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Wisteria, Trumpet Vine & Chinch Bugs

A Wisteria vine in northern Ontario?; what to do with a huge Trumpet Vine shrub; and what to do about Chinch bugs in lawns!

by Art Drysdale

by **Art Drysdale**

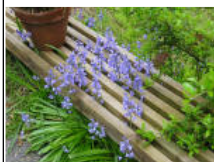
email: art@artdrysdale.com

Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>



May 2, 2010



Above, Our slow-growing *Rhododendron 'Yaku Princess'* is just about at its best as the two photos here show; and nearby are the ever-spreading bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) growing right through our bench! Below, a stunning red azalea with the *Erythronium americanum* at their best in front; this *Daphne odora* is doing about the best of a half dozen we have—improving every year; and this evergreen barberry too is at its best right now. Author photos.



This week I have to get to some more questions. I'll take them on in the order they were received over the past two weeks. Cynthia, from somewhere in northern Ontario, wrote to Donna Dawson, saying, "I have had a wisteria vine growing for the last seven years. Suddenly last year barely any leaves. This year nothing, it should at least be budding by now. I disturbed the roots by accident last year. I didn't realize that the roots travelled so far. Did I kill my wisteria and should I give up and dig it up. I live in northern Ontario, Zone 4 I think. Never had flowers but always had lots of foliage."

Cynthia, I am surprised that you are growing any Wisteria up in Zone 4 since there is very little likelihood of it flowering up there, as you have indicated is the case. However, my old friend Pierre Bourque (former Mayor of Montréal) had one that flowered regularly in the Jardin botanique de Montréal, so maybe if you try protecting it somewhat, one year you might get a few flowers!

I would not be too concerned about having disturbed the plant's roots. One of the tried and true methods of forcing a non-flowering Wisteria into blooming is to trim the roots severely! Try applying a soluble fertilizer on all of the branches every ten days or so to see if you can get it to put out more leaf buds. Then if that works (and it should) late this fall try coving it with Arbotex or even a thick coating of burlap.

Good Luck!

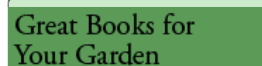
Mary Vander Munnik who listens to my daily gardening radio vignettes, likely on FM101 out Tillsonburg Ontario, wrote this interesting question, which makes me wonder just what type of answer is she hoping for! "We listen to you on the radio and would appreciate your advice. We have a 30 year old fence that we are replacing; it is held up by a 30 year old trumpet vine. If you could give any advice on pruning as it is huge, it would be appreciated. Our neighbours would like to see it gone because it is taking over the world. We like it because it brings in hummingbirds and orioles."

Basically the question here is, to remove or to prune. That is a difficult call, especially since I am at a disadvantage not being able to see the vine. I believe I would try the 'severe pruning' route first, and do it as soon as possible now. Choose most of the major thick branches (from the base) and cut those as close to the crown (the ground) as possible. Be sure to leave three or four younger, newer branches, but you may also cut those back likely by at least one-third (up to one-half).

If you think you cannot make the old vine look reasonable with pruning, another consideration would be to remove the old vine entirely, and once the new fence is in, plant another trumpet vine, perhaps a cultivar which is newer and would not have been available when the old one was planted. That might please your neighbour and that likely counts for something.

The next question came to Donna from Heather Keys in Winnipeg. "Well after completely removing the front lawn and 15 yards of soil was levelled, fresh sod was laid down and two years later my grass is dead in a large patch. My neighbour said it's cinch bugs. So I sprayed and everything but now I don't know what to do. I'm in Winnipeg and the grass is growing back except where the bugs went to dinner. So is it best to take all the dead grass and soil out and re-do it or remove soil/grass and put in an extended garden. I don't know much about gardening, my neighbours love to help me! Any advice you can give is really appreciated, really!"

Your culprits may be Chinch bugs, or some other below-ground root-eater! Nevertheless, the only difference is just when to apply the GrubOut (currently under the



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brand name Sure-Gro) or other similar treatment. The single best time to check whether it is Chinch bugs is in mid-July. It is a relatively simple to test to see if that is what you have. Take a 48 oz. juice tin (or even larger if available) and cut both ends out with a can opener. Press one end of the tin into the green grass and soil just at the edge of a brown area. Fill the tin up with water (and maybe add a little bit of liquid soap); as the water penetrates the turf, if there are Chinch bugs present, they will float to the surface. Generally, if there are more than ten Chinch bugs up floating, you have a problem.

Spraying is definitely the answer, especially since you live in a province which has not chosen to limit your opportunities to have a good lawn by banning what the enviro-maniacs call 'cosmetic pesticides'. GrubOut contains Carbaryl (also known as Sevin) and it remains as effective for Chinch bugs as most other chemicals available to the homeowner in Canada. If you or someone you know happens to have some diazinon still around, that would be effective as well. Again, spraying soon now should get the young insects that are just hatching.

The primary control for Chinch bugs these days is some of the newer grass seeds (particularly perennial rye grasses) that contain a fungus known as endophytes which actually grow within the grass plants. There are no known endophytes in any of our bluegrasses--once the staple of lawn grasses in northern climates such as ours. However, they can be found in a long list of perennial ryegrasses as well as in a number of fescues. The answer then is to purchase a grass seed mixture that contains either 100% perennial ryegrass, or a reasonable percentage of grass types that do contain an endophyte. PickSeed (another Sure-Gro company) sells a number of mixtures containing good quantities of endophytes.

Generally those mixtures containing endophytes may not be as good for over-seeding an old lawn as they are for establishing a new lawn. Therefore, I would sow the bare or almost bare areas with such a new grass seed, after applying GrubOut again this spring (to all areas of the lawn where the tin can test shows there are Chinch bugs at work).

In Ontario and Quebec, where proven-safe insecticides such as Carbaryl are no longer available to consumers (due to offensive and inaccurate enviro-maniac lobbying) I would recommend visiting a province or U.S. State where they are available, and obtaining what you need. Remember, they are legal as far as our federal government is concerned so there is nothing wrong with bringing them into the country. I would also recommend further use of the endophytic grass cultivars.

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