



A LOVE STORY

All Year Garden

allyeargarden.com

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EVERYBODY HAS DREAMS, CHERISHED DESIRES OF THEIR HEART,

the "one day I'll..." stories.

Often life gets in the way and worries and responsibilities take ownership of pieces of your life like squirrels store nuts for winter, forgetting where they hid more than half the stash.

The unused life pile grows with age, that coffee you never drank on the patio when the sun was shining brightly through the blooming lilacs, that time when you couldn't go to the zoo with the children, that craft project still sitting in a box in your basement or attic, waiting for "someday".

Our lives are made of reallocated somedays, of somedays that could have been, if only.

Take a moment, no longer than your schedule allows without adding stress, to pick one of these "someday" projects out of storage and actually do them.



INTRODUCTION - CONTINUED

Nobody bothers to weigh the value of the unfulfilled little wishes happiness is made of, and sometimes there is nothing in their way, nothing more than our getting accustomed to let them go.

Yes, your children will laugh at your knitting, and your conscience will poke you repeatedly as you savor your latte on the porch while the dishes are waiting.

Pick up that book you wanted to read for ten years, find your brushes and gouaches, paint the Adirondack chairs purple.

This is one of my 'one day i'll' stories:

every time I browsed through the numerous books about landscaping and garden design I wished I could see images like this in my yard. Of course it takes just the right light and time of day, and the camera adds its own magic, but dreamscape it is.

Now, about that latte...

- Love: *allyeargarden*



CHAPTER I

Your Private Outdoors

Sitting at the table under the tree canopy, a book in one hand, the other hand mindlessly rubbing your temple, you lose track of time.

Spotches of light filtered through the branches above move slowly opposite the sun path, while the day merges into evening.

The light becomes gentler, more tired, almost horizontal.

Around you two full walls, one half wall, a tree for a roof, and a balcony: your private outdoors.

Noises come and go, the chirping birds, the passing cars, people chatting while walking their dogs, the syncopated rhythm of joggers, the soft rubbery noise of bicycle wheels.

The words on the page start fading as the evening shadow descends into night, the contours are less precise, the contrast becomes nonexistent. Your cat comes around rubbing against your leg to remind you of dinner.



The kids go in and out of the house abruptly, slamming doors, running down stairs and giggling plenty.

Night flowering plants release their fragrance in the warmth of the day's end, and as light becomes more scarce, the sounds and scents intensify. The cat settles down in your lap, purring.

Eerie little blue solar powered garden lights dot the darkened contours of the plant masses, and you guess more than you see the familiar garden path, the lilac bush, the archway above the gate. White flowers look like reversed shadows in the headlights of passing cars.

The heavy summer night air, thick with humid fragrance, slowly cools down into a breeze.

CHAPTER II

The Art of Waiting

You walk along the garden path one morning, look around and wonder where did it all come from.

Naturally, you planted them all, or nearly all, with a few pleasant surprises here and there of self-sown perennials that sprung out from under annual growies before you got to notice them.

Otherwise, though, the tall, stately beauties surrounding you are always taking you by surprise, because the first lesson in humility that is served to obstinate gardeners is the unwillingness of living things to develop according to your plans.

They have their own internal clocks, their own environmental sensitivities and a completely different relationship with time than you.

So, those lupines that you planted and thought dead sprung up on you two years later, after you planted cosmos over them the following year, which self-seeded, and now both plants are gracefully mixing in a fluff of stringy and palmed leaves, taking over an entire portion of your garden that you were intending for a completely different purpose this year.



THE ART OF WAITING - CONTINUED

Or the snapdragons whose seeds you spread evenly over an area, but they decided to all come out bundled together to the left of the patch, leaving the rest of the dirt barren. Or the lily-of-the-valley that you tried to start from roots in the same spot for three years in a row, and now it decided to come out all at the same time and completely take over.

Maybe you were planning, but your garden begs to differ.

