

## Fall 2020 Garden Kalendar

This Fall 2020 Garden Kalendar blog post is composed of edited excerpts from my daily garden journal written in October to December 2019, accompanied in brackets by my occasional commentaries on those passages. This text represents about 50% of the total journal, focusing on entries discussing either the Coe Alumni House Garden or my vegetable garden near Wickiup Hill Outdoor Learning Center. The italicized quotations inserted into the Kalendar are from *A Celebration of Gardens* (Timber Press, 1991), an anthology of writings on gardens assembled by Sir Roy Strong, the long-time director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and eminent authority on garden history. Kept by my bedside, Strong's book was a volume I frequently visited through the year. ~Bob

*The story of mankind began in a garden and ended in revelations. ~Oscar Wilde*

**1 Oct.** Turned on the air conditioner last night, fighting what will surely be our final battle with summer heat and humidity. And today proved to meet expectations: hot and sultry. By the time I finished my first round of gardening at Coe about 10:15, I was drenched in sweat. Returning to the garden at 3:00, my fresh t-shirt was soon soaking wet. But a cold front is about to roll through. I suspect the Wickiup garden had a heavy rain this afternoon and more is on the way later tonight and tomorrow. Temps are supposed to drop 15-20 degrees, back to more normal weather for the first week in October.

One project I completed today was gathering about 20 river rocks from a Physical Plant rock pile. I used some for securing the bases for three Nelson sculptures (both mobiles and the 7' steel crane in the rain garden), filled in a row of stone along the wood chip path in the "H" bed, and placed the remainder around portions of the WFS bed in "A1." Other tasks included cutting back in the "A2" bed the weigela, which has really grown this year, but it has a lot of branches with no leaves. Removing these branches may help the chives that somehow manages to survive in the weigela's shade. I also cut back the lemon balm, which loves this area—apparently a perfect combination of soil and light—but is overshadowing the toad lilies and anemones I planted last spring. The balm is a good foliage plant for this location, but it needs to be restrained so it's not overpowering its less assertive neighbors.

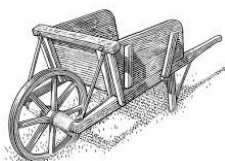
**4 Oct.** Worked at Coe for two hours this afternoon, mostly cleaning up the corner where the "K" and "L" beds meet, an area that earlier this morning received some transplanted baby hollyhocks. I trimmed old leaves on the brunnera behind the NW bench so visitors can see the fresher, greenish-silver leaves. Cut back the apple tree suckers and dug out several thistles. I also removed several small volunteer roses: they are relentless, their determination (and use of buried roots) similar to the thistles. There is a line of deeply buried thistle roots underneath two raised vegetable beds at Wickiup that keep sending up new plants among the eggplants and winter spinach.

While I was weeding, two women walked out of the Alumni House, perhaps alums here for an alum event. One woman said to the other, "This is pretty," a compliment that made me feel unexpectedly sad. Although the garden is such a complex environment, it's inevitable that most visitors will reduce a quick glance to the pretty, the picturesque. I should not be offended. Pretty is better than ugly. And when I first walk into an unfamiliar garden, my initial response

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would almost certainly be a broad assessment of the space's attractiveness. But I yearn for occasional visitors who see more than a "pretty face." It's becoming harder for me to see the garden as simply "pretty." And I know the perception of beauty is beyond my control. It's like trying to write a beautiful poem or essay: the reader will make the judgement on what is good or not good, beautiful or not beautiful. My job as a writer or a gardener is to create in ways that are as clean and precise and coherent as possible.

*Oh, Adam was a gardener, and God who made him sees  
That half a proper gardener's work is done upon his knees,  
So when your work is finished, you can wash your hands and pray  
For the Glory of the Garden, that it may not pass away!  
And the Glory of the Garden it shall never pass away!*  
~Rudyard Kipling



**8 Oct.** Tomorrow we leave for a 17-day trip to Europe so today was the inevitable scrambling to address last-minute tasks, mindful there is far more to be done than can be done in one day. Fortunately, the weather was darn near perfect for early October: sunshine, temp in 70s, low humidity. Here are a few things I did at Coe:

- Since it's likely they will turn off the garden's water supply before our return from Europe, I decided to turn off the garden hose water faucet. As I was detaching the hose from the faucet, I was blasted with a stream of water. I'm not sure what went wrong, but it appears the twin faucet piece I added last year had broken. Eventually I was able to feel around in the pool of murky water and turn off the water valve. But it was exciting for a couple of minutes.
- After draining the hoses, I decided to throw away the older two sections. They were stiff and had a series of kinks virtually impossible to remove. So the two "old" sections went into the dumpster, and I saved the flexible hose I bought last year. I like its flexibility and light weight. [*Despite keeping the flexible hose in the greenhouse over the winter, it developed a serious leak shortly after I started using it this past spring, a leak that proved irreparable.*]
- I cut back to the ground dozens of asters and goldenrod at the back of the "H" bed. No longer blooming, they were hiding the lovely switch grass. While the area now looks a bit barren, from most angles it looks much better.
- Yesterday I mowed the lawn, perhaps the last cutting of the year. A coon has been digging for grubs this week, tearing up small patches of turf—though nothing compared to the widespread destruction last spring. I did spread some grass seed this afternoon, particularly focusing on the edges of the lawn borders next to the gravel walkways. Overall, the lawn looks good.

