

Garden Kalendar: Winter 2024

This Winter 2024 Garden Kalendar is composed of edited excerpts from my daily, hand-written garden journal entries from January 2 to March 31, 2023. These passages are accompanied by occasional parenthetical commentaries in italics. The journal records my work in four gardens:

- The Alumni House Garden at Coe;
- A half-acre vegetable garden on a small farm adjacent to the Wickiup Hill Outdoor Learning Center near Toddville (a garden typically identified as the Wickiup garden);
- The gardens and landscape at Buffalo United Methodist Church, a small church not far from Mount Mercy College;
- The gardens at my home on Elmhurst Drive in Cedar Rapids.

This Kalendar constitutes about 50% of my journal entries in the first quarter of 2023. A map of the Alumni House Garden map is posted on the website's "map" page. The italicized quotations occasionally inserted between journal entries are passages from poems I found in *Leaning toward Light: Poems for Gardens & the Hands That Tend Them*, edited by Tess Taylor—a book I was reading while preparing this Garden Shed blogpost. Because of the length of this document, the complete Winter 2024 Kalendar is posted as a pdf. ~Bob

It should surprise no one that, as a poet, I've been tickled for years to learn that the word anthology means a "gathering of flowers." Even if your garden grows vegetables or fruit, flowers need to bloom to make the harvest possible.

~Aimee Nezhukumatahil (from her foreword to the anthology *Leaning toward Light*)

2 January 2023. First journal entry of the new year, but not much gardening news to report. Although it was a day when I could have done some outdoor gardening, I spent most of my time indoors organizing the mailing and distribution of the garden calendars and fall issues of *The Garden Quarto*. My goal is to mail most of them tomorrow afternoon, but the label printing, packaging, etc never goes as fast as desired. I need to print more GQ copies since I left my last copies in the Alum House. I also drafted the year's first Monday Morning Garden Report and hope to have it posted by Wednesday. Today's MMGR focused on observations when walking into the winter garden and how the surrounding urban buildings and sounds felt like a oppressive, alien environment. No leaves on the trees to block the view, and the garden is so monochromatic—minimal attachments to hold the eyes from straying beyond the walls. Alas, the advantage of Holehird Gardens in Cumbria, surrounded by the Langdales as a backdrop for a garden outside Windermere. The Coe garden is intended as an island unto itself, separate from the city. A tough challenge for the garden in the middle of the winter.

Yesterday I led the service at Buffalo and had composed a few notes in preparation for reflections on the second chapter of Matthew and the importance of Joseph in the gospel's story of Jesus' birth. But as I began speaking, I saw the creche in front of the piano and started discussing how Matthew's nativity narrative doesn't match with what we see in the creche. For

example, in Matthew's gospel Joseph and Mary live in Bethlehem—and thus no need for this business about being born in a stable. Once I was focused on the creche, I followed a path of unplanned topics, though I finally got to Matthew's Magi, symbolizing how the message of Jesus was intended for all people, including gentiles. Although I never touched on several points I intended to discuss, that's okay: no one will ever know what was missing, and the focus on the creche as a handy visual prop was probably better than my original plan. My tendency to jump to unintended diversions resembles the way I garden, frequently doing stuff I had not planned ahead of time.

On PBS tonight I watched a program on an American couple doing a four-day hiking trip of about 50 miles, following the Herriot Way in Yorkshire. So many points about their walking experience matched with what MVM and I did with the May-Term classes and our walks in the Cotswolds, Hadrian's Wall, and Scotland. I'll never have the strength or courage of heart to engage again in that kind of long-distance hiking, but I'm so blessed that we did what we did. Great memories.

4 January. Today's meeting with Lisa, Coe's instructional technologist, was quite productive. She showed me how to use a Google image search for identifying flowers in photos. I had tried using a Bing program earlier this morning that had worked well last spring in identifying photos of Holy Land flowers, but it was not working for me this morning. Back home, using my own computer, I did several Google image searches and immediately identified flowers we saw at Mal Maison in November. In two instances the flowers were varieties of statice—a flower I started from seed 6-7 years ago without much success. In the next few days I'll work through the French photos and see if I can attach names to more flower faces.

This afternoon, after working on the Winter blog posting, I read two more chapters in *Artists Gardens* by Bill Laws. While it's not a particularly insightful or well-written book, it has impressive photos of the chosen gardens and he provides info on several artists for whom I knew nothing about their involvement with gardens (e.g., Henry Moore, Peter Paul Rubens). I have not yet discovered any explanation for the order of the chapters—certainly not chronological—or for how the chapters, each on a different artist, are thematically connected.

5 January. Yesterday I found a spelling error on the back of the calendar: "Repots" instead of "Reports." It is so hard for me to proofread carefully. An irritating, sloppy error. [*What is worse, for the 2024 calendar I simply copied the old back page text, forgetting about this error, and thus the same error reoccurs in the new calendar. Incompetence piled on incompetence.*] I'm hoping another small publication project will avoid such a simple mistake. My original plan was to create a Coe garden postcard using an illustration of two gardeners that I found in Hills 16th-century book on gardening. After it was assembled, the whole thing looked a bit crude, so I went online and

took a chance with a firm that would produce a hundred 4x6" cards with a glossy photo on the front and garden info on the back, all for a reasonable price. It took just a few minutes to do the entire design, using a photo of reticulated iris in the crevice garden.

"If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden."

~Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*

6 January. While driving to the post office today, I was listening to Charity Nebbe and her Horticulture Day program on NPR. I heard a reference to a Picnic Beetle—also called a Sap Beetle. From their conversation I understood that these are the tiny black beetles frequently eating the soft flesh of a tomato or raspberry in the fall months. Since there is no safe pesticide to control them, a gardener's best option is to keep the fruit area cleaned up and eliminate any over-ripe fruit. The frequent harvesting of fruit is particularly important for protecting raspberries. The Iowa State authority also suggested using decoys that will attract the beetles to fruit that you don't plan to harvest.

Using the Google image search I identified more flowers we saw on the trip to France. One was a white yarrow that I should have identified on my own. The big surprise was a seedhead photographed in a square near Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The software suggested it was a Jimson Weed, a plant growing outside the barn yard where my Dad milked his cows. I suspect the Paris seedhead is a cultivated Datura flower, a plant more likely to be found in a French garden.

8 January. This morning was something I've long been waiting for: the gardens at home and Coe were glistening in rime, a frozen fog covering everything. In magazine photos of fall and winter gardens, the editors always choose photographs of the plants resplendent with rime. The thin coating of ice does have a beautiful effect, and I'm hoping a few photos this morning capture that visual splendor.

14 January. Yesterday was Marlene's funeral. MVM played the piano (more accurately categorized as an electric appliance) for the service at Cedar Memorial. I sat in the balcony with MVM, occasionally letting her know what was happening. The service wasn't terrible, but nothing really happened. Most of us were simply going through the motions. I told MVM that when I died I did not want a funeral service, but it would be okay during a Sunday morning worship service to have someone light a candle in my memory and say a few words. I certainly would not want people to waste their time sitting in a fake chapel listening to a fake piano. One problem with the service is that the funeral home had not printed sufficient copies of music for the congregation and no one knew the first hymn, "Sunrise." MVM found the music in an old

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EUB hymnal, the denomination that evolved out of the church Marlene's family attended in Wisconsin. Marlene told folks it was her favorite hymn. Given the fact that no one knew the hymn, many didn't have the music, and there was no singer to lead the singing, the chapel was virtually silent, except for the "piano." We did better on the second hymn, "In the Garden," my mother's favorite hymn.

