

Designing for Where You Live!

An explosion of weeds and the seasonal *caniculares dies*, 'dog days' combined to quell any enthusiasm I had for working outside, but I was energized by the opportunity to visit some one else's garden. My weeds will wait.

One of the things I learned was the efficiency of raised beds for vegetable gardening. Just think, rather than spreading soil and compost over a great expanse, when it is confined to a narrow four-foot width, it is a really rich environment. With that free-standing bed you are always within arms reach of the center. Those shyly hiding squashes can be found before they are family sized.

If you are using soaker hoses, the water will stay where it is needed. Raising the beds also assures good drainage, an important factor in Tidewater where there are so many areas with a high water table. Most of us have inadvertently stepped on or stumbled over vegetables in our ground level patches, but in a narrow raised bed we are not going to be trampling the produce.

Another lesson reinforced by seeing this lovely garden was the use of bright color. Decades ago, my first hot summer flower garden reflected the assumption that cool colors would have a cooling effect. Those cool blues and soft lavenders and pinks were beguiling by moonlight but brilliant daylight washed them out. The garden and the gardener wilted. It does seem counterintuitive but to see those vibrant golds, reds, and oranges with all their permutations was so exhilarating, it was cooling! Somehow the heat did not matter!

Sufficient numbers of each species had been clustered to avoid the spotty look that we so often end up with as we use the 'one-of-each' or 'assorted' selections approach. Fat marigold faces, masses of black-eyed Susans and stately daylilies offered a contrast in bloom size and shape and the repetition of plant combinations gave movement to the border. Studying this garden I realized how important it was to place the plantings so that the view of the water was not impeded by towering, attention demanding species but enhanced by a composition that culminated at the shoreline. It was a memorable visit.

Bad sci-fi movie?

We are so accustomed to pond scum and hearing about algae 'blooms' we don't think of it as a real problem. In the first place it is not clearly understood what causes these blooms, although hot weather seems to be one factor and fertilizer runoff another. However some algae, such as cyanobacteria or toxic blue/green algae, release poisons into the water. People can become ill eating shellfish that have fed on certain algae.

Even more curious is *caulerpa taxifolia* discovered along the coast of France and native to the Caribbean, East Africa, and Northern India. This was a warm water species until it mutated in a zoo tank in Stuttgart, Germany in 1980 into a seaweed

variety that could live in cold water. When it was passed along to a tank in Jacques Cousteau's Oceanographic Museum in Monaco it escaped into the wild.

The book "Wicked Plants" by Amy Stewart tells that this algae has been noticed and studied and noticed and studied in 68 sites world wide. What makes it so odd is that it is a single cell organism from frothy fronds, tough stems, to the rhizoids that clutch the ocean floor, a distance of two feet. What makes it unwanted is not that it kills fish, who wisely leave it alone, but it crowds out other plants essential to the ecosystem, destroying fish habitat. It is on the list of the 100 worst invaders put out by The Invasive Species Specialist Group

The good news about this menace is that in San Diego it has been stopped! The authorities there covered an 11,000 square foot patch of it with a tarp and pumped chlorine into it. It must have been both difficult and frightfully expensive but it seems to have done the trick. No one is declaring victory since even a smidgeon of it left alive could root and take off.

Once the view from outer space permanently linked our world together, there is no 'away' – every thing that happens, happens right here, on this one planet. It may be a depressing thought but it is also encouraging in that any problems also have a wide world of solutions: there are San Diego experts everywhere.