

Q: Do you have suggestions for eradicating poison ivy? I have just a small growth in my backyard.

A: Eradicating? Isn't going to happen. Controlling? Yes, you can do that, but it's not a one-off operation.

Toxicodendron radicans (eastern poison ivy) is easily and continuously spread by birds, who like the berries. They eat the berry, it's processed through their digestive systems, and they return it to the earth with some fresh fertilizer, no charge. Poison ivy is very good at camouflage and disguise, as well. It needs shade and moisture, so what better place than under an ornamental bush or tree that you are watering and caring for? It can climb trees, concealing its stems in the bark, with dark green leaves that blend right in. You really can't risk using an herbicide, because there's no way to keep from zapping the ornamentals you have painstakingly planted. Some gardeners have tried "painting" a few leaves with herbicide, but this is still chancy. So, here is our recommendation. You'll need rubber gloves (like you use for dish-washing) and paper towels or newspaper, plus a plastic trash bag for disposal. Scout out the roots, and — with gloves on and a piece of paper towel wrapped around the roots — try to pull it all out. As you



ASK MR. SMARTY PLANTS



Melody Lytle WILDFLOWER CENTER
Poison ivy can be controlled.

pull it out, keep the stems away from you, wrap it in paper and put it in the plastic bag. We have heard that washing skin that has been exposed to poison ivy, very quickly, in dish-washing soap will help. What we do is wash our hands, with the rubber gloves still on, in the dish-washing liquid. If you feel your clothes have come in contact with the poison ivy, take them off very gingerly, trying not to touch any of the oils from the ivy, and get them straight into the washing machine. This may sound very elaborate, but anyone who has ever had poison ivy dermatitis will tell you it's worth it. Toxicodendron radicans is deciduous, but even dormant plant material can cause problems if it's touched. The best time to attack it is in the early spring, when the whole plant should be easier to get out. It takes many different forms, although the rule of "leaves of three, let them be" still applies.

Mr. Smarty Plants is a service of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. More questions and answers at wildflower.org/expert or find a link at statesman.com.

MOMENTS IN A GARDEN ■
TERRY CONLAN, 62, EXECUTIVE CHEF/AUTHOR AT LAKE AUSTIN SPA RESORT



Terry Conlan and his wife, Pam, have a small informal garden in the backyard of their North Austin home. Each spring they typically plant a few tomatoes, green beans, squash, peppers and a few culinary herbs.

But Conlan's gardening passion is in full bloom as he walks through the expansive, and meticulously tended, gardens on the grounds of Lake Austin Spa Resort, where he works. The beds, tended by a group of talented green thumbs at the spa, are full of fresh ingredients Conlan uses in his daily culinary creations.

Conlan is inspired by nature. He harvests organic produce from the raised beds along the shores of the upper end of Lake Austin and prepares amazing concoctions with the garden's generous seasonal yield. Cookbook and culinary magazine editors are always after the well-known chef to share his healthy approaches to Thai, Tex-Mex, Italian, Cajun and many other food genres.

Conlan loves to walk through the gardens just after a rain or at the changing of the light that comes dramatically over the hills that surround Lake Austin, shading the gardens as the sun sets.

"Seldom is the day that I do not seek (and find) the restorative sense of peace and wellness that a contemplative stroll through its confines will provide," he says.

As Conlan snaps off another bunch of bok choy at the root for a spicy stir-fry, he celebrates the fact that almost everything he needs is in the raised beds and peace-filled pathways.

— Clare Miers, Clare@MiersMedia.com

@ statesman.com

- Share photos of your garden
- See more photos and a video tour of the raised-bed gardens where Conlan harvests organic produce for guests at the award-winning Lake Austin Spa Resort.

TERRY CONLAN

'There is power, even majesty, in the garden. The mysteries of life, death and renewal unfold daily here for all to see, are chronicled in the earth, in the plants, in the animals and micro-organisms that abet the process, and in the elements. That I am privileged to both witness and participate in some small way in this full-blown daily miracle is never lost on me.'



@ statesman.com/gardening

- Mark your calendars for the Gardens on Tour, which features five private gardens and gardens of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. It'll happen from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 12, rain or shine. Sign up for a random drawing and win wristbands to the tour. (Two sets of two wristbands will be given away Thursday.) For details go to Renee's Roots (the garden of an urban farm girl).
- Next week in Renee's Roots, look for tips on natural ways to control fire ants in your garden.

aggressively and might push out weaker species. Spread seed in spring or fall, though a fall seeding is recommended. Seeds do not have to be treated but might benefit from a period of stratification. (About four weeks of cold treatment, at about 38 degrees, breaks the seed's dormancy. By simulating winter, you can fool the seeds into germinating.)

Plants grown from seed usually bloom the second year. Be sure the seed is in good contact with the soil by lightly raking it into loose topsoil. Seeding rate is two to four pounds per acre. Seed is available commercially or can be collected in late summer. Collect seed from several plants to increase the spectrum of color. If possible, collect seed from plants with solid yellow ray petals to contrast with plants with reddish-brown rays.

— Damon Waitt, senior botanist, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

WILDFLOWERS

Mexican hat brings a fiesta to your fields

Mexican hat (*Ratibida columnifera*), named because the colorful flower heads resemble traditional broad-brimmed, high-crowned hats worn during Mexican fiestas, is blooming by the thousands in fields and along roadsides from East Texas through the Trans-Pecos and up to the Panhandle.

Both leaves and stems of this perennial herb are somewhat rough, with the upper third of the stem bare. Like other members of the sunflower family (*Asteraceae*), what appears to be a single flower is actually a composite or head of many flowers that come in two different types: rays and disks. The brightly colored ray flowers are ¾ inch to 1 inch long, often bending downward, and are yellow-orange, often deep reddish-orange at the base. Sometimes they are entirely yellow, and in other cases only



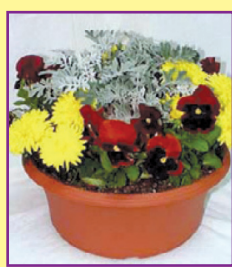
Joe Marcus

the tips are yellow.

The center of the head is an erect, thimblelike structure 1 inch to 2 inches long, bearing many gray-green disk flowers that turn brown as they mature. Flowering takes place in late spring through July but often extends into August and September if moisture is available.

Mexican hat is a drought-tolerant, fast-growing wildflower that is not fussy about soils and is easy to grow from seed. The foliage has a strong odor that repels deer, but it can grow

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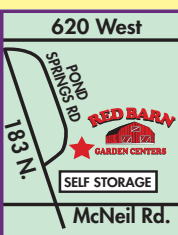
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To enter the contest, e-mail your entry to insideline@statesman.com or mail your entry to Austin American-Statesman, Inside Line Mother's Day Contest, 305 S. Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78704.

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