

Garden Kalendar: Winter 2022

Each year I post four seasonal Garden Kalendars, each posting preceded by a short introduction to explain the history of the text and how it's organized. Although each preface basically repeats what was said in the previous installments, I will continue to repeat this information so it's not necessary to check out a prior Kalendar and figure out what garden situations I'm writing about.

The Winter 2022 Garden Kalendar is composed of edited excerpts from my daily, hand-written garden journal for January-March, 2021--accompanied by occasional commentaries on those passages. The journal records my work in four gardens:

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

Kalendar excerpts have usually concentrated on journal entries dealing with the Coe and Wickiup gardens. The residential gardens on Elmhurst Drive, prior to the derecho in August 2020, were primarily stable, perennial shade gardens populated with several hundred hostas and requiring minimal maintenance. The wind storm, however, profoundly changed that landscape, destroying all our shade trees and necessitating a dramatic redesign of the gardens around the house--and thus in the past two years a substantial portion of my gardening (and writing about my gardening) has focused on these new gardens in our front and back yard.

This Kalendar constitutes about 50% of my journal entries in the first quarter of 2021. While most passages are quite mundane and not likely of interest to anyone else, I enjoy looking back at the previous year, being reminded of moments in the garden I had forgotten and being periodically surprised by previous year's plans, noting what worked out okay and what was not successful. In case someone would want to see the layout of the gardens, here are links to maps of the Elmhurst Drive back yard garden and the Wickiup vegetable garden. The Alumni House Garden map is posted on the website's "map" page. As for the italicized quotations inserted between some journal entries, they are passages from Rebecca Solnit's *Orwell's Roses*, a marvelous book on George Orwell as a gardener. Because of the length of this document, most of the Winter 2022 Kalendar is posted as a pdf. ~Bob

The writer and actor Peter Coyote once remarked that no one cries over artificial flowers, and there's a particular kind of disappointment when you begin to admire a bouquet or a blossom at a distance and find out closer up that it's fake. The disappointment arises in part from having been deceived, but also from encountering an object that is static, that will never die because it never lived, that didn't form itself out of the earth, and that has a texture coarser, dryer, less inviting to the touch than a mortal flower. ~Rebecca Solnit

2 January 2021. The beginning of a new year. No “real” gardening yesterday; I never even left the house—though I did start organizing seeds and my ‘21 planting table. This is an amended version of my Jan ‘20 table, whose existence I had forgotten until I accidentally stumbled upon it while looking for another document. It’s a lot faster to update an old file than to create a new one. Yesterday I emptied all the old vegetable seeds stored in the two green seed boxes, laid the seed packages out in the basement on the floor, two tables, and the freezer. After checking various package dates, I threw away seeds likely to have marginal germination rates. The remaining seeds that might be used this spring I returned to their boxes. Today I brought from Coe the vegetable seeds I started in the greenhouse: peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli, and a few melons. I purchase new seeds for most varieties each year, but since I have so many seeds remaining from last year, I may relax my commitment to fresh seed stock. My primary reservation is how timing can be so critical with seeds sown directly in the garden—such as carrots. The window of time for optimal sowing can be quite short, particularly when sowing schedules can be so profoundly affected by the weather and soil conditions. If the first round of sowing doesn’t work, the conditions may not allow for a do over.

At Coe this afternoon I shot my first garden photos of 2021. Because of the snow cover, I limited my walk to the path I had shoveled between the Alumni House and the garden shed via the “A” and “B” walkways. Many photos were dependent on long-distance zoom. That limitation in my movement might influence how I organize this set of photographs, assuming some are worth posting to the website.

After the photo excursion, I returned to planting spring-flowering bulbs in pots. Today I arranged several plastic pots with daffodils in the center and snowdrops circling the daffodils. I started with a bag of 100 *Galanthus woronowii*, originally intended for the crevice garden, but I never got that bed cleaned up in the fall. And now it’s too late. I’m hoping, however, that putting the bulbs in these pots will keep them alive (so they can then be planted in a perennial bed later this year), and we might also enjoy a few blooms this spring. My big challenge is lack of space—and it’s going to get tighter in the green house once we start sowing flower and vegetable seeds in February. Fortunately, these bulbs are super resilient and most of them can be moved outside in early spring. It would help if I could have constructed a decent set of cold frames for Coe and here at home. I’ve got the materials. I just can’t settle on the design.

10 January. For the past 5 days I’ve been entering data and comments into my vegetable garden report for 2020. As usual it’s disheartening how incomplete are my records. I’ve often failed to write down what got planted or where it got planted or when it got planted or what the harvest was like. My notes on the West Field melons, for example, is a patchwork of guessing, primarily because I did not write precise notes on which plants were producing which watermelons or cantaloupe. I was so thrilled to have something to harvest that I didn’t bother to record the harvest. Despite the absence of so much information, my meager records and memory are sufficiently complete to identify the major winners and losers.

At Coe I've continued planting bulbs in pots, trusting it's cool enough in the greenhouse that some bulbs will produce flowers later this spring. The thermostat on the space heater is set at 50F—but it's much cooler along the outer walls. I just read that if you store spring bulbs in a frig and plant them early in the spring, they might still emerge and produce flowers. I have refrigerated all the remaining bulbs at Coe, and I might take to Coe the large bag of daffodils here at home. Perhaps I can jam them into the small refrigerator. I did set outside the greenhouse a large pot of bulbs and covered it with leaves and dead foliage. On other fronts, yesterday I sowed 9 cowpots with old basil seed: Purple Delight (Richters), Finissimo verde a Palla (Territorial), Red Genevese 'Freddy' (Richters), Genovese (J. Scheepers), Gemma (Richters), Persian (Richters), and Newton (Seeds 'n Such). Most of the seeds are 2-3 years old; the Persian basil seeds must be at least 4 years old. Basil is supposedly viable for an average of three years so we should see some germination. I was quite liberal in spreading seeds in each pot, 8-10 seeds per pot.

