

# ask the professionals

Advice from members of the B.C. Landscape & Nursery Association (BCLNA), as well as other gardening experts around our province.



**Carolyn Jones**  
GardenWise horticulturist with a background in nursery production, retail sales, botanical gardens and garden design

## THESE GRASSES ARE THE CAT'S MEOW

What could I grow to beautify my cat's enclosed garden space? I'd like a plant that is safe if he eats it.

ONE: While my cat Garfunkel wouldn't dream of eating a plant, his brother Simon adores Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa macra* 'Auroeola'). Simon whines at the door every evening until he gets to graze a little. My late dog Dylan loved it too. I once tried it to see what the excitement was all about. It tastes okay!

Since your cat's enclosure is shady, this lovely grass will be happy. Water it regularly and add some organic fertilizer for faster growth. On a breezy day it will sway gently.

Forest grass has two disadvantages: it is deciduous, so it has to be cut right back in December. This always makes Simon very grumpy. Plus it is not inexpensive. Gradually it makes a large clump (mine is now a metre across), but it is admittedly slow growing. If your cat likes it too much, the grass might not increase.

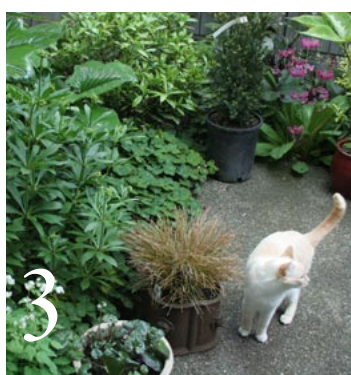
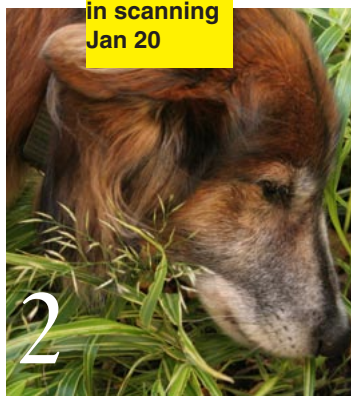
TWO: Simon also enjoys many types of sedges, all of which are evergreen. Notice the brush cut he's given the potted bronze sedge (*Carex testacea*) in my small patio garden.

THREE: Also passing muster are dwarf Japanese sedge (*Carex conica* 'Hime Kanasugi'/'Snowline'), which has green and white variegation, and the mid-sized golden-variegated sedge *Carex oshimensis* 'Evergold'. Both are evergreen, so he can nibble all winter. But I think he just dreams of spring and fresh Japanese forest grass shoots to come.

PHOTOS: Carolyn Jones



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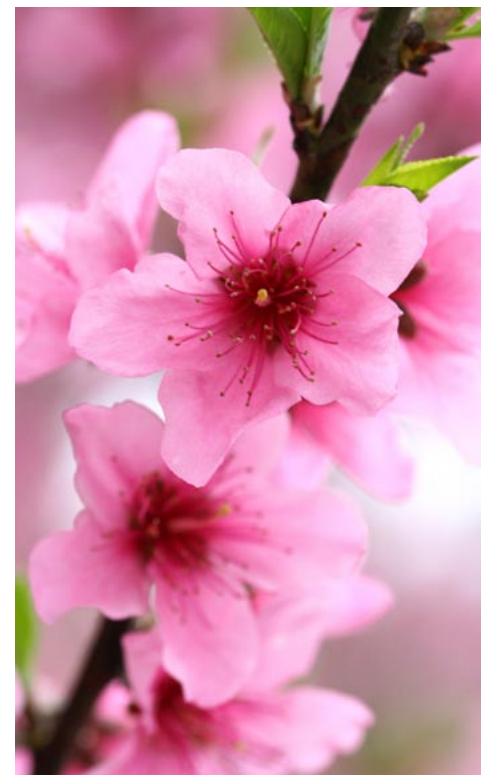
**Douglas Justice**  
Curator and associate director of the UBC Botanical Garden and Centre for Plant Research

## PLANTING A FLOWERING CHERRY TREE

How do I plant an ornamental cherry tree to give it the best start?

