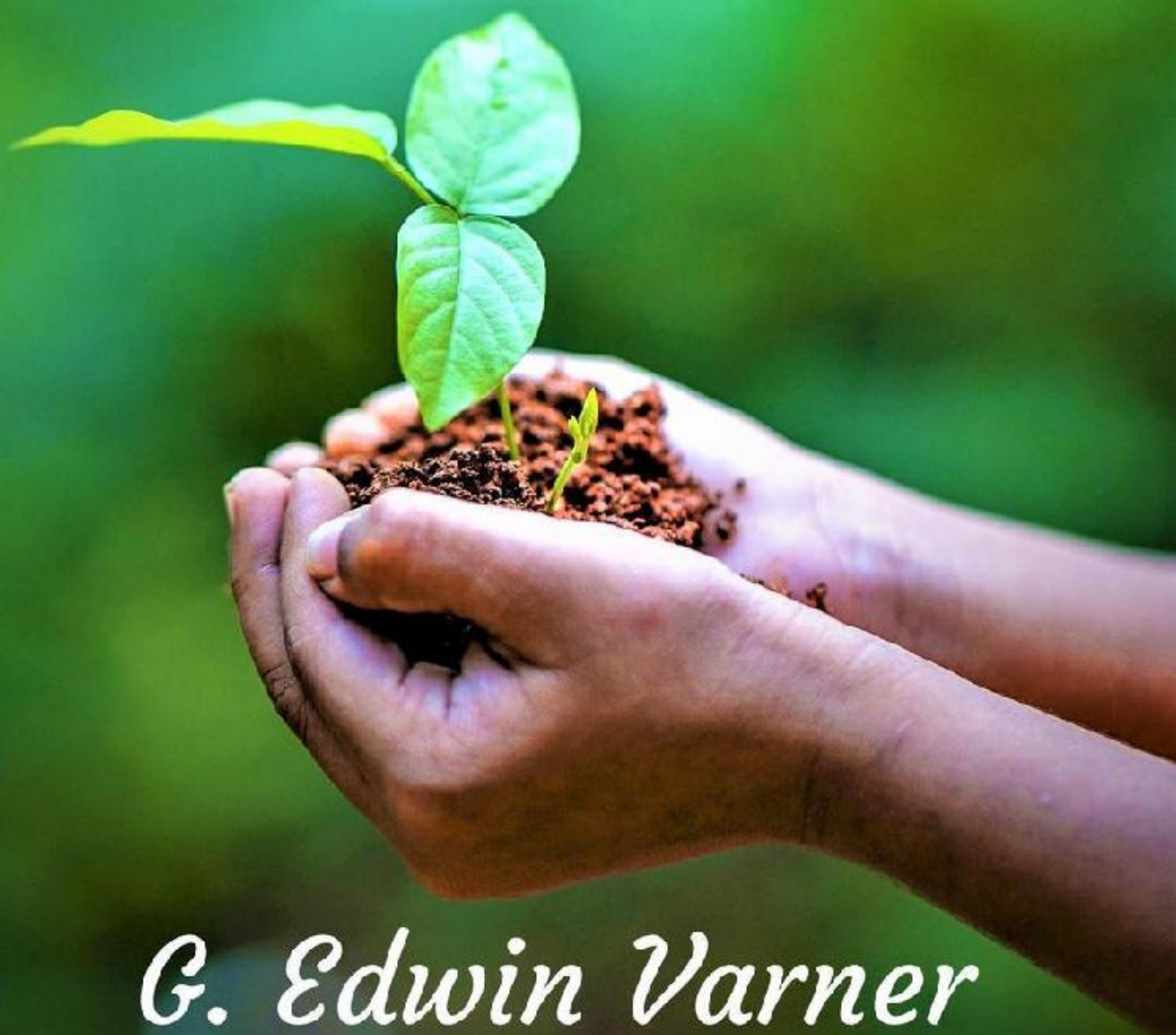


Beginning Gardening Rulebook



G. Edwin Varner

Beginning Gardening Rulebook

G. Edwin Varner

Published in 2021.

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the author assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

BEGINNING GARDENING RULEBOOK

First edition. August 17, 2021.

Copyright © 2021 G. Edwin Varner.

Written by G. Edwin Varner.

For my dear sister:

“There is no better friend than a sister. And there is no better sister than you.” — Anonymous —

I couldn't have stated this any better.

Preface

This entertaining ebook is for beginning gardeners. It lists comical rules and advice (presented as essays) about first-time flower and vegetable gardening.

Think of gardening as a game aiming to grow plenty of gorgeous flowers and abundant produce without experiencing too many pitfalls and frustrations. Presented in this publication are 25 rules or laws all new gardeners may experience when growing plants. Consider them as unusual advice on what to expect or avoid when becoming more involved in gardening.

This publication differs from my other flower gardening ebooks, for these rules apply to actual situations (some embarrassingly so) in my life of gardening. All the people mentioned are real.

Regardless of whether you own acres of land or a few potted plants on a patio or deck, gardening should always bring a smile to your face. I hope reading this short “rulebook” has the same response.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

Sir Isaac Newton calculated his Laws of Motion. There is also the Law of Gravitation (which we always try to obey most of the time using our feet), Laws of Thermodynamics, and a few more mind-numbing physics laws we desperately tried to avoid studying in high school. You may not realize it, but home gardeners also have a few laws or rules.

Gardening is a process of actions and results, otherwise referred to as cause and effect. It is a game played with tools and mental strategy. Think of it as botanical chess. Your opponent is Mother Nature — or your competitive know-it-all gardening neighbor — to produce abundant vegetables or pretty flowers. For most people, this game is always challenging and, especially important of all, enjoyable.

René Descartes, the famous 17th-century French philosopher, declared, *“I think; therefore, I am.”* To vandalize his words, let’s substitute it as *“I garden; therefore, I am a gardener.”* So, here goes nothing—or something—in describing a consortium of weird, unusual, and, hopefully, humorous rules (arranged as haphazard essays) which all gardeners may experience. There are other rules not listed, but you will definitely make up a few yourself. It’s all about learning to become a lifetime gardener.

Depending on where you live and your lifestyle, some rules may not apply to you — at least not now. However limited, once you begin to garden, be prepared to advance to higher levels of experience and complexity. Is there an “end-game” when you lose interest in gardening? Let’s hope not. Enjoy playing and planting!

Rule # 1: Get Your Hands Dirty



CC0 Photo courtesy of PixHere.com

Getting your hands and clothes dirty is the ultimate rule to practice any form of gardening. Alright, you can cheat and wear colorful, stylish gloves if you wish, but there is nothing like feeling the rich earth cupped in your hands and between your outstretched fingers.

Gardening and soil go hand in hand with each other. Your hands dig the holes with which you insert a seed or plant into the ground. It's that word "ground" that establishes the whole context of the act of gardening. Think of gardening as a path of least resistance to dissipate the static buildup of daily stress and frustrations. Your mood may be stormy, but planting a bed of flowers will always calm you.

Soil is an obscure medium. It can be topsoil from a section of land or a bagged potting mixture based on sphagnum moss. It is your choice on how you garden — open areas of land or in containers for growing your vegetables and flowers. But no matter how you do it, your hands will get delightfully dirty while your pride shines.

The soil is the foundation of anything you plant and the results you expect later. It may be the beautiful flowers or the sweet acidity of the first ripe tomato in summer. Sowing seeds or inserting potted plants in this dirt and watching them grow into food and floral beauty is a cathartic experience.

The growth of garden plants depends on your willingness to work. Your labor later produces plentiful vegetables, fruit, gorgeous flowers, and the self-satisfaction of performing a well-done job.

There is a constant learning process when working in a garden. You learn about the plants, their growing conditions, and how gardening affects you. Who knew getting your hands dirty can be the beginning of a lifelong enjoyable pastime?

But wait. Gardening has limits or stopgaps in being enjoyable. We have to endure various procedures and problems that may develop from time to time. Sticking our hands in the rich earth is easy; winning the game with abundant flowers and vegetables takes some effort.

Let's advance in understanding more rules on how to play this delightful but potentially frustrating game.

Rule # 2: Learn to Identify and Avoid Poison Ivy



As you are digging your hands into the soil, it will be prudent to advise you that an occasional earthworm or beetle grub becomes unearthed. Now, don't be squeamish, for they live there and are harmless. They are part of a healthy soil ecosystem. What you need to be alert for is one particular weed.

Take a good look at the ebook cover photo. Goodness' sake, that sure looks like a healthy Poison Ivy plant (*Toxicodendron radicans*) cupped in someone's hands. Fortunately, that is not my hands, but there have been times, especially from weeding, that my fingers have absentmindedly grabbed those shiny, deep green leaflets.

There is a wise saying that states, “leaflets three, leave it be.” I suppose other well-advised sayings apply to gardeners, but this one has to be the ultimate advice and observation.

There is a theory that global warming is increasing the spread and abundance of this plant via increased levels of carbon dioxide. No matter where I pluck, chop, and spray weeds, this vine is always present. Mature woody female vines can produce millions of seeds during the summer, and it appears they will all germinate in my gardens. Birds apparently are the leading dispersal agent for these greenish-brown seeds.

You need to learn to identify this tenacious climber to prevent experiencing a severe skin reaction to the oil released from the entire plant. Even burning wood having dormant or dead vines attached to it will release smoke containing oil droplets. To provide you with a summation of the effects of having a poison ivy experience, I will include here a poem I composed and submitted in another ebook of mine (a shameful plug for *Petal Poems: Garden Seasons*) entitled, what else, “**Poison Ivy**”:

*Poison Ivy came in contact with me,
Or was it I who found Ivy so we can agree?
I overlooked her or did not plainly see
That dear Ivy was climbing up a tree.
No matter – for the results are the same,
Poison Ivy is notorious for ways to maim.
And I have only myself to blame
As my skin has begun to inflame.
Ivy’s leaf oil quickly did spread
From hands to the top of my head,
And it is appropriate to be sadly said,*

*I have blisters that seep and are red.
The itching and scratching will not cease.
It seems it won't ease but increase,
Never allowing me one moment's peace,
Oh, how I wish for a comfortable release!
The doctor prescribed calamine lotion
Equal to the volume of a small ocean.
The idea is a half decent notion,
Apply to my skin this soothing potion.
It took a while for my comfort to begin,
Battles against Ivy I am about to win.
No more blisters from fingers to chin,
I no longer need to scratch my skin.
I am now leery of leaflets of three,
Don't handle wood until I certainly see
That if any is around – leave it be,
So that Poison Ivy never gets back on to me.*

Rule # 3: Attend Home and Garden Shows



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Before plunging your hands in garden soil, you need to establish a “game plan” for the upcoming growing season. During the late winter months, long after the party-hearty holidays, the doldrums settle in. For established gardeners, boredom arrives and settles down for a lengthy stay. There is nothing to do outside but shovel snow from the sidewalk and develop a backache. Thoughts of planting flowers and vegetables are months away, but that does not stop imaginations and daydreams from taking root. Fortunately, the well-anticipated arrival of large, region-wide “home shows” is open to the public.

One of the first public extravaganzas is the Boat Show. Here, you can materialize your fantasy of owning a yacht or a small fishing boat. With most budgets, many people would be lucky to own an inflatable raft.

What interests me about this show is wondering how they haul these large boats and park (well, in this case, dock) them in a building. In comparison, I still have white-knuckle experiences parallel parking my compact car.

Another venue is the Car Show, which makes sense because you need to haul it around to show it off to your neighbors after purchasing a yacht. A compact car will not have the fortitude to do this, so you need to buy an equal yacht-sized pickup truck having a 32-cylinder engine. The gas mileage may vary from one inch to one foot per gallon of fuel.

Another popular public venue is the Home and Garden Show. Several communities highlight these types of shows, but most emphasize more of the home than the garden. Several shows are in an arena or auditorium showcasing many home development products. They may have a small folding table of potted Primrose (*Primula*) plants for sale. I guess doorknobs and bathroom tiles scream "*it's spring!*" more so than colorful primroses or, if we're fortunate, a pot of miniature daffodils.

Sorry, I may be too critical of these shows; some venues go all-out to sell small bags of potting soil, mulch, and fertilizer. Now, that's exciting — or not.

In all fairness, the more prominent shows offer outstanding garden displays of various blooming flowers, landscaping ideas, garden tools, and racks and racks of flower and vegetable seeds. Never mind the big boats and cars for a true gardener's heart palpitates when seeing a vista of seed packets all in one place and not having to turn page after page of a catalog—more on that in the following rule.

On a trip to a major Home and Garden show on a cold late winter day, I stayed near the gardening area, specifically the huge seed racks, instead of comparing roof shingle colors and watching grouting demonstrations. I usually end up purchasing way-to-many seed

packets. Later, nestled in a cocoon-like comforter with a life-enhancing mug of hot chocolate in hand, I look at my treasure of seeds. This is what I call a proper home and garden show! I'm at home, and visions of coming colorful attractions play in my mind. They involve an entertaining display of colorful flowers and ripe red tomatoes. Being a gardener-in-training, you will eventually experience this late winter daydream.

If you cannot attend a home and garden extravaganza, there is another method to entertain you during the doldrums of winter days. Instead of traveling to see an abundance of gardening products, allow them to come to you via the postal service or online websites. But beware, for looks can deceive, and temptations become overwhelming.