16 January. Today felt more like early spring than mid-winter. The temp was in the 40s and there was a thunderstorm in the afternoon with storm sirens blaring and a small tornado crossing I-80 near Williamsburg. It was perhaps fitting that my gardening today focused on vegetables. After several days of recalling last year's successes and failures, leafing through a dozen catalogs, and marking desired seeds, I spent four hours this afternoon online, placing my orders. I had intended to purchase a sizable number of seeds from Pinetree, but their website crashed on me, similar to the problem I had last year, so I ordered most of my seeds from Annie's Heirloom Seeds in Wisconsin, Baker Creek in Missouri, Johnny's in Maine, Territorial in Oregon, and Victory Seeds (originally in Oregon but I think they are now in Texas). With a couple of minor exceptions (e.g., Lillian's Yellow Heirloom tomato seeds), everything I wanted was still available.

17 January. Woke up at 4:15, a coughing fit. I tried to go back to sleep but finally gave up, got dressed, had a cup of hot tea and two doughnut holes, and worked on the remaining veggie seed orders. I created a new computer file listing all the seeds ordered yesterday, which helped clarify what was missing (e.g., no onion, cauliflower, or Brussel sprouts seeds). After breakfast, I went on line and ordered seeds from Botanical Interests, High Mowing, J. Scheepers, Totally Tomatoes, and Seeds 'n Such. I then filled in the computer file with the new seeds. Not completely finished but I have enough done so I can focus on my big flower seed order with Select Seeds.

In the afternoon to Coe, I cleaned up perennial flower beds in the SE corner. Although I left a multitude of plants and seedheads for visitors and wildlife, it's time to make the garden more a garden and less a nature preserve. I cut back all the Joe Pye (the seedheads are just skeletons), loosestrife, goldenrod (in some cases pulling up plants and roots), phlox, monarda, penstemon, and several members of the aster family. I cleaned up all the daylilies I could find and was surprised I did not uncover any signs of fresh growth. I trimmed the oregano in the herb bed. Although the grayish brown stems were not very attractive, the trimming released a great fragrance and uncovered many tiny green oregano leaves waiting for spring. Throughout the afternoon I saw no birds, no squirrels, no rabbits, though I did encounter a pile of rabbit turds. At street-level, the garden appears to be an empty village, but that would not be true in the underground garden.

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20 January. I spent most of the morning at Coe in the greenhouse. Finally, ten months after sewing the seeds, I potted the *Nicotiana*. It's amazing they survived my negligence and the weeks when there was no heat in the greenhouse. They've wilted innumerable times from lack of water while struggling to survive in small blocks of a germination mix, and yet miraculously they have endured, grown tall, bloomed, and even produced new seedlings. Come May, they may finally have their day in the sun. I recall the wonderful *Nicotiana* that self-seeded on the east side of our garage for several years, a lovely patch in one of the "E" beds at Coe, and last fall those tall *Nicotiana* at the Mal Maison palace outside of Paris. [*These Coe Nicotiana ended up in the "A1" bed along the garden's patio, and they did beautifully with fresh blooms through October. While hoping they might self-seed, I will sow fresh seeds this spring in the greenhouse and try them in several flower beds.*]

In the afternoon I worked in the garden studio and greenhouse here at home. In the greenhouse I set out two more yellow sticky sheets for trapping resident gnats. In the last week the sticky sheets have killed hundreds of these little pests. They are particularly thick around the daylily pots. Another task was potting the seedlings started on December 8. While I lost some to the freezing weather in December, most have bounced back. Today I transplanted six basil (all big leaf varieties): the two smallest I put in cowpots; the others with more developed root systems were planted in 3" plastic pots. Tomorrow I'll do the same with the remaining basil and flowers, including several nice-looking lupine.

Another task this afternoon was sorting new vegetable seeds. Today I received shipments from Territorial, High Mowing, and Johnny's. It's always exciting when opening the seed orders and sorting the seeds into the two seed boxes. There is so much promise in a seed—all that potential stored within such a small, modest "thing." As for the old seeds from '21, the majority were sent to the compost, though I kept about 15 oldies that might still be viable.

*Black berries / Were what we wanted / The woman at the nursery
Said we needed / One male plant and one female
How far apart should we plant them? / At least six feet
And how close? / Within twenty but not around a corner
They need to see each other / To talk to each other*

~Lauren Moseley

21 January. Finally completed a big seed order to Select Seeds for flowers, including cosmos (multiple cosmos varieties), delphinium, morning glory, nasturtium, nicotiana, foxglove, zinnia (a lot of zinnias), daisies, dahlias, sunflowers, gomphrena, etc. As always, I ordered far more seeds than I can ever use, but I relish the imaginative pleasure of seeing in my mind all those flowers in full bloom in different gardens.

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27 January. Not much gardening the last three days. It's been classic January weather: periodic light snow, temp hovering in the 20s, occasional climbing into the low 30s, then dipping into the teens. Sub-zero weather forecast for early next week. While thinking about a future garden blog post, I began reflecting on how a serious engagement with gardening can involve such a wide-range of interests. It's like all of human culture and history is intertwined with gardens and horticulture. To study gardening is to study:

biology	chemistry	agriculture
horticulture	weather/climate	geography
economics	leisure & recreation	social & cultural history
health sciences	religion	art & aesthetics
literature	aesthetics	philosophy
travel	political history	cooking/cuisine
folklore	psychology	languages (e.g., Latin)
mathematics	geology	and, of course, rhetoric :)

A remarkable list—and I'm sure incomplete.

I've been thinking about the seasonal rhythms of vegetable gardening and where the seasonal divisions occur. A couple years ago, I noted how we might divide a year into 100 seasons, every 3-4 days a new point in the evolution of the year, subtly shifting from year to year, dependent on weather, impact of wildlife, etc. In terms of vegetable gardening in Iowa, I would suggest six seasons with these starting dates:

March 1: A liminal season, mixing winter and spring; sowing seeds and starting plants in the greenhouse, preparation of beds, early spring planting.

May 15: A liminal season, mixing spring and summer; transplanting and seed sowing of main summer crops, some initial harvests (e.g., greens, radishes, berries).

July 1: Summer, two months of peak summer harvest; many hot and dry days that may require watering and weeding.

September 1: A liminal season, mixing summer and fall; return of moderate temperatures, fall harvest, preparing for the first freeze.

October 15: A liminal season, Indian summer, mixing fall and winter; spring-flower bulb planting, dividing and transplanting perennials, closing down the garden after first frost, final harvests, preparation for winter.

December 1: Three months of winter; most gardening done indoors; planning next year's garden, ordering seeds, garden reading and writing projects, caring for a few plants brought inside during the winter (e.g., rosemary, potted trees & shrubs), first indoor seed sowing in February, shrub pruning and outdoor maintenance work on nice days.

28 January. A soft, gentle snow all day. It was quite cold so the snow was light and easy to shovel from the driveway. We had intended to drive to Iowa City for K's birthday, but the snow and wind convinced us to stay at home. While shoveling the drive this evening, I took a few moments to look at the snow in the front garden. The plants and trees were surrounded by a smooth, wind-polished, tight-fitting snowpack. I was impressed with the tall stonecrop. It's remarkable how well they deal with the snow and winter wind. The two arbor vita and the privet also look quite attractive in this weather. This is a season when the front garden is at its best, many distractions and minor plants eliminated, everything reduced to a few key plants, shrubs, and ornamental grasses. Minimalism at its best. Lean, unadorned, no frills.

30 January. Temp is below zero. About 9 p.m. I walked back to the greenhouse and discovered the temp was 34F, with a space heater going non-stop. Earlier today I moved the space heater I don't use from the studio to the greenhouse, thinking it was a stronger heater, but I now suspect the replacement is no improvement. Because of the low greenhouse temp, I moved two trays with flowers and basil into the insulated studio, which is set at 50F. Some basil leaves look as though they were frostbitten last night. I also placed the peace lilies together on a heating pad to give them a little more warmth.

