

WALTZING TOWARD THE EQUINOX
(NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITY GARDEN)
AUGUSTA BENEDICT

Feeble light meanders through furrows in the community garden. Under a deepening cerulian canopy shadows and plants slowly recede into the warmth of the evening's edges. Simmering tranquility is punctuated with the hesitant songs of night's arrival: The chitter of the raccoon near the compost bin, the chirr of a bat swooping briefly, the nick of a twig broken, the muting warble of a nightbird nesting. Today was clear and hot. Plucking upon the mandolin of memory, I try recalling the last time we danced in the garden to the fierce heat of Phoebus' tune. It's been awhile. Summer has burst forth after an interminable, thin and grey arpeggio of drizzle. Finally. Tonight's garden pulses with warmth and wildness.

Civilized activity, this gardening. But, in the shifting light and blurring boundaries of a summer's evening one can see the thinness in the veneer of imposed order. Within the garden space our politely planted rows commune with the unfettered abandon in the thickets of the Grove surrounding. The line is thin between carefully domesticated strawberries and their rambunctious wild cousins. Between them is the common genetic memory of wilderness. Outside the strictures of the garden's tidiness, wilderness bursts forth, beckoning in the twilight. And, left to their own, our well-mannered plantings will follow that beckoning. After a few generations the domestics will revert to a stronger, more self-reliant, coarser, more adaptable plant. Less refined, yes. Let a mound of potatoes go for a while. They do become less "pretty".

Of course, this can be a scary thing for the Calvinist mind. There is a strain of thought running through American intellectual history that equates wilderness with danger, evil and violence, an entity to be conquered, suppressed or brought to domestication. This constrictive view is well documented in Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind. Happily, the works of Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman sang articulate and uncompromising odes to the goodness of wilderness experience.

For me, the most articulate heir to Thoreau's Walden is Gary Snyder's recently published The Practice of the Wild. A gardener's toolshed is not complete without a well-thumbed copy of this book. These practical and eloquent essays are a tool to understanding gardening and Thoreau's declaration, "In wildness is the preservation of the world." If you've not read The Practice of the Wild yet, I would recommend taking it along while harvesting wild blackberries. Pick a cup of berries, find a sunny respite and dive into the cooling currents of Snyder's writing.

The first chapter, "The Etiquette of Freedom", is worth it just for the title itself. Freedom is not license and there is protocol in wildness. Snyder examines the etymologies of "nature", "wilderness" and "wildness" in this chapter and shows just how misunderstood those concepts are, in contemporary society.

Sitting here in the garden I do a goodly amount of weeding and civilizing of the wilderness tendencies in the pea patch. But then, just to be sure, there's always a sacramental, unruly overgrown area. All gardens should have a wild spot... and a volume of Gary Snyder.

If you would like to become a Community Garden member and begin growing your own vegetables, flowers, and herbs, the volunteer-operated garden welcomes new members. Regularly scheduled work parties are held at the garden each Sunday morning from 9am to 10 am. No experience, tools, or horticultural enlightenment are required. The garden's Sprout Queen, Leslie Sroufe, can be reached at 436-0738 for more information. The garden is located at the east end of Madison Street, in the Grove.



WILDLIFE ON THE EDGE

The CASPIAN TERN seems to be enjoying its resurgence in popularity. We often see it along the banks of the Clatskanie & Youngs Bay Rivers, hovering over a likely spot then diving for fish.

One of Spade's many roommates by the Club is a brown RIVER RAT who spikes the beautiful view and brings scraps and extras.

Morning Glories are considered by some one of the most beautiful (and some appearing flowers) They are also extremely potent, an effective form of torture, and the bane of gardeners & homeowners. The beautiful and fragrant flowers will wilt in minutes yet the vine is one of the most stubborn and fastest-growing species known to man.