

A Garden Almanac for 2018

The word “Almanac” is probably not the best classification title for this Garden Shed hodge-podge of garden experiences and observations I’ve collected this past year. The OED confirms that a real almanac should be an “annual table, or (more usually) a book of tables, containing a calendar of months and days, with astronomical data and calculations, ecclesiastical and other anniversaries, and other information, including astrological and meteorological forecasts.” My almanac is mostly backward looking—rather than a forecast of the future—and it includes no real calendar or astronomical/astrological/meteorological predictions. The OED, however, does offer a second definition of an almanac as a “handbook . . . containing information and statistics of general interest or on a particular subject, esp. a sport or pastime.” That comes closer to what I had in mind. Although my parents were not avid book-buyers, my Dad would periodically purchase for me a new World Almanac. In my personal library I still have his Christmas gift in my final year of high school: the 1963 World Almanac with invaluable information on a vast array of topics in that pre-Google era.

As for this garden almanac I’ve constructed, it is in no way comprehensive on any topic. It is more a “commonplace” site where I have assembled stuff I encountered or thought about or wanted to record for future reference. I have sorted items into a dozen groups, labeled by the months of the year, but there is not much rhyme or reason for the assignment of any items to any given month. Although I might have originally sought something more comprehensive, this almanac is just a compendium of random memories, observations, notes, quotations—items that for whatever reason didn’t get lost.

January

Three Plant Lists

- Top Butterfly Flowers in the Coe Garden.

Asters	Buddleja
Cosmos	Daisies
Dahlias	Goldenrod
Lavender	Phlox
Stonecrop	Yarrow
Zinnias	

- Plants Mentioned by Shakespeare that are in the Coe garden:

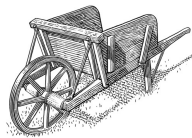
Anemone	Borage	Calendula
Columbine	Crocus	Daisy
Daylily	Dogwood	Fennel
Geranium	Hawthorn	Hyacinth
Hyssop	Lavender	Mallow
Marigold	Moss	Parsley
Peony	Pinks	Poppy
Primrose	Rose	Rosemary

- Toxic plants in the Coe garden:

Bleeding heart: foliage and roots
Buttercup: all parts
Christmas rose: all parts
Delphinium: young plant; seed
Foxglove: leaves, seeds, flowers
Hydrangea: bud, foliage, wood
Larkspur: young plants
Milkweed: Leaves, fruits, stems
Nightshade (uninvited weed): all parts
Poppy: foliage, roots
Sweet pea: seeds
Yew: leaves, seeds, twigs

Bloodroot: all parts
Cardinal flower: all parts
Daffodil: bulb
Elderberry: roots
Hyacinth: bulb
Iris: fresh roots
Lily of the valley: foliage, flowers
Morning glory: all parts
Pokeweed (weed): all parts
Snowdrop: bulb
Wisteria: seeds

“There are twelve months in the year
and every month means a different garden.” ~Margery Fish



February

Soil pH, Composting, and Micronutrients

I composed this first entry after encountering the phrase "ericaceous compost" and wondering about the meaning of that phrase. The following paragraphs are the result of collecting and throwing together a bunch of passages from several different websites in pursuit of my original quest. My apologies for the absence of any appropriate acknowledgment for the sources of the information and the wording.

- Many soil pH testing kits are available from garden centers or a local DIY store. If the soil pH is between 6.5-7.0, the soil is considered neutral. If the soil pH is low (<6.0), the soil is considered acidic, and if the pH is high (>7.5), the soil is considered basic. Some garden weeds prefer acidic soil, and an abundance of buttercups, dandelions, nettles, or plantain weeds might indicate the soil pH is probably low.

Most plants grow best when the soil pH is between 6 and 7.5. The reason behind the need for a neutral pH is phosphorus: plants need soluble phosphorus to grow, develop blossoms, and set fruit. A pH that is higher or lower than this range will cause phosphorus to remain insoluble, and the element will not be taken up by the plant's root system.

Some experienced gardeners can determine soil pH by performing a "taste test." Acidic soil will taste sour and basic soil will taste sweet. This method of determining soil pH is not recommended as ingesting dirt may result in a number of infections or parasitic diseases.

