

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

Too much of a good thing

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Years ago, when my “partner in crime,” i.e., hubby and I bought 40 acres of land, previously owned by a shepherd, we both realized we had actually bought what appeared to be a large “golf course,” with too much grass. We started renovating, landscaping, reformulating or whatever you want to call it, moving and amending acres of dirt, grass and boulders. We then realized we could plant more than we ever dreamed about. We would be in “plant heaven.” But who would have thought that all those beautiful little darlings would take over our garden, invade every crack and cranny, jump from one end of the yard to the other and make us curse at their audacious invasiveness. At night we “hear” the pitter-patter of little seeds and roots, creeping from one bed to the other and even attempting to sneak into the house. Maybe all these little ladies (remember, flowers are “ladies” and trees and thorny bushes are “men”) intuitively know hubby and I are softies for flowers.

When one orders from the seed catalogues or buys a plant with a small tag for instructions, remember that plants cannot read nor do they rarely live up to their description, if they could or would read. I have NEVER seen a plant tag say, “Warning, very invasive. Only plant in a bomb shelter.”

The following is a short list of my former “new best friends.”

Alstroemeria, commonly called the Peruvian lily or Lily of the Incas, is a long-lived perennial originating in South America. Since the Peruvian lily is native to a warmer climate, one would expect its growing range to reflect its origins. In fact, most Southern California gardeners would never believe that my lovely ladies return in profusion spring after spring—never mind the recent snow, frost, freezing weather, too much water or not enough water. The beginning of my Peruvian lily adventure is unique. Twenty-five years ago, I could not buy, borrow or beg the plant or roots anywhere. I decided to contact the University of California’s Davis campus. I described my plight to the horticultural department. Whomever I spoke to either was amused by my perseverance or just wanted me to go away. He said he would send me “some” plants. Never was I told nor did I hear, “Careful, these are invasive spreaders.” Wow, excitement and joy coming via the US Postal Service!

Some weeks later a very small package arrived. I carefully opened the package. I was not sure if I were looking at an animal, mineral or vegetable. Alstroemeria roots look like very fleshy white fingers that have been residing under water for days. Most significantly, they are very fragile.

I had received just five of those fleshy, fragile, white “things,” so I planted all of them. By the end of summer, I had completely forgotten that I had planted anything, and nothing sprouted to refresh my memory. Next summer, short slender green leaves appeared, sparsely, near the original planting site. Cutting to the chase, by year four, “Alstroemeria Hill” was given a place of honor in the garden.

As I write, the beautiful yellow,

orange, white, peach or pink Alstroemerias, have smothered their own hill, are moving to the far side of another garden and also plotting to smother it, creeping through every crevice imaginable and remaining undaunted.

Are you familiar with the Lily of the Valley, *Convallaria majalis*? My first

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mistake with these gals was planting them. My second mistake was not realizing they are sometimes called an “invasive weed.” The third mistake was forgetting I had planted them. Originally, all I thought about was the small beauty of these small fragrant woodland flowers. After I planted them, I did not see them for several years. I am now sure that many of these roots, pips, bulbs, etc., that hide for years are related to Darth Vader, hiding and gathering strength.

My first and last planting of Lily of the Valley, about fifty little pips, was more than eighteen years ago. I have no idea what they were doing all that time but, about two years ago, far from the original planting site, up came a compact matt, choking every hosta, columbine, fern or hardy clematis in its path. I was clueless as to what I was looking at and furious that my beautiful garden had suddenly changed, without my permission. Then I spotted the small, fragrant, white bell-shaped flowers on top of thin stems.

How could this possibly happen? Well it did; so out came the shovel, a few friends and much elbow grease. I read that, with an abundance of water, Lily of the Valley spreads fast in the shade. Of course, I read this way after the fact, originally thinking about a sweet and romantic woodland addition. Ha!

So why did they debut eighteen years later? I am clueless and still on the hunt for rogue plants. Some plant guides suggest that you dig up the Lily of the Valley in the fall and separate and replant them in spring so you will have more plants. Another book suggests how charming these little dainties are planted in rock gardens. Ha, ha, ha to these suggestions. Don’t read

those books, they obviously have no ideas; better yet, plant lilies-of the valley in a large container and love them in privacy. Last suggestion, do you know some people you don’t particularly care for? Sneak over to their garden at night and help them with their landscaping.

The Anemone comes from the Greek word for “wind,” as some varieties of anemones are often called referred to as windflowers, not hideously and destructively invasive. Here, I am specifically referring to the beautiful Japanese Anemone, an invasive and pervasive beautiful graceful lady, (remember I said flowers are female) Her roaming is of a very occult nature, via long underground running and smothering roots, creeping through wherever she decide to roam. The only way I have been able to “have my cake and eat it, too” is to plant this exquisite, charming and stately fall flower in a large oak barrel. I have barrels of pink, white (my favorite), and deep carmine. Since these anemones are perennials and their foliage dies down in the winter, I have all



Photos clockwise from top left:
Alstroemeria
Anemone,
Forget-Me-Not
Columbine,
Lily Of The Valley

my barrels over-planted with early spring tulips, pansies, or any loose, ground cover.

If you decide to plant *Myosotis*, better known as “forget-me-nots,” and you will never forget, however hard you try, these early-to-late light blue charmers. Their ethereal daintiness and early spring color never fails to bring smiles of sheer “thank goodness spring is finally here.” They are like the robin redbreasts of the garden, harbingers of spring. Difference is, the robins go somewhere at some time and don’t bring every relative and friend they ever knew to stay in your garden forever and ever and ever . . .

The good news is the plants easily



Sioux Rogers—And the beet goes on.

can be removed by gently pulling up their shallow clumps. The bad news is there are millions of clumps. They are always on the move as they spread very easily by seeds. They are often referred to as biennials, flowers that live for only a couple of years or as perennials, flowers that live for several years. I cannot actually tell the difference since in twenty-two years, I have never had a spring ungraced by the delicate ethereal light blue, white or pale pink flowers.

Lastly, the beloved Columbine comes and goes as she pleases. Not only that, but she also “mates” with her first cousins, sisters, aunts and lordy, lordy, who knows what other relatives. The correct word for all this risqué behavior is called “cross-pollination.” Columbines, even the smallest, crawl into any crevices they can find, such as side walks, the side of a tall tree, or maybe even under my bed, but I am afraid to look there. They have very deep and hefty unpullable roots, making them impossible to simply remove, without disrupting your sidewalk, injuring the tree bark or seeing more dust balls than I want.

Although I have not mentioned all the flowers in my garden whom have expanded their welcome, I adore, even worship and could not do without, all of the “girls,” despite my gossiping and bemoaning. My flowers and my garden are my Zen. Like dear friends, who may sometimes irritate you and you wish they would go away, you miss them and pain when they are gone.

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