

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

It's about thyme

BY SIOUX ROGERS

How many times have I likened my garden to real life, either allegorically or literally? We are now going into winter and I am wondering what to do with the mess I basically ignored all fall because I was on a “mission” to clean up and re-do the cluttered barn. This somehow reminds me of friends and how easy it is to ignore them because we have other “missions,” which may be okay sometimes, but not all the time.

Some of the plants in my garden are like my friends—they take me as I am and wait until I have time to weed out the “dead leaves” to catch up and go on from

there. Other plants demand a great deal of attention, needing to be dug up and tucked away safe and cozy for the winter. Guess what? I don't have those plants in my garden, requiring survival of the fittest. Sadly I cannot say that about some friendships in my life. I want to save most of them, keep them safe, protect and cover them nice and cozy. So with that part of my soul revealed, my real life is not exactly like my garden.

I have never really pined when a plant has died peacefully, but I have certainly felt very sad when a large tree or large vine has a *sudden* demise. And, if that tree or large vine crashes or falls down on some innocent young plant nearby, I take even more notice. You know, I sort of thought of them (the trees and vines) as old friends and was used to seeing them around. I guess that it's the same way with friendships. When the breaking of a friendship crashes and takes with it bits and pieces of my heart, I do grieve deeply.



Sioux Rogers and her then six-year-old son Weston, who is now 43 and still one of Sioux's best friends.

A garden can be admired all year long, just differently at different times. That is the same with friendships. Now, with winter approaching, what are some of the hidden garden pleasures you might behold? If you are lucky enough to have large red rose hips on some of your rose bushes, try clipping a few and arrange them with several wonderfully fragrant native evergreen branches.

As I look all around my garden, I marvel at the structure of the many beautiful bare woody plants; they are standing naked and upright with nothing to hide. To me, that represents an ideal friendship. Embrace those bare branches, cut off a few, stick them in a big vase; decorate with gummy bears, gummy worms or silver-wrapped candy kisses. Oh smooch and fancy that. Take the time to look at how full your garden is, not what isn't there. Look at all your friends the same way.

One of most beautiful sights in my winter garden is the ever peeling, curling, twisting and changing of color of the bark of oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*). While it is most likely too late to buy one from a nursery, it never hurts to try. Look around; call some of the local nurseries. I bought one locally a few years ago very late in the season. The nurseryman thought I was nuts to be so excited.

Life goes on. Sometimes plants that seem to be dormant actually are prepping for next spring. For example, the autumn sedum, which seems to have faded with the sunset, actually has wee new growth around the bottom. The rusty-brown sedum flower heads are certainly not

the hotsy-totsy bright pink of a few months ago, but are wonderful for cutting as a soft, quiet winter arrangement. And the day lilies with last season's long, trailing strappy leaves have new growth at the bottom.

If you still have tulip or daffodil bulbs in your refrigerator (the ones you meant to plant in the fall), plant them now. Believe it or not, it is not too late—they will re-set their clock and bloom when their alarm goes off.

Here are some other seasonal ideas: Cut a few green conifer branches growing everywhere, put them in a vase and hang grapes, tomatoes, mandarin oranges or whatever else is bright and cheery. Not to be overlooked in a fabulous holiday decoration is our own native state flower, the Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*). And add native fern fronds to store-bought flowers for a warm homey feeling.

Oh, and what about thyme? Great ground cover, grows almost anywhere and, since it grows in the winter, it is a wonderful aromatic herb for seasoning all those wonderful holiday savories.

For me, I believe life and friendship are like a garden. One needs to be creative whether it be with your garden or your friends. Take the time to enjoy the bareness and quiet of your winter garden and always have time for your friends.

