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The Capitol Hill
 Garden Club
 presents



Dear Garden
 Problem Lady,

*Do annuals need fertilizing?
 If yes, what with?*

Some say annuals are heavy feeders. Take care not to over-fertilize, however. Read labels and instructions carefully. Compost is a nutritive mulch for annuals. In general, minimize the nitrogen content of any fertilizer you choose – nitrogen produces leaves – and go heavier on the phosphorus content – it encourages blooms. A plant that is blooming profusely probably can use a boost of fertilizer. And ditto if it isn't blooming profusely.

Why isn't my lace cap hydrangea blooming? She has plenty of sun, but not too much. I haven't fed her.

Fertilize with superphosphate 0-20-0. This will help promote flowering and nothing else. Avoid high nitrogen fertilizers that push heavy leaf growth. You want the plant to concentrate on flowering.

Our butterfly bush is so tall I can't reach the top to snip off the spent blooms. Is it necessary to cut the spent ones to keep the thing blooming as long as possible?

Not really. The fragrant Buddleia globosa, also known as "summer lilac," grows rampantly and profusely with little care. The spent blooms do not fall or drop off by themselves, but there are so many other blooms, the spent ones hardly show. Next year you can keep your buddleia neater by cutting it back to the ground in early spring. Flowers form on new

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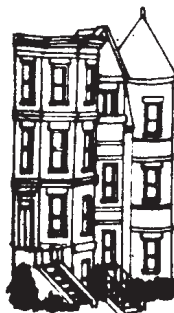


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wood. In fact, you could even prune it now – you will lose some flowers, but the shrub will grow back and develop more flowers fairly quickly.

What is the difference between the kind of pruners that cut like scissors, by the blades crossing, and the ones where the blades don't cross? And which should I use on my low shrubs?

Bypass garden pruners make a nice clean cut using two curved blades that bypass each other in the same manner as a pair of scissors. One blade is sharpened on the outside edge, and it slips by a thicker unsharpened blade. These are good for fine cuts and are most popular. In contrast, anvil garden pruners have a single straight cutting blade that closes down on a flat edge or anvil. Anvil pruners have a slicing action similar to a knife against a cutting board and work well removing tough, dead wood. They tend to be a bit bulkier than bypass pruners, making it more difficult to get in close for crotch cuts. For branches bigger than three-quarters of an inch in diameter, use neither of these. A curved pruning saw is your tool for them.

Feeling beset by gardening problems? Send them to the Problem Lady c/o Capitol Hill Garden Club at andrew@hillrag.com. Your problems might even prove instructive to others and help them feel superior to you. Complete anonymity is assured. The Capitol Hill Garden Club next meets on Sept. 14, at the Church of the Brethren, corner North Carolina Avenue at Fourth Street SE. Membership information: 202-543-7539. ★



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