

## Hope Lies Close To Home

In some times of our lives, faith and charity seem easier to find than hope!

However, when you pull your head out of your own weed patch and look around our neighborhood, you see hope in action. Everywhere volunteers are working to make tomorrow better than today for all of us.

On Saturday, Oct. 23, a crowd from the local Red Cross and Gloucester Master Gardeners, from youngsters to oldsters, gathered to wrestle trees and shrubs into their spots at the new home of the Red Cross on 17 in Hayes. Lots of enthusiasm and the mind=blowing generosity of local nurseries created a landscape to cheer the heart. Surely kindness is contagious.

On a later day at Beaverdam Park a new bench was dedicated by the Master Gardeners to the memory of Betty Engels, a devoted worker with not only a green thumb but also a rare gift for friendship. When you visit the park and watch the water from Betty's bench, you may remember a line from Wendell Berry, "I come into the peach of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief."

## CABBAGES AND KINGS

November is a good time to speak of compost. It can be loosely defined as a mixture of healthy garden trash-grass clippings, small branches, weeds, tired vegetables-which eventually becomes food for future plants. Dutiful compost gardeners have a further plus, for reasons understood by science majors, the use of compost over a sustained period corrects the too-acid or too alkaline pH of your soil.

Other gardeners have a well-organized compost production center but I just have a pile. Years ago what I piled did turn into chocolate cake crumbliness. But since I no longer turn it, it does not heat up and decompose rapidly. Now I just dig out stuff from the bottom of the five-foot pile (this has been a very weedy season).

The coarsest stuff is tossed back on top and what is left goes into the bottom of planting holes. This activity digging holes in a quiet time has been engendered by the burgeoning spread of old shrubs. They have been grown over top of their neighbors requiring that the small perennials be moved into the sun.

It is good to be outside just looking. Have you noticed the dogwoods are redder this year and the roses seem to be lasting longer? Besides, if you go inside you can't help noticing that the windows need washing.

A note to the ambitious! Don't tidy up too much. Those seed heads are important food sources for bugs and birds. On tender plants, severe cutting back will promote new growth vulnerable to winter cold.

Switch grass? Since gardeners generally and those with gasoline engines particularly are interested in the long-range availability of our favorite fossil fuels I have news of a substitute. Not just the expensive super-subsidized, and disappointing corn-based ethanol but the promise of another potential subject for vegetable-into-fuel "Switch Grass". This is a plant that can be grown on unproductive land, needs no fertilizer and little water and 'tis said, can be 'easily' processed into a fuel, cellulosic ethanol. I would not bet the farm on it, but with traditional oil and gas being harder to find and more expensive to develop it is good to hope for an alternative.

Rainy day? If you are looking for a haven on a rainy day, go to the Gloucester Library. I found a slim book, "Botany for Gardeners" by Brian Capon. You know it will be helpful when you see it is published by Timber Press. The Dewey Decimal System Number 581 tells you where to find it. This is not a glossy pub. The sketches and pictures are like lab notes-great for seeing exactly what went wrong with your tomato plants. The professor of botany knows we plain dirt gardeners do not want a doctoral thesis, just an approachable helper.

Speaking of the library, The Plant Extravaganza, which benefited them, and the Gloucester Master Gardeners was fun and successful. Hundreds of plants, buyers, dollars. Lots of hard work and more plans for next year!