

# 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](mailto:greenjeansmr@verizon.net).

## Fringe in Excess

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I have a problem. I just love the shrub known as “Fringe Flower” and planted a row of them along the sidewalk entrance leading up to my front door. They were small and manageable when I planted them from 5-gallon containers but now I need a machete to get to my house. Can I cut them back and if so how much can I take off? Thanks for your help.

Signed,  
Anita Butcher  
Summerland

Dear Anita,

Don't fret. This is not an uncommon problem. If you think about it though, Fringe Flower (*Loropetalum chinense*) and almost any other shrub or tree is going to look small and manageable in a 5-gallon container. Since this plant can eventually stretch to eight feet or more, the best way to avoid this problem in the future is to read the label,



This Fringe Flower is not a “5-gallon” anymore

ask the nursery person or look your prospective plant up online to see how big the darn thing is going to get before you buy it.

Okay, enough with the lecture, right? You already have the plant so here are a few suggestions.

You've probably noticed that these colorful shrubs have a natural, flowing, tiered growth habit. The problem when you start hacking away at them is that you sort of disrupt this innate structure.

The worst thing you can do, although I've seen it done, is to shear it into a blobby square or globe. This will get it



Loropetalums can be limbed up and thinned into trees



Shearing your Fringe Flower into a large meatball... not so much

out of your way for a while but it's not really a good look.

You can also cross your fingers and radically chop it down to the basic woody framework and hope that it flushes out into a new plant. I've seen this work before on younger specimens and you may even get that natural shape back by “starting it over.” There is a chance however, that the plant will give it up and not come back so this might be a last resort if you're thinking of removing the shrubs anyway.

My recommended method and unfortunately the most time-consuming is to artistically, thoughtfully, and selectively cut your plants back with your pruners while at the same time maintaining their original form. This isn't always easy and it has to be done often because once you start pruning, they're going to come back pretty fast.

Loropetalums are versatile landscape plants and they can even be limbed up and thinned out into medium-sized flowering trees. If you have the time and talent they can also be dwarfed and maintained as a bonsai.

One last thought. No matter how harshly you decide to go with this, do your pruning after the big spring bloom so you can enjoy the flowers first. Good luck.

## Bye Bye Bamboo

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I have some very dense and aggressive bamboo growing in a bed in my patio right next to my house. Even though it is contained in a cutout, I'm



*Cordyline stricta* 'Soledad' is a durable outdoor shade container plant



*Cordyline stricta* 'Soledad' has handsome dark green, glossy foliage with a tinge of purple

finding it very hard to control and don't especially enjoy the rats that live in it. I would love to replace it with something softer and somewhat gentler. The bed gets full morning sun but other than that it's pretty shady for the rest of the day. Got any ideas?

Signed,  
Plagued on Picacho

Dear Plagued,  
Get a cat? Kidding.

One of my favorite vertical-growing plants for bright shade or morning sun is *Cordyline stricta* 'Soledad' (sometimes sold as 'Soledad Purple') Not to be confused with *Cordyline australis* which has a different growth habit and color, this cordyline resembles a dracaena (“corn plant”). It has dark green, two-foot long, glossy leaves with purple undersides that are linear in shape. In the spring you can expect clusters of fragrant, lavender flowers. The clumps of stems may reach up to 15 feet tall by 6 feet wide, but can be easily thinned and maintained for rat control by cutting the individual soft stems completely to the ground. New stems will replace them.

*Cordyline stricta* “Soledad” takes regular watering and is virtually pest-free. It makes an awesome container plant for outdoors or in bright light indoors, however as a houseplant you probably won't get the flowers. My

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