

In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



October 21, 2011

Going Native

Remove bugs from plants you will bring inside

These past two weeks, I've begun the business of fall garden chores in earnest. The fact that my large order of bulbs has arrived has me feeling the pressure to get all other tasks done. The greenhouse has been cleaned and re-insulated and is now accepting plants that have been well washed and free of all visible signs of bugs. What a blessing it has been to have had several days of dry weather to get things underway.

Start treating your lawn now

The lawn at the moment is aerated, freed of thatch, reseeded and covered with compost. Lets hope the seeds receive the right weather conditions to get comfy before the really cold temperatures move in. Doing this task now gives the lawn a head start in the spring and hence is well worth doing even though so many other tasks demand attention.

Careful when you add perennials to established beds!

The chore I'm most relieved to have accomplished is that of planting more perennials in the perennial beds. These beds are already well established with plants and many bulbs. Getting in anything more is tricky as one runs the risk of digging up bulbs or worse, slicing into them. While my family is rounded up for bulb planting in the meadow, the job of adding more bulbs to these beds is mine alone. I know to be really cautious and can only blame myself should any preexisting bulb be damaged. Its a task attempted with great trepidation.

This past summer however, I could no longer ignore the fact that much of the two beds looked moth-eaten with ugly gaps in the plantings. More perennials were needed. Particularly those that bloom late summer into fall. So I took the time to make my wish list, do the research, refine the list and obtain the plants. A few of the choices will only be available next spring but that's okay. With the easy part over, now I had to contend with placing the plants and dealing with aforementioned bulbs. Yikes! Much

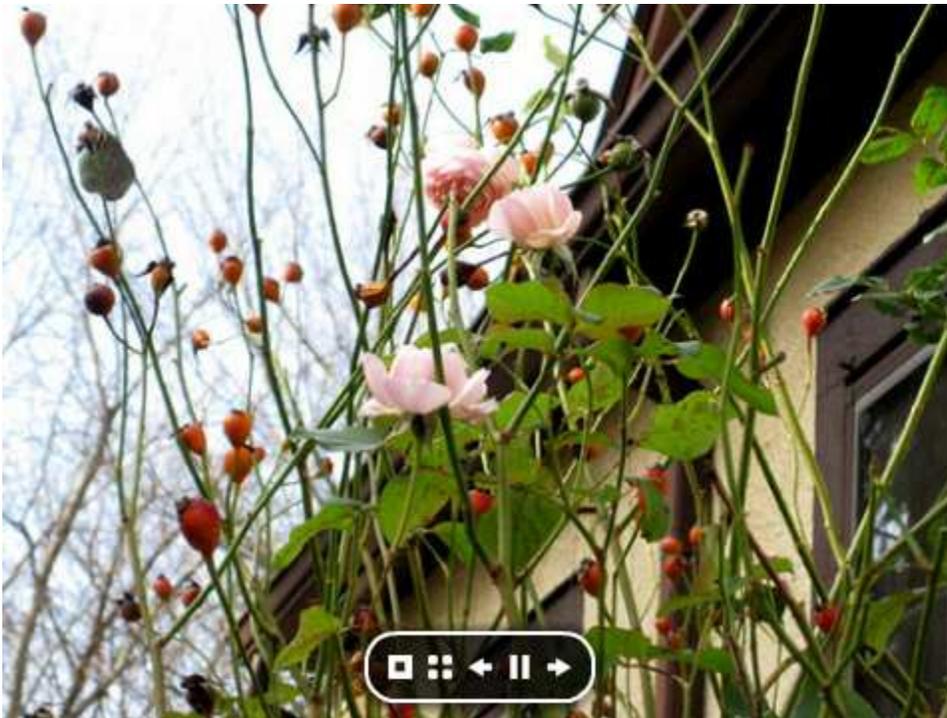
harder than you'd think. Perennials sold in fall are often bigger than those you can get in spring. Hence the hole created to accommodate them needs to be big. That in turn increases the chances of hitting more bulbs. You follow my drift?

Steeling my nerves and keeping firm in my optimism, I dug and planted. One might argue that we're just talking bulbs and they can be easily replaced. And one would be right in a general sense. But no true gardener is okay with losing even a single plant. We reluctantly acquiesce to losses wreaked by nature but by ones own hands? That leads to such guilt and self-recrimination that only serious therapy can assuage. I kid you not.

Thus, I was pleasantly surprised that perhaps only a half-dozen bulbs were destroyed. Given how intensively planted the beds are, this is nothing short of a miracle. But my challenge is not over. Next week I shall be faced with fitting one hundred-plus bulbs into these same beds. Imagine, I do this to myself! Crazy? I agree! But oh, such joy ensues in spring when the reliable bulbs come up and celebrate. Worth every ounce of anxiety.

Choosing native plants

But there is something else about which I'm even more pleased. On examining my wish list of perennials, I was delighted that it quite naturally coincided with the resolve I'd made a couple of years ago. And that was to do my best to add mostly native plants. This can only mean that I'm growing up as a gardener. Not merely focusing on pretty but much more mindful about details like texture, foliage color, drought tolerance, feeding helpful insects, resisting pests, innate hardiness and such. While my tastes may seem to be very politically correct, I've really become more intelligent in my gardening. Going native (mostly) is smart, beautiful and totally right. Now *that* is true progress.



I would love a few suggestions of perennials - "Particularly those that bloom late summer into fall." - I also need some more fall color.

Thanks By LJL on 10/21/2011 at 9:01 am

And especially native ones! By Jean Gavril on 10/21/2011 at 5:46 pm

Dear ljl and Jean, Look for some suggestions of native perennials in this coming Friday's column.