

A Commonplace Garden

"More grows in the garden than the gardener sows."
~Spanish Proverb

"One cannot expect inspiration from an institutional garden, unless it is under the command of an exceptionally strong-willed gardener, who can overcome public opinion from below and committee direction from above."
~Christopher Lloyd

"Successful gardening is doing what has to be done when it has to be done the way it ought to be done whether you want to do it or not."
~Jerry Baker

"The gardener digs in another time, without past or future, beginning or end. A time that does not cleave the day with rush hours, lunch breaks, the last bus home. As you walk in the garden you pass into this time—the moment of entering can never be remembered. Around you the landscape lies transfigured. Here is the Amen beyond the prayer."
~Derek Jarman

*"The garden admires you.
For your sake it smears itself with green pigment,
The ecstatic reds of the roses,
So that you will come to it with your lovers."*
~from "The Garden" by Louise Glück

"As is the gardener, so is the garden." ~Proverb

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Even After

Begin the day with an evening primrose turning inward,
folding into the morning's heavy summer air near the quiet river
cutting through layers of limestone, hollowing caves in
sandstone.

Begin with the swallows swooping and sailing all around you
after the secretive night visits of sphinx moths, mysterious,
drinking in the nectar and lemon scent of your pale heart exposed
beneath the constellations you cannot see.

It is August, and already the neighbor's northern magnolia
has begun to wait for its white flowers to rise from the ground.

Not until wind and snow burn the brief mark of infinity
across your face, will they begin to travel up from the cold roots.

I trust they will rise in this place we once lived,
even after we've gone.

The way the memory of certain slants of light lingers in the limbs,
or a voice you loved refuses to die with the body, insists
on reaching you when you are not prepared.

Begin with scattering small dry seeds on the hard ground

~Michael S. Moos

from *In the Range of the Western Meadowlark*



"These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God to-day. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence." ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Garden Quarto

"Let's get one thing straight. Your garden will get along quite well without you. It just won't be your garden. It will be that piece of land where once a garden was, and there is no tragedy in that. Every square inch of our planet's surface is trying to get back to a state where it feels at ease with itself, a way of being from which forestry and agriculture, road building, town planning and, yes, even gardening continually strive to hold it back. This is not whimsy. This is science."
~Andrew Timothy O'Brien



Fall 2023

October Flowers

Giant sunflowers sag,
heavy heads bulging with seeds.
They dry in the afternoon sun
their faces haggard and bumpy,
bent to the ground,
exposing to the curious passerby
the elaborate architecture
of their calyxes. I admire
how they give and yield.

Oh, to surrender to winter that way,
with dignity and resignation.
Instead, I am always sidestepping
the inevitable, putting out hopeful
late blooms, like these on the hollyhock,
which keeps on budding pink
and climbing upward as if yearning
somehow to escape gravity,
and not disappear without a trace
beneath the coming snow.

~Jeanne Emmons

Professor Emeritus of English/Writing,
Briar Cliff University

Leaving a Garden

Every morning as I walk the dog I pass by my neighbors' garden, which is beautiful. I think it took them a long time to get it to the place it is today, filled with beauty and grace and some whimsy. They've lived there over twenty years, and I imagine they've been working on the garden for that long. It's a gift to me, and to the neighborhood.

When I was young, my grandparents lived in Tacoma. The railroad tracks ran a few blocks away from their back yard, and when we spent the night there, we heard the trains go by in the early hours of the morning. They lived next door to a diner, and when we'd get off the plane and drive to their house, we'd stop for lunch there and get hamburgers and wild blackberry milkshakes. It was heaven.

My grandparents had gardens there, too – my grandmother grew roses and my grandfather had a vegetable garden. Tried as he did, he never could get me to like lima beans, but he'd delight us with funny-shaped carrots and new peas. Standing in the garden you could see Mt. Rainier in the distance, haughty and majestic and cold, such a contradiction from my grandparents' sweet, small plots.