As for weather conditions, our world has been quite stable this year: solid snow cover of at least 6" deep, high temps around 30, night time in the lower 20s, cloudy most days. No storms forecast, though it's supposed to get colder at the end of this coming week. Given this is winter, we should have no complaints.

14 January. This morning I went to the Coe garden and discovered that some bulbs planted in pots are sending up green shoots. Since this group had not gone through a cold stratification, I was unsure how well they would respond, but apparently the evening greenhouse temperature (probably in the low 40s) was sufficient to trigger the right hormones. Today I also pulverized kitchen veggies for the red wigglers and dumped a container of kitchen scraps in the compost bin. As for the garden, everything looked fine. Not much evidence that many animals or birds have been recent visitors.

At home we canned our third batch of Buck Grove tomato spaghetti sauce in three days, using frozen tomato juice from last summer, producing over 30 quarts. For the last two batches, we mixed in freshly ground garlic from the Wickiup garden. The Iowa-grown garlic definitely gave the sauce more kick. Most of our garlic is quite mild, but one of the varieties may have developed more spunk this year. Unfortunately I did not keep proper track of which garlic we used since they were all thrown together in the same bin in the basement.

The big task so far this week has been going through garden catalogs, preparing this year's seed orders for veggies, flower, and herbs. Of course, I am lusting for far more seeds than I will/could ever use. But the temptations are too powerful to resist in all instances. This evening I leafed through the catalogue for Select Seeds, which has so many marvelous photos and appealing descriptions, assuring me dozens of these flowers would be perfect for the Coe garden and here at home. I still have two more catalogs to review—Southern Exposure Seeds and Maine Potato Lady--and then tomorrow I will go on-line and order seeds. It will take several hours, with multiple websites open simultaneously. Should be fun.

If war has an opposite, gardens might sometimes be it, and people have found a particular kind of peace in forests, meadows, parks, and gardens.

16 January. Another day spent inside, finishing up seed orders. This morning I went through William Weaver's *100 Vegetables*, reminding myself of recommendations I wanted to try. I had marked about 20 possibilities and relied on my Google searches to locate sources. I found over a dozen varieties available from on-line catalogues, including two sources (Southern Exposure and Totally Tomatoes) that I used yesterday when doing my primary seed orders. My searching techniques turned up several seed sources new to me, such as Truelove Seeds and Turtle Seeds. I ended up with several small seed orders, including purchases from Hudson Valley (where I had already intended to check out their famous oxheart tomato) and Victory Seeds (an old reliable firm that no longer prints a catalog).

In the afternoon I did a Richter Herb seed and plant order, mostly for basil seeds and lavender plants, and a large order to Select Seeds for a wide variety of flower seeds. I'm determined to plant more flowers in the Wickiup garden, hoping to attract more pollinators while using daisies and marigolds and dill to detract or repel unwanted bugs. In that seed order are also annuals and potential self-sowers for the front and back yard here at home and to fill in spaces among the perennials at the Coe garden. *[As with so many plans of mice and men, several flower-seeding projects went awry. The best success came with sowing flower seeds in the back yard at home. In the Long West bed, we had a marvelous, long-lasting display of zinnias, cosmos, and calendulas in bloom. The biggest disappointment was at Wickiup, where I failed to sow any of the daisies, marigolds, or dill seeds I had purchased. But the seeds were kept in a refrigerator for the past year, and I hope to be more successful in 2022. My intent is for the Wickiup vegetable garden to become more like a traditional potager, with extensive companion planting of vegetables, herbs, and flowers.]*

21 January. First full day of the Biden Administration. At the moment it feels rather exhilarating to have sane, smart, dedicated professionals administering the executive branch of the federal government after four years of Trump and his gang of ne'er-do-wells. I'm sure we'll soon witness many failures and missed opportunities, but for the moment it feels refreshing and inspiring. I still recall the night when Clinton beat Bush. After 12 years of the Republicans, a feeling that a new culture had arrived—which of course, inevitably, proved disappointing. But thank goodness for these occasional moments of joy, even while knowing it's a temporary illusion.

As for gardening, today I tried to do my final on-line vegetable order for potatoes from Old Maine Potato Lady, only to discover they were sold out of the fingerlings I wanted. Fortunately I was able to find my Rose Finn Apples from another source, Wood Prairie Farms, a company I have used in the past. After submitting my potato order, I went to Coe to water plants and pots with seeds. So far only one basil, the Gemma, had germinated, but the plants are doing well, and many more bulbs are sending up fresh green spears. I did go into the garden and posted new signs and a map on the message board and put maps and the new *Garden Quarto* in the

box. I also finished revising and posted to the website this week's Monday Morning Garden Report, written as crude verse rather than conventional prose. Spent the rest of the day working on an overdue blog post, the December "Almanac."

29 January. In the afternoon to Coe. A box with four bags of Black & Gold seed germination mix had arrived. I've used Johnny's the last few years, but it's expensive and the shipping cost is quite high. So I decided to experiment with this less costly alternative with no shipping fees. The bags are also smaller, much easier to handle and store. Opening the first bag, I found the mixture very light and it absorbed a lot of water. Once it reached a functional consistency, I used my soil blocker to make 50 seed blocks and planted various herbs, including 15 blocks with three new varieties of basil that just arrived from Pinetree Seeds: Italian Large Leaf, Osmin, & Opal. Once the seeded blocks were in the tray, I put them on a heating pad and covered them with a plastic dome.