This morning I went to Coe and shot some photos. I was expecting the garden to look rather pristine, but a couple visitors entered the garden's unlocked SW gate, traipsed through the snow (4-5" deep), circled around the fountain, and found their way to the gazebo. When I followed their trail to the gazebo, the thermometer claimed the temp was 60F! Although the thermometer was in the sun, I find it impossible to believe it was 55 degrees warmer in the gazebo than out in the garden. I may need to invest in a new thermometer.

1 February. This afternoon I finished composing the MMGR for 23 January—an annotated commentary on the annual flower seeds purchased from Select Seeds, four pages long. After posting the draft, I read through it for purpose of inserting italics and bold, and of course found various editing errors and many passages begging for stylistic improvements. Intriguing how you can go over and over a text and keep finding problems and infelicities previously not seen or heard. The hearing is critical in a final editing because one must depend on the ear catching phrasing problems as one tries to adopt a more “natural” reading speed and rhythm. But it's “finally” posted. Tomorrow I'll start another MMGR for January's final Monday.

This morning I discovered in the greenhouse at home that a jug of water had frozen. Even with the heater going non-stop, 24 hours a day, the temp in the greenhouse the last two nights has gone below freezing. The inadequate insulation means I can't use the greenhouse at home for tender plants during the winter months. Fortunately, the Coe greenhouse is smaller, better protected, and sharing a wall with the heated shed. Although not insulated, the greenhouse

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with its small space heater always remains above 40. Tomorrow I may move some flower trays to Coe and my February seed sowing will be at Coe. Next year I'll let the greenhouse at home go cold for three months, use it for a few seeds that desire cold stratification, and wait until March to use it for the vegetable and flower seed sowing that requires consistent warmth.

*You see a woman of a certain age,
not old, yet seeing every sign
of how the world will change her.
More and more, you'll find her in the garden
but not for onions or potatoes.
She wants blooms, color,
a breaking in the earth's disorder.
Swollen branch, the right bird—
they can make her cry.*

~ from "Earth" by Cleopatra Mathis

3 February. Today I made some progress on the France trip blog post. I eliminated unnecessary photos and wrote introductions for two sections and photo captions for three slideshows, including the Omaha Beach cemetery and the small French village with the community potager. All this should have been done two months ago, but for whatever reason it was a project that did not inspire my enthusiasm until after I had finished the Winter Kalendar and posted the last two MMGR pieces. One particular pleasure today was using Google to confirm that the large yellow blossoms along a parking lot at Omaha Beach were of a St. John's Wort. The blossoms are much larger than anything I've seen here at home, but the structure of the flowers and the surrounding foliage indicated an accurate identification.

4 February. The Select Seeds order arrived, and this evening I sorted the seed packets into six groups: seeds to sow indoors in the next month; seeds to sow indoors about April 1; seeds to refrigerate for two weeks before sowing; seeds to start indoors in late April; seeds to sow outdoors about April 1, and seeds to sow outdoors after no danger of a May freeze. Tomorrow I'll blend these seeds with the seeds from Swallowtail, Baker Creek, Annie's, J. Scheepers, etc. Next week the first seed sowing of 2023 will commence.

7 February. First snowdrop bloom of the year—a single snowdrop in the patio bed. A lot of snow melted yesterday and today. The north-sloping back garden still has a veneer of ice/snow, but most of the garden at Coe is snow free. More snow in the forecast but predicted temperatures to remain moderate so whatever snow falls won't last long. There is still a huge

pile of ice/snow at Coe's NW gate, so this afternoon I shoveled snow for 30 minutes, spreading it across the "M" beds, which were 99% snow free. The perennial flower beds look rather rough—old, dead plant tops beaten down by January's weather. It's time for serious "bed maintenance"—my current euphemism for "cleaning up" the beds.

Most of my work today at Coe was preparing to sow flower seeds—and I actually sowed three packets of seeds. I prepared 50 seed blocks, using a bag of seed-starting mix with peat. It forms decent, cohesive blocks, though a little lighter than those made with Johnny's mix. I sowed these seed varieties, all from Select Seeds:

- Phlox 'Sugar Stars' (*P. drummondii*): 30 seeds in 15 blocks.
- Painted Tongue 'Gloomy Rival' (*Salpiglossis sinata*): 15 blocks, very small black seeds; the first time I've ever sown this genus.
- Globe Amaranth 'White' (*Gomphrena globosa*). 20 blocks, plus I sprinkled the remaining seeds in a large pot with potting soil and covered the seeds with a thin layer of vermiculite. In prepping the seeds, I soaked them in warm water for four hours. Since these seeds prefer germinating in the dark, I covered the seeds with a cloth laid over a manila folder. [*The gomphrena were one of the summer's best success stories; had a high percentage of germination and the lovely white blooms on the robust plants lasted into the late fall and became quite attractive dried flowers.*]

8 February. Three glorious hours working in the Coe garden, focused on sprucing up the "C" bed and removing old, unwanted vegetation. The most pleasant task was trimming the *Nepeta*, releasing its pleasing mint fragrance. The most time-consuming was cutting back the Siberian iris, which often resists my pruning tools. The long, gray Clauss scissors work the best. With the daylilies, I could usually just pull away the old foliage, revealing a lot of fresh growth. I trimmed the yellow yarrow, removing many woody stems well-past their prime. I would like to have removed many tufts of grass, but the soil is frozen, making it impossible to pull up the roots. I cut back all the penstemon stems and the tall stonecrops beaten down by the recent snowstorms. I cut back all the cranesbill, leaving for later the removal of volunteer clumps mixed in with the daylilies. In one area the cranesbill and Siberian iris are intimately intertwined. The entire area needs to be dug up so I can impose a divorce on this undesirable matrimony. The gayfeathers were stripped clean of their seeds, and I felt no hesitancy in cutting them to the ground. I also cut back a large clump of coreopsis. I left untouched the zebra miscanthus and the unnamed ornamental grass in the NE corner of the bed. Throughout the afternoon, I spotted several *Galanthus* breaking through and preparing to bloom.

*What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,*

*O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds, and the wilderness yet.*
~Gerard Manley Hopkins

12 February. Just finished watching 15 minutes in the first quarter of the Super Bowl, game tied (Chiefs and Eagles), 7-7. I assume additional points will be scored as the game proceeds and one team will score more points than the other. I would prefer a Midwest team with Kansas in its name to emerge as the winner, but who wins is really not very important—in comparison to over 20,000 dead in a recent earthquake in Turkey and the Russian bombardment of Ukraine. I'll watch more later tonight.

It was a lovely day for gardening, temp into the 40s. Still a ton of snow in the back garden but it's melting. This afternoon I trimmed the catmint, hyssop, and *Asclepias* in the patio bed. I carted most of the old foliage back to the big compost pile, which is almost full. The patio bed has a nice clump of snowdrops in bloom and many more emerging. The soil is mostly frozen so I was unable to remove any grass or artemisia.

13 February. In case all documents from the 21st century, with the exception of this garden journal, are destroyed in a catastrophic nuclear war, let it be noted that Kansas City won the 2023 Super Bowl. Truth be told, I have fond memories of being in the army in the winter of 1970, stationed at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, and three of us reserved a hotel room on a weekend so we could watch the Super Bowl. As I recall, Kansas City defeated the Minnesota Vikings.

As for gardening, I worked at home this morning, mostly on website posts, then in the afternoon at Coe, engaged in "L" bed maintenance. I cut back almost everything, except for several tall stonecrop that are still in good shape and the tall miscanthus with its attractive seed plumes. Since I've had no luck finding the original daylily map for the "C" and "L" beds, I decided to see how many old zinc labels I could find. Several that I uncovered were illegible, but enough had sufficient decipherable text so I could authenticate 13 names, far more than I would have thought possible. I have enough information to create a new daylily map, though it will have several blank spaces.