Rule # 4: Read Garden Catalogs



Long before spring planting arrives, gardeners become alive with sizzling anticipation for each day's mail delivery. *WHAT?* Yes, waiting for the mail.

Each mail delivery becomes an exciting event. I am not talking about the electrifying arrival of the income tax forms but the deluge of gardening catalogs. Seeds, plants, shrubs, trees, outdoor decorations, you name it—there they are within those pages of bounded paper tucked inside the mailbox.

You may have once heard or read that garden catalogs are the best science fiction publications ever written. Other critics refer to these catalogs as botanical pornography.

Postal people may think the maddening holiday mailings are over, but they forget about the garden catalogs. Obsessive gardeners are to blame for contributing to the difficulty of some poor mail carrier's weighted mailbag. Mail carriers have the potential to end up in the hospital with a hernia carrying all those publications. Untold numbers of them from various nurseries eventually arrive to most gardeners.

Home gardeners usually pounce upon the mail like a hungry lion to a gazelle, shuffling through the contents, looking for a long-awaited catalog or seed package. They would then either proclaim, "*YES! It's here!*" or, with an ever-expanding frown, mutter something like "*... the post office must have lost it.*"

Nurseries fill most catalogs with many exciting temptations to sow, plant, and reap with eyes, mouth, and nose. The flower, fruit, and vegetable descriptions, along with their photos, are alluring but deceptive. Oh, these catalogs are like the Sirens, those melodic voiced ladies whose songs lured sailors and their ships to their demise. Those catalog pages are so colorful, well-written (unlike this publication), and tempting that you wish to withdraw your bank savings and spend a-plenty without worry.

Who can resist adjectives such as luscious, mouth-watering, sweetly perfumed, and eye-catching? If you view these catalogs during the winter, you may shed tears for not having those tempting posies and fruit thriving right now in the garden. So, you order those elusive seeds and plants.

When they bloom or are ripe, you discover something is horribly wrong. Those luscious fruits are small and bland tasting and what looked like large, mega-colorful blossoms in the catalog are small and pastel. Hey, what gives? Are seed companies misleading and cheating the public? No, well, maybe... but the game's name is to describe something in its best light and hope the public purchases it. And we do.

We are all susceptible to these flights of fancy and stretching (really stretching) the truth claims. You have to admit, many of these publications are highly addictive and are the "drug of choice" for many

gardening junkies. We can't wait until they mail the next colorful catalog to us. The temptation to purchase those rare, sky-blue Zinnias can be overwhelming.

Some critics would say that we gardeners need professional psychological help with the compulsive ordering of seeds and plants. Maybe so, but we all feel so relieved and complacent knowing that, by spring planting, the long wait was well worth the anxiety and worry.

But that anxiety does not always stay at home. It can occur at other locations, such as extensive visits to large nurseries or garden centers. Now you will have to experience an even more complicated rule.

Rule # 5: Choose Which Plants to Grow



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

If ordering seeds and plants via a catalog or online is confusing, wait until you enter a nursery or garden center. Here, choosing “the right plants” is even more complicated. Your brain becomes confused and will make you “freeze” in place. You’ll stand before tables of various plant varieties, sizes, and prices. Your mind repeats over and over, *“OMG. What should I buy? I can’t decide!... I can’t decide!”*

Your blood pressure will rise when comparing tomato and pepper varieties. Talking to established gardeners reveals everyone has a favorite tomato variety that is “the best” and the “most flavorful.” Astronomers say there are more stars in the universe than all the grains

of sand found on all the world's beaches. Well, tomato varieties may have the stars beat.

My advice to you is this — “By late summer, we are all sick of eating red tomatoes, yellow tomatoes, bizarre-color tomatoes, beefsteak tomatoes, Roma tomatoes, low-acid tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, and whatever else tomatoes. They all taste the same.” Grow what you plan to do with them. Do you want a big slicing tomato or small ones for adding to salads? Choose the Roma types for making sauce or salsa. Go with what appeals to your longest-lasting desires.

Peppers, though, have an advantage over tomatoes in having enhanced flavors. Breeders have yet to develop hot or spicy tomatoes. There is also a galaxy of named varieties, but most dwell in the intensity of hotness, shapes, and color. A selection of peppers includes sweet bells, bananas, hot jalapeño, plus various heated-types ranging from mild to “hotter-than-hell” varieties.

There are limited colors of peppers—usually green, yellow, red, or orange types available to choose from. Please don't make a greenhorn gardener mistake of not knowing that all peppers develop green and later change color when fully ripe. High-and-mighty gardeners (aka Master Gardeners) will chastise you into unconsciousness over that botanical blunder.

Before entering a nursery, do your homework before buying an expensive number of plants. The internet overflows with information about flower gardening. Here, you can get specific information about the best plants hardy for your location. Not to be outdone, a trip to your local library is also a good bet for hands-on facts and ideas.

Your priority as a budding gardener is to establish your flower garden location. No, this is not using GPS via your smartphone but using your eyes in determining how much sun will shine on the bed or border. Sorry to say, but new gardeners insist on planting sun-loving plants in the deepest shade and shade-loving plants in Sahara Desert-bright sunshine.

There is another tendency to plant your flowers in all-the-wrong soil conditions, and growing zones without reading the plant identification labels. Another scenario is overdosing the plants with fertilizer or drenching them with a swimming pool quantity of water. You need to learn which plants can grow together in similar types of growing conditions.

Now that I scared you into never attempting to establish a garden don't panic. All you have to do is take the time to learn.

Rule # 6: Begin with Easy-To-Grow Flowers



Everyone wants to create dazzlingly beautiful flowers for their home. The problem is, who has the time to sow, plant, and care for all those many flowering plants available for a home gardener? Hey, can't you afford to hire grizzled old English gardeners plodding around with wheelbarrows, wearing oversized Wellington boots? Yeah, I can't afford one either. Well, what can we do?

As a beginning home gardener, the solution is not expensive or overly complicated. The plan is to grow certain low-maintenance perennials, annuals, and bulbs that, once planted, will grow well with less work and care from you.

Your busy life should not keep you from enjoying the beauty and relaxing contentment of flowers. There are many flowers you can grow without too much of your help. I want to say, “plant them, water them and forget about them,” but that is not truthful. Spend time and a little work in making sure they are growing well. By giving them a proper place to live and grow, along with the occasional watering and upkeep, they will reward you with beauty, but also with pride in doing something incredible.

Low-maintenance and easy-care are probably the most reassuring and goal-seeking qualities for a happy life in gardening, but it is not a “plant and forget about” activity. There is a problem with time — many people do not have the luxury of spending hours caring for the plants during the week. Spend a few minutes each weekend to admire the flowers, double-check to water them if the soil is dry, and cut off spent blooms.

Many books and catalogs will instruct you which flowers establish quick and gorgeous blooms from spring until fall. Many plants are surprisingly low-care, but you have to learn which ones to consider growing in your garden.

Don't grow flowers to impress other people. Sorry, but most people will not care. They will say the flowers are pretty but will not dwell on them. Instead, grow the flowers that impress you. They are your vision of loveliness. Grow what you will enjoy.

Please, don't be a perfectionist. Many gorgeous flowers do not have to be the latest and greatest varieties hyped about in catalogs and gardening magazines. It's all about advertising. For superior blooming, hybrid varieties are best to grow for they exhibit better disease and insect resistance.

Always remember, a good-looking garden makes any new gardener look like a professional. If all is well, then sit in your comfortable lawn chair, sip an ice-cold drink, and admire your beautiful creations.

Rule # 7: Know Your Botanical Limitations



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

After that all-inspiring, confidence-boosting accolade stated above, there are several plants you cannot grow no matter how hard you try. Every new vegetable and flower gardener will discover their “white whale” of defeat.

Botanists say most plants and their flowers are easy to grow if the growing conditions are to their liking. Oh, I see. I did not read the fine print. It appears you have to cater to their specific demands. Temperamental beasties, aren't they? List all the expensive garden plants you purchase, and they will always cause you trouble in keeping them safe and alive.

Do not expect everything will go as planned when gardening. Something will always cause trouble to interfere with the health and wellbeing of your plants. It could be a virus, bacteria, fungus, bunny rabbits, deer, or something as benign as a nutrient or mineral deficiency. One day, your plants are green, blooming well, or have many fruits almost ready for harvesting. Later, these plants look yellow, limp, or have chunks of the leaves missing. Some just vanish within 24 hours.

There is an apparent unavailability of emergency medical services for plants, so you have to become a Botanical Crime Scene Investigator. Plant Pathologists are available, but having one on speed dial is unheard of. Great. Now, it's up to you to determine the prime suspects that are causing the detrimental health of your prized plantings.

The problem is ill or vanished plants are always the most expensive ones. You can chalk this observation as a sub-rule or law. A valuable plant may look healthy when you buy it from a garden center, but as the days and weeks progress, it appears "sick" — for want of a better term.

Several observations in this rule involve weather-related problems, diseases, hungry animals, or man-made (yes, male gender-based) mistakes.

Observation #1 states natural causes such as deer and rabbits with insatiable appetites will eat your expensive plants before consuming (if ever) the cheaper ones. Never mind having acres of lush, delicious vegetation this side of Eden for those high-priced plants has unique epicurean attractions for these animals.

Observation #2 involves the misidentification of an expensive plant as being a weed. The typical male of our species is a judge, jury, and gasoline-powered weed-whacker executioner with those newly planted plants. If they look like weeds, well, damn it—they must be weeds! Never mind them being expensive.

Observation #3 relates to memory or a lack of concentration. *"Was that smelly chemical I sprayed on my plants an insecticide, herbicide, or liquid*

fertilizer? Well, the odds are in my favor for it not being an herbicide.”
Famous last words.

Observation #4 is a rarely studied phenomenon called “horizontal gravitation.” We all experience vertical gravitation (see Sir Isaac Newton and his “apple falling on the head” ordeal), but expensive plants attract dangerous objects to them. Objects, such as overthrown footballs, lawnmowers, excessive foot traffic, hyperactive neighborhood children, and aberrantly swung sharp hoes seem attracted to and move toward your expensive plants. Even if the above object is yards away—even the yard across the street—it will somehow aim itself in a direct horizontal line to travel to your rare plant or plants.

Observation #5 deals with the sudden disappearance of those pricey plants. This mini-law involves your classic “here today—gone tomorrow” mystery. “*It was here yesterday. Where did it go?*” One area of the flower garden turns into an astronomical black hole. This is an area where all rare and expensive plants once existed. Theories abound about what becomes of a valuable plant, but facts are unavailable.

Observation #6 concerns mixed colors of flower seeds, especially annuals. The seed packet photo displays vividly colorful flowers, usually of a combination of separately offered colors. A disturbing tendency, which I typically encounter, is when these flowers bloom, they have many unusual shades (not especially pretty) and are not part of the separate color types. To avoid disappointment, nix-the-mix and purchase the individual colors instead.

Observation #7 involves sowing grass seed to create, in theory, a beautiful lush green lawn. Here, you can do this yourself by purchasing what you think is enough grass seed but later determine to be not nearly enough or way too much. You can hire a lawn service or landscaper to do this but later discover they sub-hired an inexperienced teenager to perform this sowing by randomly throwing fistful clumps of seeds here-and-there on the exposed soil, all the while constantly viewing *Facebook* on his smartphone.

Observation #8 results if you actually have a new lawn seeded, but a windstorm arises right after the last fling of grass seed. It will amaze your downwind neighbor how thick and luxurious his lawn is after a few months. If, by chance, your seeding ground remains intact, be prepared to experience the drought of the century forcing you to re-mortgage your home to pay for the massive water bill to get all those clumps of grass to grow.

Observation #9 questions: Why on earth did you plant so many fruit trees and expect to have all those delicious apples, peaches, pears, and cherries available to pick within your lifetime? That fruit tree catalog showcased all those healthy trees and cheerful people (especially children) holding on to super-sized apples. The bare root trees you received were not what you expected — which was supposed to be fully mature trees.

There are several other observations, but I don't want to scare the daylights out of you.

Rule # 8: Expect Frustration Over Mislabeled Garden Plants



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

This troublesome rule is time-delayed and not apparent until your cherished plant (a lucky survivor of the previous rule) blooms or is ripe and is not what you ordered or purchased.

Never mind visiting a gambling casino and spinning the roulette wheel or placing a bet on that sure-to-win racehorse. Go instead to your local garden center or place an online order to purchase that specific, must-have plant. Then wait until the flower blooms. This rule begins with your surprised facial expression and soon-to-follow colorful but vivid, harsh language as you realize it is not what you expected.

Some of us are winners—some are losers—in the game of garden plant label switching. Accurate labeling of varietal names is essential in the nursery trade. One “lost-in-thought” distraction when sowing seeds, transplanting, and harvesting plants may cause the wrong labeled name for a plant. Another factor is nursery customers will accidentally switch plant labels while trying to decide which plant to purchase.

Flowers are not the only casualties of misidentification. Vegetable plants, like the thousands of tomato and pepper varieties, also cause gardeners frustration when their fruits become ripe. Expecting that first juicy beefsteak tomato becomes a major letdown when it is actually some elongated tasteless monstrosity. Plan to can jars of mega-hot peppers? Such great expectations become great frustrations when you later realize those peppers are sweet bell peppers.