While checking my email during a break in seed sowing, I read a message with the worst news of the year: an announcement from the President's Office that Duane Carr had died. What an inestimable friend he had been—such a warm, generous, kind person. All those years when our offices were next door in Peterson Hall—and all those years when we met every Saturday morning for the Men's Prayer Breakfast at Lovely Lane. It has been at least five years since we last communicated by email, and he only came back to Coe a couple of times after he retired—always appearing unannounced, just dropping by for a few minutes. If it had not been for the pandemic, MVM and I would have driven to Colorado last summer, and one purpose of the trip was to see Duane and his family ranch. But, alas, we never made it.

My most vivid memory of Duane is when we both served on the Academic Standing Committee. A student who had been dismissed from the college was meeting with the committee, appealing our decision. During the meeting, she started to cry. Most of us were embarrassed, not knowing what to do, but Duane jumped up, walked around the table to where she was sitting, gave her a fatherly hug, and assured her that it was okay to cry. There was such tenderness and empathy in that sincere gesture. What an incredible good fortune that he was my colleague for almost two decades. Perhaps he was not a great physical chemist (in his office he had more books on religion than on chemistry), but he was a great human being, one of the finest persons I've ever known.

1 February. In many respects, today sucked. At my 8:00 a.m. dental checkup, I learned that I needed to see an Endodontist (spelling?) about a cracked tooth, and in that appointment I learned that I needed a root canal, they could do it "on the spot," and it would only cost me \$550. I eventually escaped the Endodontist office a few minutes after 12:00 noon, and felt rather lousy for the rest of the day. But I took a couple of big Tylenol pills and by the evening I was feeling much better. Next week I return to the dentist office to start the procedure for the installation of a crown. Can't say I'm looking forward to this adventure, but at least the nerves

for that cracked tooth have been removed, and the remainder of this exercise will be more an issue of discomfort than pain.

As for gardening tasks, I did hear back from two people about publishing their poetry in the next issue of *The Garden Quarto*—and both said “yes.” I still have three other unanswered queries. I also managed some good garden book reading. I finished *Founding Gardeners* by Andrea Woolf, an excellent portrayal of how deeply involved Adams, Jefferson, Washington, and Madison (our first four presidents) were with gardens, farming, plants, horticulture. I was particularly surprised to discover their commitment to the adoption of native plants—which they understood as an issue of patriotism. I was disappointed to see how little Woolf had to say about the fact that three of these four gentlemen were slave owners and their gardening/farm operations were thoroughly dependent on slaves. Despite that oversight, still an engaging, insightful book.

There's an Etruscan word, saeculum, that describes the span of time lived by the oldest person present, sometimes calculated to be about a hundred years. In a looser sense, the word means the expanse of time during which something is in living memory. Every event has its saeculum, and then its sunset when the last person who fought in the Spanish Civil War or the last person who saw the last passenger pigeon is gone. To us, trees seemed to offer another kind of saeculum, a longer time scale and deeper continuity, giving shelter from our ephemerality the way that a tree might offer literal shelter under its boughs.

26 February. Another day of warm weather—“warm” defined as temperature into the 40s. This morning, after updating the Buffalo UMC website, I worked for a couple of hours on the book reviews bibliography. Composed drafts reviewing two more books—though the review of Wulf’s on the Founding Fathers/Gardeners is woefully incomplete and unfocused. I also worked on the comprehensive list of garden book reviewed the previous four years, attempting to establish a consistent format in punctuation, etc. I’m still reading three books for this year’s bibliography. Although I’ve read enough of each one that I could write a review and finish the book later, I recall last year composing a last-minute review of the Joseph Banks biography, and the final 20 pages are still unread.

At Coe, I watered most of the plants and seedlings in the greenhouse. All of the dianthus seeds I sowed last week have germinated. The basil, lovage, and cilantro sown at the beginning of the month are all doing fine. One of the new grow lamps is on 24 hours a day, pretending it’s late June in Alaska. In today’s watering the seedlings also received their periodic dose of fish emulsion fertilizer. I fed the red wigglers a container of chopped up potato peels and used tea bags so they should be in good shape for another week. Because of the warm weather, my dead red-tailed hawk had thawed so I threw him in a waste can. Fortunately I have several good photos of him for posting on the garden website. But far more exciting are the photos I edited of the garden’s lichens. As I was editing and enlarging the photos, I found several new varieties of lichens, more species diversity than I had expected. I’m pleased to discover we

have all these lichen mini-gardens scattered throughout the garden. This is a dimension of the garden seemingly unfazed by weather conditions. It's not evident the lichens care whether it's July or December. I was particularly surprised to see on an apple tree a lichen unnoticed when taking the photos. So much beauty so easy to miss. I'm now curious if I can find any lichen on the yews or viburnums.

28 February. Most of the day absorbed with editing the February garden book annotations. Posted the file this evening after supper. It came to 33 pages—25 pages of annotations followed by a five-page addendum listing all the books reviewed in the previous four bibs. I can't imagine anyone would ever read this blog post (in fact, not a single visit to the garden website the last two days), but that's okay. It's a refreshing exercise going back through the books, sharpening my memory of what I gained from each text. My current plan is to do one more editing and re-post a cleaner copy.

Another warm day. There's still a lot of snow but it's melting. We're probably down to an average depth of 6-8" but no snow around the house and tree stumps. T.H. sent me a photo of a snow drop in bloom, one of the bulbs I gave them last fall. I'm sure we'll have snow drops in bloom within the next week.

