

IN THE GARDEN

WITH MR. GREENJEANS

by Randy Arnowitz

Color Conundrum

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I hope you can help me with a problem that I'm having with my flower garden. Every winter I plant pansies, violas, calendulas, lobelias and other cool season annuals in my garden but they never really look that good. The pansies, violas and lobelia get stringy and turn yellow. The orange calendulas, which are my favorites, die out way before the weather warms up. The garden bed is in full sun, well-watered and I feed the plants regularly. What could be causing these problems?

Sincerely,
Wilton Budds

Dear Wilton,

I had the same problem with these winter annuals for many years until I had a gardening epiphany. I sometimes noticed that tiny volunteer seedlings of lobelia and Johnny Jump-Up violas would sprout up in the most inhospitable places like the cracks in driveways, the spaces between sidewalks and even in my clay pots of succulents. It occurred to me that since these



Avoid watering winter annuals too often, and try to water only when the soil approaches dryness to maintain bright colors



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.

little guys could germinate and survive under these Spartan conditions, they probably did not need an excessive amount of water to flourish in a garden bed. In fact, they seemed to do poorly

under these overly wet conditions and were more susceptible to fungal diseases that were present in the soil.

What works for me is to get these types of bedding plants established with regular watering – that is, keeping them evenly moist until they are rooted out. Then I back off with the water and only water when they approach dryness. I know I've said this “approach dryness thing” many times and in fact, I now have it tattooed on my forehead. Again, it means don't water when already wet but don't let the roots dry out either. I know it's a little daunting but once I mastered this concept I was able to grow almost anything successfully.

Here are a few other tips that work for me when growing cool-season and warm-season annual color.

– Don't buy overgrown, root bound plants to begin with. Better to get them in bud rather than in full bloom. If I buy little six-packs, I know they need extra care in keeping those tiny, “peaty” rootballs moist because once they dry out completely, they are almost impossible to rewet. It seems like a waste but if you can't devote this extra time to getting them going – buy 4” plants. They're more forgiving because there's so much darn soil in the pot.

– Regularly deadhead the plants, which means removing the spent blooms. This encourages the plant to continue putting out flowers.

– Each season, prior to planting, I always work some type of compost and organic fertilizer into the bed to replace what has been used up.

– If the plants start to get tired or stingy with the goods, feed them with fish emulsion, compost tea or some other water-soluble fertilizer as needed.

As an extra measure, especially if I'm feeling frivolous and reckless, I'll buy seeds for some of these and other



The Tower Garden by Juice Plus+ is an effective way to grow plants and vegetables in a small space

annuals and throw them around in the bed along with the starts I'm planting. And, I always save some for the cracks in the driveway and sidewalks.

Small Space Solution

Dear Mr. Greenjeans,

I live in a condo and have almost no space to grow flowers and vegetables. I know you've addressed this subject of limited space before but I don't even have a tiny plot of earth in which to garden. I do, however, have a sunny balcony. Any ideas on how I can grow at least a few crops and some color out there. Thanks for any suggestions you might have.

Yours,
Anita Akers

Dear Anita,

There's always the tried and true method of growing flowers and veggies in barrels, tubs, nursery containers of potting soil but I just found out about a different, edgier way to farm even in the limited space of a condo balcony. It resembles something that George Jetson might grow his space crops in, and it's called Tower Garden by Juice Plus+. My friend Maria is a local distributor and I went by her place to check it out. Tower Garden is an aeroponic growing system that is almost too mind-boggling to describe. It consists of a hollow, vertical cylinder that has slots in the sides that house the plants. A pump circulates and bathes the plant roots – which are growing on the inside of the tube – with nutrient-rich water. The brochure states, “Its compact, state of the art system fits easily on patios, rooftops, terraces, and... there is no weeding, tilling, kneeling or getting dirty.” If anyone is acreagely compromised and wants to grow the maximum amount of fruits, veggie and flowers in a minimum amount of space, please contact me at greenjeansmr@verizon.net and I will send forward your inquiry to Maria. My

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