Here are some key points for planting cherry trees as recommended:

1. Flowering cherries grow best in deep, fertile, well-drained soil.
2. Flowering cherries require full exposure and good air circulation to stay healthy and flower well, so it's important to locate your cherry in an area that is not overly shaded or crowded. 'Kanzan' and 'Akebono' cherries are wide spreading, while 'Pendula' has a much narrower crown. Expect 'Kanzan' to grow at least 3.6 m/12 ft. wide in 10 years (ultimate height and width 9 m/30 ft.), 'Akebono' 3 m/10 ft. (ultimate height



and width 8 m/26 ft.), and 'Pendula' about 2 m/6½ ft. (ultimate height and width 5 m/16 ft.). Pruning for size control seldom brings favourable results; pruning can seriously weaken a tree and often increases disease susceptibility. It is always better to site a tree where it can grow unimpeded to its natural size.

3. For planting, dig a hole just slightly larger than the size of the container. Make sure the tree has been thoroughly watered and any excess water allowed to drain away, then knock off the container and carefully place the tree in the hole, making sure to maintain the same soil level in the ground as in the container. Backfill with the soil taken from the hole to fill in any gaps. Tamp the soil firmly and make sure there are no large air-pockets around the roots. Create a small soil dam in a circle at the edge of the planting hole to contain any surface water and water the plant thoroughly.



**Conway Lum**  
Certified horticultural technician and GardenWise plant troubleshooter

## LAWN PROBLEMS

My lawn is uneven, full of dandelions and moss, and sparse in some areas. I don't really mind the moss because it is quite pretty but would like to get rid of the weeds and have more green grass. What steps should I take to fix it up? I prefer not to use any chemicals.

Remember that a thicker lawn generally has very few if any weeds. Maintain ideal fertility, and practice infrequent but deep watering through dry spells, periodic overseeding, and aerating the lawn, and keep to a higher mowing height during hot weather. Lastly, your lawn will benefit from your leaving the grass clippings on



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**Ron Hart**  
Certified horticulturist technician, Cannor Nursery

## BLOOM-LESS HYDRANGEAS

I love hydrangeas. I prune them and fertilize them but some of them refuse to bloom. What am I doing wrong?

Some hydrangeas can be pruned hard and will bloom reliably every year. Those include the popular peegee hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora') and hills-of-snow (*H. arborescens* 'Annabelle'). Both have large white flowers, and there are new pink-hued peegees as well.

However, the popular mophead hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), with their familiar pink and blue blossoms, must be pruned carefully in order to ensure regular blooms. They bloom on the previous season's wood, so a hard pruning will result in foliage but no flowers. Prune them in the late winter or early spring before they leaf out. Eliminate old wood to the ground and cut out excessive vegetative growth. But keep the overall shape of the hydrangea by leaving young budded stems. Rounded flower buds should be visible at this time; prune above them. Newer cultivars have been bred to bloom on old and new wood – giving them a longer bloom period. If you have a tendency to prune hard, these plants will still bloom later in summer on the new growth.

the lawn to break down into the soil and add nourishment.

If it needs a "makeover," dig out weeds by hand, then topdress with at least 1 to 2.5 cm (¼ to ½ in.) of a good-quality soil to help even out the lawn and also provide some nourishment. Apply a good-quality grass seed (mainly perennial ryegrass and fescue) over the entire lawn. The grass seed should be applied at the rate 20 to 50 per cent heavier than what is recommended on the bag. Use

a broom or rake to work the seed into in the soil and existing lawn. Keep moist, watering at least three or four times a day for at least 10 minutes each time. Maintain even moisture for about 14 to 21 days. 🌱

Send your questions on any gardening topic to [cpope@canadawide.com](mailto:cpope@canadawide.com) or fax 604-299-9188 or mail to Ask the Professionals, GardenWise, 4th floor, 4180 Lougheed Highway, Burnaby, B.C. V5C 6A7. For more expert advice, visit [www.gardenwiseonline.ca/ask-the-pros](http://www.gardenwiseonline.ca/ask-the-pros)