

IN THE GARDEN

WITH MR. GREENJEANS

by Randy Arnowitz

Alternative to Grass



Limit your dymondia ground cover to small-scale areas like between stepping stones

Hey Greenjeans,

I was looking to plant a drought-tolerant ground cover in my native garden and my friend recommended that I use dymondia. What do I need to know about this plant? Do you think it's a good idea? How often will I have to water it? Thanks for any help.

Signed,

Curious on Coyote



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.

at all until its roots get established.

I also find that it is best used in small, limited areas such as between stepping stones. If you install large areas of it, I think you will find it difficult to keep the weeds out of it. Different types of oxalis like to take up residence in it and before long it's shooting its seeds all over the place and if left unchecked will become a maintenance nightmare. Once the dymondia forms a mat it is more able to fend off the invading weeds.

As far a growing dymondia in your native garden, keep in mind that it is a native but not to here. If you are growing true California natives and are watering them properly, you most certainly will have to supplement the water for your dymondia ground cover.

Gardenia Mystery

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

My wife loves growing gardenias and especially likes the way they smell but always winds up killing them off. Whether she grows them in pots or planted directly in the ground they always seem to end up in the compost pile or the green bin. They get watered with the rest of the garden. What is she doing wrong?

Signed,

Disappointed on Dorking



Gardenia 'Veitchii' is a more forgiving variety than 'Mystery' problem.

Dear Disappointed,

The answer to your question lies in the phrase, “They get watered with the rest of the garden.” Gardenias are not the easiest plants to grow. They're not very forgiving as far as irrigation and if allowed to dry out to the point of wilting they often do not bounce back or recover like, say a wandering jew or Creeping Charlie-type plant will. Likewise, if you water them too often and keep them overly damp or wet they will eventually exhibit the same symptoms of wilting since the roots will begin to die from the soggy conditions.

So, if your gardenias are being indiscriminately watered by hand or by your irrigation timer when the rest of the garden is being watered with little no regard to whether they really need to be soaked, therein lies your

Once you get the hang of it (them) though, gardenias are actually not that difficult to grow. Proper watering and some healthy food formulated for acid-loving plants like azaleas and camellias should keep you in fragrant flowers almost all year. If your plants are stubborn about greening up even with food, try adding some chelated iron to the menu.

By the way, when choosing a gardenia to grow, the more compact variety called 'Veitchii' (Gardenia jasminoides 'Veitchii') is, in my experience, easier to grow. After you've mastered 'Veitchii' move on to the fussier 'Mystery' which although more difficult to grow will reward your efforts with larger leaves and showier flowers..

Dear Curious,

Dymondia (*Dymondia margaretae*), a South African native, is generally a reliable, drought-tolerant plant once thoroughly established. The word to watch here is “generally.” In my experience, once it forms a thick, dense mat it is somewhat water-wise and certainly requires less water than a grass lawn but seems to look better with regular watering.

I have quite a bit of it growing above East Valley Road in very porous, well-draining soil and that stuff dries out and looks tired very quickly. In the summer it seems to need a good soak at least twice a week to look good.

Keep in mind that when first planted from flats or small, 4” container plants it will do best if not allowed to dry out



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