Ericaceous compost is compost for acid-loving plants. To make ericaceous compost, try mixtures of oak leaves, pine needles, coffee grounds, and peat moss. Although I have plenty of oak leaves, I have no pine tree, my wife and I don't drink coffee, and I try to minimize my use of peat moss to one bale of Canadian peat per year. So it's most likely I will need to rely on oak-leaf based piles for creating an ericaceous compost. It's my impression that most unfinished compost tends to be acidic, so it's best to wait to test the compost pH until after it's finished percolating and has been mixed into the soil. I may need to lower the soil pH with sulfur amendments, but my preference would be to create a yearly supply of an ericaceous compost, which should over the years make the soil environment better for my acid-loving plants.

- Fruit, vegetables, shrubs, and herbs that prefer or require an acidic soil: blueberries, carrots, dogwood, eggplant, hydrangea, strawberries, parsley, potato, pumpkin, tomato
- Flowers that prefer or require an acidic soil: bleeding heart, butterfly weed, euphorbia, lupine
- Vegetables and herbs that prefer or require a sweet soil: asparagus, beets, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, onions, rosemary, spinach, thyme
- Flowers that prefer or require a sweet soil: clematis, cosmos, iris, lavender, nasturtiums, peonies, phlox, pinks, snapdragons, sweet peas, zinnia

The easiest way to increase the pH of garden soil is to add lime. Lime should be added to the ground 2-3 months before planting, to allow the soil pH to increase to the desired range. Clay soils will require more lime to achieve a neutral pH. Once the lime has been applied, it must be worked into the soil and hydrated, as water is necessary for the lime to react with the soil. Hydrated lime will change the pH of the soil very quickly, so take care when adding this form of lime and check the resulting soil pH frequently with a soil test kit.

Basic information on micronutrients and soil pH:

Aluminum

- Aluminum is soluble at a low pH.
- An overabundance of aluminum in the soil will kill plants.

Calcium

- Addition of calcium will increase soil pH; acidic soil indicates a calcium deficiency
- Calcium is required for cell wall formation, cell division, and nitrate uptake.

Magnesium

- Magnesium is not soluble at a low pH.
- A lack of magnesium will cause poor plant growth.

Phosphorus

- Phosphorus binds with iron and aluminum.
- Low phosphorus will cause plants to flower poorly and fail to set fruit.

Bacterial growth

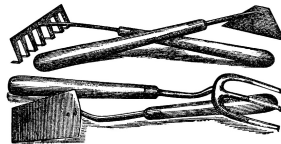
- A low pH prevents bacteria from reproducing, and may sterilize the soil.
- Bacteria are required for nitrogen fixation.

• Compost Bins. In the four gardens that I care for, I now have 19 compost bins and this winter will be constructing three more. Although I've several hundred dollars on the seven cedar

compost bins, many are constructed out of old lumber salvaged from other projects, and all ingredients deposited in the bins are free: organic matter, rain water, heat, air, decomposing organisms (earthworms, insects, trillions of micro-organisms), and patience. The organic matter is mostly leaves, grass, and shredded flowers from the gardens, but I also throw in uncooked vegetables, egg shells, shredded newspaper, tea bags, and even some occasional urine (when no one is watching). Because several of my compost bins receive a high percentage of leaves, I do add Milorganite fertilizer to boost the nitrogen content. Last year, the four compost piles at the Wickiup vegetable garden received a pick-up load of horse manure, and I hope to obtain another load this spring. Certainly one of the most profound changes in gardening in the last 100 years has been caused by the disappearance of the horse from western culture. In New York City in 1900, there were 130,000 working horses within the city, producing an average of 1,100 tons of manure per day. That is a lot of fertilizer. But by the middle of the 1920s, those horses and their fertilizer had virtually disappeared.

“In all aspects of architecture and garden design, it is not the spaces you fill but those you leave that count, so each part of the garden has its ‘gallery space.’”

~Matthew Biggs, *Lessons from Great Gardeners*



March

Beth Chatto

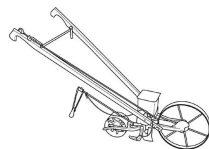
On February 27 I walked into Foyle’s Book Store in London and purchased a paperback copy of Beth Chatto’s *Garden Notebook*, a book that became my primary reading source during the flight back to the U.S. two days later. Copied below are some of my favorite passages composed by this gifted British gardener and author, who died in May of 2018, just a few weeks after I purchased her last book.

