

Ask a Master Gardener

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Angel and Devil Trumpets

Q. A friend recently told me that there are two very similar plants that are commonly known as devil's trumpet and angel's trumpet? How are they different? How do I maintain them?

A. Both trumpets are from the same family of plants known as nightshade plants. Two of their relatives are tomatoes and eggplants. Devil's trumpet (*Datura Alba*) often produces a beautiful white bloom that points upward. The flowers of this variety will appear first and then a spikey seed ball will be produced after the blossoms fall. The angel's trumpet, (*Brugmansia* species), blossoms point downward, but it does not produce seed balls. The blossoms of both stay closed during the day and open at night. The blossoms are outstanding and often reach a foot long. They appear in pastel yellows, pink, orange and white. Another attractive factor of both is that deer tend to ignore them which is an essential requirement in many landscapes. Also, both die down in winter and will reemerge in spring. However, each is propagated differently.

The *Datura* produces golf ball size seed globes, and the plant is also referred to as a thorn apple because of it. The globes produce dozens of seeds which should be saved during the winter. To propagate these beauties, spread the seed in the desired area in the spring, and they should come up readily; the best sites should get full sun and have adequate water. Even though they need full sun, they will often wilt in hot summer weather. To enjoy the prolific blooms, keep sufficient water available. However, it would be prudent to avoid consuming the leaves or roots because another name for this plant is Jimson Weed or Jamestown Weed. It earned this name during our fight for independence when some British soldiers near Jamestown accidentally consumed enough plant material to hallucinate for several days. Their soldering abilities were impaired for a while.

Since the cousin of the *Datura*, the angel's trumpet or *Brugmansia* does not produce seeds, it must be propagated vegetatively. Cuttings should be done after the last blooms of the season but while the plant is still green. In one of his articles, Walter Reeves suggested cutting a trumpet back to 6" and covering with an empty pot. Then it should be mounded with pine straw. However, he said that for insurance, before cutting back he would cut some foot long stems to root in water. This variety can also be rooted in pots of damp soil or trenched in a warm area of the garden. Either of the varieties can be moved inside for the winter when they are small enough, but steps should be taken when they are too heavy to have either cuttings or seeds for the next season.

In spite of their beauty, there are some gardeners who fear the poisonous nature of the leaves, stems, and roots of the trumpet plants. Farmers have expressed concern about cattle grazing on the plants, and some parents have expressed fears of young children's contact with the plants. There can be some blurring of vision and dizziness after contact, and it is believed that the nightshade plants deserve the

“loco weed” description that they have had. However, it is common knowledge that many plants can be poisonous with a high enough quantity and the right kind of contact. Do we want to pull out all the azaleas, mountain laurel, rhododendron, Carolina jessamine, boxwoods, Virginia creeper, elephant ear, oleander, Easter lilies that adorn our gardens? All of these and many more are poisonous under the right conditions. As gardeners, parents, and animal caretakers, it is critical that we are responsible for keeping safe any who are near our gardens.

If you are interested in these outstanding plants, a great resource to start growing them in your garden is the Mothers’ Day sale held at the AG Center, 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton. There will be some rooted trumpets available. This year the sale is scheduled for Saturday, May 9 from 9am to 2pm. Shoppers are urged to come early since many selections sell out early. Also, plan to take time to ask the knowledgeable master gardeners for advice and help about your selections. You can also get printed information about the plants during the sale. At other times you can request help with horticultural issues by calling 770-836-8546 or sending questions via email to ccmg@uga.edu.