18 February. Wednesday night after my last journal entry, the snowstorm arrived and it continued snowing through Thursday. We ended up with more than 6" and twice I had to shovel a path to the garden studio. No outdoor gardening, but it was a great day for working in the studio, completing a draft of the annotated bibliography blog post. This morning my primary accomplishment was ordering a dozen half-price plants from Bluestone. Before choosing a plant, I tried to determine where I would place it upon arrival in May, foreseeing

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that once the plants were in my hands, I would immediately start imagining other locations.

Here are the plants I ordered and the intended flower beds:

- Veronica Bicolor & Veronica Aspire (two plants): Long West Bed here at home. [*That is where they were planted but neither survived the summer.*]
- Salvia Perfect Profusion and Lychnis Petite Jenny (2 plants): Middle of the Long East bed. [*Both were planted in that bed; the salvia did quite well, but I'm not sure what happened to the lychnis.*]
- Kniphofia Hot & Cold (3 plants): I keep trying to find a red hot poker that will survive Iowa winters; I'll try these in the "C" bed with the daylilies. [*I don't recall my rationale but I ended up planting these in the "A1" WFS bed; they all looked quite healthy in October, but I don't yet know if they will revive this spring.*]
- Geranium Boom Chocolate (1 plant): Another cranesbill for the border of the SE Triangle bed here at home. [*That's where the geranium was planted and still had fresh foliage in the fall, but I have no recollection that it ever bloomed.*]
- Dianthus Stargazer & Apple Blossom Burst (3 plants). These are intended for the borders in the "C" and "L" beds to go with the well-established dianthus already in these two beds. [*I started to plant the dianthus in those beds but finally decided there was insufficient space. Several years ago I planted two dianthus in a raised "J" bed. They have done very well and nicely complement the surrounding snow-in-summer, so I planted these new dianthus in the two raised "J" beds. None of them bloomed last summer, but they grew fresh foliage and appeared to be healthy.*]
- Coreopsis Starlight & Coreopsis Barry Chiffon (2 plants). These perennial coreopsis should go well with the coreopsis already growing in the two triangle beds. [*I did plant them at home but switched them to the patio bed.*]
- Clematis Jackmani (1 plant): Probably place at the entrance to the Labyrinth at Buffalo. [*This is the one plant from Bluestone that did not arrive in good shape; it appeared to be a recent transplant and had lost a lot of soil prior to arriving in Iowa; I tried to revive it in the greenhouse, but it was dead by the middle of May.*]
- Aster Alma Potschke (1 plant): I'll try this aster in the middle of the "T" or "K" border at Coe. [*I have no record where I planted this aster or what happened to it.*]
- Anemone Pocahontas (3 plants): Intended for the "A2" bed. [*They were planted in the "A2" bed, replacing several anemone that had died the previous year; two of these plants had moderate growth through the summer and produced a few blooms in the fall; the third plant was pulled out of the ground several times by an animal (perhaps a coon attracted to the organic fertilizer under the plant) and was dead by the middle of the summer.*]

21 February. My old laptop finally died, a computer on which I had edited thousands of garden photos—and also played thousands of "hands" of Free Cell. The computer went on many May Term and Writing Center trips, including at least two trips to the Lake District. On the home

page screen was a photo of an enormous black snail we encountered on a walk in the Langdales. The computer was purchased in 2002 or 03, so it lasted two decades. For many years I've kept this computer on the barrel desk in the Library, but now that the laptop has departed, I've decided to use this barrel desk as my journal-writing table and see what it's like composing my thoughts while sitting at a real desk. Not sure if this is permanent, but so far, it feels good. Composing journal entries in a library has the right vibes.

On Sunday K & the grandkids came here for the afternoon. While sitting in the Library's rocking chair, I held Aurelia for almost two hours. She was asleep the entire time. I did nothing but hold her and rock her. I made no attempt to read or do anything else. No multi-tasking. Later Theo wanted to drive his dump truck around the back garden so we went outside, and I pruned dead foliage while he circled around the interweaving paths. No designed to be a playground for a four-year old, but it has turned out that the layout is perfect for a boy with a Theisen's dump truck. Most of the paths were free of snow. There were just a few spots along the oval beds and the big maple bed where the truck needed to become a snow plow. He did a great job as a truck driver, and I did a lot of pruning. My only frustration was that the soil is frozen so I couldn't dig up any of the excess goldenrod, and I don't want to trim them down any further because in the spring I can't reliably distinguish between the goldenrod (which in many instances I want to remove) and the phlox and coneflowers (which in most instances I want to keep). One large Canada goldenrod colony deserving removal is in the comfrey bed, which last year was overrun by goldenrod. My current plan is to convert the back of the bed to comfrey and turtlehead (expanding the small patch of *Chelone* next to the stumpery). There's also a lot of miscellaneous vegetation (e.g., mint, ground ivy) in the stumpery that should be removed, but I must wait for warmer weather.

*Going outside to weed and catching a poppy opening—
the little paper cap enclosing it*

starting to split—

*You really could see it—bud unfurling—if you were
still enough, if you were close—*

~from "Golden Poppy" by Dana Levin

23 February. An ice storm arrived yesterday morning. Fortunately the temp was in the low 30s, preventing any thick layers of ice. But Coe, including the Library, was closed today. Most of my work was church-related, with several hours composing, assembling, and editing the March Newsletter. I also posted a Bison Blog, the sixth this year, so I'm close to averaging one blog

posting per week. I've also done okay on keeping up with the Midweek Devotions, posting every Tuesday. I like the format of those postings, and I continue to find them enjoyable.

Today I was reading Jane Brown's *Eminent Gardeners: Some People of Influence and Their Gardens 1880-1980*. A skilled writer, Brown effectively portrays these British gardeners. I find the book interesting, but I'm a bit worn out spending so much time with the English upper-class, these "people of influence." Endless name dropping with everyone moving in the same privileged circles. Of course, they were the ones who had the wealth and leisure to create the gardens that I find so attractive and inspiring.

One passage caught my attention this evening as Brown discussed the disastrous deterioration of the environment and the problems we must now deal with—climate change, destruction of rain forests, pollution of water and land, acid rain, etc. All these huge problems, beyond the ability of any single individual to change the inexorable drift of these problems. And yet we have no choice but to act on the assumption that "the battle begins at home. A lovely garden is a protest." That's a great sentence—and I plan on continuing to act as if it's true, my gardens a means of protest.

24 February. After posting last week's MMGR, I sowed 50 blocks of basil. I had sown some in January, but most of those froze, so today I tried again with five different varieties, ten blocks each.

- Opal (Pinetree Seeds): Seeds probably two years old; the packet had gotten damp (condensation from greenhouse plexiglass) so they needed to be planted. The Opal is grown for both culinary and ornamental reasons; it should have deep purple leaves and be a nice addition to the "E" herb bed.
- Medinette (Richters). These seeds are also two years old; advertised as a compact variety, good for pots, dark green leaves, slow to bolt, sweet & mild flavor.
- Red Genovessa (Richters). Described as the oldest variety of large, purple leaf Genovese.
- African Nunum (Baker Creek). This is an *Ocimum gratissimum*; the other basil varieties are variations of *Ocimum basilicum*. This basil from Ghana did very well last year in the big cloth raised bed behind the garage; the catalog claims it has an oregano flavor, which I don't recall; known for its medicinal and anti-bacterial properties and excellent as a basil pesto.
- Basil Everleaf Thai Towers (Richters). I grew this basil two years ago and it was marvelous; notable for its tall, erect growth; it flowered quite late and was slow to bolt; very productive, with vibrant flavor. [*This Thai basil was also my top performing basil in 2023; beautiful, tall, erect plants producing fresh leaves into October. The African Nunum and Opal also did quite well through the summer.*]