- On describing her garden nursery’s plant catalogue: “My catalogue has grown with the nursery over the years but there are still no pretty pictures. I have not actually gone into the cost because, while I know they might help some readers, I myself, deep down, do not want to change. I am very attracted by good photographs in other catalogues but I find I easily forget them. It is the difference between watching television and listening to a good radio play. I can take the works of the best writers and gardeners, such as Vita Sackville-West, Graham S. Thomas or Christopher Lloyd, to bed and be lost till midnight, reading their thoughts and seeing their plants and gardens as a musician hears music reading a score.” (p. 6)
- “As vegetable gardeners we all tend to grow too much of a few things instead of a little of many different things. Why grow long rows of lettuce which go to seed, or cauliflowers, which

all heart at once? Especially if you are a small family, try short rows and sow more frequently.” (p. 87)

- “On the whole I do not greatly care for ‘improved’ delphiniums; with most plants I prefer them as they are found in the wild, although there are exceptions. I would not like to be without the old roses with their bewildering variety of buttoned, quilted, quartered and double flowers, nor the capricious double primroses, which have to be cosseted and cared for constantly to satisfy their delicate constitutions. Show delphiniums are a triumph for the breeders for whom bigger must mean better. Most are a bit too much for my taste in the garden, but like most people I crane my neck at Chelsea [Flower Show] and gasp at them as exhibition pieces.” (p. 270)
- “The art of gardening is to know your soil intimately, to treat it well and select plants which will make any soil seem like an asset, not a problem. You may not be able to grow all the plants you would like to possess, but by choosing plants suited to your conditions you can carpet the bare earth with contented plants rather than endure the effect of a moth-eaten rug where too many plants have given up the struggle.” (p. 288)
- “It is always spring in the propagating house.” (p. 307)
- “Both shrubs and plants are grouped so they complement each other in shape, texture and colour, nudging into one another to form large, well-knit groups rather than being dotted about in draughty isolation. But I do not mind a few bare spaces between groups at this time of year [December], where plants are retired beneath the soil. They help to create a breathing space, as it were, between sentences.” (p. 335)
- “Some days in winter I sit and write, some days I just sit.” (p. 341)

“If you don’t like a plant, get rid of it,
you won’t like it any better next year.” ~Vita Sackville-West



April

Gardening Ideas for 2019

- Tire Hills. Nearly all my vegetable garden depends on raised beds, either permanent beds constructed of wood or raised beds that are rebuilt each year. One new technique I’m considering is to plant potatoes and sweet potatoes in mini-hills constructed of old tires. Put the tire on the ground, fill it with a mixture of soil and compost, and plant the potatoes. For the sweet potatoes, I would place a wire mesh under and over the vines to try and keep the voles from consuming my harvest. For the regular potatoes, I might stack one or two tires on top of

the original tire, adding more loose soil and compost as the potato vines keep growing. This might be a technique to increase the production of each of the potato vines, assuming they will produce more potatoes along the elongated stem.

- Treating Squash Borer Damage. When I see any damage on a squash stem, I should use a sharp knife to remove the affected area and remove any borers I can find. After washing the area with a cotton swab dipped in rubbing alcohol, I could secure the cotton ball around the damage to prevent borers from re-entering.
- Deterring Birds. Except for an occasional bird pecking at my tomatoes, I don't feel I have had significant problems with birds eating seeds or doing damage to buds or seedlings, but perhaps in 2019 I will experiment with a bird deterrent I saw in Stonewall Jackson's home garden in Lexington, Virginia: feathers stuck into a large potato hanging over a vegetable plot. I don't know if the swaying potato/feather works, but it was an amusing mobile.
- Deterring Insects in Vegetable Garden. Although I don't often use my pencil sharpener, I'm thinking about increasing my use of cedar pencils. I've read that working a pencil sharpener's cedar shavings into the soil at the base of the vegetables can deter a variety of insects. I also plan to expand my use of recycled aluminum foil in the garden. Two years ago, I wrapped aluminum foil around the "trunks" of some cucumbers, and those cucumbers did very well, producing until the end of September. This year I intend to expand the practice, using the foil to protect not only the cucumbers but also my summer and winter squash from squash vine borers and other insects that attack the stems of these vegetables.

