

In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



March 25, 2011

It seems this week I've been playing dodge-the-weather in the garden.

There's much that needs doing and I'm becoming quite adept at taking full advantage of those days in the week, and sometimes mere hours, without slushy snow or rain.

Roses released from their winter coats, as I yearn to be

I unwrapped the roses from their protective burlap coats. I imagine that it must be quite freeing for the plants, as if I were opening the gates of the penitentiary. Would that we all could enjoy such freedom.

Then I gave them their overdue pruning. I usually do this task in early February, but the high walls of snow and a subsequent trip to India delayed me this year. But I'm happy to report, no harm done by the delay.

While the subject is roses, I suggest adopting a regime of spraying your roses regularly with a solution of Castille or any other gentle soap and water. It seems to work quite well in keeping them free of bugs. I know this means frequent spraying, particularly after every rain shower. But look at it this way: The practice is easy, eco-friendly and by being with the plants so often, you will notice any damage right away. Most problems are best dealt with early.

I also recommend working a cup of Epsom salts into the soil to feed the roses. I do this once a month during the growing season, another inexpensive and effective habit. After a day of hard work in the garden, you can share the advantages of Epsom salts with a nice soak for your tired feet or entire body. Epsom salts are readily available at any pharmacy.

Wood ash from the fireplace has been added to the compost bin as well as the soil around the lilacs. The ash sweetens, that is, reduces any acidity in the soil. The spongy earth made my task very easy.

Indoors, I've begun seeds for the vegetable garden. There's something about this act that seals my commitment to the garden. I'm in for the long haul.

Witness to nature in the Manhattan jungle

En route to Manhattan last weekend, I took in The Orchid Show: On Broadway at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. I invariably enjoy this annual event. But it occurred to me that over the years I've become more entertained than enlightened. The show runs through April 25; prepare to be delighted. While there, I loved seeing the many signs of spring underway. The Bronx is a couple of weeks ahead of us in terms of the plants' progress. So going there is like getting a preview of things to come.

In Manhattan, I witnessed two things that reminded me once again that our need to connect to nature is visceral. The first was the occurrence of the "super" moon on Saturday night. Residents of a number of apartment buildings hosted moon-viewing parties on their rooftops, coming together to share this wondrous sight.

The second was the sight of a new birdhouse placed in a tree in front of an apartment building. Clearly, someone had positioned it so it could be observed from his or her apartment windows. Even in the concrete jungle there exists the eternal and innate desire for a little bit of nature.