

NEW: In the garden With Shobha Vanchiswar



Monday, November 28, 2011

It seems both obvious and yet odd that we should be so easily affected by the turning of the seasons.

One lives by the rhythm of the passages of the year almost by habit. We know what to expect, what to do and how to prepare. It is comforting and familiar. So, just as we were adjusting to the glow of autumn and this years more muted colors, the sudden arrival of snow was an anti-climax. Instead of the foliar fireworks, there was a bombardment of snow and consequently, in place of the usual falling of leaves, we witnessed the falling of limbs and trees. Thats enough to throw one's sense of balance off kilter.

In the normal course of things, by this time I'm at the point of feeling elated about putting the garden to bed and getting the various tasks done. I look forward to the respite winter provides when I can dream and plan for that most perfect garden to date. Holding the promise of spring in my heart, I relax into the season with long nights and readily embrace the comfort of time spent at leisure by the blazing fireplace.

But this year, I'm unsettled. The tasks were done in such great haste that I barely had time to appreciate anything. As I cut back the plants, I did not pay the customary attention to the natural progress of how they go into dormancy. As I worked at a frenetic pace to save my botanical treasures, I could not be present in the moment. Ordinarily, I find it meditative to do these tasks and I've come to depend on them to keep me centered. I think about the garden epitomizing the cycle of life and the many gifts and lessons it provides. In the fall, I enjoy reflecting on the year that just passed. But it was not to be. Mind you, I'm not complaining as I realize in the big picture this is not a hardship of any kind. I'm grateful to have come through relatively unscathed. However, it is the uncertainty of not having the usual expectations that doesn't sit well. I'm groping for the familiar, for reassurance that all will be well.

By this stage of my life, I know nothing is certain. There are no guarantees. But that doesn't stop me from feeling like a distraught child. I find myself looking for a sign of some sort to give me back that sense that things are in place and all is as it should be. And then, in my wanderings in the garden, I realize that the tasks are indeed completed and notwithstanding the trees that stand looking lopsided due to lost limbs, everything appears as it usually does by this time. As much as the storm was a big, destructive disruption, autumn seems to have got back on course. There is yet a display of fall color, the squirrels are scurrying around hiding nuts in locations they will forget, the rose-hips, present in all their gleaming coral splendor are being devoured by greedy Eastern starlings and as I glance up, I see migratory birds in flight formations as they head out to southern climes. Raking the fallen leaves, I spy

the colchicums in bloom, their goblet shaped purple and white flowers flutter bravely in the blustery weather.

I see now that these signs were here all the while. In my self-absorption, I had lost focus. My faith in the ancient, practiced workings of nature had been momentarily weakened. Isn't it marvelous the way nature brings everything including our hearts into balance? One doesn't lose perspective or optimism for too long when working in her midst. I find myself breathing easier. What the coming winter portends may not be known but of this much I'm certain – that it too shall pass and spring will return. As a reminder of my recent lapse in faith, I pick up the fallen but still sturdy robin's nest and bring it indoors to sit on my desk where I shall see it every day.

Beautiful column. By jgaughran on 12/02/2011 at 8:14 am

Hi Shobha Ahhh. Just what I needed this chilly morning. I always enjoy your articles so much. Thank you. They are a treasure. By Kathleen Williamson on 12/02/2011 at 8:21 am

Shobha, I enjoy your conversation with Mother Nature. Yes-she pulled a fast one with the premature snowstorm and threw us all off balance. You, however, became reassured with coming balance. I enjoy the seasonal chapters of our corner of the country. It gives us wakeups, surprises and expectancies. Your words inspire me. From your #1 fan from Blackburn Old Farm, Illinois!
By Beth Dunn on 12/04/2011 at 10:01 am