And when the garden and the gardener have different opinions, the garden usually wins.

The struggling plant that you moved because you needed the space and didn't feel like throwing away now thrives in its new location with a vigor beyond expectations. Sun loving plants keep blooming in the shade behind the house, in a place that, of course, is not a showy feature of your garden. After a while, the oddities and surprises of your garden become familiar and dear to you, like an old friend's little idiosyncrasies warm up your heart after you haven't seen her in a while.

A sense of peace descends upon the wiser gardener, a sense of acceptance that in this dialogue with nature, nature has something to say back to you.



THE ART OF WAITING - CONTINUED

If those plants you failed to recognize when you transferred them outdoors and planted them at the front of the flower bed turned out to be tomatoes, or if the sun garden you neatly organized according to height and flowering season exploded into a jumbled jungle of healthy growth, or if the miniature zinnias developed into four foot tall tree-like structures, or if all those tens of berries you saw on your strawberry plants were gone the second they turned slightly ripe because squirrels and rabbits believed in sharing, enjoy it, allow it, embrace it.

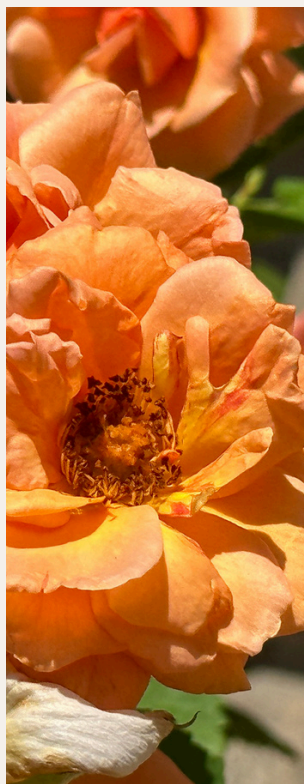
If gardening only taught me one thing it would be the art of waiting.

If you have enough patience and time, things kinda turn out the way you planned, sort of, eventually.



CHAPTER III

Eighty Acres of Roses



Do you know why I enjoy mixing perfumes?

Imagine an open field of roses, extending as far as the eyes can see, an eighty acre garden.

Hundreds of thousands of bushels of rose petals get picked, boiled and distilled, and re-distilled, and purified, until out of a thousand pounds of petals, five ounces of precious attar of roses are extracted.

A perfume so strong that it is too much for a person to bear undiluted.

You can't extract the quintessence of a sunset, but you can concentrate scent to its pure essence.

Every time I take the lid off the little bottle, an eighty acre rose garden comes out.

For the sake of efficiency we think of rose attar as just a perfumery ingredient and do not backtrack all the steps that brought it to be.

Somewhere far away, though, there is a field of roses getting distilled into a little bottle as we speak.

