

Garden Kalendar: Fall 2018

This fall's Garden Kalendar is composed of edited excerpts from my Garden Journals for the months of October, November, and December 2017. The italicized quotations are from *The Meaning of Gardens*, an anthology of 30 essays edited by Mark Francis and Randolph T. Hester, Jr. (MIT Press), a book I was reading in 2017.

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In many Eastern cultures, the human entity is divided into three aspects: body, spirit, and soul. The biblical heavenly garden, the Garden of Eden, is an attempt to satisfy these three spheres of our being: our need to feed our physical body, to quench our endless thirst for beauty and spiritual experiences, and to bring some peace to our everlasting soul, struggling to come to terms with our mortality. ~Achva Benzinberg Stein, "Thoughts Occasioned by the Old Testament"

2 October (Monday). Sunny, temp in low 80s. First day in garden after 3-day trip to Kansas for MVM's 55-year HS class reunion. At Coe, W. & B. were already working, putting up the frame for the greenhouse. Took almost four years of advocacy, but the greenhouse is actually happening. While the builders were building, most of my morning was with the chipper/shredder. Processed three bags of shredded vegetation for a compost bin, chopping up 1/3 of the original pile. After our first hard freeze, there will be a lot more to compost. Right now the material is dry and shreds easily. I added some Milorganite fertilizer to provide more nitrogen and speed up the composting.

In the afternoon to Wickiup [my 1/4 acre vegetable garden near Wickiup Hill Outdoor Learning Center]. Concentrated first on cleaning out weeds and grass in area where I store the wheelbarrow, iron poles, bamboo, etc. Also pulled up dead zucchini, watermelon, and cucumber vines. Did some harvesting: excellent hills of King Harry potatoes and fingerlings (much more productive than I had expected, based on the first hills I dug). Got some tomatoes, two small watermelon, one cantaloupe, nice Bolero carrots, 2 kohlrabi, a lot of hubbard and acorn squash, 3 cucumbers (the end of an incredible cucumber year), 3 white zucchini (several plants still producing), and a few onions. I would have picked pole beans but ran out of time.

3 October. Temp reached the 80s, but it was cloudy and showers arrived this evening, though less than 1/2". At Coe, notable progress with the greenhouse: roof is on, also plywood sides. It has a low ceiling (will have to keep my head down on the west end), but it's exciting to see it emerge. While they worked on the greenhouse, I removed a rose bush from behind the "L" bed bench. Moved the "H" sundial into that spot, where it can be more easily seen. Spent a lot of time digging out the roots of a large clump of goldenrod in "C". Once the area was clear of roots—at least the ones I could find—I

added sand and compost and replanted some black-eyed Susans. Last task was in the "M1" bed digging up those weeds with the small white flowers (probably snakeroot; stem and leaves suggest they are in the eupatorium family). I also trimmed back the red rose bush, which had gotten very tall in the past month and trimmed back some of the white rose bush. I should remove the latter: the blooms have no fragrance and a short life span--after which they turn a sad, miserable-looking brown--but this is one of the oldest plants in the garden and I hate to kill it after so many years of service.

4 October. A real overnight rain; 1" in Coe Garden rain gauge, and I'm hoping a similar amount at Wickup--with more rain in the forecast. The drought has finally been broken. At Coe discovered that W. did not remember we needed a window on west side of greenhouse and that we also will need one on the south side since he could not locate a door with a window. So two more windows must be ordered, creating an unexpected two-week delay. But the door between shed and greenhouse has been installed, and everything is beginning to take shape, providing a feel for how the space will work.

In the garden, I focused on the west end of the "D" bed, weeding around the astilbe and behind the flowering crab. Dug up half of a goldenrod patch in the middle of the bed [one year later, I dug up the rest of that goldenrod]. Earlier I removed all the goldenrod from the "C" bed--which will give space for something, perhaps Husker Red penstemon, which are promiscuously popping up throughout the bed. I also trimmed a couple of large limbs from the SW apple tree. I'm not sure this is the best time to do such pruning, but I was inspired by Christopher Lloyd's advice that you prune a tree or shrub whenever you have the time. You can't afford to wait for the perfect time.

13 October [On a 2-week RV trip to New England] Today in Amherst, visiting the home of Emily D. and the Evergreens next door. The latter, which has not been restored, is dingy, dark, frayed at the edges, much as it was on the day its last resident died (I think in the 1950s). But the Homestead has been meticulously restored and is a beautiful home to visit. Stood in Emily's bedroom, the small writing desk at the corner near two windows facing toward the street. I was surprised to see a picture of Judge Otis Lord on the wall, wondering if his likeness would have been there when Emily was alive.

