

Mondays in a Garden: Winter & Spring, 2020

Most of this January day was spent at home in my garden studio--a small, heated, cedar-sided bungalow in our backyard, a private sanctuary with a couch, a few books, a kettle for brewing hot tea, a computer, but, thankfully, no internet connection, no phone. While reading garden books or drafting garden essays, I periodically look up and see what's happening in our backyard. And I've been known to slump down on the couch and take an afternoon nap. It is here in the garden studio that 2-3 times each month, I read through hastily scrawled notes and attempt to compose my "Monday Morning Garden Reports."

My visit to the Alumni House Garden earlier today only lasted for a few minutes. I had not shoveled any walkways so the snow was a foot deep and it was cold--the night-time temperatures would dipping below zero Fahrenheit. I also did not want to disrupt the garden's serene peacefulness, these special moments when there's no evidence of recent human visitations. No trash, no footprints, everything clean, pristine, unsullied. It reminded me of the snow globe I had in my room as a child: an immaculate existence residing in its own bubble, immune from the world's noise and dirt.

As I've noted on several occasions, there are few obvious signs of any animal or bird life within the garden in January. The seed heads of the purple coneflowers are erect, well above the snow cover, but it's not apparent these seeds have been the source of recent meals. I hear sparrows chirping, but they are in the hawthorn branches outside the garden. The rectangular snow lawn is perfectly smooth, no evidence of any squirrels or rabbits having sprinted across the surface since the last snowfall. At the west end of the garden I see one set of rabbit tracks and two small displays of rabbit turds, their warmth having created small dimples in the crusty snow. Tomorrow morning, I will return and venture into the cold with my camera, trying to capture the blue, fleeting, early morning shadows that stretch across the garden's white canvas, ghosts that can never survive in the mid-day light.

I lean down and grab a hyssop's small, brown seedhead. When I first started working in the garden, the giant hyssops were only in the NE corner, but their steady self-seeding habits have enabled them to find homes across nearly all the perennial flower beds. I'm not sure the history of this variety, but I suspect it's an *Agastache foeniculum*, a Midwest prairie native. I love their fragrance after crushing a fluffy seedhead between my fingers. One common name for *A. foeniculum* is "anise hyssop," and the seed heads do have a slight anise or licorice aroma. Although some people have described the fragrance as "skunky" or medicinal, I find their perfume to be quite pleasant, a clean and aromatic mint odor--and hyssop is in the mint family. Certainly one of my favorites. The seedheads are small but attractive in a dried flower arrangement, and the 4-6' flower stalks often retain their upright stature throughout the winter. The hyssop's flowers are wildly popular with our butterflies and carpenter bee populations, but birds appear to be more attracted to other seed sources. By this time of the year, most of the hyssop's tiny seeds have fallen to the ground and the seedheads are mostly chaff--though an attractive chaff.

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In front of the hyssop is an English thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), another member of the mint family. I break off a 2" long stem sticking above the snow. Although the tiny gray leaves are desiccated and brittle, when I hold the stem close to my nose, the thyme's distinctive fragrance is immediately recognizable. I have no functional vocabulary for describing its aromatic properties, other than to say it smells like thyme. Although dried thyme has the reputation of holding its flavor after being harvested, after a few minutes it becomes harder for me to detect the thyme's aroma unless I crush it between my fingers. Apparently my brain requires a more vigorous signal to confirm this fragrance is still worthy of attention. I've read that of all our human senses, smell is for many people the last to lose its efficacy in old age. Even as we grow older, we continue producing new olfactory neurons, replacements appearing every few weeks.

