

Early problems



Helen Yemm
answers your questions

Baddie badgers again...

Airing the badger/sweetcorn-trashing issue here recently seemed to stir readers out of early-autumn slumber, and I had several helpful suggestions as to how to protect this most wonderful and – even if it survives the raiders – fleeting of vegetable crops.

My suggestion that a really early-cropping variety such as 'Lark' might ripen before badgers become active got short shrift from a fellow allotmenter, emailer **Wendy White**. She thoroughly recommends the variety, but says the badgers made a beeline for her cobs. The only one of her neighbours' plots that was not attacked in a similar lightning raid was the one where the sweetcorn was not yet ripe, thus turning my bright idea on its head.

Emailer **Valerie Strauss** is pretty convinced that it was rats, not badgers, that did for her sweetcorn in 2013, so this year she outmanoeuvred them by cutting the tops off plastic bottles and placing them over each cob before they were fully ripe.

Emailer **Shirley Sperring** from Aberdeenshire had an enormous badger problem several years ago. Her solution was a radio tuned to Radio 4 placed in a plastic bag in the vicinity for several nights. The furry thieves moved on and never returned. (I am told this works for deer, too.)

But both emailer **Hugh Clark** and **Ken and Sue Marsh** from Bidborough hit on the only reliable solution: for the crucial sweetcorn-ripening period, they installed battery-operated electric fencing. Ken and Sue recommend four strands of wire, about 4in apart, set low down to give damp little noses a bit of a shock (since fur insulates to a great extent).

For further advice and information, I recommend the helpful suppliers who provided me with anti-fox fencing for my hens (01620 860058; electricfencing.co.uk).

Green with envy?

I feed my garden every spring with either chicken pellets or well rotted horse manure. I recently visited a friend's garden where



Clematis collection: clockwise from main, 'Lagoon', 'Arabella' and 'Piilu'



when should I feed my beds? I don't want to overdo it.

Jane Ough, Dorset

Most of us succumb at one time or another to bouts of garden envy. You seem to me to be doing the right thing with your garden, topping up nutrients in the soil with chicken manure pellets and rotted horse manure in spring. But no two gardens are the same, obviously, and you may be dealing with a completely different kind of soil, site and general conditions

organic matter to the soil – either dug in, or in the form of surface mulches – simply to improve its texture and its water-and-nutrient retaining capacity; you can't overdo it with organic stuff. Maybe your friend regularly waters her pots and perennials with soluble feeds such as MiracleGro (non-organic) or Maxicrop (organic) or even uses them as foliar feeds, which can help them weather whatever kind of season we have. Unlike soil improvement, this is something that actually can be

complete spin just before your visit, deadheading everything and tweaking off yellowing or slugged-up leaves, so that her garden would be sure to impress you – which it clearly did. *Noli illegitimi carborundum* – don't let them get you down – or some such.

Ants, chrysanths, etc

Richard (no surname) asks if the ants' nests he found while tidying his strawberry bed are likely to

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