

## Garden Kalendar: Winter 2019

This Garden Kalendar is composed of edited excerpts from my garden and travel journals for January-March 2018. The italicized quotations sprinkled among my journal entries are from Helen Perényi's *Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden*, a collection of essays that provided me many hours of pleasurable reading throughout the year. ~Bob

*. . . a writer who gardens is sooner or later going to write a book about the subject—  
I take that as inevitable. One acquires one's opinions and prejudices,  
picks up a trick or two, learns to question supposedly expert judgments,  
reads, saves clippings, and is eventually overtaken by the desire to pass it all on. (viii)*

**1 Jan 2018.** It's midnight, end of the first day of the year—and thus the time for my first entry in this year's garden journal. Since Barnes and Noble is no longer selling them, I will miss the Bunde notebooks I have used the last two years. But this sturdy, lined, black Canson notebook will offer more flexibility in the length of my daily entries.

It was bitter cold today; last night C.R. set all-time record lows, temp down to -21F at the airport; the lowest temp I saw on the garage thermometer was -17F. I worked in the garden studio in the backyard this morning. The space heater was on non-stop and the sun was shining, so it was quite comfy. Outside the studio, however, was a sharp breeze, creating a wind chill at least 10 degrees below the thermometer's temp.

Yesterday afternoon I finished editing and posted my December Garden Shed essay to the Alum Garden website so today's work lacked any distinguishable focus. I did pull up the Alum Garden's master plant list, which was not updated last year. I pondered several format options for creating a comprehensive list of plants in the Alum Garden but could not decide on a satisfactory layout. [One year later, I'm still wrestling with that project.]

**2 Jan.** Another sunny day but wind chill well below zero. Low temp at airport last night was minus 23F, new low record for this date. Previous low was -19F in 1979, our first winter in C.R. After having lived in southern Texas for five years, we found that winter memorably brutal, over two months with no daytime highs above freezing.

Worked in the garden studio this morning. Typed notes from back issues of *Horticulture*. The pile of over 100 of these old magazines has information/suggestions I would like in my typed notes, but this is a project I often ignore whenever I find another task more appealing--probably because the pile is so large and appears so overwhelming. But those issues have a lot of useful advice that will get lost if I don't get them into my notes.

This afternoon at Coe I picked up my mail, which included a dozen garden books I ordered in December. So many books I would love to read—plus several big reference books, such as *Hortus III* by the L. H. Bailey staff at Cornell. After depositing the books in the garden shed, I did a walk around the garden, taking about 50 photos, all shot in monochrome black & white.

**6 Jan.** Sunny, cold, night-time temp down to -15F; daytime temp just above zero. Weather forecasters promise a thaw in the next 24 hours. With this string of subzero temps, I worry about the garden's marginal zone 5 plants and how many won't survive these record-setting lows.

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This morning I worked on a Monday Morning Garden Report, the first of the year, focusing on the cold. I edited the B&W photos in preparation for one or two website slide shows. Then I went through my November and December photos, gathering about 35 into a slide show that I posted to the website. No great photos, but some were okay. Final act of the day was cancelling the earthworm order; I'll submit a new order in March, once we have warmer weather.

**9 Jan.** 12:25 pm; 37F, 61% humidity; overcast; no wind; 51F in the greenhouse. I've been to the garden just about every day for the past two weeks, including two days with the camera, shooting black and white photos. We never had a significant snow fall last winter after Cara's two metal spheres—Ringo and Sisyphus—were installed. I wanted to capture their presence within a white snowfield. And because of the Arctic temperatures, the snow has not melted much. Yesterday, however, the temps got into the low 40s and snow began melting along the garden's south-facing walls.

**10 Jan.** 11:00 am; 39F; overcast. Cold weather is coming in tomorrow. Before I arrived at the garden shed this morning, the GFCI button for the heater's electrical outlet had popped. Thus the heater, overhead light, and clock were dead. This is the first time this problem has occurred with the new space heater—which I had set on the energy-saver cycle. Frustrating. While waiting for the shed to warm up (though the temp had only dropped to the mid 50s), I started arranging the grow lights and heating pads in the greenhouse.

**11 Jan.** 12:30 pm; 18 F; now sleeting. Winter has returned, temperature dropping 20 degrees since I arrived at Coe this morning. I did a garden walk this morning, picking up several plastic bags and minor litter. Most of the snow had melted. I was surprised to see the tiny *Nigella* that had sprouted in the "L" bed were still green. Is it possible that they will survive the winter? I posted my first Monday Morning Garden Report (MMGR) for 2018. Focused on the garden's snow-covered landscape. The transitions in the piece are not very good, but a couple sentences are ok, and I sneaked in a reference to my Mom's 106<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was going to sow some lettuce, kale, and spinach seed, but because of the sleet it makes sense for me to get home, get the car into the garage, and hunker down for the rest of the day. Plus I'm getting hungry. :)

*A garden is a private world or it is nothing, and the gardener must be allowed his vagaries.* [63]

**18 Jan.** 2:30 pm. Sunny, 37F; 47% humidity, slight breeze. We finally have temperatures above freezing, and some snow is melting. I did not come the garden this weekend (nor on Monday). When I arrived Tuesday afternoon, the heater in the shed had for a second time tripped the circuit breaker, and there were several leaks in the greenhouse roof. The snow and ice are working their way between the roof's overlapping plexiglass panels. I set up the ladder, which was stored behind the gazebo, and swept off the snow and ice from the greenhouse roof—thus eliminating the source of water. In conversation Tuesday evening with Wayne [the contractor who built the greenhouse], he seemed to think we needed to increase the panels' overlap, but

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we'll wait until spring for that repair. In the meantime, I need to sweep snow off the roof and keep it as clear as possible.