A few steps further and I come to one of the few Sweet Annie (*Artemisia annua*) that we did not pull up in the fall. Since each plant produces hundreds of seeds, a few plants can provide more than enough seeds to ensure a fresh crop of Annies in the spring. A member of the daisy family, this annual artemisia is not a particularly attractive plant during the summer. Many years ago our neighbor was cleaning up a flower bed between our adjacent backyards and pulled up all the Sweet Annie in my flower bed, thinking they were unwanted weeds. Despite their tiny blossoms and unassuming appearance, the leaves and seeds are marvelously aromatic. It's not surprising to discover some people are allergic to this artemisia, which can initiate uncontrollable sneezes. I have a dried Sweet Annie stalk in the garden shed that is two years old and still retains its fragrance. In *The Sensual Garden*, Ken Druse notes that some people have described Sweet Annie's fragrance "as being like that of Juicy Fruit gum or the inside of an old general store." The gum comparison seems more accurate, conveying the aroma's distinctly sweet character.

Of course, most people visiting the garden will walk by the Sweet Annie, unaware of the plants' potential impact on their olfactory neurons. In fact, all three of these plants are typically ignored, rarely attracting much attention. While even in winter these fragrances are vibrant and undiminished, freely available to any visitors, they do require a moment of focused intimacy. None of these fragrances is wildly broadcast throughout the neighborhood. As I ponder their modesty, I wonder what is the survival value of these fragrances for the three plants. Whom might the fragrances be attracting or repulsing? Or are their aromas just accidental byproducts?

My first job this morning was carrying the Little Free Library back to the gazebo—not impossibly heavy, perhaps 40 lbs, but it's bulky and I was pleased to make it to the gazebo without dropping it. By a remarkable coincidence this cedar library arrived only two weeks after the delivery of a smaller, Amish-built library, gifted to the garden by an anonymous donor. Now that we have two libraries to install this spring, it seems appropriate to quote Cicero's *Si hortum in bibliotheca habes, nihil deerit*, roughly translated: "If you have a

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garden and a library, you will want for nothing.” Although I think Cicero’s Latin imagines a garden in a library, I trust our reversed arrangement--with two libraries in a garden--is sufficiently close to his inspiring sentiment.

While carrying the new library through the garden’s SW gate, I was greeted by a lone male cardinal, perched at the peak of a flowering crab. This morning’s salutation was a series of short, ascending vocalizations, immediately recognizable as coming from a cardinal, but his sequence of chirps was rather guttural, in a lower register. If I recall correctly, cardinals sing by using two “voice boxes” (probably not an ornithologist’s terminology), using one set of bronchial tubes for lower pitches and one for higher. This morning’s singer sounded like this was an early season rehearsal, and he was not yet ready to utilize his full orchestra. His song, however, was a welcome confirmation that spring is coming. Last week, while I was working in my back yard, my patch of astilbe, raspberries, coneflowers, and ornamental grasses was visited by a group of about ten male cardinals, all silent, all focused on locating food.

Yesterday’s spring cleaning centered on the “I” bed west of the gazebo. Evidence throughout the bed of perennials producing new fresh foliage: variegated lilyturf (though one clump may have died, to date producing no new leaves), several varieties of mums (among the last plants to succumb to fall’s cold temperatures, among the first to re-assert themselves in the spring), new lime-green foliage in the stoncrop colonies, clumps of daffodils in several locations across the bed, fresh foliage with the meadow sage and the prairie smoke, new leaves on several perennial hollyhocks. The most surprising survivors were a clump of peony roots and a lone daffodil bulb. When I planted a dozen fritillaria in this bed last fall, I had to dig up an old peony bush and 20-30 daffodil bulbs. While raking the bed, I discovered a wad of peony roots and a daffodil bulb that were never re-planted but are both showing new growth. A testament to their determination to survive.

Two garden visitors this morning. I gave them a short overview of the garden while quietly maintaining our 6-foot zones of separation. Because the moss phlox are now in full bloom, we checked out the crevice garden, but what caught their eye was the Angelina sedum along the outer edges of the bed. As they strolled through other areas of the garden, I dug up several chunks of sedum, plus a batch of moss phlox, a gift in appreciation of their visit. I love gardening’s privacy and solitude, but it’s also wonderful to share a garden with visitors, see the garden through their eyes, and give them a present to take with them.