One way to avoid a total meltdown of anger over misidentified plants is to not purchase all your plants at one nursery. Buy some of your most-wanted flowers or veggies at one location and then more plants somewhere else. Here, you have better odds of growing what you wish. All businesses must exhibit quality control measures, and nurseries are not exempt.

Rule # 9: Perform Garden Maintenance



Weeds will eventually sprout and overtake your flowers or vegetable plants, whether you garden in ground-based beds, raised beds, or containers.

Weeds are any unwanted plants but usually are grass, dandelion, white clover, chickweed, and thistle. Seeds of these and other botanical malcontents can stay viable for over ten years or longer, assuring a gardener plenty of exercise in hoeing, digging, and pulling out billions of offending plants. In addition, many of these plants have a regrowth backup plan using underground stems or parts of roots that seem to extend to the center of the earth.

Enterprising gardeners can apply a chemical brew option of herbicides, equivalent to a scorched earth policy. No matter when spraying a weed-

killer, a sudden breeze will always spread the poison onto the plants you value.

Pumping air into the spray container by hand to force the herbicide out by pressurization is a gardener's idea of an exercise workout. However, releasing the pressurized air mixed with residual herbicide is more fearful than handling radioactive plutonium from a nuclear reactor. Speaking of which, even high levels of radiation will not control garden weeds. Irradiating them will only turn them into vegetative green versions of Marvel Comics "*The Incredible Hulk*."

Industrious gardeners will use other eradicating methods to rid their lives of the scourge of weeds. My sister had an enjoyable way to destroy, exterminate, and quickly dispatch a weed patch. She used an industrial-strength, hose-attached propane burner that rivaled the roaring exhaust flame blast from a rocket or afterburner of a military fighter jet. Where she got that thing is questionable, but she discovered one pyrotechnic way to ignite fun into gardening.

"Your first job is to prepare the soil. The best tool for this is your neighbor's motorized garden tiller. If your neighbor does not own a garden tiller, suggest that he buy one."

— Dave Barry, popular newspaper columnist and author

If you have a medium to large vegetable garden, it can take time to weed one. To speed up the removal process, many gardeners require using the service of a rototiller machine. It is gasoline-powered and comes in various models, depending on your garden size. It is best to use the super-duper, heavy, and more expensive rear-tine models for more extensive gardens.

The rear-tine built machines have more power to pulverize, cloddy garden soil. Front-based tines are more practical for small gardens with sandier or potting soil-based ground. So there, all is fine and dandy using these machines to chop up those pesky weeds. Well, guess again.

Count yourself lucky to purchase a tiller already pre-assembled. Then again, pray that whoever assembled it used all the nuts and bolts. Most

large mega-hardware or home building supply stores sell these machines unassembled in cardboard boxes. No matter what type of machine, or all the gimmicks that prompt you to purchase it, be aware they weigh half the weight of the earth. Unless you have a pickup truck the size of an aircraft carrier, the only way to get it home is by arranging the store or independent delivery service to transport it. (Please insert the *KaaCHING!* cash register sound here.)

Once delivered, your nightmare scheduled for that night is now rescheduled for right now. To begin assembly, you need to tear the cardboard box away to examine your machine. Avoid using knives, for they are too dangerous. Use instead that chainsaw you have conveniently placed... somewhere. No, I am only joking, but cutting through the box is an arduous task that Hercules would have had trouble with.

Once the box is open, you suddenly say to yourself, "*What have I got myself into?*" Parts are here-and-there, thingamabobs are mostly there, and your tool chest is somewhere else rather than being here. Be forewarned, your wrenches will not fit, and your blood pressure will rise if it hasn't done so already.

Somewhere in all the mess of parts will be the principal components of the machine and two wheels. OK. Things are looking better now. In a plastic bag is a cluster of papers which you correctly assume are the instructions on putting everything together. Also included are the convenient correct pronunciation of foreign profanity words. They will come in handy before and after the assembly. You can use your favorite slang when you later try to start the machine after several attempts to do so.

I will not bog you down on further explanations of putting this monstrosity together. I'll let you discover all that joy. For now, let's jump ahead into the far future when you finally get the machine started and begin creating a powder-like soil consistency for your vegetable garden. Here is where you should have emergency medical services on standby.

Engaging the machine, and after almost fainting from the surprise of it actually working, you soon discover that rototilling a garden is like performing a new event in a rodeo. Forget about all those easy events such as bronc or bull riding. Here, you are walking and holding on to the machine's handlebars (like holding on the horns of a rodeo bull) while it bucks back and forth and from side to side, jarring even bone and muscle in your body.

As this sinister exercise workout machine pummels you all about, there are twirling metal bars flailing and blasting into the garden soil a few inches away from your feet. Don't worry, for there is some protection for them with the attachment of a very thin sheet of metal. Then again, maybe you should worry.

Eventually, after several minutes, which seem like hours, you will have completed a successful rototilling of your vegetable garden. You can begin planting your tomatoes and peppers after a well-needed lie-down. However, to curb your enthusiasm, be careful when later re-tilling. A new garden rodeo event starts as you try to navigate the tiller successfully away from your plants to avoid having them become minced vegetable matter — which you are attempting to make out of the sprouted weeds.

This is just one of all the things we do to experience this stress-free activity called gardening.

Rule # 10: Function is More Important Than Form



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

After sowing and planting your flower and vegetable gardens, you cannot rely on Mother Nature to water your plants. Dihydrogen monoxide (aka “water”) is vitally important to all living things, so you need to transport this liquid to your gardens when Ms. Nature is derelict in her duty. So, when the scorching sun beats down on your prized petunias and peppers, and the soil looks cracked like broken glass, it’s time to drag out the watering cans and garden hoses.

As a new gardener, you are about to test your physical and mental endurance on working with these two frustrating gardening tools. How can these two items be so challenging to work with?

Let's begin with watering cans or buckets. They are all made to look attractive to our eyes but sadly neglect the goal of softly watering newly sown seeds and young seedlings. Manufacturers made older types of galvanized metal such as tin, zinc, or steel, while most newly constructed types are molded plastic. The price of these cans depends on this construction material and the volume of water they hold.

The major component of these cans is where and how the water comes out. There is the spout (like that of a giant tea kettle) that pours out the water but also the cap (affectionately known as the rosette) that, theoretically, disperses the flow of water into a fine, rain-like shower. Yeah, right.

For the vast majority of watering cans, the water flow from this rosette is more like the force of Niagara Falls. Instead of sprinkling water on your seeds and seedlings, you will blast them with several laser-like streams of water. Never underestimate the incredible force of compressed water. Modern, cheaply made watering cans will make a mess of newly planted plants.

Look for those rosette caps with very tiny holes that force the water upward instead of directly downward. Here, the water loses its force and lightly sprinkles like rain. Yes, these cans are more expensive, but they water your plants (and seedbeds) better.

Next in "watering tools of mass plant destruction" are the heinous lawn and garden hoses. These tubular snake-like hoses are grass-green, while others are brick-red, yellow, or black. Some are flat but expand under the pressure of water. The shiny gold connectors screw into the outside house spigots and other hoses. Those attachments are of cheap thin metal that corrodes after a year or two of use. They are notorious for leaking and spraying water (always toward your face), even when supplied with an internal rubberized washer ring.

The major complaint with most hoses (even those claiming not to do so) is kinking. As you wrestle with untangling the coiled hose (think of those troublesome electrical extension cords we own, only hoses are thicker), a kink or bend of the hose will occur somewhere. I have an

unfounded belief (tin-foil hat time) that all hoses have a pre-planned constructed weak spot that will produce a kink.

After detangling and straightening the hose, you are free to water your gardens with or without a hose nozzle attachment. Older ones look like cheap Hollywood B-western six-guns while newer models mimic *Star Trek* phasers. In fact, they have similar functions to a phaser — stun your seedlings or blast them to kingdom-come atoms. More advanced types have various functions, including spray, mist (a laughable setting), and rapid pulsation. Many enjoyable settings are possible for mischievous children acting out (or preparing for) adult armed rebellion.

Another negative association with hoses is the uncanny ability to trip over them. This mainly occurs when they blend in with the lawn. You know it is lying across the yard, but for some freakish reason, our feet and eye coordination are off and then stumble with flailing arms, odd dance-like leg twirls, and finishing with a couple rolls on the grass. If this were an Olympic contest, I would be a gold medal contender in a garden hose trip-over gymnastic event.

The devilish hilarity continues when you finish irrigating the garden and re-coil the empty hose. It refuses to do so in most cases. Whether you coil it clockwise or counterclockwise, one area refuses to obey and will reverse course. Finally, you will try the desperation method by twisting the hose and shouting obscenities at it. Sometimes it works — most of the time not — so you say your last swear word, gather up the partially coiled mass and throw the damn mess in the corner of the garage until needed again. Ahh, a future heart-stressful irrigation adventure already in the making.

There is a simple solution to recoiling a hose, and it is from those attractive manual hose reels. I once used one — emphasis on the word once — which I installed on the house. They resemble a fishing line casting reel (including the reeling-in handle). The problem was the hose would not fully unroll because of a kink. I lost my temper and gave

the hose a mighty jerk. Instead of the hose, the reel jettisoned itself off the house wall.

I enjoyed fishing a lot when I was younger with a casting rod and reel. That experience came in handy for me when I flung that hose reel into a trash dumpster. Revenge can be such a cathartic experience.

Rule # 11: Check for Drainage Holes in Pots and Containers



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Not all of you reading this publication have room for extensive vegetable and flower gardens. Maybe all you have is a limited patio or balcony space. Here is where container gardening comes to the rescue.

Containers are generally referred to as larger versions of those old-fashioned clay flower pots (that always manage to crack) but also constructed of plastic or ceramic (that always tend to chip). They can hold several small plants or one or two large ones. If you visit larger garden centers, you can discover several sizes, shapes, colors, and price variations.

Manufacturers paint some containers with beautiful, colorful works of art that look better not filled with plants. Their ultimate function, I suppose, is being filled with soil and inserted with flower or vegetable plants.

Here, though, lies a problem that many people fail to realize when purchasing these pots. Please make sure there are holes in the bottom of them. Manufacturers are notorious for cutting corners in alleviating functionally important parts or, in this case, “non-parts.” More attention applies to how pretty the pot looks and not the function of making all plants grow best in them.

All containers need to have a drainage hole or more. You do not want these pots to fill up with water. Having a container filled with sphagnum moss-based potting soil and drowned petunias does not look particularly attractive. You may laugh and think, “who could be so foolish as to not realize the pot needs a drainage hole?” Well, it happens all the time.

Those containers attract many people who imagine future flowers bursting out of them like an exploding volcano. They fail to see no drainage holes in the bottom — until a week later after daily watering and downpours from several thunderstorms. What was once a container filled with colorful posies suddenly resembles an overflowing version of the La Brea Tar Pits. Plunge your hand into the watery bog, and you may rescue a few gasping tomatoes or geraniums.

What happens if you have a colorful, hole-less ceramic pot that rivals the intricate beauty of a Ming Dynasty vase but was on sale at the garden center? Well, one thing is sure — you can’t punch a hole in the bottom. Otherwise, that pot will crack, split, and crumble into countless pieces. I suppose you may know someone handy with power tools that may — and I do mean, may — be able to drill a hole through the bottom. Since I am not a power-tool-handy person, this is just a theory. Otherwise, use it to hold plastic flowers instead.

An opposite problem with container drainage holes is when one or more of them are oversized. This is usually the case with those green

plastic pots of various sizes. Here, the holes may be too large and allow your potting soil to drain out of the pot. When adding too much water, the hole will void the excess amount along with a substantial gloppy slurry of potting mix. What was once a well-filled container of soil and plants now dwindles out like sand pouring out the upper end of an hourglass. The best recourse is to add a bottom layer of coarse gravel to partially block the holes but not totally impede excess water flow.

For those of you living in the colder regions of the world, empty the entire contents of your ceramic containers before freezing temperatures arrive. You must do this before the soil freezes, expands, and potentially (and most probably will) breaks. Larger plastic pots will “survive,” but that depends on the quality of plastic. There’s an oxymoron of words — quality plastic.

It is best to empty all containers of soil, or if you have room in your home, bring your plant-filled container indoors for the winter — along with whatever small beasties decide to live within the potting soil during the summer. All containers make prime real estate for all sorts of creepy-crawlers to live within, for they don’t mind the dirt, especially if they can burrow through it.

Rule # 12: Avoid Cheap Mulch



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Over the years, many landscape businesses offer all sorts of mulch to gardeners. There can be many types—such as well-rotted compost, shredded tree bark, and decaying wood chips and leaves. Many gardeners will resort to adding a thick layer of mulch to their garden soil to conserve soil moisture and to combat the spread of grass and weeds. Mulches can provide an adequate defense against the growth of weeds, but only to a point. They are an additional layer of organic material for weed seeds to germinate and grow on.

Be sure to identify what type of mulch it is for not-so-honest mulch makers can sell materials best not suited for application in a garden.

Here are two true stories about what happens when cheap mulch is not a bargain.