Dirty fingernails and all
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Sioux Rogers

Garden Guide for the Rogue Valley—
a great holiday gift for gardeners

BY MARCUS SMITH

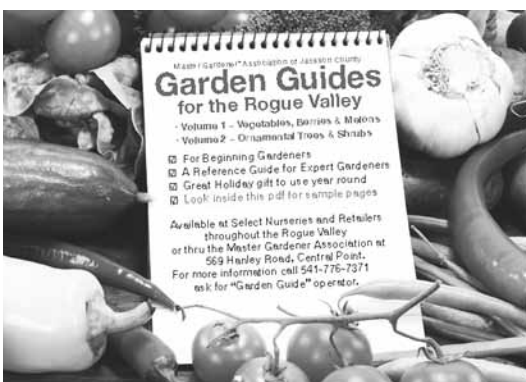
The two-volume *Garden Guide for the Rogue Valley*, written by local Master Gardeners and other gardening experts, is a gift guaranteed to delight all your gardening friends. In addition to factual, science-based information, the books offer helpful advice about local growing conditions, savvy insiders' tips, and priceless personal experience from people who have gardened here for years.

While most gardening books and websites appeal to national or regional audiences, these guides deal exclusively with the unique microclimates and growing conditions of southern Oregon. That's what makes these garden guides so unique and so valuable. Plus, all proceeds from the sale of these garden guides go to its publisher, the nonprofit Jackson County Master Gardeners Association.

Garden Guide for the Rogue Valley is available in two companion volumes:

- Volume 1, *Vegetables, Berries & Melons*, covers everything a southern Oregon gardener needs to know about these plants, including the best plant varieties and how to deal with our local weather, soil and water. A 12-month calendar shows the best time to take care of specific garden chores throughout the year. 250 pages. \$20.

- Volume 2, *Ornamental Trees & Shrubs*, offers useful information about planning, planting and maintaining beautiful, sustainable landscapes in Jackson



Buy the garden guides and help support the Jackson County Master Gardeners Association.

and Josephine Counties. It also includes specific plant varieties that thrive in our area. 250 pages. \$25.

These garden guides make great gifts for gardeners at any level—beginner to expert. (Don't forget to get one of each for yourself, too.) They're a resource that will be useful for many years.

Jackson County Master Gardeners Association is a nonprofit, educational organization that supports local gardeners through its plant clinic, spring fair, Winter Dreams symposium, demonstration gardens, and more. The books are available at many local garden centers and at the Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center, 569 Hanley Road, between Jacksonville and Central Point.

For details, call 541-776-7371. See sample pages at extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/gardening/publications.

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Applegate Food Pantry benefits
from Medford Food Project

BY ARLENE AND CLAUDE ARON

The Applegate Food Pantry benefits from our participation in the Medford Food Project, an amazing community venture that collects food to feed the hungry in Jackson County, then shares this food with participating food pantries for distribution. To find out more about it, visit medfordfoodproject.com.

We would like the Applegate Valley to participate more fully in this venture. The idea is that each time you shop, we would like you to think of those who go hungry in our own community and buy one can to donate to the Medford Food Project.

Because it's not practical to collect food bags door-to-door from our neighbors in rural areas like ours, the Applegate Food Pantry plans to work with community members to designate two or three places where you can drop your canvas bag of canned goods. Every two months, you will be able to drop your bag of food at one of the designated locations and pick up a new bag to start the process again.

Every two months, the Medford Food Project collects thousands of pounds of food that is distributed to the participating

Jackson County food pantries. Currently, over 100,000 pounds of food is being collected and distributed through this project every year.

The Applegate Food Pantry may be one of the smaller pantries in Jackson County, but our little pantry is growing—lately we have been signing up about 20 new people each month. These are your neighbors who, for one reason or another, are going through tough economic times. We hope you will consider helping out if you can afford to do so.

We are still working out the details for our participation in the Medford Food Project and will update you as we progress via flyers at the usual local hubs: Ruch Library, Applegate Library, Ruch Country Store, Applegate Store; and the *Applegater* Facebook page.

Finally, we'd like to send a big thank-you to all the generous folks who have donated money and food to keep the Applegate Pantry going and to our many volunteers who generously donate their time and energy.

Arlene and Claude Aron • 541-951-6707



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HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM THE GATER!