April is a good time to check the condition of potted plants

GARDEN MIND

By Rebecca Hart

April is a good time to check the condition of garden plants, particularly potted plants, and after a winter like the one we just had. So cold, so much snow!

I do a lot of container gardening, with some fancy pots but mostly with potted plants awaiting the perfect place to settle.

Often I buy bulbs or root divisions when available, pot them up, and grow them on until a permanent place in the garden is ready. But occasionally, if a winter is extreme, my luck runs out, and I lose treasures.

In the past weeks I've examined pots that should have shown signs of life. Gone are several pots of white hyacinths, red *Lucifer crocosmia*, several excellent clumps of both white Calla lilies and the less hardy colored pastel strains.

If a plant is "gone," normally I recycle the soil for another go, and toss the vegetative remains in either the compost or garbage can. If I see insect or fungal activity I toss it. I examine the soil too, and if I see wireworms that soil goes well away from the garden.

You must be vigilant with cleanup. However, the *Muscari* (grape hyacinths) are lovely—they are the color of faded blue jeans. My *Casa Blanca* lilies survived, and even show signs of slug damage, so it's never too early for baiting. Or other unorthodox means.

Recommended slug and snail control

Some of you are familiar with the good work done by Portland's Xerces Society, a group committed to enhancing the existence of pollinators and particularly Monarch butterflies (**http://www.xerces.org**).

Robert Michael Pyle is a founder and his recommended method for slug control is this: "Go into the garden and pluck any and all slugs and snails, put into a small paper bag. Label the bag. Put the bag in the freezer. After a few days, discard the bag in trash or compost."

Pyle's reasoning? The gastropods are sentient creatures, and do not deserve to die an agonizing death, no more than anything does. The freezer duplicates nature's slow quiet death. This is how we deal with gastropods at my house.

Robert Michael Pyle has some humane ideas on how to deal with gastropods like this brown snail.

Do it yourself project: The Crockpot Paraffin Dip Treat

Do you get stiff and sore hands after a prolonged time in the garden? Here's a comforting non-analgesic solution, easily made from on-hand supplies.

A hand paraffin dip is a process using melted paraffin wax to temporarily seal moist heat into your hands. It's a simple salon treatment and easily duplicated at home.

Basically, paraffin is heated in a designated crockpot, blended with a lubricant and essential oils, then temperature-tested with a handy candy thermometer to ensure a safe experience! The treatment is good for reducing pain and to loosen up hand and finger joints.

You will need:

4 lbs. (1.8 kg) of paraffin wax.
1 cup of mineral oil.
Essential oils. (At least use lavender, and tea tree for microbial properties; add about 20 drops of each scent.)
Crockpot or double boiler.
A candy thermometer.
Plastic wrap or plastic bags.
Terry cloth towel.

Process:

Melt the wax (use low heat); stir in the mineral oil and essential oils. Turn off the heat. Allow the wax to cool; test with thermometer.

Wash hands to keep paraffin clean for re-use. Generally, paraffin does not harbor conditions that favor bacteria. Start your dip when the temperature reads 125 to 130 degrees.

Relax your hand, dip it into the paraffin. Note: Be very careful not to contact the sides or bottom of the hot crockpot. *Do not "soak" in the wax.*

Lift your hand out; repeat 8-12 times. Then wrap your hands in the plastic bags; then wrap hand with a towel. Leave paraffin on for 20 minutes.

Relax, for about 20 minutes, then unwrap your hand and carefully peel the paraffin from your hand, back into the pot. The wax can be melted and used again.

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