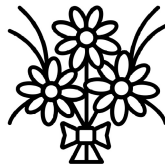


A Garden Almanac for 2019

Here are the two paragraphs that introduced last year's almanac. Since the 2019 edition adheres to similar principles, I will simply repeat what I wrote last year:

The word "Almanac" is probably not the best choice 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. My parents were not avid book-buyers, but every year my Dad would purchase an annual World Almanac, loaded with detailed information about a vast array of topics. In my personal library I still have the last World Almanac he purchased while I was living at home: the 1963 issue with invaluable data and historical information from that pre-Google era.

As for this personal garden almanac, 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 rarely any 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. ~Bob



January

"Antisthenes says that in a certain faraway land the cold is so intense that words freeze as soon as they are uttered, and after some time then thaw and become audible, so that words spoken in winter go unheard until the next summer." ~Plutarch, *Moralia*

Nine Herbs for Container Gardening in the Winter

Much of the information on the first seven herbs is derived from an information sheet by Nikki Jabbour posted to the Savy Gardening website.

(1) Basil.

- Recommended varieties: Genovese, Nufar, Dolce Fresca, Spicy Globe.
- Requires well-drained soil and ample sunshine.
- Responds well to frequenting harvesting, which stimulates new growth.
- Remove flower buds; flowering reduces leaf flavor.

(2) Greek Oregano:

- Among the variety options, Greek oregano offers the best flavor for culinary use; another option is Syrian Oregano, often called Zaatar, which has attractive silvery leaves.

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3) Rosemary:

- Rosemary is a woody shrub with aromatic, needle-like foliage; excellent with roasted potatoes and chicken dishes.
- In Alum Garden, the two rosemary plants spend six months outside in the herb garden and six months in the greenhouse. They usually don't like being brought inside, and it can be difficult to provide the right amount of moisture—not too much, not too little.
- The Savvy Gardener website recommends two cultivars: Gorizia and Arp. According to the Missouri Botanical Garden website 'Gorizia' was discovered in and named for Gorizia, Italy. It was introduced in 1986 by herb expert Thomas DeBaggio of Arlington, Virginia. It is an upright, evergreen shrub with thick, rigid, reddish brown stems and long, broad, fat leaves. The leaves, which are twice the size of the leaves of other rosemary cultivars, have a mild sweet aroma and a flavor that is a bit gingery. The thick stems make good skewers for grilling. In summer, it will have light blue flowers in clusters along the stems. It grows 3 to 5 ft. tall and wide. As for the Arp rosemary, according to the High Country Gardens website, it is a relatively new cultivar that should be hardy in zone 6—which means that in a well-protected location, it might survive a mild Iowa winter. Hill's Hardy is another new rosemary cultivar from High Country Gardens that can supposedly handle temperatures that go below zero.

(4) Thyme:

- Low maintenance, drought-tolerant, can survive occasional neglect.
- Give it full sun and don't overwater; thyme prefers its soil on the dry side. For culinary use, try English thyme or Lemon thyme, which has variegated yellow and green leaves and a bold lemon scent and flavor.

(5) Mint:

- Because mint can be an aggressive spreader, it's much easier to control the mint by growing in pots.
- Desirable varieties include peppermint, chocolate mint, mojito, strawberry mint, spearmint; several varieties can be grown together in the same large pot.
- Mint appreciates ample moisture and rich soil (Jabbour recommends 1/3 compost with 2/3 potting soil).

(6) Parsley

- Makes sense to grow two types: curly and flat-leaved parsley.
- Similar to mint, it likes moisture and rich soil; can incorporate a slow-release organic fertilizer.
- Likes full sun but can handle partial shade.

(7) Lemon Balm

- A mint cousin that shares mint's aggressive growth habit.
- Will overwinter in Iowa but growing in container in winter ensures year-round supply of fresh leaves.
- Same soil and moisture needs as mint.

(8) Cilantro

- A cool-weather herb that can grow very quickly (perhaps six weeks from seed to harvest) and will often bolt quickly.
- Cilantro is in the same plant family as carrots, has a similar deep taproot, and does not like to be transplanted; best grown in a pot at least 12 inches deep.
- Cilantro prefers moist, well-drained soil; can mix vermiculite or sand in potting soil to improve drainage.
- Spread several seeds (perhaps 6-8) over the top of your potting mix in the pot; barely cover seeds with soil.
- To ensure fresh supply, sow a succession of new seeds every few weeks.

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(9) Chives

- The easiest to grow of all these herbs.
- Not picky with regard to soil, moisture; can handle frequent neglect.
- Winter hardy, but growing in container in winter provides fresh supply while outdoor chives are dormant.



On the Fluxx-Studio website, Tom Whitwell has a posting with a list of “52 things I learned in 2019.” These are my three favorites from his list:

- “Mushrooms and truffles are fungi, more closely related to humans than they are to plants.” [Lynne Peskoe-Yang]
- “In the US Northwest, rain can damage the fruit on cherry trees. So helicopter pilots are paid to fly over the orchards, using their downdraft to dry the fruit as it ripens. For the pilots, it’s a risky but potentially profitable job.” [Maria Langer]
- “Some blind people can understand speech that is almost three times faster than the fastest speech sighted people can understand. They can use speech synthesizers set at 800 words per minute (conversational speech is 120–150 wpm). Research suggests that a section of the brain that normally responds to light is re-mapped in blind people to process sound.” [Austin Hicks & R Douglas Fields]

And three more things from Whitwell’s 2018 list:

- “AgriProtein is a British company that operates two fly farms in South Africa. Each farm contains 8.4 billion flies, which consume 276 tonnes of food waste and lay 340 million eggs each day. Those eggs (maggots) are dehydrated, flattened and used as animal feed. The company is worth \$200m, and they’re planning to open 100 more factories around the world by 2024.” [Andrea Lo]
- “In Terence Conran’s garden there is an 18’ tall birch gazebo designed by Thomas Heatherwick. A few years ago, James Dyson, the vacuum-cleaner entrepreneur, dislodged the top of it while landing a helicopter on the lawn; it has since been repaired.” [Ian Parker]
- “US nuclear testing between the 1940s and 1970s may have killed as many Americans (from radioactive pollution) as were killed by the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.” [Tim Fernholz]

"That grand old poem called Winter." ~ Henry David Thoreau



February

"The word February is believed to have derived from the name 'Februa' taken from the Roman 'Festival of Purification'. The root 'februo' meaning to 'I purify by sacrifice'. As part of the seasonal calendar February is the time of the 'Ice Moon' according to Pagan beliefs, and the period described as the 'Moon of the Dark Red Calf' by Black Elk. February has also been known as 'Sprout-kale' by the Anglo-Saxons in relation to the time the kale and cabbage was edible." ~Folklore Calendar, Project Britain

Four Plants in the Alumni House Garden

Many plants in Britain have a long history of association with humans—and over the centuries many ideas evolved concerning that relationship. Here are a few quick snapshots of cultural beliefs associated with four plants that reside in Coe's walled flower garden. [Note: These four entries are adapted from Roy Vickery's *Oxford Dictionary of Plant-Lore*, which focuses on beliefs and practices in the British Isles.]

