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Ask the Experts

Shower woes can be stalled with a little work

Q I have a metal shower stall with a white finish that about 40 years old. Soap scum, wear and tear, and water have worn down the finish to the bare metal. Although I have repainted it several times, it doesn't seem to last very long. Would there be some way to prolong a new coat of paint, such as some type of waterproof coating?

Marjorie Washburn-Crestwood

A You have a real problem on your hands, but it's not insurmountable. It's just that you might be in for a little more work than I'd hoped with your usual white enamel paint job. Caroline Offutt, owner of Offutt's Painting Services in Prospect, said Charles Lee, a salesman with Dupont Paint in the Highlands, agreed that the best way to approach your problem for a long-term cure is to use an epoxy-based paint.

As a second choice, Offutt said she might try a "Gorilla Brand" primer called GOR then cover it with a good high-gloss enamel paint.

Lee and Lee both thought the epoxy paint would be better. The epoxy paint involves mixing a base paint with a hardener, then applying the final product quickly. Before you start, though, you must be sure all of the existing paint has been removed from the metal surface.

Lee stresses the importance of this step because the chemical compounds in the epoxy paint will fry any existing enamel, causing peeling in the long run. He suggests using a chemical paint remover, sandpaper or a professional paint-stripping product for this preliminary job. Epoxy-compound paints are commonly used around swimming pools, so they hold up to water well, but you must provide yourself as much fresh air as possible while working with them. GOR has a protective mask that fits over the nose and mouth to make sure the fumes don't get into your lungs.

You can buy small quantities of epoxy paint, usually from a quart to a gallon to \$24 a gallon. You will also need to buy a special solvent for cleaning, so ask your dealer to recommend one. Once you have mixed the epoxy and applied it to your shower surface, you must let the surface cure for at least 24 hours before anything touches it.

Send your questions on home decorating or repair to Ask the Experts, The Courier-Journal, 525 W. Broadway, P.O. Box 742027, Louisville, Ky. 40207-7427. Steve Chapin will research the questions with local business people who specialize in home repair.

Nature, like a kind and smiling mother, lends herself to our dreams and our fancies.

VICTOR HUGO

In Our Gardens

Lilac (Syringia) offers fragrance

Season: Spring  
Lilac is a shrub like what's in a good, it's very very lovely. When it's in bloom, it's a mildewed mess. However, few gardeners can live without at least one specimen because, if you enjoy the intense and evocative fragrance of the huge spikes, which range in color from the common lilac purple of our grandmother's gardens to the rare soft yellow and deep red of newer hybrids.

The foliage is not always as spectacular as the flowers, but the smooth, oval leaves can be attractive until the humid summer brings wildfire, which is almost impossible to avoid with the older varieties. Newer varieties tend to be more resistant.

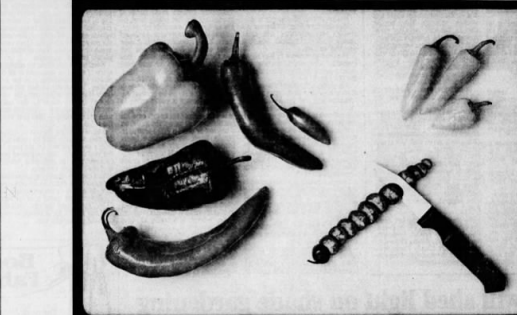
The common lilac S. vulgaris is the old one. Newer varieties include the purple-veined, one with several, multi-colored spikes Miss Kim (S. panicula), which blooms closer to early autumn than the others.

Hybrids to look for, but which may be tough to find at local nurseries, include red Charles Joly, the ivory white and reticulata Ivory Silk, and the yellow S. vulgaris Primrose.

What if lilac? Lilacs prefer a good, deep soil with sun. But as many old plants have shown, it can also handle neglect and dry conditions. Best kept as a natural, rather than clipped, shape, the plant benefits from annual removal of the older stems all the way to the ground. Do pruning during the few weeks after flowering. You can rejuvenate a tired, old, tangled mass by cutting it back severely, then training it to grow in a single stem through the summer. See how to do it. Take cuttings in mid-summer.

Home & Garden

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IT'S DOWNRIGHT embarrassing to be teased by a vegetable. But even if you've got a black belt in karate, a personal security system and a particularly diligent gardener, an organically grown capsicum can catch you off guard. Here you badly, and make you cry and scream for help.

Innocent gardeners are most vulnerable to a capsicum's surprise attack because gardeners are easily seduced by the plant's glossy green leaves, its shiny fruit and its promise of prize-winning yields. Lulled into a false sense of security with the watering, nurturing and the joy of their plant's flowering, these gardeners — some of whom envisioned nothing more than pickled peppers — find themselves gasping for breath, reaching for cool relief — heat by the very vegetable they grew.

Capsicums are peppers. ("Chili," they're called in the Southwest, even though they're rich in vitamins A, have more vitamin C than oranges and give you a major dose of heat when cooked with capsaicin — the active ingredient in pepper sprays made to fend off aggressors.)

Gardeners who have grown up with sweet bell peppers might not anticipate the need to defend themselves from the new pepper varieties that are becoming available at our markets. But some of the most incendiary ones — the habaneros, the Thai

HOT! HOT! HOT! Peppers heat up interest among gardeners

STORIES BY NANCY FARMER AND PHOTO BY BRIAN BOHANNON

the serrano, the Tabasco — have been known to cause blister-like burns that hurt for two days. Capsicum normally isn't present outside the fruit, the plants are safe to cultivate as you would any other plant in the garden. But pepper stems can leak, and berries don't always show. An inadvertent swipe of the hand across a sweaty brow can cause unexpected and excruciating pain in eyes, nose and lips.

