, it never comes back at all. What's the secret to growing this seemingly "easy" perennial?

Sincerely,
Kitty Thornbottom
In the Hedgerow

Dear Kitty,

Gardening books for our zone will probably tell you to cut your catmint (*Nepeta x faassenii*) back after it blooms by either one half, or to cut the entire bloomed-out stems back to the ground. Then, in winter or early spring cut back all last year's older growth back to the

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Cut back catmint when it's done blooming or gets old and woody



Catmint is a reliable bloomer for a perennial border

ground.

This works most of the time, but I always make sure that before I cut my catmint back I look to see that there is evidence of healthy, tiny new growth starting somewhere, either down low on the older stems or coming directly out of the ground at the base of the plant. I've found that sometimes if the plant hasn't given me this signal, it will, as you found out, die out completely. It seems to be one of those garden mysteries.

Also, if my plant has gotten really huge, I'll begin cutting it down to the ground starting at one end and roll the entire thing back like a big fat burrito as I go. This keeps all that substantial top growth out of my way so I can see what I'm doing as I snip.

My

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