



COURTESY PHOTOS

Praying Mantids are one of the largest and most recognizable garden predators.

Helpful — but with a price

Praying mantids are ravenous - eating both pests and beneficial insects

Question: I've heard that it's beneficial to introduce praying mantids into my garden to reduce insect pests. Is this true?

A: While praying mantids are one the largest and most recognizable garden predators, their contribution to garden pest control is somewhat negligible. This is because they are indiscriminate when it comes to their prey – they will pounce on any insect that comes too close, whether pests like grasshoppers, flies, caterpillars or beneficials like honey bees and butterflies. They even eat each other on occasion!

In Oregon, the European praying mantid (*Mantis religiosa*) is the most common species. Mid-summer to mid-fall is when they are most observed when the mature adults begin to move about in search of abundant food and mates. In the process of mating, the male mantid loses its head literally as the female simply bites it off and consumes it. The female then dies shortly after laying a number of white, hard-foam egg cases which overwinter on twigs, vines, and under building eaves. Each egg case contains about 300 eggs which hatch in the spring. All adult mantids are typically killed off by the first frosts of autumn.

ASK A MASTER GARDENER



Praying mantids have an unusually elongated thorax which functions like a neck, enabling the triangular head to turn almost 360 degrees. This along with two huge compound eyes and three single eyes are adaptations that make the mantid a fearsome hunter. Each foreleg folds back like a pocket knife with serrated, spiny edges ending in sharp hooks, and mantids are lightning quick when they pounce on their prey. They also have excellent camouflage ability, changing from green to brown depending on their environment.

Encouraging mantid populations in your home garden is still a good practice, but just remember these voracious predators are not fussy about what they catch and eat.

Question: I have a beautiful potted fuchsia plant in a hanging basket. Is there a way I can protect it over the winter to enjoy again next year?

A: Absolutely! Showy fuchsias are tender plants. Frost and winter cold can be the end of them – and judging by my thermometer this morning (37) – it's time to start thinking of protecting them. To overwinter these plants, they

need some special care in order to reward you again next summer with their spectacular blooms.

One of the first requirements is to maintain a vigorous, healthy plant during the summer growing season to ensure that your fuchsia can produce sufficient growth and food reserves for the following spring. Fertilize weekly during the summer with a weak complete soluble fertilizer high in phosphorous such as 15-30-15.

Bring the plant inside before the first frost is expected. Gradually taper off watering

in October and November and cease fertilizing. Water the plant only occasionally during winter storage, but don't allow the soil to become bone dry.

Overwinter your fuchsia in any dark, cool place that is 45-55 degrees F and frost-free. Prune it back, removing all the green and red stems, leaving the tan hardwood. Remove all leaves. In February or March when new growth starts appearing, increase moisture, light and warmer temperatures. Since the new growth often produces single stem branches, pinch the growing tips early to promote branching so it

doesn't get sparse or leggy. Resume fertilizing with a product designed for blooming plants, but mixed at half strength. When all danger of frost is past, move your fuchsia back outside for the summer, choosing a semi-shaded spot that is protected from the hot afternoon sun. Then sit back and enjoy the show!

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg.



Delicate fuchsias require maintenance to survive the winter.