EIGHTY ACRES OF ROSES - CONTINUED

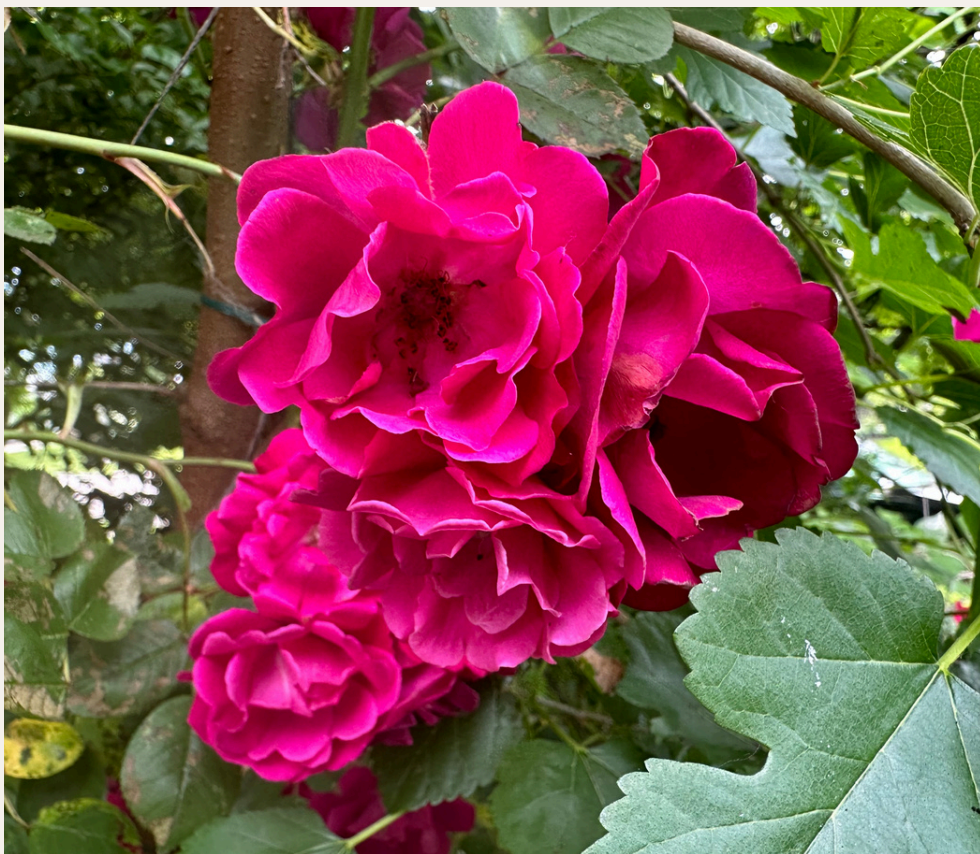
With delighted anticipation, I open essential oil vials.

They are, of course, labeled, but it is not really necessary, because when you lift the glass stopper, the scent speaks for itself: lemon, chamomile, rose, jasmine, sweet orange, vanilla, lavender.

Out of the fragrant tin box, I picked four scents.

I followed the theory about compatible aromas and diligently started analyzing the top note, middle note, and base scent, but there aren't any.

It is just a pampered subtle fragrance which follows you around like a memory.



CHAPTER IV

First Snow

Last night it snowed. It's not the first snow of the year, but it's the first one that looks like it means it.

There is a very precise moment when fall turns into winter, one we usually miss because we have more pressing things to do, and this year it came early, at least compared to the weather patterns we've been accustomed to during the last decade.

Fortunately, the garden is ready for it; the leaves were raked and removed, the tender perennials moved indoors, the garden hoses stored and the tools cleaned and put away.

I'm twiddling my thumbs, in a dour mood, contemplating five months of dreary frozen landscape. Ye gods!

I didn't get a late chance to plant bulbs before winter, so the ones that are already in the ground will have to do for next spring, but there's a pot of narcissus bulbs ready to grace my windowsill in a garden center somewhere, and I need to go find them.



CHAPTER V

The Herb Wheel

The first time I saw an herb wheel I thought it weird.

Why would one want to waste so much space in the sunshine to grow plants that for the most part don't bloom?

I guess my budding gardening instincts weren't very sophisticated.

I grew up in a garden, and a very well kept one at that, grace to my grandfather's horticultural talent, knowledge and decades of experience, but even so, one grew herbs wherever there was space left over, where it wasn't convenient to grow something else, surely they weren't a feature planting!

So, I was walking through that perennial herb garden, first trying to find any flowers, and second trying to see if I could recognize any of the residents.

I couldn't then, not more than a few kitchen herbs.

Some I recognized by name, but have never seen, some I recognized by scent, and some I'm still unfamiliar with.

What I didn't know then was that an herb garden is not meant to appeal to the eye, though, as you can see, herbs really do bloom.