25 February. At Coe this afternoon. Watered plants in the greenhouse. Many of the new gypsophilia have become leggy, even though they are directly under a grow light. A few were also limp, but a good watering should revive them. After watering most of the flower trays (including the tray of lavender, where some old seeds sown last week have germinated), I chopped up vegetable scraps for the red wigglers, who appear to be doing okay. My next indoor job was sowing *Delphinium x belladonna* 'Cliveden Beauty.' These are older seeds packaged for '21. I removed the seeds from a moist paper towel that had been in the frig for the last two weeks and sowed 40 seed blocks, 2-3 small black seeds per block. After covering the seeds with a thin layer of fine vermiculite, I put them on a heating pad, gave them a plastic dome, and turned them over to God. Tomorrow I'll find another set of seeds for the remaining ten blocks in the tray. [*This was a total failure: zero germination with the delphinium seeds.*]

Spent about two hours working in the "K" bed and the area behind the NW bench. Cut down all the tall miscanthus behind the bench—which did not produce any seed plumes this year, perhaps because in the middle of the summer I cut the grass back so the stalks would not grow so tall. It has again expanded into the yews and needs to be dug out, a nasty job because of their rock-like root system. It's a terrible location for that grass under the flowering crab apple. One option would be to cover the area with a weed control fabric, lay down a layer of mulch for a couple of years, and plant hostas or some other attractive shade plants after the miscanthus has been starved to death.

As for the "K" bed, I cut back almost everything on the west end: New England asters, Joe Pye weeds, coneflowers, amsonias, aromatic asters. I removed dead foliage from the lungwort, Lancaster cranesbill, and lambs ear—all with new green leaves. I cut back the solitary painted daisy (a cultivar with bright red petals) that somehow has survived for the past 4-5 years. I did not trim the Hakone grass nor the grass with the bullet-shaped seedheads, both of which are still reasonably attractive.

26 February. A beautiful afternoon, sunshine, temp into the 50s, minimal wind, great working conditions; spent almost five hours in the Coe garden, nearly all maintenance. Started by raking the "L" bed and area behind the NW bench, picking up miscanthus remnants, all slow work. I then shifted to the crevice garden, thinking the leaves and old foliage needed to be removed so the reticulated iris and sedums could emerge without unnecessary impediments. I cut back the big thyme (a delightful task with its vibrant thyme fragrance) and several coneflowers, plants which need to be permanently removed. They are too tall to fit well with the other flora in this bed. I removed all the myrtle spurge from the front of the bed. I thought I removed all this spurge last summer but that clearly was not the case. To remove the leaves, I hooked up the leaf vacuum and filled two bags, populated by three varieties of oak leaves that had blown in from campus frees. As for the other end of the "M2" bed, I pulled up all the Baptisia and removed

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most of the tall perennial sunflowers, although their small, tight, round seedheads were still quite attractive. I also cut back the herb—whose name I can never remember, though I know it starts with an “n”—that has set up shop in the gravel walkway around the foot of the Rising Sun sculpture. I concluded my Coe gardening by tackling the middle of the “K” bed, cutting down the aromatic asters, coneflowers, and *Platycodon*. At the front of the border I trimmed the cranesbill and dead foliage from the lamb’s ear. The “K” bed now looks much tidier—and easier to see the emerging daffodils.

A day so happy.

Fog lifted early, I worked in the garden.

Hummingbirds were stopping over honeysuckle flowers.

There was no thing on earth I wanted to possess.

I knew no one worth my envying him.

~from “Gift” by Czeslaw Milosz

27 February. Tomorrow I pick up the Chevy S-10 from storage. Wonderful to have it returning home after its three-month vacation. Beginning this week, I intend to experiment with a flower/plant of the week on the garden website home page—just a photo and a brief caption. Perhaps I can create a new posting each Monday, comparable to my weekly postings of the Midweek Devotions on the church website. [*A partial success. A year later I’m still posting a flower/plant of the week, but averaging two plants a month, about the same rate as my MMGR postings. Despite its irregularity, it does keep me thinking about what’s happening in the garden and what might be of interest to prospective visitors. The garden website only averages five-ten visitors per week, so it’s not likely any of my postings will have much impact on anyone. I’ll just continue to do it for my own pleasure.*]

28 February. As I was entering the Coe garden this afternoon, I was struck by how “big” the garden looked. My removal of so much old vegetation in the past week had broadened the garden, making it look wider, roomier, more open, and more appealing. It’s fascinating the visual impact of such routine maintenance. Still a lot to do. The “I” bed is a mess: the tall asters and goldenrod are bent over and quite disheveled, plus the metal obelisk plant support is tipped over and leaning against a yew. The “I” and “J” bed are next on my to-do list. Perhaps once they are spruced up, I can consider a good, full view photo of the garden. I finished this afternoon by working in the front border of the “G” bed, trimming the Siberian Iris. Last year’s orange leaves don’t like to be cut. The process works best when I grab a handful of spears and pull them tight with my left hand while I cut them with the gray Clauss scissors. But it’s an awkward procedure . . . and hard on my back.

1 March. Note on Japanese anemones. Yesterday I read a few pages from a book on good perennials for Midwest gardens. The author noted that Japanese anemones require soil that drains well and they hate wet winter soil. The “A2” bed where the anemones currently reside does not drain well and may explain why several anemone died last winter. Since their blooms are so beautiful in that space, one option is to raise the bed and improve the drainage with biochar, organic matter, and vermiculite. Another option is to move them to another location—for example, the west end of the “A1” bed, currently inhabited by a few stray hostas and elderberry suckers. I might also redo the raised area of the “A1” bed, the short goldenrod trading places with the anemones. A third option is the middle of the “M1” bed, once the useless, non-blooming rose bush has been removed. There might be enough space for 3-5 anemones and another group at the west end where some hostas reside. The anemones could complement the Baptisia that run along the back of that bed. Another option in that space is experimenting with cosmos—not a perennial but they could provide a lovely summer/fall “welcome” for visitors entering through the NW gate.

4 March. This afternoon in the greenhouse I prepared 18 cowpots with my soil mix and then sowed six pots, averaging 3-5 seeds/pot, of the following seeds, all the seeds quite small, all surface sown, all purchased earlier this year from Select Seeds:

- Rusty Foxglove ‘Gigantea Gelber Herold’ (*Digitalis ferruginea*)
- Foxglove ‘Dalmatian White’ (*Digitalis purpurea*)
- Foxglove ‘Sunset’ (*Digitalis obscura*)

I’m hoping that with these new foxglove in the Coe greenhouse and a couple planted last fall in the “D” bed, I can create several areas with a mid-border population of foxgloves. I’ve failed to achieve that goal to date, but an English-style garden needs foxgloves on display. I have such warm memories of hiking in Cumbria and along Hadrian’s Wall, periodically encountering the wild foxglove with the magenta blooms. I also hope to establish foxgloves at home in the Long East, the Long West, and the Old Maple flower beds. I might also plant *Digitalis* in the Comfrey bed next to the Stumpery, once the Canada goldenrod has been evacuated.

I finished the Coe garden work by trimming in the “H” bed old plant stems and foliage of gooseneck, New England asters, and Siberian iris. This area is rather wild and unkempt, and I gravitate toward allowing the area to take care of itself, leaving the dead vegetation as a natural humus builder. Despite the benefits of allowing nature to take its own course and adhere to its own time schedule, I feel compelled to try and convince the area to appear more civilized. While I was reflecting on such matters, I was being watched by the garden’s cottontail, about ten feet from where I was working. Perhaps he was trying to comprehend what I was doing. He seems quite tame and only moves away when I get within a few feet. I would like to know what

he eats. I know he likes the clover in the lawn. At least for today, he was not eating the emerging crocus.

Everybody's an expert in somebody else's business. I do not want to be any busier than my basil plant, swallowing the sun, the soil, the errant water. We suppose we know a thing or two about botany, about the intelligence of leaf, stem, root. Have you noticed the way plants lean, as though longing for news from a neighbor, a song, a touch, just a little touch.