"My aim has always been to be able to put myself in the garden, look right, look left, south and north, and everywhere find something." ~Princess Greta Sturdza, French gardener



May

Flowers, Vegetables, Herbs

- Parsley. "There are many superstitions surrounding parsley, probably as a result of its highly unpredictable germination. It is said to be very unlucky to transplant parsley, and there is an ancient saying that parsley goes to the devil and back seven times before germinating and that it will only thrive if planted by an honest man. As with many plants of the Umbelliferae family, parsley seed must be very fresh for sowing. Hot water poured on the soil half an hour beforehand will help its germination. Parsley is a biennial-prone to bolting in a hot summer in its first year-but it will become perennial if you stop it from flowering. 'Parsley bed' has long been used as a euphemism for female genitals and 'parsley' for public hair. Since the early

1700s parents have often told their children, inquisitive about how they made it into this world, that they emerged 'from the parsley bed.'" ~Edworthy, *The Curious Gardener's Almanac*

- Parsley has often been identified as an antidote to poison. By placing a sprig of parsley on a guest's plate, a host was conveying that no poison had been added to the meal.

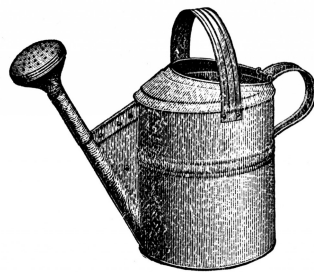
- "Green garlic has dozens of uses in the kitchen, to the point that its harvest amounts to an eagerly anticipated small festival. We eat it chopped into scrambled eggs or in an omelet, we pound its tender leaves and shoots in a mortar and mix them with unsalted butter for a gentle garlic spread, we use it as seasoning for any white stews such as chicken or veal, and it is wonderful with fish of all kinds. In all these dishes, the flavor is recognizably garlicky, but also mild and sweet, never assertive or overpowering." ~Eck & Winterrowd, *To Eat: A Country Life* [I've never planted garlic for purposes of harvesting the green leaves, but this passage has inspired me to try this in 2019.]

- "Dominance of a bud is assigned according to its rank along the main stem, with the highest rank at the top of the stem. . . . Development of the lateral buds and their stem cells along the length of a stem is apparently inhibited by the presence of cells in the topmost (apical) bud of the stem. . . . Planting a whole potato results in the sprouting of a single potato shoot; a single apical bud of the potato therefore expresses its dominance over the growth of the other buds. However, if the potato is cut into several pieces, with each piece having an eye, or bud, the individual buds of the potato are released from the dominating influence of a single apical bud." ~James Nardi, *Discoveries in the Garden*

- "If the fruit pods of okra are always picked before they become hard and woody, the okra plant will continue flowering until frost comes; but if the pods of a plant are left to harden, the whole plant will soon stop flowering and begin dropping its leaves." ~James Nardi, *Discoveries in the Garden*

"Plant only the best forms of any plant."

~Lawrence Johnston (American responsible for Hidcote Manor Garden)



June

Garden Humor

“My garden will never
make me famous.
I’m a horticultural ignoromus.” ~Ogden Nash

* * * * *

I’ve read that some farmers used to determine if the soil was warm enough for springtime planting by dropping their pants, sit bare-assed on the soil, and use their rump as a thermometer to determine if the soil was warm enough for planting.

* * * * *

“Four seeds you have to grow:
One for the pheasant, one for the crow,
One to rot and one to grow.” ~Old Adage

* * * * *

Groucho Marx: describing his Victory Garden in 1943: “I have scattered cow dung, Hitler’s speeches and most of DuPont’s most expensive chemicals over their stunted growths, but so far all I have to show for my trouble is a small bed of wild marijuana, a sprig of mint, and a dislocation of the trunk muscles that has an excellent change of developing into a full-blow rupture.”

“If you hoe when there are no weeds, you won’t get any.” ~Old garden saying



July

Discoveries of the Past Year

- This spring I started using newspaper as a first layer of mulch that would then be covered with straw, grass clippings, or wood mulch. So far, I’ve been impressed. The matted newspapers involve no additional cost, they effectively eliminated nearly all weed growth through the entire year, and they naturally decompose, adding a compost richness to the soil. I’ve found the decayed newspapers much easier to work with than the landscape fabrics I’ve used in the past, which can really become a nuisance once they begin to deteriorate.
- I’ve been growing Russian comfrey in my backyard for over 30 years. I’ve never had any practical use for the comfrey, but it thrives in a shady area, produces attractive flowers, and has

required zero care. This year, however, I began using the leaves as the primary ingredient in a weekly batch of compost tea. The leaves are reputed to have high levels of nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus. To produce the tea, I cut up the leaves, stash them into a mesh bag with fresh compost, and submerge the mesh bag in five gallons of water (preferably chlorine-free to avert killing the desired micro-organisms). After adding fish emulsion fertilizer and a teaspoon of microbe “seeds,” I turn on the oxygen aerator and let the mix brew for a few days. The problem with the efficacy of compost tea is that it can be difficult to assess whether it really works or not.

