IGC GARDENER'S QUESTION TIME HELD IN OCTOBER 2025	
Ian Warden's Questions and answers	
Val Ford I have a Poinsettia from last year which is a very healthy green plant. Any ideas how to encourage the red to appear?	Getting a poinsettia to rebloom is doable, but it takes a bit of planning and discipline because they are **short-day plants** (they need long nights to trigger their coloured bracts). **September** Bring indoors before nights drop below 10 °C. Start the short-day treatment: Give 14 hours of complete darkness every night (6–7 p.m. to 8–9 a.m.). Bright daylight the rest of the day. Keep feeding lightly. **October** Continue strict dark-period routine. Avoid artificial light leaks (lamps, streetlights). Water moderately, not excessively. **November** Bracts should start colouring. Stop blackout treatment once colour is clear. Place in a bright room, away from draughts and heat sources. **December** Water sparingly but regularly. No more feeding until spring. **January – March** Keep indoors in bright, indirect light. Water moderately (when the soil surface is dry). After bracts fade, prune stems back to 8–10 cm. **April** Repot into fresh compost. Resume light feeding every 2–3 weeks. When nights are frost-free, move outdoors to a sheltered spot. **May – June** Place in bright light, shaded from harsh midday sun.

	Continue watering and feeding. Pinch back new shoots to keep it bushy. **July – August** Let it grow strongly outdoors. Keep feeding every 2–3 weeks. Protect from very hot sun and drought.
Richard Evans My lavender has got quite a bit 'leggy' - any solutions for rectifying?	Leggy lavender is a common problem, especially with older plants. Once lavender gets woody at the base, it can't usually regenerate from bare stems — so how you tackle it depends on how far gone your plants are. Assess the plants If they are only mildly leggy (some woody stems but still leafy shoots lower down): → You can hard prune gradually over 2–3 years. Cut one third of the plant harder in the first year, another third the second year etc. If they are very woody with few green shoots at the base: → Best option is often to take cuttings and replace. Prune late Aug/Sept after flowering – flower stems and a few cms of green growth yearly from when they're new. Any cuts into old wood are unlikely to regenerate.
Sylvi Mason Which shrubs, trees, plants in general, could the Panel suggest, for year-round colour, in our climate?	Shrubs with year-round interest: 1. Arbutus unedo 'Compacta' – Evergreen, pretty bark, white urn-shaped flowers (autumn/winter) and red fruits that persist. Tolerates limestone; prefers well-drained but not fussy soil. 2. Osmanthus × burkwoodii –Evergreen with glossy foliage and fragrant white flowers (often in spring). Good as a specimen or in groupings. Adapts well, even on chalk or limestone. 3. Photinia 'Red Robin' and other, variegated cultivars, including: Pink Crispy, Louise, Pink Marble, Magical Volcano, Nana, Devil's Dream, Crunchy, Red Ballcoon, Red Robin Blood, Dynamo Red etc – Glossy evergreen leaves, new growth in red — gives seasonal colour even when not flowering. Use for screening or as individual. Very tolerant, widely planted on clay-limestone. 4. Prunus lusitanica (Portuguese laurel) – Evergreen (although there is a variegated form), dense foliage, white fragrant clusters of flowers, good for hedging or mixed planting. Tolerant of a variety of soils; handles pruning. Excellent on calcareous soils, copes with clay. 5. Cistus laurifolius – Evergreen rockrose, attractive foliage and white flowers in late spring. Very drought tolerant, good for sunny, dry sites. Native on limestone slopes in SW Europe.

