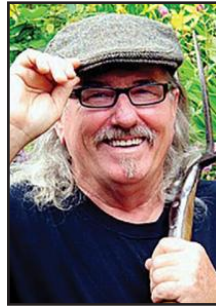


Seasonal Affective Disorder

A red cardinal pecking comfortable arrangements of plants and materials. Its aim is to maximize good feelings while reducing subtle sources of anxiety. It's about toning down excessive straight lines, sharp angles, narrow walks and steps, poor lighting, clutter, clashing colors, competing sounds, bad weather exposure, difficult plant choices, and so on, to improve the overall feel of a garden. Getting rid of things that cause grudges, and adding more pleasures.



FELDER RUSHING

I can wrap my head around how longer, chillier evenings affect our circadian rhythms, but for some restless reason, this year's end of Daylight Saving Time triggered an early onset bout of Seasonal Affective Disorder, making me moodier than usual. So, I'm exploring little ways to get me away from constant emotional snacking by the flickering flames of the TV. And I have come up with a few ideas for accessorizing the darkened garden for sensorial inspiration. For years now I have designed in garden calmness through the Eastern practice called feng shui (fung-shway), a loose set of general principles for creating more soothing, to make mowing easier.

Tone down or roundoff corners and break up solid fences or sheared hedges with an irregular plant, sculpture, bird-bath, driftwood or other unusual object, or wall hanging.

Remove clutter by consolidating plantings, and in the process gradually lose high-maintenance plants, replacing them with no-fuss species in different sizes, shapes, colors, and fragrances for everchanging all-seasons interest.

In a more sensory vein, go out of your way to attract the color, motion, and drama of garden wildlife. Install a simple water feature with a splashy fountain that faces where you sit to better enjoy the soothing sounds, and add a simple fire feature for cool evenings. Hang a wind chime, install weather-proof Bluetooth speakers.

Other words, make at least part of your outdoor space more inviting, interesting, comfortable and feeling safe and secure, like a cozy

living room den rather than a sterile visitor parlor.

That's where the red-bird gave me a winter's worth of inspiration. To get him to stop beaking his brains out on my window, I installed a big mirror for him on a north-facing outside wall, which had the unexpected effect of making my little garden seem bigger, and reflected light, color, and motion from an otherwise dark, dreary area.

I hung gnarly crape myrtle branches to prevent birds' thinking the mirror is an open flyway; they also provide easy perches, and makes it look like I have double everything, including birds.

Taking this a step farther, I positioned reflective "gazing ball" orbs and hung glass ornaments to reflect ambient light and dispel gloom in dark spots. Striped liriope and other light-colored border plants brighten walks, but I also carefully arranged low-voltage night lighting



GARDEN MIRROR WITH CARDINAL

to reveal hidden steps, highlight tree trunks, and accent strategic spots. I even hung a chandelier from my covered pergola where I spend a lot of time on a porch swing by the blazing winter fire and splashy waterfall.

Take a stroll around your garden at dusk, see where you might work in a few of these relaxing ideas. Just thinking about it sets much-needed good vibes into motion.

Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the "Gestalt Gardener" on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.

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