

Week of July 17

## Monarch of the Garden

By Sage Sassafras

The forecast calls for heavy rain and high winds. I fly to my perennial garden to loosely tie my fast-growing delphiniums to the picket fence using green baler twine. Their heights make them very vulnerable to rain and wind. Some are 5 feet tall already, but at their full height the tallest spikes can reach 7 feet. Also, if heavy rain is forecast just as these glorious plants are at their peak, I wrap their stalks together, untying them after the storm.

Delphiniums can be both challenging to establish and then challenging to keep looking presentable. But when at their most beautiful, they are truly the queen of the perennial garden and definitely worth all the effort. Although there are available shorter and more manageable forms of delphiniums, it is the majestic Pacific Giants which are the most spectacular.

Some of these monarchs of my garden are well over 10 years old and have grown to be very large plants, with as many as 75 “spikes” on one plant. I’m not sure why, but older varieties of delphiniums seem to last longer than the newer ones.

I grow most of my delphiniums from seed, under lights, and transplant them to a holding bed for a year or two before moving them into their permanent home in the perennial border. In this way, if one or more die over winter, I always have new ones waiting their turn to shine in my garden.

Delphiniums require a sunny location, abundant water, and are heavy feeders. A shovel or two of well rotted cow manure placed around – not on – the plant in either late fall or early spring will make them very happy. A water soluble fertilizer once or twice during the summer is also a good idea. Delphiniums start their show around the end of June and bloom for up to four weeks. If cut back after the blooms fade, they will sometimes send up a few new stalks again in the fall, but you will need to wait until next year to see them at their full glory again.

Mother Nature needs all the coddling we can give her. [www.WoodstockGardenClub.org](http://www.WoodstockGardenClub.org)