Case Study # 1: *I know of a person giddy with glee over purchasing a few tons of cheap mulch. He told me, "I got a bargain purchasing all this mulch! I will spread this stuff on all the flower beds. Goodbye, weeds!" Two weeks later, he was heartbroken and depressed because all his plants died — including the weeds... for a while. "I don't understand it. The plants were healthy, but they soon wilted and died. Can you look at them and see what killed them?"*

I did so and was horrified to discover his cheap mulch being shredded, old railroad ties. The railroad companies treat these wooden ties with coal-tar creosote as a preservative to prevent decay. This petroleum-based chemical has a horrible smell and is highly poisonous to all or most plants and animals. He later told me, *"That stuff sure stunk, but I thought mulch was like that."* He eventually hired a landscaping company to rid all his beds of this toxic mess and contaminated topsoil. They then replaced his beds with "fresh" material. *"My cheap mulch cost me a fortune!"* he later told me.

The moral of this sad tale is to question landscapers what type of mulch it is.

While you're at it — ask if the mulch is pasteurized. Yes, you read that correctly. Pasteurization involves applying heat to kill harmful bacteria and mold spores. We mainly performed this act for dairy products but also for pest-free, disease-free, and weed-free mulch. At least this stuff does not have an expiration or sell-by date. You can tell if a mulch is becoming pasteurized if you see mountains of it steaming on a frosty morning. Most mulch-making companies allow huge mounds of woody material to heat via decomposition over several months.

As a newbie gardener, you are probably asking yourself, *"why all this fuss over something simple as decaying wood chips and fiber?"* As it did me, the answer will shock you and is explained next in more detail.

Case Study # 2: As for the subject of why not use fresh mulch or recently chopped woody material, avoid it as if your life depended on it. Why? Because of the dreaded **Artillery Fungus** (*Sphaerobolus stellatus*) — yes, I kid you not. This case study involves what happened — and continues to occur today — for me.

A few years ago, I desperately needed to purchase some wood-chip mulch to control an entire battalion of hard-to-conquer weeds surrounding the perimeter of my new house. After a lengthy search for the best buy in my immediate area, I settled on the cheapest wood chip-based mulch available.

After applying this mulch, everything looked great for a few months until millions of black spots developed all over the house white vinyl siding after a wet early summer.

I sprayed down the house with one of those liquid soap washing canisters attached to a garden hose, but the spots remained. A few days later, a local newscast report highlighted problems some people were experiencing with white or pale-colored house siding and cars being covered with millions of tiny black spots.

The vandalizing culprit is the Artillery Fungus that lives in unpasteurized mulch. Those spots are masses of spores shot up into the cool, moist night air. This fungus prefers to aim the spores to white or bright, moonlit objects (such as a car parked near a mulch-covered flower bed) and blast their super sticky spores onto them. Honest-to-goodness, this is true!

If you have the time to analyze the molecular structure of the sticky goo from these spores, you have the makings of becoming the next mega-billionaire glue manufacturer. That damn stuff does not come off vinyl siding or the metal on cars!

When visitors look at the house siding, they stare and inquire about its unusual texture. I always reply that it is my “salt and pepper” vinyl siding (with a thick application of pepper.) Years later — and I do mean years later — most of the spots have worn off, but some remain. For

future reference, power wash your house siding with a siding cleaning solution every other year.

Make sure your garden mulch is “pasteurized” to destroy harmful bacteria, fungus, and viral agents that will ruin your plantings and, incredible to comprehend, your house and possibly your car. What is at most risk is your mental health.

Rule # 13: Perform Regular Lawn Maintenance



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

If you have a small grassy area or live without a lawn — thank your lucky stars. Celebrate with French champagne or diet Pepsi (whichever is affordable for you.) Lawns or yards can be attractive or become an ugly, sickly green shade of frustration.

I am not sure about the rest of the world, but we Americans have a torrid love affair with large lawns and lawn mowers. This love fest with grass involves owning extensive areas of land. We seem to dwell on having our own “back 40”—a spread of prime, grassy acres best suited for cattle grazing but with no immediate need for owning cattle.

Being raised on a farm, I am not a lover of grass. I cannot calculate the hours I spent helping to bale hay and straw during the summer. Stacking hay bales in a hellishly hot barn and harvesting dusty oats and wheat (which are also grasses) solidified my dislike of anything labeled as a member of the grass family.

I can never understand why people prefer to grow ornamental grass in their flower gardens. Grass, to my eyes, is not beautiful. Show me a windswept prairie of tall green grass, and I will fall and weep in fear of having to mow and bale it. As much as I love the beginning of spring with vivid displays of flowers, the fast regrowth of the once winter-dormant lawn changes my cheerful attitude to one of gloom.

Personally, as I become older, I would prefer to end this lawn-loving affair, which I will explain later. Yes, lawns look picturesque with a backdrop of a house edged with white picket fences, trees, and flower beds. The trouble is with maintenance, time, and money spent keeping it green and more manicured than our fingernails.

One grass-mowing option is to have herds of sheep graze the grass down to a more acceptable size. There are old photos of sheep teeth-mowing (and rear-end fertilizing) the White House lawn. Groundskeepers would corral the sheep in one area of the yard and let them nibble away and later move them to another section. This method worked fine, but the overall effect looked like a haircut clipped with wool shears.

One day, an enterprising inventor combined an airplane's propellers with the automobile and created the riding lawn mower. What could be better than an exhilarating ride around and around a large lawn with sharp propeller blades attached beneath the rider, slicing and dicing grass blades? Who needs roads when you could ride on your yard with a small horseless carriage with attached twirling, sharp blades?

I am sure some (many?) people had a healthy mental apprehension of climbing on such a machine that could, in reasonable theory, propel you far up into the stratosphere. Now, that would be a wild ride, but the grass would still need mowing. Well, the fear subsided after the first

lawn mower jockeys remained on terra firma green earth and gleefully mowed the lawn. Yes, they were happy since it freed them from exhaustively walking behind push mowers for several hours.

Today's riding lawn mowers cost as much as cars did years ago. Several do not have steering wheels but use hand levers to guide the mower across the lawn. Many can provide zero-turn maneuvers, meaning the mower turns around in complete circles like a figure skater performing the scratch spin in slow motion. I have yet to test-drive these machines. When I do, I'll post a public alert warning for you to take cover — even if you live on the 10th floor of an apartment building.

Lawn mowing is an expensive activity, especially with these new fighter pilot-style mowers. My old riding mower (ten years old and considered ancient enough to be displayed in a museum) has a yearly routine of breaking the twirling cutting blades belt. Throughout a few cuttings, it stretches the belt, flops about, and then snaps at the most inconvenient time — a few minutes into cutting the lawn before several days of rainy weather.

The storm of my anger soon follows the verbal thundering at the mower designers and engineers who built the machine. They are all made this way to break down and spend an hour (if you are so lucky) to replace and install another belt yourself without having a total mental breakdown.

As with most internal combustion machines, the engineers-from-Hell locate those troublesome parts in difficult areas to access and repair. If you don't have the correct tools available, it's time to call a repairman. Unable to pack my riding mower into the trunk of my compact car, I have to call for a service pickup and have the repairman spend two weeks or more (always more) fixing the machine. When repaired (for now) and returned, the bill for the repair is staggering. The new part was relatively cheap, but the labor cost is what's expensive.

When the machine is running, it is time to mow the lawn. And this leads to the next problem — the feeling that all you do with your time is lawn mowing. The grass seems to grow a foot a day in the spring. When

finished, it's time to begin again. Mr. Sisyphus, of Greek mythology, has an eternal punishment of rolling a massive boulder up a mountain only to have it roll down repeatedly when he approaches the apex of it. His dread pales in comparison to the repeated toil of lawn mowing.

The time and trouble to keep your home green can be physically and financially exhaustive. Is there something a homeowner can do to ease the frustration? Calling all the neighborhood boys and girls and enticing them with a generous summer income to mow the grass? Giving thought to artificial turf? Green paint?

Forget about lawns and haul in tons of pea-sized gravel. Nuke all the grass until it is brown, and then dump and rake the stones to all parts of your lot. Obviously, this may not be universally popular, but any devout gardener may become envious. Instead of having a green sea of grass populated with an occasional island of flower beds, why not go wild and drain that sea and unite all the islands with flowers? Stop laughing. It was only a thought. But then again....

Rule # 14: Flaunt Your Beautiful Flowers



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

You should take more time to visit your flower beds and borders. I am sure you do but is that once a week, on the weekend or every day? I hope it is the latter.

I bring this question up for when driving around neighborhoods, I will occasionally glance to view homes with outstanding garden displays. Their flower beds and foundation borders have vivid displays of annuals and perennials, but something is missing—that would be the green-thumbed homeowners.

It has always perplexed me why homeowners will always bedazzle passing drivers (or people walking past on sidewalks) with grand vistas of a floral homestead but neglect their pleasure to admire all that beauty. What is the logical reason for doing this activity? Is it to impress passing eyes by hoping your home is in the running for being deemed as one of the “eight wonders of the world”? But is this beauty for driver/pedestrian glancing-sight only?

What would happen if someone — like me, for example — were to pull into your driveway, ring the doorbell, and politely ask if you would not mind if I were to spend an hour walking around your front lawn to admire your roses, zinnias, and daylilies? I will not go further in this unlikely encounter, for I know the answer and results. I don't wish to become handcuffed by the police and be “the weird criminal of the day” on all the local television news outlets. *“Disturbed man terrorizes local family by constantly walking about their garden smelling flowers. See the shocking video on Action News at Eleven.”*

The real close encounters of the floral kind in your front beds and borders should be yourself. Beautifying the front view of your home is essential, but I have always thought a green lawn, trees, and shrubs outlining the house are adequate. Yes, add a small flower bed for some flair but save the main attractions for the backyard.

I prefer to create personal displays in the backyard where I can relax on a recliner and enjoy the sights and sounds of my own “secret garden” — one that no one else can view except my eyes and those of the family. This area should be your retreat from the day-to-day hectic trials and tribulations of your workday, a place to envision when the 3:00 pm doldrums arise.

It seems the world's eyes are always on us via security and smartphone cameras, social media posts, and judgmental strangers (usually rudely commenting on such posts). Everyone should have personal space to view the beauty of nature flaunting colorful petals and wings, the sound of the breeze tousling wind chimes, or the nonelectric buzz of a bee. All

distractions should be “OFF,” while all attractions should be “ON” for your senses.

As mentioned earlier, while driving, I would glance at homes showcasing themselves worthy as being on the cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*. I understand we shouldn't take our eyes off the road — mainly by not texting and viewing if you're still relevant on *Facebook* — but you can see magnificent floral beauty in someone's front yard. Wouldn't it be best if you saw this beauty up close and personal in the privacy of your own backyard? Save the small flower beds for visitors' front view while saving the grand displays for your eyes only in the backyard.

Rule # 15: Beware of Unruly Plants



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

What is not to like with an evergreen groundcover plant such as English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)? Well, I can think of plenty of reasons to avoid it. Our common ivy listed as a not-to-grow vine for landscaping? Say it isn't so! Well, at least for me, and for other people, yes, it is so.

Let's learn a few facts before I explain my "beef" about it. This evergreen plant is native to northern Europe, Russia, and Scandinavia—which translates to being very hardy from zones 3 to 9. It can grow in full sun to shade in practically any soil. It can cover the ground and is a familiar sight growing on house stone walls and encasing tree trunks. It can do this by using aerial rootlets that secrete a "glue-substance" that sticks tightly to a structure.

Okay, based on these facts, let's get to the heart of the "do-not-grow" matter. It's self-clinging, fast-growing, and capable of causing severe damage to house structures. It also hides potentially dangerous problems such as deep holes, power cables and is a prime real estate for protecting unwelcome pests. I will tell you more about that shortly. And, for personal observation, it is ugly, mainly when covering vast stretches of the ground and covering tree trunks. I feel sorry for the tree—and I don't say that too often.

Some areas here in the United States view this vine as an invasive weed. The state of Oregon bans its sale for it overruns forests. From these facts, I should have known better than purchasing several flats of potted vines. The character of Grissom in the now-old TV show "CSI" correctly stated, "*The best intentions are fraught with disappointment.*" There is also an old proverb of "*the road to hell is paved with good intentions.*" With these two statements in mind, here are two tales of growing this uncontrollable vine and a popular perennial called Hosta.

Once upon a time, after the construction of my new house, I planted English Ivy around the foundation and my newly planted shrubs. Reference books recommend it as a quick and easy groundcover to control weeds and cover unsightly areas. I mistakenly thought it would "behave itself," and I could manage it.

At first, yes, it looked great filling in the area. But, after two years, unforeseen problems developed. The vines grew tired growing horizontally and decided a vertical climb into the shrubs, and the house vinyl siding was in order. I was continually pulling down vines all summer!

The mat of vines on the ground provided the perfect, cool, dark habitat for sowbugs, beetles, and other mini-beasts. Often confused as insects, sowbugs (also called Woodlice, Pillbugs, and Rolly-Pollies in many locations) are related to crayfish and lobsters. It will be a long time before I eat lobsters again.

I had these miniature translucent lobsters scurrying around with their tiny legs underneath the extensive forest of ivy leaves and stems. To

make matters worse, they attracted nightmarish, ravenous packs of wolf spiders, then field mice, and, eventually, garter and black snakes. Where the hell did all these creatures come from?

My house is located near a grassy field harvested for making hay by a neighboring farmer. It was as if the house had a flashing neon sign advertising 24-hour free buffet dining for carnivorous beasts. It was only a matter of time before busloads of raccoons, foxes, and coyotes would arrive for snake meals.