Wandered around Emily's garden, which looks a bit ragged this late in the year. Took seeds of some four o'clocks (which MVM recognized, a flower her mother grew on the farm) and a milkweed. I was curious if the milkweed would have been welcomed in E.D.'s flower bed--or was it a meadow plant. Milkweed is not listed in McDowell's book on ED's garden. Other flowers included zinnias, *salvia x superba*, nasturtiums (with large orange blossoms), a lovely anemone with oversized white petals (Anemone 'Alba'), many peonies, two substantial pokeweeds (Thoreau writes in his journal about walking through a forest of pokeweeds), *Perilla frutescens* (false coleus), a Gross Pink dianthus, a dame's rocket, and some hostas. According to

McDowell, hostas in ED's time were called daylilies and not distinguished from what we now classify as daylilies.

18 October. Beautiful sunny autumn day, temp in the 60s, ideal for hiking in Acadia National Park. Our first walk we made a wrong turn and never found our destination, Schooners Head, which proved frustrating, but the walk was level and easy, through a forest of young trees, mostly oak and birch, some small maples, and one stand of young white pine. Saw a lot of blueberry bushes, many larger than typical of those in the Boundary Waters. A lot of bracken and sweet fern—several times I ran my hands through the fern leaves, momentarily capturing their divine fragrance. At Jordan Pond Visitor Center, we saw two enormous wisteria, totally covering a large pergola. Several nice potted flower arrangements, one with an overgrown but lovely salvia, its dark blue blooms hovering over the dusty miller. Also one lobelia, perhaps a Crystal Palace, with many blooms. As for wild flowers, saw an occasional small aster. All the goldenrod are finished. Oaks and maples, however, are in "bloom"—as Thoreau might have said. Our second walk was up above Sandy Beach, a route which required frequent scrambling over rocks, but fortunately for us the path was marked by patches of blue paint, usually on rocks but occasionally on a birch—the bark often worn smooth by the hands of passing hikers, holding on while negotiating the trail.

23 October. First day back after New England trip. Rain gauge at home had 3 ½"; same at Coe; 2 ½" at Wickiup. No hard freeze; the hostas still intact. At Coe, the water is turned off, no fountain. I'm saddened by the thought of five months without the fountain's comforting background murmur. W. is still working on the shed/greenhouse. Outlets are installed, dry wall up. A set of overhead lights were installed in the greenhouse, but they hang too low and will need to be replaced with smaller lights between the studs. The door and big window have been installed, but we're still waiting on the two special-order windows.

In the afternoon to Wickiup. Harvested dozens of peppers, four tomatoes (though no sungold), and 2 cabbages. Although the deer had broken down the fence and walked through the garden, no significant damage to any veggies. I focused on removing pole beans, pulling up bush beans and cukes. Pulled up weeds in front of the compost bins—and threw the weeds into the bins. Sweet potatoes were frost-bitten, and I could see many vole tunnels so I'm not optimistic about the sweet potato crop. As usual the weeds got the upper hand at the end of the season—and thus a lot of cleaning up for me in the next month.

24 October. Felt like a real fall day: cloudy, temp in low 40s, very windy, but still no hard freeze. Spent two hours this afternoon moving AHG plants up to third floor Peterson, everything at the east end: 3 ficus, a Moses-in-the-cradle, two grass planters, a

dracena, an apple croton. As for the shed, W. was caulking gaps and surfaces of drywall. Had heater on to facilitate drying. After Coe I went to the Buffalo garden [one of the gardens I've started at Buffalo United Methodist, just over a mile from Coe's campus] and harvested parsley and 6 Cherokee purple tomatoes—plus 20-25 Sungold. Interesting that in October I have more tomatoes from the three tomato plants at Buffalo than the 25 plants at Wickiup. Of course, this is the first year for any tomatoes in the Buffalo garden, and the soil should be free of any harmful microbes. In contrast, people have been growing tomatoes in the Wickiup garden long before I arrived. On the other hand, the tomato plants at Wickiup were very productive, much better than the first two years I gardened there. I am still disappointed, however, by the thin production here at the end of the season; I need to do a better job of spacing the tomato plants and finding ways to reduce the wilt/disease issues.