THE HERB WHEEL - CONTINUED

An herb garden is a garden of scents, and sounds, the buzzing of the bees, the fluttering of wings, it is to be enjoyed by touching fuzzy stems and feeling the coolness of the bruised mint and bee balm leaves on a hot afternoon.

Now, many years later, I have my own patch of herbs.

and I'm so enchanted with the waves of lavender, the umbels of yarrow and the sunny smiles of calendulas that I can't bring myself to harvest more than a few stems at a time. I guess enjoying it by sight does happen after all.

Sadly you can't get the country gal out of the garden design, I still tucked my lovage on the edge of the hosts bed.

It is what it is.



CHAPTER VI

The Garden of Remembrance

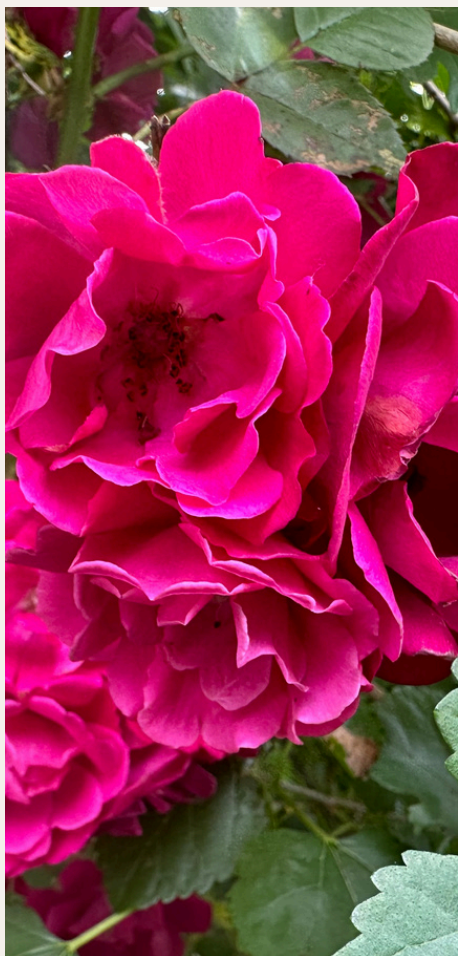
I walk the foot wide dirt path between the flower beds, careful not to get scratched by the landscaping roses covered in clusters of red flowers.

To the left, flanking the fence, cosmos and goldenrod find their way through the roses in an unruly jumbled mix.

To the right, in the shadow of the hibiscus trees, grow care free gladioli and fragrant lilies, mixed with lily of the valley; wild strawberries and buttercups gently cover their feet and expand into every nook and cranny they can find.

Above it all, an old bleeding heart arches gracefully over the moss roses. It only blooms one month a year, which makes it even more fascinating: a garden princess unlike any others, extraordinary. I can't reach it because it is kind of in the middle of the border where the roses guard it with sharp thorns.

Many times I just sit on the ground and watch the little candy colored hearts sway gently in the wind atop a profusion of giant parsley-like leaves.



THE GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE - CONTINUED

There is a contradictory nature to this plant graced with such noble and unworldly blossoms, but sustained by the most unsophisticated kitchen herb-like clump.

The flowers in grandfather's yard are always in bloom: he is a consummate gardener and doesn't let a day go by without caring for the flowerbeds, dead-heading plants, picking a berry or two or planting something new.

I spend many afternoons on the wooden bench shaded by the the grapevine, watching him sweep the paths, aerate the soil, or just wander around to enjoy the flowers.

I must confess that I am giving him plenty of stuff to clean up, since that garden bench houses my doll house, my fashion design atelier and my gourmet play kitchen, activities which create a copious mess.

So, as I was saying, I am walking the foot wide path, in my old crochet slippers with soles made of felt, in loving memory of my grandfather.

In my garden of remembrance it's 1974.



CHAPTER VII

Balance and Permanence



In the hustle and bustle of modern life nature feels slow somehow, we don't have the patience to acknowledge its subtle cues anymore and in the process we don't realize the fact that the fault lies with us and not with it.