I didn't go to Coe today, but I worked in the greenhouse yesterday. Some flower seeds sowed last week have germinated: balsam (which MVM's parents had on their farm, a dependable self-seeder), sea holly, marigolds, and dianthus. All these came up in soil blocks under a lamp. On Saturday I sowed four blocks each of five kinds of basil, all the seeds from Richters in Canada: Toscano, Everleaf, Persian, Thai, and Gecofura (spelling?). The Everleaf variety was spectacular two years ago. Tomorrow I'll sow more basil and also onions, leeks, and parsley. Space will be tight. I wish I had cold frames for the bulbs, grasses, and tulips that emerged in the basement at home. The plants look good: question is will we see any blooms. I did bring home from the greenhouse a snowdrop preparing to bloom and a few Tete-a-Tete daffodils, the yellow blooms just now opening.

Tomorrow morning the Coe Garden officially re-opens. I should send an email to the campus. I need to recruit a few students to work in the garden this spring and next summer. I have not spent much in my budget for the year, and I don't foresee any big expenses on the horizon. I will need to be reimbursed for the new park benches and the Adirondack chairs, which have not yet arrived.

2 March. A banner day: for two hours this afternoon I worked in the Coe garden—the real garden, not a digital or daydream garden. It was great to be doing something physical. The task today was cleaning up the crevice garden. I removed a few tufts of grass and sorrel, several ox-eye daisies, and all the old cleome. All the cleome's little black eggs had already escaped their nest so I could just pull out the plants without needing to worry about their self-seeding. The soil in the crevice garden was not frozen. I raked off a layer of oak leaves and found several reticulated iris coming up. In each case, 2-3 bulbs were nestled close together,

indicating they are naturalizing and expanding. I trimmed back the myrtle spurge and several sedum. Still a large pile of snow at the west end of the bed. I shoveled most of it onto the Joe Pye weed, giving the iris a less challenging route for their emergence. I also cut back purple coneflowers and old buttercup foliage under the espalier crab tree. I found several tulip spears, more yellow than green, buried under the oak leaves. The area under the espalier still looks a bit rough, an interesting contrast with the "M1" bed covered in 6" of snow.

3 March. Another beautiful day. I arrived at the Coe garden about 2:15 and worked till 5:00, mostly in front of the gazebo. It was a warm afternoon, temp into the low 50s. I didn't need a jacket—in fact, my old Irish wool hat was too warm for comfort. My first task was re-securing one of the garden lamps that had fallen over. The tall, heavy light fixture is held to its base with one small screw, a terrible design. So, several times a year, I'm trying to find a way to get a lamp upright, stable, and re-attached to its circular base. Today I had to remove a lot of dirt and clean the lip around the base so the lamp cylinder had a place to rest. By some miracle, I got it secured on my second attempt.

Another broken feature of the garden is the Pegasus statue, which had again tipped over and fallen onto the ground. Because of uneven thawing, he fell onto soft soil and fortunately his remaining wing did not break off. He is very heavy, almost impossible for me to lift, and I had to work hard to get him erect and stabilized.

I then turned my attention to the sundial bed. I cut back and pulled up most of the *Verbena bonariensis*. Some verbena appeared to be alive, so I left several undisturbed. They are perennials in Great Britain, and perhaps the deep snow this winter enabled them to survive. Time will tell. Around the sundial I cut back the sedum, lavender, and snow-in-summer. The latter does not look very happy, but it has a history of quick revival. I probably should remove the sedum and snow-in-summer because they don't want to be confined within their assigned trapezoid boundaries—which are intended to serve as the hour divisions for the sundial's gnomon shadow. I need plants willing to remain within their boundaries. This afternoon I spotted bulbs emerging in one section, but I can't recall what is planted there.

While cleaning up the area around the gazebo, I had one notable inspiration. One of the old iron-ore-red benches had spent the winter sitting outside the gazebo. Its seat is partially rotten, and my intent was to pitch it into the trash. But as I was carrying it out of the garden, it occurred to me that I could use it as a plant stand next to the greenhouse. So I cleared the area and set it next to the door. It fits the space perfectly and from a distance looks okay. Although it's not strong enough for a person to sit on, it's perfectly functional for potted plants, replacing the old plant stand wrecked by the derecho. Because of the warmer weather and the need for more space in the greenhouse, I moved onto the bench 7-8 flower pots with daffodils and snowdrops, plus two pots with scallions. [*This arrangement has worked beautifully, and it was not long before I set up the other iron-ore-red bench outside the greenhouse, serving as a second home for potted plants.*]

Inside the greenhouse, I prepared for sowing three more seed varieties that required cold storage for germination: a columbine, a delphinium, and a cleome. The last two years I've had difficulty convincing the cleome seeds to germinate; this year I'm trying a new variety. I wrapped the seeds in damp paper towels, placed them in separate plastic bags (I hope correctly labeled) and stored them in the refrigerator. I'll sow them in 2-3 weeks. As for the seeds already sown, we continue to have new arrivals. Today I spotted several tiny foxglove.

This morning I finished editing my MMGR on lichen. This is one of my more interesting Monday morning reports, celebrating a dimension of the garden that had been invisible to me. The lichens convey such a quiet, restrained beauty, rain or shine, frigid cold or July heat, apparently impervious to climate extremes, requiring no preparation or planting or attention by any gardener. All they needed were wooden benches and trees and time—and now we have these lovely organisms, like the rising of a magical sourdough bread.