- To toughen seedlings started in the greenhouse last spring, I turned a fan on them during the day so they were recurrently dealing with a moderate breeze. Moving the fan to different positions each day, I had the impression the plants did become more robust and better prepared for being transplanted into the garden beds.

- Companion Planting with Onions. While I’m sure some companion planting strategies do have beneficial results, my primary experiment for this year was a complete failure. Having read that voles are repelled by onions, I planted onions all around my two sweet potato beds and two rows of beets. While the onions did well, there was no evidence they reduced the voles’ willingness to attack the beets or sweet potatoes. This spring I’m constructing new raised beds surrounded by wire mesh, hoping the mesh will be more effective than the ring of onions.

- Red Plastic for Tomatoes. I planted two rows of tomato plants in raised beds covered with red plastic. The plastic did control the weeds and kept the area around each tomato plant reasonably clean, but I could not tell those plants were healthier or more productive than the tomato plants in the other raised beds using straw mulch. Since the red plastic was rather expensive (double the price of black plastic), this is not an experiment I will likely repeat.

- Moles. Although my mother frequently expressed exasperation at the mole hills appearing in our farm house lawn, it was only this fall I felt a comparable anger. We’ve often had a few mole hills in our back yard, but I assumed the moles were intent on eating grubs, and I had read their soil churning helped to aerate the soil. And they can be quite powerful aerators: a mature mole can move about 40 pounds of soil per hour, applying a force 30 times its body weight. But this fall, I discovered our resident moles had wreaked havoc over a large swath of the back yard. By the time I discovered the mole hills under the tall grass, the ground was frozen, making the terrain very bumpy and difficult to mow. I recently purchased a castor oil mix for the purpose of convincing the voles to avoid my sweet potatoes; it now appears I will also be sharing my castor oil with the mole colony.

- Vegetable Storage. “From many years of experience, farmers and gardeners have discovered the best conditions to use for long-term storage of each type of vegetable. Leaving only about an inch or half inch of top on the root vegetables (carrots, parsnips, beets, turnips, rutabagas) minimized the ongoing transpiration of water from the leaves and helps maintain their crispness during storage. Roots are stored best at cold but not freezing temperatures (33 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit). While these vegetables store best at 33 degrees Fahrenheit, temperatures

colder than 38 degrees Fahrenheit cause potatoes to lose their flavor. Sweet potatoes store best at temperatures between 55 and 60 degrees Fahrenheit). Onions are best stored between 40 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit). Potatoes and onions, however, should not be stored together; potatoes take on the odor of onions, and onions spoil by taking on moisture from potatoes. Placing a ripening apple in the storage area with potatoes and sweet potatoes will discourage the latter from sprouting. . . . But if carrots are nearby, this hormone emitted from ripening apples will induce the formation of a compound in the carrot that confers a bitter flavor." ~James Nardi, *Discoveries in the Garden*

"What it takes humans a lifetime to experience, a plant will experience in its own yearly life cycle. In that sense, gardening is a microcosm of life." ~Piet Oudolf

August

A Cabaret of Plants

One of the best books I read this year was *Cabaret of Plants* by Richard Mabey, author of several other excellent gardening books, including *Weeds*, the best book I've ever read on that topic. Here are a few of Mabey's passages that I highlighted.

