



Joy in My Garden

by Peg Sullivan, Master Gardener

Dropping my packages on the counter as I came home from post-holiday shopping, I stopped at the window to look out at our backyard. That's it, I thought, I'm leaving all the demands behind for an hour. I need to go to the garden. I threw on my old gardening clothes, and went swishing through a pile of crunchy leaves, picked up the rake, and sat down on a bench.

What is it that brings me such joy out here? As I raked leaves around the frost tender plants to protect them from the cold, I realized that no place brings me simple satisfaction more than being in our garden.

This isn't an extraordinary garden space, but it's my space. There are other beautiful gardens around the world with prettier "thises" or "that's", or "rarer rarities", but this is my garden where I can be free to create, prune, and move things around.

Having a garden of my own is like having a blank palette on which to redraw the memories of childhood, to recreate a scene which I appreciated in another garden, or to gather together colors which bring me cheer.

There are "garden rooms" out here, with a fragrance garden, a tucked away corner I call the "Sit-a-bit", a sunny spot where I plant my husband's favorite bright flowers and artichokes, and flower-laden arbors which beckon the visitor toward a path that leads past birdhouses under a majestic oak tree. Other corners of the yard provide citrus and herbs, and, hopefully one day, some avocados.

The garden gives me surprises. There is the serendipity of new bulbs bursting forth in the spring, the sound of a bird I can't quite identify, fruit ripening on the trees, or leaves taking on a new shade of crimson in the fall. For me, being able to watch the subtle differences in the way plants grow, reproduce, cycle through the year, store food, and fight disease is an ever-changing proof of God's amazing work in all his creation.

I can create my own garden style. Some gardeners like to identify their garden's style as formal, French or cottage. My style of gardening is eclectic and liberating, and might be described as "organized nonchalance", rather than formal or precise. I like to think that my garden has good structure or "bones", but I'm not sure. My flowers don't always follow the prescribed color palette, and I rely on faithful perennials more than annuals.

The carpet of leaves in autumn is left for a while, to replace the carpet of snow I enjoyed as a child in Colorado. The leaves are fun for making paths for a game of "fox and hounds" with the children. In good time the leaves find their way to the compost pile to produce more black gold.

Friendship lingers in my garden. There are trees and roses given in memory of my parents, third generation bulbs from my grandfather's farm in Missouri, and plants shared from the gardens of family and close friends. It is a place from which I can divide bulbs to share with new gardeners, bring tokens of fragrance to friends in the hospital, or give bouquets to friends who are simply a joy in my life.

Believe me, I'm thankful to be able to sit and ponder the joys of gardening, as these cold winter months give me a rest from the garden work! Of course, I continue to browse through the seed or bulb catalogs, even while I'm soaking my aching back in the hot tub. There is always something new to plant or discover in the months to come.

So pull on an old jacket and slip into gardening shoes, grab a second cup of coffee, and come outside with me . . . not to work, but to feel that refreshingly simple joy again.

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