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- Another area requiring attention was the “D” bed, particularly near the gazing ball. In the last four years I’ve planted poppies, lupine, and Jerusalem Cross in that space. The JC have established a recurring presence, but the area still looks unkempt and tacky. I removed a lot of weeds, grass, dead flower stalks, etc. I suppose it now looks better—if one is aware of how it looked before—but it is still a “dead” space in the bed.
- One of my last efforts was attacking the back of the “I” bed on both sides of the *Baptisia*. On the east side, a lot of hyssop has emerged in front of the yews, and the asters and goldenrod--never trimmed this summer--have become too tall and top heavy, now slumping over the plants in front of them, such as the daylilies planted this spring. I cut back most of the hyssops/asters/goldenrod so the new daylilies could receive more light and become better prepared for 2020. [*As it turned out, these daylilies did not produce any blooms in 2020; I’m not sure why they have been so slow to develop.*]

**26 Oct.** (Saturday). Back in C.R. after the European trip. My trip journal includes reflections on flowers and gardens we encountered on the Rhine River cruise and in London three marvelous gardens I had never before visited: Ham, Osterleigh, and Fenton House. But now it’s back to Iowa. I was surprised that the hostas at home had managed to escape a freeze, but my brief visit to the Coe garden confirmed that temperatures there had dipped well below freezing. The dahlias and zinnias were all brown, but several beds still looked surprisingly vivacious, particularly the mums in the “I” bed and an outstanding toad lily in the “K” bed. The lawn looked rough, but no significant problems. It was chilly in the garden shed so I turned on the heater, which should help energize the red wigglers in the earthworm factory.

This afternoon to the Wickiup garden. Almost everything above ground had frozen: peppers, beans, tomatoes, eggplants all gone. Deer had crashed through the fence on the south end and enjoyed dining on fresh broccoli, kale, and strawberry leaves, but it was the end of the season so no great loss. Fortunately there was still plenty to harvest:

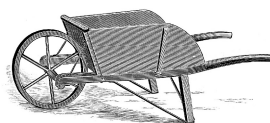
- Dug all the Yukon Gold potatoes, a so-so yield.
- The King Harry potatoes produced much better than I expected, 6-8 good-sized potatoes per hill, easily filling my plastic bucket. They are tough to dig because they are often spread out some distance from the mother plant. Despite my best precautions, my spade sliced through several lone wanderers.
- The fingerling potatoes yield was disappointing, only 4-5 potatoes per hill. I gave Marty [the owner of the field where the garden is located] some white potatoes, carrots, kohlrabi, and beets.
- Harvested several greens, including a nice clump of black-seeded simpson and a romaine—at least I think it’s a romaine, the yellow label having disappeared.
- The sweet potato yield was incredible, surpassing the total yield from the last three years. Many nice-sized “yams,” with no evidence of any type of animal gnawing or disease distress.
- Harvested a few peas. For some reason the deer ignored the pea plants as they were passing by the garden’s various beds. Also harvested a few pods of runner beans and a nice crop of carrots, though many were thin and long, confirmation that the gardener failed to thin the competing seedlings earlier in the summer.

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- Dug up most of my volunteer garlic and replanted in a new bed, which it will share with my Egyptian walking onions. This new wood-sided bed had nothing planted in it this summer but some volunteer Red Hopi amaranth. I fertilized with my Territorial Seed mix and the soil worked up quite nicely. Also planted two varieties of hard-neck garlic: Majestic (my personal favorite) and Leningrad (first-time experiment).

*A Garden was the Habitation of our first Parents before the Fall. It is naturally apt to fill the Mind with Calmness and Tranquillity, and to lay all its turbulent Passions at Rest. It gives us a great Insight into the Contrivance and Wisdom of Providence, and suggests innumerable Subjects for Meditation. I cannot but think the very Complacency and Satisfaction which a Man takes in these Works of Nature, to be a laudable, if not a virtuous Habit of Mind.*

~Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 477, 6 September 1712



**30 Oct.** A lot of gardening today but all indoors, mostly on computer. Spent several hours in the Garden Studio, typing passages from my 2018 garden journal for this month's Garden Shed blog posting. While my ruminations are not likely of value to anyone else, I enjoy how the Kalendar assignment—four times a year—requires me to read and reflect on last year's journal record, reminding me of what I was doing and my occasional reflections on the doing. It's a time-consuming project, but a reasonable undertaking as I try to become a more informed, self-reflective gardener—and that's the real goal.

The journal entries I typed today recorded my efforts to plant several thousand bulbs while fighting the cold weather, often encountering frozen ground. I may be facing similar challenges this year—though with a much smaller number of bulbs. This afternoon I ordered over \$500 worth of bulbs from Colorblends and Van Engelen. I did the orders quickly, without much conscious forethought. . . .

This morning, afternoon, and evening I was cooking veggies. Did a roasted vegetable dish with carrots, fingerling potatoes, madhatter peppers, parsnips, rosemary, garlic, seasalt, and olive oil. Sliced the vegetables very thin, baked at 400F, and they were done in 45 minutes. The rest of my cooking focused on preparing a veggie soup. Ingredients included white potatoes, yellow and orange carrots, onions, miscellaneous peppers, dried beans, home-canned tomatoes, parsnips, garlic. Only non-Wickiup ingredient was a quart of chicken broth. I also added a peas picked a few days ago, the few that had survived the hard freeze.

It started snowing this afternoon and has not stopped seven hours later. Most of it is melting, so minimal accumulation. I will be driving to Iowa City tomorrow morning to look after Theo so I'll need to allow extra time for the weather conditions.

Nationals just won their first World Series, an exciting 7<sup>th</sup> game; the Astros led until the 7<sup>th</sup> inning. A remarkable series: the home team never won. All the Nationals victories were in

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Houston. Astros were favored but Nationals got hits when they needed them. And they had great pitching.

**6 Nov.** Started as a lovely morning, sunny, temp into the 40s, but dumb me, I spent the morning on the computer, absorbed with two web postings—a July garden walk photo slideshow and a find editing of the October 28 Monday Morning Garden Report. After lunch I worked outside for four hours, but the weather had deteriorated, becoming overcast, windy, much colder. Temp was still above freezing and no moisture so I could keep working, but I sure wish I had also used the morning hours for outdoor garden tasks.