27 October (Friday). The promised cold weather arrived: cloudy, temp in the low 30s, accompanied by wind. This morning I worked at Wickiup, cleaning up garden. Took down the fence on the north side next to the bed of iris, which has become thoroughly impregnated with rhizome-driven grasses. Cleaning up that bed will be a big job, something I will tackle next year. [Alas, didn't happen; now the dream is to clean up the iris bed in the spring of 2019.] Pulled up all the eggplants from the NW circular bed. Once the weather turns a little warmer I'll plant that bed with the garlic that just arrived from Territorial Seeds. I also dug up all the sweet potatoes in the SE circular bed. Although some damage from voles, I was able to fill 3/4 of the big blue bucket, a better harvest than I expected. I did uncover two vole nests—their wondrously soft and fluffy grass beds hidden under ground—but saw no live ones. I need to reconsider how to keep them out of the sweet potatoes. [In 2018, I tried planting onions next to the sweet potatoes, having read that the voles will avoid the onions and their companions, but I can testify the Wickiup voles had no problem ignoring the onions and relishing my sweet potatoes.]

3 November (Friday). Cloudy, temp in the 40s. A lot has happened this week. On Wednesday the electrician finished electrical work on the shed and greenhouse, and early that afternoon the Physical Plant crew delivered my desk, the old wood filing cabinet (which the Psychology Department tried to throw away over 30 years ago), office chair, gro-lights, 5-shelf bookcase, and a "new" 5-drawer filing cabinet—a cabinet that was for many years in my Writing Center office, a cherished old friend. Later that day I bought a small carpet for the floor and a new light bulbs for my old lamp. On Thursday I moved in stuff temporarily stored in the movable greenhouse. The office and greenhouse are now moderately well organized—though I still don't have my files, frig, and office chair from the faculty carrel in the library. They did deliver my carrel PC, but something is wrong with the hookup and will require further IT attention. I

finished the day by removing a large viburnum from the east end of the garden and repositioned one of the nearby compost bins. Today I moved the portable greenhouse down to that area

A concise definition of the garden is that of a place where nature is controlled to serve at, and for, human pleasure. If the jungle is a symbol of sex beyond human control and the lawn a symbol of sex corseted and over-controlled, then the garden is a place where sex is available for human delight in a controllable context. ~Robert B. Riley, "Flowers, Power, and Sex"

4 November. An overcast, chilly day, temp in the low 30s. Riley might be right that the garden is a "place where sex is available for human delight," but today it didn't feel like there was much sexual activity in the bordello—though perhaps the sun's appearance in the afternoon managed to awaken some plant or bee's hormonal memories. Worked at Coe all day, though the morning was mostly on the computer. Responded to an unexpected email from K.G., a German scholar who had visited the Writing Center four years ago and had included several quotes from me in a book just published. Her text is in hardcore academic German (well beyond my meager conversational clichés), but the quotes are in English, and a few I could recognize as something I probably did say. Also met with D. about doing art work for the *Garden Quarto*. He may come by the garden tomorrow and do some initial sketching. In the afternoon I trimmed and stored the dahlia tubers in a mix of 90% peat and 10% vermiculite. I was surprised how many tubers—which I dug up just a few days ago—had already begun to dry up and go soft, but most of them still appeared robust. Hard for me to judge how much moisture to add to the peat mixture. [As I discovered the following spring, the dahlias stored in the top layer of the peat mixture did fine, but several stored at the bottom were too wet and rotted over the winter.] As for working outdoors, I used the new dandelion tool to dig up over 100 dandelions in just one small area of the lawn. The roots on some of those dandelions are amazing, resembling roots for a small shrub. It's apparent that the herbicide Culver's was dumping on the lawn was only killing the dandelion tops and not doing any significant damage to the dandelion foundations. The lawn now has a lot of circular holes, but I'm hoping they will help aerate the soil. [As it turned out, the new tool was not as effective as I had hoped, often leaving enough of the root system so the dandelions could re-emerge in the spring. The resilience of the dandelions, sedge, and crabgrass eventually led me to cover the entire lawn with weed fabric (covered in turn by mulch and wood chips). The goal was to kill everything and then in the fall to sow a mix of three varieties of perennial rye and three varieties of Kentucky bluegrass.]