Many of the garden’s key perennials are displaying fresh spring foliage. All the daylilies are filling out, creating attractive mounds of green foliage. The burgundy-red stems of the peonies have continued to grow, now topped by their emerging green foliage. The Husker Red Penstemons are generating the dark burgundy leaves that will play such a primal role in the interplay of foliage colors in May and June. I’m always thrilled to see the spears of Siberian Iris poking through the remnants of last year’s rusty brown foliage. One significant

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disappointment near the NW gate is the withered leaves of the garden's largest bleeding heart, zapped by a recent midnight freeze. The plant's newest leaves, however, appear to be okay. Many of the hostas also have frozen tips, but they will rebound. The freeze fortunately came before the flower buds were fully formed on the flowering crab. As far as I can ascertain, the flower buds are in good shape.

A few of the small, guinea fowl fritillary are blooming in a bed in front of the patio. The spring snowflakes (*Leucojum vernum*) behind the NW park bench have now begun to produce their lovely white, bell-shaped flowers hanging from the erect stems. At the tip of each petal is a small green dot. Last fall I planted three new groups of spring snowflakes among the hostas behind the SW bench, but so far none has appeared above ground. Last year the *Leucojum* maintained their blooms into June; I'm eager to see if they do equally as well this spring.

A close neighbor to the spring snowflakes is a mass of grape hyacinths, with over 200 tightly packed racemes of fragrant blue flowers. I planted these *Muscari* in 2015 but failed to record their species name; however, after disappearing in the summer, their foliage reappears in the fall—which I believe is a characteristic of *M. armenicum* (the species name providing a clue to their native Mediterranean home). Last spring I visited a garden in Minneapolis where they plant *M. armenicum* around other bulbs to help gardeners know where bulbs already exist when restocking a perennial bed in the fall.

In an area behind the NW park bench, I see three small thistles have popped up. Two weeks ago in my vegetable garden I dug over a foot deep, attempting to remove thistle roots in a raised bed. Although I had hoped to find them all, when I was working in the garden yesterday, I spied a small thistle emerging in the same bed. They are relentless—but their numbers in the Alumni House Garden have been dramatically reduced in the last five years. I remain determined that eventually they will be vanquished from this little English-inspired garden in Iowa.

We remain in the grip of the coronavirus pandemic, the COVID-19 virus dominating nearly all aspects of our lives. But within the confined space of this small garden, every day feels like a fresh, new day. The lush, nuanced greens on this post-Mother's Day Monday have created a garden that looks so different from how it did three weeks ago when it was dominated by the confident brass of the daffodils' yellow trumpets.

This is the time of year when I always feel overwhelmed: so many divergent tasks, so few hours for those tasks. Each day I remind myself that gardening is a process, playing a game where we never reach the bottom of the 9th inning, pursuing a victory never to be fulfilled. There are, however, occasional moments of grace when something looks good, when I think to myself, "Yeah, that's okay." I felt that way this morning when I saw the blooms of the garden's first camassia, *Camassia leichtlinii* to be precise. According to my cursory research, there are several *Camassia* species that are candidates for flower gardens, but the two bulb companies I used last fall for my bulb orders were pitching the Leichtlin Quamash, a species native to the

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Pacific Northwest. My first encounter with camassia came when reading about the Lewis and Clark Voyage of Discovery and their dependence on boiled quamash bulbs as a food source after they crossed the Rockies—and the gastrointestinal distress inflicted by such a narrow diet. My goal was to find a late-flowering bulb that would help fill in some flowering gaps between the demise of the daffodils and the arrival of the daylilies. The ‘Caerula’ camassia blooms have now begun to open up and they are marvelous: erect racemes of blossoms with six elongated, light blue petal-like tepals. When placing my bulb orders last fall, I accidentally ordered twice as many camassia bulbs as I intended, but they are now grouped in three locations and serving admirably in each unique space. Perhaps this fall I will add some to the crevice garden—which has a sizable vacancy now that the reticulated iris are done for the year. I suspect the camassia would like the crevice garden’s dry summer terrain.