	6. Cistus × purpureus (or other rockrose hybrids)– Evergreen, with good summer flower display (pink/mauve). Works well in sunny, dry borders. Likes poor, well-drained soils including limestone. Needs slope or raised spot for drainage in clay. 7. Choisya ternata – (Mexican Orange Blossom) Evergreen, compact shrub with glossy leaves and fragrant white spring flowers (and often repeat flowering). Also has several golden leaved forms such as: Sundance, Goldfinger and Aztec Gold. Good as a mid-layer shrub. Tolerates alkaline soils. Prefers good drainage, so consider raised bed or slope if clay is heavy. 8. Mahonia (many cultivars now available of Mahonia x media, Mahonia aquifolium and Mahonia eurybracteata; this latter has soft leaves, not spiky ones). Evergreen, interesting foliage + winter / early to mid-spring fragrant, yellow flowers, then bluish berries, though some forms flower as early as August. Adds winter interest when many shrubs are quiet. Tolerant of clay and neutral to alkaline soils. Good winter interest. 9. Teucrium fruticans – Evergreen shrub, silvery foliage, often with pale blue flowers. Very good in Mediterranean style gardens, drought tolerant. Thrives in limestone soils, provided drainage is good. 10. Salvia greggii and its hybrids– Semi-evergreen (or evergreen in milder winters), with long blooming period (spring to autumn). Great for colour in mixed borders and attracting pollinators. Prefers free-draining, alkaline soils. Excellent on limestone if clay is not waterlogged in winter. Hardy Perennials for Clay-Limestone 1. Geranium (hardy cranesbills) Eg. Geranium 'Rozanne' or Geranium x oxonianum. Flower for months (May–October), excellent groundcover. Tolerant of clay, alkaline soils, and drought once established. 2. Echinacea purpurea (Coneflower). Summer–autumn flowers in pinks, purples, whites. Seedheads attractive in winter, good for birds. Thrives in alkaline, well-drained but heavy soils if not waterlogged. 3. Nepeta (Catmint, e.g. Nepeta 'Six Hills Giant') Lavender-blue flowers for a long summer season, aromatic grey-green foliage. Loves alkaline soils, drought tolerant, pollinator magnet. 4. Salvia nemorosa ('Caradonna', 'Mainacht') Hardy perennial salvias with vertical spikes, flowering late spring through autumn if deadheaded. Ideal for limestone soils. 5. Achillea (Yarrow, e.g. Achillea millefolium hybrids) Flat flower heads in yellow, red, pink, white — summer into autumn. Ferny foliage, drought tolerant, tough as nails in clay-limestone. 6. Iris germanica (Bearded iris) Early summer blooms, striking foliage rest of year. Native to limestone soils; thrives in dry clay once established.

	7. Hemerocallis (Daylilies) Robust clump-forming perennials, flowers in waves from June to August. Cope well with clay soils, easy maintenance. 8. Sedum (Hylotelephium 'Herbstfreude'/'Autumn Joy') Succulent foliage, summer to autumn pink flowers, seedheads in winter. Thrives on alkaline soils, very low maintenance. Ornamental Grasses (great for texture + movement) 1. Miscanthus sinensis cultivars. Tall, arching, with plumes late summer to winter. Provides winter structure, thrives in clay if not boggy. 2. Stipa gigantea (Golden oats) Spectacular golden seedheads all summer into winter. Perfect on limestone, copes with drought once established. Bulbs for seasonal colour 1. Alliums (ornamental onions) – thrive in alkaline soils, striking in May–June. 2. Tulips (especially Darwin hybrids) – alkaline soil is fine; replant annually for best display. 3. Crocus & Narcissus – easy, naturalise well in clay-limestone.
Jane Hickey I have a small flowering dark pinky red fuchsia in a pot. I think it's a hardy one. Not sure, shall I put it in the glass house, if so, does it need minimal watering. Or maybe just put the pot in a sheltered spot out of the frosts.	Hardier ones will tend to have woodier stems, but if you're not sure, it's best to treat it as tender. • Move pots to a frost-free, cool, bright place (around 5–10 °C is ideal). ○ Options: unheated greenhouse, conservatory, sheltered veranda, or a cold but frost-free room. • Cut back long, straggly stems by about a third. • Keep the compost just damp — don't overwater. • In early spring, prune harder to shape, repot if needed, and start watering/feeding more as new shoots appear. Alternative (for tender types if space is tight) • Take cuttings in late summer or early autumn. Root them indoors on a windowsill. Even if the parent plant dies in winter, you'll have replacements for next year.