When we willingly bite into a spicy hot tomato, our brain registers the experience as pain and releases endorphins to help us endure the trauma. Some experts say it's the endorphin rush that has given chilies

their wide appeal. Some even say that peppers are addictive, and enthusiastic chili lovers have become known as "pepper heads" and "chili heads." Scientific tests are being done to determine peppers' real addictiveness, but so far results are inconclusive. For now we know that more people are eating more peppers and that garden centers are stocking an increasingly wider variety of chilies. Cayenne, habaneros, Mirrools and black panthers.

No matter which type you grow, from mild banana peppers to fiery ancho, the plants can be handled risk-free until they bloom. Then gardeners should take pre-

cautions when they tend their plants or handle their harvest.

Wear rubber gloves when working with chilies on the vine or off. (This surgical gloves are adequate for working with small amounts.)

Wash your hands and your face, eyes, lips or nose until after you've removed the gloves and washed well with soap and water.

Take care not to touch your skin, eyes, lips or nose until after you've removed the gloves and washed well with soap and water.

Take care to eat each pepper cautiously because one bite can produce one mild pepper and another that sears. Test by touching a finger to the whitish membrane inside the pepper and then touching your finger to your tongue. If that doesn't hurt, touch the membrane directly to your tongue, being careful not to get the capsaicin on your lips.

If you bite into a pepper that's too hot to handle, try milk, yogurt or sour cream to neutralize the sensation. Dairy products have casein, a protein that breaks the bond between capsaicin and pain receptors. Water makes the experience seem worse, because capsaicin is oil based. If all of the vegetables we can grow in our gardens, peppers are probably the prettiest. Even though there's fire in the fruit, there's no need to sacrifice pepper pleasure if you stay mindful of their potency. Simply remember — professional pepper producers practice gradual protection when they pick a peck of peppers.

Exotic varieties are among those sprouting at area garden centers

IT'S CARBON-DATING tests are correct. Peppers have been around for 8,000 years. But lately, shopping for peppers and pepper plants feels like a brand new experience. That's because exotic new varieties are popping up in garden centers around Louisville.

The hottest chili you can buy is the habanero. And the rule of thumb is that the smaller pepper packs the biggest punch.

The scientific measure of a chili's fire-power is the Scoville Scale developed in 1912 by Wilbur L. Scoville, a pharmacologist with Parke Davis, the company that developed a capsaicin-rich muscle relaxant called "Heet."

Scoville's measure determines the amount of hot capsaicin in a variety of pepper. But gardeners and cooks should be aware that hot type, number and temperature in a chili. Just because capsaicin develops in a chili, that doesn't mean you won't find one on the sunny side of the vine that's hot enough to make you gasp.

When you shop for seeds or plants, consider the pepper's general "authority" — its heat — and its other qualities as well. Make sure you buy the variety most appropriate for your needs.

Peppers, listed from hottest to mildest: Habanero: You'll find habaneros called Scotch Bonnet, Scotch, Congo, Bouquet and Genoa peppers. Usually used fresh, habaneros are great with lime and they preserve well. Piquillo: One popular variety is Firecracker. Piquillo can be used fresh, dried or frozen. They're good in soups, stews and beans. They make good dried pepper flakes. Tabasco: Louisiana or Cayun Tabasco dry well, but they're most often made into fermented pepper sauce or packed in vinegar. They're not commonly used fresh.

Heat: This pepper is an extraordinary variety that fires well, but the peppers can also be used fresh in soups, stews, stews and chili.

Cayenne: Four main subvarieties cooks have kept powdered cayenne on their spice shelf. Home-grown cayenne can be dried and powdered, or they can be used fresh in soups, stews and stews. Casacahe: Casacahe, also known as chili

bolis and bolita, dry well, cook up nicely in soups and stews and are favorites in sausage.

Serrano: Serrano peppers are terrific fresh, red or green, in salsas. They also dry nicely and are good with beans and sausage.

Jalapeno: Jalapenos are great in salsas, soups, beans and escabeche. They can be dried to be used as a seasoning.

Mirrool: Mirrools are good cooking peppers, but after they're dried they give food a yellowish color when dried.

Ancho: Red ones are popular for stringing or roasting of some peppers is called a nuna. Green Ancho peppers can be roasted and peeled or frozen and used in soups, stews and stews.

Mild: Mild peppers can be used fresh, but most often they're ground into a fine red powder.

Poblano: New cookbooks, such as Martha Stewart's, specify poblanos peppers. Dried poblanos are called ancho, and ancho are also being called for in the new cookbooks. Poblano peppers make easy soups, but they may be less when they're roasted and peeled and made into

Backyard Garage

Ball and twine unravel parking squeeze in cluttered garage

PULLING INTO SOME garages "just right" can be pretty tough. You need to park so that you don't hit the lawn mower. Knock over a stack of junk or park too close to your spouse's car.

This can be tricky at best, but there is a solution. To correctly position your car, attach a tennis ball to a string and suspend the string from the ceiling to a height where the tennis ball will gently touch the windshield as you pull in to the right spot.

No longer will the car be in too far to walk around or not in far enough for the garage door to shut. It will be in the perfect spot each time you pull in.

If you have a home or garden that will make the season, send it to us. We'll pay \$25 for those we publish. Send your submissions, along with your daytime telephone numbers, to The Backyard Garden, c/o The Courier-Journal, 525 W. Broadway, P.O. Box 742027, Louisville, Ky. 40207-7427.



PHOTO BY BRIAN BOHANNON

Larry Anderson lives in Chicago, Ill., with his wife, Sue, and their sons, Jeremy and Matthew. He is a sales manager for American Mobile Glass in Louisville.