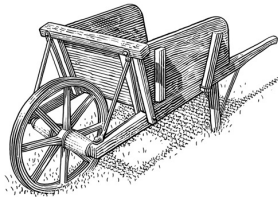
- "The first botanic gardens, created in the seventeenth century, were attempts to reconstruct the lost order of the Primal Plot, Eden itself. When they later became centres for the advancement of science and commerce, the sense that they were also botanical theatres for staging the unfolding dramas of theology and science was unmistakable." (p. 23)
- "The likely precursors of forest gardens were areas of disturbed ground near the temporary settlements of nomadic hunter-gatherers, especially fisher folk and early pastoralists, where edible plant waste and animal dung would have accumulated, conditions which were highly conducive to the generation of new varieties. The distinguished US botanist Edgar Anderson developed a 'refuse heap' theory of the origins of agriculture based on these midden sites. Prehistoric rubbish tips were places where edible plants gathered from different environments could—via their discarded seed remains—grow together in random proximities that would never occur in the world. With luck they might produce spontaneous hybrids, which would have a better chance of survival in the disturbed open ground than amongst the mature vegetation of forest or grassland. Maybe the small interactive dramas of generation on these heaps—spit out seed, dump dung, churn soil, spot the stranger—inspired the idea of cultivation." (p. 139)
- "Eastern US Cherokees regard ferns as a sympathetic remedy for arthritis, because the young fronds are cramped, curled up, and gradually unfurl as the plant matures." (p. 145)
- "Unraveling the process of photosynthesis in plants was arguably the most important development in the history of biology. Most forms of life on earth depend on this transformation of the sun's energy into living tissue. As the ethnobotanist Tim Plowman

remarked, contemplating twenty-first-century revelations about plant communication, ‘Why should that impress us? They can eat light, isn’t that enough?’” (p. 183)

- “Linnaeus had hoped to make his system of classifying plants according to their sexual organs more accessible by calling the stamens, the male parts, ‘husbands,’ and the female stigmas ‘wives’ or ‘brides.’ So the *Enneandria* were described as ‘Nine men in the same bride’s chamber, with one woman’ and *Adonis* as a mass orgy, with a hundred of each sex. Far from helping to convey his message, the vision of a kingdom of sexualised and, worse, licentious vegetables was too much for eighteenth-century sensibilities.” (p. 209)

- [Mabey quoting a letter written by John Keats for his friend John Reynolds]: “It has been an old Comparison for our urging on—the Bee Hive—however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee—for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving—no, the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits. The flower I doubt not, receives a fair guerdon from the Bee—its leaves blush deeper in the next spring—and who shall say between Man and Woman who is the most delighted? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury—let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey bee-like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at; but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive [cf. Wordsworth’s “wise passiveness”] and receptive—budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with a visit—sap will given us for Meat and dew for Drink.”

“Plant thickly.” Lawrence Johnston
Translation: where the gardener doesn’t put a plant, nature will.



September

Nutrition

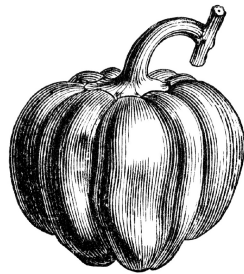
- “Peppers contain up to five times as much vitamin C as oranges. The highest levels are found when the peppers are in the early green stage of ripening.” ~Edworthy, *The Curious Gardener’s Almanac*

- “Two apples a day keeps the doctor away” doesn’t resonate so well as the original, but factually it is more accurate. There is growing evidence that the mineral and vitamin content of American-grown fruits and vegetables has been falling dramatically over the past few decades. This alarming problem has almost certainly been caused by the gradual degradation of our soil and the wider natural environment. In a recent experiment, the respected diet author and

teacher Alex Jack discovered that in the last thirty years, a basket of twelve common fruits had lost 16.4 percent of their vitamin A content, 23.9 percent of phosphorus, 28.9 percent of calcium, while iron levels were down a jaw-dropping 47.6 percent. Vitamin A levels in apples have dropped 4.1 percent, in strawberries 55 percent, and in grapefruit they plummeted a shocking 87.5 percent." ~Edworthy, *The Curious Gardener's Almanac*

- "I am . . . a big fan of cooked vegetables. It is true indeed that raw vegetables have more nutrients, but it is also true that our body has an easier time absorbing nutrients from cooked vegetables. A study shows that we absorb more beta-carotene from a cooked carrot than from a raw one even though the raw carrot has a higher content of beta-carotene." ~Joe Eck and Wayne Winterrowd, *To Eat: A Country Life*

"Plants grow better because you have put them in a good location,
and they behave differently to the way they would in the wild;
it's called third nature." ~Penelope Hobhouse



October

The English Garden

In October I attended an estate sale where I purchased two dozen back issues of *The English Garden*. For the next month I spent my evenings reading about dozens of immaculately maintained English gardens. It can become rather depressing as I compare my gardening projects with these sumptuously beautiful landscapes, typically rendered in idyllic early morning light. But, on occasion, I encounter an image or design idea that might be applicable to a faux English garden in Iowa. Here are a few gleanings culled from these old copies.

