

## **Tips: new and not so new**

Some of our new ideas about gardening can probably be traced to Pliny (@61-112). New ways to do old things abound in January. Several of the 2012 garden catalogs feature self-watering containers, smaller ones for window boxes, really large ones for a patio vegetable garden. Wicks and water reservoirs ensure that the roots stay moist unless of course you forget to check the gauge that tells you to refill the reservoir.

These pots could be a great refuge for those plants that are always thirsty such as petunias and coleus. Some species that come with directions that specify "allow the soil to dry out between waterings" might be happier in a plain old pot. Pelargoniums (non-hardy geraniums) and aloes come to mind as well as yuccas and cacti as species that might prefer less TLC.

Since clay soil remains wet longer than sandier soils, if the plant description mentions that the plant tolerates clay soil, you can assume that it will prosper in a continuously damp spot. There is news in the smallest pots as well, those used to start seeds. According to the Gardener's Supply catalog, Connecticut dairy farmers came up with "cowpots" made from manure that is dried, composted, mixed with natural fibers to become odor-free, biodegradable pots. They are more expensive than recycled egg cartons or rolled newspapers but probably do give the plants a head start.

I suppose when you budget for gardening you can balance the free fresh air and exercise to justify fun experiments. A look through the 2012 catalogs will offer lots of places to exchange cash for solutions to problems you didn't know you had. One problem many of us do have is unwelcome 4-legged critters making forays into our garden patch. You may have spread crumpled chicken wire to protect seedlings: now you can find "CatScat", a set of mats with flexible plastic spikes that will discourage cats without harming them, strongly suggesting they find an alternative site.

I confess I have not completely understood the butterfly analogy, but I do not doubt that we live in one world and if any area is damaged, it will eventually affect all of us. According to the media generally, nothing is deader than yesterday's news. However, if an event is really important on Monday, it is no less important a week from Monday.

Before WWII, few people we encountered had spent much time in faraway places, except as temporary travelers. Our big flat geography books were our links to 'away'. Today nothing is 'away'. We are irrevocably one world and what is of concern to one of us is of necessity a concern to all of us. For example the trees that are dying near us may be reacting to the poison spewing from smoke stacks a half-planet distance. The difficulty is sorting out the important from the flood of trivia.

### **planet notes:**

If the winter weather, as reflected in our fuel bills, is not as cold as expected, we are pleased. But we are not Aleutians living in the Arctic where global warming is two to three times faster than in the rest of the world. Native people in the Arctic are actually seeing dragonflies, and more dangerously, huge forest fires. The melting of ice, snow, and permafrost has the capacity to change the way of life for communities who have lived in the Arctic for millennia. The melting also results in sea level rise that eventually will affect not just Pacific Islands but our own Atlantic Coast.

One of the easier aspects of global warming to understand is the threat to the grizzly bears of Yellowstone. Because there are no salmon runs available, the bears eat grass, bulbs, bugs, elk, trout, and most particularly the seeds of the Whitebark pine tree. Currently, this food chain is being disrupted by mountain pine bark beetles. Warmer weather has allowed these beetles to move up the mountains into whitebark pine habitat with the result that the trees are being decimated and the bears are going hungry. Hungry bears move down the mountain to forage in people habitat, not a good solution!

Everything IS connected and as much as we would like to crawl into our familiar box and pull the lid in after us, it can't be done. The genie is out of the lamp and we have to be careful what we ask for.