

Have a Mini-Harvest!

The mother of an old friend used to circle her neighborhood with manicure scissors in her pocket to take advantage of any opportunity for a small cutting. Less larcenous is seed gathering, hardly objectionable if done discreetly. This is the time of year to be noticing which plants are ripe for the gathering. Seeds may seem such a minor part of the 'big picture' but commercial seed sales are breaking records, although the impetus probably comes from wanting beans or melons in one's own back yard. Veteran gardeners are adept at saving seeds from their favorite vegetables but a lot of us fancy flowers.

You may have kept the coneflower, Echinacea, cut back to encourage more flowering but there are sure to be some cones left standing, enough for both you and the birds. The elegant hybrids may not resemble the original but what sprouts will be interesting. The black-eyed Susan, Rudbeckia, seeds itself as well as stretching its roots at random, but if you want to donate seedlings to friends, this is the time to gather the seeds.

Your Buddleia, butterfly bush, will have ripe seeds among the panicles to be saved and sown next spring. These plants are survivors. The tiny one growing between the apron of the garage and the driveway has had several blooms on it this summer. I haven't tried to salvage it, fearing that I'd strip the roots away trying to pull it out of that quarter-inch crack.

Plants that may be ready to harvest include the Bellflowers, (Campanula), Canna, Larkspur, Dianthus, and Cranesbill (hardy Geranium). These seeds can be sown in fall or you can dry them thoroughly, label them, and store in a cool dark place for spring planting. Most gardeners find that seed packets surprise them when they clean out the fridge.

Seed gathering is not for instant landscaping: it is for those of us who love to putter about outside and are curious to see what happens when a seed is poked into the ground. Do be careful where you poke it, just in case it grows. I put a magnolia seed into a soft spot several years ago and now am wondering how best to move the four-foot tree and where to put it.

Leaving Well Enough Alone

Looking out my back window a few minutes ago I was struck by the beauty of that neglected spot of total disorder. The sensitive fern, *Onoclea sensibilis*, has spread yards from its position near the foundation; black-eyed Susans have threaded through it; purple blooming N.Y. Ironweed dressed in tiger swallowtails wave above them. In the background the sun strikes the golden panicles of the tall sumac and arching branches of the mimosa have lost their pink puffs but the tan seed pods hang down like clusters of ribbons. I doubt this scene would ever have been created by design, although the sensitive fern came from a friend and the black-eyed Susan migrated from where it was planted. The rest of the picture is an accident, a free gift. Some cool day I'll pull weeds and clear paths, meantime, I'll let it be.

Eco-Update

As students head back to school we become aware of what a force for change these young people can be. From small efforts, like using both sides of the paper, to larger projects, such as convincing their parents to replace burned out bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs and to put water or juice into a lunch thermos rather than using disposable plastic containers, the kids can be not only educated but educators. At the University of California, Davis, students have a 'global-worming' project. By collecting coffee grounds for a worm farm, a great worm-cast compost is created. And as you know, any place where there are deadline events such as exams, mountains of coffee grounds are there for the taking.

About those twisty fluorescent bulbs---- clamp type lamp shades wobble on them, making you think you might shatter the small glass tubes and release mercury. Some smart kid will come up with a translucent 'bulb protector' and make a fortune, don't you think?