

Q & A

GOT A QUESTION? We've got the answer, whether it's about a plant, a tricky spot or a product you need

Q **MY INDOOR DRAGON PALM TREE** is getting too big for its space. What can I do?

Dragon palms grow well in the low light and dry conditions found in most houses. That's why yours has thrived and grown so tall. Simply use sharp secateurs to cut each stem down to the height you want. The stems will soon resprout new leaves. You can cut back yuccas and areca palms in the same way. Push any of these cut stems into pots of compost and they'll soon grow roots, giving you new plants for the house or to give to friends.



Q **ON HOLIDAY I SAW lots of cacti and succulents with pretty flowers.** Can I get the ones I have at home to do the same?

Although cacti and succulents will survive very dry conditions, to get them to flower you will need to water them once per week between April and September. Do this by placing the pot in a deep bowl of water until the bubbles stop coming

out of the top of the pot. Then remove it and let the water completely drain away.

Once a month, add a liquid cactus feed such as Westland Cactus Plant Food to the water. Let the compost dry out slightly between waterings, rather than keeping it moist, and where possible, use rain water rather than tap. From September onwards, reducing watering to once per month, allowing the compost to virtually dry out before watering.



Hostas will flourish unribbled with some strategically placed slug pellets

Q **WHAT CAN I DO to keep slugs and snails off my hostas?**

If your hostas are growing in containers, you can place them on a gravelled area or raised shelf, which will make it harder for slugs and snails to reach them. Copper tape (£4.99 Wyevale Garden Centres) applied around the pot edge will also slow them down.

If your hostas are growing in the ground, sprinkle slug pellets around them. Make sure you do this as soon as they start to emerge in spring. For a more wildlife-friendly solution, use Nemaslug (£11.49 nematodesdirect.co.uk), which is an organic slug killer that's watered onto the ground.

Q **HOW CAN I KEEP my garden well-watered in summer with the least amount of effort?**

Automatic watering systems, which are available at most garden centres, make light work of hydrating your plants. They can be attached to an outdoor tap or water butt, and fitted with a timer so that watering happens at night, meaning moisture isn't lost to the hot sun. The systems use narrow tubes that run over your flower beds and pots. They gently seep water into the soil or compost.

An alternative is to use a decorative sprinkler, such as this one (right), which catches the sun as it spins and rotates. You can install it in your lawn or flowerbeds and it will water them to a radius of 4.5m. It costs £14.99 from flopro-uk.com.



That's CLEVER!

EASY IDEAS



HOW CAN I ENTICE more butterflies into my garden?

Grow a shrub with fragrant flowers, such as butterfly bush, firethorn or hebe. If you don't have room for a shrub, a smaller plant such as a lavender, alyssum, golden rod, red valerian or candytuft will also bring

them flocking to your garden. Butterflies also love warm, sheltered places, so if your garden is windy and exposed they won't visit much. Make more shelter by planting shrubs, which diffuse the wind, or create a sheltering boundary hedge with flowering shrubs that butterflies love, such as escallonia or spirea.



I HAVE A NEW PERGOLA around my patio. What plants can I grow on it to make a cool, shaded spot to relax in?

If you want a climber that's smothered with flowers rather than leaves, plant a wisteria or *Clematis montana* at the base of your pergola and the flowers will scramble all over it. To create shade, use a plant with large leaves. A grape vine is perfect if you live in the southern half of the country. It has large heart-shaped leaves and will even produce a small crop of fruit if you choose a hardy variety such as 'Flame' or 'Phoenix' (both from victoriananursery.co.uk). If you live in northern England or Scotland, go for the hardier golden hop plant, which has similar large, fan-shaped leaves and soft green flowers. All these plants will romp over the structure and cover it within three years.

Fast-growing hornbeam trees will offer year-round privacy in no time.



ASK THE DESIGNER

OUR VERY SMALL GARDEN IS OVERLOOKED. How can we create privacy without closing ourselves in?
Mr and Mrs Coid, Clevedon, North Somerset



The plain wall before the transformation



CHRIS RIXTON
GreenBird Gardening Ltd

"My clients have a very small garden overlooked by a neighbouring property. A pleached hedge was a way of creating a raised screen of greenery that offers privacy without blocking out too much light. We used two hornbeam trees, which hold onto leaves through winter, planted next to each other and trained their branches

horizontally on a framework of canes. Eventually they will grow together to make a flat and light screen of branches across the back boundary of the garden.

Underneath the pleached hedge we planted low-maintenance box balls, English lavender, alliums and ornamental grasses, which create year-round interest. The porcelain slab patio is low-maintenance and laid so that the eye follows its lines out of the house, making the garden into an outdoor room. The rendered breezeblock walls are painted pale grey, which reflects the light and makes the small space seem bigger."

Chris Rixton is director of greenbirdgardening.co.uk, a landscaping and design company in the South West.

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Want some design inspiration or got a garden question you'd like answered? Get in touch, including a picture if you have one, by email at moderngardens@bauermedia.co.uk