

**There is no statuary in our garden
except for the plastic spacemen
occasionally surfacing**

#

POEMS BY JNANA HODSON



A version of "Overnight, the climbing cucumber wilts" originally appeared as "It Was Supposed To Be a Pyramid at the Heart of a Raised Bed" in *Little Brown Poetry*. Other selections have appeared in the poet's Wordpress blog, *Jnana's Red Barn*.

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*There is no statuary in our garden
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CONTENTS

PARABLES ...

Given ...

A garden without a woman is lamentable ...

Every site is defined by water ...

A plot discloses previous hands ...

There's no backyard to speak of, rather ...

To start, as the snow cover recedes ...

Yes, to open ground in the smaller side ...

Once my Lady of Sunrise declares the soil's basically clay ...

Earth assumes many natures ...

Despite the reality ...

To celebrate ...

Submit to air circulating almost ...

Establishing a rhythm ...

Overnight, the climbing cucumber wilts ...

While cool, rainy weather delays the tomatoes ripening ...

Overdue, the tomatoes ...

Three dark bunches cling to bareness ...

In constructing her garden ...

The human impulse to color ...

ZODIAC ROSARY ...

CAPRICORN, beginning with solstice

 beside the wood-burning stove ...

AQUARIUS, in its degrees of blue ...

PISCES, with heavy snowfall or melting, depending ...

ARIES, when the sump pump kicks in ...

TAURUS, the greenest weeks ...

GEMINI, making room for our parties ...

CANCER, opening as sunflowers ...

LEO, at the heart of Lammas ...

VIRGO sunflower seed, corn, tomatoes ...

LIBRA, the color of bronze and scarlet ...

SCORPIO, of the early nightfall ...

SAGITTARIUS, with cut paper snowflakes ...
The year, more or less ...
In the greening ...

SCALE ...

A smoking garden ...
On our own ground ...
Fresh, as in May ...
Assume the rose lover or tulip breeder ...
Wildlife, close to home ...
Reprise ...
Birds of our yard ...
Garden dimensions ...
The solace of familiar spaces ...
Ten holiday uses for zucchini ...
As in Eye, Flower, and Goddess of the Rainbow ...
Looking out ...

Parables

with the test of intentions

#

Given

a strip of land
to develop
or let go wild
or trash

you make your mark

me, I think I'd rather farm
or run a trap set
drawing on something
in my bloodline

more than the banker

but this is, after all, in a city

#

A garden without a woman is lamentable

unfolding from Eve
and the Singer of the Song of Songs

all this color and excitement

my Woman wears no cosmetics
she's organic
but oh so much better for me
than health food

my Lady leads me in unanticipated ways
she's so unlike the ones before her
she works with wise fingers without hesitating
to get dirt under her nails

my Lady is one of three others in this household
if you don't count the rabbit

let me praise my Ladies ...
especially
though they delight in spicy heat
but can't tolerate cilantro

I could ask questions and more questions
regarding my wife but it wouldn't matter now
would it?

still, as the youngest one said,
"you're a mean mommy:
you're as mean as the thorns in a buckle bush"

here, when comes down to my Lady versus Squirrel
I'm caught in the middle

she keeps growing, unlike those others
withering into peanuts

she can be steadfast and playful
inquisitive and thoughtful,
ethical and scientific as a tide pool
grounded, with her own style (my own Brautigan cover)
a storyteller and bedtime reader
with that twinkle, especially
so if it's not mystery or magic, what is it
in her penchant for ritual?

#

Every site is defined by water

or its lack

we could start with Genesis 1, where water
separates from water before land appears
out of Chaos

the network of drainage
specifies a landscape, observe
the designer's first step is discerning
how water passes across any project

a pathway weaves its way
around water. Comes down
from the ridge, when needed

my region, New England

is on one hand harbors
and lobster pots

and on the other, mill towns
where the river falls. Sources of power
naturally

My native Midwest, with its lack of sea
has plentiful rainfall. Feeding
rivers. Great Lakes
summer haze
grain fields extending the full horizon

Far West defines mountains
by snowpack and glaciers

desert or swamp
come as extremes

north or south

#

A plot discloses previous hands

digging or hammering

sawing, yes, in the legend we inherit

legions to negotiate within budget

where house, barn, shed, driveway

are already placed

a mowed lawn is hardly blank

but a host of earlier decisions

divisions moving silently

lilacs

forsythia, large trees, sidewalks, fire hydrant

to say nothing of what's already indoors

inconveniently, the larger side yard

slopes off in a contortion that rejects affinity
to our household

at first, investigating with tape measure and crude map
what is given

I naively assume I'll superimpose my pleasure
interior, exterior

as if I could command anything
skillfully

wife, stepdaughters, mother-in-law
City Hall or the neighbors

only later, over time
do we regard flow
ponding and drainage

sunlight and shading
streaming through the day

if there were only boulders
to anchor this flux
rather than endless stones floating up in the beds
we might have changed course
more sensibly

yet however mundane, to evaluate soil
and which plants thrive or falter
within season and climate
the impact of small variations
the expected remainder of this life
or the children's
will take root
when appreciation arises
as much from repetition and failure
as delight
to know I've begun with something other than my own
limited imagining
that even weeds have a mind of their own

and the azalea and rhododendron came from others

my designs and hers, then, lend a hand to what's come
before harmoniously, we hope, still full of questions

to be grateful or to rectify
shuffle the deck and deal
this round

#

There's no backyard to speak of, rather

the house splits our property unevenly
with the driveway and kitchen garden to one side
(with a barn and a shed to the rear)
and a larger, uneven lawn on the other
a seeming afterthought or Demilitarized Zone
to the west