Most of the tulips in the garden are finished, and my student garden assistant was busy this morning deadheading the tulips—as well as many of the daffodils on the north side of the garden. But the Blushing Lady tulips on the south side are still in their prime. Their elegant, durable blossoms are equally attractive whether open or closed (as they were all day yesterday because of the overcast skies and light rain). Around both the “E” and “J” tulip beds are dozens of prairie tickseed—a Midwest native coreopsis. They view the gravel walkway as an ideal germination bed. Most of the coreopsis will end up in the compost bins, but this morning we began digging up and transplanting some of the larger volunteers into the tulip beds. These profligate annuals should provide early summer blooms while we wait for the dahlias to put on their display in these beds at the end of the summer.

Speaking of the gravel walkways, when I first proposed that the college create a gardener position for the Alumni House Garden, I stipulated that if I were appointed to such a position, I would only be responsible for the perennial flower beds. Culver’s landscaping crew and the college Physical Plant crew would be responsible for the fountain, the gravel walkways, and the lawn. Now, six years later, I still leave the fountain under someone else’s care, but attending to the lawn and the walkways is now my responsibility and they absorb far more of my hours than the flower beds. This week I will be concentrating my energies on cleaning up the gravel walkways. Many have become quite “weedy” and those weeds are beginning to produce flowers and more seeds. I had at one time hoped we could cleanse the walkways so their upkeep would become less burdensome. But so far, that has not been the case. Their seed supply appears to be inexhaustible, and in some cases the problem has been exacerbated by my introduction of profligate seed-producers. For example, in the southwest corner of the garden are the thousands of little artemisia—progeny of last year’s Sweet Annie—hoping they will somehow avoid my hoe’s assault. In a stretch along a walkway in the southeast corner can be found dozens of meadow sage, the product of a lovely blue-flowering sage I planted several years ago. And then there are all those tickseeds—relatively easy to kill, but it does take time, and they do keep coming back. A blessing and a curse.

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It was an unusual year for the seven white flowering crab. The youngest and smallest tree, located in a flower bed next to the patio, was the first to bloom and was soon covered with a canopy of gorgeous, divinely fragrant blooms. Two weeks later it still looks fresh and vibrant. The other whites were slower to bloom and never had a complete coverage, the blooms seemingly overpowered by the trees' expansive green leaves. As usual, the espalier flowering crab had some lovely pink flowers, but the leaves' rich coloration tends to hide the blooms. This year, for the first time, we had a nice display of pink blossoms on the two standard flowering crab at the east end of the garden. Although it has been six years since we removed the two large crabtrees next to the pergola, the roots of those trees remained behind and were intent on producing new trees. Most of those volunteers has been eradicated, but I have allowed two volunteers to grow to about 8 feet tall. They are pruned 2-3 times a year, trying to keep their burgundy foliage in the form of tight balls.

The genus *Cerastium* has some troublesome relatives—such as mouse ear chickweed—but that does not keep me from loving *C. Tomentosum*, snow-in-summer. While in some situations it can be a troublemaker, the two large patches of this flower in the Coe garden are confined to the two raised “J” beds. The species is super tough (a Zone 2 plant that can live in sandy soil north of the Arctic Circle), has silver-tinted woolly foliage that looks good in all four seasons, and produces a multitude of charming five-petal white blossoms. The “J” beds also have a *Cerastium* cultivar called “Yo-Yo” that is shorter, less aggressive, and blooms later in the spring. Like the tickseed, the self-seeding germination occurs in the gravel walkway, where each spring I dig up dozens of baby *Cerastiums*—many given away to visitors looking for a new flower for their garden collection.

