

The HPS Horticultural Advisory Service

More questions and answers from our very own GQT

From A:

I have recently acquired a *Daphne odora* and would appreciate some advice as to its care.

Does this plant require rainwater only, and will well-rotted horse manure be OK, and grit for drainage?

To A:

You don't say whether your plant is in a container or the ground – daphnes prefer the open ground; a sheltered woodland location is ideal with the usual fertile, moist but well-drained soil. Add

grit if the soil is heavy. An annual mulch of well-rotted manure would be perfect, but keep the mulch away from the neck of the plant.

If your soil is on the alkaline side, yellowing of the foliage can indicate a nutrient deficiency, which will be remedied by the application of chelated iron such as Sequestrene.

In my opinion, all plants (apart from seedlings) prefer rainwater if possible. Rainwater accumulates carbon dioxide as it falls, which has the effect of

acidifying the water. Most plant roots like acid water (not acid rain!) as it makes the minerals in the soil more available. Rainwater tends to contain a lot of oxygen too, which prevents roots from getting waterlogged in very wet soil.

Daphnes are notoriously fickle, with an alarming tendency to curl up and die for no obvious reason. Don't take it personally if that happens! Good luck with your plant – I hope it fills your garden with sweet perfume.



Daphne odora and *Daphne odora* 'Aureomarginata' at Burncoose Nursery.

Daphne odora was introduced from Japan in 1771. It makes a neat evergreen bush 1.2–2m tall and has highly fragrant, reddish-purple and white flowers. Interestingly, the flowers are cylindrical tubes that flare suddenly outwards into four lobes, so that the bloom looks flat when viewed directly head on. The scent is one of the earliest joys of a spring garden.

From B:

I have a *Brugmansia arborea*, or Angel's Trumpet, that is going yellow and lifeless and has holes in the leaves. Clearly the plant needs some help, so I'm contacting you for advice, and hopefully a solution.

To B:

Your plant sounds as though it requires some assistance!

Brugmansia (syn. *Datura*) are evergreen shrubs with bewitchingly fragrant flowers. Their distribution is Ecuador, Peru and northern Chile, so in northern climates they are often grown indoors.

One very important thing to know about cultivating *Brugmansia* is that they are extremely poisonous. Often people assume that its common name refers to the look of the flowers, rather

than the sound which will be heard after absorbing a fatal amount of its toxins! Always wear gloves when handling the plant, and don't consume any part of it.

Without seeing the holes in the leaves you mention, I would guess they are caused either by whitefly or thrips. I would recommend that you spray the plant with SB Plant Invigorator, which is a harmless fungicide, insecticide, and plant tonic that will not harm beneficials such as bees and hoverflies in any way. *Brugmansias* are also prone to glasshouse red spider mite, which causes the leaves to appear speckled or bleached.

You don't state where you are growing your plant but my advice to you is as follows.

Ensure your plant is in moist but well-drained soil. JI no. 3 would be a good choice when it needs re-potting – it will appreciate being in a large container with lots of room for its roots to spread.

Give the plant a summer holiday outside in a sheltered south- or west-facing spot. This will help with pest control. Start a weekly regime of feeding it with a seaweed-based fertiliser from spring to autumn. In winter, water sparingly and ensure a minimum temperature of 7–10°C.

I would recommend a hard prune in an attempt to regenerate it – you can do this when it moves back in after the summer.

I hope your plant revives. They are very beautiful when in flower, a complete show-stopper. 🌸

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Brugmansia arborea

Email your question to: advisory@hardy-plant.org.uk