I had created a perfect storm of food-chain pests outside my door and inside my siding. NO MORE! So, during the following winter, when all the creepy-crawlies and slithering beasties were dormant and in hiding (somewhere—which sparked another round of panic in guessing where they were hiding), I ripped the vines out with enthusiasm and replaced them with a thick layer of pea-sized gravel.

If I lived in the desert, it would look ideal, but the entire house appeared embarrassingly naked. I needed plants, preferably perennials, that were hardy, easy to care for, and add color. I decided to plant variegated green and yellow Hostas around the house. What can go wrong with planting Hostas? Plenty, I am afraid.

They looked gorgeous for a few short years but later grew with unbridled leafy ecstasy, producing humongous colonies with overlapping and overcrowded giant leaves. The gravel became less noticeable while my old nemesis of marauding creepy-crawlies became, once again, more noticeable.

One additional star performer of this convention of micro-beasts was the slug. I never encountered them before, but these gooey, slimy, and squishy bare-naked snails covered the leaves. They may have hitchhiked with a plant or two or laid their eggs in the potting soil. No matter, for here, they thrived, and I needed them to die.

There are two awful feelings in life. The first is walking face-first into a massive spider's web—complete with an attached arachnid, and the second is accidentally squishing slugs with our fingers. Ribbons of

slime cover your hand. Excuse me while I experience a “dry-heaves” gag response moment from typing these sentences.

Okay, there, I’m fine now. I would further describe the slimy element of slugs, but I think you understand why I hate these creatures. It was the recommendation of a garden center helper to apply something to my Hostas to halt the advancement of these gluttonous nude-frolicking mollusks.

The control is periodic applications of pellets containing copper. Sprinkling the granules on the soil around each plant should make the slimy beasts sick to their stomach and perish within a few days. To my amazement, the poison worked. As with any alien species introduced from another country, region, or planet, once you have them, a few lucky individuals will survive to repopulate and plague you some other day.

Over a few years, the Hosta plants looked dreadful for becoming overgrown, weather-beaten, and chewed relentlessly by returning slugs. Upon reflection of this unsatisfactory mess, I tried to dig them out. Think of mature Hosta plants as icebergs; the top growth does not reflect what lies underneath. Their thick white roots extend everywhere, intermingling and weaving with other Hostas so that any attempt to dig them up is futile.

If you have a handy-dandy backhoe parked in your garage (don’t you have one? Neither do I), it would be great to scoop out these types of perennials. Daylilies also come to mind in trying to dig and separate sections. You need suitable earth excavating machines to do the job quickly. If using the standard procedures of a simple spade or shovel, the digging would take weeks — if your backbone remains intact.

You can rent backhoes from larger hardware stores — and renting a person to operate one — but they can both be expensive. Forget that plan. So, the next idea was to use “the nuclear option,” something I sometimes have to do with massive weed build-up around my home. That weapon of mass botanical destruction is using an herbicide.

The art and practice of gardening come with inherent problems. You need to find solutions to these problems that do not involve extensive labor and expense. Above all else, you need to learn how to read (and comprehend) the instructions and warnings on insecticide and herbicide containers.

Years ago, at my parent's house, a close neighbor spread several bags of granular herbicide on the soil where many invasive multiflora roses grew on his property. The problem was the roses also grew near my father's four beautiful twenty-foot-tall spruce trees. Later, the roses died; by the following year, the trees also died. He then told my dad, "*The bag said it would kill the roses, but I did not read what else it would kill.*" How sad. All it would have taken him was to read the entire warning label on each bag.

For me, I sprayed herbicide on the overgrown Hosta plants in the late summer. Yes, I read the lengthy warning label and made sure not to spray the lawn—or myself—accidentally. I hesitated to do this, though. I felt like a mass murderer, being premeditated, calculating, and downright sinister. If arrested and brought before a judge, I would plead innocent on the grounds of temporary insanity (although my neighbors would testify of it being a full-time craziness.) My defense response would be, "*Your Honor, the slugs made me do it.*" The way some judges (and juries) determine a verdict these days, I think they would acquit me.

Anyway, the Hostas were dead by fall, and I ripped the brown leaves out and off the ground. This action created a sensation with my neighbors. Their bewildered amazement sparked panicky questions, which usually began as, "*What the hell happened here...?*" I repeatedly explained my reasons and reassured them that my psychological profile was still safely intact (although they must have had doubts—even long before this time.)

The Great Hosta Die-Off debacle eventually subsided when winter arrived, and snow later covered the crime scene. I had a few months (which always feels like years) of cold and snow to plan my next

neighborhood talking event. This time it involved what to plant on the new border.

While researching library books and online website forums, I abandoned age-old advice and forgot about planting larger perennials in the post-Hosta die-off areas bordering the house. Instead, I focused on growing fast-growing and long-blooming annuals.

I became a heretic on growing (and enjoying) only colorful annuals. Instead of planting a continuous bed of them, which would repeat my past horrors of inviting the creepy-crawlers, I planted a patch here and there, like colorful islands in a sea of gravel. My best “creations” were disease-resistant, mixed-color, dwarf zinnias, and French marigolds. The border caught the wide-eyed envy of my neighbors, hummingbirds, and butterflies. My other enjoyment was no slugs were in sight or on hand. My catharsis was complete.

I have greater respect for planting more annuals in any garden. I grew many from seed or sprinkled them in the soil — even if covered by a layer of gravel. Here, the seeds can sift downward between the rocky grains and still germinate. The only problem is self-seeding, which shows up the following spring with a mass of young growth over the gravel bed. Well, a few minutes of hoeing will solve that problem in an instant and still have islands of annuals blooming by late spring and throughout the summer.

Even with years of learning about gardens and their plants, I learned a valuable lesson about growing them. The age-old advice is helpful but can limit your enjoyment. It’s your garden, with specific properties and problems, and it may benefit you to take a leap of faith in doing something unusual—if not drastic. It may surprise you with beautiful results.

Rule # 16: Understanding Supply and No Demand



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

By midsummer, the vegetable garden explodes with an abundance of produce. Your kitchen also becomes overloaded with fresh fruit. Panic settles in on what to do with all those vegetables. Guilt then blankets your mind, for you do not want to waste them. Well, there are two quick solutions to this problem — eat them until you no longer crave food (for weeks on end) or give them away to everyone you know.

Do you remember planting your tomato and pepper plants in the late spring? If there was a vacant space, inserting a few more plants and an extra row of green bean seeds sounded like a good idea. Who knows what problems could arise by summer? There may be too much rain or

drought and hungry insects. Plant-plucking hoodlum crows could spell doom for your hard work. Adding a few extra plants would not hurt to make sure something grows and survives.

The trouble is that we never seem to learn (or expect) what happens if the doom-and-gloom prognostications never materialize, and all those added plants grow and multiply exponentially. At some point, we realize our vegetable garden is over-producing and out of control.

Right before we press the panic button, the very act of sharing this abundance with the less gardening endowed neighbors and family should solve this productivity dilemma. Their misery starts as you fill a plastic bag with extra goodies and go to the first victim — sorry— neighbor, ring the doorbell, and announce your presence with a loud “HELLO!” Followed with a smile, you offer your present of extra vegetables to them. They will not starve for several days. You return home like a knight filled with the pride of performing a good deed well done.

The next day, an abundance of more vegetables awaits harvesting. Zucchini has the uncanny ability to replicate with superior speed. Planting those extra 20 seeds in the spring may have been a good idea then but has now turned into a calamity.

All those seeds—now plants—overtake the garden with hundreds of green fruit worthy of another remake of the old movie “*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.” Two plants would be plenty for any garden, but we overcompensate because of our overactive imagination of potential ways the plants could (better yet, would) die during the summer.

Each day begins by rechecking the garden, followed by a visit to the neighbors. Good Lord—more fruit. Well, there are more neighbors, friends, and relations. It is turning into another movie, “*Groundhog Day*,” where the day always repeats itself.

There is a limit (well, there has to be) on preparing a meal with zucchini. You become numb to frying, baking, sautéing and boiling it.

Yes, you can freeze it for later use, but it thaws into a wet and slimy goo. It then goes into the garbage disposal or compost bin.

Eventually, your once neighborly neighbors and friendly friends reciprocate your generous abundance with their own garden bounty. Honestly, who can't have enough tomatoes? "*Where did this bushel basket of tomatoes come from?*" you ask when discovering it on your doorstep. Thousands, millions, gazillions of tomatoes, large and small, red, pink, orange, green, and purple-black, adorn the basket's interior.

Fortunately, tomatoes make a delicious sauce and juice if you can stretch out 24 hours of the day into 30 hours. Peeling, coring, seeding, straining, cooking, boiling, and pressure canning can sure eat away precious time. Yes, the time you could have spent delivering more zucchini to your neighbors.

Eventually, your garden vegetable and fruit bounty slowly peter out. Mother Nature decides enough-is-enough by decorating the large zucchini and cucumber leaves with a thick dusting of powdery mildew fungus. The tomatoes develop blossom end rot, and the green beans have a less 'beany' flavor.

For some (all?) of your neighbors and friends, this slow drain of products can't happen fast enough. They hide behind the curtains when the doorbell rings for fear you may be behind the door with more sacks of those hellish fruits. Summer, for them, used to be enjoyable, but they now pray for a killing frost to exterminate your garden of green horrors.

That chilly night arrives, and Jack Frost grants their wishes and prayers — dead, blackened leaves and uncollected fruit litter the garden. Your neighbors are giddy for the first time since early summer because they are more active outdoors. Their faces express calm instead of exhibiting clenched teeth and muscle tics. Life, for them, is now worth living. That horrible, daily nightmare is over, and they can now enjoy their time in the sun.

Generosity is a noble quality—to a degree—but it is best to give in slow increments. Some say it is better to give than to receive. That is especially true when confronted with an overabundance of cucumbers and zucchini.

Rule # 17: Add Extra Features in Your Garden



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Within the isles of garden centers, you can find many garden-related objects such as cement statues, metal works, solar-powered lighting, and outdoor furniture. Imagine adding some of these items within your flower garden. Invite some friends or family over for tea parties (or *Jack Daniel's* parties when you're really stressed-out) while sitting near a table in wicker chairs. Add some cakes or scones, and it sets the mood for total relaxation.

With outdoor lighting, you can extend your gardening enjoyment well into the evening — until the mosquitoes make you retreat indoors. Solar lights add a delightful ambiance to any garden setting for every

season. They provide subtle illumination for pathways, seating, or for highlighting night-blooming flowers. I think this idea is excellent for children's enjoyment in making a garden for fairies. Adults can create a Shakespearean concept of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

There is one other unusual feature that many people forget to add to outdoor enjoyment within a garden. That would be the addition of providing music. I have always equated music with flowers and vice versa. For me, flowers are the quintessence of natural beauty. Music is the apotheosis of our unique character. It is our singing voice, which is the greatest gift, followed closely behind by instrumental music.

And what varied music there is in the world! Every age, culture, and generation contributes unique vocal and instrumental gifts to all listeners. I will, however, draw the line on country-western music though. My ears bleed if I hear the twang of guitars and constant recycled lyrics about romance-jilted cowboys. Oh well, we all have our favorite music to keep us sane and happy.

Getting back to the matter at hand, adding music would be an excellent thing for any garden. Never mind including those weird-looking gnomes, multi-colorful gazing globe balls, or the cement geese decked out with strange hats. Since everyone carries smartphones around with them nowadays, you can have instant access to have music played within your garden. I once knew a person who installed an underground series of wires connected to strategically placed waterproof speakers within a large garden. Inside the house was a connected CD player supplying classical music. The effect was truly magical.

Personally, I think having a string quartet nestled amongst the flower beds strumming gorgeous music amongst a plethora of colorful and sweetly scented flowers would be ideal. Do they have any string quartets on sale at the nearest big Mart store? Possibly not. They never have what we really need. Maybe some enterprising people could come up with, oh... something like a "*Strings-'R-Us*" business, hired for occasional weekend gigs at our homes. I know you can employ some

musical groups for weddings and other shindigs, but can we hire them for regular weekend nothing-to-do non-events within a garden setting?

To make the instrumental music even more enjoyable, let's have some singers stop by and give a few renditions of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* or other operatic tunes. Imagine what your neighbors would think while they hear violins and oboes churning out Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. Or, for laughs, you could drive them crazy with lively renditions of "Dueling Banjos." But wait! You could break open the piggy bank and spring for a piano to be placed on the lawn or patio. Now that would be a pleasant touch; you can never go wrong with the sound of a piano.

Your neighbors will be jealous that they did not think of these ideas. If this plan were to happen, you could throw a weekly weekend garden party while the musicians play some jazz, hard-rock, or, if you're so desperately inclined, some twangy country-western tunes. You'll need something loud to drown out that constant shouting from the neighbors and those irritatingly loud police sirens.

Rule # 18: Be Careful Speaking at Garden Clubs



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

I am not sure if garden clubs are as relevant today as they once were. My elderly neighbor Ann once joined a club and attended one meeting. She was disappointed because they talked (aka gossiped) about the members not in attendance and not about actual gardening. She quipped, *"I'm sure I was the subject of the next meeting!"*

I had my experience with garden clubs, not in hosting but as an invited speaker. Maybe hosting would be more jubilant, for I fear my lectures were as thrilling as, well, reading this ebook. As with many of you, public speaking can become a stressful activity, even with a small group of people.