This was one of those rare mornings when I walked into the garden, and everything seemed just right, every plant in the right place, a gardener's dream momentarily fulfilled. Usually each morning's arrival is accompanied by concerns about tasks that need to be done: weeding and transplanting and mowing and mulching and whatever. But this morning, the imperfections were incidental. One contributing factor was the congruence of the garden's fresh growth with today's classic English May-time weather: overcast, following an evening rain (0.7" in the rain gauge), high humidity (85%), temperature in the low 50s, a cool breeze. What immediately came to mind was a similar morning several years ago when I entered Holehird Garden in England's Lake District: similar weather conditions in a garden with a comparable size and design, though that description does not capture Holehird's transcendent atmosphere and ambiance. One difference is in Cumbria, I could look to the northeast and see the rain clouds coming across the Langdale Peaks. Here at Coe, the spell was soon broken by the siren of an ambulance on First Avenue, announcing the personal trauma of someone being delivered to St. Luke's.

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Although my *Wilderness.org* calendar claims that summer does not begin for another 21 days, meteorologists and gardeners know that summer begins at the beginning of June—an understanding confirmed by today’s weather. The temp was mild in the morning, still in the 60s at 10:00 a.m., but the clouds (and a few intermittent episodes of drizzle) were heading east, and by the middle of the afternoon the unimpeded sun had raised the temp into the 80s, accompanied by a brisk summer wind.

When I arrived at the garden a few minutes after 8:00 a.m., two Coe students were already on the Alumni House patio, progressing through a series of yoga routines, using the glass doors as mirrors to monitor their efforts. Perhaps I should have joined them. Instead I chose a series of gardening projects, all on the garden’s south side. I began by cleaning up one of the two raised herb gardens. I had planted parsley in the bed last year, and this variety proved to be a prolific self-seeder, the bed covered with parsley seedlings. While trying to save many of the progeny, I did carve out several parsley-free zones for planting three burgundy-leafed basil seedlings, a French tarragon, and a large rosemary that had spent the winter in the greenhouse. As I was pulling up miscellaneous weeds and unwanted flowers and herbs (mallow, calendula, dozens of annual tickseed, several clumps of baby chives), I also tried to protect several bronze fennel that had sprouted this spring. When finished, I thought this herb bed looked pretty good, with a row of calendula (preparing to bloom) in the front, flanked on each side by two large mounds of chives covered with purple blooms. The back of this raised bed still requires attention—including the need to relocate a patch of little bluestem that really likes this location. But those issues can wait for another day.

As for the other raised herb bed, I did some pruning and weeding but no replanting. Both thyme varieties are blooming, and the oregano has substantially expanded since last year. The Jerusalem Cross flowers on one side of the bed have no herbal properties that I’m aware of, but these *Lychnis chalconica* like this location, and I like how their red blossoms show up at the back of the bed, easily spotted even when seen from the other side of the garden. I did pull up most of the hyssop, which was a fecund self-seeder throughout the garden this past year. Removal of the hyssop should provide more space and sunlight for the rue and the apple mint—whose adventurous root system has so far remained constrained within a buried plastic pot. The surprise of the spring is the reappearance of the tarragon in the middle of the bed. Last summer the tarragon dried up and completely disappeared. I assumed it had died, but this spring it has re-emerged, more exuberant than ever.

After messing with the herb beds, I walked along the gravel walkway on the garden’s south side, attending to whatever cleaning up operation caught my attention. I pulled up dozens of fleabane (either *Erigeron annuus* or *E. strigosus*, Daisy Fleabane). These aster-family dudes are close relatives of the ox-eye daisies whose large white flowers visually dominate the east end of the garden. I probably should try to remove all the fleabane, but I enjoy seeing a few of these small daisy-like white and yellow blooms at the back of the flower beds. I also am attracted to the humor in the scientific genus name. *Erigeron* is apparently a combination of “eri” (meaning

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early) and “geron” (meaning old, confer T. S. Eliot’s poem “Gerontion”), a name suggesting a spring-time wildflower that resembles an old man. But they are assiduous seed-producers, and my reference book on sunflowers (*The Sunflower Family in the Upper Midwest*, by Thomas W. Antonio and Susanne Masi) insists they are not suitable for garden use.

