

The Demise of Daylight Saving Time

If you are a morning person either by genetic predisposition or by the demands of a schedule, you are probably delighted that the sun rolls up an hour earlier. However, many of us morning laggards are clutching the last shreds of afternoon sunlight and waiting impatiently for the winter solstice as we check daily for the times of sunrise and sunset.

We envy the Poinsettia people who actually bloom these shorter days: Poinsettia, *Euphorbia pulcherrima*, truly brightens short days as do those cheerful morning folk. I admit to sorely missing sunshine even though the late afternoon light rests kindly on the last roses and is warmed by the flamboyant blooms of camellias. And we welcome fall rains even as we scold them for not having come during the growing season.

November begins to get busy as Thanksgiving approaches. You notice there used to be almost a month between Thanksgiving and Christmas but it seems to have shrunk to about fifteen minutes. I love holidays and long ago used to shop or make gifts all year long but that was in a more static time perhaps. If children were eager for a specific gift in September, chances were the request would appear in letters to Santa. No longer –ideas, tastes, wishes change hourly. Does that make gift cards the best option?

Unless you know your gardener well, as in sharing house and yard, a gift certificate is really the safest way to go. One gift does not fit all: most of us have a few things we received with gratitude but have never used. Actually, whether times are good or bad we need to discipline those shopping lists! One thing I have too many of is books which I weed out from time to time, but the newest one is a keeper!

Last week a friend sent me “The Medieval Flower Book” by Celia Fisher under the auspices of The British Library. It is such a comfort it will be perused beyond the winter solstice. On opening it you see it was designed and type set by Bobby & Co., London but printed and bound in Italy. The title page has delicate drawings done by a mid-14th Century English surgeon, assuring you that every inch merits your attention.

Although there are only 128 pages in a large format it seems as stuffed as a suet pudding. Every page glows with medieval art, not just herbals but also backgrounds of millefleurs tapestries, the foregrounds of paintings, and the exquisite margins of illustrated manuscripts. Several of the illustrations are from Books of Hours.

These were prayer books based on the prayers said at the different times of the day, i.e. Matins and Prime, Vespers and Compline. How astonishing the making of such a book in the 15th Century – careful manuscript with wide borders decorated not just with scattered flowers but butterflies and insects as well. How rare they must have been and how amazing that many of them have survived until today.

The Book of Hours, circa 1508, created for Anne of Brittany, who was queen to two kings, had 350 floral borders, each devoted to a particular plant. Historically, this prayer book was a step toward the florilegium, a type of herbal that was noted for its depiction of flowers to be studied for their own beauty and not as in earlier times as a guide to plants as essential medicine or as symbols of religious imagery.

Queen Anne of Brittany had some of the first glass houses in France that protected orange trees, pomegranates, and peaches. She was also recorded as having the first jasmine in France. In the Middle Ages Southern Europe knew jasmine because of their proximity to the Arab world. Native to China, jasmine followed the path of the silk route and tradesmen to Spain where it flourished in the Islamic gardens of the 11th century.

How rich is our inheritance from earlier cultures, in both art and science as well in the stories that have been passed down to us. In our awareness of the centuries old tradition of honoring the natural world as a creation to be valued, we cherish what grows in our own spaces. What is new in our time is the knowledge that appreciating the beauty of the world is not enough. Threatened by our sheer numbers as well as our use and abuse of our natural world, our generation, unlike earlier ones, has the necessity of finding the will and the ways to protect what we have.