Flowers are often emblems of ephemerality and mortality, as in the vanitas paintings so common in seventeenth-century Europe, where elaborate bouquets were often paired with skulls, fruit, and other reminders that blooming and decaying, life and death, are inseparable. In songs roses often represent love and the beloved as the prize that cannot be grasped or kept. Among the popular songs of the last several decades are "La Vie en Rose," "Ramblin' Rose," "My Wild Irish Rose," "(I Never Promised You a) Rose Garden," "A Rose Is Still a Rose," "Days of Wine and Roses."

4 March. A big day: retrieved the Chevy S-10 from storage. Of course, after sitting unwanted since late December, the battery was dead, but after two hours on the battery charger, it started right up. The pickup is a mess inside, but it was great to be driving the old stick shift again. Also convenient that it already has a full load of mulch, which will be quite useful here at home, once the snow melts.

Next task was sending an email to students on campus, notifying them the garden is now open weekdays and inviting anyone looking for a work-study position to consider a position as a garden assistant. I then turned my attention to sowing three seed varieties I had never planted before: 10 blocks of celeriac (seeds from Seeds of Italy, purchased last year), 5 blocks of huckleberry seeds (very small), and nine Clancy potato seeds from Seeds 'n Such. The potato seeds were pelleted, my first time sowing potato seeds. I just read an article celebrating the qualities of roasted celeriac. Although purchased last year, the seeds are supposed to be viable for up to five years, so I decided to give them a try.

5 March. Almost two hours this morning occupied with my first Zoom meeting with the kids, responding to their questions about life on the farm with my parents. Most of what I said was a rehash of old stories I've told many times before, but one new issue came up when I was asked why my mom started working in town at places like Batson's Drug, Winn's Café, and the Ben

Franklin. It suspect it would have been a mix of her need for social interaction (she really disliked farmhouse solitude) and a desire to have some money of her own.

This afternoon I worked at Coe, watered plants, re-arranged plant trays, and cleaned up the "K" bed. Cut back dead foliage (coneflowers, asters, miscanthus, balloon flowers, etc) and removed dead foliage from lungwort and lamb's ear. After raking the area, I spread out pockets of icy snow that had not yet melted. Nearly all the snow on the lawn has melted, but there's still a lot of snow on the south-side beds that don't receive much direct sunshine.

I sowed two varieties of poppies in the "K" bed: *Eschscholzia californica* 'Pink Champagne' and 'Apricot Chiffon'. Both are OP varieties of California poppies. I mixed the seeds, which are small, with vermiculite and then sprinkled the seed/vermiculite mix in several small circular groups, hoping for 5-6 seeds per group. Once the seeds were in the vermiculite, they were impossible to see. The seeds need cold stratification and light in order to germinate. Last summer I talked with a fellow in Iowa City who has a lot of volunteer California poppy that is a rampant self-seeder. I'm hoping we may have comparable success in the "K" bed. I have two more varieties that I'll probably sow in the "I" and "D" bed. One benefit of the vermiculite mix is that it helps me keep track of where I have sown the seeds. [*This effort to raise California poppies was a failure. As far as I could ascertain, zero germination. This past fall I sowed the poppy seeds in November in the back yard garden. We'll see if they do better after spending a few months in an Iowa winter.*]

8 March. A glorious day, my first full day of outdoor gardening since last fall. We had sunshine, temp reaching the low 60s, perfect gardening weather. We also have several plants at Coe quite pleased with the arrival of spring. Today the following flowers were in bloom:

- Several clumps of yellow crocus in the lower "J" bed; their bright yellow blooms proclaiming their presence across the garden.
- Many *Galanthus elwesii*, planted last fall, blooming in the "C" bed.
- A couple yellow winter aconites in the "B2" and "C" beds have opened up.
- In the crevice garden, a lovely articulated iris; this was actually a tight cluster of blooms, evidence that the iris planted two years ago are naturalizing and producing progeny.

I spent most of the morning in the "M1" bed, which looked pretty rough. Pulled up all the *Baptisia* and removed all the old peony stalks, which were flat on the ground. Trimmed most of the sedum ground cover, pulled up stalks of milkweed (one with a large seedpod), cut back the tall asters and obedient plant stalks (baby obedient plants are already emerging). Still a lot of cleaning up to do around the big honeysuckle, which is running rampant all over the west end of the bed, some vines 15-20'; many have roots where the vines touch the ground.

On my first visit to the east end of the garden, I discovered that Pegasus had fallen over again and broken its other wing. I'm not sure how to proceed because he is made of a lead alloy. The two professional artists I've talked with both have said they have no idea who could do the repair work. I need to do some research.

It was an unusual day in the garden with so many different visitors. One professor met with a prospective student and parents on the patio this morning. This afternoon a student was studying on the patio for over an hour. A woman who works in Nassif came to read during her lunch hour. In the afternoon three different pairs of students visited the garden and two women sat on the “J” bench, enjoying the sun and visiting. On more than one occasion I pointed out to visitors the reticulated iris in the crevice garden. Although those beautiful blooms are next to the walkway, they are small and easy to miss.

In the afternoon I drove to the Wickiup garden for my first visit since December. The garden was in decent condition. All the snow is gone. A lot of cleaning up to do but no major problems. I found a couple small holes in the fence, but no sign of any rabbit turds. At least one deer had been in the garden recently, the prints marching across several beds. I spent two hours cleaning and stacking tomato cages. The soil is damp but close to being workable. Tomorrow I will spruce up a few of the raised beds and plant spinach, kale, radishes, and lettuce. I did not remove any mulch from the garlic or parsnips, another job for tomorrow’s visit.

