

JUNE'S GARDEN

DIRT and Then Some!

Many years ago, in the spring of 1981 when I first started this garden 175 feet from the Northwest Pacific coastline, my idea was to grow all varieties of blooming flowers, a few vegetables, herbs, and a row of raspberries. Little did I realize the problems that lay ahead. By the end of that first summer my garden was a disaster, other than nasturtiums which seemed to thrive no matter what the weather conditions were.

A windstorm in July blew down the trellis of sweet peas that had grown to almost 6 feet tall and had started to bloom. A rainstorm that summer turned some of my flower beds into swamps. The clay soil, even though I had added organic matter by fall turned back to hard packed clay. When I'd dug a deep hole to plant a shrub I found the water level was only about a foot under ground. Another windstorm in late August finished off the tall blooming plants, breaking their stems. I found them all lying on the ground and being eaten by slugs. The moles, however, were successful as they tunneled through wherever I had spaded and loosened the ground. I'd had experience of creating other gardens in different locations in Oregon, and also a successful garden on the rocky shores of an island in Washington, but I soon learned it took more than DIRT (stand corrected, SOIL) to have a garden so close to the Northwest Pacific coastline.

The next spring, placed in key positions to ward off the winds, I had picket-style fences built, some at various heights leaving about a one-inch gap between slats which helped filter the wind. The fences didn't stop the enormous amount of energy stored in the wind, but they did help to slow it down.

I had drainage pipe installed, covering the ditches with sand and rock. These graveled areas created paths that divided the garden in sections.

Leaving some lawn to remain and the graveled patches undisturbed, I built raised beds about an inch deep in the middle of the garden. I added organic matter to the soil I had delivered to fill the raised beds and have continued each year to add more compost, either my own or a commercial blend of compost and

fertilizer. The soil in these beds has become light and fluffy and all the plants healthy. These plants develop earlier, as the soil in these beds warms up sooner than ground-level flower beds.

Around the perimeter of the back yard I raised the soil level, adding new soil to firm the area. I planted some pine and a few deciduous trees and shrubs. The fences, trees and shrubs did help to protect the yard from the south and west winds.

Eventually my small utility room was full of garden tools, containers, bags of fertilizer, and all that is needed to maintain a garden. A garden shed was needed.

I had one built at the south end of my deck. The shed I now call my garden room, walls of the house, and a short fence that connected the house to the shed provided more protection from the winds for me to have a sunny area for chairs and a table and a place for containers to fill with annuals each spring. I later added another shed that connected to the garden room for ladders, wheelbarrows, and wood for the fireplace. Both sheds are built high off the ground. They do not have a cement foundation but instead are skirted. This allows good ventilation. The roofs are both covered with corrugated plastic which the warmth of sunlight filters through. It's amazing how warm the sheds stay, and the metal tools, if cleaned off properly, have little rust. From the garden and the deck, because of added wooden trim one isn't aware of the plastic roofs.

The front garden was unprotected from the direct winds coming from the west and north. A three-foot picket fence and a hedge of escallonia and two pine trees now help protect the small front garden and entrance. The hedge needs trimming twice a year. In the fall I leave the new growth to allow the hedge to grow taller to protect from winter storms. This helps protect the two rhododendrons, a Forest Flame leafed pieris, and a variety of spring-blooming bulbs I've planted.

The conditions of coastal weather have designed my garden and have taught me more than patience, mostly not to be discouraged. There are rewards: a summer bouquet of sweet-scented sweet peas, an artichoke or two for dinner, quarts of raspberries to make into jam, always mixes of bright-

colored nasturtiums to collect seeds for the gardeners in the Valley as they claim the colors here are so much more vibrant than theirs.

I do have to live with the mistakes I've made: a pine tree that needs yearly pruning because I planted it too close to the house, a Skimmia plant whose leaves turn yellow from too much afternoon sun (Skimmia is a shade-loving plant), and a rhododendron 'Bell Heller,' large white blooms with yellow centers, which tends to grow tall and leggy and would cover the entrance to my front porch if I didn't prune out about a third of it each year.

It does take more "soil and then some" to have a successful garden. Gardeners love to share their acquired experience, and if you're in doubt either visit other gardens in similar locations as your own, or when shopping at the local nurseries ask questions. Most employees at the nurseries have had years of experience.

Continued next month: more about combining plants with different colors, forms, and textures.



Manzanita, Oregon

It's stopped raining finally, from the windblown slant earlier to a vertical drizzle, and now nothing but random drips... the phone wires, corners of the roof.

Being here, watching out the window clears my mind when all around me remains sturdy, silent, blowing, resisting, then resting, dripping. Nature reminds me of her resilience.

The houses are all gray and blue, unpainted, some of them, crude and natural, weathered, wearing the face of the sea, gruff, hearty.

Conifers display their deep greens tall against a chalk-white sky. Cars rarely pass. An occasional bird. The ocean is a constant force near enough to be heard rolling in, loud against the quiet. Rhythmic force.

The natural world calms me, even its storms. Uncomplaining, unapologetic, shouldering the rain, allowing the wind its will. Trees maintain their foothold, solid keepers of time, resolved.

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A free society is one where it is safe to be unpopular.
Adlai Stevenson

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When the flag is unfurled,
all reason is in the trumpet.
~ Ukrainian Proverb

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Walter Lippman

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