Although I had a brain full of facts about flowers and gardening, the interconnection between brain-to-mouth appeared to have a loose connection. In between expressing my talk about being a nurseryman and growing plants, I had the uncomfortable habit of including nagging filler or excessive packing material words, such as “*aah, oh, let’s see, oh yes, okay...*” and so on proving beyond a doubt, I was nervous or educationally challenged.

My first speaking engagement was excessively word-fragmented, but in later lectures, my vocabulary became more coherent with a few less “*aahs, let’s sees, and umms.*” When first asked to speak with a garden club, I immediately dismissed the idea, for I was uncomfortable speaking with groups of people. With support from a few relatives, I reluctantly accepted the assignment.

Before being introduced to thirty-plus fellow gardeners, I questioned my sanity (an everyday activity) of allowing myself to get into this predicament. So, after being introduced, I began my staggering, stumbling, and babbling lecture even though I had help with well-prepared, fact-based note cards. If I had only focused my eyes on those cards, my talk might have resulted in a flawless performance.

When glancing up to view the audience, my eyes met their eyes, and I froze. My train of thought became derailed and transformed my coherent flow of pre-written words into a jumbled mess of twisted wreckage of spoken sentences leaking toxic “*aahs, ohs and umms.*” I suppose I was in the beginning stages of a panic attack, especially when viewing my audiences’ faces because they were smiling at me.

My brain, one watt short of tripping its circuit breaker, was seesawing between speaking my prepared lecture while thinking, “*Why are they smiling? ... they think I’m a blubbering idiot... stop saying so many aahs and umms... they’re thinking about what they could have been doing instead of being here...*” and so on. Our inner thoughts can be a pain in the ass—the exact location where my brain was located that evening.

After my prepared but butchered lecture concluded, the hostess then asked the members if they had questions for me. My immediate thought

was, *“Oh Lord, I forgot about the Q and A follow-up. Just answer the horrid questions without further mumbling.”* The questions varied from *“tell us more about yourself... what’s your favorite flower... are you married... have children... where is your nursery...”* along with several other brief questions followed by my rapid answers.

All I can remember now of my first speaking gig is not of floral enlightenment, excitement, or contentment of a job well done but of confused amazement. Somehow, my lecture ended (after a concluding apology for being so nervous) and was rewarded with generous applause. *“Yes,” I thought, “I would also hand-clap to appreciate the pitiful end of enduring such an embarrassing lecture.”* No, they appreciated my presentation, demeanor, and knowledge.

At some point, my brain concluded that a hearty smile was in order, so I formed one over my still-clenched teeth. Possibly, part of the applause was after informing the members I had brought with me gifts of plants (peace offerings?) for each of them. Gifts can always help soothe troubled relationships, even those involving terrifying garden club speaking engagements.

After my speaking and gift-giving, the hostess served refreshments. It was a feast, for there were plenty of various dishes offered by each member. Food had a calming effect, for I “opened up” more about myself and the nursery. The evening may have developed better for me if I began with the refreshments and then followed with my presentation. Then again, maybe not, for I would probably have been so nervous as to vomit. Yes, that would have been an evening to remember. No, it was better to get the talk out of the way.

Afterward, I was so miffed with myself on the way home for acting uneasy about talking about a subject I love. It’s not fun being a professional worrywart.

As mentioned earlier, I had the honor of speaking at other clubs but spoke more coherently and confidently at them. Still, I had those nagging self-doubt issues. To help partially overcome them, I interjected some gardening jokes and historical stories into my

lectures. I took a cue to let what happens next happen without worrying.

We always hear people advise us to go beyond our comfort zones and to take chances. Give our lives a jolt of life-affirming energy now and then. No, sorry, I enjoy being in my comfort zone. I will try to provide jolts of volts to my life when I feel comfortable doing so. I prefer the “sit back and watch the world go by” option when offered to me.

Soaking in stress is not on the short-list of things I wish to experience each day. It may surprise you how a trip to the garden can help establish serenity again.

Rule # 19: Be Careful Hosting a Garden Club Party



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

My experience in talking to a garden club pales in comparison to hosting one. It seems my family has had troublesome experiences associated with these clubs.

Before I was born, my mother, grandmother, and aunt once hosted a midsummer garden club tea party. Grandma was of English heritage and knew how to furnish all the culinary items of a proper English tea party. Since it was a hot July afternoon, she substituted hot tea for iced tea and offered chilled food such as cucumber sandwiches, potato salad, and teacakes.

Her daughter, my Aunt Demi was a newly inducted member of the city garden club and hosted the party at Dad (her brother) and Mom's farm. The family farm was over twenty miles away from the city, but it was her party and invited the club's members there.

The grounds around the house had several flower beds of perennials and roses. Aunt Demi was a dedicated gardener and was proud of her accomplishment in creating these beds. Mom fondly remembered the beautiful flower displays but also how the garden party almost became a disaster.

Over the years, especially when we were young, my sister and I would encourage her to tell the story of that party. From my cobwebbed memories, I will retell it here.

The afternoon was ideal with perfect weather, and the garden club ladies were charming and cheerful. Some (being from the "upper crust" of society) had never visited a farm until now. All was going splendidly well until the unexpected visit by the nearby farmer-neighbor.

Freddy (as Dad and Mom always called him) owned the neighboring farm about a mile away. Our farmhouse was near the boundary of his land. That day, he drove by with his near-death-sounding tractor (as Dad always referred to it) and attached to it was a manure spreader (which Dad also referred to as Freddy's barnyard Cadillac.) Mom swore (literally, I suspect) he deliberately spread cow manure near the house to spy on the unusual "goings-on" activities.

They held the party on the large but cool porch overlooking the flower beds and part of Freddy's land. Mom and my aunt were frantic, agitated, and flustered at the sight of this old farmer. He drove by and waved hello with his hand as manure was being flung out of the end of the spreader by rotating metallic clapping paddles. Fortunately, no plops of cow patties landed near the house—as "us kids" always inquired to Mom in between fits of laughter upon hearing many renditions of this tale.

As usual with “all things that could go wrong” eventually went “more wrong” when Freddy stopped and joined the party. He was elderly, walked with a cane, dressed in his usual attire of mud and manure splattered, barnyard-scented, denim overalls with equally splattered tall rubber boots.

Mom and Aunt Demi became stunned and horrified at the sight of him standing near the impeccably dressed ladies. They were even more embarrassed in noticing the ever-present aroma of roses blended with cow doo-doo. What could two young ladies try with all their might to become composed and collected with dignity and decorum do with this unexpected odoriferous party-crasher? The answer lies with my grandmother’s British “stiff upper lip” and making lemonade out of life’s sour lemons philosophy.

Grandma told them, “*Let me handle this unfortunate development.*” She managed the situation, but not in the way my mother and Aunt Demi expected. Grandma went up to Freddy, shook his hand, escorted him to the party table, introduced him to her party guests, and invited him to take a seat—one a significant distance away from the guests. She then poured him a glass of iced tea and provided him with a large plate of her sandwiches and teacakes.

She then asked him to tell everyone what his chores were as a farmer—although Grandma knew all about farming since her son (Dad) was a farmer. As Dad later said, asking Freddy to talk was easy—getting him to stop was difficult. Freddy always spoke about farming and being a member of the first family to settle in the region. He also talked about harvesting crops, market prices, milking, breeding, and butchering cattle and hogs.

His primary subject concerned what he was doing by mucking out the barn and spreading the manure on the land. He explained it helped to improve soil fertility and to make his crops grow better. Mom had later said she was grateful he did not speak to the ladies about his usual slang word for manure—which impressed her, for she never thought he knew the word manure.

During his visit, the garden club ladies silently sipped their iced tea and nibbled on cucumber sandwiches. After what seemed like hours, but was half an hour, Freddy excused himself to continue his work. He thanked everyone for the invite to the fun tea party. He went on his merry way, spreading more manure in the nearby field—providing an even more thick application of barnyard perfume to the sultry rose-scented afternoon air.

Eventually, the party had, mercifully, ended. Aunt Demi was on pins and needles for a few days afterward. In those days, the city newspaper society section would report, in minute detail, on what exciting events happened over the weekend. The Garden Club news always provided in-depth information.

Much to the relief of Demi, the newspaper reported the Garden Club had a memorable and delightful tea party at the newest member's brother's farm. Her mother provided delicious food, and her sister-in-law displayed superb hosting. As for Freddy, they described him as “... *the special guest, a neighboring farmer, provided entertaining insights into old-style farming techniques and how gardeners can learn how to improve the fertility of their flower and vegetable garden soil.*” The article also stated that the gardens were gorgeous, and Demi had a green thumb to grow all of her beautiful plants.

There were other accolades that I now forget, but the review pleasantly surprised and confused Demi and Mom. They thought the day had been a disaster, but my grandmother offered a different perspective. “All garden club parties showcase member's gardens and food, but how many provide unique settings and unusual guests?” she questioned. “Those ladies had fun that afternoon. It was a party to remember. How could they not write about experiencing such an enjoyable time?”

Mom always said she and Demi thought many times about her actions and those words for many years afterward.

Rule # 20: Be Careful Attending a Garden Club Party



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

I must relate another true story about one summer evening several years after the above garden party. The key to understanding this story involves, of all things, Hibiscus flowers.

Every flowering plant family has a few flashy species that flaunt their flowers in size, color, and length of bloom. Hibiscus plants are no exception. As usual, with all members of this family, a Hibiscus blossom will only last one day, like Daylily flowers. The petals unfurl in their full glory during the day but by evening fold up into a pointed cone shape (similar to the above photo) and later drop off—hopefully, pollinated to form seeds.

Aunt Demi attended a swanky, champagne sipping, outdoor garden party. She wore a brightly colorful floral-print dress but needed to include something else to catch everyone's eye. To add that extra WOW factor, or "bling," she secured two large, bright red hibiscus flowers behind her ears.

All was fine-and-dandy until that evening she noticed people were "... *looking at me strangely, pleasantly though, but with a strained smile or as if trying to hold back a fit of uncontrollable laughter.*" While chatting with society's upper crust, she noticed they were staring at her with enormous eyes, like those of a deer caught in a car's headlights, and had a frozen smile on their face.

On arrival home, she took off her earrings, looked into the mirror, and discovered the two hibiscus flowers had folded up and appeared to look as reddish-black horns sticking symmetrically out of her head.

She took her embarrassment in stride and laughed while telling her story. "Oh well, some people think I am a 'she-devil.' At least I looked the part that evening!"

Remembering what her mother told her years ago from that potentially societal-fatal garden party, she remained calm and collected, waiting for the next edition of the newspaper describing the "who's who" of well-dressed guests, lite-gossip, and superb entertainment. Aunt Demi was especially nervous about that last entry.

Upon delivery of the newspaper, she took a deep breath, then plunged into the unknown inky depths of what the guests recounted to the reporter. To her surprise, there was nothing told about her appearance in the article. She fell into a quagmire of relief mixed with the hostility of not being mentioned at all. She always ended her story by stating, "*What the hell was wrong with those people? I was more interesting than most of them!*"

We should strive to be memorable in all we do. No, not in ways of being selfish, unjust, or commanding, but having the courage to be "pleasantly different." If you find yourself associated with garden clubs, make sure

you don't wear manure-covered overalls and have closed-up hibiscus flowers behind your ears.

Rule # 21: Your Garden Can Be Hazardous to Your Health



Like you, I enjoy many flowers with all their colors and varied shapes and sizes. I prefer flowers which release a far-ranging perfume. You get more bang for your buck with these types of flowers.

Many flowers have a light scent only your “up close and personal” nose can appreciate. When I come across any flower, I examine it like a gourmet first samples different vintage wines; check out the color, texture, and smell. I will plunge my nose into an excellent find without restraint.

More times than I can remember, after smelling flowers, prodigious amounts of pollen cover my nose. I will be oblivious to this until face to

face with someone who will then stare at me with a concerned look. In their mind, they may think, “*what unlawful substance is he snorting?*”

Realizing my embarrassing nose cosmetic, I would then crisscross my eyes to see the very tip of my nose. This unexpected behavior would most likely contribute to even more unasked questions about the behavioral problems of said substance.

I have had this happen to me many times—more times than I wish to recall. It gives me the chills of thinking people may assume I have a chemical dependency abuse issue.

After inhaling so many flowers, did I ever sneeze after inhaling a flower? Oh yes, plenty of times with the occasional honk, which may have startled a goose living in northern Canada. One particularly spectacular sneezing fit occurred after smelling a flower which I now forget and never wish to rediscover. Almost immediately after taking a sample whiff to determine its aroma, I sneezed uncontrollably.

At first, it was comical, which then turned into dramatic and then horrific. I could not stop sneezing. Panic then ensued and, by being alone, debated if calling 9-1-1 was in order. We guys need to analyze the pros and cons of calling for help when our very lives may be at stake. “*Gee, I hate to be a wimp for calling. Maybe I’ll wait and see if I get better.*” That should be a funny sentence, but, sadly, too many lives become lost by being potentially embarrassing to the male ego and self-diagnosing treatments.

