

Morning Glories

by Carol Barany

There was a time when the garden of my dreams featured carefully curated collections of unusual plants, all fitting a specific color scheme, with everything in just the right place.

Those who know me well know it was nothing more than wishful thinking.

The truth is, I garden by serendipity. I have a garden composed mostly of unexpected surprises.

It was naptime on the day before Thanksgiving in 2018, with high wind warnings posted in the Yakima Valley. I was reading to my grandson when halfway through “Anansi and the Talking Melon”, we heard a great “whoooooosh.” Entangled for years with the twining stems of a massive wisteria, that’s the sound a 90’ Norway spruce makes when it captures the force of high winds much like a sail does.

One powerful gust uprooted the tree.

Guided by nothing less than divine providence, the tree fell in a direction that left life and property unharmed.

The tree was cut up and hauled away. Truckloads of soil were hauled in to fill the void. My husband built a rock wall to encircle the area, roughly 20’ x 20’, where the tree once towered. The rest of the story was up to me to finish.

I procrastinated for a long time.

Finally this spring, that barren area was covered with pavers, creating a patio with room for a table for 10.

Who could have know that last fall, birds planted sunflower seeds that grew into flowering towers more than 10’ tall along patio’s southern boundary this summer?

Everyone who sees “Carol’s New Garden” praises my inspired use of sunflowers. I had nothing to do with it. The birds get all the credit.

Good friends gifted me with a hand-crafted Moon Arch on my 70th birthday. For the last 2 years, I’ve moved that arch here and there, with no permanent home in mind. In April, it was installed as the permanent entry to our new patio.

I now had an arbor that was begging for something to cover it.

I happened to find some blue morning glory seedlings coming up in my dahlia beds. I can’t remember how long ago we planted the original seeds, but those annual morning glories have been coming back for years, spread here and there by the wind. With nothing to lose, I transplanted about a dozen of the seedlings at the base of the arch.

The results were so spectacular that I planted more in pots on both sides of my front door. When my grandchildren saw them, they begged to take a pot home to Olympia, where

their morning glories are now growing up the railings on their front porch. Morning glories make a great introduction to gardening for small children.

Few other plants add more romance and lushness to a garden as quickly as annual flowering vines, and morning glories are my favorites. If you have a new landscape without mature trees, it won't take long for vines to cascade over an arbor or trellis, giving the impression that your garden has been there forever. Trellised vines provide a green screen, creating an oasis of privacy.

I know some readers consider morning glories to be nothing more than a nuisance, given their ability to self-seed year after year. I get it. But I can't stop loving them. Mine are growing in a confined area, and in pots. That makes them much easier to control. When they pop up where they're not wanted, as I know they will, they're easy to pull out.

Morning glories are found in three closely related species, *Ipomea nil*, *I. purpurea*, and *I. tricolor*. With heart-shaped leaves from 4 to 6 inches across, the vines can scamper more than 10' in a single season. Flowers are funnel-shaped with wide, fluted petals in a range of colors, including my favorite shades of blue and purple. Some cultivars have fringed edges or double petals. Grow them from seed. You won't find plants at nurseries, since their twining nature makes them a merchandising nightmare.

Imagine them twining around the lamppost, or the post that holds the mailbox; joyfully climbing strings, a trellis, netting or lattice; or clambering over a fence. You can even grow them in hanging baskets.

Each blossom lasts but a single day, opening at sunrise and closing by afternoon. That's not so bad when you can count on fresh blooms tomorrow, and every day until frost.

Not wanting to miss the spectacle, morning glories may be what it takes to a confirmed night owl into a "morning person."