

A Commonplace Garden

"Nature's laws affirm instead of prohibit. If you violate her laws, you are your own prosecuting attorney, judge, jury, and hangman." ~Luther Burbank

"If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden." ~Frances Hodgson Burnett

"Gardening, reading about gardening, and writing about gardening are all one; no one can garden alone."
~Elizabeth Lawrence

"Once a landscape goes undescribed and therefore unregarded, it becomes more vulnerable to unwise use or improper action." ~Robert Macfarlane

"Almost any garden, if you see it at just the right moment, can be confused with paradise."
~Henry Mitchell

"A garden always seems to have been growing to this moment. A garden is always now." ~Niall Williams

"This garden is no metaphor— more a task that swallows you into itself, earth using, as always, everything it can." ~Jane Hirshfield

"Great things are done by a series of small things brought together." ~Vincent van Gogh

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Jane Powers writes from Dublin

In midwinter, the day is only a few hours long, and the low December sun produces a weak, milky, light. Still, it is enough to illuminate the teasel skeletons that stand like gaunt sentinels about the place. I started growing this spiny warrior decades ago to attract goldfinches. But, now that the feeders are stocked with niger seed and sunflower hearts, the birds can't be bothered with the finicky labour of winking out the tiny teasel seeds. So, now I grow it for its sepulchral presence in the winter garden. It self-seeds too lavishly, but the dark green, ruffled rosettes are easy to weed out.

Another plant that makes a fine upstanding corpse is the native great mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) with its single, tall and straight, broom-handle seedhead. A crowd of them looks painterly when emerging from a planting of buff-coloured grass. Also beautifying the winter garden with their desiccated carcasses are the baroque-looking, beaded stems of *Phlomis russeliana*, the over-sized thistly heads of artichoke and cardoon, the strawy starburst of agapanthus, the brush heads of miscanthus and calamagrostis and—of course—Miss Willmott's ghost (*Eryngium giganteum*). Brown, in all its different tones, from palest beige to dark espresso bean, is one of the important colours of the garden at this time.

From late November onwards I'm continually curating the dead: strategically removing sagging and decaying material so that only the perkier cadavers remain to decorate the beds and borders. Most of my other work is busy-busy tidying: emptying and organizing the glasshouse; clearing vegetable beds; weeding everywhere;

The Garden Quarto

Any garden belongs to everyone who sees it—it is like a book, and everybody who visits it will find different things. . . . This garden, like most others, is a trick that looks a bit like nature, but isn't really. It is written deliberately to lead the viewer into a collection of stories using colour and form, light and shade, to elicit personal emotions, to seed the imagination, to spark a journey of remembrance of forgotten things.

~Marc Hamer



Spring 2024

covering bare soil with leaves or storm-cast seaweed and letting the worms gradually bring the material underground. I spend more time than I would like unwinding the dried strings of bindweed that spiral through certain areas. I never win the bindweed war, but I comfort myself that the leaves are the larval food plant for at least two of the angel-like plume moths. So, it's not all bad.

The gardening day ends early in winter, but when I go inside, the robin—whose eyes are better than ours in the half-light—is still out and about. It's more his garden than mine.

~Jane Powers

From "A Day in My Garden in Winter"
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Five Haiku

dried sunflower heads clotted with snow winter garden	a rabbit alone among the garden shadows winter morning
flock of doves beneath dried sunflower stalks startled grey rising	a dead cicada in a small green box the big eyes shrouded in tissue
unexpected snow even the sunflower stalks look surprised	

~Kathleen Cain

Author of *The Cottonwood Tree: An American Champion*

Food for Thought

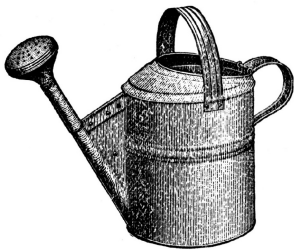
Henry David Thoreau, hungry
for the essential sustenance,
a single cell to contain it,
builds his hut, spades his garden plot
as if he could turn up sod
and simple life simultaneously.
Tears out nettles, ironweed,
wild and thorny canes
to plant his broad-leafed beans.
Pauses, leans on his hoe, observes
“the bee probing the thistle
& loading himself with honey & wax.”
Delves his prickly conscience;
writes in his journal,
“I would fain hunger & thirst after life forever . . .
Eating and drinking more abstemiously . . .
Recruiting myself for new and worthier labor.”

Determined to self-sufficiency,
carries a vial of yeast home from the village,
but its cork pops from the heat in his pocket.
Reads Cato’s recipe for bread
which does not prescribe leavening,
substitutes Indian meal for wheat flour,
bakes small loaves in his fireplace ashes,
“tending and turning them as carefully
as an Egyptian his hatching eggs. They are
a real cereal fruit which I ripened. . . .”

And he washes the broken yeast
out of his homespun shirt
in the cold waters of Walden.

~Ann Struthers (1930-2024)

From *The Alcott Family Arrives*,
published by The Coe Review Press, 1993



Call

The gardener calls me.

Beneath the earth his flowers
are blue.

Deep beneath the earth
his flowers
are blue.

Ruf

Mich ruft der Gärtner.

*Unter der Erde seine Blumen
sind blau.*

*Tief unter der Erde
seine Blumen
sind blau.*

Morning Glory

Sunlight softens helicopters hover
Skies above Brooklyn Presidential
Visit, murder investigation, matters little.
Noise in the skies, noise on the ground.

You should prune the morning glories
I tell my elderly neighbor.
She refuses. She likes the way the vine has
Curled around her fence with a ferocity
That cannot be so easily cut back. I get that.

Wildness is rare on a Brooklyn city block,
Old roses return late May as if to say, ha! you
Think we do not know the season? Squirrels
Roam the bricks of buildings, while the gleaners
Fight with raccoons for the spoils of left-out trash.

Huge green leaves for plants with names
Unknown to me sparkle on mornings bright
And dead tree leaves demand constant sweeping away.

The tabby is big, old, and tired—too many kittens
Not enough food—these are ungenerous cat lovers.

Neighbors greet each other and shake their heads
At the young men and women, mostly, but not
All Whitefolk running running—or their faces
Drowning in a pool of handheld devices.

You almost wish they smoked or cursed
Had personality—but they run and run and run
Thus, the joy of this vibrant morning-glory vine
Rooted in her garden's disarray—happily dominating.

Oh, morning glory—purple, green
Leaves plump as Italian cookies, blossom
Your hearty display for all to see, hold your
Vine's haven on Macon Street. Only

Winter, harsh winter will take your vines
Back to the ground your wildness calmed.

~Patricia Spears Jones

From *The Beloved Community* (Copper Canyon Press)

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Bud

The bud of a caress,
tended by no gardener,
hidden in the foliage of my body,
slowly,
inexorably opening itself,
estranges me from myself.

Knospe

*Die Knospe einer Liebkosung,
von keinem Gärtner gepflegt,
im Laub meines Körpers verborgen,
langsam,
unaufhaltsam sich öffnend,
macht mich fremd mit mir selbst.*

~Translations by Mark Burrows

~From *The Wandering Radiance: Selected Poems of Hilde Domin*
(Green Linden Press, 2023)