Daisies

- Often seen as an essential harbinger of spring. "It ain't spring until you can plant your foot upon twelve daisies."
- Daisies used in love divination. "In Wales the daisy is selected by the doubting maiden who is wishful to test the fidelity of her lover. Gathering a daisy, she commences plucking the petals off, saying with each one, 'Does he love me?—much—a little—devotedly—not at all' and the last petal decides the question." Another version is to pluck the daisy petals and alternate, "He loves me, he loves me not."
- In the seventeenth century the daisy was valued for the treatment of broken bones. According to Threlkeld, "The small Daisie is of greater Reputation than the other [the ox-eye daisy] because it helpeth Bones to knit again. It is therefore called by our people in the North of England Banwort, by which name I knew it forty years ago at Keibergh in the Parish of Kirk-oswald, and County of Cumbria, where I drew my first Breath, May the last 1676."

Dandelion

- Frequently associated with bed-wetting. Here's an excerpt from Irish interview in 1991: "As a child every other child I knew lived in horror of picking a dandelion—it was widely accepted as a fact this would lead to bed-wetting." this belief led to many local names for dandelions: pee-beds, pee-in-bed, piss-i-beds, pissimire, pisterbed, wet-the-bed." Also true for Europe (Dutch pisse-bed and French pissenlit).
- The ripe dandelion seedheads were also used as clocks to tell the time or predict the future. "When dandelions lost their yellow petals and grew that fluffy material, children used to pluck them and by blowing it they imagined they could tell the time. Each blow was countered as an hour, starting at one o'clock."
- Particularly in Ireland, dandelions were used in the treatment of a wide range of illnesses: indigestion, kidney troubles, weak hearts, jaundice, nerves, warts, and the treatment of insect stings.

Elder (also known as boor or bour tree).

- An enigmatic plant because it is valued for its many reputed herbal remedies but also is often associated with witches. For some people, the elderberry was "believed to have been the tree from which Judas Iscariot hanged himself. The proof of which is the fact that its leaves have an 'ugly smell,' and, moreover, that its fruit has since degenerated from its original size and excellent flavour."
- According to some sources, "it is alright to pick the flowers for wine or culinary use, but the tree is a friend of witches and the wood should never come into the house."

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- In Scotland, an elder was “often planted near old crofts and cottages as protection from witches” and on the Isle of Guernsey, the tree was “planted as near as possible to the back door, the most used entrance, since it was a sacred tree and a good protection against witchcraft.”
- Elder trees were often planted around toilets to deter flies. “Elder bushes are invariably to be seen outside the dairy windows on the north side of old-fashioned farmhouses in the Midlands. This was done because elder-leaves are supposed to be very objectionable to the wasps and other insects, the tree thus provided both shade and protection. For the same reason a switch of elder with leaves on is used when taking or driving a swarm of bees.”
- The wild elder was perhaps the plant most widely used in folk medicine. According to an elderly Gloucestershire resident, “The Queen of all Forest remedies was ‘ellum blow tea’ . . . The flowers were gathered in the spring and hung up to dry in closed paper bags . . . in the kitchen . . . You dared not sneeze in the winter or down came the bag, a good handful was put in a jug, covered with boiling water, covered with a tea towel, and left to infuse. One had to force the evil-smelling brew down one’s throat willy-nilly. I loathed it, and to this day can recall that smell of cats which emanated from it. Poultices of the mixture were used for sprains, aches, etc. in joints, also for boils and ‘gathered’ fingers–whitlows and so on. It seemed to be a universal panacea; the only use it didn’t have was for constipation. . . Elder berries were favoured too; they were boiled up with sugar, the resulting syrup strained, bottled, and used in winter for coughs and colds.”
- Elder leaves were some times used as a substitute for tobacco.

Lungwort (*Pulmonaria* species, especially *P. officinalis*); also known as liverwort.

- “Lungwort has characteristic cream-coloured spots on its dark green leaves, and produces flowers which are pink when young and become blue as they age. These characteristics have led to the plant being given a large number of local names.”
- “Lungwort is associated with the Virgin Mary because it has blue and pink flowers--these two colours being the colours of the Virgin’s clothes in medieval paintings.”
- From report printed in 1886: “I had an old woman weeding in my garden, and proposed to her to turn out a plant or two of [lungwort], to which she strongly objected, and said, ‘Do ee know Sir, what they white spots be? ‘No, I don’t.’ ‘Why, they be the Virgin’s Mary’s Milk’ so don’t ee turn em out, for it would be very unlucky!’”

"The flowers of late winter and early spring occupy places in our hearts well out of proportion to their size." ~ Gertrude S. Wister

March

"The word 'March' comes from the Roman 'Martius'. This was originally the first month of the Roman calendar and was named after Mars, the god of war. March was the beginning of our calendar year. We changed to the 'New Style' or 'Gregorian' calendar in 1752, and it is only since then when we the year began on 1st January. The Anglo-Saxons called the month Hlyd monath which means Stormy month, or Hraed monath which means Rugged month. All through Lent the traditional games played are marbles and skipping. The games were stopped on the stroke of twelve noon on Good Friday, which in some places was called Marble Day or Long Rope Day. The game of marbles has been played for hundreds of years and some historians say that it might have been started by rolling eggs. In the past, round stones, hazelnuts, round balls of baked clay and even cherry stones have been used." ~Folklore Calendar, Project Britain

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Garden Humor

- An optimistic gardener is one who believes that whatever goes down must come up. ~Leslie Hall
- Don't wear perfume in the garden, unless you want to be pollinated by bees. ~Anne Raver
- One of the healthiest ways to gamble is with a spade and a package of garden seeds. ~Dan Bennett
- Unemployment is capitalism's way of getting you to plant a garden. ~Orson Scott Card
- Gardening requires lots of water, most of it in the form of perspiration. ~Lou Erickson
- The best way to garden is to put on a wide-brimmed straw hat and some old clothes. And with a hoe in one hand and a cold drink in the other, tell somebody else where to dig. ~Texas Bix Bender, *Don't Throw in the Trowel*

Humorous observations by unknown authors:

- Gardening is a matter of your enthusiasm holding up until your back gets used to it.
- Compost happens.
- Dad's weeds, mom's garden.
- Gardeners are like doctors--they bury their mistakes.
- Gardening: a leisure activity of little leisure and much activity.
- Gardening begins with daybreak and ends with backache.
- Give the weeds an inch and they will take your yard.
- Autumn follows summer, winter follows autumn, drought follows planting.

Humorous remarks that rely on puns, all by unknown authors:

- Gardeners learn by trowel and error.
 - Old gardeners never die; they just run out of thyme.
 - A few plants short of a full flat.
 - Gardeners don't get old, they go to pot.
 - Gardening: another day at the plant.
 - Gardening tills the soul.
 - Everyone has these on their face? Tulips
 - What kind of socks does a gardener wear? Garden hose.
 - If April showers bring May flowers, what do May flowers bring? Pilgrims.
 - What do you get if you divide the circumference of a pumpkin by its diameter? Pumpkin pi.
 - What can you make from baked beans and onions? Tear gas.
- And, finally, "A Veggie New Age Song"
Peas would rule the planets,
and love would clear the bars.
It was the dawning of the Age of Asparagus.