~from "Closing In" by Jason Myers

7 March. A good gardening day. A bit cool, temp in mid 40s, distinct breeze, overcast. In the morning at Coe I trimmed plants in the "M1" bed (mostly sedum and honeysuckle). Then to the greenhouse where I filled two shallow plastic containers with a thin layer of my potting soil mix and a layer of fine vermiculite. Sowed about 40 balsam seeds, sprinkled on a light dusting of vermiculite, and covered the containers with a plastic dome that came with a Hy-Vee Chinese meal, confirming my commitment to recycling. I had a good rate of germination last year with the balsam seeds in vermiculite. We'll see how it works this year. [*Two years in a row—excellent percentage of germination.*]

In the afternoon I was at home in the back garden. After some maintenance in the Long East bed (e.g., pulling up *Baptisia*), I focused on the Long West bed. I began by cutting back the long border row of Siberian iris, using my new Clauss titanium hand scissors. I raked most of the bed, revealing many emerging daffodils. While weeding, I lost my hori-hori knife, shortly after I used it to dig up and replant several daffodils. I searched and searched without success. Very frustrating and inexplicable. After supper I drove to Ace to buy anti-critter pellets (to protect the crocus in the lawn at Coe) and purchased a new Fiskars hori-hori. Maybe tomorrow I'll find the missing knife. [*Alas, the mystery remains unsolved. I never did find it.*]

March 8. Another good gardening day. Sky remained overcast, temp perhaps reaching 40, but no rain. At Coe a few snowdrops in the SE lawn section are blooming. I'm pleasantly surprised how well the small white blooms show up in the grass. I've undervalued their potential for lawn naturalization. I should plant more next fall. [*In November I did plant another 200 snowdrop bulbs in the two east-side lawn quadrants.*]

Back at home, I raked “clean” the rhubarb bed and re-positioned some chives. I left one clump in place, but the other large clump I dug up, separated into four smaller clusters, attempted to remove all the grass and weed roots, and replanted the new clumps to create a more symmetrical 3-2 arrangement. The bed looks much better. The rest of the morning was in the garden studio, drafting this week’s MMGR and editing a garden shed post.

While in the garden today, I was thinking about how so much of gardening requires one’s focus on the future. I do various jobs—such as removing old foliage or pruning shrubs or sowing seeds—so the garden will look good or be productive in the future. One must always be thinking about where we are in the year’s seasonal cycle. In the next few days, I will sow eggplant seeds because they need to be ready for transplanting the last two weeks in May. If the seeds are not sown in March, no eggplants in August. On the other hand, there are many instances when I’m so engaged in a gardening task that I’m oblivious to the future and—at least at the conscious level—quite present-focused. When I walked into the back garden this morning, I had no plans for rhubarb maintenance or replanting the chives. I had no plans. I knew there was plenty of work, and I would find something worth doing. I walked by the rhubarb bed, saw that it needed attention, and with no further thought I decided what I was going to do. While cleaning up the rhubarb bed, my mind may have wandered through different time zones, but I was primarily in the present—whether carrying rhubarb foliage to the compost bin or creating holes for four clumps of freshly minted chive segments. Throughout that half hour, I didn’t think about my health or Presidential politics: I just attended to the immediate task at hand. Part of this absorption in present time is a back-of-the-mind understanding that no matter how hard I work, the garden is always incomplete and in transition: the gardener’s work is never finished, only abandoned at the end of each day. Since my livelihood does not depend on harvesting a cash crop to be sold for a good price, I’m free to garden as an end unto itself, blissfully free of economics and politics—assuming, of course, I’m lucky enough to live in a state that allows individuals to have such hobbies and lucky enough to have sufficient income to engage in such hobbies. I’m the beneficiary of unimaginable good fortune, allowing me all these hours of private, time-free joy.

9 March. Cleared about ten small areas in the Long West bed, removing grass and sorrel—and inadvertently chopping off the tops of several submerged daffodils. In those small islands, I sowed California Golden poppy seeds mixed with fine vermiculite. The Swallowtail Seeds instructions said to press seeds into the soil by “walking over the area” —and so I followed their directions. [*Alas, to no avail; I don’t believe the seed sowing produced a single poppy.*]

In the greenhouse I filled 18 cowpots with soil mix and sowed eggplant seeds, two seeds per pot, three varieties: Millionaire, Long, Purple, and Listada de gandia—an Italian, French, or Spanish heirloom, depending on different seed supplier blurbs. I suspect a Spanish origin since

Gandia is a Spanish city on the Mediterranean coast. I set the trays on a heat pad and covered with a plastic done. In the garden studio I revised this week's MMGR, typed notes/quotes from *Braiding Sweet Grass*, and read about twenty pages in the Rhys Vegetable book, mostly on potatoes. The book provides an excellent historical overview of potatoes and a fascinating ten pages of photographs with brief paragraphs on dozens of varieties. Rhys is written for British gardeners, and not a single variety he describes matches with any potato varieties I've ever seen in Iowa. The diversity of potatoes is staggering.

This week's MMGR focused on old plants in the "G" bed. This evening I decided to try and determine the identity of the two old rose bushes in the "G" and "H" perennial beds. Doing a Google search on a photo of the blooms, I was told it was most likely a Rugosa Rose. I was not initially convinced, though most of the characteristics did match: large shrub rose, blooms from summer into fall, straight and sturdy canes, expands via suckers, disease free, not bothered by drought or cold, etc. All those characteristics were on target. The problem was that to my eye the blooms did not match: while the Google photos showed single petal blooms, the two Coe roses have double blooms with 15 or more petals. But while pondering this issue, I saw a link to a Dutch hybrid, first marketed over 100 years ago, and the photo images matched perfectly. I had found the Coe rose.

In childhood, I talked to plants because I sympathized with them, stuck in their pots or soil, unable to walk away. Now I talk to them with a bit of poetic performance or ritual, even in secret. Though I have no idea if "experience" is the right word, I would like the plants to experience what I am able to offer as I try to take back some of the harm my human footprint might have caused on the planet.

~from "Reaching Past the Human" by Brenda Hillman

10 March. This morning I watered plants in the Coe greenhouse. I had received a new thumb pot in the mail, only to discover it has several design flaws. Unlike my ceramic thumbpot, this new one is lightweight and darn near impossible to fill with water. It's also much smaller than my ceramic water sprinkler and even when full doesn't hold much water. I will continue looking.

I was surprised to discover that a flat with 50 seed blocks, prepared just a week ago, already had close to 100% germination. Unfortunately I had not prepared any labels for these seedlings, and I could not remember what seeds were planted in this tray. Fortunately, I found the seed packet with my notes indicating that on March 6 I had sown 50 blocks of African Daisy 'Polar Star' (*Dimorpho theca pluvialis*). The Select Seeds packet stated the seeds should germinate in 10-20 days. These seeds germinated in five days. Apparently, the temp, light, soil, & moisture were near perfect conditions.

