

## When to Let It Go?

Gardeners are so passionate about the sprigs they have nurtured to trees and those budget-benders that they just had to have, that when a treasure sickens and dies, it is truly a real, if small, disaster. This spring's tour of inspection has revealed a lot of mishaps. You are not alone in pulling out dead stems and convincing yourself that mulch is scenic.

By some accidental forethought I had jabbed my spade around a few of the azaleas that had rooted from ground-hugging branches. Since their roots had been pruned, they moved easily into gaps.

Heat, cold, drought may not exactly be the cause when plants do not flourish but gardeners know things die and let them go, however reluctantly. Disease is another matter. My friends and neighbors have a perfectly sited spread of helleborus plants. One of the large centrally located plants showed black lines radiating onto the petals from the base of the flower. A search on the internet revealed that it was probable that the plant had "hellebore black death", a virus.

This is a recently discovered virus causing stunted and deformed plants with black streaking and netting patterns in leaves and flowers. The virus is hellebore net necrosis and so far there is no cure. It has been seen in England for about twenty years but has become progressively more widespread and more serious.

It is thought that the virus is transmitted by aphids, particularly the hellebore aphid, *Macrosiphum hellebore*. This process has not been established as fact but as a tentative explanation. We would love to have the right answers all cut and dried, but in science, like life, all the answers are open to further discovery.

Without a cure, any affected plants must be dug out, bagged and trashed, - not assigned to the compost pile. If you have hellebores setting seed you need not panic as most viruses are not transmitted through seeds. It does require patience to wait until those seedlings bloom, but those of us who love winter-blooming hellebores are frequently delighted to find a blooming plant in a place there one was never planted.

### **Environmental note:**

I suppose this tidbit could be filed in "the dog ate my homework" drawer. Can you believe that large corporations want the right under law to sue countries if those sovereign states have health protection or environmental laws that may reduce their corporate profits? Officially this ruse has a title, "Investor - State Dispute Settlement". The tribunals set up to arbitrate such cases are secret. These shenanigans would be a part of the secretive Trans-Pacific Partnership and other trade agreements.

### **Plant notes:**

You have probably seen these items before but in case you have not, a repeat: a growth accelerant applied to the plants stimulated watermelons to explode in Eastern China. And not so comical, one out of every four deaths in China is caused by cancer, blamed on the pollution caused by coal-fired power plants. China's air pollution becomes part of the air circulating the earth. There is no 'away' anymore.

Brazil has been the world's biggest consumer of farm chemicals since 2008, using more than 1 billion liters of the toxic stuff a year. Recently Brazilian women decided they had had enough of damage to their health and the environment: they marched by the tens of thousands. I wonder if anything will change?

This is one thing you may have noticed in your own garden. Weeds are becoming immune to herbicides. According to scientists at Iowa State University, since there are so many crops with built-in-gene resistance to herbicides, the poison has been flung about with impunity. As a result, it will take increasing amounts of herbicides to slow down those invasive pests.

I don't know many gardeners who use pesticides, except perhaps in an attempt to get rid of poison ivy. I have found out that round-up doesn't faze poison ivy. If you cover your gloves with plastic bread wrappers and pull, then cover the pest with the bags and put in the trash, it does work. In any case, wash your hands with dish soap immediately, just in case. The detergent in the dish soap cuts the offending oil from the poison ivy better than hand soap does.

29May14