9 March. This morning Cara delivered the new plant/vine steel arch. It was originally intended for the “H” bed, but once it arrived, we felt it looked better next to the shrub rose in the “G” bed, complementing Cara’s large sundial in front of the gazebo. It’s a beautiful addition to the garden, effectively filling in that open space on the peninsula.

10 March. Yesterday I interviewed four candidates for work-study positions as student garden assistants and today interviewed another five people, with one exception all female. Apparently working in a garden has no appeal for young men. All were engaging applicants with diverse personalities and cultural backgrounds. My plan is to offer 5-6 of them jobs and give them some freedom in choosing what their garden tasks, introducing possibilities that go beyond pruning and weeding. My list of options includes:

- Organize garden parties/activities.
- Create garden podcasts, using the garden as the stage for music performances, art displays, readings, conversations, interviews, etc.
- Photograph plants, birds, visitors (for example, the website has almost no photos of people in the garden).
- Construct tufa planters.
- Create a vertical garden.
- Clean tools, equipment, plexiglass panels.
- Clean and oil benches.
- Develop new advertising options.
- Map the garden in greater detail than the maps I’ve created.
- Finish the red wheelbarrow project.
- Rebuild compost beds (which might include using the electric shredder).

- Assemble the new greenhouse next to the compost bins.
- Clean yews; remove dead leaves and branches, etc.
- Assist with editing *The Garden Quarto*; this might involve searching through old Coe publications for potential texts.
- Compose short text for *The Garden Quarto*.
- Create new design/logo for garden clothing, letterhead, labels.
- Install new labels for plants throughout the garden.

14 March. First day of Daylight Savings Time. Our pastor overslept, so I served as worship leader until she arrived, much embarrassed. After church, I went to Wickiup. The weather forecast indicated a rain/snow mix should be arriving about 3:00, so I took an apple for lunch and intended to keep working until the weather turned inhospitable. The sky was overcast, but the rain never came, and I kept working until after 6:00—and thanks to Daylight Savings Time, there was still plenty of light. It did get quite windy during the day, the wind out of the east, and it got colder as twilight arrived, but I had no problem working while just wearing a hoodie. Except for the ten minutes to eat my apple, I never needed a break, my longest work day since last fall. My jobs included:

- I set up the big black garden “bag” after digging a round depression, 2-3" deep, for it to sit in and secured the pouch with four steel posts. The felt-like bag has a 6' diameter, much larger than I had imagined (and I have three more that came in the same package). I worked for over an hour shoveling soil and compost into the bag, and it's still only 3/4 filled. I sure hope it works—and the cloth material holds up in Iowa's weather extremes.
- Trimmed dead leaves from the two raised strawberry beds.
- Finished cutting and removing old asparagus stalks; everything dumped on the big compost pile.
- Removed straw, weeds, and grass from half a dozen raised beds so they can dry out and heat up faster.
- Cleaned and stored remaining metal tomato cages; several were bent by winter storms but they will all be serviceable this summer.
- Weeded the dill bed—which was very weedy.
- Pulled up and threw on the big compost pile all the old brassicas in the round V1 bed.

Despite steadily working for almost seven hours, it doesn't seem my list of accomplishments is very long, but the garden now looks much cleaner. As I'm writing the final sentence for this journal entry at 10:00 p.m., it still has not started to rain, but the wind chimes have become a insistent accompaniment to my journal entry. The temp tomorrow is supposed to be 20 degrees colder than today.

It may be the very uselessness of cut flowers, beyond the pleasure they give, that has made them a superlative gift, embodying the generosity and anti-utilitarianism of gift-giving. When he [George Orwell] went to Germany to report on the end of the Second World War,

he came across a corpse near the footbridge that was one of the last unbombed bridges across the river through Stuttgart: "A dead German soldier was lying supine at the foot of the steps. His face was a waxy yellow. On his breast someone had laid a bunch of the lilac which was blooming everywhere." It makes a picture and strikes a balance, that yellow face and those lilacs, death and life, the vigor of the spring and the immense devastation of the war. The lilacs don't negate the corpse or the war but they complicate it, as the specific often does the general. So does the unseen hand that had laid a bouquet on a soldier and the news that lilacs were blooming in Stuttgart, which in 1945 was shards and rubble from the thousands of tons of bombs dropped on it by British airplanes in the course of the war. The flowers say that this person a British reader would look upon as the enemy was someone's friend or beloved, that this corpse had a personal as well as a political history.

15 March. I'm guessing it's a few minutes before 9:00 p.m. My Swiss Military watch has periodically been stopping and re-starting, so I took it into the watch repair shop, where it will hang out for the next month. Cost of the repair is estimated at \$125, more than the original purchase price. But I love the watch, we've been together for over twenty years. It's an old friend, like the Chevy S-10. We've grown attached and I would prefer to repair it rather than throw it away. So I'll support a disappearing breed—the watch repair person—and try to exist for a month without a watch. We'll see how that goes. At least my old flip phone can function as a pocket watch.

Last night a convincing facsimile of winter came to eastern Iowa. About dawn, it started snowing and by ten this morning it was blowing hard and snowing hard. The temp, however, refused to drop much below freezing, which meant it was melting at about the same rate as it was arriving. Thus not much accumulation, just a chilly coat of white paint over most of the landscape.

