

# TOM'S GARDEN

## BLOG AUGUST 2022

### The Snapping Dragon

Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*)

Native to Mediterranean Europe, Syria and Turkey.

The common name comes from the appearance of the flower, a little like a dragon. To snap the dragon, put your hand behind the flower and squeeze the "cheeks." The dragon will snap. Put your finger inside the open dragon's mouth, then let it snap shut. It is so funny, especially for kids! Snapdragons rely on large bumblebees for pollination, as smaller honeybees are not able to open the flower's jaws.

This is a very popular annual flower for cutting and arrangements. There are so many heights and colors available that you will always have dragons to play with. They are best during cool months and can tolerate frost down to about 25 degrees F. The flowers start blooming at the bottom of the stalk and work their way up. Although snapdragons will slow down and stop blooming in the mid-summer heat, if you keep them watered, they will start blooming again until fall. They really prefer cool weather.

Snapdragons grow best in rich, well-drained soil and full sun to part sun. Early on, pinch off the stem tips for a bushier plant and deadhead the spent flowers to extend the blooming season. They will readily reseed if you let the seed pods fall to the ground.

Snapdragons need regular watering, especially when they are seedlings. Avoid overhead watering to keep your plants healthy and disease-free.

Rust fungus can be a serious problem with snapdragons. Pre-treat plants with an antifungal spray before the disease appears. Once rust appears and affects blooms, destroy the plants and grow in another part of the garden next year. Snapdragons are easy to start from seed and are available in spring at nurseries.

### Love In a Puff (*Cardiospermum halicacabum*)

The tendrils of this vine grasp trellises and climb rapidly once the weather gets warm. The light and airy foliage is nice with very small white flowers. It is most comfortable growing through shrubs or along with other vines such as clematis or cup & saucer vine. As the vine continues to grow, the flowers give way to papery green fruit.



The fruit will dry out and turn brown during the season. When dry, open it to reveal 3 seeds. Each black seed will have a white marking, in the perfect shape of a heart. That's where the "love" is.

This is where love-in-a-puff comes from. This plant likes full sun to part shade and rich, moist, well-drained soil. Mature size is 10 to 12 feet, trailing. Give it something to climb on and combine it with other vines.

### **How to Grow:**

Direct sow after last frost or start indoors (recommended) 6-8 weeks before last spring frost. Nick the seed coat with a file before planting ½ inch deep. It grows very well in containers.

Keep the soil moist but not soggy and fertilize in late spring.

## Choosing the Right Hydrangea

Hydrangeas are easy to grow and have a variety of flower colors, leaf shapes and plant sizes. They bloom, starting in May and into fall. Some varieties hold onto flower heads for winter interest.

### Old Wood/ New Wood

Old wood refers to the previous year's growth. The buds for the current year's flowers were formed in August the year before. If these cultivars are pruned or cut down, they will not bloom the next year. New wood refers to the current year's growth. Those that bloom on new wood set their buds during the year that they bloom. These plants can be pruned in fall or early spring.

Bigleaf hydrangeas bloom on old wood and the flower buds can be damaged by a late spring frost. It is best to plant these on the north side of a structure so that early growth will be delayed.

Some cultivars of hydrangeas bloom on old and new wood. Give these plants some

winter protection and you will have successful blooms each year. Look for "remontant blooming" (reblooming) on the nursery tag.

### Light

Hydrangeas are woodland plants, so most species appreciate protection from the hot afternoon sun even if they are labeled full sun. This also depends on the ability of the soil to hold onto water.

In the garden, those grown in full sun will have flowers that fade to brown sooner and have droopy leaves during the hottest part of the day. Providing plenty of water will help these plants look better.

Conversely, dense shade will result in less foliage and smaller flowers.

Morning, or half-day sun with afternoon shade is the ideal.

Hydrangeas prefer a loam soil rather than a sandy or clay type. A well-drained soil that can hold some moisture is important.

Amend sandy or clay soils with organic matter before planting.

Water needs of hydrangeas depend on the species. All species should be watered thoroughly, and mulch will help hold moisture during dry periods. Bigleaf varieties require more water than others. Diseases are not normally a problem with hydrangeas, although powdery mildew and leaf spot can occur when grown in crowded places with little air flow.

Aphids and Japanese beetles are the main insect concerns with hydrangeas. Dislodge aphids with a strong stream of water and pick off Japanese Beetles early in the season.

## Container Gardening

Container gardening changes with the changing summer conditions.

In the spring and early summer container plantings are happy with the warm days and cool nights. As the weather gets warmer, we need to change how we take care of these plants.

We usually select pots that fit the plant as it is in the spring, but later that plant will outgrow its pot. Larger plants have more roots and need more water. If a pot is too small, it will dry out and heat up faster and put stress on the plant.



Don't be afraid to replot a plant in the middle of summer into a larger pot. When you take it out of the old pot you will notice a massive root system with very little soil, which makes it impossible to hold moisture.

You can pour water into the pot until it drains out of the bottom and the plant will still be dry. A good soaking in a bucket or large storage bin will help. Since these plants are in pots, the pot can be moved into a protected, shaded area during the hot times of the day. Large pots can be put on wheels to help move them. Hanging baskets should be turned weekly.

You must keep up with watering. Pots will often need watered twice a day during summers heat. More watering means that you will have to fertilize more often. Also, don't overcrowd them.



I couldn't keep this shallow planter watered when it had flowers in it. I put succulents in and now they never need watered. Just rain is sufficient for these drought proof plants.



A large pot like this only needs watered once per day with three plants in it.



Coleus love shade and a large pot.