"There are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm.
One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery,
and the other that heat comes from the furnace." ~Aldo Leopold



April

“I think this is what hooks one to gardening: it is the closest one can come to being present at creation.” ~Phyllis Theroux

In the summer of 2014, the first year I started taking care of the Alumni House Garden, I read through 25 years of back issues of *Horticulture* magazine, inserting hundreds of post-it notes on articles and gardening practices/recommendations that I thought might prove beneficial. This summer, five years later, I re-visited a pile of those issues from the 1990s. Here are brief summaries from several articles that I still found worthy of further consideration.

Wayne Winterrowd, “Annuals for Connoisseurs” (1992)

Winterrowd’s recommendations for annuals that deserve more space in our gardens.

- (1) *Briza maxima*, quaking grass (its seeds are “like catches of tiny green fish on a line”). This self-seeder can be helped by taking the “chaffy seed” and rubbing it lightly between the hands and sowing, chaff & all, where it is to grow. Grass goes well with stonework; transplants readily
- (2) *Nicotiana sylvestris*. Sow seed in sterile potting mix. When seedlings emerge, place in full sun; give generous weekly doses of half-strength liquid fertilizer. Transplant after last day of frost. Once established, give side-dressing of regular garden fertilizer.
- (3) *Gomphrena globosa*: works beautifully in a weathered bucket. Sturdy, much-branched, bushy annual to 12”, producing hundreds of clove-like magenta blossoms. In Homer’s *Illiad*, “the body of Achilles was covered with a blanket of gomphrena to signify his immortality.”

Editorial response to letter of inquiry concerning Siberian Iris (1993)

- These iris do best in well-drained, organically rich, slightly acid (pH 6.4) soil, with plenty of water and full sun.
- It flowers best if leaves are left intact after blooming, but if leaves flop, cut back to eight inches in late summer.
- Remove flower stems at base two weeks after blooms are finished.
- Every 3-4 years divide clumps after blooming cycle or in fall.

“Encore to Autumn” by Wayne Winterrowd (1993)

Winterrowd’s recommended plants for autumn color in a Zone 4 garden:

- Peonies (some varieties have leaves with dramatic fall colors)
- Bergenia leaves can acquire burnished tints in autumn; recommended varieties are *B. cordifolia* ‘Purpurea’, *B. crassifolia* ‘Autumn Red,’ and ‘Abendglut.’ Bergenias can be planted in shade and should produce colonies that can flourish for many years without resetting.
- *Lysimachia clethroides* (gooseneck loosestrife). Can be a problem because of its aggressive stolons, but if you find the right corner for it and you gain many positives. “It is called gooseneck loostrife because of its four-inch cobs of little white stars, borne atop four-foot stems, curiously twisted down and up, like geese bowing to the flock. There is an ancient belief also that some part of the plant (oh, I wish I knew which) can quiet quarrelsome tempers, hence ‘loose strife.’ It does not seem to have that effect on the tempers of gardeners who have planted it in their borders. . . .” In addition to the flowers, the stems become brilliant scarlet in the fall; leaves “take on shades of crimson and dusky rose, textured above and below like suede.”
- With regard to ornamental grasses, Winterrowd recommends *Miscanthus sinensis* and *Pennisetum alopecuroides* ‘Hameln’

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- *Geranium macrorrhizum*: notes that the leaves smell of myrrh, and the fragrance is strongest in the autumn.
- *Euphorbia polychroma*: descriptive species name is accurate because in autumn the leaves are multicolored; this euphorbia will grow almost anywhere.

• *Sasa veitchii*: the kama zasa treasured in Japanese gardens, a bamboo with dramatic autumn colors.

[Comment: with the exception of the bamboo and the bergenia, all the other plants recommended by Winterrowd are currently in the Coe garden. I can attest that the gooseneck loosestrife has many admirable characteristics, but it is a relentless invader, and I've spent the last four years trying to restrain it to two beds at the east end of the garden. Moderate success.]

“The Elegant Espalier” by Lee Reich (1996)

The OED indicates word “espalier” comes from Italian spalliera—meaning “wainscot work to lean the shoulders against” or “stakes of the same height.” Reich emphasizes the espalier is not restricted to fruit trees; it works well with redbud, Japanese maple, weeping cherry, evergreen blue Atlas cedar. An espalier consists of one or more main stems, called leaders, off which grow branches or arms. The term “branch” refers to something temporary, the “arm” to something permanent. The simplest form of espalier is just a single leader, a cordon. Cordons can be either vertical, diagonal (oblique), or horizontal. Apple trees grown as vertical or diagonal cordons can be spaced as closely as 18 inches apart in a row. Recommends red currant as a good plant for a novice to work with.

Bob Polomski writing on the topic of growing sweet peas in the Q & A (1996)

The key to growing sweet peas (*Lathyrus odoratus*) is cool weather, full sun, fertile soil. Prepare bed by adding a lot of compost. Sweet peas prefer neutral Ph soil. Sow the seed as early in spring as soil can be worked. You can improve germination by soaking seeds in warm water for a couple of days. Space seeds 4-6" apart, 2" deep. Germination should occur in 2-3 weeks. When seedlings are 4" high, side-dress with 10-10-10 fertilizer. Surround seedlings with mulch to conserve moisture. Provide wire fencing for support. Remove faded flowers to encourage further blooming. Provide plenty of moisture. Cultivars that best combine showy flowers and aroma are “Firecrest,” “Maggie Mayk,” and “White Supreme.”

“Compost-Based Potting Soils” by Heather McCargo (1996)

McCargo recommends potting soils that use compost, not peat moss . Peat moss is non-renewable and it does not have the nutrients of compost. Plus compost is much cheaper. Ideal compost is hot-composed (to kill pathogens and weed seeds) and needs to be screened. A pH of 6.5 is desirable goal. A standard mix would be 3 parts compost, 1 part vermiculite, ½ part perlite. To this add coarse sand (mason’s sand), the ratio dependent on the plants. For example, bluestar, maidenhair fern, new england aster, turtlehead, bleeding heart, coneflower, phlox, and all bedding plants and vegetables would be 2 parts compost mix to 1 part sand. For cardinal flower, 3 parts compost to 1 part sand.

“Colorful Complements” by Rob Proctor (1996)

Article focuses on annuals that make good partners with perennials. In a garden “You need some good weeds”—the self-sowers. Proctor mentions *Silene armerica*, *Cynoglossum amabile*, and *Bupleurum griffithii* (looks like a euphorbia). “The summer garden reminds me of a cocktail party: a polite, tasteful gathering at first, it gradually becomes more disorderly and uninhibited. Some guests depart early, others linger on, and late arrivals enliven the proceedings. It’s a wild and giddy last flight. After a while, few are able to stand upright without support. They’re rumpled, sloppy, and disheveled.” Among the “drifters,” he notes the sweet, delicate fragrance of *Nicotiana suaveolens*, “with its myriad of small, pure white trumpets held in airy heads above small rosettes of leaves.” He also likes Texas sunshine, *Helenium amarum*, a prolific bloomer from July to frost; it grows well in sun or part shade, in all kinds of soil, dry or moist. Concluding summary of his basic principles: “Most border design boils down to a few simple principles:

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plant the tall things in the back; contrast the big, shiny leaves with small, fuzzy leaves; and pair the roundy-moundy plants with the spikes.”