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In organizing this year's vegetable seed orders, I had failed to order the yellow watermelons (yellow on outside, red interiors) that were so productive and delicious in the 2022 West Field. My oversight occurred because I could not remember the melon's name. Going through last year's empty seed packets, I eventually stumbled upon a packet for Faerie F1 melons, purchased from Totally Tomatoes. I also discovered that this year, ten seeds of this watermelon would cost over \$6. Not wanting to pay that much for ten seeds, I went online and discovered the seeds for half that price were available from a company called GNSEED. While looking through their website, I found a variety of flower seeds that caught my attention and I eventually submitted a \$60 order for 15 different seed varieties, mostly annual flowers but also a basil and an intriguing red carrot. I knew nothing about the company, but they did have a lovely website that was easy to navigate. They also sell an assortment of diverse orchid seeds for plants that produce quite exotic looking blossoms. Orchids, however, are far too challenging for my modest horticultural skills. Perhaps in my next retirement, I'll take up orchids. *[When I initially made this impetuous internet seed order, I had not taken the time to find out where GNSEED was located. When I received a confirmation of the order, I was surprised by the company's estimation of a long delay before the seeds would be delivered. It was not easy but upon further research, I determined that the company was located in China and the seeds would be shipped from China. And indeed, over a month later, I received a package with a Chinese post mark. All the seeds were in small plastic bags with the name of each seed and no further information about the seeds or the company. As it turned out, all the seeds proved to be viable, and I ended with two 10' rows of delicious Faerie F1 watermelons.]*

12 March. First day of Daylight Savings so my internal clock needs adjusting. It was a chilly, overcast Sunday, the ground still snow-covered so no outdoor gardening. Most of my day after church was in the garden studio and greenhouse, where I sowed 50 blocks of four vegetables: Lesya peppers (Baker Creek, 15 blocks), Ping Tung Long Eggplant (Southern Exposure, 10 blocks), Buena Mulata peppers (Baker Creek, 10 blocks), and Calabrese Broccoli (Annie's Heirloom, 15 blocks). For my seed blocks I used my germination recipe of coco coir and vermiculite mixed with a Maine Woods seed-sowing product that uses peat and perlite. The Maine Woods formula reminds me of the germination mix from Johnny's Seeds, which is also from Maine and blends peat with perlite. Both create blocks that hold together nicely and are easy to work with; however, the Maine Woods product is cheaper and comes in smaller-sized bags.

15 March. In the afternoon I drove to Wickiup garden, the first trip this spring. It was a perfect day for early spring gardening. Overcast, temp in low 50s, a bit breezy but quite comfortable. Worked for about four hours, all maintenance tasks. I cleaned up the pole bean remnants from the trellises. Pulled up the sunflower stalks (some over 10' tall) and placed them on Marty's

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bonfire pile. Pulled up and dumped into the West Field compost bins the marigold stalks and the tall goldenrod. Removed the white nylon netting that had been protecting the sweet corn in the S3 bed and stored it in the shed. As for the black plastic netting, I rolled it up and threw it in the pickup for permanent disposal in the city's garbage system. While in the garden, I saw many piles of old rabbit pellets, but I never saw any evidence of deer. Overall, the garden looked in decent condition. I was surprised to see so many volunteer garlic popping up in last year's garlic beds. I obviously missed some bulbs when harvesting them last fall.

21 March. Yesterday I sowed 26 varieties of tomatoes in 150 seed blocks (probably a personal one-day record for tomato seed sowing), and today I sowed another seven varieties in 50 seed blocks. Here is a list of tomato varieties with name of seed source; most varieties got five seed blocks but a "10" identifies the tomatoes with 10 blocks. The word "new" identifies those varieties that I've never previously planted. *[I've inserted an asterisk after the tomato varieties that produced significant numbers of high quality tomatoes in the 2023 garden; a double asterisk is reserved for those varieties that were extra special in quantity and quality. While almost 100% of the seeds germinated, one night a tray of seedlings was left overnight outside the greenhouse, and the next morning I discovered a deer had eaten the seedlings of Andrew Rahart's Jumbo Red, Bas Ranya, Moskoich, and Big Rainbow, and thus those varieties were never planted. I was particularly disappointed to lose ten Big Rainbow, my top performing tomato in 2022. Of those that were planted, I probably will not again plant Blue's Bling, Marianna's Peace, & Pomona F1; the Lillian's Yellow Heirloom and Pink Berkeley Tie-Dye did not produce many tomatoes, but the ones that I did harvest were delicious, as always.]*

Abraham Lincoln (Victory)	Dad's Sunset (Baker Creek)*
Andrew Rahart's Jumbo Red (Victory; new)	Dr Wyche's Yellow (Baker Creek)
Arkansas Traveler (Annie's; 10)	Fourth of July Hybrid (a Burpee freebie)
Bas Ranya (Victory; new)	Galahad F1 (Johnny's)
Big Beef Hybrid (Seeds 'n Such; new freebie)*	Garden Leader Monster (Ferry-Morse freebie)
Big Daddy Hybrid (Burpee; new freebie)	Gardener's Delight (Botanical Interests; 10)*
Big Rainbow (Victory)	Golden Bison (Victory)*
Blue's Bling (Victory; new)	Juliet F1 (Johnny's; 10)**
Brandywine (High Mowing)	Kellogg's Breakfast (Victory)
Brandywine Black (Annie's; new)*	Lemon Boy Plus (Seeds 'n Such; 10)*
Brandywine True Black (Victory; new)*	Lillian's Yellow Heirloom (Victory)
Brandywine Yellow (Victory; new)*	Marianna's Peace (Seeds 'n Such)
Bronze Torch F1 (Johnny's)**	Moskvich (Victory)
Cherokee Purple (Annie's)	Nebraska Wedding (Victory)
Cloudy Day Hybrid (a Burpee freebie)*	Pink Berkeley Tie-Dye (Seeds 'n Such)

Pomona F1 (Franchi)

Wapsipinicon Peach (Victory; 10)*

Sungold F1 (Territorial; 10)**

Yesterday morning I worked in the Coe garden. Since it was the spring equinox and the sun was shining, I took several photos of the seasonal sundial at 11:00 a.m. (God's time) and everything lined up beautifully. I also photographed the crocus in the lawn area and the first reticulated iris blooms in the crevice garden. The snowdrops are also blooming in beds "A1," "C," "G," "H," "I," "J," "K," and the lawn. By far the largest display to date.

One odd discovery yesterday morning. All the papers posted in the wooden information board next to the NW gate had been removed. The push pins had been left behind, but the board was otherwise empty. I'm clueless why someone would have removed the signs while leaving behind the push pins. Fortunately, the garden map, the policies sheet, and the "Did You Know" sheet are saved on the computer. Inside the sign board I found two old wasp nests and several dead yellow & black wasps so I did a little cleaning before closing the front cover.

Today's schedule mimicked yesterday's schedule: morning at Coe, afternoon at Wickiup. After watering the greenhouse plants at Coe, I inserted the lithium battery into the new Stihl leaf vacuum and filled a bag with leaves from the "M1" bed and walkway. The Stihl worked beautifully. It was wonderful to do this job without needing a long electrical cord, and it was quite efficient sucking up old leaves. It never got jammed and chewed up the leaves so they were just right for the compost bin. The "M1" bed still has small areas that need raking, but the bed now looks reasonably neat. One exception is the area around the honeysuckle, still littered with oak leaves wedged into the fence and the thick vines. The honeysuckle also needs trimming, which should inspire it to produce more blooms.

While working in the "M1" bed, I thought about adding more snowdrops or daffodils for early in the year blooms. I also considered options for adding a tall, back-of-the-border plant that blooms in late summer and early fall, something that would look good with the Baptisia. One option would be a Boltonia. I love their blooms and their white blossoms would go well with the Baptisia foliage. One reservation is that the Boltonia I've previously planted in the "E" and "A1" beds looked great for a couple of years and then they disappeared. In both of those locations, they were partially shaded, and it's my impression they prefer full sun. The "M1" bed receives plenty of sunshine, but the Boltonia might be at a disadvantage competing with the early emerging Baptisia. Perhaps I should consider a tall annual, such as a Cosmos or a Mexican torch with their bright red and orange blossoms.