17 March. A damp, overcast day; temp hovering just above freezing. I worked at Coe morning and afternoon, mostly on computer projects. I had intended to prune old foliage (Joe Pye, goldenrod, tansy, etc), but because of the weather and my effort to fight off a head cold, I remained inside most of the day. This morning before driving to Coe, I visited my neighborhood ACE Hardware and purchased a sealant tape to repair the cracked plexiglass in the greenhouse roof. Once I had the surface dried off, I applied several layers of the tape. Time will tell if it worked. [*Except for one minor leak, the taping solved the leak issue.*]

Most of the afternoon I focused on this month's Garden Shed blog—a collage of passages from old Monday Morning Garden Reports from January to June of last year. Like the quarterly Kalendars, this project involves a recycling of old material. One significant difference, however, is that the MMGR passages have already been revised, edited, and posted. So this blog will be more a re-packaging, arranging the passages in a new context. As I read through the old MMGR postings, some passages were more "essay-like" than I had remembered and might benefit from this recasting. Several passages I really enjoyed reading,

including one report I had completely forgotten: my observations on the importance of fragrance during the winter months, plants (such as Sweet Annie and hyssop) that otherwise can be overlooked and undervalued.

18 March. This morning I began filling in the vegetable garden map, devising a plan for what gets planted where. As always, I began by selecting the raised beds for the tomatoes, reserving spaces for 50 plants. By noon I had most of the beds tentatively filled in, knowing that once I'm in the garden, putting seeds and plants in the soil, changes will inevitably occur. I'm often reminded of General Eisenhower's observation on planning: "In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."

One other task this morning was creating a plan for K's front yard, the space between the curb and the hillside with the feather reed grass. The space is about 500 sq ft, 50' long and 10' deep. I devised a simple, symmetrical structure of four rows: back row alternating Joe Pye and *Baptisia*; second row mixing coneflowers and black-eyed Susans; third row a sequence of peonies, Siberian iris, and daffodils; and the front row would include yarrow, lamb's ear, coreopsis, and *Brunnera*. To help give the garden a more relaxed appearance, we can randomly mix in groups of tall verbena, columbine, alliums, poppies, foxglove, delphiniums, bee balm, gayfeathers, cranesbill, and catmint. A combination of these varieties should provide a season-long bloom cycle. While deer will eat just about anything, these should not be among their preferences.

21 March. In the afternoon drove to Wickiup. Began by cleaning up some of the H1 bed and planted Alaska Early peas, the first veggie seeds to be directly sown outdoors this spring. The soil temp registered at 50F, which should be just right for the peas, 5 degrees warmer than yesterday. While sowing the peas, I discovered a mole tunnel running the length of the bed, 3-4" under the surface. I stopped sowing and used a hand trowel to destroy the tunnel. When I started preparing the soil in the T1 bed for an 8' row of Snowwhite Snow Peas, I began by digging into the bed to locate any hidden tunnels. Fortunately no tunnel was found, and I could proceed with the pea seed sowing. I concluded my sowing spree with two 8' rows of carrots in a J bed: a row of Bolero (a 75-day orange Nantes) and a row of Napoli (an early, 55-day carrot bred for early spring sowing). I covered the carrot seeds with a mix of vermiculite and compost. I need to order a new bag of vermiculite. I can't find in C.R. a large bag with the small-grained vermiculite I use for potting soil and seed sowing.

22 March. Cloudy all day, temp into the 60s, perfect weather for gardening. I left the S-10 at Keenan's for a new battery, and worked at Coe all day. After a brief stint at the computer, I cleaned up the two raised herb beds. The biennial parsley is greening up, some leaves large enough to harvest, and also the chives. In the "F" bed I cut back the *Baptisia*, tansy, Karl Foerster grass, penstemon, Sioux Blue Indian grass, coreopsis, cranesbill, daisies, etc. After raking the bed, I tried to fix one of the metal plant supports, but several pieces have broken off.

I may try to find a welding shop that can permanently weld together the various pieces, making the supports stronger and more stable.

In the afternoon I replanted the Husker Red penstemon around the new arch sculpture in the "G" bed and pulled up penstemon and verbena at the entrance to the bed's wood chip path. Next task was pruning the honeysuckle on the "H" bed's Eiffel Tower support. Removed innumerable *Lonicera* vines running all over the area, periodically pulling up roots where the vines were in contact with the mulch. I should have potted up some of those progeny to give away or sell at a church sale in June—but I didn't. I also met with one of the new student workers and showed her how to weed the gravel walkways and clean up an area behind a garden bench.

A garden offers the opposite of the disembodied uncertainties of writing. It's vivid to all the senses, it's a space of bodily labor, of getting dirty in the best and most literal way, an opportunity to see immediate and unarguable effect. At the end of the day if you dug, how much you dug is as clear and definite as is the number of eggs collected from the chickens.

24 March. Yesterday afternoon I did some seed sowing. I had forgotten that in the garden shed frig were seven different varieties of flower seeds requiring cold stratification. Most of them should have been sown 2-3 weeks ago, but I'm hoping the extra stratification time won't do them any harm. I prepared 50 seed blocks in a large tray. Sowed 15 blocks with "Hello Yellow" Asclepias and 15 blocks with the "Yankee Mix" delphiniums. The delphinium seeds had been mixed with vermiculite and were indistinguishable so I just spread the mixture on the top of each germination block, hoping a couple seeds would end up on each block. The Asclepias seeds were wrapped in a moist paper towel and much easier to see. Once the seeds were in their assigned blocks, I put the tray on a heating pad, covered it with a plastic dome, and called it done. As for the last group of foxglove seeds sowed in February, so far no signs of germination.

