

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Oops in the garden

BY SIOUX ROGERS

I wonder how much you readers actually listened and did in your own garden what I suggested in my last column. Seems as though I had all these wonderful ideas, but that is as far as I personally went.

Actually, I did do some creative planting, but it did not involve cucumbers crawling over propped up dead branches or using an old ladder as a wraparound trellis. Did I really suggest that?

I had an ugly area—oh, unkind me—well, an area “in the raw” but with very fertile soil. This is rather ironic since the fertility came about because I was covering with cardboard an awful and ugly weed patch. The cardboard broke down as it was supposed to. The weeds were then mostly gone or very easy to pull up, and in the soil was a bonus of an abundance of earthworms. I then realized I had this very fertile area, but it was way far away with leftover sprawling plants. By sprawling I mean like major squashes and pumpkins. Well duh, the sprawl married the now very fertile weed patch. Perfect, and who cares that it is out of the way. No urban sprawl in my garden.

I wonder if I really was born under a cabbage leaf and I had a cradle made from a cucumber. So often I am amazed at the similarities of garden happenings and real life. While I have titled this column “Oops in the garden,” I could just as well have titled it “Oops in my life.” Listen up to garden goofs and real life.

Too much of any fertilizer can actually “burn” the plant. That happened to me once. Well, I did not burn, but I had too much “fertilizer” (my doctor called them vitamins). I became very toxic, big red blotches and all.

It is so tempting to think “more is better,” but often it is not. Too much water in your garden, unless you have a lily pond, can rot or actually drown your plants. Too many toys or sweets for your kids will either rot their sense of reality or their teeth. Too much or the wrong fertilizer can cause, for example, lush green leaves and no fruit or flowers. Too much of any fertilizer can actually “burn” the plant. That happened to me once. Well, I did not burn, but I had too much “fertilizer” (my doctor called them vitamins). I became very toxic, big red blotches and all.

It is just as ridiculous to try and grow a coconut tree in our northwest backyard as it is to try growing rhubarb in Texas. This little information is relevant to “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” In other words, go native. Plant what grows in your area. That usually means checking with the local nursery or the old-timers from your area. Unfortunately, I have found many

nurseries selling plants that are not only unable to grow easily in this area, but they are invasive. So how is this in real life? Well, some people, as some plants, truly do not have a broad growing tolerance. They are either city, country, mountain or desert folks, etc. That is fine, just like your garden. Just know what grows where and it will thrive.

Some people, either in their gardening state of mind, or another state of mind, suffer from the “Lust Syndrome” or “must have everything.” Too much of anything is out of balance. The sense of “precious” is lost. Gluttony devalues and bloats your life. Sadly, I confess to having “lust syndrome” when it comes to plants. I mean really BIG lust, but not for a coconut tree. And I do “lose” many plants. I mean “lose” in that I can’t find or remember where I planted something. Well, of course, I do fancy an excuse. I spend hours in our garden enjoying, working and eating the harvest. The rest of my excuses go like this: I buy all my clothes at thrift shops or they are hand-me-downs. We don’t have many toys. Will that do?

How many times have you thought about or actually have “thrown out the baby with the bath water”? New or unbalanced gardeners tend to do the same, thinking, “The only good bug is a dead bug.” Most of us have been educated to know that ladybugs are “good” and cutworms are “bad.” Actually, without making a sweeping judgment on all the garden creepy crawlers, remember these little preaches: The garden is where the bugs live, not you. It is their home. Actually it is a very small percentage of all of the things that creep, crawl, fly or go bump in the night, which are true pests. The secret is BALANCE. Keep your garden and your life in balance and it will stay healthy. There will always be a few creepy crawlers in your garden and in your life. The helpful insects and friends should always be holding the teeter-totter level.

Some cultures and some gardens thrive within close quarters, others do not. One needs to respect and know who is who and who needs what. In my many years of gardening I have discovered the instructions for spacing not always to be suitable or accurate. I tend to like a rather crowded garden that

looks like a quilt. I also have found that plants grown close together can shade a smaller plant, which craves shade. This type of planting can be done only when your soil is very well prepared. The roots go down for nourishment and do not need to sprawl sideways. This is no different from comprehending the importance of a good foundation when building a house, raising a child, or maintaining a friendship.

Neither life nor a rewarding garden comes with a free lunch! One must weed out the weeds before they spew nasty seeds all over. Pay attention! What makes your garden healthy and thrive? What makes you healthy

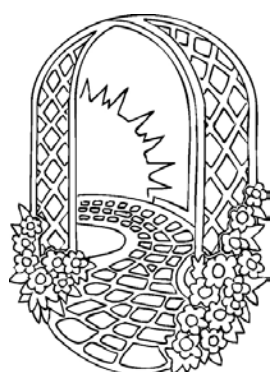
Each garden and each gardener’s life is uniquely their own. Difference is, people can lie about what makes them happy—I know I can. But my garden never lies to me. I must pay attention.

and thrive? Each garden and each gardener’s life is uniquely their own. Difference is, people can lie about what makes them happy—I know I can. But my garden never lies to me. I must pay attention.

I know I am an enigma to many of my friends who have wandered through our garden, marveling at it. As they are walking they also are forced to listen to me babbling about everything that is wrong and what I would never do again. Why, I ask myself then, do I keep gardening? I have made so many mistakes—big, bad and obnoxious. The answer is, I am so grandly rewarded. Every nook, every rock, every dead plant, every thriving plant has a story, a reason and a season. My garden, any garden, mirrors life. It changes, it moves, it grows. It lives, it pays it dues, and it dies. Pay attention, there is often a beautiful rose, standing strong in the middle of a thunderstorm. My sister Judith in real life has often been that rose for me. That is what really matters. Every garden has its rose, just pay attention.

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Tips on Summertime Sprinkling #12

with Bob Quinn

Dear Bob Quinn,

We have never had any problems with our well—plenty of water for our needs and more than enough to run a sprinkler for lawn and garden. A neighbor tells me that during warm weather we should run enough sprinklers to keep the pump running continuously. Why should that be?

The first reason is that if your pump is going on and off during sprinkling, the power demand is significantly greater. This increased demand to phase the pump in and out can be as much as 30%-40%, according to the experts.

That translates into a real dollar cost and wasted power resources. Just as important is the fact that such on-off, on-off cycling also takes its toll on your pump, and over a period of time will shorten its life expectancy.

Both of these costly conditions can be avoided simply by turning on enough sprinkler heads to keep the pump in operation continually, or install cycle stop valve. Look for future article on cycle stop valves.

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 — 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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