Quickening,
*the doctor called it, the desire
for the coming child. Imagine:*

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*next August, we will carry our daughter
into the garden. We will hold
the fruit to her face;
we will teach her tomatoes.*

~from "Quickening" by Jacqueline Kolosov

23 March. Some rain last night and a light dusting of snow; temp remained chilly enuf so my gardening was all indoors. I had an ENT appt to drain my left ear, an unpleasant operation but I can hear much better. They inserted into the ear drum a new drainage tube. My ear is still throbbing, and I can hear my heart beating, but thank goodness the beat is regular. The heart medicine is working. As for gardening, I filled another 50 block tray with 30 seed blocks of Sweet Yellow Onions and 20 seed blocks of tomatoes: Thessaloniki (Victory), Striped German (Annie's), Horizon (a free sample from Totally Tomatoes), and White Currant (Baker Creek). Space is now hard to find in the greenhouse. I have three trays of onions I can start setting outside once the daytime temp is above freezing. I could also set out the foxglove and daylily pots, which are on the floor in the garden shed.

25 March. Spent the morning working on church publications (worship service bulletin, church website, Bison Blog, April newsletter, updating home page) and finishing the first draft of this week's MMGR. In the afternoon, after a short visit to Coe, I drove to Wickiup and worked there for four hours. It felt cooler than yesterday with a brisk NW breeze, so I wore a jacket even though the temp was in low 50s. Jobs at Wickiup included removing grass and weeds from the "J2" & "J3" strawberry beds. The grass is mostly quack grass, its root system permeating the west end of both beds. It's a slow process digging out the roots without damaging the strawberry plants. I removed dozens of old strawberry plants. This coming week I hope to remove all the strawberries from the "U2" bed and start a new strawberry patch in the "U3" bed where I had cabbage last year. That "U2" strawberry bed has never been very productive.

My next job was cleaning up the "Z1" black raspberry bed on the west side of the garden. Removed old cane, many of which were difficult to extract because they were entwined in the deer fence. I also scraped out a ton of creeping Charlie, and spent a long time removing grass surrounding a thick group of raspberries. After placing all the old canes on Marty's bonfire pile, I cleaned up several raised beds ("Y1," "Y2," & "Y4") and removing grass and weeds from the blackberry patch in Z3. These dudes have serious thorns, and I'm not sure I want to keep them. Much easier working with the thornless blackberries.

My final project was preparing the "M1" bed for planting garlic—which should have been planted last fall. After raking and hoeing the bed, I covered it with a mixture assembled in the wheelbarrow: compost, 4-4-4 organic fertilizer, bone meal, & John & Bob's Maximize Soil

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Conditioner. After loosening the soil with the broadfork, I covered the bed with my compost mix and raked the bed a second time. The soil worked beautifully, the bed ready and waiting for the garlic. I would have planted the garlic this afternoon, but I didn't have a dibble in my tool kit.

26 March. After lunch I drove to Coe, watered plants in the greenhouse, and picked up a charged battery for the hedge trimmer. Drove to Wickiup and used the hedge trimmer as a tall grass lawn mower along the outside edge of the garden fence. I have most of the grass cut on the east and west sides of the garden, but still no sign of a rabbit entrance. While leaving the garden, I realized the rabbits could be coming through a corner of the gate, an easy repair.

After my battery was finished, I moved into the garden and dug out grass and weeds around the four white currants, a project that forced me to confront a problem I've been ignoring: what to do with the red raspberries spreading into and around the currants. Should I transplant them into a vacant bed north of the currants? Or move them to the west border, replacing the thorny blackberries? As I was pulling up quack grass and pondering the raspberry issue, the weather began to deteriorate—a mix of rain and sleet, temp dropping into the upper 30s, and a serious NW wind. So I picked up my tools and called it a day. Back at home I fixed 50 seed blocks in the greenhouse but decided to wait until tomorrow to sow any seeds. The rest of the afternoon was in the garden studio, drafting a garden blog post.

27 March. After lunch I went to Coe, watered plants in the greenhouse, and did a quick tour of the garden, picking up trash, and jotting down notes for this week's MMGR. It was gratifying to see so many small bulbs blooming around the garden, particularly the large orange crocus in the lawn. The sun was shining brightly so all the crocus and winter aconites were fully open. In the crevice garden, I saw the first butterfly of the year, not a white cabbage as usual but an orange and black specimen, the size of a painted lady but with swallowtail-shaped wings. I suppose it was either a Question Mark or a Comma butterfly, both of which can over-winter in Iowa.

28 March. This morning started in the greenhouse at home, watering plants and sewing 50 seed blocks:

- 25 blocks of Seeker Mix Statice (*Limonium sinnatum*) from Select Seeds. This the first time I have tried to grow statice, a choice inspired by seeing them in bloom last fall at Mal Maison in France.
- 25 blocks of Cleome Mixed Colors from Burpee. [*Both of these flowers played a significant role in the Coe garden. I planted about ten of the Cleome at the back of the "J" Dahlia bed and they provided background blooms for the dahlias until October. Several of the statice were planted at the east end of the*

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“A1” bed, next to the ramp entrance to the patio. Those statice were still in bloom in early December, lasting longer than the garden’s perennial mums.]

After an hour in the Garden Studio, composing a draft of this week’s MMGR, I finished the morning by cutting grass and other plants in the NW triangle bed. A host of new growth is emerging and we need the old stuff out of the way. While raking up old foliage I found a spring beauty and several crocus in bloom. The tulips are coming up, there are new leaves on the columbine, and the daffodils are on the move. The reticulated iris are blooming in one of the Long Oval beds. I filled two green yardies with tall switch grass and the ornamental grasses in the middle of the NW Triangle bed. They would make good compost, but the compost bins are already full.

*Even when the garlic crop is good,
something else is always dying —
the peas withering in the afternoon we hoped
for rain instead of watering, the tomatoes
over-shaded. It should teach us something
about pathos or fate, but really
couldn’t we have tried harder? Predicted
the week of heat when the spinach bolted?*

~from “After All” by Anna V. Q. Ross

29 March. Gardening began early today, arriving at Coe at 7:30 and leaving MVM at Marquis to teach an AT lesson. Since it was quite chilly, temp in mid 20s with brisk wind, I dealt with indoor tasks. After feeding the red wigglers and transplanting 5 Hidcote lavender seedlings into peat pots, I sowed 50 blocks of these flower seeds:

- 15 blocks of African Marigold ‘Hawaii,’ *Tagetes erecta*
- 10 blocks of Cleome ‘Color Fountain’
- 5 blocks of Delphinium ‘Yankee Mix’
- 10 blocks of *Clematis tangutica*
- 10 blocks of Tobacco ‘Cranberry Isles’

Since these seeds require light and moderate warmth to germinate, they were all surface sown or covered with a thin layer of soil or vermiculite and placed on a germination mat under a grow light. *[The results of this seed sowing proved to be a mixed bag. As far as I can tell from my incomplete notes, the clematis and the delphinium never germinated. On the other hand, the tobacco plants ended up doing well in the “A1” bed, the cleome were combined with cleome already planted in several beds, and the marigolds were assigned duty in two planters facing the fountain. The marigolds*

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struggled with the dry summer, requiring frequent watering, and they began to look rather ragged. I eventually stopped watering them in August and deposited them in the compost pile.]

31 March. This morning at Coe, miscellaneous maintenance tasks in the “C,” “K,” & “L” beds. The golden yellow crocus planted last fall in the two east-side lawn sections look great. They add a dramatic energy to the scene and are currently the garden’s visual focal points. A few days ago I described these crocus blooms as orange but today they looked more golden. I need a color wheel to help me find the words for the colors I’m trying to identify. There are also Purple Crocreation in bloom and a few Tommies (which in comparison to the other crocus look rather fragile and delicate), but it’s the gold coins that make the real noise. I asked my student assistant to create a map of the lawn sections, identifying areas where no crocus came up—a map that could help us know where to add more crocus next fall.

*In the evenings
I scrape my fingernails clean,
hunt through old catalogues for new seed,
oil workboots and shears.
This garden is no metaphor—
more a task that swallows you into itself,
earth using, as always, everything it can.*

~from “November, Remembering Voltaire” by Jane Hirshfield