

JUNE'S GARDEN

Hole in the porch floor
Can't decide whether to stay -
Then a bird sings near.

Nasturtiums come back
Hard to eradicate them
Might as well enjoy.

She made a garden
It became a way of life
Often, it lives her.

Anne Splane Phillips
c 1997

Anne's poem pertains to when I made my decision to stay at the coast in a house that had been used as a summer cottage. I did stay and renovate my cottage and eventually created a garden where before a few unattended patches of reseeding nasturtiums grew alongside a soggy yard. The grass could only be mowed in the dry summer months as in winter from the rains it had standing water where frogs made their home.

The bird's song that day came from a winter wren. I had become familiar with winter wrens when I had lived a short time on the edge of a spruce forest, which is their natural habitat. I had thought I would never see a winter wren in my yard in the more open area along the shoreline of the Pacific Ocean, where the spruce trees long ago grew down to the water's edge, but had been logged in the early 1900's to make room for homes for the early settlers.

So that day in November, 1980, hearing the high, clear notes and trills of the winter wren and spotting it busily hopping along my front fence was a welcoming omen portending the right place to make a home and create a garden. For 17 years, in November, a winter wren visits and gives me its present of a beautiful song.



When I first started this garden I'd been given the gift of a sack of potatoes from Audrey and Art Smith who had lived in this area for years. Audrey's remark about what she called Crazy Potatoes was "If you plant these you'll never starve." I took her sound advice and added a row of onions, thinking "I can always make clam chowder," since one of my other enjoyments is digging for razor clams. As it turned out, the potatoes became more plentiful than the clams, as they became harder to eradicate than the nasturtiums.

I've become an expert in making potato soup. The day I served my family my special recipe, I added nasturtium flowers and chopped parsley to float on top of each bowl. They crowned me Chef of the Day. I still hold that crown with my family of friendly competitors of both cooking and gardening.

The garden became known to others after pictures of it were published in a national garden magazine. The editor of that magazine had asked for people to write in and answer her question, "Why do you garden?" My answer was, "My garden has become my centering place," and I was chosen with five others, all from different locations across the U.S., to be interviewed and photographed.

Two years later another national gardening magazine published

the story of my garden, and last year my garden was chosen to be a part of a video for Public Broadcasting, called "Northwest Style of Gardening."

During the last several years gardeners from as far away as Australia, England, Japan and many parts of the U.S. have found their way to my small garden. These visitors have shared their garden stories, we've exchanged seeds and green thumb knowledge, and I've continued to correspond with many of them. The garden did become a way of life for me, we grew together.

Thank you, Billy for giving me space in your newspaper to share my interest in gardening with others. Some years ago when you and Spud lived next door to me, you know how much I enjoyed the music you and your friends practiced nightly, but I always meant to ask you about the oyster shells you added to your compost pile. Were you advised that the shells would add nutrients to the compost, or were they just meant to be a decorative touch? Should I be adding some to my compost pile?

I was sorry you moved before you made the garden you had talked about, but we did share a few over-the-fence gardening conversations.

It's been fun, Billy! Goodby to the old Upper Left Edge. Good luck and success to a new U.L.E. when your dreams come true of finding a business manager, leaving you time to continue to be a very creative editor.

I'd also like to thank the many others who have helped me write this column; my good friends Beverly Kerns and Nan Williams who both have edited and typed my scribbles for publication and encouraged me to continue; Anne Phillips and other poets who have used my garden for their inspirations; the most talented artist Sally Lackaff for her pen and ink illustrations; and you readers who sent gardening questions that kept the spark of interest to continue the column.

Those of you who already have a garden know what it is to create an environment of joy. Those of you who have just started a garden and have cupped your hands around the tender roots of a new plant, setting it in the soil, then been rewarded by watching its energy of growth, you've caught what's termed "garden fever" ... and those of you who may only be thinking maybe you might start a garden, plant just one plant by your door. Next year I guarantee you'll want to plant two more!




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