



Wilson's Nursery



Connie's Corner

Rain-Day Ruminations

by Connie Kratzke

Hello Everyone! Obviously, it's been a while. As every spring goes, this one presented a plethora of challenges. Some were expected and others, not so much. I found myself reacting to stimuli rather than executing well-laid plans. Every search for inspiration was futile. A steady stream of job security contributed to my creative fugue.

In the past, I have gotten my head back together at the gym or on the trail. I've had to take a little break from those repetitive motions. Going full bore all the time has its drawbacks and for me, they've materialized in my feet and knees. The bright side of that depressing little revelation is spending more time in my gardens. Who knew the relief I needed was just outside the door?

*Last year, in my "Running in the Shadows" issue, I talked about underplanting large trees. I am happy to say that phase one of that project went off without a hitch. Nine *Carex roseas* and nine *Waldsteinia ternatas* survived their first winter with no snow cover! That's pretty impressive, considering that they live in a sun-less desert. Recently, I added more of both survivors. In addition, I planted *Carex pensylvanicas*, 'Autumn*

Glow' Toad Lilies (*Tricyrtis*), 'Praying Hands' Hostas and Sweet Woodruffs (*Galium odoratum*). A P.J.M. trauma victim is also recovering in the peace of this dark space. So far, everything is looking really good. Consistent rain has certainly helped. The Toad Lilies may seem like an obscure choice, but I have found them super tough. The only other one I have has survived competition with gigantic Eupatoriums for numerous years.

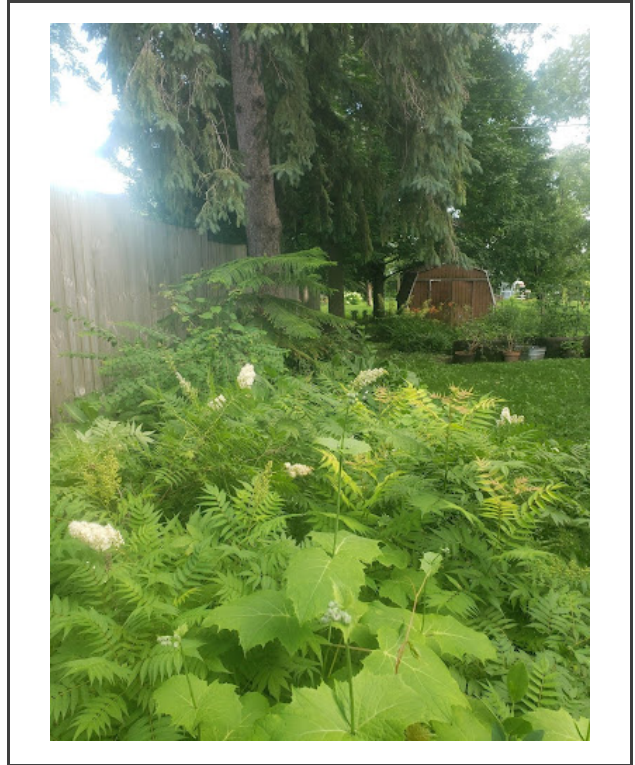
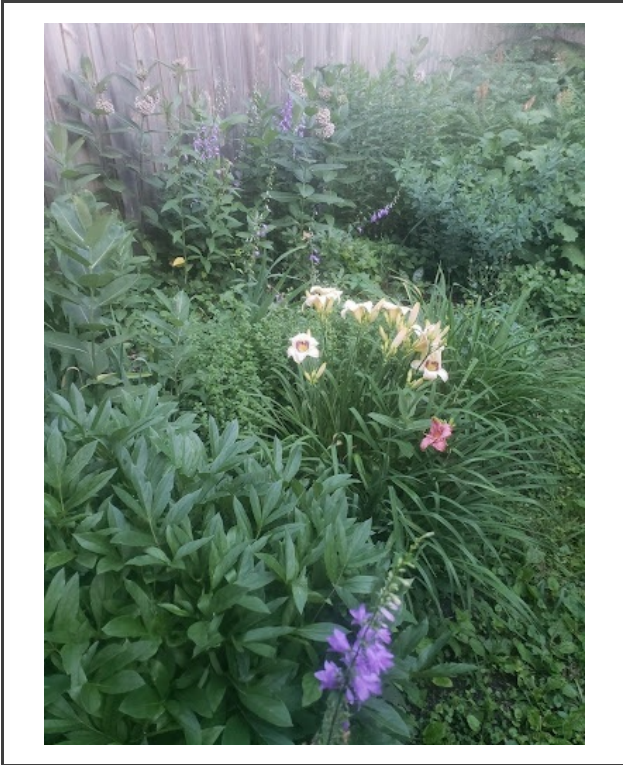
My goal beneath our large trees is to mitigate mud. Grass simply does not want to live there. Every now and again I will pessimistically attempt seeding. Perhaps, my projected negativity is the real issue; but I don't think so. One of these futile experiments is underway in our front yard as we speak. Inspired by better than expected results of construction-related boulevard restoration, I have attempted to seed the mud flats of our front yard again. We'll see. Chick Weeds and Wild Violets seem to thrive and I'm not going to fight that. I am shooting for a woodland floor look, where the ground is carpeted in soothing green. I weed out Dandelions and Lamb's Quarters, but attractive trespassers are welcome. Perhaps they will find solace in the same place I do. *Vinca minors* perform acceptably several feet from the trunks of our frontyard trees, but less successfully beneath. *Carex pensylvanica*s survive, but won't thrive. I know I am not the only one living in the shadows, so I am grateful for the learning opportunities they provide.

