

TOM'S GARDEN

BLOG FEBRUARY 2022

How to grow Persian Shield (Strobilanthes dyerianus)

Persian shield makes a striking border plant when paired with soft gray-greens or chartreuse. In our zone, 5 or 6 bring your plant indoors and grow as a houseplant through the winter. You can move it back outside in the spring. In zone 7 and 8 Persian shield will die back to the ground but remain alive and regrow the following season.



This plant wants rich moist soil slightly acid to neutral, 5.5 to 7.5 PH. It is non-toxic to people and pets and grows 3 to 4 feet tall and wide in ideal conditions.

Native to Myanmar, it prefers moist soil and shade during the hottest parts of summer. Especially protect it from the hot afternoon sun.

Persian shield requires above 60 degrees and warm humid air. When grown in rich soil, only light feeding is required throughout the season. Planted in part shade, it will pick up the light and reflect it back off its leaves.



If grown indoors, it needs bright light to keep its color. Dry air indoors will cause the leaves to dry and drop off. Misting daily is recommended. Use distilled water as chlorine will damage the leaves. When indoors in a container, pinch back the plants to keep a manageable size.

If your plant gets leggy, take stem cuttings and discard the mother plant. New plants can easily be started from softwood cuttings. Use a rooting hormone and plant in sterilized potting soil. Keep moist but not soggy. Spring and early summer are the best times to take cuttings.

Since Persian shield is grown for foliage and not flowers, pinch back the leaves to create a fuller plant. If left to grow on its own, it can get tall, leggy and floppy.

Basic Early Spring Pruning

This type of pruning should be done late winter or early spring.

Clean up around the base of trees and shrubs. These sprouts should be clipped off to ground level.



Fruit trees and shrubs are sometimes grafted onto a hardy root stock. The root stock can send up suckers that will take nutrients away from the plant and not be “true” to variety. Some may even start underground and come up several inches away. Remove dead and crossing branches. You can do this anytime during the season. Sometimes a wild branch will appear in the middle of a shrub. If it looks out of place, remove it.

Grasses provide a nice winter interest when nothing else is growing. It’s time to cut the grasses back to about 8 inches or so. Make a nice-looking mound so it’s ready for new growth.

Knockout roses should be pruned hard before they start to bud out. They will thank you with more blooms.

Are you in “zone denial?” The USDA zones have been creeping northward in recent years.

Well, this year we are having a good old-fashioned zone 5 winter. This happens occasionally and throws warmer hardiness zone predictions out the window. The lucky aspect of this winter is the heavy blanket of snow that is covering and protecting our perennials. I even shoveled some extra snow on my rose bushes, and they are completely covered. I’m sure the snow cover will save some of the zone 6 and 7 plants that nurseries recommended were O.K for us to plant.

How to Save That Overwatered Houseplant

So, you took good care of that plant you brought inside and now it’s overwatered. Most houseplants and succulents die from being overwatered. When a plants roots stay wet too long, the roots begin to rot and the leaves become pale and droopy, making you think the plant needs more water. You can usually rescue that plant if it isn’t too late.

Remove the plant from its pot. Lay it on its side on some newspaper and remove the soil around the roots.



Let the roots dry for several hours or overnight. Use scissors to remove any roots that look slimy or dark. These roots have rotted and will never come back.

Scrub the pot well or use a new one. You may need a larger pot so the roots have some room, about one inch around the edges. Make sure the pot has drainage holes. Put new potting soil in the bottom of the pot, then place the plant, spreading out the roots as much as possible. Fill in around the sides to the original soil line. Let the plant recover, you may lose a few lower leaves. If you are rescuing a succulent, use well-draining cactus and succulent soil. Most plants, especially succulents, prefer the soil to go dry before watering again. Resist the temptation to over water. Most houseplants can be rescued this way if not too far gone.

Starting Herbs Early

Don't forget to save some room for herbs under your grow lights. Sometimes I just don't remember and then have to buy nursery plants in spring, which can get expensive. I like to have plenty of herbs to give away as gifts, use all summer and dry for the winter.

If you are already starting vegetable and flower seeds early, herbs should be included.

I like to start some herbs in February instead of March or April. Some of these seeds take a long time to germinate and benefit from a longer period-of-time indoors under the lights. A potted herb makes a great house-warming gift, Mother's Day gift or a gift when visiting friends. You will also have a jump on the season with larger, more mature plants. Use a soil-less seed starting mix, preferably without peat moss. Sphagnum moss is

better. Sphagnum moss is sustainable and more environmentally friendly than peat moss. Also, peat moss is acidic and sphagnum is PH neutral.

Sprinkle the seeds on top of the mix and then cover with the recommended amount of mix for that particular seed. Some seeds need light to germinate and should be pressed into the soil and kept moist. Plant more seeds than you think you need, you can always thin them out later. Mist the top of the soil lightly to keep the seeds in place, then water from underneath by soaking the cells in a tray of water. Some seeds need warmth to germinate, so a heat mat helps warm the soil. You can also place them on top of your refrigerator where it is warm. If the seeds need light to germinate, cover with a dome or plastic wrap for a greenhouse effect. Once the seedlings appear, keep the lights close to prevent legginess.

You will be rewarded, come spring, for starting herbs early.

