

In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



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On the persecution of Pollyanna

This winter has truly tested my patience and optimism.

Okay, my patience is limited. My family can testify to that, with countless examples. But my optimism, now that's tough to erode. So for me to admit that my positive outlook has been placed in jeopardy is a big deal.

The first four snowstorms I took in stride. It is winter after all and snow is a nice layer of insulation for dormant plants. I happily took care of removing excess snow from shrubs, swept it off the greenhouse and cleared paths with old-fashioned elbow grease.

Then the ice came

But then came more storms, accompanied by ice. Right away I got concerned for shrubs and tree limbs bearing too much weight. Ice is a substantially greater threat, and seeing the rose limbs individually coated with a quarter inch thick layer of ice sent me into a state of dismay. There was very little I could do. In sunlight, the crystal sculptures looked magnificent, I confess. But my appreciation of their sparkle was clouded by fear for them; their branches could snap in an instant. I crossed my fingers, and they are now permanently in that position.

Meanwhile, I noticed how bricks and flagstones were being pushed up and down every-which-way by the daily freezing and thawing. Another thing to set right in spring. With the storm drain in front of my property dammed up by four feet of petrified snow, the run-off saturated with salt was now finding its way into my garden. Not wanting the grass and other plants harmed by the salt and de-icing chemicals used by the town and similar services, sweat equity was applied to unblock the storm drain. Tragedy averted.

Greenhouse not so green



When temperatures plummeted and stayed that way for several days, I worried again how the garden was faring. But my full attention was diverted to the greenhouse. This haven for tender plants is heated by propane. There are two tanks set up so if one gets used up, the other automatically takes over. And if both are spent, the back up electric heater kicks in.

Well, wouldn't you know it, it was so cold that both tanks were used up very quickly and the electric heater failed. In twenty years of greenhouse ownership we've never had this happen. Luckily, the problem was discovered soon enough so only young, small plants suffered. I have studiously avoided checking exactly which plants because that'll send me into a state of mourning. I'm going with ignorance is bliss on this one.

What do you do with a frozen window box?

Then this past Saturday, in the freezing rain, I noticed the window boxes were leaning forward in an alarming manner. My immediate concern was not so much for the containers or plants. When I could not immediately discern the cause, I could only hope that the brackets were not pulling away from the wall damaging the stucco walls.

As it turned out, the window boxes were frozen solid and the plants in pots within had been shifted forward. If they received any more snow or ice, it could literally be the tipping point, bringing down pieces of wall and lower-roof shingles. We could not risk walking below the boxes without wearing hard hats!

Nothing could be done till the ice was thawed. We tried everything. Even a drill could not make headway. So we waited till the sun came out on Sunday and temperatures were above freezing. Then we melted the ice by hosing it with hot water. It took a while, but it worked. The pots were removed and we took off our hard hats. Whew!

Yes, it has been tough and moving to warmer climes has begun to look quite attractive. But the bulbs in bloom indoors remind me of spring, and make me realize how much I would miss them if I moved someplace they could not thrive. The primroses from last spring and saved in pots are in flower and set my heart a flutter. The camellia is studded with rosy-red flowers and hints at warm, southern winds. The recently ordered seed packets have arrived and I see them brimming with promises of a better tomorrow.

The glass remains half full.

