

I suppose my love for gardening is shared by most of you in this room. It is remarkably therapeutic; I can weed out my troubles, shovel up my woes, and flourish in the beauty of my flowers, I can prune a jungle of chaotic branches into a phenomenal living sculpture made of the bones of a shrub. It is very personal for each of us, why we garden, what we experience in the process, how it defines our lifestyle.

I come by gardening honestly. Both my parents were gardeners, especially at our Bainbridge Island home, where Mom weeded the beds, and Dad planted close to 50 begonias in pots every year, to line the oyster shell path leading to the front door. My job, passed on from my older siblings, happy to be relieved of it, was to fish fertilize the begonias and the fuchsias once a week. I hated it.

In spite of the stink, in spite of my finding good reasons to walk off the property when my parents started weeding or mowing, that gardening bug stuck. Once I became a homeowner, I was busy planting around the house, and starting a vegetable garden. My first Vashon home was on Cove Road, followed by a few rentals, ultimately landing me on my LisaBeula property in 1982.

Forty years. Forty years on one piece of land. Enough time to watch saplings become fifty-foot trees. Enough time to plant a sequoia, watch it take over, make huge messes, and decide to take it down. Enough time to cultivate a wide variety of roses and dahlias.

When I bought my house and property in 1982, twenty feet high blackberries hugged the house. Vestiges of a vegetable garden revealed itself under the berries. An amazing old birch stood guard over the house, while a huge wisteria appeared to be holding up a decaying shed nearby. Previous owners had cut a massive maple outside the kitchen window, a huge mess shouting to be removed. Two camellias and an Italian plum tree welcomed me. One pink dogwood and one flowering magnolia hid under the blackberries, and that was about it. Nothing more. In essence, I had a blank slate with just a few welcome specimens to keep.

As for my life as a gardener, I become obsessed in the Spring and Summer. If I have just an hour of free time, I will head outside. It seldom feels like work, unless it's shoveling, and then I really have to convince myself. Before retiring, I found a way to soothe myself around my frustration of keeping up my gardens with so little time. I decided to go out for just an hour, no more. It was amazing to realize how much I could accomplish in sixty minutes. Now retired, with plenty of time, I still lean in to my one hour at a time mantra when I feel squeezed, when the beds are a mess. Try it. One hour, no more. It's magic. And it does far less damage to our bodies than six hours used to do in our younger years.

I am creating beauty, over and over again, beauty in every season. In my forty-year-old gardens, flowers bloom every month, a gift of life in our temperate climate with gardeners working over half a century on my one plot of land. A sculpture artist with Nature, I prune the bones of my trees and shrubs, who reveal their naked beauty and promise when little color is revealed in my beds in late winter. I am always stunned with how huge my burn pile becomes in March after a month of pruning.

This time of year, we gardeners clean up. For me, it comes in the form of weeding beds I have ignored in the end of summer abundance, deciding on who gets tossed, and who need to be moved. I mark potential transplants with orange flags, and hope that I can figure out where to put my once 4 inch pot perennials that now demand three foot square real estate.

This process creeps into my head in the middle of the night or early morning hours. Whatever caused me to wake, quietly turns on a little button in my brain that begins to think about where I will move those pesky plants. Just the other morning, I must have spent an hour of restlessness, picturing my perennials that have become unwieldy, out. Out of the garden. Gone. Make room for more! Make room for the plants that I really DO like, and not those I chose years ago that no longer sing to me. We have waited, haven't we, for the rains to come and the Fall work to begin. At a time that I am usually happy to kiss my gardens goodnight, wish them well for four or five months, there's just a little more to be done.

It is a lifestyle for me, branded deeply in my soul, that calls me to be outside over and over again. Outside in the dirt, my artist's palette, my temple, watching, considering, creating, using my old body as long as possible. Some of us have this insatiable passion, an introvert's love to leave the warmth of the house to get dirty, ponder, and imagine. For this I am grateful, as I know I have many more years to nurture, sustain and love my garden.