On Tuesday, Gabriel and I sowed 25 basil and kale seed cubes. [Here's a table with the seed varieties, the germination numbers, and the number of successful transplants.]

Seeds: 5 cubes	Seed Co. Source	Jan 26 Germination	April 2 Germination	May 1 Transplants
Green Globe Basil	Richters	0	1	1
Dolce Fresca Basil	Richters	4	5	4
Red Genovese Basil	Richters	5	5	4
Persian Basil	Richters	3	4	4
Nero di Toscana Kale	Territorial	5	5	5

All the seeds were packed for spring 2017, which may explain the low germination rate for the Green Globe. It was fun to get back into the seed sowing routine and discover the lights, heat pads, and timers were all working.

I did a little research on my Dutch Serotina Honeysuckle, that has now been languishing for two years in the middle of the "H" bed. Dave's website informs me that the species is not aggressive (certainly true for the one I planted). A Z4 plant, it has become naturalized in some northern states (e.g., Maine, Washington) and Canada (e.g., Nova Scotia and British Columbia) but is not considered invasive. 'Serotina' has been in cultivation since the 1600's, groomed to flower at a later date than the species. The Royal Horticultural Society has given this cultivar group its coveted Award of Garden Merit, recommending that it be identified as "*Lonicera periclymenoides*, Serotina group." The website quotes one honeysuckle authority who claims that most of what's sold as 'Serotina' in the US is an impostor. Supposedly it will bloom best in full sun but it can do well in light/dappled shade—a reasonable description of its situation in the "H" bed. If it does decide to flower, the blooms will occur on new wood, so it is best to prune it in early spring.

Encountered this quote today: "The opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth is usually another profound truth." -Niels Bohr

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**23 Jan.** Gabriel planted the following 9 varieties, 5 seed cubes per plant. All seeds were at least one year old and the Everwilde Farms seeds were packaged for 2015.

Seed	Source	8 Feb Germination	April 2 Germination	May 1 Planting
Blue Grama	Prairie Moon	1	1	No survivor
Pearly Everlasting	Prairie Moon	3	3	Planted in "A1" bed
Bottlebrush Grass	Prairie Moon	1	1	No Survivor
Rising Sun Coreopsis	Swallowtail	5	5	Planted in "E" and "J" beds
Sunfire Coreopsis	Swallowtail	5	5	Planted in "E" and "J" beds
Anise Hyssop	Everwilde Farms	0	0	Zero germinations
Purple Giant Hyssop	Everwilde Farms	0	0	Zero germinations
Dianthus	J. Scheepers	5	4	Planted & thrived in raised beds
Rando Penstemon	Swallowtail	0	0	Zero germinations

**26 Jan.** 4:15 pm; 54F; 49% humidity. Although a beautiful day weather-wise, the worst day ever in the garden. During my early morning police call, I discovered that Wheeler's Pegasus had tipped over and his right wing was broken off. My guess is that the soil thawed unevenly underneath the statue, causing it to tip it over—which I find amazing because the statue is so heavy it's impossible for me to lift. In the process of trying to reposition it, I lost my grip and it fell again, this time breaking off the tail as it hit the partially frozen soil. A few choice curse words did not alleviate the pain I was feeling. I've grown to love this statue, particularly after we moved it into the middle of the "H" bed, what seemed an ideal location. Of course many famous Greek and Roman statues are missing body parts, but I would like to find some way to get this fixed. I think it's made of lead, which explains its dead weight, but this also means it will be a challenge to find a firm that has the skill and equipment for restoring its wings and

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tail. [As a temporary “solution” I moved Pegasus so he’s now nestled in among the yews, hiding last winter’s damage. So far I have not found a company prepared to restore this statue.]

While the warm weather may have been responsible for grounding Pegasus, the unseasonable temperatures also brought a beautiful day for serious garden cleanup. I spent over an hour removing dead foliage from beds “C”, “K” & “L”: cutting back asters, Joe Pye, cranesbill, and nepeta (my favorite because of the fragrance). We now have a lot more vegetation that needs to go through the chipper/shredder. Today would have been a good day for chopping up my recent harvest. Instead I spent my remaining hours sorting photos from last year’s Guernsey/London trip—creating four slide shows to accompany the Garden Shed blog posting, which includes excerpts from the garden journal for January-March of 2017. I’m also trying to finish the Monday Morning Garden Report for last Monday, which just needs one more editing.

**31 Jan.** 4:30 pm. Overcast, minimal wind; 38F; 48% humidity. Earlier today I posted the 22 Jan MMGR to the website and included a photo of our first seedlings. Also looked through several pages of Burrell’s *Perennial Combinations*, thinking about options for flowers/grasses here at Coe. Spent an hour pruning old foliage, mostly in the “F” bed (monarda, daisies, black-eyed susans, hostas—whose foliage is much easier to clean up after it has dried out and been frozen) and “H” bed (daylily foliage, asters, potentilla shrub). As I was dumping the stuff onto the compost pile, it occurred to me that we need a three-sided storage/compost bin similar to what is often found in English gardens. I think I could construct one so it would look okay. A bin would help to keep that area cleaned up.