Article by Nance (1998)

- In the middle of the largest room in the garden is Nance’s “three-minute lawn”—a circle of fescue eight feet in diameter. “I hate mowing grass, but you need a little bit. The grass is like an area rug that calms this whole garden down.”
- On Korean box: “It’s a little more yellow green, but that’s what a garden is about: it’s different greens—gray greens, blue greens, yellow greens, silver greens. That is the calming background. Like arms that embrace the flowers, they carry the bouquet.”
- *Euphorbia corollata*, a delicate filler that “you just sprinkle through like dust. I overplant . . . but who wants to look at mulch? I want the plants to drift and knit together.”
- You want plants that are happy and are thriving. Emphasizes the use of joe-pye weed and other indigenous American plants. “Certain plants such as oxeye daisies and cosmos, bring a garden down to earth and keep it from becoming too rarified and contrived. *Nicotiana* is a simple flower, yet when it floats through the border above the grasses at dusk, the blossoms seem to dance like stars.”

“Standards” by Tovah Martin (1996)

Photo accompanying the article shows the following examples of standards; these would need to be grown in pots in Iowa and over-wintered indoors: *Abutilon* ‘Gold Dust’; *Pelargonium* ‘Mabel Grey’ and *Pelargonium crispum* ‘Minor’ (tender geraniums); *Lavandula dentata* (French lavender); *Heliotropium arborescens*; *Choisya ternata* ‘Sundance’ (Mexican Orange); *Lantana camara*; *Rhododendron indicum* ‘Snowbank’; *Cupressus sempervirens* ‘Swane’s Golden’; *Argyranthemum* ‘Vaga’; *Tibouchina urvilleana* (Brazilian Princess Flower); *Anisodonta hypomandarum* (Cape Mallow).

Martin says that good candidates for standards are herbs with strong woody stems and small, tightly stacked leaves—such as rosemary, myrtle, lavender, boxwood, coprosma, sweet bay, lemon verbena, and *Helichrysum italicum*. Other candidates are citrus, fuchsia, scented-leaved geraniums, begonias, hibiscus, *Streptosolen jamesonii*, *osteospermum*, gardenia, lantana, coleus, & brunfelsia. “. . . virtually any plant with a strong stem and a branching habit will do.”

Some mature quickly: hibiscus and pelargonium within a year. Most require several seasons. During formative stages, the central stem (“leader”) is lashed to a stake. Strip off side branches, leaving only the tip for growth. As the plant nears target height allow, allow side branches to form a “crown,” usually the top 1/3 to 1/4 of the stem.

Roger Swain, “What’s So Special about pH 6.5?” (1999)

The pH is the measure of soil’s acidity or alkalinity. Logarithmic pH scale goes from 1.0 (most acid) to 14.0 (most alkaline). Most mineral soils (soils lacking in organic matter) range from 3.5 to 10.0. Most good garden soils should be slightly below neutral point of pH 7: add ground limestone to soils determined to be acidic or powdered sulfur for alkaline ones. The pH values are important because they can determine the availability of essential nutrients. For most plants, most nutrients are less available at a pH lower than 6. Copper, iron, manganese, and zinc become less available at a pH above 7. Phosphorus is most available for metabolism in a narrow band (6.2 to 6.7). Acid-loving plants—such as blueberries and rhododendrons—are exceptions because they learned to live in naturally acidic environments such as bogs. They rely on “symbioses with mycorrhizal fungi to help them absorb the scarce nutrients. Other crops will escape disease if grown in a soil of higher or lower pH. Potato scab, for example, is not a problem in soil below pH 5.2” But these are exceptions: most plants do best in soil with a pH of 6.5.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day.
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.
But if you so much as dare to speak,
a cloud come over the sunlit arch,
And wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you're two months back in the middle of March.
~Robert Frost, from "Two Tramps in Mud Time"

May

"What potent blood hath modest May." ~ Ralph W. Emerson

Subject: Potatoes

Excerpt on growing potatoes from an article by one of my favorite garden writers, Wayne Winterrowd, in the May 1989 issue of *Horticulture*.

"Although all domestic potatoes appear to have descended from one wild progenitor, *Solanum tuberosum*, their genetic pool is extremely rich. Each tuber is essentially a cutting of the parent plant, true to variety and easy to carry over, making it possible for home gardeners to preserve distinct varieties for many generations. Thus the range of potatoes available is greater than that of many heirloom vegetables. One source lists 50 distinct varieties."

Winterrowd discusses some of his favorites:

- 'Lady Finger': Winterrowd's favorite [and also one of my favorites]
- 'Yellow Banana': similar to Lady Finger but somewhat larger and straighter and perhaps more abundant.
- 'Yellow Fir': pink skin, covered with odd knobs and protuberances.
- 'Peruvian Purple': deep purple skin, the flesh tending toward a bluish purple.
- 'Early Rose': matures early, should be eaten fresh.
- 'Tobique': good, standard, all-purpose cultivar
- 'Brigus': dark-skinned, very good for baking.
- 'Yellow Rose' (also known as 'Yellow Apple' and 'Finnish Yellow': the sweetest of all potatoes)

Baked Potatoes: the Dos and Don'ts for the best crispy-skinned spuds (recommendations from The Maine Potato Lady 2020 Catalog):

DO:

- Choose a variety that bakes up well, such as Green Mountain, German Butterball, Carola, Purple Viking, Yellow Finn, or any Russet variety.
- Preheat oven to 350-400F.
- Scrub the potatoes and space them evenly on the oven rack or on a perforated baking sheet.
- After 15-30 minutes (depending on size of the potatoes) prick them with a fork several times to allow moisture to escape as steam, then turn them over. This release of moisture will prevent the potato from exploding in your oven and will also yield a light, fluffy baked potato, perfect for soaking up butter.
- Bake for another 15-30 minutes until fully cooked. When the potatoes are done, you will be able to pierce them easily with a fork, and when you squeeze them gently, indentations will remain.

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- Remove the potatoes from the oven and massage or roll each one gently to break up the flesh inside.
- To serve, slit the potatoes open with a sharp knife, and serve with butter, salt, and pepper. Other choices include sour cream, cottage cheese, snipped chives, green onions, caramelized yellow onion, or the drippings from your steak or roasting pan.

DON'T:

- Wrap the potatoes in foil, doing so will prevent the moisture from escaping; the potato will be steamed rather than baked, with a thin damp skin and hard interior.
- Rub the skin with oil. This will limit the escape of moisture.
- Prick with fork before they are half done. Doing so will make the potatoes dry out too quickly.
- Crowd on a baking sheet. Doing so will limit the escape of moisture.
- Bake in a microwave; this is essentially the same as steaming.

