

## DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

# Ride a 'real' gator

BY SIOUX ROGERS

May and June are enthralling months of the year. The spring blooms have faded, the winds of March and the dampness of April are over and gone. The new cycle is starting: we plant and we start to reap.

For me personally, this year started off with what appeared to be insurmountable mountains. What I discovered was, most mountains are really molehills, especially when friends help with the climb. My garden so mimics life, or is it the other way around? Sometimes I plant a flower, hoping it will be an enhancement of beauty in my garden. Instead, the flower turns into a vicious weed. The reverse also is true. At times, what I think of as major drama in my life is just part of life. Nothing more, nothing less. My garden and friends are my calming spirits.

A few weeks ago, my Father died. He was 97 years old, lived alone, did his own shopping and kept his own books straight to the penny. On the day of his funeral, my 98-year-old mother-in-law died. She was like a mother to me. She was my first mother-in-law 44 years ago, and remained an active, loving part of my life until the day she was gone. The thought of not talking to either of them every Sunday is grievous, but their blooming time was over. It was long and glorious, as it should be.

In the garden, one always can replant, re-do, and remake. Real life is not always so easy. Now I have decided "to spend less time worrying about who is right, and more time deciding what is right" (from "Life's Little Instruction Book"). Losing a parent or a friend, either through death or otherwise, is what it is—a loss.

Moving on now. Let's replant and refurbish food, flowers and friendship. Mid to end of May is the perfect time to get all those warm-weather crops in the ground. Warm-weather crops are tomatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, etc. Cabbages, broccoli, and dark leafy greens already should be in the ground. Basically, plant what is in the nursery as little seedling/starts. That will keep your brain from going on overload.

Remember, your garden does mimic real life. Think how different your children and friends are. So, just because it is May, and your neighbor is planting cantaloupe, that may not work for you. Keep an eye on your garden and your heart. Plant what grows best



David Gray, 1911-2008, and daughter Sioux riding a real gator. (Photo courtesy of Paul Gray.)

for you, in your own garden.

Heart and feelings aside, let's be creative this summer. Same old, same old is—old. How about planting your tomatoes in this lovely, space-saving style? The idea, 30 years ago, is from my gardening brother-in-law, Milt. Find or buy two-foot-long ceramic sewer pipes. Position the sewer pipes anywhere, as long as there is full sun. Place a water saucer under the sewer pipe and fill with amended soil. I would suggest placing a tall strong support deeply into the soil you have dumped into the ceramic sewer pipes. Then place your little tomato plant next to the support. You can now have a tomato patch in any sunny spot. You can even (carefully) move them around—if you decide you have chosen the wrong location.

Here is another "hot" idea: your morning coffee. Enjoy it in a big mug, but save those dang coffee grounds! Coffee grounds are very high in nitrogen, which means good leaf growth, and also are acidic. Add the grounds, or even leftover black coffee, to ferns, hostas, blueberries or any acid-loving plant.

Varoom! Is that what the slugs and snails have often done to your newly planted seedlings? Did they nibble up breakfast, lunch, and dinner all in 20 minutes? Do the coffee thing again. Well, of course, no cream and sugar. I have coffee grounds around all of my leafy greens, broccoli, cabbage and everything else I planted in the spring. Actually, I ran out of coffee grounds for the last row, so this will be a controlled "coffee grounds vs. slug test." The theory behind coffee grounds and creepy crawlers is that when their "feet" touch the caffeine, it is absorbed into their bodies. That is a fatal metabolic flaw for a slug or snail.

Speaking of creative: how about trellis planting "outside the box"? Vertical space is always a hassle for me, short of a fence or a ready-made trellis. I have neither. So this year I am taking

an old wooden ladder and stringing it with up/down supports. That should qualify as vertical. I actually may use all four sides and just plant on each side the four different varieties of cucumbers that my sweetie-pie and I compulsively bought. I know this is not an absolutely unique idea. I, personally, have just never stuck an old ladder in the middle of my "tidy" vegetable bed.

For many years I have used dead lilac branches to prop up my peonies. This works great, because eventually you cannot see the dead lilac branches; they blend in. This year, those dead branches with multiple "fingers" also will go ker-plunk into my tidy vegetable garden. Here is the plan: I will take several (which translates to 12 for me) tall "fingered" branches and place them closely side by side in a long straight row. I will plant several runner beans at one end and let them travel to the other end. Not sure if this really will work. It will, however, save me the trouble of building a bean trellis. Anyhow, it will look interesting. Remind me to fess up about all these plans—like what worked and what didn't. One piece of advice: if you use a branch as support for anything, before sticking it in the ground make sure it is dead, not just sleeping. I planted a "dead" branch several years ago and guess what? It grew! I probably should have done CPR first to confirm its demise.

As I roll around in the dirt, not quite ready to push up daisies, I dedicate this column, with love and gratitude, to Mom, who loved me unconditionally, taught me to cook and to clean crystal chandeliers. And to my Dad, whose love for me lasted until his last breath, who taught me to ride a real gator, to drink Scotch and to think outside the box.

For the love of dirt,  
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## WELL WATER, REAL PROPERTY, AND YOU

with Bob Quinn

Dear Bob Quinn:

My wife and I have been reading your interesting columns on well water long enough to know that before we make an offer on a parcel of land on which to build our dream home, we should know something about the potential for a reliable water supply. But how do you do this?

It's been said that information is the key to making wise decisions, so you would be wise to seek the advice of a reputable well driller. A computer print-out of other wells in the area in which you will be building would be a help. Such a tool can show you the depth of other wells, the flow rate, along with estimated costs for drilling. More than a few real estate contracts for property are written to include a contingency, calling for an adequate supply of water.

If you're planning to buy property in an area where adequate water could be a problem, it might be a good idea to arrange for the well to be drilled with a reputable contractor (with the owner's permission, of course). If a water source is not uncovered, you are only out the cost of the drilling—a fraction of what it might have been.

Bob Quinn is on the board of directors for the Oregon Ground Water Association and owner of Quinn's Well Drilling and Pump Service located at 6811 Williams Hwy. As part of a tradition of information that began more than 50 years ago, these columns are provided to help take the mystery out of well drilling and groundwater.

Visit Quinn's web site at [www.quinnswell.com](http://www.quinnswell.com)—it's a tremendous source of information. We provide well drilling, plus we install, maintain and repair complete water pumping systems. Contact our professional staff by phone, e-mail, or visit our office.

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