

Moving forward into a brighter New Year

The adage that “hindsight is 20/20” is usually pretty apropos; but, looking back, how about changing it to “let’s put 2020 in hindsight” and say g’bye to a weird year?

This is my 40th annual year-end summary, in which I customarily admit some of my failures and foibles - of which there are plenty - and offer hopes for a better next year.

Wasn’t all bad, of course. I certainly can’t complain, what with so many frustrated and hurting people suffering terrible pains and losses. All I lost, other than a dearly loved horticulture and travel friend who passed away last month, was a few dozen cancelled lectures around the country, along with all the international flower shows that I usually report on. And eleven months apart from my sweetheart who’s been cooped up in our home in England.

On the upside, I became

a grandfather for the first time - welcome, little Alice Jeanne, a 12th generation American Rushing! I rescued and rehabbed some baby possums, and, after

years of serious lobbying, managed to get the approving attention of the flag commission members who thoughtfully winnowed thousands of wonderful proposals to finally select a proud new pennant that includes our beautiful state flower!

On the garden side, after over a decade of planting summer gardens and then abandoning them to months of traveling overseas, 2020 provided a perfect opportunity to try my hand at actually maintaining summer and fall plantings. Some of it worked, some not so well, a stark reminder that I’m a better horticultural expert than actual gardener.

In my eagerness I set out way too many flower and vegetable plants which, other than jalapenos and



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burgundy okra, produced poorly. Too much fertilizer, judging from the mas-

I managed to make some passable fried green tomatoes before the blights and squirrels got the rest. And I harvested some decent birdhouse gourds.

The giant zinnias, from seed simply scatted atop bare dirt, were magnificent all summer and fall; I covered them a couple of cold nights last month to get another few weeks of big cut flowers for my little cabin.

The cabbage, broccoli, kale, and other cole crops I planted this fall got devastated twice by night raiding rodents, costing me not just the money for the plants, but the time it would take to get more planted before winter. And dashed hopes.

Luckily for me, I understand the problems and why I couldn’t or wouldn’t do much about them; but for the countless newbies around the state who set out little gardens for the very first time this year the learning curve was steep. I stopped on my walks to chat with many of the dozens in my own neighborhood, offering advice and hoping they didn’t notice my miser-

able lack of results.

A few accomplishments include building a new raised bed, reconfiguring my compost pile, adding a triangular porch to my cabin with a three-level bird condo, fashioned an above-ground water garden from a galvanized horse water trough, made a concrete bird bath designed a corner English cottage garden, made Christmas decorations from garden materials, and put up enough fig preserves to get me and mine through a year or two.

Oh, and wrapped up Maverick Gardeners, my latest book, about the outlier DIGrs (Determined Independent Gardeners) with whom I’ve had the pleasures of meeting and sharing plants. Out in a couple of months.

So...my garden and I survived an abysmal year. Buh-bye, 2020, no love lost! Here’s hoping for better next year.

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