"I love spring anywhere, but if I could choose
I would always greet it in a garden." ~Ruth Stout

June

"Live in each season as it passes: breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit."

~Henry David Thoreau

There are over 480 different species of North American ladybugs, and they are not all red with black polka-dots. They come in a wide range of color combinations, including brown, yellow, cream, orange, black, gray, burgundy, pink. Some have spots, some are striped or banded or mottled. Despite their diverse physical appearances, all ladybug species have the following five characteristics in common (source of text: Jessica Walliser, author of a post to the Savvy Gardening website).

Fact #1: Ladybugs have stinky feet. You probably already know that nearly all ladybug species are predaceous as both adults and larvae. They consume a broad diversity of prey, including aphids, scale, mites, mealybugs, small caterpillars, insect eggs and pupae, whiteflies, mites, and psyllids. But, did you know that ladybugs leave behind a chemical footprint as they walk around looking for their prey? This footprint is a type of volatile odor known as a semiochemical, and it sends a message to other insects. When another predatory insect is out hunting for prey on the same plant the ladybug was traipsing around on, it "smells" the ladybug's foot print and may decide not to lay eggs anywhere nearby, just to keep those eggs from being eaten by the ladybug too. For example, the stinky feet of a ladybug may keep parasitic wasps from laying eggs in aphids because the female wasp doesn't want her offspring to be eaten right along with the aphids.

Fact #2: Ladybugs eat other ladybugs. A process known as molecular gut-content analysis allows scientists to find out who is eating who in the garden. . . . Scientists examine the DNA found in the digestive system of beneficial insects. . . . A team of scientists found that more than half of the ladybugs collected in a field of soybeans had remnants of other ladybug species in their guts. Many of them had ingested multiple species. When one good bug eats another good bug, it's called intraguild predation (IGP), and it is a routine occurrence in your garden. Needless to say, the dining habits of ladybugs are a complicated affair.

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Fact #3: You'll never see most ladybug species... unless you like to climb trees. Though many of North America's ladybugs are generalist predators who eat whatever prey they can catch, there are also a plethora of specialist species who can only consume just one particular species of adelgid, mealybug, or mite. In order to survive, these specialist ladybugs must live in the particular tree that hosts the species of insect they consume. But, even among ladybugs who can feed on a broad diversity of insect prey, there are dozens of species that spend their entire lives in the tree canopy. You'll almost never see these tree-dwelling, garden friendly bugs, unless you're an arborist...or a monkey.

Fact #4: Native ladybugs do not spend the winter in your house. The ladybugs that enter homes and other structures to overwinter are an introduced species, the Asian multicolored ladybug (also called the harlequin ladybug). All native ladybug species spend the winter outdoors, in leaf litter, under tree bark, in natural crevices, or, in the case of the convergent ladybug, they migrate and hibernate by the thousands on mountaintops in parts of the American West. Native ladybugs do not overwinter in houses. Unfortunately, non-native, Asian multicolored ladybugs far outnumber native ladybug species in many parts of North America. And, in fact, these ultra-competitive, exotic ladybugs may be to blame for the dramatic decline in many native ladybug species.

Fact #5: The ladybugs you buy in the store are wild-collected. Before you buy garden friendly bugs, such as ladybugs, and release them into your garden, you need to think about where they came from. Almost all of the live ladybugs you find for sale at your local garden center were harvested from the wild. After migrating for hundreds of miles, the convergent ladybugs I mentioned in Fact #4, gather together to spend the winter on sunny mountaintops. These hibernating insects are "harvested" with backpack vacuums; they are then packaged into containers and shipped around the country for sale at your local garden center. This practice disrupts natural populations and may spread disease and parasites to garden friendly bugs in other parts of the country (Imagine if we did this with another migrating insect – the monarch! We would be up in arms! So, why aren't we up in arms about these wild-collected ladybugs?).

"In summer, the song sings itself." ~William Carlos Williams

"In June, as many as a dozen species may burst their buds on a single day.
No man can heed all of these anniversaries;
no man can ignore all of them." ~Aldo Leopold

July

"Hot July brings cooling showers,
Apricots and gillyflowers."
~Sara Coleridge, *Pretty Lessons in Verse*

I have long been confused by the common flower name "gillyflower," trying to determine what group of flowers the name is actually referring to. Finally, this fall, while reading Ken Druse's marvelously informative (and beautifully illustrated) *The Scentual Garden*, I came upon an explanation that helped explain my confusion. "Gilliflower is a name given in Britain to any number of fragrant flowers, usually ones that smell of cloves." Druse proceeds to argue for the value of learning a flower's Latin name. "When you know a plant's real name, it becomes an individual. . . . One way to learn the name is to write it down or make a note in your phone. Another is to use it—say it out loud. Don't worry about your pronunciation; there aren't any ancient Romans around to correct you."

Two items from the April 2002 issue of *Horticulture* magazine.

Alison Saylor and Gillian Teixeira, owners of Trade Secret Gardens nursery in Carlisle, Massachusetts produced a table that confirms what most of us had already suspected were the true meanings of many garden catalog plant descriptions. Here are their translations:

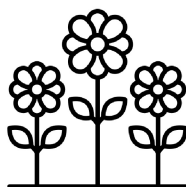
What the catalog says . . . What it really means
Attracts butterflies . . . *Attracts bees*
Beautiful foliage . . . *The flowers are pathetic*
Delicate flowers . . . *You need a magnifying glass to see them*
Designer colors . . . *Paper-bag beige*
Dormant in hot weather . . . *Looks dead most of the year*
Drought tolerant . . . *Prone to rot*
Edible flowers . . . *Deer love them*
Excellent for cutting . . . *Single flower is at the top of a spindly 2-foot stalk*
Flowers all summer long . . . *It had a one-minute, insipid bloom in June, and perhaps I saw another in August*
Heavy feeders . . . *Yellowish foliage and puny flower unless constantly fed*
Invasive . . . *It will come up through a foot of concrete*
Late to emerge . . . *Looks dead most of the year*
Native . . . *It's a common weed*
Tall . . . *It lies flat on the ground most of the time*
Unusual . . . *One of the ugliest plants on the planet*
Vigorous . . . *The smallest particle of this plant will takeover your whole garden, and you'll never get rid of it.*

“High Ground,” an essay by Verlyn Klinkenborg

“I believe that humans love to garden simply because the labor of gardening is indeed infinite, which means that most of us work pleasantly in arrears of conscience, always feeling guilty enough to morally sauce the work at hand.” If performing garden tasks in a timely manner—such as planting garlic in the fall—the world feels right. But often the garlic gets planted late or potatoes dug late—and then when job is completed, it’s like “satisfying an overdue debt.”

