

## In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



Monday, April 16, 2012

### How to enjoy your garden

A great deal has been said about what needs doing in the garden. The list is endless and far too often one is so focused on getting the work done that it's easy to forget why one gardens. It's all very well to say how pleasurable it is to get hands into the soil, toil outdoors in the fresh air, the deep satisfaction of growing one's own flowers, fruits and vegetables and so on, but mostly, we simply don't pause long enough and frequently enough to truly appreciate the garden. I speak from experience and so for the last few years I've been quite deliberate about adding certain elements that has made it compelling to immerse myself in the delights of the garden.

For a start, I created seating in various locations in the garden. What this does is ensure that there is always a place in sun or shade, secluded or more open for me to rest, contemplate, read, snooze, eat or dream. These areas can be simple tree stumps used as stools, chairs that can be moved around to permit conversations with others, stone or wooden benches, a hammock or a tree house. What they all do is invite one to linger and observe. Even in winter, these seats are used to marvel at the pristine snowscapes and the interplay of light and shadow cast by the watery sun.

In order to have something to view at all times, I've made certain to not just have flowers to extend the season but included topiary, espaliers, a little sculpture, plants and shrubs with interesting foliage or shapes, and a variety of climbers such as roses, wisteria, hydrangea and clematis. A meadow that sparkles with blooming bulbs in spring and then is abuzz with all sorts of small creatures and flying insects in summer is a most loved area in my garden. To someone who only wants colorful drama this looks humdrum in July and August. But to me, it presents a place to closely study the happenings in nature. This "wild" growth has a mown path running through it and provides a visual contrast that is

both charming and contemporary at the same time. A humble stone bench set at one end is my go-to place for calm and inner quiet.

Well-planted pots are important elements in a garden. The pots themselves can make strong statements. The plantings provide year round interest and can be swapped out whenever one wants. Big pots can stand in for sculpture and small ones are easy to rearrange or move around as needed. I have in my possession quite a collection of pots in various sizes and shapes. I collect them on my travels like others do photographs.

Fragrant flowers are essential pleasures that every garden ought to have. Some perfumes are heightened by the heat of the sun while others are only detected at night. Having both kinds means the garden is enjoyable any time! And speaking of nights, I have put up lights that make evening gatherings more comfortable. From candles and hurricane lanterns to a strings of small lights and an antique tole chandelier, I create areas to spend long summer evenings with friends, family, flowers and fireflies.

During the day, the sounds of the birds and bees are a constant and I never tire of working in their company. But its only when I sit quietly that I'm fully appreciative of the various voices. Its the difference between background music and listening to a symphony performed live. Every garden is enhanced by the presence of water. Even a small birdbath works well. The sight of birds flitting to and fro to splash and drink is exciting. I have, in addition, a small, antique fountain that transports me to sun-drenched village squares and leisurely meals under clear blue Mediterranean skies.

And so, with such obvious pleasures to avail, and with humble apologies to John Milton, I too sometimes serve (my garden) when I stand and stare. And sit.

Thanks again, Shobha, for another lovely article. Hanging out in my garden is my favorite part. I wish I liked the planting, weeding and pruning more, but we all have our limitations. Yesterday I brought an old quilt and lay under my red maple, right next to my fragrant viburnum. Heaven. I still think your articles should be syndicated. More readers deserve your thoughts and advice.

By Kathleen Williamson on 04/20/2012 at 7:31 am

I second Kathleen's motion. Syndicate these columns, or find some way to share them with a wider audience. As for stopping and enjoying the garden, thank you for giving me the excuse I needed to ease up on the weeding this weekend!

By Julie Gaughran on 04/20/2012 at 1:32 pm

Thanks so much Kathleen and Julie. I really appreciate this. Maybe your endorsement will make things happen!  
-Shobha