Major afternoon focus was digging up the dahlia tubers in the “E” and “J” beds. I did manage to store in peat all the tubers from the “E” bed: the Bishops, the Kelvin Floodlights, and a third dahlia I bought in the spring from Easy to Grow, a short and sturdy dahlia that produced strong red flowers in a superb display. The Kelvins also did well, though several became top-heavy and needed support that never came to their rescue. The Bishops have much smaller blooms and did fine. In the process of digging up the dahlias, I also dug up a couple dozen Blushing Lady tulip bulbs. Most appeared alive, many with fresh roots, some accompanied by accompanying bulbils. I’ll replant some with the new group of Blushing Lady tulips in the Van Engelen order. In the “J” bed, I got about 3/4 of the dahlias out of the ground. In all that digging I only found two old tulip bulbs that appeared viable. Found none of the species tulips I planted last fall, ones that I had hoped might naturalize in this bed. I suspect they need a bed with better drainage and dryer conditions throughout the late spring and summer. Here is a list of the bulbs I ordered for planting this fall, most intended for the Coe garden:

<u>Name of bulbs</u>	<u>Number of bulbs</u>
Camassia Purplish Blue	100
Chionodoxa Forbesii Blue Giant	50
Crocus Chrysanthus Goldilocks	200
Fritillaria Imperialis Maxima Lutea	5
Fritillaria Imperans Rubre Maxima	5
Galanthus Nivalis Flore Pleno	100
Iris Histrioides Katharine Hodgkin	100
Puschkinia Scilloides Var Libanotica	100
Puschkinia Scilloides Var Libanotica Alba	100
Snowflake White	100
Blushing Lady Tulips	100
Tulip Ice Sticks	50
Tulip Emperor Mix	100
Narcissus Avalon	50
Narcissus Golden Echo	100

**9 Nov.** (Saturday) A beautiful November day, welcome respite before we return to winter temperatures. This morning we had sun, no wind, and by noon I was working without a jacket,

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temp about 50. Though it cooled off in the afternoon, could still work til sunset. I was in the Coe garden all day, focused on bulbs. Planted the Imperial Mix of tulips in the "J" bed with miniature Ice Stick tulips in the front of the bed. Also planted clumps of yellow crocus in small groups at the front of the border. Next task was planting large Fritillaria in the "I" bed, which required a lot of preparation. Pulled up the glass flowers and removed a crowded mess of flowers: various asters (New England, aromatic, a native wild variety), goldenrod, unwanted rosebush, miscellaneous weeds and grasses. In the process encountered some daffodil bulbs that I had not remembered were in this area. Eventually carved out an 18" x 10" rectangle and dug down about 10". Laid out the 5 large bulbs and covered with a mix of soil, compost and vermiculite, trying to make sure the bulbs are surrounded by good drainage. Also added bulb fertilizer. Replaced the glass flowers, just west of the fritillaria. Then turned my attention to the "E" bed and planted about 90 Blushing Lady tulips. In the process dug up 3-4 old bulbs that I will replant in the "A1" bed. My next bulbs were the reticulated iris. I intended to plant some along the edge of the "C" and "L" beds, near the benches, but discovered several groups of small bulbs already in the "C" bed, in front of the Nepeta. I have no memory what was planted in that area, but there are certainly some thriving bulbs with fresh growth. I eventually found a spacer where I could plant a clump of 7-8 of the small iris. I then turned my attention to digging volunteer cranesbill out of the crevice garden, a slow process because of their tough, well-entrenched roots. Before I could finish, it was getting dark and time to head home and fix supper. We're supposed to have okay weather tomorrow morning before the arrival of the Arctic Express. I may skip church and head to Wickiup to harvest carrots and finish planting my garlic; also need to cover strawberries, onions, rutabagas, and parsnips with straw.

**10 Nov.** Well, this sucks. Last night I had a cough and felt tightness in my chest. Woke up this morning with a real chest cold and sore throat—but no problem with sinus drainage. Although I definitely did not feel 100%, the temp was in the mid 30s, much warmer than tomorrow is supposed to be—so I decided to skip church and worship the Lord in the Wickiup garden, a darn nice place for an hour of prayer and humming hymn tunes. One primary task was planting the German White porcelain and Majestic garlic. I also dug up and planted 30-35 smaller garlic, descendants of an unnamed garlic planted two years ago. In prepping the bed, I mixed in a load of Wickiup compost and a bag of compost from a bin at home. Half of the bed I fertilized with the Territorial Seed fertilize and the other half with fertilizer that I've had in the back of the pickup for the past two years. This bed had tomatillos and tomatoes in it this year and the tomatillos did great. We'll see how the garlic does. I also dug up all the carrots in three beds, all the beets (no giants but many nice small-to-medium ones), and five white parsnips. As usual I did a terrible job of thinning the beets and carrots; did a better job with the parsnips. Finally, I moved 3 loads of straw to cover the parsnips, rutabagas, and a few carrot I have not yet dug.

**12 Nov.** Cold, bitter cold. It snowed 6" Sunday night and then the temp started dropping yesterday, reaching -5F last night, 11 degrees below the previous record low on this date. Today was sunny but felt like winter. I was scheduled to go to Iowa City today to take care of

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grandson, but I have a serious cold (sore throat, coughing, nasal drip), and because of icy roads I couldn't drive the old pickup (to bring back to C.R. a milk cart and table purchased at a garage sale). So I spent most of the day working in the greenhouse. I cleaned dahlia tubers and storing them in peat. Finished about 2/3 of the dahlias. I also did several groups of peacock orchids, but they were planted very late in June and most of the tubers (or corms, can't recall precisely how they are classified) did not develop fully and I suspect most will not store properly. I'm disappointed with myself that I was so slow planting them this past spring. Some of the tubers are still in the ground, probably frozen and not likely they will survive.

