

Garden Kalendar: Spring 2021

This Garden Kalendar is composed of abridged and edited excerpts from my daily, hand-written garden journal from April to June 2020, accompanied by occasional commentaries on those passages. This Kalendar posting includes about 1/3 of my total journal entries. The selections primarily focus on passages 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 *Cultivating Delight: A Natural History of My Garden* by Diane Ackerman, one of my long-time favorite authors. I found her book on gardens and related topics an intellectually fertile and inspiring text to read in 2020. In this Kalendar I've included several passages from her "Spring" chapter. Because of the length of this Garden Shed posting, the complete text is posted as a pdf document, which can be opened by clicking on this link to the Spring 2021 Garden Kalendar. ~Bob

Is it spring yet? Spring travels north at about thirteen miles a day, which is 47.6 feet per minute, or about 1.23 inches per second. That sounds rather fast, and viewable. I start looking for subtle clues and signs in the snowscape. Weeping willow branches have already started to turn yellow, and the tops of distant trees look dusty pink from new buds. A few cardinals have arrived early to claim the best nesting sites before their rivals return, and I swear I heard the steely twang-and-kazoo of a red-winged blackbird. ~Diane Ackerman

Excerpts from Garden Journal, April-June 2020

1 April 2020. Today, in the midst of the COVID-19 epidemic, I was thinking how lucky I am to have my gardens. It was beautiful early spring weather, the Alum Garden with several hundred flowers in bloom, the daffodils ready to explode, emerging buds on the apple and forsythia, and in the midst of this I'm feeling as good as I've felt in a long time: no cold or flu, no dizziness, no sinus problems, all my limbs reasonably functional. It was a good day.

Rained off and on this morning so I stayed in the garden shed, catching up on old email and organizing plants that I will be giving away. Between showers, I did clean up some of the "K" bed and moved the two new teakwood benches from the gazebo to the gravel walkway in front of the patio. The garden looks more complete with those benches in place.

In the afternoon to the Wickiup vegetable garden. My first job was laying out more weed control fabric between two beds that will become a row of potatoes and squashes. MVM and I covered the third walkway yesterday, so today I worked on #4. After unrolling the fabric, I moved a bunch of short logs to hold it down. The rest of my Wickiup adventure involved digging up volunteer strawberry plants to give away at Coe. It was a slow process, but I collected over 150 plants and many more are waiting for my return. Most of the plants have strong, healthy-looking roots and should handle the transplant trauma with minimal problems. I also dug up all the volunteer garlic in the western circle bed. Not many faculty or staff asked for garlic, so I'm confident we'll manage to handle everyone's request. While digging up the strawberries, I was pleasantly surprised by the high number of earthworms I encountered. It does not appear the earthworm-eating moles have tunneled under the strawberries.

Received in the mail four varieties of potatoes ordered from the Maine Potato Lady. An expensive price tag (\$48 for the total order, including shipping), but it's fun experimenting with

varieties not available in Hy-Vee: German Butterball, Rose Finn Apple, Moulin Rouge. In preparation for planting potatoes, I stopped at Frontier and purchased a bag of bonemeal to boost the phosphorus in the soil. I also read recently that one should avoid providing the potatoes with too much nitrogen, which stimulates the potato plant to put its energy into leaves and not roots. [*The German Butterball and Rose Finn Apple potatoes did great, but the Moulin Rouge variety was a failure: the plants never grew very large and the 20 hills barely produced 20 small potatoes.*]

2 April. A big gardening day, many different tasks. Spent two hours packaging the strawberry plants, garlic, Moses-in-the-cradle, and geraniums that I'm giving away at Coe. Doled out over 150 strawberry plants. When I arrived at Wickiup to dig up more strawberry plants, a male bluebird was in the middle of the garden. As I moved my tools from the pickup to the garden, he flew to a series of different perches and then flew to a wooden bird house in the middle of the adjacent field—where a female was waiting for him. Other tasks at Wickiup included:

- Laid down weed control fabric between the next two potato/squash rows in the West Field and laid a double row of fabric along the east side of the garden (parallel with the road) in an effort to restrain the invasion of the quack grass.
- Transplanted 20+ white and orange onions that had over-wintered.
- Sowed a 4' row of white snow peas and a short row of Cherry Belle radishes (Ferry-Morse seeds, perhaps the first F-M seeds I've ever sown). It's supposed to turn cold and wet tonight, with highs tomorrow in the 30s, but I think the peas and radish seeds should do okay. I did install four square metal cages for the snow peas to climb on.
- Dug up a lot of quack grass—or whatever is the proper name for the aggressive grass with the relentless subterranean runners. It took a long time digging it out of the raised bed with the salsify and the big circular bed next to the compost pile.

One amusing moment this afternoon. While preparing to plant the peas, a car stopped by the garden and the driver yelled something at me. I shouted back that I was hard of hearing and that I would walk over by the car. The driver—a large, elderly gentleman—asked if those were strawberry beds in the garden. I said, “Yes, I have five strawberry beds.” He then said it was a nice looking garden, and he wanted to give me a present. A woman, riding shotgun, thrust toward me a small plastic bag. In the bag was a small knife. The man said the gift was compliments of his quarry company. As he drove off, I noticed in the backseat a younger woman looking back at me and smiling while holding a dog. The gift of the knife reminded me of when my Mom and I were walking by Perkins Hardware on the Main Street of my home town. Ray Perkins came out of the store, congratulated me on recently graduating from the 8th grade, and gave me a present—a penknife. At the time I assumed that Mr. Perkins was a businessman hoping to drum up good will for his hardware business. Only in the past year have I discovered that his father had married my grandmother, who had been a widow for many years. Perhaps he gave me the knife because of the family connection—a relationship he and my mother would have understood but was never explained to me.

3 April. Chilly, wet day, rain off and on. Sad to see many of the early spring blooms beaten down. Just a few of the crocus at Coe still look fresh—in contrast to the crocus in my back yard, which are

just reaching their apex, and the snowdrops that still look quite fresh. The reticulated iris in the Coe crevice garden are now finished, but the hellebores at the other end of the garden are in their prime, as are the forsythia. Both the old and new Imperial Fritillary in the "I" bed are emerging and the Tete-a-tete daffodils are in their full glory. While I'm thinking I made some good decisions with last year's daffodil bulb planting, it's hard to go wrong at this time of the year. We are not expecting the structure of a Mozart symphony in a spring garden. We're thrilled to enjoy all these individual instruments warming up and performing, improvising, doing their own thing. A gardener's passion for flowers in a disciplined, cooperative harmony needs to be a summer ideal.

The afternoon was dedicated to sowing tomato seeds, ten varieties of seeds, each seed in an individual seed block (composed of a germination mix from Johnny's Seeds). Varieties I sowed today include the following:

Galahad: an F1 hybrid from Territorial Seeds; for me a new tomato; advertised as a compact, determinate, with good disease resistance, producing large, red, juicy, crack-resistant slicing fruit; the seeds were expensive (10 seeds for \$4.95) so I hope they prove worth the expenditure.

Gardener's Delight: these did very well for me last year, particularly the two vines in the bed with the Wapsipinicon Peach; produced many small, red, well-formed, crack-resistant fruit; the package had 40 seeds for \$1.95, notably cheaper than the Galahad hybrid.

Lemon Boy: It surprises me that Seeds 'n Such is the only catalog I consulted that lists Lemon Boys; the last five years this tomato has been my most dependable and productive performer.

Lillian's Yellow Heirloom: an indeterminate, potato leaf heirloom from Victory Seeds; great tasting, large yellow fruit; one of my favorite fresh-eating tomatoes.

Red Brandywine: an indeterminate, regular leaf tomato from Victory Seeds; excellent fresh eating tomato, but the vines have not produced many tomatoes the last couple of years.

Beliy Nagiv: recommended by Annie's Seeds as one of their favorites; supposedly produces 2" red tomatoes with excellent flavor; one attraction was the early maturity date of 54 days.

Oregon Spring: another experiment, seeking a productive early summer producer; advertised as doing well in a container.

Sunpeach: an F1 hybrid from Pinetree; only ten seeds in the packet; supposed to be an improved Sungold because it resists cracking, Sungold's most notable failing.

Wapsipinicon Peach: an indeterminate from Pinetree; this was the great discovery of last year: a marvelous tasting tomato, no cracking; very productive and fruit held up well on the vine.

Legend: a 90-day indeterminate; a new heirloom for me, sold by Victory Seeds; catalog claims it produces large fruits on blight resistant plants.

[The next day I sowed seeds for Sungold and eight tomatoes I had never grown before: Monte Carlo F1, Artemis F1, Mountain Merit F1, Early Detroit #17, Damsel F1, Pozzano F1, SV7846TH, and Carmello F1. I had good germination rates with all the varieties and had a healthy batch of young tomatoes that were transplanted into the garden in late May. Unfortunately, despite taking several precautions to protect the young seedlings, the garden was hit with a devastating cutworm attack, chopping down over 30 plants. Most of the tomato plants did generate new foliage, but the production on most of these plants was far below expectations, and I was unable to judge many of the new varieties. The most successful of the 2020 varieties were the Lemon Boy, Damsel F1, Red Brandywine, Early Detroit #17, and two tomatoes started at a later date:]

the Kellogg's Breakfast and Pink Berkeley Tie Dye. The most notable failures were the Monte Carlo F1, Belyi Nagiv, Mountain Merit F1, Pozzano F1, SV786TH, and Carmello F1.]