Klinkenborg describes an early 15th-century French calendar *Tres Riches Heures*, each month with an elaborate illustration focusing on a task to be done that month—such as knocking acorns from an oak tree for pigs in November or plowing field with oxen in March. The duc du Berry’s calendar is like an astronomical alarm clock, reminding viewers of jobs that must be done at the right time. Klinkenborg regrets that too often he feels in need of such reminders. “I feel untimely most of the time, and as a result I tend to believe that the real art of gardening is timeliness, and that I won’t be a true gardener until the necessary rhythms of each of the plants I grow is ingrained in my bones.” To gain this may take a lifetime in the garden. Most of us must rely on notes written on scraps of paper and calendars.

When God blesses the harvest, there is enough for the thief
as well as the gardener. ~Polish Proverb



August

“One footstep of the owner is worth 10 tons of fertilizer.” ~Scottish wisdom

One book I read this summer was *Life in the Garden* by 84-year old Penelope Lively, a winner of the Booker Prize in 1987 for her novel *Moon Tiger*. Although Lively includes some reflections on her own experiences with gardening (beginning with her childhood home in Cairo), her observations primarily focus on the role gardens play in literature and art, particularly painting. Not a great book, but it does have some superb commentaries on other artists' works and several evocative tributes to the power of gardening in one's personal life. Here are several of my favorite passages:

- If you make a forensic inspection of any garden now, there is little there that is native: our gardens are cosmopolitan, they speak in tongues. Introductions that may initially have been fashionable acquisitions for the few have become, over time, ubiquitous, and the norm. (88-89)

- To garden is to elide past, present and future; it is a defiance of time. You garden today for tomorrow; the garden mutates from season to season, always the same, but always different. In my vegetable gardening days, while digging a trench for the potatoes I would remember the Majestics I grew last year, and wonder how the Maris Pipers I am putting in today will compare. In autumn, I plant up a pot of 'Tête-à-Tête' daffodils, seeing in the mind's eye what they will look like in February, and comparing them with 'Hawera,' which I found grew rather too tall last year. We are always gardening for a future; we are supposing, assume, a future. I am doing that at eight-three; the *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Limelight' I have just put in will outlast me, in all probability, but I am requiring it to perform while I can still enjoy it.

The great defiance of time is our capacity to remember—the power of memory. Time streams away behind us, and beyond, but individual memory shapes, for each of us, a known place. We own a particular piece of time; I was there, then, I did this, saw that, felt thus. And gardening, in its small way, performs a memory feat: it corrals time, pinning it to the seasons, to the gardening year, by summoning up the garden in the past, the garden to come. A garden is never just now; it suggests yesterday and tomorrow; it does not allow time its steady progress. (111)

- You can't impose order, where nature is concerned. A garden may be a defined area, but it is also an artificial concept, and plants will evade definition if it suits them—jump the wall and flourish elsewhere. It seems a form of give-and-take: the garden colonizes the wild, the wild probes the garden, sending up natural growth wherever it gets the chance. What is a weed, and what is not? (126)

- Beyond the actual rose there is the symbolic rose, the flower that seems to have harvested more symbolism than any other. A symbol of silence, discretion, for the Romans, who had dining-room ceilings painted with roses so that guests were reminded that what was spoken in drink was "*sub rosa*" only, a custom that was revived in the seventeenth century. It is the emblem of that peculiar Protestant sect of the same period, the Rosicrucians, who held mystical beliefs apparently related to alchemy, with, it seems descendent secret societies still around today." (151)

It is a golden maxim to cultivate the garden for the nose,
and the eyes will take care of themselves. ~ Robert Louis Stevenson

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"August" by Mary Oliver

When the blackberries hang
swollen in the woods, in the brambles
nobody owns, I spend

all day among the high
branches, reaching
my ripped arms, thinking

of nothing, cramming
the black honey of summer
into my mouth; all day my body

accepts what it is. In the dark
creeks that run by there is
this thick paw of my life darting among

the black bells, the leaves; there is
this happy tongue.

September

But now in September the garden has cooled, and with it my possessiveness. The sun warms my back instead of beating on my head . . . The harvest has dwindled, and I have grown apart from the intense midsummer relationship that brought it on. ~Robert Finch

The Morville Hours by Katherine Swift is among the most beautifully written books on gardening that I've ever encountered. Anna Pavord, one of my favorite garden writers, has described the book as "magical." I would agree. While reading it this summer, I kept thinking, I never want this book to end. Here are a few passages from Swift's memoir on the resurrection of a Shropshire garden.

- Nowadays, adrift in an affectless no-man's-land, we are cut off not only from the hopes and fears, the triumphs and despairs of the agricultural year, but from the shared emotions of the great story which plays itself out month by month in the liturgical year. The twenty-first century is fighting a losing battle to keep its calendar. Gardeners of course have never lost it. (9)
- Gardens are about people first and plants second. Like our multi-layered language, gardening is made up of different elements, bits and pieces from far and near, now and long ago, taken and incorporated into the vocabulary of plant and tree, the grammar of path and hedge. (14-15)
- Anticipation is one of the gentler pleasures of gardening. We sow seeds and then wait for them to come up. We plant trees which we never see in maturity, except in our mind's eye. . . . Anticipation is the imaginative leap which enables us to picture how a garden will look in ten, twenty-a hundred years' time, and yet still relish the time in between; to enjoy not knowing, too, or half-knowing, savouring the delights of gardens which tantalize us into wondering what is through the arch, around the next corner. (53)

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- The sense of touch is a paradigm of connectedness. We talk of management being 'out of touch' or 'hands on'; people are 'hand in glove' or 'lose touch'. We have a 'firm grasp' of our subject, or tell someone who dithers to 'get a grip'. We speak admiringly of those who 'lend a hand', or who are 'not afraid to get their hands dirty'. Digging is about as close to nature as you can get in the garden; it's what the earthworm does, and the frost. Working the soil. I like the smell of it—the rich mouldy smell of newly turned earth. I like the sound of it—the thwack of the spade, the thump of the sods, the wingbeats of birds come to investigate. I like to feel the texture of the soil changing with the seasons and the weather and with my own activities. I like the satisfying look of a newly dug bed at the end of the day. I stand up and lean on my spade to ease my back, estimating how much done, how much more to do, and I watch the birds: a robin and female blackbird with her bright round golden eye, come to see what I'm up to. (106-7)
- The *Hortus conclusus* of the Middle Ages was a garden which existed at more than a merely horticultural level. It also functioned as a symbol of virtue or virginity, an analogy stemming initially from the Song of Solomon—a 'garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed'—and hence of the Virgin Mary, who is frequently portrayed in the context of such a garden. By analogy too the enclosed garden came to represent the unattainability of the Lady of the courtly-love tradition, and key scenes of romance tales such as the thirteenth-century *Roman de la rose* would be played out in the setting of such a garden. . . . But, heavily symbolic as such gardens were, there was real danger and a need for real walls. This was a world still full of wild animals—boars, bears, wolves—a world where politics was conducted by the sword, where the garden—whether secular or monastic—presented a real refuge from the horrors as well as the temptations of the world. (113)
- You can smell the spring even before it arrives, like a seafarer becalmed for months on the wide expanse of ocean, scenting land before he sees it. Caught unaware, snooping, perhaps to collect milk from the step, one morning it is suddenly there, on the breeze, unmistakable after the long months of winter: a smell compounded of greenness and rain showers and damp earth; a hint of balsam, a rumour of hyacinths—pregnant with the ghosts of flowers-to-be, like Flora's breath. (129)
- With gardening, every year is a new beginning, a fresh start, a clean slate. Gardeners have a lifetime of second chances (this year I *will* sow the celeriac in February), and each spring is a new beginning (this year I *will* weed the bittercress before it flings its seeds everywhere like grapeshot), each morning a clean slate (this year I *will* spray the roses before they get black spot, dig the tulips up six weeks after flowering, mow the long grass in the Orchard before the rain knocks it flat). (132-133)
- Swift states that what she likes best about gardening is "not the thinking about it or the designing of it, the talking about it or the admiring of it, but doing it. Doing everything and anything in the garden, from the hardest task to the most menial or the most boring, doing the work as a daily routine, not just when you want or what you want, not just in spring and summer when the weather is good, not just when it's pleasant, but now, in the cold and the wet. (317-8)
- Near the end of the book, Swift talks about how much she likes the silence of gardening. "Nor that silence out of doors is ever really silence. But absence of words, space for the thoughts to come. A silence that allows you to listen." (328)
- Necessary things for human life: fire, food, shelter (a home). Necessary things for plant life: earth, water, air (light). Necessary things for human growth: myth, legend, stories (history).