**15 Nov.** At Coe this morning for two hours. Mostly cleaning up the greenhouse, re-arranging pots, and discovering some Kelvin Floodlight dahlia tubers I had missed. After cleaning them up, I found enough space to store them in a dahlia bin. I intended to sow basil seeds but ran out of time. At home I worked on the Fall *Garden Quarto* issue and creating a new digital map for the Wickiup garden. It's a slow process creating over 50 rectangular boxes, representing the raised beds, with the appropriate dimensions and locations, but it should be a good, useful map when finished. I also read several pages in Katherine Swift's *The Morville Hours*—one of the most elegant, beautifully written garden books I've ever encountered. Stunning imagery and phrasing united with detailed, precise, practical information. It's slow going, requiring attentive reading, but well worth the effort.

**17 Nov.** (Sunday) Two days with all my garden work at home, indoors. It has warmed up, temp into the 40s, but everything is damp, combination of melting snow and an all-day soft drizzle. We are supposed to have at least two more days into the 40s, so I'm hoping I can plant bulbs and do some yard work here at home. Today I made one significant step forward: I cleaned up the garden shed. Created a new storage area for my family's old wooden rocker and moved a large pile of weed control fabric and garden netting onto the overhead platform. This enabled me to sweep the floor—a major breakthrough. The space now feels much larger and functional. One other task was removing the wooden faux bridge from its deteriorating cardboard box and stack the parts on the work bench. The next step would be to assemble this stupid thing, which I never should have purchased, at least 15 years ago. It would be a good candidate for the next church rummage sale. In sorting through boxes of stuff I did throw away the peony tubers I bought in 2015—\$82 for nothing. Dumb. I can't even recall where I intended to plant them.

Yesterday I should have been working on *The Garden Quarto*, but instead I spent several hours correcting and editing the digital map of the Wickiup garden, trying to achieve a more accurate representation of each bed. Interesting to discover that I spent hundreds of hours in that garden this summer, but I can't recall the positions of some beds. Tomorrow I'll print a copy and, weather permitting, take it to Wickiup and compare my new map with the reality—keeping in mind Alfred Korzybski's admonition that the “map is not the territory.” This morning I did finally turn my attention to the Fall *GQt*. The major pieces fell into place quite easily, and I spent most of my time choosing quotes for the Commonplace Garden. Selected a Michael Pollan quote on the “wild” for the front. Other pieces by Ann Struthers, Mrnalini

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Harchandrai, Kim Potts Savage, Karen Lee (a California poet with a poem on the language of flowers) and “Planting Flag Iris” by Rita, my summer student worker. Overall, a substantive, diverse issue. Although I’ve now used all the submissions sent me by Nick Mason-Brown, Ann Struthers, and Bob Drexler, I’m confident I can find suitable pieces by alums, students, guest writers, and garden authors from the past.

This afternoon, after cleaning the garden shed, I started a new version of the “Bean” essay that I initially drafted this summer. This new version is terrible, but at least I finally got the project re-started. [*As it turned out, after three days working on the Bean essay, it was set aside; perhaps this winter I will produce something worth posting to the Garden Shed.*] Still not sure what I want to do for this month’s blog post. I may try to construct a photo slide show of Coe flowers accompanied by poems on the same flowers, a project I worked on while in Europe.

**20 Nov.** Finally, the day I’ve been waiting for: no rain or snow, bits of sunshine in the morning, and temp into low 50s. Serious gardening weather. Alas before I could play outside, I had to finish several church computer tasks and print the master copy of *The Garden Quarto* for the copy center, but I did get in three hours of gardening in the afternoon. Focused on the “G” bed peninsula in the Coe garden. Trimmed the shrub rose and cleaned up dead foliage (mostly peonies and Siberian iris). Saved a bunch of black-eyed Susan seed heads that I’ll scatter in the backyard here at home. This morning I got so enthralled with various seed heads that I pulled out the Canon and spent 30 minutes taking photos. I hope some close-ups turn out okay. Coneflower seed heads are so elegantly designed and endlessly fascinating. I managed to clear an area east of the Japanese maple and planted about 25 Camarissa bulbs, the first time I’ve ever planted these dudes. They supposedly don’t mind damp soil—and the east end of the peninsula stays relatively moist through the winter. The fritillaria I planted around the maple last year were a failure, just a couple of plants surviving the winter. In cleaning up that bed, I found a lot of gooseneck and their roots: tough, insistent characters. But it was heartening to see so few horsetail, a distinctive point of progress. As for setbacks, I did see a patch of vetch on the pergola side of the north rain garden channel. I thought it had been eliminated when I dug up the area last year, but it appears one or two root fragments escaped my notice. Although there is some horsetail in the area, the population is much sparser, evidence that a determined attack can pay dividends.

**22 Nov.** Sunshine, last night in the 20s and today temp to upper 30s. It was a bit chilly, but no wind and a good day for gardening. In the morning at Coe, walked around the garden, picking up litter, including a Conair Hair Dryer. That’s a first. Later in the morning a Viet Nameese student came by to talk about photos she had taken in the garden in early September. She is doing a project for a digital art class and wanted me to identify the flowers in her photos. After our meeting, she sent me about 25 photos, and I identified all but one flower (probably a buddleia, though the angle of the photo made it hard to be certain). In our conversation, she talked about her interest in clothing and fashion design, and we discussed the possibility of her designing an Alumni House Garden tee shirt or sweatshirt. Create our own clothing line. We’ll see what happens.



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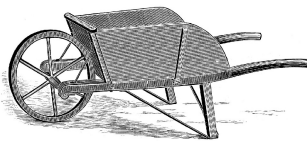
In the after I decided to run some dead foliage through the shredder. Since the electricity is still not available at the east end of the garden, I moved the shredder to the garden shed and started shredding some Joy Pye, sunflowers, asters, and goldenrod. Regrettably, I failed to keep the dispenser chute clear, and the machine got clogged. Took over 90 minutes to get everything cleaned out so the motor would restart. . . . which means not much shredding was accomplished before it was time to go home. Before leaving the garden, I walked around the garden and collected sample of seeds and foliage that I thought would have interesting or distinctive fragrances. I brought them home and started trying to figure out how to describe their olfactory qualities: chives, basil, sage, oregano, sweet Annie, Russian sage, yarrow, lemon balm, thyme, hyssop. My vocabulary for fragrances is woefully inadequate and lacking any system for organizing my responses. I have ordered Druse's book on how to think about garden fragrances. Perhaps his language will prove helpful.

