

# Home/Garden

## Some questions from the mailbag

I was happy to find some questions in the mailbag this week. I'm always happy to hear about new plants and successes — and to answer your questions.

One reader transplanted raspberries 12 years ago and they have not borne well since. Why not? Another reader wants to know how to control the Japanese beetles that plague her raspberry bushes and do damage in the rest of the garden?

If your raspberries bore fruit well before transplanting, you should look at what is different about the new site or soil. Raspberries are not very fussy although a pH of about 6 is ideal. It usually isn't worthwhile to spread commercial fertilizers heavily, but organic mulches are very helpful. They add nutrients to the soil as they break down as well as increase the amount of humus in the soil.

Mulch with barn cleanings if you have it, plain grass clippings or autumn leaves if you don't. Organic matter in the soil cannot help but improve the vigor of these bushes. If your new site has a heavier, less well drained soil, this could explain poor fruiting. Soil that is too wet will not kill the bushes, but it will decrease the yield and you'll want to consider ways to improve the drainage.

Japanese beetles can be a big problem. I've known people devoted to organic gardening principles who finally caved in, suited up with extreme care, put on a nose mask and sprinkled Sevin which is a really deadly and dangerous pesticide. I tried one of those traps that lures the love-starved beetle with sex pheromones, but I did not put it far enough away from all other crops and my fruit trees suffered.

I have had most success with milky spore disease. These spores cause the "blood" of infected Japanese beetles grubs to turn milky white; then they die. You can buy

Pat Leuchtman



Between The Rows

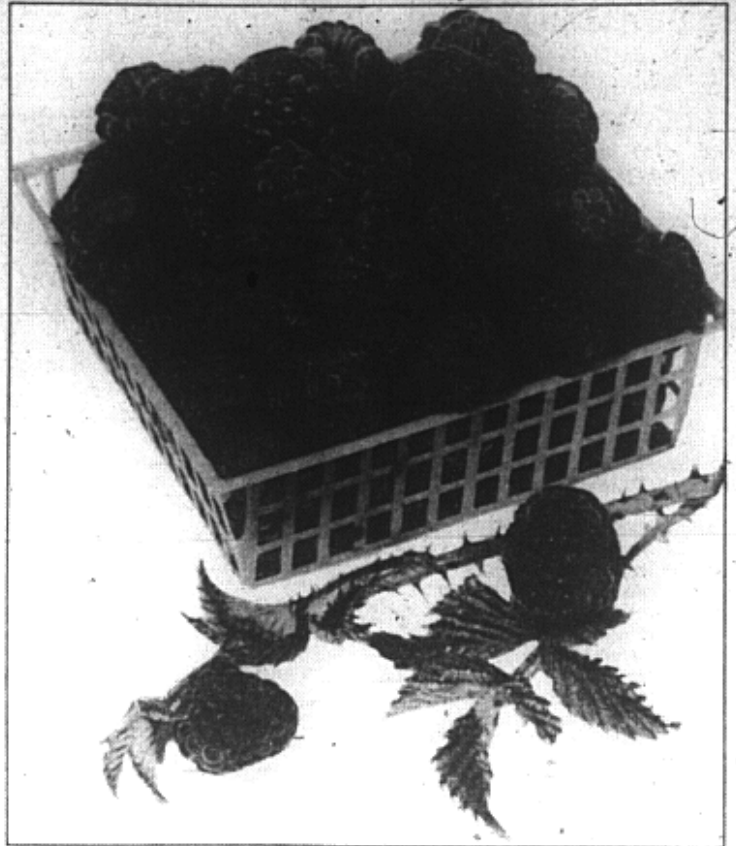
containers of milky spore disease as a white powder from most garden suppliers and apply a teaspoonful to your lawn every three feet. When rain washes the powder into the soil, the grubs who live among the grass roots eat it and die. It is harmless to all other living creature, people, pets, birds, earthworms and even other insects unless they are very closely related to the Japanese beetle.

There are two slight drawbacks to milky spore disease. First, it's quite expensive, nearly \$20 for just one pound. Second, it can take up to three years to reach full effectiveness. However, it lasts and remains potent in the soil for many many years. Each grub that eats it and dies continues to infect the soil.

I couldn't afford to buy all I needed at once, but each year I would buy a pound or two and apply it to the lawn in front of the raspberries, on either side of my rose walk and along the grape arbor. I haven't eliminated Japanese beetles, but they no longer do substantial damage. As far as I'm concerned milky spore disease is the answer.

Another reader is having trouble with his Christmas cactus which looks wonderfully healthy, but it never blooms. Why not?

Christmas cactus, Schlumbergera bridgesii, is native to moist tropical forests and is very long lived. It does not need direct sun, but does best in medium to bright light and normal house temperatures. The soil mix should be fairly rich and drain very



well. Make sure your pot is prepared properly to allow all excess water to drain away.

To set buds, Christmas cactus needs nights that are cool and long. Nighttime temperatures must be around 55 degrees. Many people bring their Christmas cactus outdoors during the summer and allow it to remain there until temperatures become cool in September. In addition to needing cool night temperatures Christmas cactus needs 13 hours of darkness every night during this period. Even if it usually keeps you company in the living room, put the cactus into an unused room until buds are set. After that the hours of light will not matter.

From the time your plant sets buds, keep it evenly watered and fer-

tilize it every two weeks until it blooms. During its bloom period it should be watered sparingly. Let it dry completely between waterings.

After it flowers, Christmas cactus must rest for at least six weeks. Cut down on watering. If necessary it can be repotted during March or April and allowed warmer temperatures. Christmas cactus will bloom even when potbound, but if bloom seriously diminishes and the plant has not been repotted in three or four years, give it a bigger pot and fresh soil.

In May the growing season begins. Water more generously and start fertilizing every two weeks. Remember its better to fertilize more often with a dilute solution, than infrequently with a strong dose.

## Master Gardeners help spread word on horticulture

By KAREN IDOINE  
UMass Cooperative Extension

Usually, Master Gardeners have had a few years experience with veg-

In Franklin County, Master Gardeners can also rely on the Home

sion agents and Master Gardeners in the county offices. New Master Gar-

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