

GARDENS AGING *gracefully*

STORY AND PHOTOS
MELANIE REKOLA

In life, things change – there is no avoiding it. And the ability to accept and adapt to change often dictates success. As with life, so it is with gardens. It is through adversity that both evolve. With some maintenance, you can delight in watching your garden getting better with age.

Great results take great sacrifice and a ripened garden takes work to realize its full potential. Gardens don't necessarily evolve naturally in a way that is pleasing. Saplings grow into full-bodied trees and a once sunny spot filled with abundant blooms becomes a shady nook with sporadic blossoms atop straggly stems. Mortar crumbles, patios heave and wood rots. The casualties of pruning mishaps are evident in evergreens with bare spots and trees sporting right-angled branching. Misguided pruning shows in hedging-gone-wild and gargantuan shrubbery blocking pathways and windows. Invasive triflids slink into the lawn. Alien species choke out the more delicate likes. Sadly the garden then resembles the Amazonian jungle more closely than a beautifully planted property. But, with change comes great opportunity. Amazing and exceptional beauty can be preserved and expressed with a few simple tactics!

L Assess your landscape with fresh eyes. Look at your garden from the whole perspective to decide what should stay, what should go and what should be changed. Don't focus on the emotional value of individual plants or outdoor objets d'art. Search for great bones lurking in the depths, and place equal importance on function and beauty. Write it all down.

TIP: This impressive approach is easier said than done for many, so if the going gets tough, enlist a friend with good taste or hire a professional.

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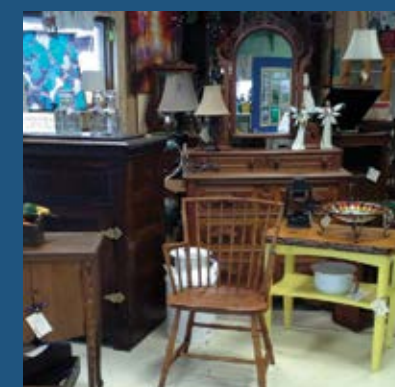


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gardening

2 Proper pruning can reinvigorate a well-established garden. To me, there is nothing as beautiful as mature wood, no matter if it's tree, shrub or vine. A lovely tunnel effect can be achieved by pruning out passageways and leaving overhanging branches above head height. This technique can also be used alongside a patio lending a divine feeling of walls and ceiling to an outdoor room. Where possible, remove only one-third of live wood at a time. Sometimes a shrub has grown so gangly there is no possible way to prune it aesthetically. In those cases the shrub can be lopped to the ground in hopes of rejuvenation. It's worth a try, as life wants to keep living!

TIP: Leave some dead wood, somewhere, to provide homes for our native stingless bee species that need our help by way of habitat.



3 Culling the garden can be a sensitive task, especially for those who place emotional attachment on vegetation. But realize many plants can be relocated, grown in a pot or given away. A struggling plant will require removal. Invasive plant species must go! Research your hostile offenders to choose the best course of eradication. Chemicals are not an option as a mature garden is a living, breathing ecosystem that many life forms have become dependent on. Digging and picking out the roots or layering newspaper with mulch placed on the surface may be the only option to stifle out noxious plants. Plastic is not an ideal choice as it will rob existing tree roots of needed moisture, often killing nearby trees.

TIP: Relocate any spiders and toads you disturb to retain their natural, pest-consuming attributes for your property ecology. Adding bat houses and attracting birds will also help keep down the mosquito populous that often plague shady yards.

4 Explore the world of new plants adapted to your garden's evolution when considering new additions. Shade gardens, though more discreet, can be as stimulating as sun gardens, but with more focus around foliage and form rather than flowers. Pale blossoms, markings and silvery foliage look especially beautiful in shade and glow in low-light situations.

TIP: The soil around conifers is naturally acidic, opening opportunity for plants that enjoy this environment, such as blueberry, blue hydrangeas and lupines.

It is said life brings us not what we want, but what we need. Case in point, patience is not a personality aptitude I naturally possess. But when it comes to the garden, I have infinite tolerance and endurance. Gardens, like fine wine, improve with age. Both are worth the wait. **OH**

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