



Lessons from the Garden

As I write this article on the last day of July, with summer heat and humidity blanketing my vegetable and rose gardens, I wonder how I can keep fungal disease at bay. Blackspot seems to laugh as I pick mottled leaves from my beloved roses. It knows that it will win the battle despite my efforts to prevent its advance. Our humidity and rainfall give it the advantage. Blackspot robs the roses of their foliage, leaving them naked and vulnerable. As a besotted rose gardener, I worry about their ability to bloom with so few leaves. “How can my rose bushes reach their full potential with Blackspot ravaging them?” To my surprise, the defoliated roses are still blooming. The canes are thorny and bare. Atop these rather grotesque canes, sit the roses, enchantingly beautiful and intensely perfumed. They are like naked goddesses, flaunting their blooms, unaware of their exposed legs and the disease that threatens them from below. I wonder, “how can they bloom so resplendently with so few leaves?”

Like the roses, my tomato plants are afflicted with fungal disease. Early Blight, Bacterial Speck and Septoria Leaf Spot invade their leaves. Yet, they seem unconcerned. Frayed, yellowed leaves and weakened vines continue to climb, blossom and set fruit. Again, I wonder, “How can this be? How can they remain productive in the face of so much disease?”

I suppose that the answers lie within the secret of Mother Nature. Mother Nature is the teacher and the garden is one of the vehicles by which she imparts her wisdom. In my garden, she seems to choose roses and tomatoes to teach about resiliency – the ability to persevere in the face of challenges.

The roses teach that beauty can transcend affliction. Beauty can surprise us and appear where we least expect it. Through the tomatoes, she teaches that vitality and new growth are possible even in the face of infirmity. A fighting spirit may be required, but productivity can remain. Finally, I think that Mother Nature urges us to be still and to listen for she has much to teach us...

As Gertrude Jekyll once said, “ A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust.”