

In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



Dainty grape hyacinths

April 6, 2012

For I am but human ...

I am only an average man but, by George, I work harder at it than the average man.

~ Theodore Roosevelt

Every so often I am confronted squarely by my limitations and inadequacies. Its never comforting but always humbling. One dreams so many dreams and aspires to such heights only to understand that its not yet time for the realization of certain dreams or the conquering of lofty peaks. But this is not meant to be disillusioning. It is simply a call to confront reality.

Time always appears expansive. So it comes as a jolt when one realizes that deadlines are due, projects need completion, weeds beg to be pulled, bills cannot wait any longer, family is in dire need of clean socks and a hot meal. We've all been there.

In spite of the best of intentions and generally decent level of organization, life can upset the agenda. And that's what's happened to me this spring. Not only did the season arrive prematurely but suddenly, other projects and opportunities arose without preamble. Mind you I'm not complaining. Far better to have lots to do than none at all. Or worse, not be able to do anything. However, with reluctance one sees that something has to give. For someone like me, that's hard. I work constantly to keep perspective and balance. While certain unnamed parties can so easily neglect a task to focus on another, I try to fit it all in. I've improved over the years and no longer wait till I'm totally overwhelmed. I've learned the art of compromise. Relinquishing some control, delegating more and simplifying chores helps enormously for one's peace of mind. Its positively a godsend to the family that would otherwise have to deal with a very grumpy, frustrated me.

Thus, while trying to juggle the demands of garden, work, community and family, I've come to terms with my humanness. I've cut back and cut down. Everywhere. For the purposes of this column, I'll share a couple of examples of garden compromises.

With spring's early arrival, there's been a sense of urgency to get tasks underway. In order to

accommodate them along with the obligation to do my other work, it has meant putting in extra hours. But who wants to be bogged down by chores when the weather calls for a time-out to frolic barefoot in the sunshine?

With the intention of maintaining balance and consequently my sanity, I decided to forgo the business of starting my vegetables and annuals from seed. Not having to mind the seed trays has eliminated one item off the to-do list. This might seem like such a small task but in reality it is not. Difficult it may not be but it does take a bit of time and attention to raise healthy seedlings and get them ready for planting out. This year, I'm just buying the young plants from the nursery. What I splurge on purchasing is compensated by the time I gain. The seed packets purchased this past February will be stored in a cool, dry and dark place and used next year.

Similarly, I've curtailed time spent writing everything in my garden log. No, I'm not giving it up altogether as the journal is so useful to my learning and planning. But, I'm just writing one line comments on what's doing and rather than listing every plant added to the garden, I'm putting the plant labels in a Ziploc bag labeled with month and year. It does mean I'm relying on memory to recall where the plants have been placed but for this season that's a risk I'm willing to take.

Just as I'm compulsive about doing all the gardening myself (with my family's willing and invaluable help), I know others who also cannot imagine doing without the pleasures and pain of getting their hands into the soil. A dear friend was recently confronted with a health crisis that makes it impossible for her to do too much of anything. Gardening makes her incredibly happy but now she can't do most of what needs doing. It's been difficult to adjust to this. She's finally decided to seek some help from outside and hired what the English call a 'jobbing gardener'. One who understands gardens well and will do the jobs assigned on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. He/she doesn't design, plan or make his/her own decisions. Rather, the jobbing gardener takes care of whatever is indicated. They use their knowledge and experience to do it right without supervision. In exchange, the employer is still involved in the garden, gets priceless peace of mind as well as time for recuperation, other demands or whatever else is necessary. And while it might otherwise have succumbed to forced neglect, the garden looks beautiful and inviting.

The point I'm making is there's no loss of face in doing less or seeking help by necessity. In the large scheme of things, it's all about balance and well being. Our biggest obstacle to getting there is our own minds.

I'm now off to look for more things to hand off as beach and hammock season approaches.