In the process of cleaning out the “D” bed, I managed to create a space for planting the three kniphofia purchased from Bluestone Perennials. This is my third attempt to introduce red hot poker into the garden. This new variety supposedly can handle Zone 5 winters. The space I’ve provided for them is a bit crowded, with daylilies on three sides—and I would prefer they were in the middle of the border, but we’ll see how this arrangement works out. I don’t want to make major changes moving other plants until I know these kniphofia are survivors. To demonstrate my commitment to their well-being, I did surround their roots with my super-duper soil/compost/fertilizer mix—which includes organic fertilizer pellets, bone meal, blood meal, and Bob & John’s “soil optimizer.” I have no evidence that the Bob & John’s will enhance the value of this mixture, but I’m inclined to believe something named “Bob & John’s” must be good. I also intended to plant some Bluestone anemones, but they were drooping so I watered them and set them in the shade, saving them for another day.

One exciting discovery: the Russell lupines next to the gazing ball in the “D” bed have two large blooms. The plants look healthy with excellent foliage and more blooms on the way. I found a baby lupine emerging on the other side of the steel ball, indicating that last summer’s lupines had produced and distributed viable seeds. I am particularly pleased about this development because the lupine colony I introduced in the raised bed on the north side of the garden was almost entirely killed off by last summer’s hot, dry weather. This location on the south side is better protected, the soil does not dry out as quickly (though still too fast for the nearby astilbe), and this may be our most promising terrain for a self-sustaining family of lupines. Although our minor achievement is not comparable to the incredible lupine displays we saw in Scotland last summer, perhaps this is a baby step in the right direction.

Before leaving the garden for lunch, I stood on the steps of the patio and looked across the garden, now cast in full, mid-day sunlight. For the first time in six years, I felt like I was seeing a fully developed English-style garden. There have been previous moments when I had a comparable surge of satisfaction, but those had been on cool, overcast days, perhaps with a bit of light rain. Today, however, there were no such atmospherics. The klieg lights were on, no where to hide. There were certainly some barren zones: most notably the two beds where the dying tulips have not yet been replaced by the coreopsis, cosmos, and dahlias. But overall the herbaceous beds looked complete, the various groups of perennials in tight juxtapositions with each other, like a complex jigsaw puzzle composed of pieces constantly evolving, changing size, producing new color and textural combinations. But somehow, for at least this one hour of a day, the puzzle looked complete, a gratifying entrance into the summer months.

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I just finished two hours cleaning up what I call the Wilderness Field Station bed (south of the Alumni House patio). Of the plants that I brought from the Field Station vie years ago, four still survive: wild strawberries (producing white flowers in April but never any fruit), a small but tough thyme that Harlo planted at the Field Station, a group of pearly everlasting (*Anaphalus margaritacea*), and several yellow buttercups (unintended stowaways that now occupy several locations in the garden). It was another ideal gardening day, bright sunshine, temp in the 70s, relatively low humidity, slight breeze, a perfect day for sitting on a bench under a flowering crab. Last year the older crab trees were busy dropping their leaves, yielding to the scourge of the recurrent scab. So far this year, we have some brown, fungus-infected leaves littering the ground, but the majority of leaves are still green and attached to the trees—promising the possibility of decent shade deeper into the summer.

While sitting on the bench outside the gazebo, I initially focused on the flower bed around the floral sundial, where I just finished cutting back the snow-in-summer and pulling up various unwanted grasses, sedges, bindweed, fleabane, a Solomon's seal, and several clumps of creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea'). The creeping Jenny is a beautiful yellow-leafed groundcover with charming yellow flowers—though easily overlooked because of their similarity to the shape and color of the leaves. I find it hard to believe this plant is in the same genus as the larger and aggressive *L. clethroides* (gooseneck loosestrife) which I am frequently digging up and throwing onto a compost pile. But even the more restrained Jenny has completely outgrown the sundial segment where it was originally assigned, and I've transplanted several clumps to areas where it has more freedom to roam. In the meantime, I need to determine what annuals should fill in the sundial segments that currently have no flowers to help mark the passing hours. Last year several four o'clocks re-seeded and reappeared in near perfect timing (my pun for the day). Perhaps they will make another summer appearance in the next few weeks.

