

Autumn: A Time for Letting Go

If we believe there is a time to plant and a time to uproot the plant, we can delight in the last roses competing with their own red hips and the sprawling apricot daisy faces of single chrysanthemums under the pink veil of muhly grass. We can wait for spring, savoring fall. Grasses come into their own in November, catching dew and light and dancing for our attention.

Most gardeners love November, enjoy chasing leaves off the deck, relishing the sparkle of red berries as leaves fall from the deciduous hollies. They welcome this down time, when nature withdraws from the flamboyant surface to work magic deep in soil and roots. Not every spot must be packed with color: there is something soul-soothing about the empty and quiet spaces in our gardens where bare branches are framed against the sky.

Those plants lost to sight in high bloom time can be seen now. We notice the bright yellow centers of *Chrysanthemum pacifica*, *Dendranthemum pacifica*, properly now *Ajania pacifica*. This low mounding perennial with the confusing name deserves space because the silver-margined leaves are attractive all summer. The flowers that finally show up in late October and last until late November have yellow buttons without visible petals. Another reason to have *Ajania* is its tolerance for the poor soil most of us have plenty of.

This is the season to putter outside, contentedly wasting time on chores that probably don't need doing.

Gifts and Catalogs: Do holiday decorations appear earlier every year or is it my imagination? One catalog that announces on its cover 'The Most Important Gift Catalog in the World' just may be! Heifer International helps families all over the world move from poverty to self-reliance by donating animals and the training needed to care for them. If you buy a cow, or even a part of a cow, for your mother-in-law, she doesn't have to stable it in her condo but can enjoy knowing her gift provides milk and health to a struggling family.

Is there a child you would like to interest in the excitement inherent in the natural world? How about a living gift? With parental approval you might give a worm composing kit, an ant farm, even a few chicks or rabbits if space is available. Through several family moves we hung onto the dog (very expensive transportation) a Jerusalem cherry, and a jade plant that I dimly remember in decline at UVA?

It isn't easy to keep gifts useful. Stores and catalogs are bursting with 'stuff' that begs to be taken home and we face the contradictory impulses of 'living simply' and 'boosting the economy'. We CAN have the best of both worlds by careful buying. Look for fair traded tea, coffee, chocolate, and spices for small gifts. For gifts that are events, buy appliances with the Energy Star label. Check for wood products from managed

forests and recycled paper products. No more trouble than checking the calories on packages of food.

A great gift is soon available, new and improved and updated “Home Gardening in Gloucester”, a resource guide for gardening right here. Through research and experience the information germane to gardening successfully continues to evolve as new cultivars are developed and others found to falter over time. More environmentally benign practices replace older methods and newer techniques produce better results so a new edition of this handbook was needed.

Marketing of the book is being developed and will be announced shortly. Meantime, fill in the gaps in your shopping list for gardeners. Although the spiral bound manual is too large to stuff a Christmas stocking, the modest price, \$12, makes it affordable for multiple gifts.

Good News-Bad News: Were you surprised to read that, after centuries of effort, ships navigated the elusive ‘Northwest Passage’? In September for the first time in recorded history two ships managed to make their way across the top of the world. Due to the effects of climate change, there are ice-free passages through the Arctic north of both Canada and Russia. Quantities of time and money can be saved when merchants use this shortcut. However, if industrial fishing, drilling, and mining move into a part of the world for which there is no experience as guide, what may be the unintended consequences? There are surely enough unsolved problems facing our generation without biting into this wild mushroom.

Good News: Solar thermal electricity costs are inching lower as solar installations increase. The use of solar water heaters is gaining rapidly throughout Europe. Spurred by the high cost of power, two million Germans now live in homes where both water and space are heated by roof top solar systems and Spain is requiring all new and renovated buildings to have solar collectors. In the US, Hawaii, California, and Florida tripled their use of the systems in 2006 and this use has continued to increase.