*Until the advent of modern science, horticultural knowledge was entirely based on observations by those who dealt directly with plants, soil, and weather, and the old gardeners weren’t fools. That body of knowledge, long dismissed as folklore or old wives’ tales, looks better every day. Some of the good systems devised by the ancients were models of efficiency compared to ours. No Indian farmer used up five to six pounds of topsoil to produce a pound of corn, and the Iowa farmer does. No wonder the ‘new’ ways to farm and garden so often turn out to be several thousand years old. It was, after all, ‘primitive’ peoples ignorant of chemistry who identified the plants containing basic drugs like quinine, caffeine and digitalis, who without having heard of vitamins located the plants richest in them, who discovered hallucinogens. No findings of comparable importance have been made by modern plant scientists, who are spending more and more of their time trying to understand why so many techniques practiced by the technologically backward have been so successful. (125)*

**5 Feb.** I wrote most of a first draft for my first (and last) MMGR for February. MVM and I will be leaving for London next Monday morning and won’t be back until March 1. Everything in the greenhouse seems okay. I had not been here since Friday, so the oldest germination tray needed watering. The other two trays still have their plastic cover and so they don’t dry out as quickly—but I did give the second tray a light sprinkling.

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**8 Feb.** 2:20 pm; 26F, 47% humidity. The quiet before the storm: supposedly 5-6" of snow on the way, on top of the 3-4" already on the ground. I've spent most of the day at the computer, this morning in the Garden Studio at home, and since lunch here at Coe. I have been concentrating on drafting the annotated bib blog posting; I might finish the first draft later this afternoon. It's far too long—with several annotations running over a page—but I'm probably the only one who will ever read it, and the annotations are primarily notes for myself. I do find it useful to go back through books I read the previous year, trying to clarify my initial assessment, and perhaps rescue a few passages for further recollection. The project has taken many hours, and I couldn't do it if this were an active gardening season.

Another time cruncher was working on seed orders, mostly for veggies. Took three full days going through seven catalogs (Johnny's, Seeds 'n Such, Victory Seeds, J. Schleepers, Baker, Select Seeds, and Richters). I finished and submitted the orders for the first five and will finish the Select Seeds and Richters before leaving for London on Monday. I'm hoping to be better organized than last year in recording the sowing and germination of flower and vegetable seeds. I also want to expand the number and enhance the aesthetic appeal of the flowers we keep in pots. I liked how the marigolds, nasturtiums, calendula, and celosia worked last summer in the pots in front of the "E" and "J" beds. Perhaps this year we can make them look fuller, more diverse, more colorful. Definitely need plants that can handle the heat and dry spells without requiring constant watering.

Met with Gabe yesterday and we went over a few of his jobs while I'm gone. I showed him how I would like for us to experiment with some cold pot sowing of native flowers and grasses that require cold treatment. Most of these seeds were purchased two years ago, and so their germination rate may be diminished. When I tried this experiment in 2016, I didn't have great success. I made a mistake in the choice of sand I mixed with the seed, which produced hard clumps of sand once it dried out. But no harm in trying again and perhaps something will work. As for the seed germinations in the green house, it's done okay. The first tray got almost 100% germination, except for one kind of basil seeds. Less success with some of the others so far, but some varieties can be slow to germinate.

Earlier this afternoon I sent Coe students information on the first *Garden Quarto* and an invitation to submit something for the second issue. Deadline for submission is March 31. Maybe we'll luck out and get something good. All we need is one good student piece. I also revised last Monday's MMGR. I need to double check a couple of sentences (for example, making sure my memory is accurate on a reference to Erdrich essay discussing the Ojibwe language). I hope to get that Monday report posted later today.

*I should say here that I have never sent my soil for analysis to my county extension agent, or my compost either. I don't even know what the pH may be—this referring to the degree of sourness or sweetness. . . . I would rather assume that plants, like animals and people, are hungry most of the time and need a balanced diet. I rely on natural substances to supply that, and leave it to the plants to pick and choose what they want. (135)*

**Excerpts from my travel journal to Malta and London, last two weeks of February.**

**17 Feb** (Saturday); 9:45 pm. After a marvelous breakfast at our B&B in Naxxar (toast, salami, three kinds of cheese, apple-stuffed pastry, hard-boiled egg, orange juice, English breakfast tea, and a perfect melon—reminding us of a golden honeydew), we went to Mdina via Jason’s Cab service. The driver was an Englishman who first came to the island in 2000. Told us there had been enormous changes in the past 18 years. While the roads had improved, a much higher percentage of people now drive cars and the traffic is terrible. The Maltese had experienced a big improvement in the economy after joining the EU—which brought in significant funding for economic development—but that did not necessarily correspond with an improvement in the quality of life.

After a 20-minute ride to Mdina, Malta’s ancient capital, we were on our own, walking into the walled city, high on a plateau. Temperature was cool (upper 40s) and overcast, but a pleasant day for sightseeing. Mdina is an incredible place to visit: narrow, winding streets; buildings 4-6 stories tall; everything a tan limestone; very quiet (with frequent signs requesting visitors to be mindful of local inhabitants). When we arrived, not many people were around—though by the afternoon the scene had dramatically changed. After we wandered through the city for about 30 minutes, we came to the point where our Mac’s Adventure directions had us leaving Mdina and walking through the countryside. This meant leaving Mdina and its surrounding sites unexplored, so we set the directions aside and chose to spend the day exploring on our own.