- "David Howard, head gardener at Highbrove. . . told me not to bother with planting *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote' [a lavender I planted three years ago in the Coe garden] and to use 'Imperial Gem' instead, as it doesn't fall about untidily as 'Hidcote' does. Another of David's tips is what to do with all those old teabags. He suggests that you collect them all in a dustbin, fill it with water, and use the resulting liquid to help make soil more suitable for your acid-loving plants. Teatime for camellias [or blueberries in Iowa]—bar the cucumber sandwiches." ~Helen Dillon (July 2008)

- Article on Hannah Peschar's Sculpture Garden, a 10-acre countryside garden in Surrey. One of the sculpture pieces is "We Have Only Come to Look" by Stuart Bourne, which included a

passage from Sylvia Plath's poem "New Year on Darmoor. "Measuring 6.5' x 6.5', it is made from toughened glass, which is largely opaque apart from the poet's evocative words and a clear rectangle at eye level that encourages you to really look at the canopy of trees beyond. Glass works well in a garden because of its reflective qualities and the fact that even a large piece such as this never dominates the scene." (January 2010)

- A list of prominent English gardens that have a significant presence in a movie or TV series (January 2007).

- ☞ Burghley House (*Pride and Prejudice*; *The Da Vinci Code*)

- ☞ Broughton Castle (*Shakespeare in Love*)

- ☞ Castle Howard (*Garfield 2*)

- ☞ Cobham Hall (*Bleak House*)

- ☞ Haddon Hall (*Elizabeth*, the '98 film with Gwyneth Paltrow)

- ☞ Kenwood House in Hampstead Heath (*Notting Hill*; one of my May Term classes happened to be visiting Kenwood House on a day when the garden was being used for shooting a scene in a TV series)

- ☞ Lacock Abbey (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*)

- ☞ Montacute House (*The Libertine*; *Sense and Sensibility*)

- ☞ Stourhead (*Pride and Prejudice*)

- ☞ Wakehurst Place (*As You Like It*)

- ☞ Waterdell House (*Rosemary and Thyme*)

- ☞ Wilton House (*Mrs. Brown*; *Sense and Sensibility*)

- Issues always include recommendations on plants that English gardeners have found useful in the featured gardens. Here are a few of the plants described in the magazine that I would like to bring into the Coe garden (which, alas, requires removing something already in that space).

- ★ *Trifolium repens* 'Purpurascens Quadrifolium': a Z-4 clover with attractive dark bronze leaves as a potential groundcover for an area with partial shade.

- ★ *Sedum spathulifolium*: a mat-forming evergreen perennial with silver-green leaves tinged with purple; native to western U.S. and Canada; candidate for the rock or crevice gardens.

- ★ *Artemisia schmidtiana*: possible replacement for an artemisia in the "K" bed that has lost its vigor the past year; Z3, available from numerous sources.

- ★ *Celmisia semicordata*: common name, New Zealand daisy; the photos show large, aster-like flowers with white ray florets surrounding a mass of yellow disc-florets; would need to be treated as an annual.

- ★ *Papaver orientale* 'Patty's plum': so far I have failed to establish a poppy colony in the garden, but coming across a photo of this poppy has inspired me to try again.

- ★ *Hamamelis 'Pallida'*: somewhere in the garden we need a witch hazel; I'm not sure if this is the right version, but according to *The English Garden*, it has the qualities (including fragrance) we're seeking.

- ★ *Cyclamen purpurascens*: I had not realized there was a cyclamen that could survive an Iowa winter, but this may be what we're looking for: rated to Z4 conditions and it's available from one of my favorite mail order plant catalogs.

☆ *Hedera colchica* 'Sulphur Heart': we need a climber for a garden wall that is in the shade most of the day; though this Persian Ivy is only rated for a Z 5b winter, it might be worth taking a gamble; based on the photos, it would be a lovely addition to the garden.

"It is not the plants but how they are used that counts." ~Penelope Hobhouse



November

Two Recipes

These are two new kale recipes I discovered this fall that involve late fall crops: butternut squash, carrots, kale, garlic, home-canned tomatoes. They both happen to be gluten-free, so they have been easy to share with our daughter, a member of the celiac community.

