

Exploring an Enhanced Gardening Ethos

Ethos [ee-thos, eth-os]: *the fundamental character or spirit of a culture; the underlying sentiment that informs the beliefs, customs, or practices of a group or society.*

Spirit. Customs. Practices.

We're entering an age in which we're less concerned, as gardeners, in the ostentatious and opulence of the past. I believe that what we are all seeking now is a garden that speaks to us. Gardens of plants that simply make us happy. *Channeling Gertrude Jekyll, to create gardens that have elements of usefulness, mindfulness and self-gratification.*

Basic rules & wisdoms of garden creation...

- Rule #1. There are no hard and fast rules. Just **Guidelines**. Only simple design tenets which change depending on your place, the gardener, and the garden itself. *Gardens are a merger of physical and psychic spaces.*

Guideline: Remember, the garden is not for them, it's for you.

(The truth is, we don't have time, energy or money to create a garden that lots of other people will admire.) Don't build a garden to out-do your neighbor. Better, cooler and more different should not be your motivation. Unless your plant budget is unlimited, then Go for It!

Eudaimonia "*Human Flourishing*" or "*A Final Purpose*" Aristotle refers to it as "practical or ethical wisdoms" and also as the term meaning "the highest human good".

Creating a fantastic garden is journey of little actions that add up to something special. The big point here is to **try to do worthwhile things** and not just compete with the crowd. What are you planting and why?

Guideline: Sustainability should be the goal.

The Big 3 – 1. Limit amount of turf grass. 2. Limit use of herbicides & pesticides
3. Plant a mix of exotic & native flower plants

- **Guideline:** Focus on the long-term not immediate gratification. How long does that plant live?
- **Guideline:** Don't just shrub it up! Pick plants that "speak" to you. Drifts of 1 are not necessarily a "mistake".
- **Guideline:** Don't get the notion that having a garden is difficult. *It's not how much you attempt to grow, but how well you grow what you attempt.*

Buying plants is more like adopting a pet – learn about what they need, what efforts and responsibility will you need to employ to care for them?

- **Guideline:** Immerse or lose yourself in the process – Create a relationship with your plants.
 - Immerse yourself in the environment – Do a camp out in the space.
 - Understand that creation requires some risk – Georgia O’Keeffe took risks and she’s revered as one of the most significant artists of the 20th century.
 - Design innovation comes from experimentation and experience.

- Beauty vs Showy or Flashy. Unlike people, plants don’t have the tendency to behave differently when under observation. They have no self-deceptions or “wishful-thinking”. They do what they are going to do if you provide optimum conditions.

- **Guideline:** Repeat the colors and textures even if you are choosing different plants. The over-all structure should possess a sense of visual cohesion. Patterns make sense. Layers will build the image. Take Mandala designs as a clue. Pattern within a pattern – You are the center of the cosmos within your gardening universe.

- **Guideline:** All plants do something unique. Buy by color, texture, size, type. Keep your eyes open. (what do you like?) *A touch of chartreuse is clever in a tie or blouse but a three-piece suit of it might be over-the-top.* Generally, the bolder the color the less you need of it, otherwise that is all you see.

- **Guideline:** Enhance subtle spaces – Pay great attention to light and shadows, sharp lines. *Never ignore the power of negative space.* All forms need space, but *Dramatic forms become more appealing with more space.* What garden image can be enhanced in late afternoon sun VS morning sun?

- **Guideline:** Plant shopping 101. Flip all your thinking! Don’t say, “Hey, that is pretty! Where can I plant it?” Work out the Where, How and Why first. Answers to those questions will reveal the WHAT to plant.

Let’s all agree to not refer to plants as “plant materials”. *This is a vulgarity of people that have little taste and no honest personal connection to plants.* They’re living things after all.

A Plant catalog isn't meant to sit and read cover to cover. It's intended to be a "*mental biscuit*". Best enjoyed one nibble at a time. Read a line and think, read a line and dream. Similar bedside reading as Gideons.

Guideline: Don't grieve the losses

- No plant is perfect. Things happen. Plants die, it's a "Circle of Life".
- Be patient. But then move on. Why did this happen & think long-term.
- Reflect on the circumstances of its origins. Accept the constant myriad of changes in the great universal cosmos. After all this is the true sport of gardening, learning all of the idiosyncrasies of your plants and simply treat them accordingly.
- The garden is a dynamically developing **system**. Both successes and losses will happen before it becomes balanced.
- Take plant deaths philosophically. If a plant has given of itself as much as it can in a single season, give thanks, don't be greedy. Now "Let's go shopping!"