Our first objective was to find St. Paul’s Catacombs, located outside the city walls. Within minutes we were lost. So we entered a small chapel that had information on local religious sites—in exchange for voluntary donations to raise money for restoring their small chapel. We talked with a local for about 15 minutes, and he gave us a simple map of the area, advising us to visit St. Agatha’s nearby museum and catacombs, which we did. We spent 15 minutes in the museum, which included some primitive religious art and a 4,000 year-old mummified alligator. The catacombs tour was conducted by a young man, probably in his late teens, who spoke far too fast for us to know what he was saying. But a few bits of information we did manage to retain:

- The catacombs are enormous; we saw only a small fraction of them.
- The catacombs have many different kinds of tombs, differentiated by wealth and social class.
- Many small tombs for children.
- Many frescoes with portraits of saints; most of this art work had been defaced when the Muslims took over Malta (reminding me of defaced images in Chinese temples, a consequence of the Cultural Revolution).
- Saw a round stone circle/table, used by people for a meal after the burial of a family member.
- Passageways were narrow, very winding; we would have become totally disoriented without our guide.
- The catacombs did have air holes/shafts to provide some ventilation.
- A few of the tombs still have the bones of people buried there.

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After St. Agatha we went to another church, built over the grotto where St. Paul stayed after being shipwrecked while traveling to Rome. This church had its own catacombs and rooms constructed as bomb shelters during World War II. While standing in Paul's grotto, I was struck by our incredible good fortune enabling us twenty years ago to see the room on the Street Called Straight in Damascus where Paul's ministry had begun and now to visit this site, celebrating the conclusion of Paul's ministry.

Leaving the grotto, we walked back into Mdina. Since it was almost 2:00, we decided to get something to eat, eventually choosing Fontanella Tea Garden, a restaurant and tea room famous for their chocolate cake. We had a local beer, an excellent pizza (with meat, onions, cheeses) and a slice of their world-renowned cake, which was surprisingly light and had a perfect touch of sweetness. Following the meal we visited Mdina's cathedral, plus a short walk through their museum. The cathedral lacked the ornate decorations of the Cathedral in Valletta, but it had a similar atmosphere, in part because of the colorful marble tombstones in the floor.

A few observations on plants, flowers, and gardens we have encountered so far on this trip:

- We have seen few private gardens, but we have seen many potted plants that would be typical indoor house plants in Iowa--mother-in-law tongues, jade trees, aloes, cacti, asparagus ferns.
- Upper Barrakka Gardens. This garden in Valletta is at the top of the city fortress. The beds had a few trees but all the flowers were bedding plants--mostly geraniums, arranged in neat rows, recently planted in a red rocky soil with an extensive irrigation system, the hoses running along each row. We also saw some beds with pansies.
- Shrubs. In one landscape bed we saw two small trees--an almond and a judas tree. The almond was just beginning to bloom. Around the trees were Maltese everlasting, with gray, sage-like foliage.

**20 Feb.** 8:50 pm, in the Gozo Hills B&B in Xaghra (pronounced sha-raw, accent on first syllable). Yesterday was a great day, one of the best walking days we've ever had. It began with Jason's Cabs picking us up at the Chapel B&B and taking us the Cirkewwa Ferry. After a 30-minute wait, it was a 30-minute trip to Gozo, which took us by Comino Island, where we hope to walk tomorrow [because of a faulty weather forecast, we did not visit Comino Island]. As we were leaving the ferry in Mgarr, our cab driver spotted MVM and accurately guessed we were the American couple she was waiting for. She took us over some rough, pot-holed roads to Qala, where we began our twelve km walk along the north coast of Gozo and then to Xaghra. MVM carried Mac's directions, and we never got lost--though several times we did need to backtrack. But no serious problems.

As for the walk, it was what we were hoping for on this trip: sunshine, comfortable temperature, beautiful Mediterranean blue sky, beautiful Mediterranean blue/green sea, and rustic countryside. We were surprised by how most of the small fields (many about 1/4 acre) look deserted and unkempt. Many walls are in disrepair and the fields appear full of "weeds." We saw a lot of trash dumped in fields and along the side of the road. During our walk along



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the NE corner of the island, we frequently felt we were viewing an abandoned landscape. We saw very few houses and almost no people. We did, however, see a lot of flowers in bloom, including a few I could recognize—or resembled ones I thought I knew. [Many of these flowers are featured in the “Walking on Gozo” photos I posted last spring to the “Garden Walks” page on the Alumni House Garden website.]

- Giant Fennel. Some specimens were 4-5' tall, flower heads just beginning to open.
- Dandelions. Similar to Iowa dandelions, but many of the Gozo species had several blooms on a single flower stalk and leaves not as jagged; they did produce some lovely yellow fields.
- Crown Daisy. The leaves looked like marigolds; some were quite large, indicating they were a perennial in this temperate zone. Later in a Natural History Museum I found a drawing of the flower, identified as Crown Daisy, clearly a member of the composite family.
- Alyssum. We saw thousands with tiny white blooms in small clusters, nearly all on the edge of the paths, a perfect border plant.
- Oxalis. These cape sorrel were all over, with lovely yellow blooms.
- Snapdragons. Usually 18-24" tall, mostly white but some red blooms.
- Clover. Mostly white but also clover with lovely light purple blooms.
- Spurge. Blooms of light yellowish-green, similar to the spurge in the Alum Garden.
- Borage. Saw flowering clumps throughout the walk.
- Flowers with Six White-Petal Blooms. The petals had a thin pink midrib line; very attractive; on 2-3' flower stalks, blooms going up the flower head. [I eventually determined these were Summer Asphodels, *Asphodelus microcarpus*.]
- Mallow. Saw these throughout the walk; both blooms and leaves very similar to those in Alum Garden.
- Rue. Saw one *Ruta graveolens*, with its distinctive foliage and fragrance.
- Thyme. Saw many plants in one stretch, located not far from the sea, but the leaves lacked a distinctive thyme fragrance.
- Prickly Pear. Saw many prickly pear, often like large shrubs, frequently at the edge of fields; saw one farmer had stuck the cactus leaf segments in the ground to protect young seedlings.
- Iris. Came upon one clump of blue iris; also a clump with lovely peach-colored blossoms.
- Sweet Peas. Just a few loners; never could distinguish any fragrance.
- Geraniums. Some were like small shrubs, a few in bloom.
- Bamboo. Growing wild; many gardens had fences made from bamboo poles sewn together.
- Nasturtiums. Saw several enormous plants with a few blooms.
- Crocosima. Saw several patches in bloom, resembling the crocosima in the Alum Garden.
- Golden camomile. Not sure we saw this on the walk but did find some inside a Citadel we visited.
- Poppies. Saw one field of red poppies, apparently naturalized.

