

## Down to Earth & Practical

Thinking that readers might enjoy connecting with other gardeners to collect ideas about what to do in a garden and what to do it with, I asked the Gloucester Master gardeners for input. The first to respond was Noel Priseler and she introduces us to a tool we can really use in taming ornamental grasses.



This Christmas present from my daughter Jill has turned out to be the “cat’s meow or bee’s knees.” Held like a long-barrel gun, it easily slides into a shrub or rose bush to cut a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch or smaller branch. The power-lever technology of the pruner makes it easy—you don’t have to squeeze so hard--to prune small tree branches, shrubs, and thorny rose bushes, and, because of the its length, you don’t catch your arm or sleeve on the branches or thorns. To date my hydrangeas, roses, coral honeysuckle, butterfly bushes, beautyberry bushes, and many others have been pruned and are ready for spring. Thanks, Jill.

Another Gloucester Master Gardener, Theresa Denby, asked about a way to deter stink bugs from making themselves at home inside a house, a problem facing one of her friends. I was fascinated because, although I am frequently visited by ants, I had never heard of stink bugs being a challenge to good housekeeping.

Stink bugs belong to the order Hemiptera, the insects that really are bugs! Others in the order are bedbug, squash bug, plant bug, and water bug. Their distinguishing characteristic is piercing and sucking, not chewing, mouth parts. They have inconspicuous, membranous wings and shield backs that resemble those of beetles, but are not as hard.

When the March issue of ‘Avant Gardener’ newsletter arrived it had a solution that might help even though the bug in question was a different species. The article discussed the brown marmorated stink bug, BMSB, which is increasingly a problem in this region. (The name may suggest that it looks like marble in some way or other?)

Originally from the Far East, the BMSB was identified in a Pennsylvania orchard in 2001 and since that time has been seen in 29 states. In a poll conducted by a trade paper 50% of growers reported crops lost to the pest and the invasion was worst in the Mid-Atlantic area where great numbers of tomato and peach crops were essentially destroyed.

This particular species is more damaging because its saliva has the ability to destroy plant tissue where it bites. It can be controlled by pyrethroid insecticides but this treatment also kills the beneficial insects needed for pollination and control of other harmful insects.

And – having mentioned beetles – it is almost that time of year to be on the watch for that garden nemesis, the iridescent green Japanese beetle. A reader in Cobbs Creek graciously forwarded a clipping from the Wall Street Journal with tips from readers for fighting those devourers of roses and other landscape treasures.

A prologue: I have a Little Leaf Linden tree in my yard that is a magnet for Japanese beetles and usually the top third of the foliage is skeletonized by the time the beetles go underground to lay eggs that become root-eating grubs and eventually emerge to start the tiresome, tedious

circle all over again. Cleaning out the garage I “discovered” a rusting can of Milky Spore and thinking it probably had lost its effectiveness but couldn’t hurt, I emptied it in the front yard.

There were very few beetles the following year but I won’t claim cause and effect; it may just be a cycle? This year should tell the tale. Among other suggestions was the advice to avoid beetle traps; you’ll just add to their numbers. Giving a child a jar of soapy water to brush them into is fun and it works, works even better at a penny a beetle. Other WSJ readers suggested chickens and especially guinea hens, adept at snatching beetles out of the air.

One off the wall idea was using that click-on candle lighter to shoot flame at them? Anything that works!