

A Harvest of People

by Carol Barany

Let us give thanks for a bounty of people.

For children who are our second planting, and though they grow like weeds and the wind too soon blows them away, may they forgive us our cultivation and fondly remember where their roots are.

Let us give thanks;

For generous friends...with hearts...and smiles as bright as their blossoms;

For feisty friends, as tart as apples;

For continuous friends, who, like scallions and cucumbers, keep reminding us that we've had them;

For crotchety friends, sour as rhubarb and as indestructible;

For handsome friends, who are as gorgeous as eggplants and as elegant as a row of corn, and the others, as plain as potatoes and so good for you;

For funny friends, who are as silly as Brussels sprouts and as amusing as Jerusalem artichokes;

And serious friends as unpretentious as cabbages, as subtle as summer squash, as persistent as parsley, as delightful as dill, as endless as zucchini and who, like parsnips, can be counted on to see you through the winter;

For old friends, nodding like sunflowers in the evening-time, and young friends coming on as fast as radishes;

For loving friends, who wind around us like tendrils and hold us, despite our blights, wilts and witherings;

And finally, for those friends now gone, like gardens past that have been harvested, but who fed us in their times that we might have life thereafter.

For all these we give thanks.

Our beloved Jim McLain, who wrote a gardening column in the Yakima Herald-Republic from 2003-2013, offered *A Harvest of People* by Max Cootts in one of his Thanksgiving columns. Yakima's Master Gardeners quickly adopted it as part of their tradition.

Anyone interested in gardening can never be bored in Yakima. I'm thankful for every garden I have the pleasure of seeing on a walk or drive through our city. The new "starter" gardens speak of so much hope. They remind me of my early gardening days when I was just discovering plants, and the sheer bliss that came from the smallest successes. For the keepers of these gardens, and for those who open their more "grown-up" gardens for a closer look on the Yakima Arboretum Garden Tour each June, your imagination and creativity inspires me to keep wishing and dreaming for a garden "just like that."

Describing the myriad of Yakima gardeners I've met over the years as "boundlessly generous" is just the beginning. Always cheerleaders, they have at times been mentors, evangelists, and occasionally psychotherapists, enthusiastically sharing their love of the game with me. Raise your hand if you've admired something in another's garden, and before you knew it, they're off running to find a spade and a cardboard box so you can take a start home. Nothing is ever expected in return, other than the pleasure that comes from seeing their plant making someone else happy. I've learned that Yakima gardeners are humble and kind, eager to share what they know with anyone who asks. My garden blooms with friends in the form of the plants they gave me, making me thankful for the greatest lesson of all: that "a garden grows best when it's given away".

If you sit near the back at a Master Gardener meeting, you'll notice a sea of predominantly grey-haired heads filling the room. The current nature of our program is that gardeners often can't complete the training until retirement frees up time during the day (when our classes are held), and we're working on changing that. In the meantime, at a class for the public, or at our annual plant sale, you'll see a totally different demographic. Young twenty-something singles, millennials, and young families with babies and toddlers in strollers and backpacks come in droves. During the past five years, more Americans are growing their own food, and the largest increases are seen among younger households. Their desire to grow their own fresh food and flowers, often with practices that are far more ethical and sustainable than mine ever were at their age, refreshes and inspires this old gardener's spirit, hope, and optimism. Don't ever stop. For all of you, I'm thankful.

Lately, I've been thinking that perhaps gardening's greatest joy for me no longer comes exclusively from the plants themselves. I love talking and writing about plants almost as much as I love growing them. For that privilege, and for you readers, I am especially thankful.