8 April. This morning was overcast and cool but still lovely gardening weather. Doc H. came by so we walked around the garden for a few minutes, chatting about a few flowers. I cut off a small daffodil bloom so he could get a hint of its delicate fragrance. He's frustrated with the limitations imposed by teaching online classes, but it is what it is.

After he left, I focused on cleaning up the "H" bed. Cut back all the tall grass west of the gazebo and the unwanted volunteers shooting up from the flowering crab's roots. That area now looks a bit spiffier. Also trimmed around the pergola's clematis—which is now leafing out. In the early spring its branches always look so thin and desiccated. I'm always surprised to see it come to life.

When I got home for lunch, I discovered a box from Johnny's Seeds with three new varieties of strawberries. After a quick lunch, I headed to Wickiup and planted 25 of each variety: Earliglow (early season), Jewel (midseason), and Sparkle (mid-to-late season), each variety in one of the new steel-sided raised beds. Since I had already mixed into the soil a wheelbarrow load of fresh compost, I planted the strawberries without adding any fertilizer. I will probably use a miscanthus mulch because it's so easy to manipulate in small spaces.

After planting the new strawberry plants, my next task was digging up the volunteer strawberries that have emigrated out of the old beds. I am surprised I have could harvest over 75 plants from such a small space. They will all be given to Dana as she starts a new strawberry bed.

Once the strawberry plants were packed in a plastic grocery bag, I started digging holes for potatoes—and within minutes it started to rain. But it was a gentle rain, and I had no problem working through two separate rain showers. The temperature also dropped, but I felt quite comfortable working with my rain coat over my old L. L. Bean jacket. Never did see the sun until late in the afternoon when a few rays of sunshine appeared on the western horizon.

While working in the Wickiup garden, I did experience one great discovery. Throughout the afternoon I heard this bird's recurrent vocalizing, a beautiful 4-5 note sequence, every 20-30 seconds. I have frequently heard this bird in the past, but today I finally stopped my strawberry planting and spotted the serenader on top of a bluebird house in the middle of a grassland next to the garden. I didn't have my binoculars with me, and I initially could not identify any distinctive markings, but then the bird turned toward me and I saw the broad, dark V on the breast—and I realized it was a meadowlark. But why didn't I immediately recognize the vocalization? As a farm kid growing up in southern Kansas, I would have heard thousands of meadowlarks. Only later this evening did it dawn on me that in Kansas I was listening to the western meadowlark, but here in eastern Iowa my companion was an eastern meadowlark singing a distinctively different vocalize. How wonderful to discover that at the Wickiup garden, two of my primary companions are the cottonwood trees—the state tree of Kansas—that reside along the creek running by the garden and the meadowlark—the state bird of Kansas. No wonder I so often feel like I've come home when I arrive at the Wickiup garden.

Gardeners have unique preferences, which tend to reflect dramas in their personal life, but they all share a love of natural beauty and a passion to create order, however briefly, from chaos. The garden becomes a frame for their vision of life. Whether organic or high-tech, they share a dark secret, as well. Despite their sensitivity to beauty and respect for nature, they all resort to murder and mayhem with steel-willed cunning. ~Diane Ackerman

10 April. This evening I went to Coe, closed the greenhouse windows, watered seedlings, fed the earthworms and turned over their pile of poop. Saw plenty of red wigglers wiggling. Did a quick walk around the garden. The yellow daffs are at their peak with a high % of blooms. Noted that most snowdrops I planted last fall have a few blooms, but the snowflakes planted behind the SW bench have not yet emerged. The old Imperial Fritillary have come back and may have spawned a couple offspring, but only one plant with a full head of blooms. I need to do some research on fertilizing and feeding these bulbs. The yellow fritillary planted last fall have emerged, and they look like that intend to produce some flowers.

11 April. Holy Saturday, the anniversary of Jesus Christ harrowing hell, two hours before Easter Sunday. My gardening this morning was in Iowa City at K's new home. It's exciting as we watch all these flowers emerging, many spring-time plants totally unsuspected. Saw hundreds of a small spring bulb with a single leaf that look like it should belong to a tulip. I suspect they are trout lilies but so far no blooms. Along the hillside path on the south side of their house are dozens of trillium, randomly popping up amidst this woodland vegetation, quite different from the tight colony of trillium in our back yard, a colony that has slowly been expanding by a fraction of an inch each spring for the past 40 years.

My main assignment today was to remove trees too large for K to handle. While I managed to dig out two with challenging root systems, I was stymied by a third that had a huge tap root. I'll need to return, armed with my battery-powered saw. While attacking these unnamed trees, I spied a lot of garlic mustard and Virginia creeper running all over the hillside. But can't do everything in one day—and my assigned mission was to dig up trees (though occasionally, just for fun, I did pull up several dozen garlic mustard).

12 April. Easter Sunday. I think this is the latest date that Easter can occur. The day turned out quite different from my expectations. The cold front and rain were late in arriving so I could work in the yard for three hours after the Easter morning church service. I pruned the burning bush shrubs along the northwest border of the house. These old bushes—which were well established when we moved into our house 42 years ago—had not been pruned for several years and were now over 10' tall. I cut back everyone to under 7' and removed many dead branches and suckers. At the moment the shrubs look rather naked, but there was ample evidence of new growth. While pruning, I also removed an unexpected volunteer gooseberry bush and dug out several small maples and redbuds. Another job was removing last fall's leaves from the patio—many saved in order to provide winter protection for the astilbe pots. After filling the tumbler composter with leaves, I made half a dozen trips to the compost piles in the backyard. Didn't quite get everything picked up, but the patio now looks more civilized. In the afternoon, once the rain arrived, I worked in the garden studio,

downloading and editing recent Alumni House Garden photos, and I revised a draft of my long-overdue blog post on London parks and gardens. When I walked back to the house for supper, the temperature had dropped over 15 degrees—though it was no longer raining.

13 April. Discovered this morning that the *Garden Quarto* issue copied at the Print Center has several editing errors: a couple of spacing mistakes, the wrong font for one of the commonplace quotes, and two editing errors in the Lindsay poem. In my rush to get this issue finished, my editing was inexcusably sloppy. So I spent an hour correcting those errors, printing a new copy, and posting a clean copy to the website. I'll send a note to the authors, explaining there will be a delay in mailing their printed copies.

Once the *Garden Quarto* problems had been addressed, I did a garden walk and wrote a first draft of this week's MMGR. Although the sun was shining this morning, the wind chill was in the 20s, and in the afternoon the sun deserted us. We even had a brief snow shower. So I canceled thoughts of any outdoor gardening for today. Instead I edited April garden photos and worked on my Osterley House notes for the February Garden Shed posting. While I would like to be gardening, my motivation is tempered by my lack of desire to deal with the cold weather. I've definitely become a wimp gardener.

18 April. Wind, wind, wind. This afternoon at Wickiup garden, the NW wind was steady, hovering around 30 mph. Fortunately, the temp was into the 50s so low temperatures were not a problem, but the wind was physically eshausting. Most of the four hours at the garden involved planting potatoes in the West Field. Since this is a new space for any serious gardening, the soil has not received much care, so I prepared a mixture of top soil, compost (from my backyard), vermiculite, Territorial fertilizer, and bone meal to use for filling in each hole. I only planted the seed potatoes about 2" deep, and I didn't fill the holes all the way. The plan is to provide a shorter time for the potato plants to reach sunlight and then to build a mound around them, inspiring further growth. This is the first time in decades I'm not planting potatoes in a raised bed. Not sure if I will stay with this pattern for the remaining four rows. I'm guessing we will have 20 hills per row, an average of 5' between each hill. A month from now, once we are past any potential freezing temperatures, we'll sow melon and squash seeds between each hill.

D. came by the garden and offered me a couple of frozen trout. When he returned with the trout, I gave him three good-sized parsnips I had just dug up. I'm willing to trade parsnips for trout any day. Although I had a good crop of parsnips, I should have done a better job last summer of thinning the young plants. Several instances of stunted growth from 2-3 parsnips growing too close together. But overall a good yield. The parsnips are now on the driveway waiting to be cleaned. I'll probably roast them, but I might do some recipe research. I still remember those amazing parsnips we ate at a pub on the first night of our week hiking along Hadrian's Wall. So sweet and delicious.