**25 Nov.** Could not have asked for a nicer day for the last week in November. Temp into the upper 40s, some sunshine in the morning, clouds in the afternoon, but no rain. I was at Coe all day, the soil ideal for planting bulbs.

- Cleaned up bed behind the SW bench; planted 50-60 *Leucojum* (Summer Snowflakes) in 5-6 different groups.
- Cleaned out area in front of the Goatsbeard and planted about 25 Carissima bulbs.
- In B1, I cut back all the cranesbill and at the front of the bed—using a new plastic dibble—planted about 75 yellow crocus.
- In the “C” bed, facing the new crocus, planted 40 *Chionodoxa* (Glory of the Snow).
- Planted *Leucojum* behind the NW bench, in same area where I planted some a couple of years ago; saw the tops of several snowflakes already emerging.
- In the raised “J” bed, planted about 20 Ice Stick tulips, the same ones also planted in the middle of the lower “J” bed.
- At the back of the crevice garden, tore out the bloody cranesbill, a volunteer that had totally taken over the area. A dense, tough root system, hard to remove. By the time I had extricated the cranesbill, it was getting dark. Tomorrow I'll try to plant the reticulated iris in that space.

*Toward seven o'clock every morning, I leave my study and step  
Out on the bright terrace; the sun already burns resplendent  
Between the shadows of the fig tree, makes the low wall of coarse  
Granite warm to the touch. Here my tools lie ready and waiting,  
Each one an intimate, an ally: the round basket for weeds;  
The zappetta, the small hoe with a short haft. . . .  
There's a rake here as well, and at times a mattock and spade,  
Or two watering cans filled with water warmed by the sun.  
With my basket and small hoe in hand, facing the sun, I  
Go out for my morning walk. . . .*

~Hermann Hesse, *Hours in the Garden, An Idyll* (1952, translated by Rika Lesser)



**26 Nov.** Classic English gardening weather this afternoon: gray, steady drizzle, temp in 40s, bit of wind. It was not raining hard enough to stop me from working outside, but after an hour I was ready to go in the garden shed, brew up some ginger/honey tea, and enjoy the space heater's dry warmth. A few jobs I tackled today:

- Returned to the crevice garden and spent another 45 minutes digging out cranesbill roots at the back of the bed. I had not realized their root system would go so deep; no wonder they are unfazed by the summer's hot, dry weather. I'm sure I didn't get every root bit, but two areas (on either side of the German Thyme) are sufficiently cleared so I could plant the Katherine Hodgkins *Iris discoroides* (or maybe it's "Hodgkin" without the "S"?). The bulbs are the size of acorns and easy to plant in the porous sandy soil.
- Around the gazebo sun dial I planted a bunch of *Chionodoxa* and several dwarf iris; cut back the exuberant snow-in-summer, whose foliage looks marvelous at this time of year, revived by the autumn weather.
- In the afternoon I planted Blushing Lady tulips at the back of a raised "J" bed after cutting back the hyssop that had recently moved into the neighborhood. Then planted three batches of *Leucojum* around the hydrangea shrub in the "H" bed; in the same bed I also planted an island of *Camassia*.
- Finished the day by planting five more *Fritillaria imperialis* in the "I" bed, quite near to where another group was planted last fall. For the fritillary I dug a trench 10" deep and covered the bulbs with a mixture of soil, fresh compost, and vermiculite-amended by some bulb fertilizer. I've read fritillaria can be heavy feeders. I'm anxious to see if the old fritillary will do as well in 2020 as they did last spring. [*They didn't; they all came up, but only two plants produced blooms.*]

**5 Dec.** Over a week since my last entry. I left the journal in my Garden Studio at home and never retrieved it till yesterday. On the last two days of November I concentrated on completing my November blog post, the anthology of flower poems combined with 21 photos of Coe garden flowers. One challenge was tracking down appropriate photos. Second task was figuring out how to arrange the anthology and which software to use. After some trial and error, I decided to use the WordPerfect Graphics software, the same program I used for the Labyrinth design. I had to start from scratch, figuring out how different commands work. I eventually created 11 separate pages, each page with two poems and two photos (except for the first page with a single photo and poem). Once I got rolling, it went quickly, taking me about 30 minutes to construct a page. I saved each page as a PDF, which would mean that folks reading the blog posting must open each page separately. I still have a bunch of poetry and photos I didn't use so I may do a future followup.

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As for gardening, Monday was the beginning of a three-day stretch with sunshine, temp into mid 40s, no new moisture. I focused on cleaning up beds at Coe. I cut back all the cranesbill in the "B1" & "B2" beds; also spent a lot of time in the "H" bed. The electricity outlet on the pergola is not working so I created a compost pile next to the greenhouse, where I could hook up the chipper/shredder to the greenhouse electricity. [*Alas, much to my embarrassment, one year later this "temporary" compost pile is still there, most of the materials now too damp and decomposed to run through the chipper/shredder.*]

**6 Dec.** Temp only reached upper 30s today, but it proved to be an excellent day for gardening: sunshine, no wind, low humidity, dry conditions, and the lowest temp last night only hit the upper 20s so the soil was not frozen. I was thus able to plant more bulbs. In the "G" bed on the berm in front of the forsythia, I planted 25-30 large Van Engelen *Leucojum* bulbs. In the corner of the berm along the south rain garden channel I planted 15 narcissus. I also cut back the phalaris in the two buried barrels in "H" and planted another 15 narcissus. Back on the forsythia berm, I planted about 50 snowdrops. The berm should look quite different in the spring.

