

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.

Issues with Cyclamen

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

This may be a really dumb question. I am known for my green thumb and have no problems growing everything from veggies in my raised beds to orchids in my greenhouse. Every year when cyclamen become available at the nurseries I buy a few but always kill them off. The leaves and flowers get all droopy and the whole plant looks horrible. I would think they are easy to grow since they are just about everywhere at this time of year. What am I doing wrong? Should they be left in the pots, planted in the ground or what?

Signed,
Wilton Baddly

Dear Wilton,

If it makes you feel any better, I don't think these plants are all that easy to master either. It sometimes seems they go down whether watered frequently or infrequently with a little water or a lot of water.

After some hits and misses, here is what I've discovered about keeping cyclamen healthy and producing a wealth of flowers and leaves.

For starters, they do better outside in very bright shade or full morning sun. They will look a little less vibrant if grown in full, harsh, all-day and afternoon sun. If brought indoors, keep them in a brightly lit room that is on the cool side. Cyclamen probably will not last long in a stuffy over-heated house.

If you are keeping your cyclamen in its original container, thoroughly soak the plant; pot and all in a bowl of water when the soil *begins* to dry out until the soil is saturated. Let it drain before setting it back in its saucer or decorative planter. If the pot is encased in that funky florist foil, remove it so the water can drain out of the bottom of the pot and away from the soil.

If you are transplanting a single cyclamen into a larger pot or grouping many of them into a large planter you will probably notice that the soil in your original cyclamen pot is different from the potting soil that you are transplanting into. It could be that the soil around the root ball is very “peaty.” This means that after you transplant your plants, it may be difficult to keep that “peaty root ball” moist even though you are soaking the heck out of the new surrounding soil. I've yanked sad-looking cyclamen out of their pots after weeks of what I thought was conscientious



These cyclamen are thoughtfully and thoroughly watered



The finicky plant comes in pink, too!

watering only to find the root ball totally dried out.

On the other hand they are easy to *over* water. Keep in mind that the lumpy thing from which the leaves and flowers arise is a bulb and it stores water and food. That means that indiscriminately watering your cyclamen because it's your watering day or if the soil is already moist, is another sure way to send that thing to the green bin. A mushy cyclamen bulb is a dead cyclamen bulb.

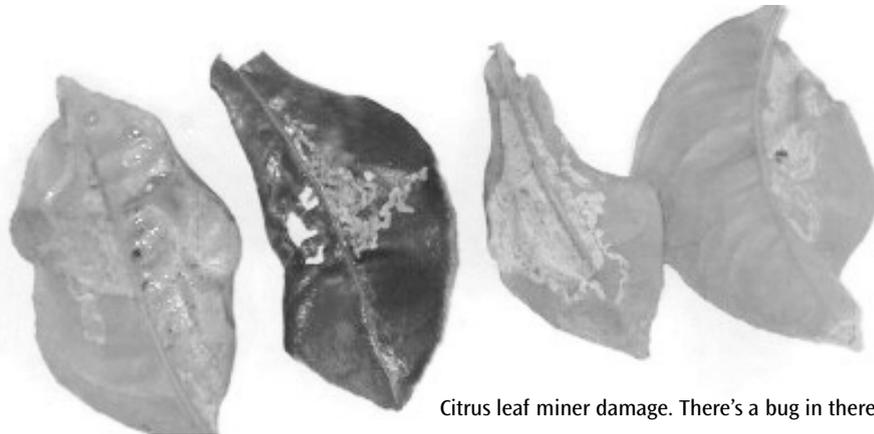
If you're planting cyclamen directly into your garden bed be sure your soil is porous and well draining. As above, be sure root balls of the individual plants are being thoroughly watered until they have had a chance to root out into the existing garden soil.

Whether transplanting or planting cyclamen, it is very important to bury the bulb at the same depth that it is already planted in its original container. Do not let fallen leaves, soil or mulch collect around or cover up that big, lumpy bulb.

Citrus Pests

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I have a friend (I'll call her Mary) that has some kind of crazy pest on her citrus trees. There are silvery trails on the new leaf growth and the affected leaves eventually curl and become distorted. It started on one of her navel oranges and now it seems to have spread to her other citrus trees.



Citrus leaf miner damage. There's a bug in there!



Try “natural” remedies for eliminating citrus leaf miner

What is this pest and what can I... I mean what can *Mary*... do about it? Thanks for any help you can give.

Signed,
Mary's friend

Dear Mary's friend,

The damage you describe is caused by the citrus leaf miner, or *Phyllocnistis citrella*. This leaf miner is difficult to get rid of and is caused by the larvae of a tiny moth that lays its eggs on the new citrus growth. When the eggs hatch the larvae tunnel into the

leaves causing a silvery trail and subsequently the leaf distortion. These larvae then pupate in the leaf and emerge as moths and start the cycle all over again.

You can try cutting out the affected growth and spray with any product from the nursery containing spinosad which is a naturally occurring compound produced by a bacterium. Try not to let anyone talk you into using any harsher chemicals.

Hopefully in the near future, levels of biological controls such as parasitic wasps that eat the miners will increase and take care of the problem. Fingers crossed.

My

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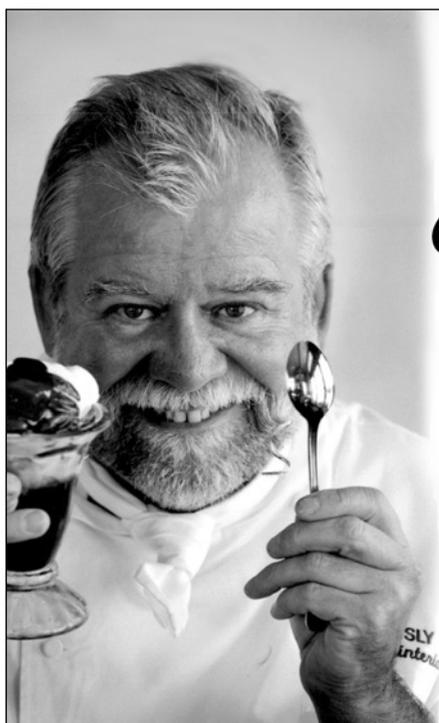
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