Susan Cleaver We would like to plant some shrubs/bushes to provide Spring/Summer colour to our garden. Any suggestions on what we can plant that will tolerate being completely waterlogged for	**Shrubs which don't mind wet feet in Winter** **1. Cornus alba / Cornus sericea** (Dogwoods: look out for cultivars – Elegantissima, Baton Rouge, Gouchaultii, Aurea, Miracle, Siberian Pearls, Kesselringii, Neon Burst, Ivory Halo, Cream Cracker) Hardy, tolerates wet feet. Spring: small creamy flowers. Summer: berries for birds. Winter: colourful stems (red, yellow, orange) = bonus colour. **2. Viburnum opulus** (Guelder rose. Look out for: Compactum, Park Harvest, Oh Canada, Xanthocarpum, Pechcin,) Loves damp soil. Spring: big white "snowball" flowers. Summer: red berries. Autumn: red foliage.

days at a time in the Autumn/ Winter months	**3. Spiraea japonica / Spiraea × bumalda** Many varieties, including: Anthony Waterer, Little Princess, Goldflame, Albiflora, Magic Carpet, Goldmound, Halward's Silver, Double Play Red, June Bride, White Gold, Dart's Red and many others. Tough, tolerant shrub. Late spring–summer: masses of pink, red, or white flower clusters. Takes clay, can cope with seasonal wetness (as long as not permanently boggy). **4. Kerria japonica** (Look for double flowered 'Pleniflora' larger flowered 'Golden Guinea' and variegated 'Picta') Bright yellow flowers in spring, sometimes again later. Will tolerate clay and heavy soils. Provides a cheerful burst of colour in shady or damp areas. **5. Physocarpus opulifolius** (available in forms dwarf, golden leaved and dark leaved, eg: Little Joker, Magic Ball, Dart's Gold, Diabolo, Red Baron, Lady in Red, Angel Gold, Panther, Lucky Devil, All Black, and many more) Spring: white/pink flowers. Summer: decorative seedheads. Very tolerant of clay and temporary waterlogging. **6. Itea virginica** (Virginia sweetspire. Check out varieties: Little Henry, Love Child and Henry's Garnet) Early summer: fragrant white flower spikes. Autumn: brilliant red foliage. Native to swampy areas — happy in wet conditions. **7. Hydrangea arborescens** (Look for: Annabelle, Incrediball, Ruby Annabelle, Pink Annabelle, Candybelle, Sweet Annabelle, Candybelle Marshmallow, Hills of Snow, Candybelle Sorbet, Lime Rickey, Golden Annabelle, BellaRagazza Limetta/ Blanchetta/ Mauvette, Bella Anna, Hayes Starburst and Emerald Lace) Large flower heads (white/ pink/ red/ greenish/ double) from early summer. Tolerates heavy, moist soil well. Cut back each spring for fresh growth. **8. Clethra alnifolia** (Summersweet. Varieties include: Hummingbrid, Creels Calico Anne Bidwell, Ruby Spice, Sixteen Candles, Vanilla Spice, Pink Spire, Obelisk) Mid to late summer: fragrant spikes of white/pink flowers. Very tolerant of waterlogged soils. Good for attracting pollinators
Barbara Dugard Craig's questions and answers	
Jan Bailey What do you need to do with youngish banana plants in the winter please?	Young banana plants Hardiest is Musa basjoo. Depending on size, move potted plant into a dry, cool space, using a cargo net & sack truck if heavy. Cut leaves down, protecting the heart with straw or fleece, then pack exterior. If in the ground, try covering entire plant with a large slotted, plastic drainage pipe, with a plant pot on the top.
Richard Evans I would like to know if by putting black covering around my tomato	From what I've read, most professional gardeners have stopped using black covering some years ago. I'm not a fan either, as it encourages soil compaction, with a tendency to reduce movement of water and air in the soil and around the roots; nor is it eco-friendly.

plants all year round is affecting the fertility of my plants. My crop this year has been poor, could this be the reason?	
