

My Aunt Dorothy used to say that everyone should be skilled in several ways so that they will never be out of work. Diversifying makes not only economic sense; it is beneficial in a myriad of ways for similar reasons. We are less prone to prejudice and other types of small mindedness, when we have neighbors and friends from a variety of backgrounds, with a variety of interests. We maintain our viability when we eat a variety of foods. Nutritionists urge us to, “Eat a Variety Every Day” and biologists remind us to celebrate biodiversity in our environment. Diversity allows us to be less dependent on any one species because we have, just for instance, several species of bees pollinating our crops instead of only one.

It was only recently that I gave thought to those other species of bees and other pollinators, such as bats, moths, ants and flies. As I pursued some knowledge on pollinators, I stumbled across the fact that many centuries ago, the honey bee was introduced to North America. I read that Native Americans called them white man’s flies! That is when my mind made the leap to the realization of how unnatural most of our large scale farming practices are. They are dependent on pesticides, herbicides, water irrigation systems, fertilizers to make up for the sterile soil and they are dependent on hired pollinators; the honey bees.

I know we love to love the honey bees but do we want to be totally dependent on them? Aunt Dorothy would say no!

I have been thinking of environmental diversity recently as I provide the minimal care to my fairly new yard, each year making some changes. I live on a hill of sand, which is great for drainage but it drains so rapidly that it is difficult to grow anything. I didn’t need much time to ponder the plan. At my former place I had encouraged a no-mow lawn with clover and fescues and had seen the diversity explode when I stopped attempting to have the lush green yard.

In fact, the day I arrived in Plymouth and met my neighbor with the golf course-perfect lawn, I gave him the heads up that my yard would never look like his and if he didn’t like it, well, he would just have to look the other way! He kind of laughed, not fully realizing that I really meant it. While I certainly like the appearance of a lush green lawn, I’ve seen too many people become slaves to that. People talked about getting rid of the grubs and which weed killer worked best. I thought of those little signs warning people, and their pets, to stay off because chemicals had recently been applied. That did it for me. I decided I would cease and desist that effort and aim for a different goal, san chemicals and bird and bug friendly.

I suppose that some people would consider my little yard ugly. Maybe I overlook its faults and see only beauty in the same way that a mother sees only wonder, magic and perfection when she gazes at her child. My small yard is changing and I see only potential when we meet. What I notice most in this third year, is the diversity of wildlife now attracted to the area. It is delightful to see the increase of birds and the return of toads. It makes perfect sense now that I think about it. What do toads need? They need insects to eat. How can they survive if I kill off the bugs with pesticides?

I have a lot of what people consider weeds. I have noticed that the weeds produce seeds and that the birds love them. The golf course perfect lawns (like my neighbor’s) are

mowed so frequently, that there is no opportunity for the grass to produce seed heads. While the birds are enjoying the seeds in my yard, the bees and rabbits are loving the clover. The clover requires little to no mowing and has deeper roots than grass, thus providing aeration, nutrients and drought tolerance. The little pathways in between clumps of clover, grass and weeds allow for toads and birds to hop about.

This is all working out.

I've ripped out the wall of bittersweet, exposing a beautiful wild dogwood. Now that there are spaces between low plants, shrubs and trees, the birds can zip through, land on exposed branches for a look-see and feel safe. Finches, warblers and cardinals visit my backyard on a regular basis, without a bird feeder.

Considering the rising prevalence of asthma, allergic reactions and allergies in general, I figure that the fewer chemicals we have in our life the better. There are so many areas out of our control, when it comes to toxins, why willingly add more? It has long been known that the mixing of chemicals can have synergistic effects, where the combination is stronger or faster acting or longer acting than the separate chemicals would have. We walk through life in a sea of toxins and we wonder why we are sick, why we see an increase in immune dysfunction and allergic reactions.

Having a chemical free yard where I don't have to post little signs warning people and pets to stay off, sounds like a good idea to me. Add some friendly toads and birds and it is a whole lot of Aunt Dorothy style diversified fun, right in my back yard.

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