From my bench, I can see four clematis, each in a different stage of flowering. The clematis on the north side of the pergola was the first to flower, producing large 5" wide blossoms at the end of May. Although the blooms have vanished, they left behind these exquisitely curved, golden seedheads—which ensures I won't be pruning the vine any time soon. The clematis at the back of the rain garden is also at the end of its bloom cycle, with one remaining magenta-white flower. The other two clematis—one on the trellis on the south side of the pergola and the other slumped across the top of the shrub rose—are now covered in small blossoms. Two years ago I provided a four-foot trellis for the clematis next to the rose bush, thinking the clematis could share a few blooms with its thorny neighbor. As it has turned out, the clematis has used the trellis as a launching pad and its magenta blooms now totally cover the top of the shrub rose. Last week I met with the sculptor Cara Briggs Farmer to discuss designing a taller trellis that would arch over the rose bush and provide a more suitable home for the rambunctious clematis.

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Another success story has been the honeysuckle planted four years ago under the “Eiffel Tower” trellis. This honeysuckle has historically concentrated its energies on producing vines that traipse across the garden mulch and has not shown much interest in sending limbs up the trellis or producing blooms. In fact, until this year, I wasn’t sure what the flowers looked like. In April the honeysuckle received a serious pruning operation, removing all the limbs on or near the ground. The benefits have been remarkable. The plant has focused on growing the upper-level limbs, and it has produced large purple “buds” that are opening up into softly fragrant flowers. I performed the same rigorous pruning on the large honeysuckle covering the fence next to the NW gate, producing similar results. Last year that Hall’s honeysuckle only had a few blooms in the fall; this year, the vines are covered with hundreds of pale-yellow blossoms. I had been considering the removal of this honeysuckle, but the profusion of flowers and attendant fragrance have earned it a reprieve—at least for this year.

Another success story near the gazebo is the establishment of a clump of *Coreopsis grandiflora* ‘Early Sunrise,’ planted last spring in an open area east of a large hydrangea. The plants seemed to struggle through the summer, and I was not sure how they would perform in their second year. This spring, they have all emerged, producing an umbrella of vibrant, golden-yellow flowers that resemble daisy-like marigolds. I’m hoping that recurrent deadheading will keep this perennial flowering throughout the summer.

On the other side of my bench, a province of perennial sunflowers is now in bloom, as are the spiderworts and hollyhocks. Perhaps most striking are the white blooms—with soft pink centers—of the rose campion (*Lychnis coronaria*). These short-lived perennials have proven to be admirable self-seeders, patiently spreading themselves in their corner of the bed. Last year I tried organizing them into several distinct clusters, and one of the clusters has remained intact, creating an appealing mass of white blooms over their fuzzy gray, dusty-miller foliage.

The three “J” beds are not at their prime in this stretch of June. The tulips are all gone. The dahlias are growing but they won’t be producing any flowers until August. The annual prairie tickseed (another species of *Coreopsis*) are thriving, but many are still relatively small and the most mature won’t start blooming for another week. As for the two raised beds, the snow-in-summer are finished blooming, and later this week they will receive a severe trimming. I love their silver-gray foliage, but the fresh leaves are hiding a mass of long brown stems that need to be cut out. While they will grow back quickly, and perhaps will bloom again in the fall, their summer haircut will leave that space naked and exposed. As for the taller plants at the back of the bed, the columbine are almost finished with their bloom cycle. The fleabane are in full bloom, but they are too tall for this location and look like a weed—the wrong plant in the wrong place. The one attractive participant in this bed is the clump of dianthus with its burgundy blooms. Unfortunately the miniature snapdragon that had been its partner for the last three years did not survive the winter.