Jacquie Strasser Does a drip feed pipe laid along a veg patch save on watering, and should it be turned on at night?	Drip pipes are laid along the surface of raised vegetable beds, or herbaceous borders. Factors like plant type, soil type, temperature, rainfall, and water pressure impact how often and how long you should run drip irrigation. As a baseline drip irrigation schedule, you can run drip lines for 20-60 minutes one to three times per week in the summer and 10-30 minutes one to two times every week in the spring and autumn
Sylvi Mason I have a large Olive tree, full of good size olives but they are still hard! Could the panel suggest a magical way in which I could ripen them?? Also, is it true, that if you leave green olives long enough, they will turn into black olives? I was told this by a French friend and was wondering if she was winding me up ha ha ?	This year my olive trees were covered in green fruit, but most disappeared during the canicule. Some purple ones remain, with a new rash of tiny fruit that won't survive the cold weather. They do colour up to purple and then eventually to black. Olives need to be cured to be edible; various methods involving oil or salted water are detailed on the internet, great patience also needed
Lucy Sheppard's questions and answers	
Carolyn Palmer Rather than continue to use a general all-round fertiliser, is there one specific one I can buy *off the shelf* to promote green growth, and then later, when it's time to start flowering, switch to a different fertiliser to promote flowers?	Miracle Gro produce fertilisers that seem to be among the best balanced and may cover some of plants specific requirement. There are a myriad of fertilisers available making choosing one challenging. Cost, ease of application and availability may dictate choice. Probably opting for plant specific fertilisers best. Remember the ratio eg 10: 10 :10 refers to the % of NPK in the fertiliser. The higher these numbers the more concentrated the fertiliser. The rest of the weight is made up with a filler, which contributes nothing to soil structure. There are many recipes online for homemade

My geraniums /pelargoniums have been so bad this year, (poor growth and few flowers) despite being in various degrees of sunshine and watering/feeding regularly, what may I have done wrong?	fertilisers…usually involve soaking different plant leaves in water to release nutrients which are then in soluble form. Grass cuttings can be soaked to release N, so will not deplete your soil of N . However, cardboard is all carbon and breaking this down will deplete soil nutrients. • Phosphorus (P): Essential for root development and flower production. A higher phosphorus content in fertilizers encourages robust blooming. Look for fertilizers with an NPK ratio that emphasizes phosphorus, such as 5-10-5 or 10-30-20. • Potassium (K): Enhances overall plant health, disease resistance, and flower quality. It plays a crucial role in the energy transfer processes within the plant, which is vital for flower development, water balance. • Nitrogen (N): While nitrogen promotes leafy growth, too much can lead to lush foliage at the expense of flowers. A balanced approach is necessary to avoid excessive leaf growth without blooms. Micronutrients: Fe,(chlorophyll, photosynthesis) Zn, enzymes, proteins, growth regulation) B, (flower fruit formation hormone regulation). Mg chlorophyll photosynthesis.
Sylvi Mason Which nutrients should I add to my plants in pots to keep them happy and healthy and how should I protect them over winter?	Looking after pots and best nutrients. Water logging of roots can be one worst scenario. Deciduous plants will not require much water over winter for growth per se. therefore needs to be free draining. Protection from frost. Mulching is very effective. Also need to protect evergreens from wind desiccation especially in Spring and flower buds from frost in Spring…best to store away from early morning sun. Potted plants very reliant on what fertiliser is in the compost, but demand low over winter when cold and short day length.
Val Ford Somebody once told me that lemons or lemon peel is not good to put on compost. Do the panel think there is any truth in this or if any other citrus peel shouldn't be put to make compost?	They contain flavonoids…antioxidants. Phenolic compounds, rich sources NPK They contain Citric acid…increases acidity, but is weak acid Chemical properties that can be natural pest repellents, also found in pesticides, so labelled toxic, but breakdown v quickly (so not a threat), Antimicrobial (so they breakdown quite slowly, but no evidence they slow rate of composting). NOT attractive to worms (exclude from vermicomposting). Often covered in wax to deter penicillin moulds. Because of the fertilising effects and minimal negative effects evidence in favour of inclusion. To accelerate breakdown cut up first, increasing surface area for microbes. Also help the consistency of

	the compost, increasing water holding. Like bananas, could store in container of water and use to fertilise pot plants. However, many other benefits as natural cleaning and beauty (skin) products, also human health.