19 April. It was a perfect April spring day: a bit cool, a bit breezy, but sunshine and great working weather. This morning I filled the green yardy with shrub prunings from last weekend. One more week and they will all be picked up and sent to the city's compost pile. I then opened the garage door, backed out the Honda Fit, straightened up the work bench, threw a bunch of stuff away, re-

ordered the garden tools, swept the garage floor, and presto: the place now borders on the “almost organized.” In preparation for lunch, MVM and I assembled a new dish, compliments of the BBC, that involved baking parsnips and potatoes in a honey-mustard white sauce, which became part of the supper’s menu. Turned out to be a good options for cooking taters and parsnips.

After lunch back to Wickiup with two more bags of compost for the potato planting. Today I did a row of Yukon Gold and a row of Dakota Pearls, a new variety I’ve never tried before. Once the potatoes were buried, I went into my East Garden and planted two peonies—actually one big peony bush given to me three weeks ago that I separated into two new bushes. One peony went in the NW corner of the garden and the other in front of the scaredeer sculpture. In planting the first peony, I encountered a lot of quack grass, and I’m sure I missed some of the roots. As for the second peony, I discovered embedded in the roots a small plastic sign indicating this was a Krinkled White peony grown in a nursery in Michigan, but I couldn’t decipher the name of the nursery. As I rubbed away the caked on mud, I also rubbed away the nursery’s name.

I finished my Wickiup chores by cleaning out the steel raised bed intended for sweet potatoes, but as I began removing the weeds and grass, I discovered that some lettuce planted last fall had germinated, probably black-seeded Simpson and Russian kale. So I switched to a different plan, saved the lettuce and kale, and planted short rows of Lollo Bionda leaf lettuce, Pink Beauty radish, Merveille de Quatre Saisons bibb-type lettuce, and Rouge D’Hiver romaine lettuce. Except for the Baker Creek radish seeds, everything was from Victory Seeds. After covering the seeds with a mix of compost and vermiculite (which helps identify where the seeds are sown), I watered everything—a task that involved my first trip this spring to obtain water from the creek. I also watered the three beds of new strawberries. The plants don’t look very happy, but I’m sure they will survive.

20 April. After my morning at the Coe garden, I spent the afternoon at Wickiup, mostly seed sowing. In the “L1” bed, I sowed a short row of Celesta F1 radishes (from Territorial) and an 8’ row of Golden Sweet peas (Baker Creek). Both are for me new varieties. The peas were intriguing because they were of such different colors, ranging from white to a dark brown, almost the color of the soil. I was planning to sow carrots in a “J” raised bed, but discovered a thistle was emerging in a bed I had cleared of thistles two weeks ago, and in digging out the thistle I found several more thistles preparing to emerge. Those thistle roots are deeper than I expected. I decided to choose another bed for the carrots and switched to the “Y1” bed, a raised steel bed that worked so well with sweet potatoes last year. After hoeing the bed, I used the broadfork to loosen the soil and planted three 6’ rows of carrots: Shin Kuroda (Botanical Interests), Amarillo (a yellow carrot from Baker Creek), and St. Valery (an heirloom carrot from Baker Creek, one that did very well last year). While sowing the carrots, it was windy and chilly and a few drops of rain. Saw showers to the north and east, but as I left for home the garden was still dry. If it doesn’t rain tonight, I’ll need to water the newly sown seeds and the new strawberries. I did notice that the Little Snowpea Whites I sowed on April 2 have now begun to emerge. Looks like a high percentage of germination.

21 April. My last task of the day was working in the garage, trying to repair my Dad’s old shovel. The handle broke about three years ago. I bought a new wooden handle, but I had never tried to

remove the remaining old handle segment so I could insert the new handle. I did manage to loosen the pin holding the old handle but it still won't budge. It appears I have no choice but to dig out the old handle remnant. Spent 30 minutes using my Dad's old hand drill, slowly grinding away at the old handle, but the wood—perhaps hickory—is incredibly tough. Going to be a long process.

This morning I was at Coe, mostly in the greenhouse. I watered plants and potted nine more eggplants and peppers. Spent a lot of time scraping tiny aphids off the leaves. The eggplants are much slower to work with because their leaves are floppy and less sturdy. Since I double-seeded each of the eggplant soil blocks, for each block I had to separate two viable seedlings. I should have adopted the tactic I use for peppers and tomatoes: one seed per soil block. The peppers, tomatoes, and eggplants have all been close to 100% germination. One variety of tomato, the Montecarlo from Seeds of Italy, was slow to germinate, but I think I now have four seedlings of that new variety. The one exception is the Habanero pepper: 0% germination.

At Wickiup in the afternoon I began by cleaning up the "M2" bed and removing weeds and grass. Weeding is one of my favorite garden activities. I enjoy being my knees, intimately engaged with the soil and the plants, including the weeds that will be dumped on the compost pile. The process feels like a harvest, a demonstrable confirmation of my faith in the future, dedicated to this compost that won't be used until next year. There are few tasks that bring a joy comparable to digging up fresh compost and spreading in a garden bed. It is as emotionally satisfying as harvesting fresh peas and strawberries—though the latter are much more satisfying for eating.

22 April. Earth Day, 50th anniversary. Many groups had big events planned for today, but everything got canceled because of COVID-19. My celebration was silent, making my small contribution to the health of the earth. As a gardener, my primary commitment is to the soil: the weeding and composting expresses one's commitment to enriching the soil, nurturing the organisms that live in the soil. In the garden shed, my pets are my red wiggler earthworms. Every day when I enter the garden shed, I lift the lid to their green home, stir up their bed, and say "hello."

This morning my day began by making a soup, the first time using our new slow cooker. No recipe. I just started adding whatever veggies and herbs I could find, plus a summer sausage from the freezer. Mixed together frozen tomatoes, two quart jars of canned tomatoes, freshly diced parsnips and carrots, frozen peas and green beans from last summer, frozen onions and sweet peppers, and a minced garlic bulb from last summer. Also added a few ingredients not from the garden: quinoa, rice, dried beans, parsley leaves, Italian spices. Cooked on high for four hours and then on low for 3 more hours. Came out darn good, enough for 3 more meals plus two containers for the freezer.

*There is a way of sitting quietly and beholding nature which is a form of meditation or prayer,
and like those healing acts it calms the spirit. ~Diane Ackerman*

23 April. In the afternoon I went to Buffalo and planted the Balsam Fir tree that F. gave me. Should have been planted three weeks ago, but the last month I've been consumed with trying to get the vegetable garden organized and functioning. I also planted three rhubarb I had impulsively

ordered from Gurney's. When I opened up the package, they were small and dried out and I don't have much confidence that they will survive. I planted them in a bed where two years ago I planted another impulsive purchase: three dwarf red raspberries that were completely over run by the giant hyssop, which has thrived in this location. The hyssop are tough plants and once established don't like being dug up. The situation is not helped by my failure last year to maintain the walkways around the herb beds. And then there are the hundreds of volunteer strawberries running well beyond the raised beds where they were initially planted. I'm also surprised at how the chives and oregano have spread so prolifically. With the exception of the raspberries, everything else in this garden has really thrived.

After Buffalo, I drove to Menards. It felt strange being in a store, wearing a mask, trying to keep my distance from everyone else. My goal was to buy some good-quality weed control fabric that I would use at Wickiup and Buffalo. I found a large 300' roll, commercial quality, that looked like it should be tough and durable; however, it proved to be more expensive I expected. I had apparently misinterpreted which price marker applied to which rolls. I then went to Frontier and purchased a large bag of vermiculite and a bag of bonemeal. Then to Wickiup. Did no planting, but I did manage to cover a 100' long path between two melon and potato rows in the West Field. Got the new fabric laid down quickly with minimal problems with the wind. I anchored down the fabric and shoveled soil over the edges to keep the fabric from blowing around.

24 April. Today is Arbor Day, at least in some states. On the news I saw a short video showing President Trump and wife planting a tree. It was clearly not an activity either person relished. I suspect neither likes to have dirty hands.

25 April. This morning, three hours working in K's backyard, mostly digging up unwanted trees and shrubs and pulling up a lot of garlic mustard. Spent thirty minutes removing an iron post: it was deep in clay with roots wrapped around it. I did discover that some plants I first spotted a couple weeks ago in her backyard are bluebells—though I don't know what variety. Brought back memories of walking through a forest on the Isle of Guernsey and coming upon a field of bluebells, just after we had discovered a small cemetery to the side of our trail. Such unsuspected encounters are so special. This morning I also saw a number of dog-tooth violets with their drooping yellow flowers. While I was pulling up weeds and unwanted shrubs, K was using string to tie together neat packets of small branches for the garbage truck. Very neat and tidy, just how her maternal grandparents would have tackled this task.

As I was working in K's backyard, P. was removing the final chunks of wood still wedged in the handle of my shovel. He eventually succeeded in removing the old handle by using a blow torch to burn out the old wood. He said the smoke from the old wood smelled like hickory. When I got home, I inserted the new handle and secured it with a small bolt. I then took the shovel to Wickiup and used it to prepare a raised bed for planting. The shovel cuts into the soil very easily and the blade is just the right angle—though I might feel that way because of having used this shovel for over 60 years.

