

A Commonplace Garden

"In Heaven, it is always Autumn."

~ John Donne

A garden is forgiving. Plants are built to put up with a lot of nonsense. They obviously can't get up and walk away, so they're made to endure. It's part of their nature. ~Rosefiend Cordell

There is an old Chinese saying that if you plant pines you invite the wind. ~Dan Pearson

"I see gardening as a reiteration: I do a bit, then nature does her bit, then I respond to that, and so on, not unlike a conversation." ~Sue Stuart-Smith

"For however charming in humanity is the virtue modesty, and however becoming is the unobtrusive bearing that gives evidence of its possession, it is quite misplaced in a Dahlia." ~Gertrude Jekyll

"A weed is a plant that is not only in the wrong place, but intends to stay." ~Sara Stein

"Methinks I see the sunset light flooding the river valley, the western hills stretching to the horizon, overhung with trees gorgeous and glowing with the tints of autumn— a mighty flower garden blossoming under the spell of the enchanter, frost." ~John Greenleaf Whittier

A publication of the Coe College Alumni House Garden
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52402
<https://coealumngardens.weebly.com/>

I Still Marvel

Each spring I wait for the crocuses to come,
eager to greet their purple bursts as they rise

from the soggy earth and stubborn patches
of late-lingering snow, and while I know

what their veils will show of radiance,
this does nothing to blunt my wonder

at their shining spread across the lawn.
They never bother to argue or complain,

but simply spear their greening blades
up beyond the hold of winter's grip,

as if to sing in a gentle soundless way.
And though I've seen all this before,

I still marvel when they come, stem and leaf
and flower unfurling themselves

from the clutch of roots, a patience we
yearn for, a lure of this long listening.

~Mark S. Burrows

From *The Chance of Home: Poems*



The Garden Quarto

The best part about writing about the garden is that it's so big. You can write about love, as sphinx moths visit the evening primroses opening up at dusk and bats swoop in to sip nectar from the saguaro cactus. You can write about death as the soldier bug prongs a Mexican bean beetle lunching on a leaf— or your own father's failing heart, as the Japanese beetles move in to devour his rosebushes. ~Anne Raver



Fall 2022

November Rose in Pittsburgh

In the tiny front yard
at the house
of a neighbor dead three years,
flowers are left uncared for.

Yet they have been faithful to their yearly blooming.
White iris, pink azalea, yellow rose
have taken steadfast turns
each spring and summer.

Today, in late November,
I pause to see a rose in bloom.

It whispers someone loved the soil here,
once cared for roots and stems so thoroughly
they persist even in neglect,
while temperatures,

having lost their ties to seasons,
cannot enforce
the time a rose must rest
or stay its blooming.

~Sally Witt, CSJ

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issue of the *Christian Century*.



Morning Glories

I have started them in flats, from a few seeds so hard you have to score the outer casing with a knife, their hulls so dry you have to soak them in water, waiting a day to plant them. Some years not one seedling could take the shock of even a slight drop in temperature, though I hardened them off before putting them in the ground. I moved them out by day and in by night.

This year they take the trellis, curlicue of tendril, heart-shaped leaf. The bud utters a sudden gasp of blue. Those dry, hard seeds smoulder like pipes, germinating at last, and spinning slender streams of vine to coil and fume like hookah dreams, with bright, cool puffs of bloom, so tender you think they'll burn in the noon sun. Like small umbrellas, unbound, they unfurl fantastically in the rainless light.

They will not be gathered. They hoard their blue. In sky or lapis lazuli, there's no other blue like that. Their deep, drowsy eyes open, cool and remote, the pupils dilating yellow and more yellow in the dangerous sun. They dawn and dawn, until they seem bright purses gaping, with their linings turned out, unabashed, each offering that single, round, unmourning coin, a gift, a widow's mite.

But counterfeit. This inbred, alien hue is studied, is all art. No blessed mother ever wore this unvirgin blue. They deny like high-priced whores, practiced, immaculate in their cold openness. And, though undone, like silk underthings astray in each light, they twist themselves at noon into nocturnal spirals, and sleep unmoved all day, wound in pale sheets, spare as shepherd's purse, and tight.

~Jeanne Emmons
From her book of poetry *Rootbound*



The Garden

Cherry red tomatoes,
dusky, brown, knobbly potatoes.
A blue morpho flutters by,
clouds painted across the sky.
Bright, cheery, yellow sunflower,
the hose gives it a shower.

~Eleanor Farrell
Harding Middle School

Five Haiku

first squash blossom
first blush on tomatoes
first gifts of July

the robin nearby
the more distant dove
holy braid of sound

opulent is *it!*
the very word to describe
early July's garden

listen carefully-
goldfinch, phoebe, and bushtit
all speaking their hearts

sitting, walk finished
breakfast and a busy peace
July garden

~Steve Kennedy
Coe Alum, '78



Any garden belongs to everyone who sees it—it is like a book, and everybody who visits it will find different things. . . . This garden, like most others, is a trick that looks a bit like nature, but isn't really. It is written deliberately to lead the viewer into a collection of stories using colour and form, light and shade, to elicit personal emotions, to seed the imagination, to spark a journey of remembrance of forgotten things. . . . ~Marc Hamer (from *Seed to Dust*)

Sunflowers

I'm in the world but I still want the world.
I'm full of longing and can't move,
enthralled in the garden. Having died
all the way back to the root, I grow again
into a version of the thing I love. I'm her
and not her, hermaphrodite with a heart
like a plateful of black flames.
The bees inspect me like doctors.
All my hard little tears, future selves
who haven't grown. Bedclothes swell on the line
while around me giant sunflowers burn
through their masks of radiant desire.

~Jenny George
Author of *The Dream of Reason*