Kale/Squash/Quinoa Stew

Ingredients:

2T Olive oil	1 Onion, diced
2C Butternut squash, cubed	3 Garlic cloves, minced
1t Cumin	1t Coriander
½t Red chili flakes	1/2t Paprika
1T White wine vinegar	15 oz Diced tomatoes
4C Vegetable broth	½ C Dry quinoa
2-3C Chopped kale	

Cooking steps:

- Heat oil in pot, medium heat; add diced onion; cook for 4 minutes.
- Add squash; cook for 4-5 minutes.
- Stir in garlic, cumin, coriander, paprika, pepper flakes, salt and pepper.
- Add tomatoes, broth, quinoa.
- Cover and simmer about 30 minutes.
- Stir in kale; cook another 15 minutes.

Oven Roasted Carrots and Kale

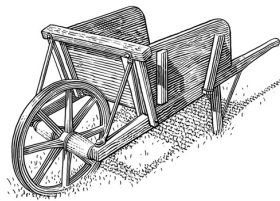
Ingredients:

1 bunch carrots, sliced	1 C kale, chopped, stems removed	
2 T olive oil	1/2 onion, chopped	4 cloves garlic, minced

Steps:

- Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
- Combine kale, carrots, onion, garlic, and olive oil in a large bowl; use your hands to mix well. Make sure all the kale gets massaged with oil.
- Spread in a 13 x 9 baking dish and cook 20-25 minutes, stirring once halfway through.
- Salt to taste and serve.

“The four essentials of a good garden are perfect lawns, paths, hedges and walls; if the surroundings are unkempt, the flowers will give no pleasure . . .
Walter [Margery’s husband] would no more have left his grass uncut or the edges untrimmed than he would have neglected to shave.” ~Margery Fish



December

Garden Quotes and Observations

- “The soil is the gift of God to the living.” ~Thomas Jefferson
- “God gave us memories that we may have roses in December.” ~J. M. Barrie
- “True that a plant may not think; neither will the profoundest of men ever put forth a flower.” ~Donald Culross Peattie
- “If dandelions were hard to grow, they would be most welcome on any lawn.” ~Andrew Mason
- “Gardening makes you an optimist, you must think ahead. Often it is the timescale that is the therapeutic element, not just the everyday practicalities.” ~Penelope Hobhouse
- “The good rain, like the bad preacher, does not know when to leave off.” ~Ralph Waldo Emerson
- “Flower colour is fleeting, and less important than the colour, texture and shapes of leaves. Foliage supplies structure for at least six months of the year. It also has greater subtlety than flowers, with less strident hues.” ~Penelope Hobhouse

- “Gardening has a physical and spiritual side, both need to be satisfied. There is a danger that too much time is spent working. Islamic gardens are for sitting and contemplation, not walking.” ~Penelope Hobhouse
- “You have to think like a painter, you need to walk a garden at all times of day and season and watch the light, the way it hits a leaf with a particular texture, or filters through the leaves; you adjust and more plants to enhance that experience. You’ve got to notice everything that is happening to every plant, every day.” ~Bev McConnell, New Zealand gardener
- *Solutor Ambulando* ~St. Augustine [Translation: “It is solved by walking.”]
- Every plant must pay its rent. The garden should be filled with garden-worthy plants.
- Coe’s gravel walkways: a germination bed for self-seeding flowers.
- “I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do.” ~Willa Cather
- Of all art forms, gardening is the most inclusive, inviting everyone can express their creativity.
- The garden does not have to be perfect; the perfect is the enemy of the good; the goal is enjoyment, not perfection.
- “All gardening is landscape painting.” ~William Kent
- “To dwell is to garden.” ~Martin Heidegger
- “Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help. Gardening is an instrument of grace.” ~ May Sarton
- “Our associations with plants help maintain and restore the fragile bond between people and the natural world.” ~James Nardi, “Discoveries in the Garden”

“The garden is . . . a ‘visual koan’ (dialogue, question or statement). It remains in the mind, and, if it can be likened to anything, rather than ‘islands in the sea,’ it is the mind. It does not matter, therefore, what materials the garden is composed of, what is important is the mind that interprets the essentials. The garden exists within ourselves; what we see in the rectangular enclosure is, in short, what we are.” ~Matthew Biggs

A Rose Emoticon: @]->--