One disheartening discovery this afternoon. While sorting through miscellaneous papers, I discovered a stupid editing error in the Fall 2018 *Garden Quarto*: in an Emerson quote in the Commonplace Garden--the "H" of "have" on one line and the "ave" on the next line. I was so disgusted with myself missing such an obvious copy editing error. I remember having a terrible time with the layout margins in that issue, producing several "final" versions. I suspect that while searching for the right spacing, I inadvertently screwed up the Emerson quote. Although impossible to change the past, I did pull up the old file, corrected the error, saved the issue as a new PDF, deleted the old link on the website, and installed the new file. At least one advantage to publishing on the internet is this allowance for correcting old mistakes. Next week, I'll print a few clean copies of the Fall '18 issue so we're no longer handing out copies with a corrupt Emerson. This episode should re-enforce the importance of more rigorous proofreading, even when I think everything should be finished.

**9 Dec.** A day of two seasons. Light rain last night but temp remained above freezing, so I had no trouble working outside this morning. I concentrated on bulb planting and miraculously got everything planted by noon. Directly above the patio in the backyard I planted 50 snow drops, 50 chionodoxa, and two clumps of snowflakes. In the hosta garden in the front yard I planted two groups of Echo narcissus and a few leftover tulips. The soil was perfect for planting: moist but not wet, not too cold, easy to work with.

One other task: about two months ago--before our October trip on the Rhine--I dug up a bunch of daffodil bulbs in a bed bordering on our neighbor's property. Not knowing what to do with them, I left them lying on a limestone border, totally exposed for over two months. Even though we've had temps down to zero, the bulbs still seemed okay, so I dug a trench around the cornflower pot, half-buried in the hosta bed west of the patio, and planted the bulbs. I have no idea if they will survive or produce any flowers, but it seemed worth the

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effort. At least they're no longer lying on the bare limestone. [*Despite my lack of care., a high percentage arose from the dead in the spring and most of them bloomed.*]

At Coe this afternoon, the temp had dropped over 10 degrees to the mid 20s, it had begun to snow, and the wind had picked up, making it feel much colder. But I still managed to get a lot done. I strung a second set of Christmas lights over the standard hawthorn in the "H" bed. When the lights came on at dusk they added a sparkling cheeriness to the east end of the garden. I also did some extensive house cleaning in the shed and greenhouse, sweeping and vacuuming the floors and rugs. I also re-positioned the chipper/shredder in the greenhouse so it's less of an obstruction for doing any work at the work bench—though this did require moving the trash can into the shed. Overall, the place is now much cleaner and more efficiently organized.

Another afternoon task was sorting through the peacock orchid corms (or whatever they are) and storing them in a container filled with dry peat. Many of the corms didn't flower this past year, but most had grown larger and are definitely worth saving. My final project was beginning to work on the December Almanac blog posting by reading old garden company emails. I started with Johnny's Seeds and pulled out a list of good veggie seeds to be planted in late summer or early fall for late season harvest, including a few veggies that one may be able to overwinter (carrots, turnips, kale). Could be a useful list for the future. [*Because of the August 10 derecho, my late summer and fall has been consumed with cleaning up and resurrecting lawn and garden areas at home that were devastated by the storm. I did plant a couple short rows of lettuce at the Wickiup garden, but the deer broke through the fence and ate the lettuce—as well as the kale, broccoli, and cabbage that had been planted in the spring. The deer also ate the sweet potato plants but their grazing doesn't bother the underground tubers, which turned out to be a bumper crop.*]

**14 Dec.** Yesterday was cold and overcast, but no rain or snow, and I was able to clean up most of the backyard. Hooked up the space heater in the garage to warm up the lawn mower so it started on the first try. The mower vacuumed up and filed over ten bags of shredded leaves, including the foliage from the large hosta bed in the northwest corner. I also raked up most of the dead foliage in the east-side raised bed. Realized that I will need to redo that retaining wall I rebuilt perhaps 15 years ago, moving it 12-18" to the east so it abuts the neighbor's newly installed dog fence. I also decided it no longer makes sense to have the grass path between the round flower bed and the weigela bushes, a path now blocked by the new fence. So I'll rebuild that entire bed. I also need to plant something along that fence, perhaps short evergreens or a row of Baptisia?

Another job begun yesterday was organizing my old *Horticulture* magazines that I read and notated back in 2014 when I started taking care of the Coe garden. I put the mags in chronological order and will now go through them more methodically, typing notes on information and suggestions worth retaining. It's apparent from what I looked at today that I was frequently highlighting information on plants new to me, many of which have now become old friends. In preparing for my end-of-year almanac blog, I read through all of my old typed notes and retrieved several items that struck me as particularly insightful or useful.

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Today I spent my gardening time at Coe, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The lights were on when I arrived and they came back on before I left in the evening. Several hours were spent harvesting and preparing dead foliage for composting. I was particularly focused on the “K” bed, removing balloon flowers, asters, goldenrod so that the miscanthus behind Cara’s steel plant supports is easier to see and appreciate. Meanwhile my student garden assistant was clearing up dead foliage on the east end of the “A1” bed. On one occasion when I walked by, she was trying to dig out a small cranesbill, thinking it was a weed—and in its present condition it would be hard to tell what might be its beneficial contribution to the garden bed. Fortunately for the cranesbill, the ground was frozen and the plant was proving difficult to dislodge. I suggested that for today we center our attention on the foliage above ground, only removing items that could be easily raked or clipped off with the scissors. The bed soon looked much better.