There is a reason for nature's slowness, the same reason that makes long lived creatures' hearts beat slower, the rhythm of the tides monotonously even and the timing of the first bloom in spring eerily precise.

Systems that are inherently stable have no reason to change over long periods of time, and those systems include many species of the plant kingdom.

One can't understand a garden's idiosyncrasies, because it functions on complex parameters that are mostly hidden from view, especially when one regards the vegetal realm as a simple, static set that can be modified at will.

In reality an established perennial border is an autonomous system that manages its own nutrients and water, maintains its own hierarchy, finds its own balance.

BALANCE AND PERMANENCE - CONTINUED

In all my years of gardening I learned one thing: the garden picks and chooses what it will accept or reject and it always has the last word.

You can expend enormous amounts of energy to make the wrong plant fit and exhaust yourself in the process, but at the beginning of the next season that plant will not be back, no matter how bold the font on its perennial label.

This is why every spring I wait with the trepidation of a final exam to see which of the new plants got booted off the island. Those that don't usually thrive and grow beyond my wildest dreams.

After years of experience one reaches some level of wisdom; one stops worrying whether things will work out and starts knowing that they will. For instance, I don't doubt the fact that next April the garden will be covered in violets.



CHAPTER VIII

Soft Fog

Nature stepped quietly into the end of the year, wrapped in a sleepy drizzle that turned to fog before it touched the ground.

The landscape looks unreal under the powdery mist, soothed by balmy air too warm for December, under the blanket of silent skies.

The garden settled into a comfortable charming mess, as it is fitting for the end of a season, but the perennials didn't bother to go dormant. They are working hard to build up their starch reserves before the hard freeze kills their aerial parts.

There is a scent of humus and mushrooms in the breeze, and spring greenery and pollen. I saw daffodil blades poke through the ground; it doesn't feel like winter at all.

True winter doesn't start until early January, but it doesn't feel like fall either.

Maybe we're looking at a fifth season. It is strange to see bare branches when the weather is so warm. I expect tree buds any moment now.



CHAPTER IX

Plants of the Underworld

The fact plants spend half their lives underground was not lost on Greek mythology, which considered them a bridge to the Underworld (after all the chthonic gods also watched over agriculture), but some plants were specifically dedicated to these gods, and counted as their favorites.

Pomegranates were the fruits of Persephone, embodying the wisdom, plenty, and accomplishments of maturity.

In the afterlife myths it was to the Asphodel Meadows, and not to the Elysian Fields, that most people were sent to spend eternity.

Their ghostly flowers were sacred to Hades and symbolized death and rebirth; Persephone is often depicted wearing a crown of asphodels.



PLANTS OF THE UNDERWORLD - CONTINUED

The name asphodels sometimes gets them mistaken for daffodils which are also among the goddess' favorite flowers. One version of the legend says the flowers Persephone was picking when Hades snatched her and took her to his realm were daffodils.

The elm tree stood guard at the entrance to Hades, roosting the spirits of dreams in its branches.

Finally, cypress, the mournful tree, which, despite its funeral vibe, is a symbol of everlasting life.



CHAPTER X

The Glow of Late Afternoons

Everything looked radiant in the glow of the golden hour, before the sunset dimmed it to violet and blue.

This surreal light quality created halos around everything, lighting up the late daffodil blossoms from inside like so many tiny lanterns.

I stayed outside for as long as I could and took many pictures, I didn't want to miss this little slice of heaven that opened fleetingly before my eyes.

Every day there is a chance for the golden hour, but the actual occurrence of one is quite rare, especially so early in the year.

Being inside this light, however briefly, makes one realize how beautifully complex life is and how easily it blends together in harmony and peace.

Time feels different and makes all the problems in the world subside and everything looks perfect just the way it is.

One of the benefits of gardening is that one is outdoors frequently enough not to miss these moments.

