

A recent walkabout in our garden revealed an ongoing refrain, coming from my mouth to a visiting friend: "I didn't plant this." "We didn't plant these." "Oh yes, they're pretty, but we've never planted them!" Hearing my own words, I realized that as much as I plan or meticulously plant coordinated vignettes, our garden—and most of the gardens I love—are big, blousy concoctions of old-fashioned perennials and self-seeding biennials and annuals. Think drifts of love-in-a-mist, stands of foxgloves dotting a country garden and you have both my garden and the gardens in which I love to find myself. A garden by chance? A garden as gifted by birds and a breeze? Both of these, yes, but it's taken me a while to understand and see how the self-seeders play with my carefully constructed perennials and shrubs.

Self-seeders in a Portland area garden are easy to grow: Those three words are core to their existence. Easy to grow means tough, too: They have to be in order to make it on their own, because self-seeders aren't deliberately planted by human hands but instead follow a life cycle of germination, growth, survival and seeding again with little-to-no help from me. For those of us "lazy gardeners," doesn't this sound ideal? But it also means you can't pull them out when they're still young and tiny, nor can you deadhead them, thus preventing them from producing seeds and regenerating for the next season. It takes a little different of a mind-set, but once you get the hang of it, and are able to distinguish weeds from seeds, you'll be in the zone.

Seed By Design



the sassy gardener

BY LEANN LOCHER

An area of our front garden is filled in among the plants with love-in-a-mist. This airy fringe-leaved plant has cornflower blue blossoms, followed by tiny balloon seed pods. I have never once planted it, but it showed up thanks to birds or a breeze who brought its seed from a neighboring garden. It seeds in rich soil between perennials such as dahlia, lavender and euphorbia, and along the front walk in areas I've struggled to get other plants to grow. Early in spring I see the sprouts everywhere, but once they reach about an inch, I am able to identify them for what they are—versus weeds I don't want. This is key to growing self-seeders: The big, blousy look of a self-seeded cottage garden can easily morph into a giant weed patch if you don't carefully pull the weeds from the seeds. It may take a few seasons, but keep an eye open to identify them and your comfort and confidence in encouraging self-seeders will grow right along with your poppies, upright verbena and love-in-a-mist.

A few things *not* to do when encouraging a self-seeded garden include heavy hoeing or soil turning in spring or the use of weed killer or seed germination preventer. Doing these things kills the weeds, but it also kills any seeds of the



plants you want to nurture. And no deadheading or seed pod removal toward the end of their life cycle. This seed production ensures they'll return to your garden in the coming year, so you'll need a little patience and tolerance in letting them set seed. Here's a hint, though: You can always shake the seeds of a favorite self-seeder in areas of the garden you'd like to encourage its growth in next season.

Self-seeding gardens are full of gifts. A visitor to my garden often leaves with a poppy seed pod in the fall or, if visiting in the spring, a box of freshly dug prolific self-seeders such as verbena. We are always rich with plants in the self-seeding garden and it's fun to share the wealth. In fact, it's most likely how the majority of self-seeders in our garden began, and seeing

them emerge every year is like visiting with the friends who gave them to me.

Self-seeding plants in a Portland area garden:

- Breadseed poppy *Papaver somniferum*
- Columbine *Aquilegia*
- Feverfew *Tanacetum parthenium*
- Forget-me-not *Myosotis*
- Foxglove *Digitalis*
- Honeywort *Cerintbe major purpurascens*
- Jupiter's Beard *Centranthus ruber*
- Love-in-a-mist *Nigella damascena*
- Nasturtium
- Upright verbena *Verbena bonariensis*
- Viola

Tales from Facebook:

I asked readers on the Sassy Gardener Facebook page what self-seeders they grew, and the response I didn't expect to get was tomatoes. A homegrown compost spread throughout the garden also spread tomato seeds—tomato plants everywhere! Thanks to Grace, Jacquelyn, Jean and Sylvia for sharing their love of self-seeding plants. You can join the conversation at facebook.com/sassygardener. ☪

LEANN LOCHER is an OSU Extension Master Gardener and grows all kinds of plants, including weeds, in her North Portland garden. She's really hoping this summer turns out some ripe tomatoes.

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