

Before we begin today's column it's important to correct one statement from last week. When pruning out your hydrangeas and lilacs it's only portions of the hydrangea that you cut down to the ground if pruning is needed (remember remove no more than one-third). Lilacs are only pruned to shape (not cut to the ground). The rule of one-third is good to follow during all pruning. It's best to prune too little rather than too much.

OK now on to today's tidbits. We'll cover pruning clematis, water-wise vegetables and I'll share a discovery I made at the Soroptimist Garden Show.

This is the time of year many people purchase clematis or, if they have one or more, wonder what the heck to do with them. Clematis armandii is the evergreen clematis that you see covered with fragrant white blossoms this time of year. Armandii is a profuse grower and rarely needs pruning. But, it doesn't mind being pruned back drastically when necessary. We have one that often climbs into the evergreen trees nearby. It doesn't mind being in sun or shade. Armandii is not a picky plant.

The whole trick to pruning other clematis is determining when they flower. You might have to observe your clematis for a year or two before tackling the job of pruning it. Spring-blooming clematis (which sometimes bloom in the winter in mild weather) flower only on old stems. Wait until they finish blooming and then prune or trim where needed. You'll follow the three D's rule (dead, diseased, damaged). Summer or fall-blooming clematis flower only on new growth (the stems produced in the spring). After they've bloomed, cut back about half of their growth.

OK, now here's the clincher – some clematis bloom twice a year. Sunset Western Garden Book tells us that these clematis bloom on last year's stems in spring, then again on the current year's shoots in summer or fall. Sunset says, "In late fall or early spring, prune lightly to thin out excess shoots or untangle stems. After spring flowers fade, prune more heavily so that new shoots will develop providing a second round of flowers."

Now, having said all that, if your clematis are flowering and growing well for you, then don't worry about what anyone says, just continue doing what you've been doing. And, if you're buying clematis for the first time make sure you find out what kind of clematis you're buying. Ask when it will bloom and how you are to care for it. If the nursery person can't tell you, ask someone there who can.

Speaking of nursery persons, I had the privilege to meet Cheryl and Bob Corbin at the Soroptimist Garden Show. And, of course, I purchased some of their healthy plants. The couple owns Corbin Farms at 644 SW Winterspring Lane in Port Orchard. Their phone number is 360-895-8656 and their email is [ccorbin@silverlink.net](mailto:ccorbin@silverlink.net). I'm glad I met them and you will be too. Corbins offer a wide assortment of annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. They're open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Bob Corbin started out growing plants to sell for dried flower and flower arranging. His specialty was annuals. When people started using silk flowers more and more, he started growing perennials and then moved on to shrubs and trees. That was six years ago and their nursery is keeping both Bob and Cheryl busy. They hope you'll come visit them in Port Orchard. I know I will.

Another gardener friend asked about water-wise vegetables to grow this summer if it continues being as dry as it has been. I recommend the book "Water-Wise Vegetables" by Steve Solomon (Sasquatch Books). He has also written "Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades." Find both books at the library and read them through before purchasing them. Solomon's theories are quite interesting and deserve a perusal.

At the Raab Park Youth Garden we have full sun nearly all day. The only water that we get (other than rain) arrives on Mondays when the children water the garden profusely with watering cans. The rest of the week, the plants fend for themselves. We've had great success with potatoes, tomatoes, tomatilloes, hot peppers, bush beans, radishes, parsley, chives and sunflowers. You'll also have good luck with peas, with little watering, if you plant them this month or at least in April. In addition to this list, Solomon recommends beets, parsnips, onions, broccoli, cabbage and kale.

This is a great time of year to get out in the garden, visit local nurseries, and walk through public gardens. Treat yourselves to some gardening therapy.

*You can email comments to Peg at [gardenmentor@yahoo.com](mailto:gardenmentor@yahoo.com) or in care of this newspaper.*