

Quirky gardener

Is there a quirky gardener in your neighborhood who does things a bit on the wacky side?

Our expectations of a "normal" landscape are deeply ingrained: tidy lawn, shade trees, clipped shrubs hugging the house, flowers or vegetables in neat beds or containers, a fern hanging on the porch, maybe a flag or school logo by the door.

In spite of high maintenance and - dare I say - general lack of personality, there's nothing wrong with the Yard of the Month model; conforming is not only fairly easy, but also a social virtue signal that projects a stable image to neighbors and protects property values up. And I salute it!

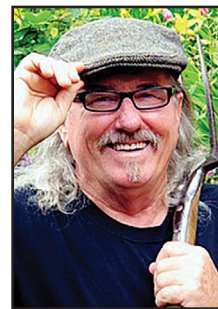
But what about those outliers who break all the rules, and don't seem to care? You know, the garden version of

guys who wear funny hats and grease paint to pro football games?

To be clear, most of these gardeners are not deliberate nonconformists; they are merely other-motivated. Mostly they simply garden so passionately they veer away from the norm.

Some may be garden club members or participate in a local Master Gardener program, but they act on understanding that the rules of horticulture are tempered with certain inalienable rights such as being free to display as many wind chimes and gnomes as they want, plant any color flower next to any color flower, and try (sometimes successfully) doing things the experts say won't work.

Many of these what I call DIGrs (Determined Independent Gardeners) see weeds as metaphors; when someone



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DIGr GARDENS ARE DIFFERENT

calls a beautiful wildflower in their gardens a weed, DIGrs, sadly, interpret it as saying their garden itself is a weed in the community. While I resist comparing or romanticizing the ways gardeners do anything, most

DIGr gardens are easy to spot, from their reverse layout (faces the house, not the street) secluded behind a privacy fence or gate. The cluttered space within is a hodgepodge of plant groupings woven with meandering paths usually lined with stones, bricks, pottery shards, or the like.

Something is usually in flower every month of the year, and somewhere there'll be a queue of pots of plants waiting for their own holes (often in vain). Throw in scattered sacks of potting soil, old pots, well-used tools, and other "useful someday" stuff, and of course lots of yard art, both classic and whimsical, sometimes store-bought but often homemade from found objects.

Those are the outward manifestations of what DIGr gardens look like; the gardeners themselves also exhibit certain shared characteristics. Their arms are scratched, and fingernails often - yeah, you know. They plant stuff in plastic milk jugs, have local plant swaps circled on the calendar, and can be seen checking their

gardens at night by flashlight, digging in the rain, or amusing themselves with a thumb over the end of their hose. And all they want for their birthday is for someone to haul some mulch for them.

DIGrs, in their unexpected ways, offer others a confidence boost to brandish a little personality. They're showing that gardening is less a team sport with refereed rules, and more a big tent under which everyone has opportunities to shine. The garden lifestyle is simply about living intense versions of themselves, and hoping for understanding.

Rather than ridicule them, try to see how they give us permission to color a bit outside our own lines. In an "at least mine ain't that bad" way, they make our own gardens look better.

Just as you wouldn't dream of going into someone else's house to turn their toilet roll around, let's honor our different approaches.

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