

When I walk through the garden, the plants make me happy by virtue of their beauty. Their flowers can be fabulous, but it may be the way each plant plays off the others with foliage in shades of green, blue, white, red, yellow or pink. The textures of the leaves – spiky, rounded, ferny, lobulated, scalloped, shiny, fuzzy – also provide interest, especially when combined with the various architectural forms of trees, shrubs, and plants.

My garden isn't a designer's dream by any means. Much of what grows next to its neighbor got there by accident. Rarely do I visit a garden center with a specific purchase plan for the plants I buy. I'll walk through, something grabs my attention, I buy it, and then I figure out where I'm going to put it when I get it home. I'm a plant collector.

While I aspire to assemble what grows in our gardens in an aesthetically pleasing way, that talent doesn't come naturally to me. But now and then, a moment of brilliance strikes and the result works. Many people hire someone to design their gardens to achieve a desired effect, but for me, that's just one of the aspects of gardening that I enjoy – playing with the plants, moving them around until I'm happy with how things look. My garden is one big learning laboratory where I perform all kinds of experiments.

In truth, I've learned more from my failures than my successes. I now know that merely adding sand to clay soil in an effort to improve drainage doesn't work very well, unless you're wanting to make concrete. You have to add enough sand so that it makes up at least 50% of the total mix in order to achieve that better drainage goal.

I've learned that the foliage of the annual *Gazania* resembles that of dandelions. Several years ago, I marveled that a pot of gazanias somehow survived our frigid winter when I noticed them growing again in the spring. Only when I saw a flower bud did I realize that I'd been nurturing a dandelion.

I've learned that it usually doesn't pay to rush things. You can plant seeds early in the season, thinking you're getting a jump on things, but if it's not warm enough for them to germinate, they'll sit there until it is. And if it's too cold and rainy, they might even rot.

I've learned that Murphy's Law is alive and well in my garden. Fellow gardeners can tout their success at growing this or that – "It's the easiest plant to grow ever!" – but I may have killed it. Numerous times. Those Johnny Jump-ups that grow willy-nilly in my friend's driveway? Can't grow 'em. The native Joe Pye weed that threatens to take over most gardens? Deader than a doornail after its first winter. The second time, too.

Conversely, there are plants that probably shouldn't survive in my garden, let alone thrive, yet they do. 'Kent Beauty' oregano, an ornamental herb, is in its fifth year here. Marginally hardy here at best, it's overflowing its border. And year after year, Anemone coronaria graces the garden with red, white, and blue poppy-like blooms. It doesn't know that it's supposed to freeze out here.

I've learned that persistence and patience reap big rewards and that it's not necessarily the destination when you're gardening. For me, it's most definitely the journey. "A gardener's work is never done" doesn't mean what most people think it does, because our definition of work is quite possibly different from that of the general population.

Gardening has been shown to be a great stress reducer and better exercise than most people think. And did you know that there's a specific bacteria in the soil that raises the serotonin level in our brains just by breathing it in while working in the garden? Take time to smell the roses, indeed. I rather like the smell of dirt.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at [www.ourlittleacre.com](http://www.ourlittleacre.com) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre](http://www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre). Contact her at [PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com](mailto:PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com).