From "The Far Field" by Theodore Roethke

I have come to a still, but not a deep center,
A point outside the glittering current;
My eyes stare at the bottom of a river,
At the irregular stones, iridescent sandgrains,
My mind moves in more than one place,
In a country half-land, half-water.

I am renewed by death, thought of my death,
The dry scent of a dying garden in September,
The wind fanning the ash of a low fire.
What I love is near at hand,
Always, in earth and air.



October

Even if something is left undone, everyone must take time
to sit still and watch the leaves turn. ~Elizabeth Lawrence

Herbal Salts

During the summer and fall months, we are frequently using fresh herbs to season our recipes: rosemary, chives, sage, tarragon, oregano, parsley, cilantro, fennel, dill, several varieties of thyme, several varieties of mint, half dozen different kinds of basil. The problem is that for the winter months, most of these fresh herbs are no longer available. We do have a large rosemary bush we bring into the house during the winter, and occasionally we have a basil or parsley plant growing in the kitchen window, but the use of herbal seasonings definitely declines beginning in October. Copied below are recipes from the website Spruceeats that should enable us to effectively capture the flavors of our favorite summer herbs.

Basil Herbal Salt

Ingredients:

- ½ cup fresh basil leaves
- ½ cup kosher salt (or coarse sea salt)

Procedure:

- Put the basil and kosher salt into the food processor and pulse for approximately 30 seconds. The mixture will be wet and should look like green sand with tiny flecks of basil.
- Spread mixture in a thin layer on a baking sheet and place in an oven heated to 225 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Bake for 15 minutes and then stir the mixture and bake for another 15 minutes until completely dry.
- Remove basil salt from oven and allow to cool for a few minutes before using your fingers to grind up any remaining clumps.

Your herb salt is ready to use or can be stored in a tightly sealed glass jar for up to a year.

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Rosemary Herb Salt

Ingredients

- 1 cup rosemary (packed fresh leaves)
- 1 cup salt (coarse)
- 3 cups salt (Kosher, or other flake-style salt, like sea salt)

Procedure:

- Put the rosemary leaves and coarse salt in a food processor and pulse on and off about 8-10 times, or until the rosemary is blended into the salt, and the salt is similar in texture to table salt (it will be damp and look almost like wet sand).
- Add the Kosher salt to a bowl; stir in the rosemary salt mixture and combine thoroughly.
- Spread out on a baking sheet to dry for a few hours and then transfer to jars with tight-fitting lids.

The sweet calm sunshine of October, now
Warms the low spot; upon its grassy mold
The purple oak-leaf falls; the birchen bough
drops its bright spoil like arrow-heads of gold.
~William Cullen Bryant

November

"November always seemed to me the Norway of the year." ~Emily Dickinson

In November I ordered a copy of *The Art of Gardening* by Thomas Hill, the first book on gardening written by an English author, the original edition published in 1563. On opening the book, I discovered that the full title of the edition I received is *The Arte of Gardening wherunto is added much necessarie matter, with a number of Secrets; and the Phisicke hleps belong to each hearb, which are easily prepared*. The text was "Gathered by Thomas Hill, Citizen of London" and my edition was printed by Edward Allde, 1608. Actually, the edition I received in the mail is a Scholar's Choice photocopy, which means that my copy is often very difficult to read, difficulties caused by the ornate font, the publisher's 17th-century spelling practices, Hill's knotty sentence structures, and imperfect photocopying. Nevertheless, it has been fun and enlightening to read Hill's detailed accounts of the vegetables, herbs, and fruits important in the early 17th century. To give a taste of Hill's commentaries, here are his comments on the "Physicke helps" of the Radish:

"The Radish is hot and drie in the third degree, but some write in the second degree. And now the Radish eaten at supper, doeth digest the meate eaten, and heateth the stomack, and causeth also a stinking breath, if any sleep by and by after the eating. And this roote is hurtful until women with child, and therefore to be refrained in that season. And the iuice of the roote anointed on olde ulcers, doeth both cleanse and eat away the canker in them: and the same like worketh the poudrer of the root. And the iuce of the Radish boiled with hony, and mixed with a little vineger, and after strained and drunk, doth help the quartaine ague, and stopping of the milt. And the root of the radish laid plaster-wise, doeth helpe the water between the skin, and such diseased with the hardnes and swelling of the milt. And the iuice of the root drunke with the liquor of Raisons, doeth helpe the kings euil: and drank with hony, doth put away the cough: and this being also drunk, helpeth such which be stopped in the brest, and draw the wind short. And of this root is made an Oximel on this wise: first bruise the root some what, and infuse them for two or three daies in vineger, and after put to the same a third part of hony, which strained, drink

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thereof, for this helpeth the quartaine and one day ague, unles the same proceed of salt fumes. And if there be colde and undigested humours in the stomacke, then steepe the oindes of the rootes of the Radish with hony and vineger mixt together, & of the same let the patient daily eat a good quantity, and after the same so eaten, drinke a draught of warme water, putting then your finger, or a feather dipped in sallet oile into the throte, and this forthwish will procure you to cast forth at any time, but the aptest time is in the morning. And against the hardnesse of the Milt and Liver, seeth the hearbe along in Oile and Wine, and apply the same plaster-wise, and the same plaster laide hot on the bottome of the bellie, neare to the root of the priuitie, doeth help the strangury. And the water of the Radish distilled in Septembver, drunk morning and evening, unto the quantity of three or foure ounces at a time, doeth help the strone, causeth urine, and clenseth also the raines, and the bladder: It doth clense the places also where the strones containe. And the same water drunke, doth help the kings euil, killeth the wormes of the belly, and helpeth the digestion of the stomack, and purgeth it of all clammy humors, and other matters which hinder digestion, and it openeth also every stopping of the inner members and veings. And drunke in the quantity abovesaid, doth extenuate the rough humours, and causeth a cleare voice, and this water gargelled in the rhote, and holden in the mouth, doth helpe the swelling of the throte, and ulcers of the gums, for it both refolueth, breaketh, and consumeth. And this water drunk morning & evening, unto the quantity of foure ounces at a time, for three or foure weekes together, doeth helpe the water between the skin, if that the patient refraineth much and often drinking: for the less the patient then drinketh, the more he sendeth forth of the water in the urine, and by that means is the sooner holpen. These hitherto of the properties of the Radishes. (Pp. 143-144)