In our partially shaded border areas, there are plenty of Creeping Bellflowers, Large-Leaved Asters and European Milkweeds. I keep those who cooperate and evict the rebels. In our eastern perimeter 'Sem' Sorbaria, Red Snowberry and 'Arctic Sun' Dogwood have amalgamated into a nice hedge. A variety of perennials with a Monet-inspired color pallet grow amongst them. Some of my favorites are 'Twilight Prairie Blues' Baptisia, *Kirengeshoma palmata*, 'Sweet Sandia' Coneflower and 'Hewitt's Double' *Thalictrum*. Peonies, *Calaminthas* and Daylilies form the perennial foundation. Prairie Smoke Geums occupy a small region. Asters, Cranesbills, Irises and Columbines are tucked into the gaps. *Pulmonarias* have self-sown here and there. There are also a few 'Prince Charming' *Polygonatum*s. Mints mingle throughout. While this may sound chaotic, the effect is serene. This year I've extended the border to the south where some inherited tulips dwell. Hostas are my staple fillers, but I've recently added some 'Chartreuse on the Loose' *Nepetas* and 'SunSparkler® Firecracker' Sedums. Their color is fading a bit, but vigor has not been hampered by the shade of our 65-foot Spruce and its Black Ash buddy.

In just about every garden on our property are plants that came with the house and others that just keep showing up. I am not a chaotic gardener. Finding balance between my vision and reality was stressful at first. During our first years of residency, I pulled my hair out in fits of O.C.D.-induced panic on a regular basis. Mid-summer would hit and my period of toiling would begin, induced by the subconscious influence of European ancestors. Failing repeatedly to get my horticultural "ducks" in a row, I was forced to adopt a different philosophy. These days, I simply ask myself, "does it look nice?" "Am I enjoying it?" We mustn't let unrealistic expectations reduce our enjoyment or diminish our peace. Landscapes evolve if we let them, often surpassing our visions of perfection.

I was inspired to write this edition by our friends at Tonkadale, who shared videos of their home gardens. They shared successes and challenges; completed projects and future goals. What resonated was their passion for plants. That's why the vast majority of us get into this crazy field and undoubtedly, why we stay in it. Goodness knows it's not because we crave insane fluctuations in temperature or long hours of physical exertion. Nor are we inspired by futile battles with minute, six-legged foes. Powdery films of "what the hell do we do about this" appear right when other pressures are lightening.

Customers email pictures of green plants asking why they died. These struggles aren't what drive us, the serenity we create does. When searching for peace amidst the battle, don't forget to check behind those bushes you planted.



****All of the above pictures depict the balance between the purpose and the random. If you are a Stephen King fan, you may appreciate this reference.***

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