

Power Flowers

One of those events that flower lovers put on their wish list, along with the British Chelsea Flower Show, is the renowned Philadelphia Flower Show. Although I have never been to the Pennsylvania show, a friend e-mailed pictures of the recent 2012 exhibition for me to admire. Along with a rhododendron with white blooms like a tropical orchid, and proper orchids to envy, was a large display of a 'green' city in miniature.

Such displays have the charm of pure magic. The imagined city was landscaped with small sedums and such playing the role of large trees and shrubs. This portrayal of an ideal city was not just an intellectual exercise in design but a demonstration of the impact such design can have in maintaining a socially viable urban space within the constraints of cost and efficiency.

As our numbers grow and we spread ourselves all over productive farmland on our 5-acre mini-estates, it is ever more necessary to make compact city living an attractive option. The cost of the infrastructure essential for living in far-flung suburbia has become too great a demand on localities.

The water department of Philadelphia faced with the huge cost of upgrading their centuries old waterworks has attacked the problem from the "put-in" end by managing the torrents of polluted rain and snowmelt. To keep that flow out of the city's drinking water has meant planning for the installation of native plants, rain barrels and cisterns, sidewalk and downspout planters, roof and wall gardens and porous pavement.

To most gardeners these efforts to filter and reduce runoff are not new. Several new homeowners wanted porous patios and driveways having read of them, but were unable to find a source locally. Gravel is good but not practical on a steep slope or for children's play space. There is also a sealant for driveways that is not based on the familiar coal tar formula that is toxic in waterways.

Green infrastructure has the capacity to reduce, slowdown, filter, even absorb runoff and it is heartening to see it directed by the department responsible. Instead of asking for the billions to rebuild the waterworks, they are promoting an alternative solution.

Not just carrots:

If you avoid vegetables and concentrate on a flowerbed, when your friends speak rhapsodically about their fresh radishes, you can counter with news of your delicious daylily salad. Truly, most flowers are edible. This partial list came from NCSU Cooperative Extension: bachelor's button, calendula, chrysanthemum, dandelion, daylily, dianthus, English daisy, hibiscus, hollyhock, lavender, lilac, marigold, nasturtium, pansy, clover, rose, sunflower, violet.

I can't attest to the taste or vitamin content as my only experience was decorating a cake with crystallized violets, but when I was a child lawns enjoyed clover as an ingredient, which we munched. A prejudice, but I think dandelion greens a wonder and I've not tried it but dandelion wine used to be highly valued in neighborly gift exchanges.

Eco-notes

If you loved that childhood story of the little engine that could with its repetitive "I think I can, I think I can", you will enjoy this story of a small Lutheran church in a small German village, Schonau (population 2383) Concerned about nuclear power after Chernobyl in 1986, the pastor and congregation carefully shifted off the grid, put solar panels on their church roof, eventually starting their own power company. Today, that rebel co-op employs more than 50 people and provides renewable power to 115,000 homes and businesses.

Another indication that we are entering a new world is the news concerning the worldwide increase in wind power. It established a record in 2011 for new installations with the world's current capacity able to provide electricity needs for 380 million people. Not a great percentage when divided by our seven billion earthlings, but encouraging nonetheless.