

Our Experts Answer Your Gardening Questions

FALL CARE FOR CALLA LILIES

My calla lilies are blooming beautifully right now, and I'd like to grow them again next year. As fall approaches, how do I go about dividing the bulbs and storing them over winter? I live in USDA Hardiness Zone 5.

—T.L., MADISON, WISCONSIN

Calla lilies (*Zantedeschia* spp.) are native to southern Africa, and although species vary in their hardiness, none are reliably hardy in Zone 5. If you are growing them in containers, you can bring the containers indoors before frost, place them where they will receive bright, indirect light, and grow them on as houseplants.

If your calla lilies are growing in the ground, dig them in fall as soon as the foliage begins to turn yellow or brown. Loosen the fleshy rhizomes gently, and if you are interested in propagating them, separate side shoots at this time.

Minnesota Extension horticulturist Mary H. Meyer, advises that the rhizomes should be cured for one to three days in a well ventilated room, away from direct sunlight or drying winds, before storing them for the winter in sphagnum peat or vermiculite, in a cool, dry room.

AILING TOMATOES

My tomato plants are very green and healthy and producing lots of young, green tomatoes. The leaves, however, are curling up. Should I be concerned?

—G.C., VIA E-MAIL

Tomatoes like relatively constant moisture and do not tolerate excesses in wetness or dryness. Large swings between wetness and dryness can result in a number of problems, some more serious than others. Sounds like you have leaf roll, a condition common with tomatoes. It is a temporary disorder that results from excessively wet soil and is especially noticeable after heavy rains. Fortunately, it

WE'RE READY TO HELP: For answers to your gardening questions, call Gardener's Information Service at (800) 777-7931, extension 131, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Eastern time, or e-mail us anytime at gis@ahs.org.

does not slow the plant's growth and a normal crop of fruit is usually produced. As the soil dries, the symptoms disappear and the plants return to normal.

NON-BLOOMING HYDRANGEAS

I live in central Wisconsin and there are three hydrangeas on my property that are about five years old and have never bloomed. The plants are about two feet tall and have dark green, two-inch-by-four-inch leaves with serrated edges. Two of them are in the shade most of the time and the other gets about a half day of sun. Why haven't these plants bloomed?

—B.O., VIA E-MAIL

It sounds like they are probably big leaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*). They are considered hardy only to USDA Zone 6, while central Wisconsin is probably Zone 4. Although these hydrangeas will survive in colder areas, they will not thrive and will not flower reliably.

In an article about hydrangeas in the July/August 2003 issue of *The American Gardener*, author Richard Bir suggested that lack of bloom is generally caused by one or more excesses: sun or shade, nitrogen fertilizer, cold, etc. "More often, however, the cause is improper pruning by the gardener or a cruel trick of Mother Nature," wrote Bir. Hydrangea flower buds develop in summer, the year before the flowers appear, so "anything that damages flower buds will result in a lack of flowers."

In your case, the "excess" that is responsible for the lack of blooms is most likely cold temperatures. An inelegant way

to protect the buds is to wrap the plants in burlap in late fall. (See "Seasonal Garden Goods" on page 54 for other protection options.)

You could also consider replacing your hydrangeas with some of the reliable rebloomers Bir recommended in his article, including 'David Ramsey', Endless Summer™, or 'Oak Hill'.


COMBATING HORSETAILS

I have horsetails growing in my yard and would like to know how to get rid of them.

—L.W., VIA E-MAIL

Horsetails (*Equisetum* spp.) are primitive plants that have existed unchanged for eons. They can be very invasive and hard to eliminate, especially in moist soil. These flowerless, seedless plants thrive in moist areas, and reproduce by spores and—more problematically—underground rhizomes that can extend more than three feet below ground.

Andy Kendig, extension weed specialist at the University of Missouri, says the university has just begun a study on the control of equisetum. "The first thing we've found out is that the stuff is hard to control—even very high rates of Roundup did little," he says. "Our best treatment so far has been herbicides related to the 'Weed-B-Gon/Dandelion Killer/Trimec' herbicides. These products must be used with great caution around desirable broadleaf plants."

As an active, backyard gardener, however, Kendig continues, "I say with 'great authority' that you cannot replace manual or mechanical weed control." So if the horsetails haven't spread over too great an area, a diligent digging program is probably your best bet. 

William May, Gardener's Information Service Volunteer, and Marianne Polito, Gardener's Information Service Manager.