27 April. Arrived at Coe this morning and discovered minor vandalism. Someone had broken a window screen on the greenhouse, and in the garden the manual lawnmower had been used to cut two irregular swaths in the NE lawn section. I also found a good quality steel cooking pot next to the garden fence. I suspect bored neighborhood kids. This petty mischief does occur at a moment when the college administration is deciding whether the garden should be unlocked for students, faculty, and staff. I think it makes sense to give students a safe outdoor space to study, but I'll leave that decision to the President's Administrative Council. [*The Council voted for the garden to be open 8-5 on weekdays.*]

29 April. A cool, overcast day, very windy, so it felt much colder than the thermometer's 50F. I had left two windows open in the shed and greenhouse, but the temperature in the shed was still quite comfortable. Spent most of the afternoon in the garden studio at home, typing 2019 May and June Garden Journal passages for this month's Kalendar web posting, due to be posted by tomorrow night. I'm typing far too many passages, but I find myself absorbed in the petty details of my gardening routines, fascinated by descriptions of moving potted plants, cleaning up perennial flower beds, trying to get garden seeds sown, dahlias planted. No readers will care, but I care—and thus the creation of a 25+ page baggy monster, taking up far too many hours of my life. I just finished typing page 20, single-spaced 12 pt Times Roman, and I still have ten more days in June to record. Since I'll never get it finished by tomorrow night, I'll post a placeholder and try to create a "final" document in a couple days.

30 April. In the afternoon to Wickiup where I concentrated on the round, keyhole bed to the right of the garden gate. After hand weeding it, I used the broadfork on the entire bed and then dug 24 holes for the Rose Finn Apple fingerling potatoes. All the potatoes I planted had multiple eyes that had already sprouted so I feel good about the emergence rate. While weeding, I did leave one emergent plant that sure looks and smells like horseradish—though I don't recall planting any horseradish there last year. Unlike my potato planting in the West Field, in this bed I did not add any fertilizer or soil supplement. This bed has developed a really nice loam consistency and the sweet peppers in it last summer were very productive. I'm thinking the potatoes will do well. [*And, indeed, it produced an excellent crop of fingerlings, even after the bed was buried under debris from the August derecho.*]

Just before leaving the garden, I harvested six spears of asparagus. We had them for supper with a simple white sauce—the way Mildred liked to fix them, though I don't recall the Vathauers had an asparagus patch on their farm. My parents did have an asparagus bed on the west side of our vegetable garden, an old colony well established in the 1950s and it was still producing fresh asparagus when my Dad died in '95. The last time I was in the garden, I recall standing next to the bed and throwing into the pasture old frozen meat that my mother no longer wanted. At the time I wondered when was the last time anyone had harvested asparagus from that bed. I remember my folks eating asparagus, but I don't recall they ever tried to make me eat it. The garden and the farmhouse and barn and fences and outbuildings and trees and everything else are all gone, the farmstead now nothing but pasture. But I do dream that a remnant of that asparagus bed has somehow survived.

2 May. A beautiful Saturday, temp in the upper 60s, mix of overcast and sunshine. Started the morning by digging up hundreds of dandelions in the front and backyard. The front is looking okay, species tulips just opening, a nice patch of sweet woodruff beginning to bloom. The *Leucojum* are “blowing” and some daffs still in bloom, plus one lone red tulip, a good diversity of flowers. As for the backyard, the dandelions still dominating, but I did remove most that were residing in the large hosta bed. Also pulled up all the garlic mustard in the gooseberry patch.

At 10:30 I drove to Coe and watered the greenhouse plants. The veggie youngsters that I set out yesterday, the initiation of their hardening off in preparation adulthood, had gone okay in their first night out, but they were dry. Inside, I potted the Black Beauty eggplants. Spent the rest of the morning in the rain garden. A lot of horsetail has appeared, and as I had expected the river oats are aggressively spreading. The seedlings quickly develop a dense, tough root system, and they seem adept as germinating in the midst of another plant’s roots, making them tough to remove. The rain garden also has a weed that I think is on a *Polygonum* smartweed. In the middle of each leaf is a dark thumbprint, and the plant produces a flower that resembles an ornamental persicaria. I was pleased that while doing a survey of the garden, I did not spot a single dandelion in the lawn; however, I did dig up some big ones in the “G” bed.

Lawns provide a pool of calm in the midst of flowery commotion. The Japanese call it ma, the space between.

In flower arranging the empty spaces are vital to the total effect. Emptiness isn't always negative.

It allows one room to act and concentrate, it forms and defines. ~Diane Ackerman

3 May. A dandelion, by any other name, is still a dandelion, *Taraxacum officinale*—i.e., bittersweet, blowball, cankerwort, Irish daisy, lion’s tooth, piss-in-bed (one of many names with a reference to bed-wetting), priest’s crown, swine’s snout, yellow gowan (gowan is a Scottish word referring to various yellow or white flowers growing in fields). Dandelions are on my mind because in each garden I visited today this ubiquitous invader demanded my attention. This morning, I spent 30 minutes in the backyard digging up more dandelions. I did, however, accomplish a couple of other tasks. I cleaned up the spirea bushes along the east side of the garage while covering the remaining leaves with fresh wood mulch. The spirea have been trimmed, and they look the best they’ve looked in several years. Another accomplishment was preparing a home for the cucumber vines I started in the greenhouse. These Manny cucumbers have exploded in their growth even though their sustenance is limited to a small cube of Johnny’s seed-starter blocks. I’m giving them the white wood trellis that was for many years in MVM’s music studio. After nailing it back together, I planted 5 cucumber plants in the two planters on the driveway next to the garage and wound them onto the trellis. *[Although three of the plants were killed by low temperatures shortly after I planted them, the remaining two plants proved very productive, even after the August derecho destroyed their trellis.]*

4 May. Last year I never used the tiller at Wickiup garden, but today I got the tiller out of the garage, give it some fresh gas (plus a few drops of oil), and received confirmation that miracles can still occur: it started right up. So I took the Mantis to Wick this morning and began tilling the rows reserved for planting sweet melons, squashes, and watermelons. By my estimation, we should have enough space for 90 hills, 15 hills/row. Today I tilled three rows. Although the soil is recalcitrant,

the operation went okay. After finishing the West Field, I tilled the big round V1 keyhole bed next to the compost pile and the J12 raised bed. In the round bed I planted a bunch of small vegetable plants started from seed the first week of April: red kale, Blue Wind broccoli, 2 red cabbages, a few kohlrabi. None of these plants looks healthy, but with some luck and a few rain showers at the right time, a few will survive. As for the J12 bed, I sowed cylindra beets, Annie's Parsnip Blend, and two varieties of radishes. *[Of all these vegetables, the broccoli and parsnips were the most successful; all the cylindra beet tops were eaten by a rabbit and never recovered. Last fall I installed a chicken wire fence all around the garden, attempting to make it more difficult for neighborhood rabbits to find an easy entrance into the garden.]*

6 May. My 75th birthday today. I find such a span of years unfathomable, impossible for me to grasp that I could be this old. Many events in my life feel like they must have happened to someone else, occurring so long ago—and yet I don't feel old. I have the illusion I feel about the same as I did when I was in my 50s. Perhaps the key issue is health . . . and at least for today I felt good, able to do just about everything I wanted to do: the mind, the sight, the arms, the legs, the breathing, the heart and lungs and kidneys and all those other hidden organs, everything apparently still working. Not perfect, but I don't need perfection. I just need to be good enough to keep going.

This morning at Coe was spent with two cameras. With camera #1, I took still photos of various flowers and plants; camera #2 was a tablet, enabling me to shoot three 10-minute videos while I commented on the flowers and shrubs. On Friday I'm scheduled to have a Zoom meeting and discuss with the folks in Advancement how the videos might be used for a Coe alum event. While the video may be their preferred option, I'll propose using a Powerpoint with recent photos, a format I find more appealing.

After the video, I spent about 45 minutes hoeing two gravel walkways, both beginning to look a bit rough. While I was hacking away at the purslane and its friends, Prof. M came by the garden and informed me that Roundup would save me a lot of tune and eliminated the strain on my back. I thanked him for his wise counsel.

8 May. While it's VE day, what first comes to mind is "Hurrah! Hurrah! For the 8th of May. Outdoor intercourse begins today!" Signs all over the WSU campus had drawings of one pair of feet a second pair of feet facing the opposite direction with the accompanying verse. Silly college humor, but it brings back fond memories of grad school days.

This morning I assembled a short Powerpoint presentation to show CC in the Advancement office, suggesting this might be a model for my Webinar event. She went along with my suggestion—rather than for me to create a video—and it's likely the event will be scheduled for the end of May. I need to come up with a title. I initially thought of using "The Curious Gardener"—a phrase with a long tradition—but it might be good to have a title more specifically focused on the Alumni House Garden. The Webinar should last about 40 minutes: a 20-minute presentation followed by a 20-minute Q&A, assuming anyone is still awake by the end of my Powerpoint. I might divide the presentation into three unequal segments: (1) brief intro of the garden and my initiation as a garden in 2014 (accompanied by a series of garden photos from 2014 to the present); (2) an overview of the garden this year, January to May, emphasizing how quickly the garden

evolves in the spring; (3) a final section on the garden in the final week of May. The last two sections would focus on specific flowers. Conclude with a coda, mentioning the website, *The Garden Quarto*, and an invitation to come by for a visit.

