

Felder Rushing

Do you have a landscape like everyone else, or a garden that says something about you?

Gardens are specific places, human constructs that don't exist in nature. But gardening is a verb, generally meaning the deliberate choosing, arranging, putting into soil, maintaining, and adjusting plants in our guarded areas, indoors or out. An active pursuit which can, and should, please and change with us.

ern one-stop garden centers began springing up as horticultural fast-food outlets, and a few innovations we now take for granted changed the way we gardened.



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Last week I attended a lecture by Monty Don, a down-to-earth populist British garden influencer, on what makes a garden. We were both raised toiling in large gardens tended the hard, physical way: Wheelbarrowing manures and compost, which were unavailable in plastic sacks, double-digging beds with a shovel and fork before tillers became affordable, pulling weeds by hand because safe herbicides weren't available, hauling water in cans from rain barrels or a distant faucet rather than hoses, pushing clunky non-motorized lawn mower, the works.

But soon, in the early days of modern gardening, color TV started capturing our attention to possibilities, mod-

Newly developed inexpensive plastic pots and lightweight soil-less mixes in bags made mass-producing and shipping otherwise unobtainable plants possible; lightweight gas engines and mowers and tillers and string trimmers became affordable, and hoses and herbicides and electric hedge trimmers took some of the sting out of chores.

Then even our expectations began to be influenced by mass media. I was fourteen when Southern Living magazine started changing how we view our gardens by suggesting, all but mandating, garden lifestyle choices. We went from my garden club grandmothers' encouragements to be more efficient while helping clean up and beautify our towns, to comparing ourselves to others, for better or worse.

Along the way, many if not most modern gardens became democratized into somewhat sanitized, one-style-fits-most lookalikes, routine spaces to be maintained "as is" in perpetuity. The HOA mantra of



FRONT YARDS ARE GETTING MORE PERSONALIZED

keeping foundation shrubs and hedges pruned, lawns weeded and edged, tomatoes out of sight but in rows reigned supreme.

Nothing wrong with any of this, of course, if you are mostly interested in putting on a public face, a means to a social end to be maintained repetitively just so. But the actual act of personalizing even the most standard garden is what makes a garden great. As Monty put it, "To have a

lovely garden is seen to be admirable and respected, regardless of the style; but the doing - actually making and gardening your own way, with your own hands - is always better."

That in mind, and partly because maverick garden experts like he are encouraging self over style, I am seeing individual garden touches creeping out from once-hidden backyard Edens into the front yard. Perennial flowers



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planted in neatly edged curving beds along property lines are subtly dividing streets of once-standard wall-to-wall lawns into individual gardens. Individual trees are now being planted in groups, underplanted with groundcovers or small shrubs or just neatly mulched beds.

Blueberry plants are being sneaked into once-formal rows of shrubs, porches are sporting larger pots with mixed plants including "edimental" herbs and vegetables,

and vine-draped arbors, may be a low picket fence and gate, are springing up in side yards, helping segue from back to front. Garden art is getting more prominent, perhaps a bit tastier.

Our basic American garden style will never be cottagey like that of England, Japan, or any other gardening society. But the standard style is filling out, getting more interesting, with more personal touches. The way we want to see ourselves.

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