



Garden q & a

STEPHEN BROWN

### **Purple Queen, *Tradescantia pallida*, an Irritant**

January 5

**Question:** What is the name of the purple, viney, perennial groundcover-type plant that is used in many center islands and medians? It's not oyster plant. We have a brick planter which my husband planted with these plants. Every few months they require aggressive trimming which isn't a problem. Last Saturday, he went and sat on the brick wall planter without his shirt on, and worked his way down the length of the house, pulling them off and trimming them. He has developed a fine, red, itching rash on his side that was facing the plants, and on the inside of his wrist where he was pulling them off. Do you know if this plant does that sort of rash thing? It's the only thing we can think of that's caused it.

June B., e-mail

**Answer:** The plant in question is probably *Tradescantia pallida* better known as purple queen. For most people, handling this plant is not a problem but there are exceptions and it appears that your husband is one of those exceptions. Furthermore, one can develop an allergic reaction to a plant that in the past was not experienced as an irritant. Wearing clothing for protection would probably be of little use. In some cases, it may even make things worst. For example, if the plant's sap became trapped between ones clothing or gloves and the skin the problem could be exacerbated. Be sure to wash the clothes before putting them back on. You do not need to get rid of the plant but it's probably best that someone else does this chore.

Stephen Brown is a horticulture agent with the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the horticulture desk at 461-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by e-mailing [brownsh@leegov.com](mailto:brownsh@leegov.com). Visit his web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/GardenHome.shtml> "Garden Doctor" video clips <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/Video.shtml> and flowering trees information at [http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA\\_Z.shtml](http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsA_Z.shtml)