Guideline: Learn Provenance & Botanical Latin

- Provenance is your guide. Focus on whence it came. Where was that plant from? What does it need/want?
- What kind of natural environment does this plant really like. Is it fast spreading, establishes quickly, "self-seeding", tolerates hostile environments. These traits might be words of caution, not elation.
- Know your place.
- Learn Latin. Binomial nomenclature – *Ranunculus alpestris*, *Aquilegia canadensis*, *Helleborus foetidus*, *Dicentra formosa*, *orientalis*, *occidentalis*, *Ficus pumila*, *parviflora*, *Echinacea purpurea*, *Ginkgo biloba*, *tomentosa*, *spicata*, *spectabilis*, *Helianthus tuberosus*, *Linaria vulgaris*, *Astilbe davidii*,

Guideline: Forget your zone, know your Micro-climate

- Exposure yourself. South and west facing walls may be zone warmer
- Containerized plants – must be 2 zones more cold tolerant.
- Pay attention to the lay of the land for clues to success
- Mimic plant communities if nothing else. Some species dominate in a setting others are more rare. *Create a mix of plants that relate well to one another*. Natural environments are a matrix, not The Matrix.
- It's fun to experiment but don't ever lose admiration for ordinary, fool-proof plants. *Use ordinary plants in unusual, unique ways!*

Plants grow, but not as simply as you may know or think about.

- You're not planting a 2 x 4. Plants grow, but how exactly?
- Many perplexities of how plants function, lie in the chemistry of their cells. Biochemists are still learning about complex cellular functions in plants. Even if we say we know something, it's a guess at best.
- **Watch your Auxin!** A simple example: The extent to which cells elongate is directly proportional to the prevailing concentration of auxin in their cells. i.e.; It controls phototropism in sun-loving plants. And it **controls apical dominance**. (My friend George would say "*Hey, what you do in private is your own business*") Auxin maintains embryonic meristems (tip growth) in dormant state. If tips (apex) are clipped – no auxin is produced – lateral bud break occurs. Presto! The plant becomes bushier. So simple, yet cellularly complex.
- Every part of a plant has a function. *It is critical to know that not all of them have evolved simply to make you angry, frustrated or upset.*

THE BIG PICTURE

Hey, what's that you're spraying man?! Stop and think. Ask questions.

- How far have we come from the first EARTH DAY? Walt Kelly's poster for the first Earth Day "*We have met the enemy and he is us.*" c.1970
- **We're it.** Our role as humans, because we understand it, is to take care of nature.
- **It takes** enormous amounts of **energy, effort** and **practice** to lessen our individual impacts on the environment. Practice EPP – environmentally preferable purchasing. We offer more safe bio products than ever before.
- Herbicides & Pesticides – Learn, look or ask about AI & MOA. There is no "EASY" button. Whatever product you use will have an affect on something else. That's just how it works. Lessen the effects.
- **Pioneer plants** – some call them weeds, have cycles too. Till or no till? By nature, they are cover crops. Lambs Quarters, Dandelion, *Polygonum pensylvanicum*, Johnsongrass
- Generally, pollination is weak & yields are dropping in backyard gardens. Urban and rural.
 - About 80 million lbs. of pesticide Organophosphate are sprayed on American crops per year. Everyone has been exposed to trace amounts over a long period of time – feeling weak, tired, irritable, depression, loss of memory? All side effects of exposure.
 - Erythritol – 'EE-rith-ri-tall' Who knows what this is? **Truvia®** (sugar alcohol) may have potential as organic herbicide too.

- 70% of produce in U.S. tests positive for pesticide residues. AFTER they were washed! Worst top 5? Best top 5? Grow Your Own!
- Nitrates and phosphates contaminate our water wells and estuaries causing explosive algal blooms.
- Livestock production severely effects erosion, soil salinization, compaction and general degradation. We're all guilty of paying-a-never-mind to all of these things and focus only on what's in front of us. Now degradation is in front of all of us! World population of 10 billion people est. by 2050. Its 2020!

Just a snippet about climate change. Do you feel it?

- 1878 John Wesley Powell - Powell's original goal in describing the 100th meridian as the dividing line, of the humid East and arid West, was to persuade the federal government to bear in mind the greater aridity when promoting settlement and development in the western territories. No water. No development. He was very practical and informative beyond his years.
- Climatological data shows, just since 1980 the 100th meridian climate divide has shifted, due to climate change, 140 miles east encompassing areas of western Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri and so on going south.
- Data shows that rainfall totals have just started to change, but temperatures are going up which causes increased evaporation of soil moisture, making less available for adequate crop growth. Corn can be grown east of the 100th M. but not west of it! Who's growing wheat now? You will!

Are you the "champion of change" in your community yet?

- 100% organic?
- Have you switched to a plant-based diet? Easier and tastier than ever!
- Nature is now the exception. We built everything else around us.
- Save at point of purchase, lessen your impact on the environment and growing in an organically responsible way. Everyone has an option to change.

These simple things can materialize into thousands of individuals moving independently, but with a common purpose.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

--Margaret Mead

The fundamental character of our Gardening culture should be unified in our energy, creativity and actions.

We can't go back, but everyone must believe that we can improve what's left.

We all have the ability to better coexist with our environment. The reality is, all that any of us can do is control what we individually do, but everything that each of us does will make an impact.