

MAPLE BLADDER GALL

Q. I have a 6-foot maple tree in a pot. Early in the summer it had many small red balls that later turned black. Nothing ever hatched from them. On a few of the branches there are slightly bigger eggs. What could these be and how can I get rid of them? My husband thinks the tree should be destroyed, but I am not sure.

A. Don't destroy your tree. Your tree has been attacked by tiny mites in the air that settle on the leaves and form maple bladder galls, commonly seen on silver and red maples. Don't try and scrape the galls off; they are part of the leaf itself and the problem is mainly cosmetic.

When the leaves drop in fall, the galls will be gone. The insects may or may not return next year. You can use a dormant oil spray in early spring for control. Clean the soil around the tree, but do not put the leaves in your compost, recommends Patty Evanger, manager Red's Garden Center, Northbrook.

OAK TREES

Q. We have two large oak trees and would like to enhance them with an underplanting of shade-tolerant plants. How do I create the lush beds necessary to sustain shade lovers without damaging the tree roots?

A. Oaks, hickory and ash tree roots do not compete as tenaciously with under-story plants as maples do. If possible, cut off low tree limbs to get more light on your plants. Lay out the garden using a hose to follow the drip line of the trees. Spread pine bark near the tree trunk, but not touching it, and use a bench or bird bath for a center of interest.

Many plants tolerate dry shade, such as sedums, especially *Sedum ternatum*. If you have no squirrels, early spring-flowering bulbs would be appropriate. Bleeding heart, epimedium, brunnera, sweet wood-ruff and lily-of-the-valley could fill in a garden area. Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*) would add a contrasting form. Hostas also grow in partial shade. "In summer, add begonias, impatiens, cup flower (*Nierembergia*) and a pot or two of tropical plants for a lush look," adds Susan Wysock of Midwest Natural Garden, St. Charles.



Hydrangea
Limelight®

SILVER MAPLE ROOTS

Q. The roots of my silver maple tree are growing through the surface of the soil. Is it possible to cut them, or should I leave them alone?

A. Don't bother cutting the roots of the silver maple. If you cut them, they will come back up.

HYDRANGEA

Q. Do hydrangeas come back and flower year after year?

A. Yes, if your plant is a strong one. An overabundance of new hydrangeas on the market has made them more popular than ever. But the newly introduced plants are often weak and straggly, and the promised bushel-basket-sized flowers are often wishful thinking.

When your plant is young, it is best to prune it in order to encourage branching. If the plant is leggy, shear it back to one-third to one-half of its original size. Note that you will be sacrificing the current year's flowers. Every time you cut off the growing tip of a plant you encourage it to branch and thus produce more flowers in the long run.

The popular Limelight® and 'Little Lamb', cultivars of *Hydrangea paniculata*, are reliably hardy flowering shrubs that can be pruned in fall or spring. The new pink Invincibelle® Spirit and white Incrediball® cultivars are improved versions of smooth hydrangea, *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle'. Their buds do not freeze, and they bloom on both new and old wood.

Plant hydrangeas in a sunny area that will get afternoon shade. If the foliage droops, your plant needs water. With a little attention you should see big blooms, according to Tim Wood, product development manager, Spring Meadow Nursery, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 🌱

Ask Our Experts

What are some plants that usually do well when planted in containers?



Nick Pesche, Owner,
Pesche's Greenhouse,
Floral Design & Gifts,
Lake Geneva, Wis.

I think succulents are going to be hot again this year for

container gardening. There are so many great varieties and they require very little maintenance...just a nice sunny spot. Once people see the diversity of color and texture I think they're a must-have for every deck or patio.

Lee Goebbert, owner, Goebbert's Farm and Garden Center, South Barrington

For a sunny location, Supertunias® (hybrid petunias) mixed with verbenas would be a good combination. Another possibility for sun would be geraniums mixed with 'Diamond Frost' euphorbia or bacopa. I happen to like the Rocky Mountain series of geraniums, but any of them would be good.

For shade to part-sun location, I'd recommend Dragon Wing™ begonias mixed with Techno™ White or Techno™ Blue lobelias. The begonias can also take full sun, so they're sure proof exposure-wise and will bloom all summer.



Debra Laniosz, owner,
Thistle Stop Garden Shop,
Yorkville

Dragon Wing® begonias surpass all other begonias for ease of growing and put on a lovely show. Dragon Wings are a cross between angel wing and wax begonias and have the best qualities of both varieties. They bloom profusely until frost. To keep plants looking their best, add some Soil Moist polymer and a timed-release fertilizer to the soil when planting.