

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.

A Hairy Question

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I saw a grass for sale at the nursery that I absolutely fell in love with. It had airy, intense deep pink seed heads that were at least half again the size of the grass. The tag said it was called Hairy Awn Muhly. What do I need to know about this plant? Does it take sun or shade? Water or no water?

Signed,

Amorous on Ashley



Hairy Awn Muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), better known as Hair Grass, displays its true colors and extravagantly smoky texture

(*M.dubia*), Bamboo Muhly (*M.dumosa*) and Soft Muhly (*M.pubescens*). All muhlys do best in full sun and have low water needs.

The fine-textured, dark green foliage of Hairy Awn Muhly reaches a graceful, mounding, two feet in height when full grown. The flowers that occur in September appear as rich, pink-y, red-y, purple-y, fluffy almost smoky clouds that seem to hover above the plant. (Convinced yet?) Into the winter, as the grass becomes dormant, these flowers slowly turn brown.

Depending on your location and microclimate, in the winter your entire muhly may go dormant and become straw-like. However, I have a large stand of it and it stays green all year. Regardless of how evergreen it is in your garden, I recommend cutting the whole thing down in February within a few inches of the ground and literally within a day or so it will begin to come back. You can practically hear it growing; it's that fast. Okay, well not actually hear it, but almost.



Bougainvilleas are vigorous container plants but its roots need room to breathe



Bougainvillea will escape from its container if conditions aren't to their liking

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I potted up a five-gallon bougainvillea into a large ceramic pot and placed it in my garden in a place where there were lots of rocks and cement under the soil. The plant didn't really grow all that much for about a year and then recently it really took off. It is now sending out wild and crazy shoots all over the place and some of them are

quite robust and long. My question is this: Now that it's growing so well, do you think I should take it out of the container and transplant it directly into the garden?

Sincerely,

Overgrown

Dear Overgrown,

I would guess that after being held captive in the ceramic pot for a year your “bougie” has gone rogue and busted out. That is, it probably sent a big, fat root down through the drain-

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age hole in the bottom of the pot and out into the soil below and is probably in Australia by now. Bougainvilleas are very vigorous once they become established.

If you cut that root now and the plant does not die, you will for sure set it back and it could possibly take another year before the plant re-establishes itself.

So, Let's review. The good thing is that your bougainvillea is finally thriving. The bad thing is that eventually, that big root will get bigger and bigger and finally obstruct the drainage hole completely. When that happens you will notice that after you water the pot, the water will not drain out but will remain on top of the soil. This situation can kill your plant almost overnight.

So, this is what I would do: Using a masonry bit from the outside of the pot, drill some new holes all around the lower part of the pot as close to the bottom as possible.

If that isn't possible, plan B would be to take a short piece of rebar and a hammer and try to gently, yet firmly pound a few holes or cracks out of the bottom of the pot from inside the pot. Push the rebar down into the soil and then gently, yet firmly give it a few whacks with the hammer. The idea is to leave the pot intact but to give the roots a few more exit routes out of the bottom.



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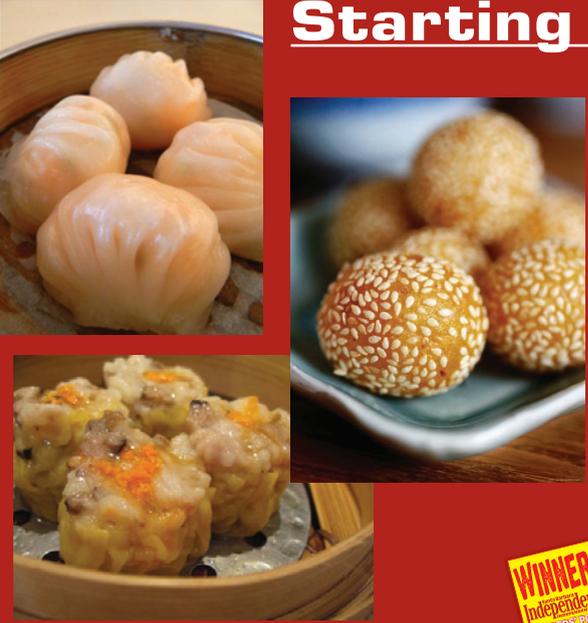
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