

Of a certain age

By Sue Stafford
Columnist

There they were, set out in the parking lot to tempt me on that warm spring day. Green leaves, brightly colored blooms, sturdy little starts of lettuce and squash, all waving at me in the April sunlight, begging me to take them home and plant them.

I know better. There is still snow on the top of Black Butte — the local indicator that it's too early to begin gardening in earnest, unless you have a greenhouse. As I inspected the trays of premature annuals from the valley, evidence of freeze-burned leaves from our erratic nighttime temperatures was everywhere.

The other day the mail lady brought me a box that reminded me I did succumb to one early purchase. I ordered some butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) from High Country Gardens in an attempt to attract more pollinators to my yard. Even though they promise to ship according to the gardening zone in which you live, my five little pots, all carefully wrapped in plastic and securely packed, but a little wilted, arrived during the cooler period following our first 80-degree days.

That first night they rested in my kitchen sink, rehydrating and safe from the freezing nighttime temperatures. The next morning they greeted me, all revived, their

tender green stems standing tall. They have spent several mornings on the deck in the warm spring sunlight gaining strength in preparation for transplanting, which directions say must occur seven to ten days after their arrival.

Last night was their first overnight outside — up close to the house and covered with double layers of remay to keep them warm and protected. Getting their roots into a permanent home, along with some strawberries donated by my farmer friend, will be my first “gardening” of the season.

Like everything else in my life lately, my seasonal attempt at growing annuals and vegetables will be greatly scaled back. A few carefully chosen spots of color in large deck pots and perhaps a cherry tomato plant and some lettuce will do it.

The days of hours spent bending over or kneeling to plant large flowerbeds with seasonal color are gone. Rather than a multi-day blitz of the yard to remove all the pine needles and clean up the perennials, I spend a brief hour or two every couple of days in an attempt to create some order.

No more long periods in one position, weeding an entire bed. Frequent changes in the chores — sweeping, raking, weeding, pruning — help keep my body from freezing up from lack of movement. Getting up and

down from kneeling or sitting on the ground is done slowly and carefully — and hopefully with no one watching.

With appropriate adaptations, gardening is one of those pastimes that can be pursued well into later life. Raised beds and pots, cushioned handles on tools, hanging pots on pulleys, and vertical gardening are all ways to stay engaged in an activity that provides joy, stimulation of the senses, fresh air and sunshine, physical activity, and the opportunity to nurture living things. There is the added benefit of fresh fruit and vegetables for your table and lovely bouquets to share with friends.

I have decided to divide my outside activity into two separate categories in my mind — gardening and yard maintenance. I used to call it all gardening and loved every bit of it, but by doing that now, I find myself thinking of gardening as work. But in all honesty, gardening — planting, growing, watering, and enjoying the fruits of my efforts — is an absolute joy and a rewarding summertime

activity.

Yard maintenance, on the other hand, has become more work than joy. Raking pine needles and cones (an endless endeavor), pruning, edging, mowing — those are physical, sweat-inducing, joint-straining hard work. There is definitely a great sense of accomplishment when the yard is all spiffed up and orderly, but that maintenance is becoming more of a challenge every year. Because it takes me so much longer, it seems that I am never done.

A little attitude adjustment is helping me not view yard work as just an unpleasant chore to be dispensed with as quickly as possible. Instead, it is my almost daily avenue for exercise, where I can engage all my senses and commune with nature. No interruptions, no deadlines — just allowing myself to feel the sun on my back, the breeze on my face, and the dirt on my hands.

I am alive in my little corner of the world where I am lucky to continue to be a steward of what Mother Earth has provided and give thanks for it.

Sisters salutes...

• Jan McGowan wrote:

The fifth in the Salon Series hosted by Hood Avenue Art and benefiting Circle of Friends was held last Thursday evening. Circle of Friends connects young people with adult mentors.

The Anvil Blasters were the latest to contribute their time and talent to the intimate audience that gathers in the gallery from time to time.

Thanks to everyone who donates to this series, including Melvin's Fir Street Market and Doug & Katie Cavanaugh, who have provided two performances. The Patchwork Players will conclude this year's series on May 19.

While the crowd was gathered this night to help our kids, Jim Cornelius' powerful solo, “Ghosts,” reminded me that there are lots of people, from kindergartners to soldiers, who need our support and understanding. Here's to everyone doing good where you can.

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