24 November (Friday). A beautiful, sunny day, record-breaking high temp of 71F, breaking the previous record high by 8 degrees. It felt like spring. This morning I cut off the tops of the peacock orchids, which I dug up over a week ago, and cleaned them

with the garden hose, removing most of the dirt, and then gently scrubbed them by hand with an old toothbrush. Split some of them up, and laid them out to dry. I discovered many were held together by a remnant of an original corm. Not sure how to handle them, but I decided in most cases to cut them apart—though in a few instances I left them as a tight corm clump. Tomorrow I'll put them into a bin of peat and store them for the winter. Based on last winter's experience, it appears they are easier to store than the dahlias tubers. [Spring of 2018 confirmed those suspicions: nearly all the peacock orchid corms survived intact; the only problem was that many started sprouting several weeks before I was able to plant them. They knew when spring had arrived; I was the unprepared team member.]

27 November. The beautiful days continue, sunny, high temp in the 50s. This morning at Coe, I had to work inside on various computer tasks. Later in the morning MVM and I drove the pickup out to the recycling center, with a load of cardboard, a dehumidifier (\$9 disposal cost), florescent bulbs, an old CD players, and a 20-year collection of batteries (which, we discovered, were all thrown away—alkaline batteries aren't recycled). After a Mexican lunch in Marion, we went to Home Depot, seeking an air filter for the chipper/shredder I had purchased at Home Depot—but no luck. Back at Coe, I went on line and ordered one from Amazon. Amazing that the air filter order could be combined with a book order (a Mary Oliver poetry collection) and I was thus eligible for free shipping. Gabe showed up at 2:00, and we spent an hour cutting out dead foliage in the "F" and "G" beds. Cut down all the bronze-leaf loosestrife, next year's plants already emerging, looking like baby ajuga. In the "E" bed, cut back the boltonia, which had looked so marvelous in the late summer in front of the garden mirror. The boltonia already has a cluster of small green leaves at its base, all prepared for the spring.

While pursuing the humblest occupations—such as planting or cutting flowers, I have perceived, as a chink of light through a door opened quickly, a great plan of things than our programme for the year, a larger world than that surrounding us, and one universal pattern of things, in which all existence has its place. . . . I have felt peace descend upon me while I have handled plants, so that a rhythm and harmony of being has been brought about. That harmony is the beginning of health. All of us need that harmony, for we are all to some extent disordered by conflicting desires, imprisoned by habit, or fevered with ambition and opposite strife. There is a universal pattern, a pattern that flows like a stream, like the moving pattern of a dance. It is possible even through such contact with the earth as I have had, to be drawn into that pattern and move with it. ~Elaine Penwardin, It's the Plants That Matter; quoted by Charles A. Lewis in "Gardening as Healing Process"

2 December (Friday). Another lovely, late-fall day, sunny, temp in the 50s. This morning worked at Wickiup over four hours. Took down and rolled up most of the plastic fence. Took apart supports for pole beans and tomatillos. Most of this stuff now stored in the shed here at home. Some of the garlic planted in November has green spears showing so I raked and cleaned up that circular bed. Started hoeing up grass where the east-side fence closest to the ditch will go in the spring. Very slow progress. It would make more sense to mow that fence line and cover with weed-suppressant fabric.

3 December. Perhaps the last nice day of the year. Temp into the 50s, but overcast in the afternoon, a cold front arriving tomorrow with rain. After lunch I vacuumed up leaves around the house. Filled 3 garbage cans for the compost piles. Then to Wickiup for 3 hours. Dug up remaining potatoes—one great hill of King Henry, but they are tricky because they often are spread out far from the center of the hill, similar to the sweet potatoes. Dug up all the fingerlings, though many close to the surface had gone soft. Dug up remaining carrots, a bunch of parsnips, and 4 white turnips. Cut the asparagus to the ground and did a lot of weeding.

4 December. Yesterday's journal was too pessimistic. We got one more nice day, cloudy but temp into the 60s, probably the last "warm day" until March. Expecting 50 degree drop in temp by Wednesday, plus 30-40 mph winds. An arctic express. But today, I worked outside without a jacket. This morning I was at Coe. Installed the new air filter for the chipper/shredder. Spent the rest of my Coe time putting a cover over the wooden sundial. I tried driving tent stakes into the gravel walkway to hold the cover, but ground was too hard, so I weighed down the ends of the cover with two bags of river rocks. Not an aesthetically appealing solution, but it will be okay until I figure out a better alternative. [I never did; in February, when I removed the cover, it was still being held in place by the bags of river rocks. The wooden sundial has now gone back to the artist's studio, to be replaced this spring by an iron sundial that will not require any winter protection.]

In the afternoon to Wickiup to deliver 16 fence posts and the 20 boards for the new raised beds; needed to complete that delivery before the pickup goes into winter storage. Before coming back home, I dug one hole and installed one fence post—only 15 more to go. I'm still undecided on how to construct a functional gate.