As I lifted my eyes in this quasi-dreamlike state I gasped with surprise when I noticed the fragrant white bunches of French lilac swaying gracefully over my head, I kind of stopped expecting it to bloom after so many years.

It bloomed before the dwarf variety too, I didn't expect that either. My garden loves to enchant me every now and then.



CHAPTER XI

The Herb of the Animals

In old Thracian mythology *Vincetoxicum hirundinaria*, the white swallow-wort, nicknamed Herb of the Animals, was thought to possess powerful magic that could open any lock.

A gentle touch of the plant would make chains and shackles snap open and fall to the ground. It could help one understand the minds of animals and find buried treasure.

Thieves had only slide a piece of leaf under the skin of their palm and let it heal over, and they would be able to open any door and break any lock.

Possessing this herb would have made one so rich and powerful, folklore abounds with stories about wise men who went searching for it.



THE HERB OF THE ANIMALS - CONTINUED

Naturally, the acquisition of such a valuable plant is not an easy feat:

it only grows in the same place once every nine years, otherwise one has to cross at least three rivers for a chance to find it, in a place where a demon got struck by lightning.

I always thought its existence a myth, that it was a vegetal Dodo bird, and was surprised to find out it actually exists.

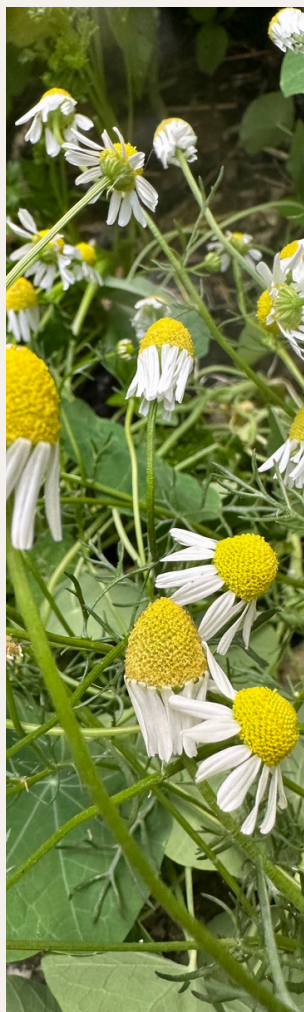
I wouldn't let it heal inside a wound to master its powers, though.

It's poisonous:)



CHAPTER XII

Strange and Wonderful



From the helicopters and parachutes of **maple seeds and dandelions** to the Velcro like grip of **smartweeds, stickseeds and burdocks**, we're all acquainted with the determination plants show in ensuring their seed propagation.

In order to promote seed dispersal, plants make their fruits nutritious and colorful, enticing birds and animals to eat them and later spread the seeds far away along with natural fertilizer.

The seed-spitting gourd explodes when it's ripe, propelling its seeds away from the mother plant, and it's not alone in using this method.

Mistletoe fruits burst open when they are ripe and launch their sticky seeds onto neighboring trees.

The tension in their drying fruits allows **violets and geraniums** to shoot seeds at incredible speeds over long distances.

Tumble weeds distribute their seeds by letting the wind blow away their entire plants.

Coconuts, palms, mangroves, and water lilies cast their seeds on the water, which enables their small wooden boats to drift until they encounter favorable conditions for growth.

CHAPTER XIII

Garden Angels

Whether you believe in angels or not, we're all acquainted with the wealth of stories that evolved from people's faith in their existence.

According to tradition, an angel's most important duty is to protect.

What?

Basically everything: people, places, endeavors, universes, time, events that haven't happened yet, you name it, there is an angel in charge. For those of us blessed with a green thumb, the icing on the cake are the garden angels, whose task is to oversee the growth of plants and ensure they thrive and multiply over many seasons.

This probably explains the popularity of angel statuary in gardens large and small and the feeling of serenity that comes upon us when we discover them suddenly, half hidden by luxurious plant growth.

