



Well, it was predictable. After a prolonged spring of windy, dry and chilly, we were fast-forwarded into the worst kind of heat, humidity and desert-like weather that we ever get around here. On the first day of summer. Appropriate, huh?

Unfortunately, in between those dramatic extremes, except for a few isolated spots in the area, it forgot to rain.

Some years, you can lay a seed or cutting on the ground, and conditions are so ideal that it roots on the spot. Untended and uncovered. Makes us gardeners puff up with pride, thinking we really have our skills honed.

Not this season. This one looks ominously like those we get occasionally that put us gardeners in our proper, humbled places. And we are reminded that just sticking something in the ground is no assurance it will grow.

My second planting of green string beans has finally come up. Some of it, anyway. The first attempt sprouted a total of five stalks in about a 20-foot-long row. Not a single one of the yellow wax beans germinated.

Old seed, you say? Could be, though I've kept other bean seed from year to year and it usually

sprouts just fine. By comparison, the planting of sugar snap-type peas only came up marginally as well. And, that seed I purchased fresh and stuck in the soil within hours.

Likely, the lingering cold and damp rotted the earlier-planted seeds. Digging at several spots in the first bean planting yielded no traces of the white seeds. They had vanished. Zip. Gone.

And, the second batch has germinated only half-heartedly, with precious little moisture in the top few inches of ground to get them up and growing. In fact, there's not a whole lot of moisture there even if you go down several inches deep, a state of the soil that has farmers in our neighborhood growing more jittery with every day of pineapple-topped curling corn and bright, sunny, hot ... hot ... hot temperatures. Say, did we skip a couple of weeks and it's actually August?

We've done the drought-stricken summers around here more times than most of us care to remember. Been there. Done that. Don't care to do it again, thank

you.

On the other hand, the volunteer stuff that shows up from year to year — even in a less perfect growing season like this one — never fails to amaze me. And it persists through the most inhospitable conditions.

Several years ago, I snagged a few cuttings of a tender, variegated vine from a good friend's porch box planters. They rooted, were coddled through the winter in the greenhouse and set out the following spring in a wooden barrel-half, in company with red geraniums. That continued for a couple of years, each fall I made sure to take a few cuttings to continue having this happily-growing, pretty vine.

Maybe it was the relatively warm winter, but there is presently a thick, three-by-five patch of the stuff growing where I never even planted it. I'd like to transplant a bunch of it to banks and garden corners, but it seems to thrive better left alone.

About ten years ago, I started a seed pack of cleomes. Cleomes are tall, somewhat gangly, flowers that bloom heavily with large, pink, white and lavender bloom clusters, set lots of seeds and drop them profusely. I've not planted any since, but every year have recurring cleome volunteers in the garden, along with morning glories of the same eager willingness to replenish and reseed themselves.

And, last year The Farmer spent a few minutes at dusk a few evenings tending a small patch of wildflower seed he scattered on a steep bank of the little pond. By late summer, several plants had bloomed, including an annual poppy or two. After reseeding

themselves, they make the prettiest patch of flowers on the place, with a couple of dozen stunning red and orange poppies, golden coreopsis, some sort of laven-

dar phlox and a few assorted unidentifieds.

Sometimes I suspect us gardeners types just try too hard.

Train Plants To Compensate For Indoor Environments

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — While human beings can live indoors with low light levels and dank air, plants are another story entirely. Luckily, plants can be trained to better adapt to the rigors of indoor living, according to a horticulturist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Keeping indoor foliage plants alive has long been a challenge for plant lovers," says J. Robert Nuss, professor of ornamental horticulture. "Too often, homeowners will bring a plant home from a greenhouse and put it inside, only to see it die within weeks."

Nuss says most plants must be carefully prepared for the light conditions inside a building before placing them in a home. He explains that plants need enough light indoors to maintain a slightly higher level of photosynthesis — the food manufacturing process in plants — then the energy the plant loses from transpiration, a process by which plants lose moisture through tiny openings in their leaves and stems.

"If a plant doesn't receive enough light it will begin to use up its food reserves," Nuss says. "This results in leaves dropping off the plant, which means a loss of chlorophyll necessary to maintain photosynthesis. Without

adequate light, plants will decline and then die."

Nuss points out that plants can be trained to accept lower levels of light by acclimatizing, or gradually reducing their light levels to the point that comes closest to an indoor environment. "But acclimatizing plants is not a quick process," he warns. "Depending on the plant, the process could take up to 15 weeks."

Nuss recommends starting a plant in a sunny spot and then slowly moving it to areas of lesser light every few weeks. "Once the plant has stabilized, you can provide the necessary light with incandescent or fluorescent lights," he says. "Indoor light sources can give off a lot of heat, so remember not to place the light too close to the foliage."

Nuss says that incandescent lights, which given off much more heat, should be placed toward the ceiling, directly over plants. Fluorescent lights, which are cooler, can be placed closer to foliage and within smaller spaces.

"The indoor environment is tough for plants," Nuss explains. "Even tropical plants native to darkened jungles can have problems. In general, however, plants with thick leaves adapt better to indoor conditions."

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