

## June: The Month of Beginnings

There is something about marking the calendar with graduations and weddings that generates excitement about new experiences and new ideas. Common sense tells us that it is hot July and the first tomatoes that follow June but we expect something more, perhaps a remake of how we garden?

Gardening may be politely termed an active pursuit: that does sound less forbidding than labor intensive. Oddly, in an age where we are offered the quick fix, instant, easy, and painless everything, more and more people are gardening. They may begin by wanting to give their home more “curb appeal” but they end eagerly watching the subtle changes from day to day, season to season, year to year. Gardening gives a further dimension to their busy lives.

Thousands of businesses supply plants and tools, hundreds of decorative items to enhance the space and as many bagged, bottled, and packaged miracle products to make your garden the envy of that Jack person of beanstalk fame. Although our species is probably hard-wired to grow a plant, few gardeners have more than part of a weekend to keep up with a lawn and garden, so they want their property to be both handsome and manageable.

The reason we want a house in the first place, rather than an apartment, is for the family to enjoy. Sadly, for some families, the ‘outside’ becomes not just a passage from car to front door but actually a dreaded chore. The dream of a place for the whole family to work and play together fades and finally dies. When that happens, it is time to shrink the chores.

Now that sports are organized few children have a baseball game scheduled in their own back yard: you need not maintain a lawn the size of a soccer field. A wide border of flowering trees and easy care shrubs will lessen the expanse of grass, which is the most time and money demanding part of your landscape. The trees eventually provide shade for a child’s pool or sandbox or other equipment for endless engineering projects.

Letting small children plant a few carrot seeds and then watching them pull them up one by one until they are eating size is great fun. As a bonus, children enjoy eating what they’ve grown. All of them, twos to teens, take pride in growing something for the family meal. Children can astonish us at how quickly they learn about birds and beetles, lady bugs and dragon flies.

Children truly need the pride that comes from “doing” not from merely “having”. As they grow up developing the simple skills of weeding, mowing, freezing corn, or canning tomatoes, they develop confidence in their abilities, their own invisible suit of armor. It goes without saying that the grownups in their lives have to curb those parental expectations of perfection!

Gardeners with never enough time to execute the plans they have carried in their heads, or even in a file, dream of retirement! It happens. The lone apple tree is joined by an orchard; a grape arbor links the garage to the tool shed; a fish pond is an anniversary gift. Time speeds up and suddenly digging, planting, and weeding are hard work, perhaps too hard? Can the orchard become part meadow? Can azaleas and other flowering shrubs replace the perennial beds? By choosing different bloom times there can be lots of color to anticipate. With gold and lime, deep green and jade, we are reminded that yes, green IS a color. The texture contrast in shrub foliage keeps it from becoming a static background.

Chosen with attention to size there are many evergreen and deciduous shrubs that seldom need pruning. Mulch and ground covers all but eliminate weeding. The most beloved perennials can be moved to pots by the front door or annuals may be used. Annuals, even annual grasses, have the courtesy to leave when the party is over, without fuss or fanfare.

As 'work' becomes 'hobby', shrub roses replace hybrid teas, swaths of ground cover replace grass. The herons have eaten the fish but the frogs keep the pond healthy. And for that hard to mow slope, why not a drift of ornamental grasses that can be manicured once a year with a weed-eater? As time goes on, that large unused vegetable garden can be ignored while seedling pines, ironwood, oaks, and sumac create a small thicket that attracts grandsons and forts like a magnet. Change may be inevitable but in gardening, there is always a new day.