Next time you're at wit's end about that dry patch in the shade where nothing seems to grow, there is comfort in the knowledge that specialized help is available.

So then, you ask, if this is so, why hasn't my garden turned into the paradise I always dreamed of?

Sadly, like it is with most interactive systems, the answer is usually operator error. Besides, the garden is always doing splendidly with or without the gardener's input, just not in the manner they want it to.



CHAPTER XIV

Wild Garden

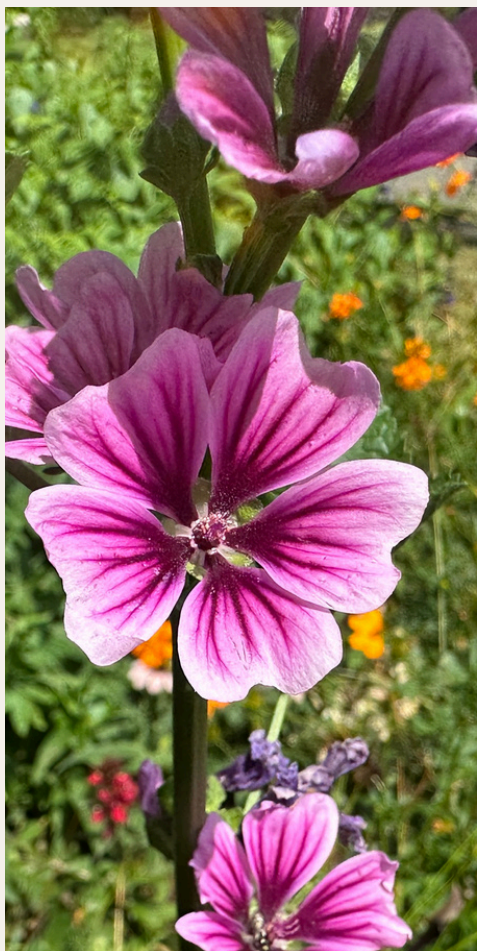
It rained after a long time, it rained over the wilderness of the garden, over the random mishmash of overgrown stems and flowers.

As in years past, the garden pays homage to my free rein horticultural style by devolving to its previously non-planned state, shall we say.

The rain came as a blessing after many days of sweltering heat and every plant breathed a sigh of relief at the abundance of water made available again.

Even after many years of gardening I still can't get used to the non linear graph of plant development: they don't grow a little bit every day, their evolution is lumpy, like a knotted string, like an uneven thread crafted by an unexperienced spinster.

After a week of stagnation everything doubled in size, and the change was so blatant I paused to ponder whether I was in the same garden.

