

Time to Stop and See!

Along with the delicious left-overs that distinguish our national holiday of friendship and feasting, we are enriched by lingering thankfulness. Long ago I was told the best way to avoid the twin hazards of depression and self-absorption was by making a daily list of “thank-you”s.

This list can easily be constructed by leaving the chores and taking a walk outside. Everywhere you look there is beauty free for the taking. We can be grateful for the many plants that make the shortening days and lavender dusks of November a fine time of year. A few roses stubbornly remain, though if you bring them into your warm house they will thank you by shedding their petals.

This has been a fine year for camellias: the shrubs seem more laden with blooms and the profusion of buds promise a long season. November is when grasses come into their own. The softer light catches the subtle colors of their flowering that are unnoticed when the sun is higher.

One lazy ground cover, *Ajanía pacífica*, that resembles chrysanthemums finally produces a flower. It is not the expected daisy, but a golden button. It goes by other names, *Chrysanthemum pacificum* or *Dendranthema pacificum*. As well as the petal-less flower, it is distinguished by foliage with a narrow silver edge. They survive poor soil although I suspect they would also flourish in loam. They may bloom earlier in the season but their greatest attraction is that they are here, now!

My small ‘gratitudes’ include the foliage on the *Fothergilla* shrub that I planted because I’d seen one that was glorious in fall. Mine wasn’t: the leaves just faded and fell, but this year the shrub was a clear gold with some red. Did it emerge from adolescence or does weather make a difference? *Fothergilla* is a genus of two species native to the Southeast. The flowers that precede the leaves look like bottlebrushes and you may find one that is fragrant. They seem to have lost that charm as the species have been interbred.

Living here we are thankful to have well-tended public areas that provide beauty year round. We are lucky too, to have local providers of all sorts of flowering plants. We have been told often that the money we spend in our own communities, stays in them and circulates to help us all. It is also true that plants raised here will do well in this climate.

We are not so crass as to congratulate ourselves for having escaped the power of “Sandy” as we know it can happen again with this area being the victim. Even those of us who couldn’t imagine living in New York City have memories of such icons as the Staten Island Ferry, Rockefeller Center, the Metropolitan Museum, even Tiffany’s tiny windows. In reading all the stories of courage and dedicated help, there were also some curious little bits.

Even while lights were off in much of the city, the New York Times restaurant critic gave praise to the small eateries where the margin of profit is so narrow an emergency can play havoc with them. In extolling the virtues of Chinatown and Downtown establishments, mention was made of a chef who thickens both soups and other typical Asian dishes with kudzu starch. We know kudzu as a menace so how fascinating to learn that it is used not only as a culinary ingredient but also in Chinese herbal medicine to treat ailments such as migraine headaches and hangovers.

IS IT TOO EARLY FOR RESOLUTIONS?

We have a tendency to dismiss those problems we can do little about, refusing to spend our limited worry quotient on them. But we can do a lot to protect the planet when all our

“littles” are added together. You know the drill as well as I do and probably forget and leave your tote bags in the car less often than I do. That is a good rule: no paper, no plastic.

Another rule, one easier to follow, is to reuse anything than can be adapted for storage freezer containers, mailers and so forth. Of course if you do not have a water supply you can be excused for buying one of those 50 billion plastic water bottles Americans bought last year. But if you aren't in a war or hurricane zone, don't be caught with one that hasn't been refilled from your kitchen faucet!

29nov12