

64 WEEKEND LEISURE

HELEN YOUNG
TWIG



What's the best natural fertiliser for edible herbs?

(Laura Jilka, by email)

For leafy herbs use a soluble fertiliser that is high in nitrogen. Organic-based choices include Charlie Carp, PowerFeed or Organix Harvest. Liquid fertilisers enable rapid growth because the nutrients are available to plants immediately. Apply every few weeks. Mediterranean herbs such as thyme, sage and oregano need less fertiliser than soft, leafy herbs.

Can I divide my asparagus to make more plants? If so, can I still harvest next season?

(Jarra Knell, Dalveen, Queensland)

Asparagus crowns can be lifted and divided in late winter or early spring. Dividing will check their productivity, so you may need to wait until the second year to resume harvesting. Add copious amounts of organic matter such as compost and manures to the soil before replanting.

After gall wasp infestation and suspected collar rot, my Eureka lemon was cut to 10cm above the graft where there are three healthy shoots.

Should we have removed the whole tree? Is a self-sown, spiky lemon worth keeping?

(Joan Fleury, Brisbane)

If the new growth is prospering, you can address the causes of collar rot and let it regrow. Collar rot produces bark splits, oozing gum and loss of foliage. The causes are poor drainage, overwatering and mulch or weeds close against the trunk. If not controlled it can ringbark and kill the tree. Treat it by cutting out diseased bark and painting with a copper fungicide paste. Self-sown lemons are usually spiny, of variable quality and can take many years to fruit.

Where can I purchase Sim carnations?

(Margaret Belle, Goolwa, South Australia)

Sim carnations grow up to 1.2m tall and have lovely fragrance. They are available seasonally by mail order from Tesselaar Bulbs on 1300 428 527 and Lake Nurseries on (03) 9756 6157. Both have sold out this year. Contact them in May next year for a catalogue to pre-order.



Send your questions to:

Helen Young, PO Box 3098, Willoughby North, NSW 2068, or email twigreview@telstra.com. The best letter this month will win a \$100 pack of Scott's garden care products including Seafeed 3in1 plant health tonic.

FLORA

THE pretty perennial *Gaura lindheimeri*, or whirling butterflies, is available again in NSW. Now sensibly removed from the noxious weeds list, its cultivars are welcomed by gardeners for their drought-resistance, easy care and airy clouds of bloom from spring to autumn. The dainty flower stems of 'Passionate Pink', 'Ballerina Blush' and 'So White' reach 50cm or more, but new 'Lollipop Pink', pictured, is neater and more compact. Named for the breeder's father and aunt, it features hot pink flowers and dark pink new growth. For repeat flowering, prune gauras back to the foliage crown after each flush.



Pictures of perfection

HOLLY KERR FORSYTH
GARDENING



THIS little plant is from Mexico. I chose it purely because it is beautiful. The flower has the most wonderful smoky pink calyx: it flares out at the bottom and is so purple it is almost black."

Artist Beverly Allen is speaking about *Rhodochiton atrosanguineum*, the purple bell flower, and the species she has painted for *The Highgrove Florilegium*, a two-volume, limited edition folio of watercolours illustrating plants grown at Highgrove, the country house of the Prince of Wales.

For those among us who cannot draw a straight line, the ancient art of depicting botanical specimens in such perfect detail that they appear to be living holds a deep fascination. In the best work, the paintings appear three-dimensional: you can see pollen on anthers, the texture and gloss of the petals. Scale and perspective are crucial.

"You are also looking for botanical accuracy, of course; fine detail and fine paintwork," Allen explains. "You should not see brushstrokes."

Allen's work can be seen at Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens, in an exhibition showcasing species found in the three gardens run by the Botanic Gardens Trust, including Mount Annan and Mount Tomah.

Allen has contributed a painting of a new orchid developed from two dendrobiums that are native to Papua New Guinea, *Dendrobium engae* and *D. shiraishii*. This lovely orchid, which will soon be available for purchase, blooms in two shades of green, with deep purple stripes and rows of spots.

Allen's *Cyathea australis* is included in *The Highgrove Florilegium*: like all her work, it is executed from a living plant and is life-size. The fibrous texture of the unfurling crosier is vibrantly depicted and the rust-brown spores on the underside of the fronds are so realistic, you imagine you could brush them away.

Among Allen's favourite subjects are epiphyllums, a genus of epiphytic cacti popular with 19th-century Australian colonists. Native to South America, some, such as *Epiphyllum ackermannii*, were listed from 1850 by nurseryman William Macarthur and can still be seen at his home, Camden Park, southwest of Sydney.

Others, including *E. oxypetalum* and *E. hookeri*, are night flowering, so Allen paints them after dark.

"While they are rather awkward plants, the colours are stunning: hot pink and orange," she says. She also loves the flamboyant red blossom of the eucalypt that grows near her studio, on the shores of Sydney Harbour.

Trained as a graphic designer and illustrator, Allen has been painting botanical specimens for more than a decade. Her garden is full of the rich colours and textures that she chooses to paint. There is a fiddle leaf fig with large, lush leaves and a massive *Strelitzia nicoli* with rooster-like inflorescences in purple and cream.

Asked what is needed in the execution of these gorgeous paintings, she says: "Patience and the ability to continue until it is finished, until all the details are in. Every nuance of texture, every botanical detail. You paint them because then they are gone, until next year."



No detail left out: An epiphyllum hybrid by Beverly Allen, whose work is featured in an exhibition at Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens as well as in the limited edition *The Highgrove Florilegium*

PRUNINGS

■ In Sydney, the inaugural exhibition of contemporary botanical paintings from the Botanic Gardens Trust Collection is on display at the Red Box Gallery in the Royal Botanic Gardens. The exhibition is open from 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday, until November 21, with a special weekend opening today and tomorrow. Entry is free. Inquiries: (02) 9231 8133. Beverly Allen will conduct a four-day botanical art workshop at the gardens next March. Inquiries: Friends of the Gardens, (02) 9231 8182 or friends@rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au.
■ At the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne, in Domain House, Dallas Brooks Drive, the ninth biennial exhibition of botanical works is on until November 23. Inquiries: (03) 9650

6398 or go to www.rbgfriendsmelbourne.org.
■ To inquire about *The Highgrove Florilegium*, published on specially made paper, hand-stitched, bound in goatskin and limited to only 175 sets, go to www.addisonpublications.com. Royalties support the the Prince of Wales Trust.
■ If you are in London before the end of July, don't miss the exhibition of works by Australia's botanical artists at the Shirley Sherwood Gallery of Botanical Art, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Titled *Down Under: Botanical Artists from Australia and New Zealand*, it includes three works by Allen among more than 40 paintings, collected by Sherwood since 1991.