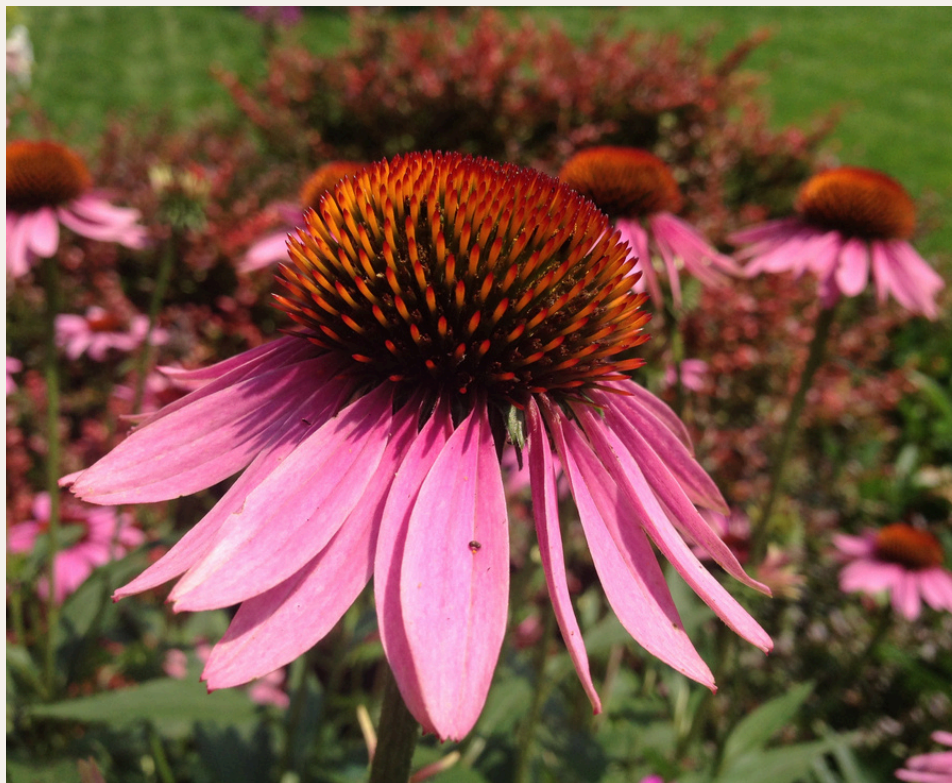


WILD GARDEN - CONTINUED

I can almost feel the giddiness and relief of plant life, its rejoicing under the drenching rain, like a boost of oxygen for the lungs, like a large gulp of cool water after a long thirst. The big light and sound show in the sky energizes life in a primeval way, touching only emotion and unexplainable by reason. The old brain guidance that used to ensure human survival in prehistoric times is still alive and well, well hidden underneath multiple layers of analytical reasoning, artistic expression and scientific observation, ready to shed years of learned suitable behavior and jump in puddles again. In a way it is a reminder of our commonality with the other living things on earth, and the shared emotion of life thriving.

A common course in miracles, as a dear friend once said, after all life would become a little stale if we understood everything.

That being said, I'm sure there is a scientific study somewhere that analyzes and explains the dynamic of plant growth in great detail and I would like to apologize in advance to the author of that study for my ignorance.



CHAPTER XV

The Color of Fragrance



Green perfumes boast notes of vetiver, citrus, green tea, herbs and bamboo.

Their clean fresh smell energizes and brightens the mood; they are excellent pick me ups to shake off the dullness of dark winter days.

White perfumes are eminently feminine, floral and intense. They are too strong in large quantity and should be used sparingly.

White flower fragrance is a unique, well-defined scent that evolved from the simple jasmine and orange blossoms blend to include all the heavy florals, like lily of the valley, honeysuckle, lilies, tuberoses, gardenias, osmanthus, frangipani, and hyacinth.



Black perfumes are earthy and complex, with hints of musk, sandalwood, oak moss and cedar. Their palettes are sophisticated and intricately constructed, and can be a bit of an acquired taste.

They frequently include spices, patchouli, heliotrope and orris root, and are suitable for both men and women.



Amber perfumes are sweet and powdery, with strong oriental notes, evocative of the Arabian Nights. They have all the sweetness of the heavy florals, but none of the bright playfulness of their fresh notes.

Amber perfumes are heavy with the scent of Damask roses, labdanum, honey, vanilla, bergamot, violet, oud and ambergris, and linger forever on the skin, fading in time to a sweet powdered memory.

CONCLUSION

This is the beginning of something good.

Most gardeners, often unknowingly, have an idealized image of what a garden should look like, and aspire to recreate it, again and again.

Mine is a summer morning in my grandfather's garden.

His example did not make me a green thumb, one has to earn that through personal effort and experience, but it gave me the knowledge that this abundance, this balance, this almost perfect self-supporting environment can be built: it made the all important difference between believing and knowing that I can have a beautiful garden too.

Pink roses are a symbol of happiness and gratitude. Now, more than a hundred years since my grandfather's birth, I wish to honor his memory with this photo and thank him for teaching me the art of the possible.