Anyway, back to my constant “ahh-choo!” allergic marathon, I had to will myself to stay calm and try to contain my nasal explosions. Then I had another pathological fear that if I withheld my sneezing, it would backfire and damage my “innards.” I can imagine hearing the coroner in an autopsy room stating, “*He died of a repressed nasal discharge resulting in massive internal hemorrhaging.*” What an embarrassment to my male ego that would be.

Well, something worked for my nose suddenly released a river of fluid — oh well, we are all friends here and say the common vulgar word of

“snot” — and gushed the offending pollen grains out of my nasal cavity like a fireman flushing sediment out of a fire hydrant. This reaction is not pretty to describe but much better than witnessing the event.

I must now make a powerful plea before you ever put your nose into a cup of floral petals to make sure they are unoccupied. By what, you may ask? Well, practically any creepy crawler you can imagine.

I suppose the government should include a public health warning on all flowers. The wording would be like the Surgeon General imposes packs of cigarettes, stating this product can be hazardous to your health. Here, it may involve bees, bugs, and spiders.

There is no more elegant form of terror than finding your nose ‘snout to snout’ with a disturbed bee or alien bug who shares the interior of a beautiful double petal rose. What begins as a great pleasure to inhale the delightful fragrance turns into experiencing the terrible feeling of *SOMETHING* wiggling and crawling on the tip of your nose — or even worse — entering your nose. Oh dear lord, that thought just gave me the heebie-jeebies.

You instantly discover one of your body’s autonomic nervous reflexes kicks into high gear. Your entire body propels you miles away from the flower, your hands wave and brush at your nose like some disgusting but preferable malady like, oh, let’s say, rabies.

The waving hands always come to the rescue in all frightful affairs. The mouth produces a long and spine-tingling scream, scaring the daylight out of everything else in the vicinity except the nose attacker. Big, strong, muscular guys can belt out an eardrum-shattering little girl scream if warranted.

Did this ‘close encounter with the six-legged kind’ happen to me? Well, some stories should be untold for fear of public embarrassment. All I will say is keep your nose clean and watch where you put it.

Rule # 22: Always Visit Public Gardens



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

You should try to visit a public garden now and then from spring to fall to see what's blooming.

There are several public gardens in my area within easy traveling distance. Armed with a digital camera, I record several photos of plants and flowers. It's not only to photograph the flowers but also to admire how the paid and volunteer workers plant and keep them healthy and floriferous. I'll usually spark a conversation with them on how to care for the plants.

Sometimes, I will also ask personal questions about how and why they became a garden caretaker. They offer many replies (after first expressing shock that someone should ask such a question), but their

common reason is experiencing the park's peacefulness. It's just them and the flowers for most of the day and taking pride in what they accomplish.

Their smiles grow when seeing my digital camera, proving they are doing something valuable with their time and work. Viewing their prideful smiles, I tell of my life with flowers and why I now take all the photos. Flowers, smiles, laughter, and entertaining stories—what a beautiful exchange of common interests in a public garden!

One day, in a community garden, my sister and I walked about the displays and came upon a strange flowering plant. I was not sure of its identity. Close to it, weeding a bed, was a lady (who I assumed was a worker) clad in overalls and rubber boots. I walked over to her and said, *"You appear to be a knowledgeable person. Can you tell me what this plant is?"* She explained, in greater detail than what I was expecting, not only the name of the plant but also its Latin name, why it has that name, is a native prairie wildflower, its significance of growing here, how tall and wide it grows, its seasonal length of blooming, its hardiness, preferable soil conditions, sunlight requirements, and so on — all this spoken information glued together like this excessively long sentence.

At some point, my mind blocked out bits and pieces of her talk and thought, *"Wow, she is knowledgeable!"*

After a few more comprehensive facts on that plant, known as Compass Plant (*Silphium laciniatum*), she ended with a rather expressionless face. *"Questions, sir?"* she inquired.

"Ah, no. I don't think so," I replied. "Thank you for all your information."

She continued her work while my sister and I continued our stroll. *"Boy, she sure knew her stuff about those flowers, didn't she?"* said my sister.

"More than I was expecting!" I replied. "I hope she did not mind me asking if she was a knowledgeable person. It was a compliment, but it may have come out the wrong way."

My sister then laughed. "Well, if she was pissed-off with you, she certainly let you know it by giving you a detailed lecture."

That encounter weighed heavily on my mind, but I eventually forgot about it until a week later when we both watched a local television show showcasing that public garden. A guest on that program was that "knowledgeable lady worker." Both our mouths dropped open when introduced as being the head gardener and manager of the garden. She was, apparently, a regular guest on the show.

"Oh, my God!" shouted my sister. "That's the woman you talked to and may have insulted!"

Yes, it was "that lady." She was a popular guest speaker and a regular TV personality. She also talked during the interview as she did to me — in a slow, methodical cadence. At that point, I realized she was not being "aloof" towards me but was her natural way of expressing herself.

My sister had a different take on her behavior. "I think you insulted her for not recognizing her as a TV personality."

She may have had a point, for I've read where TV people can have fragile egos.

When I visit public gardens, few other people are walking about admiring the beauty. I can understand this during the workweek but on weekends? I'm not expecting crowds of people to advance to the front gates of these gardens in frenzied anticipation of seeing beds of petunias. Still, I hope to see several other admirers casually strolling the grounds on any gorgeous summer Saturday afternoon. Unfortunately, the more reasonable expectation is seeing only a few people. I would love to see children, especially those that behave themselves and not the free-range, rampaging, and destructive types, desecrating the grounds.

Here, the flowers are so abundant, adorning every square yard of cultivated land, and few eyes are there to admire this beauty. Where have all the people gone?

When people are about, some are there to jog on the paved pathways. Okay. I understand their need to exercise, but this is not the place to do it. At one public garden, I walked and then stopped to take a photo of a clump of flowers. I did not realize it, but a jogger was galloping behind and plowed into me. I fell. Without breaking his stride (and losing his precious Tour de France fantasy run-time), he continued on his way without asking if he had injured me. “*Sorry, dude...*” was all I heard him say.

Another distraction also walks public gardens. It is people not viewing the flowers but staring intently at their smartphones. They are the same people who walk city streets oblivious to traffic lights, utility hole covers, other pedestrians, and cars. Sometimes they get injured from not paying close attention to their immediate surroundings.

Here, they walk zombified in the center of a path in these parks, staring at tiny screens, and navigating precariously by peripheral vision. I guess the overpowering urge to keep current (and get more “likes”) on *Facebook* or view the latest *YouTube* videos of cats playing pianos prioritize what is occurring around them. Here, amongst all of Nature’s splendor, they tap endless text messages.

Now, before you throw me off my Luddite-lite soapbox rant, yes, smartphones are great tools to research the Internet on various subjects. There are times and places to use these cyber-devices. They are merely tools and not calming substitutions of the surrounding reality.

If you want to experience natural calm, look at those fantastic flowers and listen to the tweeting of birds while on a walkabout throughout a public garden.

Rule # 23: Visit Flower Shows and County Fairs



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Besides visiting a public garden to see various flowers, take the time to attend flower shows or County Fairs. Some flower shows may be general attractions of many flower types or varieties, while others are more specific.

Each season can include daffodil, orchid, rose, dahlia, and chrysanthemum shows. The enjoyable part of these shows is seeing (and smelling) all the various rare flower varieties. The unsettling part is you wish to grow most of these flowers but don't have the space to grow them — or the means to find them.

It is at a flower show where you meet like-minded growers. Depending on your frame of mind, that will either pique your interest or scare the daylights out of you. My frame loosened years ago, causing my picture of mental health to become lopsided.

One of my favorite summer-to-fall events is the yearly County Fair. My sister usually goes with me to walk about the fairgrounds to experience the crowds, smells (usually of manure and greasy French fries), and attractions. Being interested in gardening, we will always visit the flower judging exhibition. But, before doing so, we will tour the farm animal exhibits, including the poultry judging barn where many chickens, geese, turkeys, and doves vie for the honor of "best-in-show."

Never wear red clothing if you ever go to a Fair and enter a building where turkeys are being judged. One year, I wore a bright red shirt and ultimately caused an avian riot of incredible intensity. As I entered the poultry building, the usual cacophony of clucking, quacking, honking, gobbling, and cooing ceased. Then, suddenly, the barn erupted into a volcanic eruption of eardrum-shattering, hideous squawks, squeals, and honks, along with explosions of loose feathers, dust, and bedding fiber.

I will not include describing the commotion of my fellow Fair observers of their added screams, cries, and hollering while they vacated the premises at lighting speed. Yes, those birds frightened us, especially those large, white turkeys! They were ready to attack with sharp leg spurs flinging upward like Ninja warriors on the attack.

Mobs of penned turkeys jostled against one another to escape and run me down to peck, slice, and beat me with beak, spur, and wing. The movies "*The Birds*" and "*Jurassic Park*" were tame compared to the violence and carnage these post-dinosaurs could (and will) inflict. I was visually (and auditorily) startled.

Then, a brave, level-headed man promptly escorted me out of the building with my sister in our wake. He apologized for his rough action but needed to establish control of the avian uprising quickly.

"It's your bright red shirt, sir! You need to get out now! The color has frightened all the birds!" he shouted. I remember mumbling something like, "My shirt scares them! Good lord man, they're scaring the hell out of me!" It's a wonder he did not rip the shirt off from my back but quickly re-entered the frenzied feathered mob to restore order.

Not only was my shirt bright red, but so was my contorted face from 'I-want-to-die-quickly now' embarrassment. The constant hysterical laughter from my sister did not help, but a quick retreat (oh, let's be honest and say flee-in-haste) away from that area was in order.

For the rest of our time at the Fair, I was in constant panic mode for fear of being charged with inducing panic at the poultry barn by the security officers. A day or so later, I perused the local newspaper pages to determine if there were reports of anyone having an unusual death... such as having a heart attack by being mobbed by voracious raptor-like turkeys.

To get back to the subject of gardening instead of psychotic turkeys, we eventually made our way to the gardening exhibition. The primary competition revolves around judging the best single-cut rose, dahlia, and gladiolus for some unknown reason. There are many colors and sizes represented, but my major gripe is that almost all of them do not list the name of the floral variety.

I am not the only one disappointed because I have seen many notes attached to vases from fellow gardeners desperately inquiring if the exhibitor knows of the variety's name. Some people included their phone numbers. I haven't been that desperate, but I felt the pain of wishing to know the name of any gorgeous flower. You usually discover a few comedians here, for they will leave a note saying the flower's name is "Audrey Two" (in reference to "*Little Shop of Horrors*.")

Many of the dahlias are those giant one-flower forms when only one flower bud may grow and develop. Some are so impressive that non-gardeners (you can tell) cannot understand how "us" gardeners can produce such a giant flower. We know dahlias are a cluster of tiny flowers grouped to look like one enormous flower but also the trick on

how to raise such a humongous "blossom." It's like knowing a magician's trick—yes, it's impressive, but discovering the secret destroys "that special magical mystery."

Another flower judging event is deciding which pumpkin or squash, sunflower, and (I kid you not) cluster of tomatoes are largest. By the end of the Fair, people had entirely picked off the seeds on those sunflowers and tomatoes. Oh well, if they spark interest for people to grow them next year, I guess the vandalization is worth it. It's not similar to inducing avian and human panic at the poultry judging arena.

One major floral judging event involves creative art displays based on interpreting a theme. Let's say the subject is "In the good old summertime." Here, floral artists stick cut flowers, small branches, grass, and other garden-related materials onto a Styrofoam base to fit on a display table. The exhibitors can use any plant-based material to create what I think as colorful, miniature, stationary *Tournament of Roses* parade floats.

Other judging displays involve landscaping businesses competing in creating and presenting their visions of an ideal lawn and garden makeover. Here, they use real turf-grass, small shrubs, flower beds with stone walkways. It would be better if the building had better lighting to make the displays pop with life. Instead, the landscapes look frozen in twilight or under a storm cloud, ready to dump buckets of rain.

Finally, there is a competition that involves all ornamental plants. Judges look for unusual and beautiful entries, whether it is a hanging basket or clump of flowers, a shrub, or a potted indoor plant. One year before I began my flower nursery, I competed in this competition. My plant of choice was a fuchsia tree or standard.

Standards are plants, such as a rose, shrub, or woody plant that grows upward on one stem, nipping off any side branching growth. You pinch the top growth off at a certain height, and the top-most side growth branches will grow. Yes, it is time-consuming, but the effect of a tree-like flowering plant is gorgeous.

The most important part of this tree training is a sturdy pole or stake. You use it to tie the precarious and tender-slender stem onto it. The other requirement is having the plant grow in a wide-based container or pot. It has to be broad to prevent the top-heavy plant from being blown over by the wind.

As I mentioned earlier, I grew—slowly—a fuchsia cutting into a six-foot bushy tree. I began this project the previous fall, and over the several months before the Fair did all the things gardeners do to nurture their botanical babies.

Finally, the date of the Fair arrived. I signed up to be an exhibitor in the correct gardening category. All exhibitors, ranging from those unloading livestock (including demented Ninja turkeys) to non-animal competitors, fast-food vendors, and various sponsored business exhibits, would arrive a day or two ahead of the start of the Fair.