9 May. This morning to K's; worked in their backyard for three hours. Most of my time was digging up dock, "curled dock" I believe. In most instances the tap root would break off, which means the dock will probably rebound from this temporary setback, but in a few instances the gods were with me and I pulled up an entire root system, often over a foot long. I also pulled up a lot of garlic mustard and Virginia creeper and creeping Charlie and a couple weeds that I've often seen before but for whom I have no name. Chatted with a neighbor to the north (a "Dave") who identified a tree with lovely new dark burgundy leaves as a smoke tree. He confirmed my suspicions that the many small one-leaf plants were trout lilies. He also said he had no objections if I dug out a tall, ugly vine with needles growing up into Dave's smoke tree. It took about five minutes with my spade to dig it out. Also learned that the neighbor's flowers with the lovely yellow blooms—which looked like poppies—but he said were not really poppies. A little research with P's phone app identified it as a Celandine Poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*), and according to my Taylor reference book it is a species in the poppy genus, a Z4 perennial native to eastern U.S. that will self-seed "profusely" when in an amenable environment. A plant worth further consideration.

12 May. K. and two-year old T (my grandson) showed up at the garden this morning, so I quit working and we walked around the garden for a few minutes, watching T check things out.

- T looked at one of drinking water fountains and said "mailbox"—and indeed the shape is similar to their mailbox. When we told him it was a drinking fountain but the water was turned off, he said "water" and "off." When we walked by the other drinking fountain, he said "water . . . off."
- When we were looking at some of the Blushing Lady tulips, he picked up a few pieces of gravel, and I thought he was going to put the gravel in the tulip blooms, but K told him to put the gravel down. He immediately stopped and put the gravel back on the walkway.
- T walked up to the east gate but found it was locked. He said "gate," but he didn't seem unhappy it was locked. When we came to the NW gate—which was open—he started to walk through the gate, but K told him he was not to leave the garden. He stopped at the entrance, looked out, but made no effort to any further.
- He stayed on the gravel paths and kept a steady pace while we were walking around the garden, checking out stuff.
- T really liked the moss phlox, which is now in full bloom. He would gently put his hands into the blossoms, and after lifting up his hands the flowers would bounce back. [*In December my Christmas present from K was a photo of T touching the moss phlox blooms.*]
- He spent a long time with the wind chimes. While holding on to the clapper, he discovered that he could influence the sounds and he played at making up different "melodies."

14 May. After working in the Garden Studio and editing this week's Monday Morning Garden Report, I drove to Coe, set several trays of greenhouse plants outside, and began cleaning up the east end of the garden. The ox-eye daisy blooms are just beginning to open and that portion of the

garden will become much cheerier in 2-3 days. These daisies spring up all over the garden like weeds, I love their “simple” blooms. They are not a fancy, cleverly designed cultivar—just a nonsense daisy. Unfortunately, hundreds have emerged on the gravel walkways, so these white paths are looking rather messy, compounded by the garden’s other vigorous self-seeders treating these small rocks as their nursery. So I spent a good chunk of the morning hacking away at the walkways—though I had to moderate my desire for wholesale killing by taking the time to preserve some prairie tickseed and snow-in-summer, both of which I want to save for transplanting.

16 May. An 11-hour day, almost all of it at the Wick garden. Left home at 7:00, picked up some veggies from the greenhouse for J. and D. (I left her tomatoes, peppers, and raspberries) at Ever-Green so she could pick them up later. Arrived at Wick a few minutes after 8; J. was already there, waiting for me. We discussed how to organize our joint planting of the West Field. We decided to divide the field into four sectional quadrants:

- Winter squash in the NE quadrant
- Cantaloupes, honeydews, and other melons in the SE quad.
- Watermelons in the NW quad.
- Pumpkins in the SW area.

We estimated we had about 90 mounds to plant in the six rows running north and south, allowing four mounds per variety. If my records are accurate, we sowed the following seeds in this order—with source of seeds in parentheses. [*End of year assessments are provided in the brackets.*]

Rows 1 & 2

- Sweet Reba Winter Acorn Squash (Botanical Interests) [*These did well; very productive.*]
- Bugle Butternut (J. Scheepers) [*Disappointing; only produced a few squash and they were small.*]
- Red Kuri Squash (Natural Gardening) [*Beautiful squash but only harvested two.*]
- Lakota Squash (Baker Creek) [*Plants were relentlessly attacked by squash bugs; only produced a couple small squash.*]
- Boule d’or Honeydew (Baker Creek) [*Produced a few small honeydews.*]
- Sarah’s Choice F1 Cantaloupe (Johnny’s) [*As has been true in previous years, my most productive cantaloupe, excellent texture and taste; remains my favorite cantaloupe.*]

Rows 3 & 4

- Magda F1 Squash (Natural Gardening) [*I thought this was a winter squash but discovered it’s a summer squash; very productive, with marvelous medium-sized fruit; a couple of plants kept producing into October.*]
- Autumn Frost F1 (Territorial) [*Good production of a good squash; flesh similar in taste to a butternut.*]
- Thelma Sanders’ Sweet Acorn (Territorial) [*Produced many fruit but they became a favorite of deer or coons or ground hogs; only managed to harvest a couple that had not been partially eaten.*]
- Vegetable Spaghetti Squash (Territorial) [*This was the first time I had planted vegetable squash; these vines were very productive and contributed to many fall-season meals.*]
- Lambkin Fa Pie de Sapo (Territorial) [*These skin-of-the-toad winter melons are delicious but very susceptible to cucumber and squash bugs; they need to be grown under netting.*]
- Athena F1 Melon (Territorial) [*Limited production due to diseased vines.*]
- Winter Luxury Pie Pumpkin (Pinetree) [*An excellent pumpkin for the kitchen; productive vines.*]

- Sugar Pie Pumpkin (Botanical Interests) [*Our most productive pumpkin; excellent for baking and long storage.*]

Rows 5 & 6

- Black Diamond Watermelon (Ferry-Morse) [*I love this old standard but only produced two good-sized watermelon.*]
- Ali Baba Watermelon (Baker Creek) [*By far our most productive watermelon; good texture, excellent taste, holds up well in the field.*]
- Sangria Watermelon (Pinetree) [*Harvested a couple small melons.*]
- Moon & Stars Watermelon (Pinetree) [*Fairly productive but several fruit destroyed by the derecho.*]
- Jaune Gros de Paris Pumpkin & Small Sugar Pumpkin (Annie's & Pinetree) [*These pumpkin vines ran together, and I was not sure which pumpkins came from which variety.*]
- Jarrandale (Botanical Interests) [*Large, beautiful bluish-gray pumpkins, but only 1 fruit per vine.*]
- Cinnamon Girl (Johnny's) [*Not as prolific as Sugar Pie and Winter Luxury, but an attractive, medium-sized pumpkin. We also had one volunteer pumpkin that produced very large fruit, but we have no idea what was its variety.*]

In preparation for all this seed sowing, we tilled each area to be planted, the only time I used my Mantis tiller this spring. The tilling went well, though the soil was wet in a few spots. Before sowing the seeds, we did mix into each hill my special fertilizer mix for this year: compost, Gurney's organic fertilizer, John & Bob's mineral additive, and vermiculite. Now we wait and see what happens.

18 May. I began my morning at Coe by taking notes for this week's MMGR. It was a classic English gardening day in May. Walking into the Coe garden, I felt like I was at the Holebird garden in the Lake District on a June day three years ago: overcast, cool, threat of rain, everything looking fresh with a diverse spectrum of new greens. What was missing was a view of the Langdales on the horizon. Here the scene was surrounded by the sounds and smells of the city: car traffic on the local streets, an ambulance on 1st Ave, the fragrance of Wendy's bacon.

19 May. Cutworms. Devastating. When I arrived at the Wickiup garden this afternoon, I was stunned to discover that all the eggplants and 11 of 13 peppers had been cut down, a clean slice at ground level, almost certainly by cutworms—i.e., moth larvae. I've always protected tomato plants by wrapping the stems in newspaper. And last Saturday I commented to Jim that I had learned this technique from my father, even though I wasn't sure it really made any difference. Now I have painful evidence that it does. I also discovered today that some young peas had been clipped in a similar fashion. But they present a different challenge since they can't be individually wrapped. Fortunately, I still have a few backup eggplant and pepper plants, and this afternoon I sowed 18 pots with pepper and eggplant seeds, including a Rolandia eggplant that just arrived from Territorial. Since we still have 120 days until the middle of September, there should be plenty of time to get more plants started.