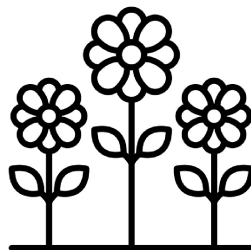
Hill provides similar commentaries on the use of dozens of other “Pot-herbes, Flowers, &c,” including Lettuce, Beetes, Coleworts, Parcely, Lovage, Fennell, Rue, Mint, Garden Time, Violets, Roses, Basil, Marigolde, Lavender, Pyony, Poppie, Gillifloure, and Strawberries.

“Solitude Late at Night in the Woods” by Robert Bly

The body is like a November birch facing the full moon
And reaching into the cold heavens.
In these trees there is no ambition, no sodden body, no leaves,
Nothing but bare trunks climbing like cold fire!

My last walk in the trees has come. At dawn
I must return to the trapped fields,
To the obedient earth.
The trees shall be reaching all the winter.

It is a joy to walk in the bare woods.
The moonlight is not broken by the heavy leaves.
The leaves are down, and touching the soaked earth,
Giving off the odors that partridges love.



December

At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled mirth;
But like of each thing that in season grows.

~William Shakespeare (*Love's Labour's Lost*)

The last two books I read in 2019 were unexpectedly similar in many respects: *A Garlic Testament: Seasons on a Small New Mexico Farm* by Stanley Crawford and *How to Catch a Mole: Wisdom from a Life Lived in Nature* by Marc Hamer. While the authors provide substantial information about how to raise garlic and kill moles, they use their personal experiences to explore larger social, cultural, and personal issues. For example, Crawford concludes his memoir with a chapter on selling his garlic and other produce at a farmer's market in Los Alamos, which serves as a context for re-examining his attitudes toward nuclear weapons. Here is a sample of passages from Crawford's engaging narrative:

- Cultivated crops, like words, like language, are things that glide into view out of the murkiness of the past. I think of my words as mine, but the chances are that even after fifty or sixty or seventy years of chewing on them, writing them down, word-processing them as a speaker and as a writer, I won't succeed in putting a single new one into circulation. Same with plants, with crops, as a gardener and farmer. I know that there are weeds out there waiting in line to become domesticated, or even redomesticated in the case of crops that have fallen from grace back into being weeds again. You can tell by the way they hang around the garden that they have adapted themselves to our seasonal disturbances, but I doubt I'm the one to figure out what they're good for in relation to the fashions of human existence. What we're given in words and cultivated plants has been worked over for hundreds of generations before it comes to us, and the chances of our adding much to it are very slim. What we add is illusion: each time we're born, the world looks new, is new, which gives us a strange kind of leverage against the weight of accumulated biological and cultural existence, which means for a while, off and on, now and then, under certain circumstances, we believe we are the owners or managers or the franchise operators of this world, not the other way around, and that we have invented almost everything in sight, from the words that drop so easily from our mouths to the plants we grow in our gardens. (24-25)
- There is a kind of knowledge that can be obtained only by a long succession of small or even absentminded observations and which remains so private that you fail to see it for what it is, and so entangled is it in a habitual activity spread out over many years. And to whom would you speak of the inner life of your fields? (50)
- Crawford's definition of a weed: "a plant that gets in the way of my intentions." (138)
- In the biological world the only true death is extinction. Egg, seed, spore, nut, root, and bulb are carriers of all our immortalities from generation to generation in parcels large and small. The garlic bulb passes through a continuous metamorphosis from bulb to plant to bulb again with much less dying back than most creatures. Each garlic bulb by weight is between one-tenth and one-fifteenth ancient history. This may be the utility of its antiseptic sulfur-based compounds, to convey such a large amount of seed matter from generation to generation. The garlic clove you slice into your salad dressing has managed to stay continuously alive for tens of thousands of years, immune from the churning biological recycling that takes place in the soil all around it—until that unlucky moment when your knife cuts into its flesh, and

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you begin feeding your hopes for immortality on its own proven success. By comparison to a garlic clove, how small is the bridge of sperm and ovum across which we pass from one generation to the next. (151)

- Every time you go to market you relive the story of Jack and the Beanstalk: you trade the family cow for worthless beans, but if you plant the beans, you can grow the vine by which you climb to the heavens to slay the giant or vampire that tyrannizes the community. Because you go to market, because you take the chance, because you take the elemental dare again and again, the community lives, prospers, survives. (185)

- Roughly the same rules apply for selling at the Los Alamos Farmers' Market as at any other farmers' market, more or less. And the reasons for growing for such a market, and for selling at one, remain the same as elsewhere, namely that buyer and seller stand on an equal footing as producer and customer, that the selling farmers and gardeners are not agents or representatives or employees of institutions or corporations, that they are likely to be in possession of more information about their produce—and be generally willing to impart it—than the entire staff of a supermarket, and that the give-and-take of buying and selling takes place without the intervention of corporate advertising machinery, in an open space, under the sky, in an atmosphere of enhanced sensual alertness. A good market is an information system where fruit and vegetables are exchanged along with lore about how they are planted, grown, stored, cooked, and in this the Los Alamos Farmers' Market is no exception. It may also be the most beautiful farmers' market in the whole country. (215-6)

- Thus to cream a garden and then to plant it is an act of independence and even defiance to that greater world. And though that garden or field you have first dreamed and then planted may later come in the high summer noon to seem a tyranny of its own, it is nonetheless one to which you have bound yourself voluntarily, with eyes open, head clear, without intermediary, without the sleight of hand and the duplicity, or which much less of them, of human aggregations—political, corporate, whatever—that will always aspire to feed you, fuel your equipment, illuminate your nights, and imagine away your life.

The dreams will fail. There is no perfection. There will be drought, flood, plague—inevitably, everywhere, sooner, then later again. But everywhere also the imagination will overcome them, and like the spider that within hours emerges from the rubble to spin a first silver filament across the desert created by a man on an orange tractor as he tills under the last harvested field, it will begin its work of creation and re-creation. It has not—you may argue—yet been wholly defeated anywhere. It may, for all its sloppiness and foolishness, be our most powerful faculty. (238)

From December to March, there are for many of us three gardens--
the garden outdoors,
the garden of pots and bowls in the house,
and the garden of the mind's eye.

~ Katherine S. White, from *Onward and Upward in the Garden*

"The gardening season officially begins on January 1st,
and ends on December 31." ~Marie Huston