Richard Evans How would the panel recommend storing geraniums over winter?	Perennial outside geraniums are a small plant and different to the summer annuals known as Pelargoniums from South Africa that require min temp 5C to 40C maximum and there are many varieties. No inbuilt dormancy period and on a warm sunny window sill might flower through the winter with a little feeding. Note: Sunlight, some anecdotal evidence that extreme, intense, sunlight may have negative effects. Ivy leaf varieties prefer a slightly shadier spot. Prerequisites for growth: frost free, dry, fresh air, access to sunlight, preference is 10-16 °C. Free draining compost. ***Storing Pelargonium geraniums*** Preparation: Remove dead, diseased leaves, flowering heads. Cut back by one third, just above a leaf joint. Use as cuttings? This helps keep resources in the roots. Possibly repot with some fresh free draining compost but not too nutrient rich. Don't overwater. Can store them dormant also, at cooler temperatures, 7-10, soil free in brown bags, hanging upside down. Soak roots once a month. Must be dry, frost free with natural light, unless you want to put them into dormancy. Insufficient light, too much moisture will induce legginess. Conservatories ideal, likewise frost-free greenhouses Pinch out shoot tips over winter, plant cannot support too much top growth in low light and temperature. 10-16C ideal for over wintering To prepare your overwintered geraniums for summer, trim them back to provide adequate light. Gradually acclimate them to outdoor conditions. Feed occasionally.
Caroline Palmer's questions and answers	
Liz Oaten What can I do to prevent mice, slugs and birds from eating my strawberries?	Mice: Mousetraps baited with peanut butter or humane traps. Release them A LONG WAY AWAY. Avoid poison as it poisons other valuable critters! (Owls) Slugs: Beertraps – many contraptions available in the shops or on the internet. Birds: Netting, netting and more netting. Use of twinkly windmills.(Old CD's or tiny glitter baubles hung up. Birds are scared of the twinkly flashes of light).
Jan Dorling Given the extreme high temperatures/drought of Summer,	Move over to plastic pots as they retain their moisture. AND/OR, line your terracotta pots with a plastic bag.

what measures can we take to mitigate their effects? Australian gardeners consider it essential to mulch up to 50 cm deep?	Place 2 to 5cm of mulch on the top of the soil making sure to NOT let it touch the plant stems. The best mulch 'seems to be' WHITE stones/pebbles as they reflect the light/heat back while retaining the moisture underneath. Other mulches will do, eg spent mushroom compost/home made compost/potting compost. Always water at night – the moisture will last longer in the lower temperature of nighttime.
However, how to get hold of appropriate mulching material in sufficient quantities?	Builders' merchants sell gravel/stones/pebbles by the ton. Fill a trailer or have it delivered.
Is mushroom compost a contender and if so, where can one obtain this?	Yes! The internet sells spent mushroom compost – available from Leroy Merlin : Aged mushroom compost a big bag 1,000 L at 179€. Also - Ribérac market has a mushroom stall – they may sell you their spent compost?
Richard Evans This year I have lost a wonderful mature Indian bean tree and have also lost 2 mature rose bushes, one a semi climber. Can't be the heat as they have been watered regularly. Does the panel have any idea why?	The Indian Bean Tree (Catalpa Tree) is quite short lived – only living between 50 – 70 years. It seems that your tree may have reached the natural end of it's life. They can suffer from an infection called 'Verticillum Wilt' – for which there is no cure. Roses… vVery possible that you have not watered them enough. We all try to be 'modest' with our watering during the drought, but a little careful watering is unfortunately **not enough** in some cases. We may need to get more inventive with saving our grey water and re-using it. (Washing up water/ bath water…)
Jacquie Strasser Are 'Lasagne beds' better for growing vegetables than other methods?	To explain – It is layering up brown and green composting materials, to make, in effect, a low, rectangular compost heap. There are mixed opinions……. **Pros:** Cost effective. Improves soil. Low maintenance, no dig/till. **Cons:** Re-cycling paper mills will miss out on using this material (!) The heavy layers squash out the essential air and slow down the decomposition. Time consuming – a lot of time spent gathering together the enormous amount of composting materials to layer up. It will take several weeks to decompose down to a fraction of its original height.