

Jonesin' for Dirt

The earth is sooooo soft right now.

My wife says I'm addicted to gardening, but that makes it sound like a bad thing. True, even now with winter raging, I'm out there every chance I get. Big deal. It doesn't mean I'm addicted. I can stop any time.

Take last spring. I'd been on a binge from dawn till dusk. "It's freezing!" my darling bride called through the back door, "Come clean up for dinner."

I stripped out of my grubby overalls and pulled on a pair of sweats.

"You're so busy gardening," Wifey complained across the dinner table, "you don't leave any time to love, honor, and cherish."

She was right. I'd taken vows. No point mentioning the pay-off in homegrown tomatoes and cukes come summer. I offered a contrite shrug and passed her the bread.

"You're always out there with your hind end in the air," Wifey continued, apparently not satisfied with that view.

"I'll cut back. I swear."

"Promises, promises," she said, a forkful of salad hovering. "I'll bet you can't stay out of the garden for a week."

I'm a sucker for a dare, and she knows it. "You've got a deal." Hell, I could go cold turkey, if I had to. Seven days? Piece of cake.

I got some inadvertent help when a rip-roaring rainstorm deluged our Northwest valley all that next week. Finally, the Sunday sun rose to clear skies. I woke up aware I hadn't set foot in my garden since the past weekend. I ached to get out there.

But I'd promised my wife a lazy day together, breakfast, the Sunday crossword. NO GARDENING. I only had to hold out one more day. My hands twitched.

Morning light streamed through the blinds. My next of kin snored softly beside me. The garden monkey on my back wouldn't let me rest. I needed a fix. I reached under the mattress for my seed catalog. Nothing. Where was my stash?

"I recycled it," Sweetie muttered. She tugged the comforter up to her neck and rolled over. The things she'll do to try to keep me clean.

Her even breathing resumed. No way I'd fall back to sleep now. I could at least survey the garden from our window. No harm in looking. I tossed on my sweats and slid into my fleecy slippers.

What would it hurt to open the door? Somebody had to bring in the paper. I flipped the deadbolt, turned the doorknob, and let in a gust of spring air. Yes, I did inhale. It's not like I was breaking my promise – I was only breathing.

Weeds had sprung up since my last outing. No crime in pulling a few. I had to get the paper anyway. That's efficiency, not gardening.

I stepped gingerly into the flower bed. A clump of crabgrass pulled easily from the damp ground, releasing rich, earthy perfume. Sweet, dark earth. I huffed the aromatic garden humus. Savored the rush.

A dandelion flaunted itself. I crouched, wrapped my fingers around the dark green rosette and tugged, expecting the usual disappointing snap. Instead, the entire long taproot slipped from the moist soil intact. What luck. What a high! Might as well polish off this one corner, my slippers were muddy anyhow.

When our tea kettle's whistle pierced the morning quiet I was down on all fours picking chickweed from between the daylilies. How long had Wifey have been up? She was sound asleep when I came out here a minute ago. I tossed one last weed onto what was now a good-sized pile, wiped my hands on the wet lawn and trotted up the steps, the Sunday paper under my arm.

"Where were you?" my spouse called from the kitchen.

"Nowhere," I sang, and kicked my soggy slippers under the couch. "Just went to get the paper."

Award-winning writer Sally Sheklow manages her habit in Eugene. Kudos and kvetches welcome at sally@wymprov.com



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Notice to Parents!



Learn about Eugene 4J schools. Start by visiting your neighborhood school. With the district's open enrollment policy, parents may opt to send their children to any school within the district, provided that there is space available. All schools in the district focus on nurturing the success of each child.

You can enroll in your neighborhood school at any time. To enroll in another district school, the open enrollment period is from NOW until March 3 for the 2006-07 school year. The 4J Schools Guide – available at any school, at the 4J Education Center or at www.4j.lane.edu – offers an overview of each school.

Schools throughout the district will be open for visits:

Mon. Jan. 23 - Thurs. Jan. 27 and
Mon. Feb. 13 - Fri. Feb. 17

Please phone ahead or visit www.4j.lane.edu, as each school offers different activities and times when parents can visit.

School's open – and you're welcome to visit.



More information is available at

Eugene School District 4J
200 N. Monroe Street Eugene, Oregon 97402
687.3481 TDD: 687.3447 www.4j.lane.edu

Districtwide Information Meetings

Meetings at the 4J Education Center, 200 N. Monroe, will provide general information about the school application and enrollment process. Spanish translation will be provided at each meeting.

Thurs. Jan. 19: 7 – 8 pm
Sat. Jan. 21: 9 – 10 am
Sat. Feb. 11: 9 – 10 am

The Application Process

To enroll your child in a school other than your neighborhood school, follow this process:

- Pick up an application at any school, at the 4J Education Center, 200 N. Monroe, or at www.4j.lane.edu.
- Return the application no later than March 3 to the 4J Education Center.

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