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The Capitol Hill
Garden Club
presents



Dear Garden
Problem Lady,

I hate the way something is devouring my hosta leaves, particularly the white parts of the green/white combos. Have sprayed with numerous commercial pesticides, but the white parts are in ribbons.

The good news: your hosta will survive. The bad news: the culprit – probably a slimy, grayish-tan creature with two antennae on its head – the common garden slug – is hard to get rid of. It eats at night, especially when there is ample moisture. In the daytime it hides under wet leaves in the dark. Judging from the damage, you have many slugs in your hosta bed. Using a flashlight, you could pick them off your hosta leaves at night and drown them in a bucket of soapy water. Or you could imbed shallow plastic bowls containing beer up to their rims near your hosta. The beer attracts the slugs and drowns them. Both involve work on your part, and, after several days, more beer.

A friend told me that hyssop is a hardy native perennial. What does it look like and where can I buy some?

Hyssop, also called Anise Hyssop, has aromatic leaves that smell like licorice. Its soft lavender or pink spikes grow to about three feet and attract bees, hummingbirds and butterflies. Hardy to zone four, it fills out bald spaces in the late summer garden. It likes rich, well-drained soil and is available at garden centers or online.

I have a magnificent white hydrangea that is called 'Tar-

diva'. It blooms much later in the summer than other hydrangeas. I know that pruning hydrangeas is tricky. Some bloom on old wood, and some bloom on new wood. When can I prune my Tardiva?

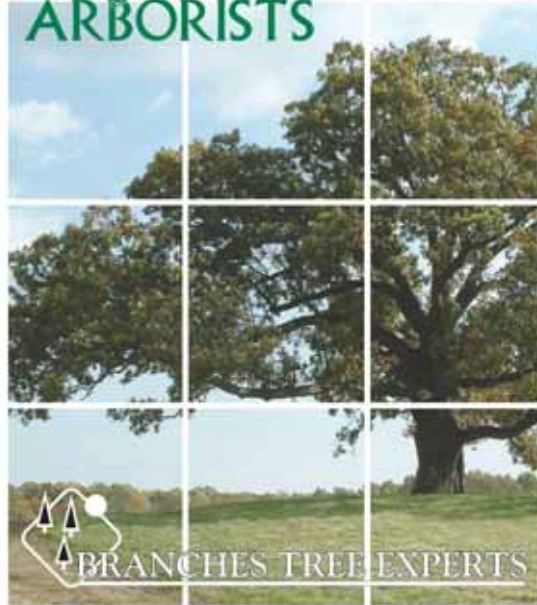
There's no need to prune any hydrangea unless it has dead branches or is too large. Prune hydrangeas that bloom on so-called old wood – mop-heads, lacecaps and oak leaf hydrangeas -- shortly after they finish blooming. That's because their next-year's buds are formed in the summer. If you prune in fall or the following spring you will be cutting off already embryonic blooms. All other hydrangeas (these all are white) – the PeeGee or Paniculata Grandiflora, the Annabelle, and your Tardiva, which is a Paniculata -- can be pruned at any time during the year except just before they bloom in summer. This second Paniculata category is the only one that can be shaped by pruning to take the form of a tree.

Feeling beset by gardening problems? Send them to the Problem Lady c/o The Capitol Hill Garden Club at andrew@hilrag.com. Your problems might prove instructive to others, and help them feel superior to you. Complete anonymity is assured.

Capitol Hill Garden Club programs are free. On Tuesday, September 8, dynamic horticulturist Sandy Flowers discusses "Plants I Can't Live Without" at 7 p.m. at the Church of the Brethren, 4th Street door, corner North Carolina Ave. and 4th Street, SE. Membership details at 202-543-7539. ★



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