Looking across the garden, I’m irresistibly drawn to the bright yellow calendula blooms in one of the raised “E” beds, the same flowers featured in the Alumni House Garden calendar’s

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June photo. Equally attractive is the white mass of astilbe-like flower spikes of the goat's beard (*Aruncus dioicus*) at the west end of the "D" bed. I planted the *Aruncus* five years ago in this shady corner of the garden remembering it as a superb back-of-the border plant in English gardens, not knowing that it is a North American native. The clusters of tiny flowers don't last long, but the plant provides an excellent background of foliage for later blooming flowers, including the astilbe positioned in front of the goat's beard. Near the east end of the bed are three small scarlet flower heads of the Jerusalem Cross. It intrigues me how a few small dabs of scarlet can have such a powerful impact when seen against the yews' dark green foliage.

I arrived at the garden late, just after 3:00 pm. The temperature was 69F, with 70% humidity. The sky was overcast with a slight drizzle. The rain gauge reported 3 ½" of rain, the second rain this June of over 3 inches. Because of the downpour, many flowers were pressed to the ground—such as the catmint, already flopping over because of their top-heavy flower spikes. But the dominant impression was conveyed by the yellow and orange flowers, all over the garden: perennial sunflowers, Stella d'oro daylilies, multiple clumps of zagreb and moonshine coreopsis, the mass of bright yellow yarrow facing the patio, the patch of yellowish-orange flowers in the raised herb garden (I usually refer to these as calendula, but truth be told I'm not sure the species of this perennial heavy-bloomer).

The most notable non-yellow flowers are the two large elderberries on either side of the SW gate next to the garden shed. Both shrubs are covered with large panicles of white flowers surfing above the foliage. It's hard to believe it was only five years ago I planted the larger elderberry, perhaps 15' tall and much taller than its parent. Unfortunately it has an invasion of poison ivy under its shade that has not yet been killed off, but this spring it was also home to a robin's nest. While the robins were sitting on the eggs, they frequently had to chase away squirrels investigating this corner of the garden.

It has been a good year for birds in the garden. There is a new nest in the espalier crab tree, probably robins, though I never witnessed what birds had constructed it, and a flimsy looking nest that cardinals were using in one of the pruned crab trees north of the pergola. A week ago there were at least two young cardinals recently hatched, but two days later when I checked out the nest, it was empty. Not far from the cardinals' nest we have attracted some nesting wrens. Two years ago I installed four wooden wren houses in four different locations. Last year the houses were unused, but this spring we have a wren family using the house attached to a pergola post. For the past two weeks the wrens are insistently chirping at me any time I approach their homestead.

Another notable event in the garden is the appearance of a tall bloom spike on the Helen von Stein Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantina*). We now have four patches of this woolly betony, chosen for the soft, velvet-like texture of its silver foliage. The original clump was planted in the spring of 2015, but this is the first time one has bloomed. I have no idea if the flowers will produce viable seeds. This species has a reputation for producing a lot of seeds and becoming weedy,

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but that has certainly not been a problem with this cultivar—which has proven to be a model citizen.

While it's a pleasure to see the emergence of a new flower, most of my attention this week will focus on flowers winding down their bloom cycle. Several of these will require deadheading (the dianthus and the coreopsis) or modest pruning (some meadowsweet and goatsbeard planted close to a garden path); others will require a major pruning, cutting the plants back to ground level, such as the Husker Red Penstemon, the spiderwort, several salvia, and some catmint. The catmint are still vigorously blooming—and serving many different pollinators—but they are becoming too tall and sprawling. The Johnson's Blue cranesbill offers a similar challenge: dozens of lovely blue flowers but the plant has is leggy and floppy.

Another task for this week will be weeding, fertilizing, and mulching the dahlia beds. Almost all of the dahlia tubers have now “germinated” and are producing healthy above-ground plants. The weeding will be slow because of the ubiquitous purslane, a plant difficult to kill off. The purslane is also appearing all over the gravel walkways. I know Michael Pollan and other avant-garde gardeners are proclaiming we should be eating purslane because of its nutritional richness, but I'm not yet a fan of purslane spreading itself across the Alumni House Garden. Perhaps my determination to limit this weed's distribution in the garden confirms my inability to see the garden from a more enlightened perspective. But for the next couple of weeks, my intent is to dig it out of the walkways, yank it up from the flower beds, and throw it in the compost.