

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Intuitive gardening

BY SIOUX ROGERS



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My uncle Abe taught me to never plant anything I did not like to eat or buy a tree just because it was on sale. But it was my grandma Olga who intuitively understood my garden plants. I could trust her to walk through my garden and not step on a lovely flower and then call it a weed.

Here is a wee example of intuitive gardening. A good friend was given a heap load of “deadish” outdoor plants. Well, most gardeners would have sorted through the good, the bad, and the dead, but my friend’s intuition told her not to waste her time sorting. Instead, she just toed them all into a healthy, empty garden bed, fed them a little fish fertilizer, and watched them grow over the winter. The survival of the fittest would determine the winners. That was good intuition.

Garden intuition comes partially from books or mentors, partially from observation, and partially just from the willingness to try and even fail. Failure is okay! Failure is the way we learn about almost anything, even friends. We believe we have a wonderful new friendship growing, and it turns out to be, ugh, a weed. Two choices here: pull out the weed or find some beauty in it that you can live with. If neither works, move on to the next creative endeavor.

An intuitive gardener looks around to see what is growing and how things grow. Nature does not grow in straight rows like a cornfield. Nature does not grow the tall things in the back “row,” the mid-size things in the middle “row,” or the short and stalky things (like me) placed up close and personal in the

front “row.” Observe a forest, a meadow, an old homesite. It is not textbook organized. Nature plants things where they grow best. For example, nature wouldn’t plant an apple tree that might get 50 feet tall under the eaves of a house. Likewise, the intuitive gardener plants an apple tree far away, in the orchard. That is good intuition or just plain smart observation.

Gardening intuition means you respect a plant’s preferences. Say you have a plant that needs to wear sunglasses and a hat when in the sun. *But* you do not have a shady place for it, and it’s one of your favorite plants. Use your intuition. What would you do if you wanted to get out of the sun? Maybe tuck yourself under a big bush, hide under a fern, or better yet, make a wonderful garden statement

by setting out an umbrella and creating a nice shady place to relax out of the bright sun. Goodness, I have done that with my succulents so they would not sunburn, as I have seen happen. I placed them under “statement” umbrellas.

Intuitively, for me, a “resting” spot in my garden is an absolute necessity. This can be an old hollow tree trunk, a bench, just the earth under a large tree, or a few chairs tucked into wherever you feel comfortable. Here is one of my favorite, albeit silly and weird, resting places: a few bales of hay in my chicken coop. Yes, way weird, but I do so love the silly antics of the mixed flock of chickens, ducks, turkeys, and geese. They peck around me, jump up on the hay bale, and usually want to know what’s in my evening wine glass. Peck, peck, peck.

Perhaps, in a very few words, intuitive gardening is based on what makes both you and your plants feel comfortable. If you are unhappy burning in the hot sun, chances are your plants will be unhappy in the same situation. If you are shy and like little hidey holes, I’ll bet some of your plants feel the same way. Follow your nature-based intuition, not a lecture you just heard or a book you read. A dear friend recently said, “If you step on the ground and are barefoot, you will understand what the earth wants.” That is real intuition.

Trust your intuition. It’s your soul talking to you. —Tony Kelbrat, *The Natural Order of the Universe*

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An intuitive idea: Get sprawlers like squashes, melons, and cucumbers above the ground; grow your shade plants underneath.



An “intuitive” resting spot in the author’s garden where she hangs out with a glass of wine and her turkeys and other birds.



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