

Our Experts Answer Your Gardening Questions

CONTROLLING ROOT WEEVILS

I recently lost several foamflowers (*Tiarella* spp.). Their roots appeared to have been severed from the upper part of the plant, right at the crown. When I dug in the soil, I found numerous small white grubs. What are these grubs and how do I treat them?

—N.E., SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

The likely cause is one of several species of root weevils that plague a wide variety of ornamental plants. The larvae, which you discovered, are typically under a half inch long, white with tan heads, and a C-shaped body. The black, brown, or reddish colored adult beetles—which appear to have long “snouts”—usually emerge in summer and feed on foliage. But it's the larvae that do the more serious damage by eating the roots and crown of plants.

Control is usually most effective if you spray the adult beetles with synthetic pyrethroids in the evening when you see them feeding. You can also drench the soil in fall or spring to control the larvae.

Dan Heims, co-owner of Terra Nova Nurseries, a wholesale nursery that has introduced several new varieties of foamflowers, says that a drench of very hot water is an organic option for killing the grubs. For more information about the root weevil, see the Terra Nova Growing Tip online at: www.terravanurseries.com/news/PreviousGrowTips.htm#Root%20Weevils.

ELIMINATING BERMUDAGRASS

What is the most effective way to remove wiregrass from a bed of 10-year-old azaleas? The wiregrass has crept in from an adjacent lawn area and is deeply entrenched at the base of each azalea. I have hand-pulled the tops of the wiregrass, but can't get to the roots. Is there a way to eradicate it without damaging the azaleas?

—J.T., GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Several grasses are known by the name

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“wiregrass”; the most common are goosegrass (*Eleusine indica*) and Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*). Since goosegrass is relatively easy to pull up, your problem is probably Bermudagrass, which grows very long, deep roots and is almost impossible to pull up completely. Even a small piece of root left in the soil can generate a new plant.

In your case, it is probably best to use a non-selective herbicide that contains glyphosate to kill all the grass around the azaleas. To be most effective, the herbicide should be applied while the grass is actively growing. Since Bermudagrass goes dormant in most areas in the late fall, it is best to treat in early to mid-summer. Be sure to keep the herbicide from coming in contact with the foliage of the azaleas and, as with any pesticide, read and follow the instructions carefully before using.

It may take more than one application of herbicide to kill the Bermudagrass, but it will eventually die. Then install continuous metal or plastic edging around your azaleas to prevent the wiregrass from creeping back into the bed.

IRIS CLARIFICATION

What is the difference between *Iris pumila* and dwarf or intermediate bearded iris?

—R.W., LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

Iris pumila is a species of iris; it has not been hybridized or bred for any particular trait. Dwarf bearded irises are the result of hybridizing *Iris pumila* and one or more other species of bearded iris to form a more compact, cold tolerant plant. Although dwarf bearded iris cultivars are often sold

under the name *Iris pumila*, they are usually hybrids of two or more species.

NON-BLOOMING ORCHID CACTUS

A couple of years ago I purchased a red orchid cactus (*Epiphyllum* sp.) and it has grown well and is now a good size plant, but it has yet to flower. Is there any special kind of treatment to get it to flower or will it just do it on its own?

—A.J., FLORENCE, KANSAS

There are several possible causes for your plant's reluctance to bloom. Epiphyllum Society of America board member Pat Dobbins, who grows over 1,200 different epiphyllums at Epie Acres in Placentia, California, explains that any epiphyllum “has to have its roots crowded before it blooms. The most common mistake beginners make is putting it in too large of a pot.” She suggests that if you think this is the case, you should repot it in a smaller container.

Another possible cause of non-flowering is light: Epiphyllums are short-day plants—they require a certain length of darkness to initiate flower buds. The length of darkness your plant receives indoors should correspond with the length of the natural dark period outdoors. If it is in a room where lights are turned on in the evening, the requirement for initiating flower buds will not be met. Even a few minutes of light interrupting the dark period can prevent flowering.

Finally, your cactus may simply be too young to produce buds. All plants go through a juvenile stage of mostly vegetative growth before entering the adult stage where flowers and seeds are produced. Dobbins says that it may take three to four years before it reaches full blooming size, so it may just be a matter of time. ☺

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