We walked by many vegetable gardens on the steep hillsides. Saw a lot of peas and in one garden a man harvesting shell peas. I asked him what kind, and he said he didn't know. “They're just peas.” He probably saves his own seed for the next planting so they might be an heirloom variety that he inherited. We also talked with a “farmer” who was preparing to spray

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his garlic. Confirming what we had observed, he told us that not many people kept up the gardens. When he was a young man, he could make some money by selling his produce—such as tomatoes—but those days were gone. He said that most of the land had been owned by the church and was given to the government. It was not clear from our conversation if he owned his garden or he was using government land. He said many of the plots were now owned by people on Malta—a point later confirmed by a woman who told us the Maltese just want a quiet place to come for the weekend.

About 3:30 we arrived at Ramla Bay. As we approached the sandy beach, we were walking through rough, untilled fields, dominated by tall grasses and bamboo. Saw many plants that looked like daffodils but no evidence of any buds or flowers. On the beach we stopped to eat two mandarin oranges and watch the waves. After a ten-minute break, we pretended we were ready for another challenging climb up a hillside. The slick path was very steep, but we eventually reached the top—supposedly the site of Calypso's Cave (celebrated in Homer's *Odyssey*). Unfortunately, because of geological instability, the cave cannot be visited, so we turned our back on the coast and took off on our final 1 ½ km walk into Xaghra. Though we were walking on a tarmac with a steady traffic, including big trucks, we had no problem reading the church at the city center, which enabled us to find our B&B in a complex of new B&B's, all constructed in a similar style around a common courtyard.

**25 Feb** (Sunday). We are now living in a converted garage flat in NW London, between Finchley Road and Hampstead Heath. So far our home for the week has worked out beautifully; it's a short walk to the Heath and the flat is quite comfortable. Although there's no kitchen, we do have a dorm room frig, microwave, toaster, tea kettle, small table, two folding chairs, an ok bed, an ok shower. This morning we walked to Golders Hill Park, just beyond Hampstead Heath. It was supposedly landscaped by Capability Brown and is beautifully laid out. Yesterday morning in our first visit to the park we saw about half of the park, including the walled garden and a large, grassy pen with fallow deer and a giant rhea from S. America. We saw many lovely iris-like flowers—some kind of spring bulb, ahead of the crocus and daffs—and a stumpery, the second one I've seen in English (the other in the Lake District at a private garden near Kendall). The stumpery is in a wooded area and included a sign celebrating the ecological diversity enhanced by the inclusion of these tree stumps along a small stream. I wonder if it might be possible to install a small stumpery in the SE corner of the Alum Garden.

In the afternoon we went to the Peacock Theatre and saw an Australian dance group in a production called *Beat on Pointe*, bringing together ballet and hip hop. The performance was interesting—though not something I would want to see or hear again. The music was very loud, definitely more hip-hop than ballet. Three male dancers were quite impressive, particularly one young man who only did break dancing (very adept at spinning in circles while standing on his head). One of the male dancers obviously had substantial ballet training. He did one piece in high heels and another comic number with five female dancers. The ballet choreography was neither innovative nor inspiring, but the audience members—dominated by hundreds of school-age girls—were thrilled.

In the evening after dinner in the crypt in St Martin-in-the-Fields, we attended a performance in St Martin's sanctuary of Handel's *Messiah*, a welcome antidote to the musical preferences of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Australians and their young fans. It was a small orchestra (7 instrumentalists) and 10 voices, but they had no problem filling the space with the glorious music. The chorus was very good and blended beautifully. The soloists maintained clean vocal lines, good diction, voices ideally suited for Handel. The star of the performance was the trumpeter. This was the first time I've heard a live performance of the *Messiah* when the trumpeter had the chops to do full justice to the music, confirming that all the solos and choruses had been leading to the climax of the final pieces. The trumpeter was perhaps in his late 50s and played so effortlessly. He never looked like he was working; no evidence of strain, everything crystal clear and precise. It was a great experience.

Twice during the day we went into the National Art Gallery, both visits concentrating on the Impressionists. Took dozens of photographs—as did the thousands of other people huddled around the same paintings. My photos concentrated on flowers and plants in landscapes. I wanted to get a good photo of Van Gogh's Sunflowers—the painting in this suite of galleries garnering the most attention—but it was so crowded that I settled on taking photos of the crowd taking photos of the painting. One shot did feature MVM, who managed to get much closer to the painting than I ever did. Fortunately, most of the other paintings were easier to study, including a couple of Monet paintings that feature iris.