I've been thinking about this brief passage in "The Garden as Idea, Place and Action" by Francis and Hester: "A garden, different from a lot and a yard, is fundamentally separate from its surroundings. It is a temporary world of its own that is distinguished by a hierarchy of caring." If you happen to be passing our home on Elmhurst, you will notice that everyone else's front yard is grass, plus a few shrubs and trees, one lawn flowing neatly into its neighborhood. It's like everyone signed a land usage agreement that all the front lawns had sworn allegiance to the same by-laws. The

one exception is the 90' wide swath in front of our house: no lawn, no short and mowable grasses. Instead there is a garden, dominated by hostas and daylilies, plus some ornamental grasses and evergreen shrubs. It is, indeed, "fundamentally separate from its surroundings." I didn't intend for us to appear so rebellious, but occasionally when driving up to the house, I feel like we have failed to adhere to an unspoken social contract by creating this "temporary world of its own." And perhaps the emergence of this garden does signify a hierarchy of caring. Neither the hostas nor daylilies are midwest natives, but they provide nectar for bees and butterflies and they thrive without the requirements of any pesticides or herbicides. They get my vote.

5 December. Today I went through a large pile of old *Horticulture* issues, looking for reviews of garden books that might be worth reading. Came up with 15 books, all initially printed in the 1980s. In a few instances I used Amazon to track down new editions or other books on similar subject that might be more up-to-date. I also decided to order an earthworm "farm" and a compost tea kit. I got interested in the latter when reading *Fighting Like the Flowers* by Lawrence Hills, an organic gardener/writer, a British version of a Rodale. Hills extols the virtues of comfrey tea (and I've got a substantial patch of unused comfrey), and I've been hearing a similar message in a book on organic lawn care that vigorously advocates compost tea. So I thought, let's give it a try. The greenhouse is really going to be crowded once these operations are added. [Because of temperature control issues, I set up the worm farm in the garden shed office. The red wigglers arrived in April and seem to be doing quite well, producing some great soil thoroughly enriched by all those worm castings. As for the compost tea operation, I've been producing 6-7 gallons per week, which has been used in many areas throughout the garden. I've discovered there are a lot of garden experts with quite diverse opinions about the benefits of compost tea, but I figure most gardening is operating in the dark. We are often just throwing the dice, hoping we will occasionally be lucky and hit a jackpot.]

8 December. Picked up from the copy center the first issue of *The Garden Quarto*, with pieces by Ann Struthers, Nick Mason-Browne, Laura Farmer, and Maggie Hart, a Coe student. A minor, minor publication, but we have included several lovely pieces (both prose and poetry), and I think the final product looks pretty good. The editing was fun, and perhaps there will be a few readers who find pleasure from it. Now I need to obtain several small display stands and make it available to the vast multitudes at Coe; also need to create a new website page, providing a home for digital copies of this and future issues.

19 December (Tuesday). Another beautiful day for working outside. Sunny, temp in the 40s. After working at Coe in the morning (mostly computer stuff in the garden shed), I

drove out to Wickiup this afternoon and put in a good 3 hours. I constructed two more wooden raised beds, similar to the design I used for the old beds. Fortunately the ground has thawed enough so I could move some soil and was able to reposition two older beds so there was a wider path for walking between the beds. I also hoed and raked three beds so they should be ready for planting spinach and lettuce in late winter. One other job, I dug five post holes and put in the posts so I only have two more posts to put up for the new fence. Three of the posts went on the north side, placing the iris bed on the outside of the garden. Always more work to be done, but I think the garden is in fairly good shape for the spring. Tomorrow morning the pickup will go into storage, and the next day we fly to DC so today's trip to Wickiup will be the last time I drive the '88 Chevy S-10 this year. That priceless vehicle has played such a big role in my life since I inherited it from my Dad in 1995. Before storing it for the winter, I should take its photo. [The last garden journal entry for 2017.]

In the Genesis story, the serpent in the garden tempted Adam and Even with the promise that in defying God they would become like gods themselves. Our new gardens must surely not reflect the same lust for power and perfection. Rather, they must be modest gardens, expressing our wonder and reference for the world as we discover it, as we allow nature to reveal itself—our humanity a part of the whole mystery. Gardens should be like the songs of praise of which the Haggadah speaks, giving “Praise, for the earth restored to its goodness; Praise, for men and women restored to themselves; Praise, for life fulfilled in sacred celebration. . . .” ~Catherine Howett, “Gardens Are Good Places for Dying”