

Plant of the week: *the Arbutus*

THE *Arbutus* is a small tree which grows wild on acidic slopes.

It is also known as the strawberry tree because of the superficial resemblance of its fruit to a strawberry which, although edible, has little flavour.

The *Arbutus unedo*, or giant *Arbutus* is a bigger member of the family and can grow up to 20m with a massive trunk.

Relative

It is a genus of the family Ericaceae, native to warm temperate regions of the Mediterranean and has a distant relative in America called *Arbutus xalapensis* which is less widely known.

Few, if any, garden centres sell this huge tree but if your soil is slightly acidic you could try to grow the smaller *Arbutus andrachne* which grows up to eight metres and whose peeling bark reveals a smooth trunk.



ENORMOUS: This tree can grow up to 20 metres tall

Tips to keep lilies fresh indoors



HARDY: Lilies can last for three weeks



CAUTION: Keep out of direct sunlight

IF YOU need a refined shape, an extraordinary fragrance and a magnificent flower for a simple bouquet your best choice is definitely the lily, the champion of all seasonal flowers. If you need more ideas on how to use this flower in your home, visit the bulb information centre at www.bulbeafleur.com (English option). In the meantime, here is some advice by Ercole Moroni, a great Italian florist whose shop in London is a Mecca for flower enthusiasts.

- Lilies can stay up to three weeks. Buy them in their budding stage and well ahead if you like to have a spectacular show when they open.
- To avoid ruining the stems. Cut them diagonally with a very sharp knife so they can absorb as much water as possible.
- Do not fill your vase to the top and change the water regularly. Avoid wetting the flowers.
- To get the best out of your bouquet, do not change its position too much and add some spoons of lemonade to the vase (it contains citric acid).
- Lilies do not like full sun or air conditioning so keep them away from both.
- Lily pollen stains easily. If the flower comes in contact with clothes or a piece of furniture, do not remove the pollen with your hand but blow over it and remove what is left with sticky tape.

Questions and answers

Compost invaded by woodlice

Q I have been using a compost bin for the past year. At the moment it is full of woodlice. What can I do to get rid of them?

A The presence of woodlice in the upper part of the compost bin is quite normal. Underneath you should find various fauna, from the earwig to the manure worm. If there are really too many woodlice, you need to stir the compost and wet it; it will raise its temperature and the woodlice should go away. If your compost bin is quite wide and you have some blackbirds around, open it regularly and the birds will feast over these crustaceans.



COMPOST: Let birds help with bugs

The photinia refuses to redden

Q In 2003 a gardener planted some photinias in tubs on my terrace. In spring they are covered with white flowers but no red leaves. Since they

were planted these shrubs have grown to resemble old trees with a few, scrubby leaves. What can I do?

A Only the young spring leaves go red in spring. For some reason (soil quality, watering) your photinias are not growing well. Principle number one of pruning is it should be inversely proportionate to its growth. Cut back well in early autumn and feed by adding compost and even changing some of their soil. If everything goes well you should have some nice red shoots for next year.

A shy cymbidium

Q A year ago I bought a cymbidium and it is growing beautifully on my terrace but it is not flowering any more. Should I give it fertiliser? Or do I need to repot it?

A Cymbidiums are beautiful when they are forgotten. Do not fertilise

or repot; just water them regularly in summer. Like other orchids, they need to feel cold to flower. If your balcony is sheltered and the winters mild, you should take it outside.

A bougainvillea with no flowers

Q In 2003, my son gave me a red bougainvillea in a tub. For the past three years it has not produced any flowers, in spite of lush foliage. I feed it with fertiliser every month and water it twice a week. It is in a south-east facing terrace enjoying full sun. What should I do?

A I think you have used too much fertiliser, which is the reason for the dense foliage. The red bougainvillea's flowers last less than the purple ones. Water less in winter and a little more frequently (according to the size of the tub) when it is warm or windy.

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