The flower competitor people would enter and set up their displays the day before judging to keep their prized petals "fresh as a daisy." I had a stressful 30-mile trip from my home to the Fair, transporting the fuchsia tree in my compact car. I proceeded at a snail's pace, avoiding Newton's Laws of Motion whenever possible. Fellow motorists unlucky enough to venture forth simultaneously as I, and travel in the same direction, may have—and probably did—cuss at me repeatedly. By the benevolence of the flower gods, the fuchsia and I arrived at the Fair physically unscathed.

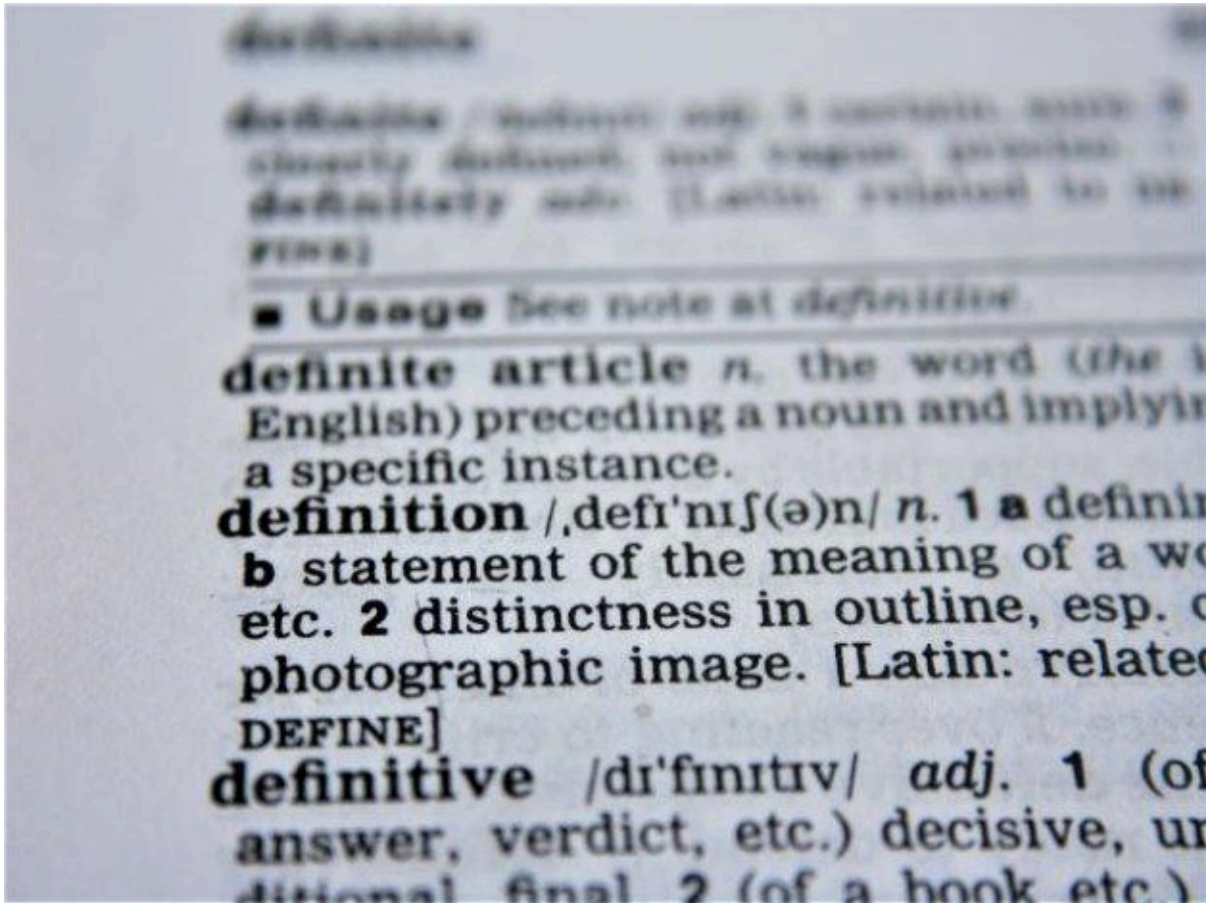
Flower judging was the following morning, but I could not attend. That evening, my Aunt Arlene called saying I had won a blue ribbon for my "*absolutely beautiful tree-thing*." The next day, Mom, Dad, my sister, and I went to see it. I was proud of winning a "best in class" blue ribbon for doing what I love. My sister, though, was simmering with anger — bless her — for she noticed I did not earn the honored "Best of Show" ribbon. The judges awarded it to a Boston Fern hanging basket. "*A FERN!*" she shouted. "*That boring fern basket got best-of-show? What a rip-off!*"

I still have the ribbon from that long ago Fair. In later years, I only needed to see that ribbon to remind myself I can do wonders if I permit

myself the courage to do so. You will eventually perform wonders in anything you grow in a garden — or, maybe, for any show or Fair.

If you wonder what became of my red shirt from that Fair, I eventually donated it to a Goodwill store. I never knew if the Fair police (and those hateful turkeys) were still on the lookout for me. After watching countless television crime shows, I learn it's wise to discard any incriminating evidence as quickly as possible.

Rule # 24: Understand What Gardening Words Really Mean



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Presented below are a few gardening words or terms you will eventually encounter in print or on websites. There is the traditional or actual definition of each word and a silly (wink-wink) gardener-experienced interpretation. But is it really silly or the truth? You will eventually figure that out.

Please note: The basis of this rule is from humorous internet websites. Original authorship is unknown, but I have added additional definitions to this publication.

ANNUAL — (1) A plant that grows and blooms quickly from spring-sown seeds and lives for a single growing season. (2) A flower that vaguely resembles what is shown on the seed packet. (3) A plant gardeners wish would be a hardy perennial.

BED — (1) A geometrical plot of ground where flowers are planted. (2) Where most gardeners sleep when deer and rabbits are dining in (1).

BIENNIAL — (1) A plant that lives for two growing seasons, producing leaves the first year and then flowers the following year. (2) The type of plant most gardeners get bored with and accidentally destroy later, thinking of it as a non-flowering weed.

BULBS — Dormant, oval, swollen stems or roots planted in autumn to provide winter snacking for chipmunks and squirrels.

CATALOGS — Entertaining science fiction or mesmerizing botanical pornographic periodicals published by plant nurseries and seed companies.

DEER-RESISTANT — Description of garden plants deer are hesitant or proven to avoid eating except those local deer that find your plants particularly appetizing.

FENCE — (1) A wire or wooden barrier erected that, in theory, protects garden plants against marauding herbivorous animals. (2) The same barrier that gardeners trip over and fall on those garden plants.

FERTILIZER — (1) Chemical plant food applied in excessive amounts under the idea of “a little bit more won’t hurt.” That extra bit did hurt. (2) Organic plant food, commonly referred to as manure, compost, and “yucky, smelly stuff,” applied under the idea of “a little bit more won’t hurt.” That extra shovelful did not hurt.

FLOATING ROW COVER — (1) A lightweight gardening fabric that protects rows of plants from frost and insect damage but allows sunlight, water, and air to pass through. (2) A lightweight gardening fabric that covers the upper branches of a tree after being blown upward from excessive thunderstorm winds.

FRUIT — Fleshy, seed-enclosed part of plants, especially trees, supposedly flavorful and colorful if you overlook damage caused by worms, birds, and disfiguring fungus.

GARDEN — A 24-hour outdoor diner owned and operated by naive growers who provide nutritious vegetarian meals for insects, birds, and animals.

GERMINATION — (1) The beginning process of a sprouting seed or (2) The process of becoming a horticulturally minded citizen of Germany.

HANGING BASKET — (1) A suspended horticultural container filled with potting soil and ornamental plants. (2) A suspended horticultural container responsible for emergency room cases of forehead injuries, cracked skulls, and concussions.

HARDINESS ZONES — (1) A classification of related areas based on the lowest temperature a particular plant can survive in winter. The United States Dept. of Agriculture devised this system to help gardeners and growers determine if a specific plant can survive in a particular region of a country. (2) Those higher zones which you wish you lived in so your plants could survive.

HOEING — The manual method of severing weeds at the soil surface along with stems of newly planted flowers and vegetables by a dull metal blade attached to a wooden pole.

MASTER GARDENER — (1) An individual who claims to be an expert in all things gardening. Subordinate gardeners usually refer to this same individual as being a Master Pain-In-The-Rear End.

NURSERY — (1) A hospital or house location for newborn gardeners. (2) A business where green plants are exchanged for monetary green paper.

PERENNIAL — (1) Any plant which re-grows from the ground each year. (2) Any re-growing plant that gardeners wish would be an annual.

ROOT — The unseen subsurface part of any plant subjected to over-watering, inadequate watering, over-fertilizing, mishandled

transplanting, and pot-bound conditions.

ROTOTILLER — A torturous garden exercise workout machine used for jarring your arm bones, back muscles, and, if you're lucky, pulverize cloddy garden soil.

SEED — (1) Exotic food for birds served on or in garden soil. (2) Small, dormant, embryonic structures of plants, obtained in paper envelopes, usually expensive, distributed in or on garden soil or soilless growing medium, and guaranteed not to germinate.

STAKE — A wooden or plastic label listing the varietal name of a plant as a future reminder. It is placed beside the plant today but mysteriously gone tomorrow.

TRANSPLANT — (1) The traumatic physical separation of a plant from one growing area to a less desirable location causing physical harm to the root system. (2) The politically correct designation of a corrected gender-identified plant.

VERMIN — The collective classification of all outdoor creatures that pride themselves as being vegetarians and enjoy eating your produce and flowers. This term may include your obnoxious relatives or neighbors.

WEED — (1) Any unwanted plant growing in soil along with desirable garden plants. (2) A plant subjected to applications of herbicide or physical hoeing or cutting to cause its demise. (3) The only plant surviving after the unfortunate demise of all desirable plants in the garden.

WEED WHACKER — (1) Sinister twirling garden tool wielded by husbands who chop off plants first then ask questions later. (2) Sinister twirling garden tool wielded upon husband's body by an angry wife who finds prized perennials missing after hearing those asked questions.

XERISCAPING — (1) Gardening with plants that tolerate less water or are drought-tolerant, such as cacti and succulents. (2) Landscape

designs created by businesses using plantings of broken or outdated Xerox® copier machines.

Rule # 25: Become an Adventurous Gardener



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

I am not sure if adventurous is the correct word with the act of gardening. It seems to imply becoming an *Indiana Jones* sort of person traveling the globe searching for mysterious and rare botanical finds and escaping dire consequences (like avoiding poison ivy) while doing so. I don't think there will ever be a new film entitled "*Indiana Jones and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.*"

Oh well, maybe a tiny part of being such an explorer is venturing into the nearest garden center jungle.

Historically, there were people like *Indiana Jones* searching for new plants and flowers. During and after the discovery of the New World, explorers brought along botanists on their travels. They did not base the finding of new plants on gardening but on culinary and medicinal pursuits. Flower gardening came much later when people had the time and money to enjoy such leisure.

Eventually, the study and application of genetics came to the rescue in broadening the appeal of discovering new types of flowers, fruits, and vegetables. This is where we are at today and what appears to continue for the future. But here lies a problem — is there a limit to breeding new plants? Will we run out of “new and exciting” flowers and vegetables?

Eventually, you may become bored over the constant offering of common flowering plants in nurseries or garden centers. It happened to me — and sorry to say — I continue to be bored. I sometimes visit garden centers and have that defeatist “been there — done that” attitude.

For flowers, there are monotonous varieties of impatiens, geraniums, petunias, and marigolds offered for sale each year. New gardeners may grow the basic bedding flowers each spring but, over time, gravitate toward finding unique and fascinating plants. You need to become an adventurous gardener and discover these new botanical treasures!

When you become more experienced in raising flowers, grow the more unusual species and varieties. Plants listed as long-blooming are always a significant reason to grow them but don't overlook other plants that bloom a short time. Many of the most beautiful and enjoyable flowers experience a short time to “strut their stuff.”

Try to enjoy the beauty of a single blossom. Many times, we look at a flower garden or bed and admire “the big, colorful picture.” View a single blossom and admire its interesting form and exquisite blend of colors.

It's not that we want beds and borders of ugly or weird flowers, but to add those unusual and intriguing plants that stimulate our attention and curiosity. Searching for and growing unique garden flowers makes gardening more entertaining.

Conclusion

It is my hope you enjoyed reading this ebook on what new gardeners may experience.

I based the above rules on a repository of experiences, unusual stories, and fragmented memories of my life in gardening. I hate to call these “stories.” It implies I made them up as fiction. Let’s call them actual “remembrances of things past.”

If there are any semi-fictional areas in this ebook, those parts would be what people actually said. Here, I may have embellished their exact words, but the substance of their thoughts still resonates in my memories.

The above silly rules should not deter you from enjoying gardening. You will experience many successes, so proudly proclaim you grew those fantastic flowers and abundant vegetables. Take a bow, for you deserve this tribute in graduating from a beginner to a successful lifetime gardener.

Thank You for Reading This Ebook

I hope you have enjoyed this ebook on rules to live by while gardening. My other selection of ebooks covers an extensive listing of flower-related subjects based on specific qualities. Whether they are easy to grow or are a challenge, you will find most, if not all, flowers a joy to grow.

An ebook mentioned earlier, called *Petal Poems—Garden Seasons*, features poems I composed over several years. If you enjoy poetry, you may find them "strangely" entertaining and enjoyable.

Please visit my author website of <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.