

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

What did your mom tell you?

BY SIOUX ROGERS

Of course we never listened to mom, especially when she said, "Do as I say, not as I do." What nonsense! Why did she do it in the first place? Okay, this is easy. I am not your mom, just an experimenting gardener with very dirty fingernails and cracked heels (ick) to boot. Never the less, this is a great time to listen to my past season's flaws and successes. Nothing in gardening is a failure, just an experiment.

Last "summer" started out very early, like in the middle of a snowstorm. You may have heard this story already, but just humor me. I had a call from the *Daily Courier* newspaper in Grants Pass. They had read my article about cup gardening. They wanted to come out and do a full story on this crazy idea. My friend came over and we planted these wee little plants in ten-inch plastic cups, bottoms cut out. The newspaper reporter came over, took his pictures and it started snowing. The next morning the garden was solid snow, like really solid—no cups, no plants, nobody was home. Moving right along into spring, then summer, wow, giant healthy plants. The cups had acted like mini greenhouses. Granted these cup crops were cold-weather crops, not tomatoes and yummy melons, but still, can't argue with success.

Now I forgot what the point was... Oh yes, experiment—make it up as you go along.

Experiments that did not work

Here is what did not work in my summer garden. I'll save the good stuff for last.

My gutter garden failed, in that only about one quarter was viable.

My squashes and melons planted in five-gallon containers behind the asparagus bed withered on the vine. Well, not the zucchini, but I still did not have enough to run to the neighbors and leave abandoned zucchinis on their back porch, or feed extras to the deer and chickens. Saga will be ongoing, but I think nasturtiums will win out, assuming I remember to water them once in awhile.

Tomatoes in our microclimate were their normal struggling, icky flavor and very sparse.

We also realized that the "new" very black cherry tomato looks beautiful but tastes awful, even after it ripens, which takes forever. Basically it tastes like a glass marble!

My other melons and squashes planted in big tires in full sun did nothing except struggle. I do believe that out of the five tires, I had one unidentifiable round "melon."

Experiments that did work

Here is what I did right and what I will repeat next year.

Instead of fussing with trellises for all the climbing things we plant, I simply made eight cylinders, about one foot tall and three feet around, from some field fencing wire I had salvaged. I hooked the cylinders together however I could. I planted on the outside bottom of the tall cylinder and vroom—up the climbers went, without any help from mom.

I planted a few themed wheelbarrows. First was a "lemonade" stand. The old wheelbarrow had lemon grass, lemon verbena, lemon geranium and stevia for sweetening. If I can beat the frost, I will unroot all of these plants and place them in pots because they are frost-tender. Next year I may do the same using a larger wheelbarrow and sinking the pots into it so that I

Planted in a concrete sewer pipe next to the house, this tomato plant is still putting out blossoms.



can easily lift them at the end of the season. I also did a "Mint Julep" cart. Mint needs to be contained, we all know that, so that is exactly what I did. I did a variety of mints. This is the second year in the same cart. They seem to hide in the cold but pop right up again in the spring, bigger and better.

Japanese eggplant right outside the kitchen door did great. I rotate every other year between eggplant and basil. Pretty boring, but it works.

I did more miniature lavender, parsley, sage, rosemary, and other edible herbs and flowers right outside the kitchen door again. In the same area I have horseradish in a large container. Even though I have some of the same plants elsewhere, it is wonderfully convenient and fun to just walk out the door and pick the seasonings for the feast of the night.

Experiments to try next year

Here is what I should have done or will do next year:

The gutter garden would have worked better if I'd had a deeper gutter to use.

Given that I don't and won't, I need to pay better attention to what is planted in them. I thought that miniature gourmet lettuce would be perfect. The roots are shallow and lettuce tolerates shade. The basil at the far end did great, but then I seem to have good luck with planting basil anywhere, so why waste the gutter plan. The lettuce probably needed much more water, like



Sioux Rogers—And the beet goes on.

twice a day in the hottest part of summer. On the other hand, that is way too much work, and we eat much more kale and chard than lettuce. What was I thinking? (Slap forehead.) Okay, no lettuce in the gutters, but maybe some radishes. Small ones though.

The other plan is strawberries—their runners can just trail over the sides so they will not replant and spread into my everywhere. And last, but not to be forgotten, are nasturtiums. I love to decorate salads with them, and the trailing varieties would be lovely backed up to the chicken coop. Saga of decisions will continue, but I have a hunch the nasturtiums will win. Remind me to water the gutter.

The squashes and vines, whether in five-gallon containers or tires, need full sun, more compost and regular watering. They were clearly neglected.

One tomato, planted in a concrete sewer pipe next to the house, is still green, ripening up the tomatoes and putting on more blossoms. Just thought I'd brag because I have no more concrete sewer pipes or room around the south side of the house. So next year we will plant tomatoes with our friends in their sunny, lower-elevation, well-fertilized plot.

So what did mom say...geez, I cannot remember. But I am telling you, there is no such thing as failure, unless you do not try.

Dirty fingernails and all

Sioux Rogers

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