Because of the wind chill in the low teens, I periodically took breaks in the garden shed to work on computer projects. I collected several items for the almanac, including a piece copied from the Kitchen Garden Seeds website on storage of root crops and a piece I wrote on the Iowa Gardeners website posting that listed the twenty best perennials for an Iowa flower garden. The Alumni House Garden has 19 of the 20—only missing the Virginia bluebells. I also started constructing a graphic map of the flowers in the “A1” flower bed. It was slow going as I struggled to devise a clear and functional design while struggling to master the commands needed to create the design. It took me 15 minutes to learn how to draw a line from a graphic symbol representing a plant to the name given below—only to decide that the lines were not going to work: too many plants crowded into a small space. I first attempted this project in 2014, and I’m still unsure how to proceed. I would love to have a set of maps completed by the spring, drawings that could help me remember what is planted where while also helping to imagine new plant combinations. *[Alas, a year later the maps still do not exist. Perhaps this coming winter I will finally create a functional schematic representation of the garden and its plants.]*

**17 Dec.** Although I spent most of the day at Coe, I never walked into the garden. It was all computer work in the morning. After having pondered the matter for a couple of weeks, this morning I woke up and immediately decided I was going to create an Alumni House Garden calendar, using photos from the past year. I spent over an hour trolling through about 2,000 of my 2019 garden photos, trying to find one or two good photos for each month. I settled on a big garden view for the front cover, using the sky as the space for the calendar’s title. After choosing the photo finalists, I composed a concluding paragraph with information on the Canon camera and the website. In the Chem Library I printed out B/W copies of each page. I was immediately struck by how crisp and detailed the photos were: much sharper than how they appeared on my computer. I then took a flashdrive and mockup calendar to CopyWorks. It will cost over \$300 for 25 copies, but I’m hoping the calendars will make decent Christmas presents. I was surprised at how much pleasure I had creating this calendar; perhaps I miss the gratification I gained producing over twenty years of Writing Center calendars.

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**18 Dec.** An unusual day in several respects. This morning I went to CopyWorks and checked out the calendar. Looked darn good, photos coming out more vibrant than I had expected. Although this project is a bit expensive—over \$12 per calendar—it’s fun to see such a project capture a few visual high points from the past year, and it should make a decent holiday gift for a few friends. Final copies will be ready on Saturday.

Another special event this morning was meeting the Coe student who will be creating a design for some Alumni House Garden T-shirts or sweatshirts. She showed me three drawings, and we finally settled on the one based on a photo of a bee visiting an aromatic aster blossom. We also discussed the lettering for the words COE ALUMNI HOUSE GARDEN and the possible colors and styles that would work best with her illustration. She seemed genuinely excited about the project.

As for gardening work, I did some cleaning up of the “L” bed in front of the patio. I cut back the Siberian iris, nepeta, spurge, stonecrop, asters, goldenrod, daylilies, coreopsis, etc. I left a few areas with old flower stalks/seeds (potential food for visiting wildlife), but overall the bed looks much cleaner. I piled most of this stuff over some plants outside the greenhouse that may need protection during the winter months. It was cold today: some sunshine but high temp only about 25F so the day alternated between working in the garden for 30 minutes and then going inside to do some computer work while warming my hands and feet.

**20 Dec** (Friday). Began the day by sending email to faculty/staff informing them of the new *Garden Quarto* issue and inviting folks to visit the garden today at the noon hour and check out the seasonal sundial. Since there are few people on campus, it’s no surprise no one came, but perhaps an invitation in December will help entice visitors for the spring equinox. I also mentioned that free copies were available of the Alumni House Garden calendar, and I did a quick calendar distribution trip around campus, delivering copies to Kim in the President’s office and a few friends in Peterson and the Library. The rest of the morning and early afternoon I focused on cleaning up the west end of the “M1” bed. I hooked up the leaf vacuum and collected five loads of leaves—mostly oak—and dumped them in the #3 compost bin, which is not yet full but getting close. I also cut back the sedums, hostas, and honeysuckle—which has been running all over the bed this year, producing tons of foliage but no flowers. I need to keep the base of the honeysuckle rigorously trimmed so that it will choose to focus its energy on bloom and scent production. The crevice garden still needs some serious attention, but overall the northwest corner of the garden looks much improved.

*I asked a schoolboy, in the sweet summertime, ‘what he thought a garden was for? And he said, Strawberries. His younger sister suggested Croquet and the elder Garden-parties. The brother from Oxford made a prompt declaration in favour of Lawn Tennis and Cigarettes, but he was rebuked by a solemn senior, who wore spectacles, and more back hair than is usual with males, and was told that ‘a garden was designed for botanical research, and for the classification of plants’. He was about to demonstrate the differences between the Acoty- and the Monocoty-ledonous divisions when the collegian remembered an engagement elsewhere. ~Dean Hole, Our Gardens (1899)*



**21 Dec.** Winter solstice. I intended to go to Coe and take a photo of the sundial at noon but didn't remember till it was almost 1:00 p.m. Today was a near perfect December day. It was just below freezing last night but the garage's thermometer recorded upper 40s this afternoon. Sunshine, soft freeze from the south, perfect day for gardening. This morning I worked at home. Did some website stuff (still working on Coe garden map) and then worked in the backyard: trimmed the two old weigelas along the neighbor's fence and raked up leaves around the big maple.

After lunch I drove to Wickiup, my first visit since November, just after Thanksgiving. I intended to cover walkways with paper and mulch, but I ended up spending most of my three-hour visit straightening up the area where I store garden equipment (tomato cages, fencing, steel rods, etc). I did some hoeing of weeds and grass on the west side and intended to fill the blue steel raised bed with a mixture of soil, manure, and vermiculite, but discovered the soil I wanted to dig up was still frozen, despite the relatively warm day. Enjoyed a stunning sunset with magenta and orange colors on the undersides of several strings of clouds across the western sky. What amazed me was how far south the sunset was, the sun disappearing between two large cottonwoods on the west bank of the creek. In the summer the sun is setting behind the willows, perhaps 70-80 degrees north of the current sunset location.

M., the owner of the farmland where the garden is located, came by, offering me Gurney and Jung seed catalogues. She told me that folks in the area were worried about J., who lives across the road, shooting his shotgun after having had too much to drink. It is shotgun hunting season and several times this afternoon I heard a series of shots in the direction of the Cedar River. I must say I'm not crazy about having a drunk hunter firing his shotgun while I'm gardening. The chance of getting shot is quite remote, but the news did make me a little nervous.

