

Keep It Simple!

Our recent snows have simplified my garden's design, or lack thereof. It was simply snow. No doubt it is a reflection of our diminishing powers, but my dear, elderly friends are universal in expressing their dismay at how complicated everything is! Simplicity is what we so desire as we add one more item, procedure, need, appointment, obligation to the growing 'to-do' list.

Gardeners who travel by air are finding a once simple thing as moving from point A to point B is no longer possible without going from A to D to C to B with one's luggage trailing well behind. Another irritant is that communication device which will work anywhere in the world with just one additional gadget. Only it doesn't. The pair does not play well together but is antipathetic without another expensive ameliorating gadget.

Even our plant world is becoming prone to complicating excess. Years ago a visitor gave me a green plastic sleeve that was to be filled with soil, holes poked in the sides and wee plants tucked in. This contraption was to be dangled from a place where it would be a menace to water. The concept blossomed: next came walls of plants. Not the crannied flowers emerging from ancient stone walls but massive greenery struggling to sort up from down from its attachment mid-wall. Can you believe this anomaly of a garden bed is now being brought indoors?

We are encouraged to hang a group of plants on a wall or door as if a plain wooden door or a well-behaved wall needed to become 'lively'. We can always hang a seasonal wreath on a door if its doorness is inadequate? Windowsills will accommodate the herbs handy to the soup pot: they do not need to encumber cupboard doors shedding bits of leaf and soil into your morning coffee. Too clever by far are many innovative approaches to gardening.

Gardeners, probably more than most other shoppers, are likely to stop at the plant market to pick up one plant and come away with ten. It is not really impulse shopping, but just that inherent plant love. One or two may languish unto death before the right spot is found and another few may be related to Jack's beanstalk and have to be cutback continually until their charm fades and they are added to the compost pile. All of this activity takes time, time that would be better spent caring for that one plant that was the purpose of the visit to the store in the first place.

If you are inclined to make 'anytime' resolutions you may decide to buy only what your garden has place for, concentrating on those plants that do well in your garden. A sweep of a few kinds is more tranquil and prettier than a hodge-podge of one of this, that, and the other. I know because I have so often puttered about trying one of this or that, a willing victim of plant love.

This winter we may lose a few plants that are borderline hardy in Zone 7. We may have Zone 7 seasons most years but I suspect January's sustained cold may have killed some vulnerable plants. We may find further proof that the plants native to Tidewater are the survivors, a clue for what to look for when replacements are needed. We may find that shrubs have a better chance to be seen in all their glory when they are not massed branch to branch. If the open spots that remain seem too bare to you, a generous collection of bulbs will add interest, bridging the seasons throughout the year. The charm of most of the smaller bulbs is most evident when they are seen close up with shrubs as a quiet background.

Environmental note:

- Warmer temperatures are expanding the range of deer ticks that spread Lyme disease.
- Jellyfish thrive in warmer waters. Some species eat plankton needed by other fish.
- Pine bark beetles have exploded across the West, killing forests.

- Drought-resistant salt cedar is lowering water tables and crowding out cottonwoods and other plants important to wildlife.

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