One other notable achievement today. We walked to Hampstead Village, hoping to visit the Fenton House and Garden—only to discover it has been closed since the first week in November and won't open again until next week, after we have left London. But in the village we saw the striped melons we discovered in Malta. The grocer had them labeled as Frogskin Melon. Later we found them in a Sainsbury grocery store, labeled Piel de Sapó (the skin of the toad) and imported from Brazil. [After returning to C.R., I found a source for the seeds of this melon and planted ten in my vegetable garden. They produced a dozen small melons, but only one reached maturity, all the vines killed off by vine borers. I'll try again this year but I must be more pro-active in protecting the vines from insects and disease.]

**1 March** (Thursday) One big disappointment yesterday is that we trekked through the snow in Hyde Park to visit the roof garden on High Street Kensington—a garden we had not visited since the spring of '93—only to discover that the garden was closed in December and it will probably never reopen. Since we were not far from the Victoria & Albert Museum, we walked over to that incredible collection and had a delightful two-hour stroll through miscellaneous collections. For the first time in many years we were able to see the Raphael cartoons of Peter & Paul. They are incredibly powerful. I love the one that shows Jesus in the boat and the other figures moving toward him. That's the a cartoon where we can compare Raphael's original with a tapestry based on the cartoon. The lighting is very dim in the room, but I was able to get a decent photo of the tapestry.

Some other wonderful discoveries in the V&A:

- An early edition of Gerard's *Herbal*, open to an entry on Ladies Mantle.

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- A stained glass on the Mery May Pole; reminded me of when in second grade I was King of the Maypole program. MVM commented that she remembered being impressed that another one-room country school near hers had a maypole. Of course, we were both unaware of the maypole's phallic symbolism.
- An early organ cabinet (a claviorgan, cross between an organ and a harpsichord) and a 16<sup>th</sup>-century virginal that might have been played by Queen Elizabeth I.
- A 16<sup>th</sup>-century chicken drinking pan that had a series of concentric rings to protect baby chicks from drowning or splashing water out of the pan.
- A shaving bowl with a side cut away for the chin and neck.
- A 17<sup>th</sup>-century Pounce Pot that stored powdered resin for sprinkling to dry out the ink on unglazed paper.
- Beautiful wooden flowers embedded in the marquetry of 17<sup>th</sup>-century furniture.
- A 17<sup>th</sup>-century "detector lock" that had the key hole hidden under the leg of a figure. The lock counted how many times the lock had been opened so the owner would know if anyone had been surreptitiously unlocking it.
- A stunning early 18<sup>th</sup>-century tapestry recreating the design of a formal garden at Stoke Edith, Herefordshire.

During our week in London, we visited the National Art Gallery five times. These recurrent visits made the collection seem less overwhelming because we weren't trying to see everything in one or two visits. My favorite gallery was a small room exclusively dedicated to 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch still life paintings of flowers in vases. All these small oil paintings render their subjects with meticulous precision in color and arrangement. The artists in the collection included:

- Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625): *Still Life with Tulips, Chrysanthemums, Narcissi, Roses, Irises* . . . (1608-10)
- Balthasar van der Ast (1593/4-1657): *Flowers in a Vase with Shells & Insects* (circa 1630)
- Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder (1572-1621): *Still Life of Flowers in Wan-Li Vase* (1609-10)
- Osias Beert the Elder (1580-1624): *Flowers in a Porcelain Wan-Li Vase* (circa 1615) and *Flowers in a Serpentine Vase* (circa 1615)
- Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1683/4): *Flowers in a Glass Bottle on a Marble Plinth* (circa 1670)
- Jacob van Walscapelle (1644-1727): *Flowers in a Glass Vase* (circa 1670)
- And one female artist: Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750): *Flowers in a Glass Vase with a Tulip* (1716)

One aspect of these paintings I particularly enjoy is the presence of bees, flies, grasshoppers, snails—giving the impression these still life paintings capture a precise moment in time. Also interesting how they rely on black backgrounds, no contextualization, no domestic or natural settings. Each vase of flowers is a separate, self-contained world.

One other high point of our week in London was a visit to Highgate Cemetery. We walked from our flat to the cemetery on Tuesday. This meant crossing Hampstead Heath—where we have often become lost on previous excursions—but this day we found the diagonal path that took us straight across the park. In the middle of the Heath we passed by the enormous oak that my May Term students once measured by counting how many people it took to wrap their

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arms around the trunk (the answer was five). Once through the park, however, we had some difficulty locating the road that would lead to the cemetery. After asking several other walkers, we finally found our way—and in the process, stumbled upon an island in the middle of the roadway that had hundreds of folk memorials to the pop musician George Michael, who had lived in this area and died in 2016. The random memorials reminded us of the idiosyncratic memorials we saw in a cemetery outside of Big Bend National Park in southern Texas. Many of the Michael memorials included quotes from his music, accompanied by dozens of photos and candles.

After purchasing our tickets for the afternoon tour of Highgate's West Garden, we walked through Waterlow Gardens, located next to Highgate. These multi-use gardens are beautifully laid out. Although nothing was now growing in them, we particularly enjoyed how they had arranged the kitchen gardens, a series of raised beds using old railroad ties, 2-3' high. It appears that each bed is cared for by students from different local schools. What caught my attention was the gardener's chalk board, providing notes for visitors to the garden. [This was the inspiration for the information center installed last spring at the NW gate of the Alumni House Garden. In Waterlow Gardens we also saw a sundial surrounded by flower beds that inspired a comparable sundial in front of the Alumni House Garden's gazebo.]