After a series of curses and lamentations and more curses, I did get a few things done at the garden. I cleaned up three "J" raised beds, which also involved digging out the weeds and grasses in the paths around them and recovering the paths with newspaper and mulch. In one bed I pulled up all the rudebega: they were starting to bloom, quite attractive yellow blooms, but I needed the bed for this year's plants. In the process I also dug up a bunch of tiny onions, probably seed from onions in the bed last year. My final task was planting the remaining German Butterball potatoes in the "O1" bed where a number of volunteer potatoes have appeared—probably King Henry potatoes. I had about 15 butterballs left over, so I'm glad to get them in the ground. The Rose Finn Apple fingerlings are coming up in the "K2" bed—planted on May 1—as are a large number of potatoes in the West field. This should be a record year for tater production. [It was.]

Nature always has the final word. ~Diane Ackerman

20 May. More cutworm damage at Wickiup. The two remaining peppers were cut down and five tomatoes—ones "protected" by a strip of newspaper wrapped around the stem. The worms cut off the tomato right above the top of the paper. Also found more peas with the tops clipped off. I've decided on several steps to try and protect my remaining plants from any further damage:

- Re-wrap the remaining tomatoes with newspaper wraps that go much higher on the main stem.
- Plant the remaining eggplants and peppers in metal and wooden raised beds. I'm hoping the raised bed sides might interfere with the larvae's movements.
- With several small eggplants—too small to be wrapped in newspaper—I surrounded the stems with 2" nails (an idea discovered on a YouTube video). I will also try wrapping the stems in aluminum foil, a tactic recommended by a friend.

While I'm replacing all the peppers and eggplants, I may see if the clipped tomatoes rebound and produce new stems. [*The increased height of the newspaper wrapping did not work, nor did the nails or aluminum foil provide any additional protection. The eggplants and peppers planted in the metal raised bed suffered no damage from cutworms, but several plants in the wooden raised bed were cut down. As for the tomatoes, all of them survived, but with some varieties their production was dramatically reduced. For example, a Wapsipinicon Peach tomato produced only two fruit by the end of the summer.*]

24 May. Watched several garden videos today, including one by MIGARDEN on the subject of keeping fungal-susceptible vegetables such as tomatoes free of fungal problems. The video emphasized three key steps:

- (1) Limit tomatoes to a single main stem, trimming off the side branches. You want the sunshine and air to have direct contact with the leaves.
- (2) No leaves near the ground; aim for minimum of 10" clearance.
- (3) At any early sign of fungal problems, spray with a baking soda mix to ensure the pH conditions are not conducive to fungal growth. Recipe is 1 T of baking soda, 1 T of vegetable oil, and 2-3 drops of dishwashing liquid mixed into one gallon of water. Spray mixture when conditions are under 80F, early in morning or in the evening. Be careful not to apply too much spray to each leaf (baking soda can cause burning); need to reapply once every 1-2 weeks. [*I adopted the first two steps and*

perhaps because of those preventive efforts, I had no significant problems last summer with any fungal or other disease problems in my 30+ tomatoes. I never did need the baking soda spray.]

25 May. Memorial Day. Only recently did I realize that the cemetery in my home town was the site of our only public garden. Although most of the landscape was of carefully mowed grass and shade trees, there were peonies in bloom at the end of May. Early on Decoration Day, we would collect honeysuckle from the vine that covered our back porch and lay the honeysuckle and lilac blooms on the graves of my grandparents. Neither of those flowers lasted very long, but they were our only flowers on the farm blooming at the end of May. The last time I was at the cemetery for Memorial Day weekend, I planted some plains coreopsis at my parents' grave site, thinking there was a possibility they might self-seed—but I've never been back to see if my effort was a success.

For several years I played the trumpet at the conclusion of the American Legion's brief ceremony honoring veterans buried in the cemetery. I was usually the echo to Tim playing Taps, but one year Tim couldn't be there and I became the principal Taps player, with my friend Tony playing the echo. Unfortunately, he was playing too softly, people didn't hear him, and everyone began dispersing while he was still playing. It was a bit awkward. I also remember on Decoration Day when my Dad was introducing an old friend to some folks and he forgot his friend's name—which happened to be Roy Rogers (though not "the" Roy Rogers of the movies). Dad was terribly embarrassed.

When I arrived at Coe, I discovered a dead coon in the live trap. The corpse was already stiff and covered with flies. I dumped the body into a black plastic bag and deposited her in the nearest dumpster. Even when there was no question the coon was dead, I kept expecting she would become alive again and snap at my gloved hand extricating her from the trap. I still have a big job cleaning up the trap. She really worked hard to escape this prison. I hope this is the last of this year's coon encounters. Last year I trapped 13 coons at the Wickiup garden (the flooding of the Cedar River driving them out of their preferred habitat). I never again want to deal with that many trapped coons.

27 May. Began the day by picking up a fresh load of mulch from Ever-Green and by 8:00 am was at the Wickiup garden, where I worked for the rest of the morning. There was a break, however, in the morning when I realized I forgot to bring my thermos with me, so I drove to Fareway, purchased a peach tea, a spray bottle of Bug Soother (the gnats at Wickiup are bad right now), and a big package of Charmin toilet paper—the first time I've seen a package of toilet paper in a store since March. Forgetting my thermos paid unexpected dividends.

As for gardening, I began by hoeing potatoes and covering emerging plants with mounds of soil in the West Field. The temperature was about 80F and the sky was overcast, but it was very humid, and I had no problem working up a bountiful sweat. I kept reminding myself to slow down, take it easy, no rush. Clearly the potatoes love the current weather conditions. Their growth has been explosive the last two weeks. The plants I covered three days ago have all fully emerged. The squash and melon seeds have germinated.

After finishing a row of potatoes, I moved into my main garden, cleaned up the steel bed next to my compost pile, and planted six Beauregard sweet potatoes from Maine Potato Lady. Around

the bed are weeds and volunteer raspberries that need to be removed, but I saved that battle for another day. Once the potatoes were watered, I spent a long time debating which melons to plant for growing on the livestock panel in front of the compost pile. I finally went with a Territorial Seed honeydew. Only 13 seeds in the package so I carefully distributed them, hoping most of them germinate and are willing to climb the panel. *[These melons were a total bust, unable to deal with the garden's cucumber bugs.]*

28 May. Today has been consumed preparing for tomorrow's Webinar. Last night I discovered problems converting my WordPerfect files to PowerPoint. This morning I confirmed that the conversion would not work even with small files. Fortunately I could save as pdf files and the pdf format works with the online Webinar operation. So today I combined three files into one big WordPerfect file, cleaning up fonts and page arrangements for each slide, and then publishing the complete, composite file as a pdf.

As for the practice session this morning, it went okay. I took too long with my initial intro. I need to move through the slides at a much faster tempo. But the basic machinery worked okay. We did the "broadcast" from the sunroom in front of the Dybsetter painting, but we decided the sunlight will be too bright tomorrow so we'll do the show in the library in front of a bookcase.

As a break from all this Webinar stuff, I did a three-hour trip to Wick this afternoon. It had rained 0.7" and the exposed soil was too wet to work or do any bed prep, so most of my energies focused on pulling weeds from the asparagus bed, the raised steel bed that has the lettuce, and a "J" bed with three varieties of carrots. In that bed I also did a lot of thinning in spots where seeds had germinated in close proximity. In another "J" bed I did some deep digging, trying to pull out four new thistles. No matter how thoroughly and deeply I dig, I'm always missing some root segments, and now these beds have veggy seedlings, making it impossible to dig as deep and wide as needed.

Just before leaving, I harvested a dozen asparagus spears and several kinds of greens: two varieties of spinach, kale, baby romaine, and some greens that overwintered and are now going to seed. The spinach is lovely; in fact all the greens look good and we should have a steady supply for the next month. I also harvested four radishes, which I now recall I accidentally left in the pickup. The greens were very muddy. MVM washed and rinsed them several times before I did a final rinse and spin. We should have enough for doing our first meal with bacon and wilted lettuce.

30 May. Yesterday afternoon's Webinar went okay. I was nervous and apprehensive about pulling it off, but it went as well as I could hope for. In the morning I spent three hours at Coe, mostly working in the "I" bed. I removed a lot of hyssop east of the *Baptisia*. Repositioned several small campion so they are a tighter group. Removed two stoncrop and placed them in the back of the crevice garden. Moved some mums so they are more tightly grouped around the light fixture, and planted three bergenia from Bluestone at the front of the border and three echinops from Bluestone at the back of the bed, next to the two century plants—which are growing and have not yet been eaten off by a groundhog or rabbit. They look the best they've ever looked (knock on wood). It's amazing they've had so many traumas and still reappear each spring.

When I got home from Coe, MVM and I spent 45 minutes position the computer in the library, going through the sign-up procedures, checking out the pdf. Discovered several errors in layout but

nothing worth revising at this late hour. At 12:50 the site opened up, people started answering my poll questions, and at 1:02 Caitlyn got things rolling, introduced me, and I quickly covered the poll results. By 1:10 we were on to the pdf and it took me 25 minutes to run through the 80 slides. The photo slides worked ok, and most of the time I was relatively coherent. I finished at 1:40 and had 20 minutes for questions and answers. Fortunately the questions required no substantive botanical knowledge. At 2:00 we were done.

