

## Gratitude for Nature's Gifts

By Susan Camp

“The World is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;--  
Little we see in Nature that is ours...”

William Wordsworth's lines seem to me more relevant today than they might have been during his lifetime. Twenty-four hours a day, every day, we are bombarded with bad news: catastrophic natural disasters, mass shootings, wars, famine, poverty, political dissension, oppression of minority groups, and the list continues. Cable news never sleeps. How can we survive the daily onslaught of miserable events?

Thanksgiving is here, with its message of gratitude and lots of food, family, and football, but some families have members who aren't fun to be around and spoil every celebration, and many people can't afford to put on a Thanksgiving feast. And there is Black Friday. The day after giving thanks for all we have, we can go shopping so we can buy even more stuff. After all, the holidays are only four weeks away!

In recent years, Jim and I have backed away from the holiday frenzy. We don't participate in the shopping mania; we buy fewer, but hopefully, more meaningful gifts for family members, and we donate to several charitable groups to help make someone else's holidays a little brighter. This doesn't mean we have become hermits or grinchies; in fact, this year we will join our sons and their families for Thanksgiving. Scaling back on the holiday craziness does mean we have a little more time to enjoy the rewards for hard work and to feel grateful for all we have, including the natural beauty that surrounds us.

This holiday season, I have vowed to appreciate our little sanctuary here on Cedarbush Creek. I am thankful for the success of the front garden we designed and planted, even though it cost us plenty in money and hours of backbreaking work. The shrubs, perennials, and bulbs provide us with color, texture, and fragrance in every season. The herbs enhance our senses with their varied shades of green; their savory flavors for cooking; their scents that are used to make sachets and potpourri.

I am thankful for the beautiful pines and tall oaks, beeches, tulip poplars, and other trees that offer us lovely, baby-green leaves in springtime; cool shade from summer heat; and glorious color in fall. In winter, they are regally crowned with snow. The trees provide habitat for the woodland creatures and a buffer that offers us protection and privacy from intrusion by the outside world.

I am thankful for the inquisitive squirrels, cheeky raccoons, and clever foxes, and I am happy to share our trees and land with them. I am grateful for the gentle, graceful deer, even though they sometimes take advantage of our generosity and help themselves to more of our daylilies, hydrangeas, and azaleas than I think they should! I am thankful for the flying creatures: birds, butterflies, bees, and beneficial insects, all of which offer us their beauty and grace and pollinate our plants. The snakes, frogs, toads, and spiders often go unappreciated, but they work hard for us as well by eating unwanted insects.

Our yard facing on Cedarbush Creek is a window onto the serenity of tidal water and marshland. Egrets fish in the creek, while ospreys and eagles circle above, hoping to spot a tasty morsel below. The color of the creek water changes daily with the angle of sunlight or cloud cover. The marsh grass turns from green in summer to yellow in fall, to green again in spring. We are refreshed, just sitting on the deck on a summer evening, watching as the sun sets on the creek and the stars begin to twinkle.

Sometimes it feels good to step back from doing, take a breath, look around at the beauty of simple, natural things, and say "Thank you." May you enjoy a Thanksgiving filled with laughter, joy, and thankfulness.

November 23, 2017