

## Give Thanks for a Sleeping Garden

If you garden you can find something for which to be thankful 365 days a year. I know, when voles and deer dine on your treasures and rain drowns and wind savages the darling buds of May, you may have to take a second, or even a third look. But you will find those things in your garden that make your heart sing with gratitude. Emerson said it best: "In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows."

Often it is the unexpected that pleases us. It may be the sprig of variegated *Carex* you thought had died. Perhaps it is the rose that sulked all summer and gave you three fragrant pink roses mid-November. Most certainly you are thankful that at this season there is little work in your garden that can't wait for a day that is sunnier, warmer, cooler, wetter, drier, less busy.

You can be thankful that if you must find something to pull you outside there is a delightful, free source of new plants from old favorites. One of the most satisfying ways to propagate new plants is by root cuttings. This is an activity you can explore this time of year with great success. Root cuttings taken about the thickness of a pencil can be gently unearthed near the crown of a shrub or perennial. When you take a cutting of about 3 to 6 inches, mark the end nearest the crown with an angle cut so you will know that is the end that goes UP in the pot – or vice versa, suit yourself, just remember the end farthest from the mama plant will sprout roots and needs to be planted DOWN in the pot.

In places where winters are really cold bundles of cuttings can be buried below the frost line but here you can pot them up and put them in a cold frame or surround them with leaves under a shrub for a little protection. I have read that earthworm castings incorporated into the potting mix, up to half, encourages rooting.

I am thankful that my Christmas cactus survived the glaring summer sun parked under a Foster holly too spindly to provide the indirect light it prefers. You can't kill them. One friend tossed hers on the compost pile only to have it resurrect in glory. According to Tech, Christmas cacti, *Schlumbergera*, require special care to produce flowers in December. "Buds will form when temperature are between 50 and 60F, or if the plant is exposed to at least 13 hours of complete darkness each night. Putting them in a spare room is well worth the effort it may take for the spectacular display of blooms that is sure to follow."

I brought mine inside about the first of November, well budded, put it near a south-facing window and it has bloomed continually, red-red narrow petaled flowers opening from pink buds. *Schlumbergera* is a true cactus originating in Brazil's tropical rainforest. The leaf-like fleshy stems can be broken off in spring or summer and potted for more plants. Like most houseplants it is best to water cactus sparingly. More are drowned than killed by under-watering. If you let chlorinated water sit over night it will

neutralize some of the chlorine as well as reach room temperature. As warm climate plants, houseplants dislike cold water.

From Tech comes the information that research done at Ohio State found water below 50F can destroy the ability of root cells to take in water and nutrients. Other tests show warmer water, about 90F, stimulates growth. If your home is equipped with a water softener, it may be too salty for plants since the salt tends to accumulate in the potting soil. I haven't been able to find out if that water can be filtered using charcoal to make it healthier for watering. Unless you raise plants commercially, you can enjoy them while they do well and when their toes curl up, toss them and cut your losses. Life!

This week among the things that spur our gratitude may be the list of things we do not need. In the season where giving and receiving become so entangled that it is hard to separate needs from wants, it is rather fun to notice all the things you do not want in your Christmas stocking.

A piece of sculpture in a garden would be a joy, but no gnomes. A grow-your-own mushroom kit would be neat, but ceramic tinkling toadstools? We may not be thankful for the avalanche of requests soliciting our help, but the needs are real. With a dose of discernment, we can be thankful we are able to give.