My grandfather died in that house. A few years later, as the neighborhood changed and the diner became a massage parlor, my grandmother left. The gardens went fallow. The house was sold and eventually some owner tore it down – it and the massage parlor – and now a strip mall occupies that space.

I miss the house, with the view from the upstairs window of the drive-in far away, and the llama rug my uncle brought back from Venezuela. I miss the dog run and the old black Lab Lady who lived there. I miss the shed attached to the garage, full of Grandma's canning. I miss her roses, and I even miss his lima beans. I miss them more, of course, but it has been a long time since they died.

I think about what it must have been like for my grandmother to leave that place and that garden. I think about all those people who spend decades planting seeds, and tending to the plants, pruning and weeding and sometimes throwing something out and sometimes starting all over again. A garden is so personal, such an effort of labor and imagination and hope. And patience. I can't imagine what it's like to leave such a labor of love.

I wonder if God was sad when Adam and Eve left that garden, sad that there was no one there to tend it anymore, or simply to appreciate it. It's such a lovely founding myth, the Eden story. We know how Adam and Eve fared; they made it out alive and started over, but life was different after they left the garden.

It always is.

~Beth Merrill Neel

Reprinted from the author's blog,

Hold Fast to What Is Good

Two poems from *Going to Seed:*

Dispatches from the Garden

Night Soil

They've built a new composting outhouse here at Waldo Lake. The old pit toilet up in the forest had a better view, but this one's clean and almost odorless. I approve. If I see a ranger I'll ask what they do with the final product.

Night soil – isn't that a lovely name for excrement? For forty centuries, Chinese farmers composted it and returned it to their fields. High in minerals, phosphorous, nitrogen, it's safe to handle if you cook it right.

When I worked at the Convent, we composted the sludge from the sewage treatment plant to fertilize the trees and shrubs. Nun dung, we called it. The roses bloomed profusely, and the rhododendrons grew immense.

Garden Noir

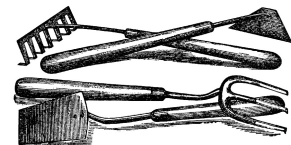
Damn. The squashes have crossed again. This one is supposed to be an acorn squash, but it looks like a billy club with warts. How far apart do I have to keep these plants? Some vegetables have no shame.

And look at this: tell-tale spots on the tomato leaves. Under my pocket magnifier, pretty yellow rings with dead tissue in the center. Necrosis, caused by who knows what – a virus, a fungus, a mutant pathogen. Probably infections. Better rip up the whole lot before it spreads to the peppers.

Listen, you've got to be tough to grow vegetables. Tough, smart, and a little bit mean. Because plants are headstrong and narcissistic, prey to all the sins of the flesh. They'll strangle each other when you aren't looking. Make no mistake – in the quest for food, beauty, and truth, a lot of creatures are going to get hurt.

~Charles Goodrich

A long-time Professional Gardener



Five Passages from *In the Artist's Garden*

by Ronald Blythe (1922-2023)

- "According to religion, Paradise, a sheltered garden, is where we should be. My first botany was in one of those Bibles which didn't end with Revelation, but with a list of plants. And I sometimes hear God questioning us as we enter Paradise: 'My beautiful Earth; why didn't you enjoy it more, its trees and flowers?'"
- "I am cutting the grass. It stands tall, and has quite forgotten that it is a lawn."

- "There is the familiar pleasant smell of decay. And sticks everywhere, waving seed about and perfect in themselves. Never give a garden a tidy too soon. Allow its gauntness. Observe the lesson of its passing. Let the grass grow under your feet for a while. Be patient, be thoughtful, be philosophical if you can."

- "Visitors marvel at my hollyhocks. A sumptuous cerise, they sway against the ancient wall. An old gardening book is crammed with hollyhock advice. But I let them get on with it – life. Their buds must have suggested the crockets on spires. They have shabby feet and dizzy tops."
- "October is when one has to seize the moment. Sunshine one day, wild rain the next."