*It was women who invented horticulture in the first place, women who ventured into field and forest in search of wild plants, and women who domesticated them while men were still out chasing wild beasts. Women were the first gardeners. (260)*

**4 March** (Sunday) 5:30 pm; 49F; 39% humidity; clear skies, some wind, making it cool enough to require my fleece while working outdoors. I visited the Alumni House Garden yesterday for the first time in almost three weeks. Overall, things looked good—though the temp in the greenhouse was supposedly 102F; it was really hot—and many of the cubes in a germination tray had dried out. But we only lost a couple of new seedlings. Today, I worked in the garden for over 4 hours, which included convincing my computer to load the photos from the London/Malta trip. I was constantly getting a “communication failure” message when trying to download photos from my small Canon camera; I finally uploaded the photos by inserting the photo disk into the new Canon. Now the task is to sort through hundreds of photos and get them edited and saved with titles that make them retrievable by subject. That will be many hours—but best to do it on rainy/cold days when I can't work outside. As for today, I concentrated on cleaning up old flower beds “L,” “B,” and “D.” Cut back cranesbill, sedum, tickseed, coneflowers, Joe Pye, asters, Siberian iris, obedient plants. Removed dead foliage of the oldest Helen von Stein lamb's ear. Later this spring I should dig it up, divide it into several smaller clumps, and replant. Several days ago I was reading Beth Chatto's journal, which I purchased at Foyle's in London, and she talked about traveling to Germany to attend von Stein's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration—an event that lasted for several days—with garden aficionados (first time I've ever used that word!) from all over the world.

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*If we had paid no more attention to our plants than we have to our children, we would now be living in a jungle of weed.* -Luther Burbank, horticulturist (7 Mar 1849-1926)

**8 March.** 11:30 am; 30F, 50% humidity; sunshine; slight breeze. Beautiful morning, though a bit brisk. Worked on Monday Morning Garden Report and sowing seeds. Discovered we're missing the 4' florescent bulbs for the biggest grow light. Must have taken bulbs out at some time, but I could not find them in the greenhouse. New problem discovered concerning the greenhouse: water is condensing on the ceiling overnight and then dripping down as the interior warms up. And it does warm up. Thermometer indicates it's 90F in the greenhouse—though I suspect it's not really that warm. But easily in the 80s. I opened the small south window to help lower the temp; need to remember to close it this evening.

**9 March.** 4:50 pm; 34F; sunny; virtually no breeze. Spent over two hours working on photos from the Malta and London trip. I was disappointed with the Dutch still life photos I took at the National Art Gallery in London, but they might still be usable for a slide show. I now have most of the Gozo plant photos labeled, and that slide show should be complete in a day or two. I also revised the Monday Morning Garden Report—focusing on sundials and the possibility of adding a new sundial to the "H" bed. Cara is coming Monday morning to look at the site and discuss the options.

I went to Ace and purchased two 4' florescent bulbs and set up the light over the tray that I sowed yesterday. Walked over to Peterson 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and harvested four stems of scented geraniums and planted four of them in a pot with a soil mix from somewhere (not sure of its history). Also cut off several forsythia branches and stuck them in water; we'll see if the buds open up and bloom. Yesterday I made a bouquet with dried grasses and seed pods. Looks pretty good—if I say so myself. I finished this afternoon's chores by pruning dead foliage from most of the Siberian iris in the "G" and "H" beds. They look much better, but the work is slow going, and my unprocessed compost pile is getting quite large. Next week is supposed to be dry and warm (after forecast for snow this weekend), offering an opportunity for substantially reducing the size of the pile.

*To see things in black and white is to see the basics, and I would now recommend to any designer of gardens that he go out and look at his work by the light of the moon.* (142)

**10 March.** 4:25 pm; 42F; 40% humidity; overcast; slight breeze. Spent the past two hours in the garden, cleaning up dead foliage, primarily in the "F," "G," & "H" beds. Cut back a tansy, some sunflowers, asters, daylilies, Siberian iris—adding more stuff to the unprocessed compost pile. Supposedly rain/snow on the way later this evening. In the greenhouse, noticed several seedlings have brown leaf tips. Not sure if that is caused by excessive heat, lack of water, or some unknown combination of factors. I'm trying to keep the blocks watered, but not let them get too wet. May have erred on the dry side. I've also been running the fan on the seedlings, trying to toughen them in preparation for when they go outdoors in April.

**16 March.** 4:45 pm; low 30s, overcast, windy; feels like freezing rain or snow could be on the way. Worked in garden all day, mostly in the sunshine. In the morning I concentrated on cleaning up the “M” beds. Cut back coneflowers, Joe Pye, sedums, Baptisia. Ran leaf vacuum and filled up big container with chopped up leaves. The crevice garden is reasonably neat. Just need to dig up the creeping sedum overrunning the bed. The rock garden has most of its leaves cleaned off, but still a lot of sedum to pull back; also one over-exuberant creeping veronica.

This afternoon I finished the Monday Morning Garden Report (focused on cleaning up beds close to the patio) and posted it to the website. Enclosed a photo of an eastern yellow jacket, probably female (based on black dots on its abdomen)—though it may be a western yellow jacket. Both are listed as Iowa natives on a bee identification website. I thought the color patterns on its back were closer to the eastern. I read that only the female queen survives the winter, and she begins the spring by locating a nest—often an old rodent abode. While I was trimming back a sedum, this yellow jacket appeared close at hand, moving very slowly. I’ve read that they eat insects potentially harmful to a garden, but I’m not sure I really want yellow jackets flying around the garden: their bites are nasty and they are able to continue stinging. When Jim Perkins and I were baling the Perkins prairie hay field in 1962, I wonder if what the New Holland baler stirred up was a nest of yellow jackets. As the “bees” were chasing me across the field, I certainly did not stop to conduct a species ID examination.