**23 Dec.** Another beautiful day. By the time I got up (about 7:15) the temp was already above freezing—though there was still a light frost on the grass and my pickup's windshield. When I got to Coe about 10, I was undecided about whether or not to open a garden gate. I had stated in my email on Friday that the garden would be open from 11 to 1 in case anyone wanted to check out the seasonal sundial. Since the campus is closed down with only a couple cars in the nearby parking lots, I doubted anyone would come by, but I decided to be a man of my word and unlocked the NW gate. Much to my surprise, F., a retired Coe prof., came by to see the sundial and we spent perhaps 10 minutes discussing how it works. I also gave him a garden calendar.

When F. arrived I was taking garden photos, concentrating on foliage, dried seeds, and a few plants that have green leaves. I was hoping to manage a few good shots of seedheads; I

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find the design of the coneflower seed heads endless fascinating. The melted frost on the lamb's ear leaves created some lovely colors and textures. After F. left the garden, I focused on cleaning up the "D" bed, removing asters and goldenrod and cutting back the cranesbill.

In the afternoon I drove to Wickiup, where I worked for almost three hours, mostly focused on covering up the central axis pathways with paper and mulch. Fortunately the wind was not blowing, making it much easier to lay out the papers before covering them with the grass/hay mulch. This warm weather is a godsend, enabling me to complete a lot of early spring cleanup and preparations.

**26 Dec.** Boxing Day. I remember a gray, overcast Boxing Day in London in December, 1966, my first visit to London, waiting to catch a red double-decker bus near Regent's Park. Although everything in the city was closed down for this day after the big day, I was still thrilled to be in this remarkable city. Now, 54 years later, I'm driving an old Chevy S-10 pickup to my garden near Wickiup Outdoor Learning Center, arriving about 3:30 pm. Like London, it was an overcast day, and the dark came fast, the temp in the mid 30s, a slight breeze. It did not take long for my hands and toes to get cold. My first task was digging up remaining carrots, a few parsnips, and a half-dozen beets. A few of the root crops were soft, but most were okay. When I brought them home, I took them to the garden shed, turned on the light (one of the first times I've ever worked in the shed at night), turned on the heater, and sorted through the veggies, cleaning them of excess soil, cutting off their tops, discarding a few that were too small or had suffered vole damage (a few of the carrots). Many of the carrots were Japanese Manpukuji carrots from Baker Creek Seeds, notably long and thin—the majority around 2' long but not always fully developed, many suffering from my failure to thin them in the spring. This variety deserves another planting but they need deep loose soil and more space than I had allocated.

**31 Dec.** Last journal entry of 2019. It's 10:05 pm., just two hours remaining in the year and the decade. In two hours it will be the 20s—perhaps another roaring 20s? Who knows. I do know I will be entering my 9<sup>th</sup> decade, though I have no conscious memory of the 1940s. That's a lot of decades to go through. In terms of distinct decade markers, much of it has become a blur. For example, from the early 1980s to my retirement in 2014 all my life seems lumped together as one continuous, elongated decade. I suppose when you get old and settled into a pattern of life—in my case driven by my teaching and administrative work at Coe—the decade distinctions become relatively insignificant. And I was so busy with my work and family, most of the mass culture I ignored. I didn't see many moves, didn't watch much TV, didn't listen to current music, was not an avid sports fan. Viewed this way, my life sounds pretty dull. But that's okay.

Today I focused on finishing the Almanac blog post, and I did get it posted. The document came out okay. I can't imagine anyone will ever read it, but it captures some stuff I read and learned this year—and it does have a lot of good quotes on gardening. Twenty pages, single-spaced, mostly 10-pt font. It was fun doing, but I'm glad it's done.

This afternoon I went to see Cara in her studio in Marion. Gave her two copies of the calendar and the *Garden Quarto* fall issue. We then talked about possible projects at Coe: a bird



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feeder with multiple platforms, a wall mirror to complement the one on the south fence, new flower supports along two walkways, etc.

Overall it was a good year at the Wickiup and Coe gardens. The most progress was at Wickiup with the new raised beds, the improved walkways, the improved fencing to deter deer incursions. The garden and landscaping projects at Buffalo were left in holding patterns—though the installation of the outdoor worship sculpture is a major step forward. My garden projects here at home are also in limbo, hampered by my indecisiveness on what the backyard should become. As for Coe, the biggest progress was in the acquisition of new sculptures. I also feel I'm getting a clearer idea how to plant in masses, moving away from so many small, single specimen flowers. I'm a slow learner but perhaps the garden is headed in the right direction.

*Nay more than this, I have a Garden-plot,  
Wherein there wants nor hearbs, nor roots, nor flowers  
(Flowers to smell, roots to eate, hearbs for the pot.)  
And dainty shelters when the Welkin lowers:  
Sweet-smelling beds of Lillies and of Roses,  
Which Rosemary banks and Lavender encloses.*

*There growes the Gilliflowre, the Mynt, the Dayzie  
(Both red and white,) the blew-veynd-Violet:  
The purple Hyacinth the Spyke to please thee,  
The scarlet dyde Carnation bleeding yet;  
The Sage, the Savery, and sweet Margerum,  
Isop, Tyme, and Eye-Bright, good for blinde and dumbe.*

*The Pink, the Primrose, Docwslip and Daffadilly,  
The Harebell blue, the crimson Columbine,  
Sage, Lettis, Parsley, and the milk-white Lilly,  
The Rose, and speckled flowre called Sops-in-Wine,  
Fine pretty King-cups, and the yellow Bootes,  
That growes by Rivers, and by Shallow Brookes.*

*And manie thousand moe (I cannot name)  
Of hearbs and flowers that in gardens grow. . . .*

~Richard Barnfield, from *The Teares of an Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love* (1594)

