

The Pleasures of Gardening

BENEFICIAL LANDSCAPES

It's fall. Some of us are tired of weeding, watering, managing. The growth we impatiently waited for in spring has by now gone rampant. As one gardener put it, "the autumn garden is a machete garden."

Even on the best of days, gardeners aren't likely to brag. Have you ever had anyone say they're good at gardening? Or anything even similar to that? They might invite you to stop by because their lilies are in full bloom or to see all the butterflies on their asters. But when you do stop by, they're more likely to apologize for the bare spot they haven't gotten filled, or the weeds, or the plants that are flopping or...

For as much pleasure as we get from our yards, we tend to focus on failures rather than successes and act as if it's a pass/fail activity (and yes, we failed).

But at its heart, and within our imaginations, gardening is something else entirely.

- It's a hobby, passion and impulse that simply can't be ignored.
- It absorbs our mind and energy enough to help us lay aside the day's worries.
- It's an opportunity to "look closely, look often," in the words of prairie ecologist J.E. Weaver.
- It aligns us with the seasons and, even more immediately, with the changes that take place hour by hour, day by day.
- It's a way to beautify our homes and neighborhoods, and ultimately a gift to friends, family, neighbors and passersby.
- Gardens are a chance to witness growth and change. Sometimes those changes take place so quickly we miss them. Other times it's what Mac Griswold refers to as "the slowest of the performing arts."
- It teaches us patience and deferred gratification. There is no hurrying a plant.
- Gardening is not a career ladder we climb for the sake of success. There's no assurance of success (what is gardening success anyway?) and we might be regularly humiliated by the results, but there's no stopping us.
- Through it, we can grow our own herbs, nuts, vegetables, fruits. You can't get more local than your own backyard.
- One of its pleasures is bringing the beauty of the natural world closer in both as we get on our hands and knees in the garden and as we bring in cuttings, bouquets and other treasures.
- It keeps us active (possibly sore, but active) and no gym fees are required.
- It's an opportunity to connect with kids, neighbors, grandparents—away from phones, screens and busyness. It's a chance to "be there now" with them, engrossed in the fragrance, feel, sound, colors and sometimes even taste of the natural world that's immediately around us.

We may be exhausted and frustrated by our gardens in late summer and early fall, but as the weather cools and the threat of cold weather threatens to push us indoors, it's time to remember what we love about gardening and enjoy it.

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CUTLINE: Anemones offer late season bloom on sturdy, upright stems.