Later this afternoon, after the clouds moved in, I trimmed the sedge along the rain garden border. It is aggressively spreading into the iris. I need to dig up the iris/sedge area after the iris have finished blooming and create a border between the two [a problem still not addressed]. I like the look of the sedge in that location, but they need to be constrained. I also decided that the volunteer iris popping up in the rain garden are Siberian Iris—the dried, russet foliage exactly matching the S. iris in the peninsula. Now that I know what they are, I can dig them up and either create a new colony or give them away. I also cut back most of the *Verbena bonariensis*. I crushed their seed heads, sprinkling the seeds in hopes they would again self-seed. [They did self-seed, though not necessarily in the locations I had expected].

In going through photos today, I came across several photos I took last year of the “C” and “L” beds. The brilliance of the greens and the flowers (particularly the daylilies and the coneflowers) took my breath away. I had forgotten—or not fully appreciated—how dynamic were last summer’s colors. I suppose at the time I shot the photos, the colors in the photographs did not do justice to the reality, but after a winter of browns and grays, the colors of the garden in July were thrilling to revisit.

**22 March** (Thursday). 4:00 pm; overcast; 49F; 39% humidity. Weather forecast has winter weather on the way, with a real accumulation of snow possible beginning tomorrow evening and into Saturday. This week I started using an electric chipper/shredder. The larger, gas-powered shredder is hard to move around and has been cantankerous, unwilling to ignite. The new electric is slower to operate (and does not handle some items very well—such as wet foliage and Siberian iris foliage), but it’s quiet, easy to move, starts and stops with no problems, and doesn’t use any gas (thus no emissions). Now the four cedar compost bins are full, and I’ve started putting shredded material in a large garbage can. After I finished the shredding, I

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paced off the dimensions for a home-made compost bin, 5' wide by 6' long—and it will be over 5' tall. I can use square posts that I have at home for the four corners. I'll leave open the side facing the portable greenhouse. Despite my limited carpenter skills, I feel ready to start on this project, hoping to tackle it once this next round of winter weather is behind us.

On Sunday a woodworker from Iowa City will be visiting the garden and we'll discuss the creation of a little free library. We will also talk about the possibility of "message center" for the NW gate, enabling me to leave messages for visitors, perhaps similar to what I saw at the Waterlow Park kitchen garden in London. Not sure where we'll put the little library. At the moment I'm inclined to locate it next to one of the Leopold benches at the east end of the garden. Another option would be by the gazebo (thus people could get a book, sit in the gazebo, and read). Received an email from Cara with a revised design for the flower bed sundial (also inspired by our visit to Waterlow Park). She came up with the idea of creating a steel circle that would surround the flower bed and provide a stable base for the sundial. She will shortly be sending me a price estimate (apparently steel prices are fluctuating at the moment because of the recent steel import tariffs introduced by the Donald).

Daffodils and tulips have really advanced the past week with the relatively nice spring weather. We have three yellow crocus blooming in "C"; not many of the crocus we planted in the fall of 2014 have survived. I cleaned up some dead foliage in the "E" beds and noticed that the chives are growing. Also a chance that one of the parsleys might have survived. It has a tiny bit of green foliage.

**23 March** (Friday). 49F; 31% humidity; overcast, some breeze, but I was quite comfortable working outside in my fleece and L. L. Bean Irish country hat. The big event today was the arrival of 300 red worms. I brought them to the garden after lunch and set up their Vermihut. I mixed the coconut block with a gallon of water, and once the water was absorbed, I mixed in some compost from a compost bin and several shredded pages of the NY Times. Worms probably don't read, but I thought they deserved a high class newspaper for their first day in their new home. I let the mix sit for about an hour to reach room temperature (now low 60s) and mixed in the worms, which were all huddled together in the middle of the bag, surrounded by a compost mix. Supposedly it could take up to a week for them to become acclimated to their new home and start some serious eating—and maybe even reproducing. Because of their preference for darkness, instructions said to leave a light on in the room so they are not tempted to leave the Vermihut. I don't want to arrive at the garden shed tomorrow morning and discover a herd of red earthworms crawling all over the floor. Although the Vermihut has air vents large enough for them to crawl out, I'm pretending everything is A-OK.

Ran the shredder this morning, and it was having trouble chopping up stuff it had previously been handling with ease. I dragged it up to the garden shed, read the manual, and discovered it was not too difficult to clean out. Once it was opened, I discovered some foliage rapped around the middle of the cutting blades, slowing everything down. It took about ten minutes to remove the wiry stems and get the shredder reassembled. This afternoon I did two more batches of mulch, everything working smoothly. The downer is that for some reason, even though I did four loads of mulch, the pile to be mulched doesn't look any smaller. :)



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Heard on the radio today that spring is running a few days late this year, but perhaps better late than early. In 2012, we had a very early spring—with many fruit trees in blossom—and then a late freeze was devastating. No sign so far that the forsythia buds are ready to start blooming. The buds on the forsythia branches that I cut and put in water have all opened, but they are all green: apparently the branches I harvested only had leaf buds and no flowers. But it's still nice to have some fresh green foliage in the greenhouse.

*Farmers and gardeners are notoriously conservative,  
but this is a simple matter of form following function,  
and since the functions have changed little, so have the forms—  
infinite though the variations are from country to country to country,  
and in Europe, even within a country.*

*According to Anthony Huxley's Illustrated History of Gardening (1978) . . .  
every country in Britain once had its distinctive spade and to a lesser extent still does,  
while in Belgium twenty-two patterns are currently available. (222)*