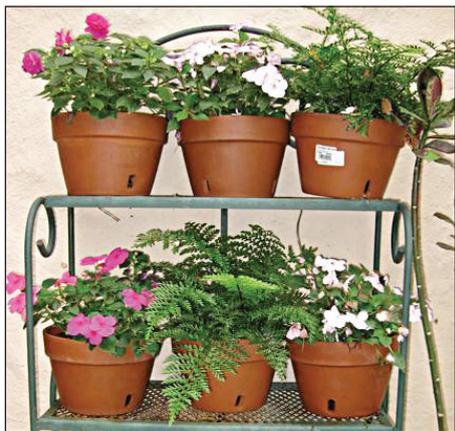


Safe from the Beasts



Impatiens and ferns are not on the menu, at least not yet

A few months ago a reader asked me if I had any ideas about what could be eating her dipladenias and star jasmine. I discussed the possibility that fox squirrels, a relatively new pest, could be the culprit and mentioned some plants that I thought might be safe from these and other varmints.

Since that inquiry, I have been working with a client that shares her garden and container plants with scurries of squirrels, roving bands of chipmunks and herds of rabbits. Incidentally, a



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.

group of rabbits can also be called a colony, nest or warren, although these terms usually refer to the place in which they live.

More about names for groups of animals later on, though.

The point is that after losing baskets of cascading bedding plants, terra cotta pots boasting hardy perennials and color bowls of annuals, I have succeeded in finding at least a few miscellaneous plants that so far (fingers crossed) have proven to be not very appetizing to wildlife.

Small pots of impatiens and ferns are as of yet untouched and most of the varieties of begonias including the bedding and fuchsia types and the Riegers that I tried are holding up well.



Heucheras, sedum, caladium and impatiens don't appeal to the wild-life palate

Ivy geraniums were untouched initially but now only the flowers are being eaten off the plants and the foliage is totally intact.

The dark purple heucheras as well as those outrageous chartreuse ones are surprisingly immune to the devastation and the caladiums, pelargoniums and sedum that share their pot space are safe too, and actually growing and filling in.

Gartenmeister (Fuchsia ‘Gartenmeister Bonstedt’) and shrimp plant (Justicia brandegeana) in large containers are standing up well to the beasts also.

I came upon these successes after only a little exasperation and frustration and some persistent trial and error.

By the way, groups of chipmunks are not actually called “roving bands” but according to Answers.com, they are referred to as a scurry or sweet of chipmunks.

I also discovered, with the help of EnglishClub.com, that a group of:

- Bats are a cloud
- Bears are a sleuth or sloth
- Cats are a clutter
- Ducks are a raft
- Foxes are a troop
- Frogs are an army
- Kangaroos are a mob or troop
- Owls are a parliament
- Tigers are a streak
- Zebras are a cohort

Mealybugs Take Over

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I love all those New Zealand flax plants but no matter whether I grow the large ones or the small ones in containers or in the ground they always seem to get some bugs. After awhile I'll find all this sticky, white stuff down there at the base of the plant where the leaves come from. Eventually, the leaves get mushy and the plants decline or fall apart. Is this a bug, a disease or my imagination? Thanks for your help.

Signed,

Flax Facts



New Zealand flax is kept bug-free with frequent rinsing and some good food

Dear Facts,

New Zealand flax or Phormiums are a group of diverse and versatile plants. They are available in all sizes from the 18" grass-like Phormium ‘Jack Spratt’ to the mammoth, eight-foot Phormium ‘Sundowner.’ But in my experience (and apparently yours) they all eventually become infested with mealybugs.

Phormium mealybugs are small, fluffy, cottony bugs that live hidden within the folded base of the leaves where they suck on the plant juices and emit a sticky, white mealy substance.

With mild infestations the plant does not really suffer but as you've probably observed, heavily infected plants are generally slower growing and less healthy and the leaves may become discolored and eventually fall apart.

There is no simple chemical control for mealybugs but Malathion is sometimes recommended. The main problem is that the bugs are hidden in the leaf bases so it is necessary to pull back each leaf before the chemical can reach the pests.

Systemic insecticides are also prescribed but personally I wouldn't use any of these chemicals. I find that if the plants are watered and fed properly and the plants are hosed off frequently, especially down where the bugs hang out, you can keep the problem under control.

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