1 June. My gardening efforts began this morning about 8:00 a.m. Arriving at the Coe garden I discovered two Coe students doing yoga on the patio, using the glass doors as mirrors. While they were improving their bodies' flexibility, I focused on the south side beds.

- Weeded the westside "E" bed. I tried to save most of the self-seeded parsley while clearing space for three basil, a small French tarragon, and the big rosemary that was in the greenhouse over the winter. Some volunteer fennel have popped up, as well as a few mallows. The perennial calendula—or whatever it is—is preparing to bloom. The chives are in full bloom and look quite good. Overall that bed is in good shape.

- I walked along the gravel walkway, cleaning up whatever caught my attention. I pulled up a lot of fleabane. Left several toward the back of the border. Although a wild weed, they are lovely little flowers in the aster family, and I think they make a nice addition to the garden, a modest seasoning that adds a little spice to the meal.

- I cleared out a space in the "D" bed for the kniphofia. It's a tight, crowded space with the larger daylilies on three sides, but the kniphofia are right at the front of the border, not far from the drinking fountain. I gave them some fresh soil mix and my super-duper fertilizer recipe (Ferti-lome time release pellets with Bob & John's soil enhancer, bone meal, and blood meal).

- Pulled up a lot of weeds and asters that had invaded the astilbe group at the west end of the "D" bed.

- My next job was to plant the new anemones in the "A2" bed, but 3 of the 4 plants were too dry and very droopy. I'll plant them later but I'm not optimistic they are all going to survive. Fortunately, all the ones planted last year have generated new growth and doing well.

- I was excited to see that the lupin in the "D" bed has large blooms and I found a baby lupin in the bed, suggesting it had successfully self-seeded last fall. I'm thinking that open area around the gazing ball is finally going to fill in. This is nothing comparable to the incredible lupin displays we saw in Scotland last year but still gratifying to see this small success.

6 June (Saturday). Brief thunderstorm early this morning, about 3:30 a.m., which motivated me to hop out of bed, put on my pants, run downstairs, go onto driveway, and roll up the S-10's windows. Although the rain was negligible, the cold front did lower both the temp and the humidity. This morning MVM and I drove to Iowa City and I spent almost three hours removing poison ivy from K's backyard. I tried to protect myself: wore gloves and rolled down my shirt sleeves, trying to minimize the possibility of the ivy touching my skin. It was a slow process because I was trying to remove all the roots. I also removed several large docks, trying to pull up their large tap roots. When I got home, I put all my clothes in the washing machine, took a long shower, and washed the

tools I used. *[This was the first of several efforts to remove the poison ivy from my daughter's backyard. So far, I've never developed a rash or experienced any problems from my encounters with this nasty vine.]*

7 June. Worked at Wickiup all day, four hours in the morning, four in the afternoon. Bright sunshine, temp close to 90F in the afternoon, but the humidity was okay and there was always a breeze so heat was manageable. I periodically took a break in the shade with water and orange juice in the a.m., water and Pepsi in p.m. Here are a few jobs that I tackled:

- Weeded most of the big oval bed next to the compost piles. Though surrounded by weeds, the broccoli looks good and I added three more broccoli seedlings started from seed in early May. Although they quickly wilted in the heat, they came with developed roots and some attached soil. If I keep them watered, they should survive. In the oval bed I also planted three pineapple tomatillos started in the greenhouse two months ago. Somehow, despite my disregard for their well-being, they are still alive and should do okay.

- I checked all the tomato plants that had their tops cut off, I assume by cut worms. Of the 18 plants that were topless, all but five have generated new growth. I replaced the five "dead" plants, using tomatoes I sowed in early April. They had never been potted, their roots confined to the seed germination block, but they all looked healthy.

- In May I watched a video, produced by the University of Michigan, advocating the importance of eliminating a tomato plant's side shoots and removing lower branches so no leaves are close to the ground and there is ample air ventilation around the bottom of each plant. The video emphasized the importance of a tomato plant having a strong central trunk. I've also read articles arguing against such trimming, stressing the value of plants with increased leaf surface being able to generate more energy for growing more and bigger fruit. I decided for this summer to try and follow Michigan's recommendations, motivated by the suspicion that fewer branches and leaves near the ground will reduce mildew and other disease problems. So I went through all my tomato plants untouched by the cutworms and did my own pruning, snipping off all the new stems emerging in the joint between the trunk and an established branch. *[The summer of 2020 was not a great year for tomato production. The plants that survived the cutworm never fully recovered, and their fruit production was without exception well below average. As for the other plants, their fruit production was constrained by the hot, dry weather in July and the plants were pummeled by the August 10 wind storm. Nevertheless, the tomato plants disease problems were notably reduced and the indeterminates remained productive into October. At the moment I remain committed to continuing to use this pruning system.]*

- In the afternoon worked for two hours on two long rows of potatoes, squash, and melons in the West Field. I was pleased that I did not find any more Colorado potato beetle larvae, but the cucumber bugs were thick as thieves on the melons (none on the pumpkins and watermelons). They can be tough to kill by hand because they know how to use their wings when threatened, but fortunately for me they were frequently copulating, which notably reduces their inclination to fly away. One hill of melons was in bad shape, with over 10 bugs I managed to kill. I gave the plants some water, but they looked very weak and anemic.

- Last job of the day was weeding, beginning with a zucchini bed. I pulled up the extra zucchini plants. It's tough for me to enjoy killing so many zucchini plants, an emotional dilemma caused by their high germination rate. I also weeded two rows of bush beans in the J15 raised bed. These

plants all look good. These Provider and Mascotte varieties had a high percentage of germination—even though they were sowed in April in cold weather.

8 June. Poison Ivy. Everywhere I go. Saturday I struggled with it for three hours in K's backyard. Now, this morning at Coe, as I'm pulling the hose along the garden wall, I see the classic three-leaf pattern with a shiny gloss. Fortunately I see Chad on campus, and he confirms the P.I. identification, and he volunteers to spray it, which is fine with me.

My main accomplishment at Coe was mowing the lawn. . . . and I trimmed most of the viburnum at the east end of the garden. In the process I removed several trees growing up through the viburnum canopy. I also encountered a lot of bindweed throughout the viburnum, as well as several patches elsewhere in the "H" bed. I may experiment with a herbicide because pulling up these critters is mostly a waste of time. If I don't get the roots, they come back the next day.

I drove out to the Wickiup garden about 4:00 pm, hoping to miss the day's warmer temps. It was still hot, but there was a good breeze, and I was able to keep going with only one break. After a quick inspection of the garden, I headed to the West Field to check out the potatoes and melons. I began by weeding the winter squash and melons while looking for cucumber and squash bugs. Every hill had some of the little yellow/black demons, and I probably managed to kill by hand 75% of the ones I spotted. I was surprised to find so many on the pumpkin vines, but these vines are much more resilient than the young sweet melon plants, some of which have been devastated by this insect plague. I also squished a couple of nasty-smelling squash bugs, but they were all loners. I refreshed about a dozen potato hills, but only found one plant with beetle larvae.

At 7:30 I started harvesting. The row of Little Snow Pea White (from J. Scheepers) has been fantastic. They were planted early (2 April) with near 100% germination. They are nice-sized plants packed with flowers. Today was their fourth picking. I also harvested a nice bag of spinach (which is just beginning to bolt) and romaine and black-seeded Simpson lettuce. Everything in good condition, only minor insect damage. I finished my evening in the garden by pulling up a dozen nice-sized "red top" radishes. MVM assured me they tasted good.

12 June. Yesterday at Wickiup I watched a small bird with dark gray back, light gray breast, and rather long tail feathers, hopping around on a tomato cage, pecking at a white string tied to the cage. I was guessing the bird wanted to use the string for constructing a nest. To help him out, I untied the string so it was loose. Later in the day I saw two pieces of string were on the ground and one piece was rewound on the cage. I unraveled it and left it hanging. Today, all the string was gone, perhaps helping a nest hold together.

At the Coe garden, there is a robin's nest in the elderberry by the SW gate, a sturdy nest in the espalier apple, a nest under the eaves in the gazebo, and a cardinal's nest in the cropped flower crab in the "H" bed. This nest has at least two baby chicks, which explains why the tree remains unpruned. I did not want my trimming to upset the chicks or the parents. I've seen a wren darting around the small bird house I mounted on the pergola, but I'm not sure if this potential nesting site is being used.

