

THIS MONTH'S



FEATURED ARTICLE

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How Does Your Garden Grow

OK, it isn't spring yet, but it is the time of year when we begin to yearn for flowers in our gardens, so we continue with another excerpt from Georgia Jones' A Garden of Weedin'

There is no question in my mind that a woman invented -- Discovered? Whatever... agriculture.

There is the obvious fact that women were gathering in the hunter/gatherer tradition and closer to the source than the men who, presumably, only looked at plants as camouflage to use in stalking some other animal to its ultimate death. And there is the fact that gardening is a true blood sport.

Certainly, it is hard, back-breaking work but women have been doing that from the first, and more of it than men. In the modern world, right now, as I write this, the majority of all heavy labor on the planet is performed by women. The main cause of miscarriage throughout the world is the damage caused by those cute baskets National Geographic used to photograph. You know. The ones women wear like funny hats? Only the funny hats are filled with pounds of produce, water buckets, building materials, whatever needs hauling and other no pack animal is available. Balancing these baskets on our heads, shifts the center of gravity, the spine, and the pelvic bones until a woman is unable to carry a child inside her. She is only good for carrying things which are not important enough for men to entrust to their pack animals.

She is the true husbandman this woman.

When I work in my garden I don't think about mild clichés like "You are closer to god in a garden than anywhere else on earth." I think, instead, of this woman. I think about what it means to shape a plot of soil, to make it produce food or beauty. I think about the plants that I have to kill so others may live. And I think that, besides the sunshine and exercise, I am getting a perspective on dominance and power in this microcosm of the daily struggle for survival on this planet.

Those are life and death decisions I make in my garden. This plant lives while another dies. In some ways it is arbitrary. Which is which is determined, not on an intrinsic

beauty or usefulness of a plant, but on whether or not I want it there. I am playing god.

If you use sprays or other herbicides, it is the garden equivalent of carpet bombing. If you use more organic means, it becomes even more macabre because with mulch, for instance, you are feeding the chosen plants off of the decomposing bodies of those which you have personally rejected. There is no doubt: This is a blood sport. This life and death must happen for a garden, or a farm, to exist. Yet, as you do the garden duties, move close to these plants, observe their roots, watch their growth patterns and appreciate their color, the gardener begins to appreciate the life force there, too.

How can you tend your garden? Take care for the health and happiness of your plants? Observe their many survival strategies? Sing or play music for them in some cases? And think that it is better to be a vegetarian? It is a blood sport, this garden.

Stooped, tugging with all of my strength to dislodge a weed which has stubbornly lain claim to this patch of earth, I remember that we are all part of the same creation, and we were, all of us, designed to survive off of the decomposing bodies of our neighbors.

This is a very womanly pursuit. Women are closest to creation, after all, and we have always understood sacrifice and necessity. We have survived everything that this planet could challenge us with over the eons, even abuse by our own kind. And survival is the essence of the garden.

I am a fortunate woman. I have help in my garden, but I was the one who slung the concrete into the walls of the pond and smoothed it into shape barehanded. I have help, but we each work in our separate ways creating from our separate visions, and, luckily, it merges into one vision, diverse and unique, as our lives have done.

My garden is large and varied in the plants that grow there. People hang over my fence to see what I have done. When they do, I step back into the shadows, into the sheltering shade of my tree. The garden speaks for itself. What could I say about it to these strangers who want to share but feel like intruders to me? This is my creation, my universe. This is something I have made out of the rawest of materials and shaped to reflect my idea of beauty and abundance. I don't mind the ones who look in silence, who realize that there is nothing to be said about creation except that it is.

I ruthlessly dispose of insect pests, cracking snails, which are the bane of my garden, like walnuts. I never forget that this is a blood sport.

And, as I haul the weeds away - because if I were to rely on compost in a garden of this size I would have to go into the commercial compost business - I pull the black plastic bags around those plants who lost the battle for my personal approval and glimpse their green, still living, bodies and sometimes I am sorry. Most of the time, though, I peek in with a feeling of triumph. These are the weeds and I have overcome them, for now. They will be back, their progeny or their cousins, and I will have to do it all again. But that is part of the appeal of this particular work. It moves in cycles of life and death to which I become an integral part. I am the gardener.