

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.

Post Fire Landscaping



Matilija Poppy (*Romneya coulteri*) is a Zone 4 native for “firescaping”

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I have a garden question for you that I hope you can help me with.

My home escaped the Tea Fire when the wind changed, but the steep chaparral hillside above me burned to the ground. It’s my land and I’m wondering what to plant while I have the opportunity. Preferably low water, low maintenance, and not a fire hazard.

Ralph Fertig
Sycamore Canyon

Dear Ralph,

Thanks so much for your most timely question. I know it sounds like a simple one but actually the answer is a little complicated. I will try to point you in the right direction so you can explore your options before you decide what to plant.

It is recommended that a fire-wise landscape be mapped out to include four zones. With the first zone (which we’ll call Zone 1) being the area closest to your home. In this zone, a homeowner is advised to plant irrigated groundcovers, low shrubs and fire retardant trees. There is a wide variety of plants recommended for this zone. A partial list would include yarrow, aeonium, agave, agapanthus, aloe, alstroemeria, arbutus, asparagus, bulbine, camellia, cotoneaster, phormium, ribes and sedum.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Zone 4, which is the farthest zone from your residence. This section should consist of native plants that are maintained and kept thinned to reduce excess brush that would fuel a fire. Some examples of plants for this zone are manzanita, ceanothus, coffee berry, Matilija poppy, tree mallow, lemonade berry, white sage, black sage and other natives.

What you decide to plant depends on how far from your home the hillside is. Here are two websites that explain all the Zones (including



Lemonade berry (*Rhus integrifolia*) is another excellent choice for Zone 4 “firescapes”

Zones 2 and 3) and should help you with your plan:

San Marcos Growers: <http://www.smgrowers.com/resources/firescape.asp>

City of Santa Barbara’s Firescape Demonstration Garden:

<http://www.santabarbaraca.gov/NR/rdonlyres/992622F5-9803-4931-B93C-C3E76E97A8C1/0/firescape121708finalcmk100.pdf>

Help Mr. Greenjeans!

We have this wonderful flowering plant in galvanized planters that put out lots of beautiful flowers, but there is hardly a single leaf to be found. We’ve forgotten the name but would love to fill the pot with more than stems and flowers.

I’m looking at them today and there are some small leaves coming out; in the past they’ve usually just disappeared. I notice a slight burning of the tips of the leaves and the color of the growth is almost maroon not hardy green.

Any advice on this oddity?



The mystery plant used to be *Russelia equisetiformis* “Flamingo Park”

Signed,
Tom Simmons
Simmons & Co.
Las Canoas Road

Dear Tom,

Judging by the photo you sent I’m convinced that your plant is, (or was) either *Russelia equisetiformis* which sports red flowers or the coral-pink blooming *Russelia equisetiformis* “Flamingo Park.”

Regardless of which one you have, in order to tell you exactly why your plants look so sad I would have to know a little more informa-



Healthy *Russelia* should look like this

tion about how they’re being cared for. For example, do the containers have drainage holes in the bottom? Have they been over- or under-watered? Did they freeze this winter?

Both russelias bloom in spring and summer, are easy to grow in sun or shade and should thrive with regular irrigation. At the risk of sounding like a broken CD, as with almost any plant, your russelia should not be watered if the soil is already soggy or wet, but rather when the top of the soil begins to dry slightly. This probably means feeling the soil before you water to really determine if it’s a watering day or not.

It could also be that if they’re in an especially chilly part of your yard they could’ve been damaged by the cool temperatures this winter. If that is indeed the case, with thoughtful watering your plants should leaf out again and bloom this spring.

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