

## 5-11-18 Perennial Wonders Heal Problems

I don't have much of a green thumb, but I do love plants and trees and observing nature. So, while I whittle away at my meagre gardening, I am given so many opportunities to relax and recovery.

Yes, recover. Public health is not an easy field and there are times when recovery is needed, enabling me to carry on.

The plan was one of alliteration: plant, prune and primp. Some purchased plants needed planting. A gift hanging plant needed re-potting. A border garden needed weeding. While accomplishing those tasks, nature was oh so interesting!

I watched with interest as four blue jays mostly fought, here and there, from one tree to another. Sometimes they hopped about as a group, following, following making an odd chirring noise. This was just one instance of mating season in full swing! Three of the blue jays were vying for the chance to be chosen by the one female. It was like high school all over again! I hope she makes a good choice.

A diminutive Carolina wren sang his heart out at three locations in hopes one would be chosen. I am certain one will. I am hoping they will return to my window box. I never knew they were there last year. This was a recent discovery as I cleaned out the window box and saw the igloo-like nest of grass, dried leaves, pine needles and moss. After admiring its architecture, I left it, in hopes the travelers would soon return.

A rabbit knew enough to freeze as a neighborhood cat prowled the perimeter of my yard. The "plan" worked. The cat never saw the rabbit. As soon as the feline visitor began to leave the yard via the driveway, that rabbit was sixty feet away in a few leaping bounds.

For some reason, it is always a surprise to me that the perennials actually return! I know that is the meaning of the word perennial and I guess it is my lack of gardening experience and the weird harsh winters, but it is such a joy to see peonies sprouting, and ferns unfurling. I am also beginning to recognize plants as sprouts. That is important, of course, so that I don't think it is a weed and pull it. Not too much danger there, however, as I am pretty relaxed about weeds and take a wait-and-see attitude. I like moss, dandelions and violets, for instance. My sister, who was a fantastic gardener, once told me that she would never allow violets in her yard, as they are too invasive. Thus, I celebrate differences of opinion, as I rejoice seeing violets arriving in my back yard!

I saw the beginnings of the perennial sunflower, otherwise known as sunchokes. This year, I will experiment with cutting some of them back mid-season, before any buds appear, in hopes of having a shorter plant, as they are very tall, left to their own devices. Also, I plan on eating some of the bulbs this year. Native to New England, they are a tasty food source and can be used like chestnut or jicama.

Birds appreciate sources of tasty food also. I finally saw my first hummingbird! I knew they had arrived, as I heard one buzz by Saturday evening and I saw the nectar was lower than the day before. Just as with the perennials, the birds return and are so welcomed!

The goldfinches are turning yellow again, losing their dull winter plumage. They are absolute acrobats leaving the thistle seed feeder!

I have added a suet/seed feeder for the first time and have enjoyed watching cat birds, black birds, blue jays and red bellied wood peckers there. Cardinals are loving the mesh tray with dried meal worms. Juncos and chickadees enjoy the sunflower seeds. All this variety of bird life is possible because of Audubon's squirrel baffle! It is bullet shaped and really works! Praise be!

Confounded by the baffle, and ignoring the Lord's Day last Sunday, a squirrel went to work to check out my house and give me a message. As I was writing this column, a squirrel jumped up onto my kitchen window screen, looked up at a humming bird feeder, looked at me, looked at me, looked at me and then gave up and left. He told me how disappointed he was that the Audubon baffle really worked. Oh, well, he will get by. There's lots of squirrel food out there in nature.

As my gardening efforts wound down, I realized I had seen quite a few feathers and even some chunks of rabbit fur. It is a wild and tough time of year, for sure.

I placed the feathers and fur into a little hanging basket of nesting materials. I am pretty certain the birds don't need my donations but, just in case, I wanted to make life easier for them, if I could.

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