13 June. Yesterday was a beautiful day, today was even better: temp in the 70s, low humidity, steady breeze from the east. I prepared a “sack lunch” and spent the day at Wickiup, arriving about 9:00 a.m. and staying until 6:00. Although I had to leave with many jobs undone, still a glorious day. On several occasions I thought back on the days when my Dad would take me with him to spend the day at our farmland “out north,” the name we always used for this 80 acres of farmland and pasture. We would ride on a large grain wagon, being pulled by Dad’s team of work horses, Bert and Jim. The distance was about four miles. A trip of perhaps 30-45 minutes. It was long enough that my Dad would have wanted to make as few round trips as possible. I walked it a few times, though I have no memory of precisely when or why. On the wagon trips Dad and I would take along our lunch—fried chicken, some sliced bread, and a large glass water jug wrapped in a gunny sack that had been drenched in water before we left home. Dad explained to me that the evaporation of the water cooled the water in the jug, my first lesson in physics. While dad was working in the field planted in corn or a sorghum, I would play in a wooded area where there had once been a farm house. Nearly all evidence of the farmstead had disappeared, except for some stones that had been part of a cellar or the foundation of a building. The last time I visited this deserted site, about 25 years ago, there was an enormous pack rat colony partially protected by one corner of those stones.

As for my day at Wickiup, I initially concentrated on cleaning up a row of potatoes and melons in the West Field. I removed a lot of weeds and grass but found relatively few bugs. All the plants appear in good condition. About half of the field is now completely mulched and relatively weed free. I then turned to the tomatoes in my primary garden, weeding the two long beds while pruning the plants to maximize air circulation. Once I was finished with the weeding/pruning operation, I then started digging up compost, spreading it around the tomato plants, and covering it all with the hay I’m using as mulch. I’m pleased and surprised to see that several of the tomato plants clipped off at ground level by the cutworms have already generated new growth.

Most plants are pimps and thugs. Because they can't walk, flowers will do anything, no matter how lethal, extreme, or bizarre, to get other life-forms to perform sex for them. ~Diana Ackerman

18 June. My final task at Coe today was cleaning up the eastside raised “J” bed, which was full of fleabane, hyssop, and the lion’s head weed—or whatever it’s called. I like the little fleabane daisy blooms, but there are too many of them and they are too tall and exposed for that bed. So I pulled them up (as well as the other uninvited visitors), leaving the snow-in-summer, the columbine (which still has a few blooms), and one dianthus (also blooming). Once all the “weeds” were removed and the snow-in-summer trimmed—though not as extreme as the trimming its partner received in the west-side bed—the bed looked much neater. I then opened up a bag of 30 gladiola bulbs, purchased on a whim at Menards two months ago. The spacing was tight but I got all the bulbs to fit in the back side of this “J” bed, surrounded by the freshly pruned snow-in-summer. The gladiola should have been planted a month ago, but we don’t always live in a perfect world where everything happens on time. I decided to pretend I was gardening in Ontario where a mid-June planting might be the only option. The key point is they are in the ground and thoroughly watered. Now we wait.

20 June. 9:00 pm. Sunroom. First day of summer, though, as a gardener, I feel June 1 is the real beginning. By the 20th, a summer rhythm with summertime concerns has been established. It's no longer a springtime world. As for today's gardening, it was all Wickiup. I drove out this morning at 8:30 and spent the first two hours working in a light drizzle. I needed my rain jacket, but only for about ten minutes was it raining hard enough to force me into the pickup. Most of the morning was hand-to-hand combat with weeds. I began with the J14 bed, planted with three rows of three varieties of beets, plus several rows of scallions at the east end of the bed. The beets had an excellent germination rate (sown the first week in April), but as I was weeding I discovered that the weeds had hidden the damage to the beets by rabbits eating their tops. In one stretch the damage was so severe that I re-sowed the row with some Ace beet seeds.

This morning for the first time I did see a rabbit—a young one—in the garden. He disappeared into the grass on the south border of the garden. I need to get that area cleaned up so I can find where the rabbits are going through the fence. Fortunately I had some Fareway apples with me so I set up a live trap near the south fence, using apple slices for bait. I should have done this much earlier, but it took the rabbit sighting to get me motivated. I should not have needed that visual stimulus.

After setting up the trap, I weeded a bed of sweet potatoes, the King Henry potato patch, the C1 bed of cucumbers, and the okra bed, which had hundreds of a weed I really don't like. Even the young ones can have a tenacious root system, and they have a great ability to regenerate even after they have been chopped up.

21 June. I celebrated Father's Day by spending most of the day in the vegetable garden. Arrived about 8:30 am after having picked up and put away our Hy-Vee groceries. Stayed at Wickiup until 3:00 pm. MVM came out in the morning, brought me a sandwich, and we harvested strawberries—more than I expected. This evening we froze 5 quarts. As for Wickiup, it was hot and very muggy. By 10:00 I was drenched in sweat, but fortunately there was a decent breeze periodically shifting from west to south.

Most of my work focused on pathways. I covered several stretches with either newspapers or weed control fabric and then covered them with the hay. In working around the grapes, I was struck by their rambunctious growth the last month, a dramatic contrast to their restrained growth the first two years. As I was preparing the path next to the asparagus, I moved a cardboard sheet and discovered the nest of a mouse, who quickly scurried to a hiding place under the grapes. The nest was made of chopped up bits of paper, but I saw no evidence of young mice. Not far away was the live trap I set out yesterday. Most of the Gala apple slices were gone, but the trap door had not been triggered. Perhaps the small rabbit does not have sufficient weight to trigger the mechanism. I left the trap in place with fresh bait.

About 2:00 it began to cloud up, with dark clouds to the west and north. Two storms went past the garden to the north. The second storm brought with it a wonderful cool breeze, flavored with fresh rain. I immediately recalled how wonderful it felt on the farm when a cold front came through and at least for a few hours broke the summer head. When I left Wickiup, it had not yet started to rain, but I needed to leave: I had drunk all the water in one thermos and all my iced tea in the other. Seven hours in the garden was enough for one day.

25 June. For the past week I've been trying to recall the name of a common weed found all over the Wickiup garden and the gravel walkways at Coe. Finally, last night, I pulled out my Roger and Dickinson guide to *Weeds of Northern U.S. and Canada* and began looking. Eventually on p. 352, I found it: *Portulaca oleracea* L. Common names include purslane, wild portulaca, pusley, low pigweed. When at Wick today, I was pulling up hundreds in the okra bed, all the time repeating the name "purslane . . . purslane . . . purslane," hoping one of those repetitions would trigger a long-term memory fragment that will be retrievable later in life. We'll see.

29 June. They have arrived. In the last 3-4 days, I'd seen an occasional loner, the solitary scouts checking out the battlefield, but this morning I discovered them in masses—though in a new location. In the "M1" bed, surrounding a rose bush, I've allowed a few wild milkweed to set up shop, offering a potential home base for Monarch butterfly larva. Today, as I was looking at the clumps of milkweed blooms, I realized the flowers had attracted dozens of Japanese beetles. So I walked to the garden shed, squirted some dish detergent into some water in a yogurt container, created a lovely layer of soap bubbles, returned to the "M1" bed, and began collecting beetles. While many flew away, there were several instances when I dunked 8-10 beetles with one pass under a flower head. It was evident from damage to the rose leaves that the beetles had been lunching there for a day or two. I walked down to the "H" bed rose bush and collected more beetles—though the situation was complicated by a clematis and several threads of bindweed winding through the shrub. There are also large clumps of horsetail under the rose bush: i.e., the whole situation is a real mess. As for the "G" shrub rose, the situation is even worse because so much "stuff" is growing around the bush, I can't even reach the plant, and it needs to be trimmed because of all the dead rose blooms that need removal.

30 June. A sad day. I learned that George G. died last night. The lungs just stopped working. A super nice fellow. I wish I could have known him in his younger years. My favorite memory is watching him walk back to this pew in our small church after passing around the collection plate and pretending to shoot Allison with his cocked finger. Now he's dead and Allison is in Arizona, caring for her ailing father. Our lives, as we grow older, become consumed with absences, ghosts of people still present, even though their bodies are gone. It becomes harder and harder to live in the present.

One gardening connection with George. He had purchased a broadfork and he brought it to the church's garden, where I used it briefly. Given his long-term health problems, it was probably not a tool he ever used much, but that short encounter confirmed this was a tool I wanted to add to my arsenal, one that has had a big impact on my vegetable gardening.

This morning, after a brief trip to Coe to harvest some fresh parsley, basil, and tarragon, I drove to Wickiup and worked there from 8:30 until 3:30. It was a good day for gardening: temp in low to mid 80s, thick cloud cover (northern edge of rain clouds in southern Iowa), and decent breeze out of the south. One job I finished was working with the soil on the long tomato bed next to the gate. After weeding the bed, I gave each plant a handful of my home-brewed fertilizer and covered the soil with fresh compost, followed by a layer of newspapers and a layer of hay mulch. I

also removed all the extra suckers and the lower leaves of each plant so no leaf is within six inches of the soil. The plants that escaped the cutworms are at least 4' tall and looking quite healthy.

Compliment a gardener enough on a plant and you're bound to receive a cutting, or if it's abundant, a whole plant. Gardeners don't find digging up flowers and giving them to friends a loss. More akin to a potlatch, it's a form of display. 'Look what glorious gardens, I have! Such gifts proclaim. "I'm overflowing with flowers, they're multiplying so fast I have to give them away." ~Diane Ackerman