26 March. The major task today was digging out the Smith & Hawkin greenhouse kit purchased "on sale" in 2005. The packing box had never been opened. After moving the box to Coe, I opened it up, spread everything out in the gazebo, skimmed through the instructions, and decided its assembly was relatively straightforward. Two student assistants have indicated they plan to put it together this weekend. I will also leave them instructions for constructing the two Adirondack chairs, a task which should not take long. In preparation for the installation of the new greenhouse (which will primarily function as a storage shed), I took most of the stuff out of the old greenhouse. The students should not have much difficulty taking it apart and throwing it away.

28 March. This afternoon we drove to K's after lunch. We walked around the yard and discussed with K various planting options, mulch, walking paths, leaf disposal, etc. We

decided she would need to order five cubic yards of mulch, three of which, by my estimate, can be used for the front yard. She will get a small wagon to help cart the mulch up the steep incline into the back yard. She has already done a lot of cleaning up: the back yard looks much better than it did at this time last year. Pulmonaria are emerging all over the place. K. said she was not particularly fond of the pulmonaria with their combination of variegated leaves and multi-color blooms, like the plant "was designed by a little girl." I told her the variety of colors may be the lungwort's tactic for informing bees which blooms are fresh and which ones may have already been visited by other pollinators.

Back at home, I raked the flower beds in the front yard and put most of the material into a yardy for recycling. I spent a long time removing wood chip remnants from around the pin oak tree stump, creating a mound while also uncovering flowers and hostas just beginning to emerge from their winter hibernation. I cut back most of the ornamental grasses and dug up miscellaneous grasses deemed unworthy. On the east side of the driveway I raked chips around the area of the departed silver maple. The task now is to choose what annual and/or perennial plants to locate in these two mounds of decaying wood chips. One issue is to see how the hostas handle this terrain now that they have no trees protecting them from the mid-summer sun.

29 March. Wind. And more wind. It was blowing hard at Wickiup this afternoon, gusts of 40-50 mph, almost blew me over a couple of times. I decided to garden on my hands and knees, trying to keep a low profile, usually working with my back to the SSW wind. Fortunately the temp was comfortable, in the mid 70s, but the wind was exhausting. Twice I went into the pickup cab, just to rest and regain my strength.

On the way to Wickiup I stopped at Ever-Green and picked up two large plastic buckets of biochar. The 5-gallon buckets hold these small, black, light-weight pellets created under intense heat. They are intended to function as a carbon soil enhancement. Proposed benefits include:

- Reduce soil compaction.
- Enhance microbial activity.
- Increase soil moisture-holding capacity.
- Stabilize soil nutrients, reducing leaching of nutrients.
- Reduce soil acidity and buffers pH.
- Improve electrical conductivity of soil, leading to better nutrient and mineral availability and uptake.

I mixed the biochar into raised J beds 9 & 10. In J10, I sowed seeds of Golden Indian Edible Pea Pods and Sugar Magnolia Snap Peas and in the center of the bed a row of Franchi Ravanello 'Flamboyant' Radishes. In another J bed I planted the same peas and radishes but without the biochar. We'll run a simple comparison test to see if there are any identifiable differences. In the J9 bed, I'll sow carrots and beets, again with another comparison bed without the biochar. In the carrot bed that I sowed last week, I also sowed a middle row of radishes, including a total of 4 seeds of Purple Plum radishes and a 7' row of Red Head Radish from Territorial.

Needless to say, I was surprised when I opened the complimentary package of Purple Plumb and discovered only four seeds. But I had already made the sign so I went ahead and sowed the four seeds, with ample space between each seed. My garden signs this year are a dark blue and much larger than the yellow signs I've used the past two years. The blue 10' wooden signs provide plenty of room for recording the seed name, source, and date of planting. [*The beets in the J9 bed with the bio-char were the largest and fastest growing beets I've ever grown; the Golden Indian snow peas also grew to be large, beautiful plants covered with blooms. The soil was beautiful to work with later in the summer when I replanted those beds for the fall garden. My current plans are to continue experimenting with the bio-char in more of my raised vegetable beds. I also integrated bio-char into the dahlia beds in the Alumni House garden. While I did not observe any difference in the vitality of the plants or their bloom production, the bio-char certainly made the soil less compacted and more friable.*]

31 March. Yesterday I drove to Marty's and got my first load of ten red cement blocks for building new raised flower beds in the back yard. Each block weights 40 lbs so ten blocks meant an extra load of 400 lbs, a substantial burden for my Chevy's old suspension system. But the S-10 handled the extra weight with no apparent problems, so I plan to load twelve blocks for the next trip. After lunch I unloaded the ten blocks and carted them up the hill using the wheelbarrow. Fortunately the perennials are starting to become active, and it will soon be easier to determine which perennials have survived the winter and which will need to be moved. The astilbe and peonies, for example, are just now awakening.

This afternoon I prepared 50 seed germination soil blocks and sowed ten seeds of each of the following tomato varieties, two seeds per block:

- Buckbee's Abe Lincoln (Seeds 'n Such)
- Amish Paste (Southern Exposure)
- Arkansas Traveler (Southern Exposure)
- Berkeley Tie Dye Pink (Baker Creek)
- Bloody Butcher (Totally Tomatoes)

I have 25 other varieties to sow, plus a dozen pepper varieties and half dozen eggplants. A lot of seed sowing will occur tomorrow. [*Of the seeds sown on 31 March, the Arkansas Traveler was the clear winner. The three plants in the Wickiup Garden were incredibly productive, producing lovely medium-size red tomatoes in July and still going strong in October. The Bloody Butcher was the biggest disappointment, only yielding a few small tomatoes.*]

In an age of lies and illusions, the garden is one way to ground yourself in the realm of the processes of growth and the passage of time, the rules of physics, meteorology, hydrology, and biology, and the realms of the senses.