when we set forth
nothing, not even a fence or a doorway
appears to tie it to our small estate
though it is, the mortgage insists, ours all the way
to an obscure diagonal boundary
a few feet from Old Ernie's pristine asphalt

and so
sniffing around this patch, I consider
how it twists away from our red siding as if rebelling

from repeated intentional slights
or fleeing to friendlier neighbors

an attitude

we would reverse with a nip here, a tuck there
a berm, raised beds
basic visuals and plantings
and a wilder style

apprehensively, I imagine
having the wherewithal to install a swimming pool
or an enclosed porch overlooking this expanse
even tall wooden fencing or Japanese precepts
executed with a backhoe and truckloads of topsoil
and a cadre of hired help

all the same, my wife ventures
her own conception of an asparagus bed
and raspberry patch, for starters,
plus an interlocking maze of raised frames

of vegetables and flowers

perhaps

had I detected how our squirrels

use smell to communicate

I'd rely on easier means of marking my territory

chattering with frolic in place of all this labor

or I could just stop

with the smaller projects

she set out along the driveway

but what American male could resist

the challenge of claiming his own untamed land

his own sod to bust, his own logs to fell

however public or private his toil?

so what if this wasn't behind the dwelling

but closer to traffic?

wherever you turn, you always begin

with what's come before: rocks and trees,
openings to sunlight, yesterday's debris
the flow of water, especially

together, these entwine with unregimented weather
invasive species of many sizes
in the ground, in the air
the packs of kids and furry tails

between my emerging compost piles
I straighten up and inhale deeply, knowing
it will be mine, by God, when we're finished

#

To start, as the snow cover recedes

the renegade bower beside the driveway
is sheared, in some desperation,
by more than half, to a six-foot height
opening light to a strip that will become her kitchen garden

while on the other side of the house
the twigs and limbs accumulate as three mounds
each the size of a single-car garage

nothing exactly by plan
between my hours at the office and helping
renovate the barn
saw, lop, and cart away

this appears in no fairy tale
written in urine
on the underside of branches

or the rotten crown molding squirrels enter

this uneasy pact we'll share

repeatedly, we wonder what the next gyration will expose

am I playing a king or a knight or simply a pawn
in this emerging stratagem of twigs and mud?

even without neat little squares to navigate,
I learn about deciduous shrubbery
as well as my new wife and her kitchen-side herbs
on a narrow belt no longer darkened

however abbreviated, the hedge
regenerates as a thickened partition, mainly as decorum
since the tenants on the other side overhear
nearly everything, anyway
especially with the windows ajar

maybe you can see where my labor of discovery is going
one row at a time, exposing the full board
unaware of the phalanxes already forming
behind me, the array of squirrels countering children
all called to some battlefield where I would
throw myself on a grenade, heroically
ending my complicated past while providing for heirs
though life rarely ever solves itself as easily as a lottery
no, in the meantime, I'll simply dig up tons of sod
to open slashes for my beloved's intended cultivation
and convey the heavy massed roots to the far yard
we now call "the swamp," for good reason
or even "the Irish garden," as our own bad joke
as in the Old Sod
all of it back-aching labor by the boatload
all the while the squirrels run their overhead arteries

to establish order is always a start
on the opposite flank of a house screening a queen
even one stalemated in a small city

#

Yes, to open ground in the smaller yard

carves up tons of sod hauled by wheelbarrow
to the larger yard, our seasonal swamp
intending there a second sequence of raised beds
to offset wetness aggravated, as we discover
digging at a suspected spring bubbling atop the terrace
a buried rusted pipe from who-knows-what
and the city engineer counsels “apply hydraulic cement”
“plug it”
“sump-pumping into another’s property is illegal anyway”
yet other clandestine ducts keep leaking
somewhere beyond my probing

in this matter of soil and water
my muscles and bones ache days after
still, as I grin in the Irish surfacing broken bottles
bricks, nails from earlier times, outlines of earlier sheds
or walkways (*which my wife disputes*)

though to date no arrowheads or big bones

it's such a balancing act
and will always require balancing
especially at your back

working the earth belies my character
of air and fire
descending from treetops
and telephone-line runways
I still don't belong in a burrow

but for her

before I get a functioning lawnmower
the swamp erupts in waist-deep weeds

on its far side, elderly Ernie laughs knowingly
before lending me his scythe
and demonstrating its use

“just call me Scythemaster”
my girls are instructed
watching me rock the cradle

oh, then, do I ache deeply

#

*Once my Lady of Sunrise declares the soil's basically
clay*

she insists I work in loads of peat moss, sand, and
vermiculite

before she'll plant anything in good conscience

in addition to the beginnings of two panels of ferns
behind the lilacs – my woodland mirror

or a blooming tepee with gourds and climbing beans
surrounded by zinnias for my Lady of Sunday Comics
in the heart of the exposed swamp

and the race to implant the kitchen-door garden

I'm not that young, even to be this foolish
and this time, a month of rainfall starts

with fireworks, of course, viewed from our second-floor deck

before consulting a plumber about a bathroom and heating for the barn or a boiler replacement in our cellar, connecting natural-gas appliances and restoring the downstairs toilet and shower to use in a house

before drafting radical views of both the Garden of Eden and Gethsemane and then the doctrine of Inward Light alas, by year's end, both would flower to book length or, should I say, all? this time around, getting serious as connecting the dots in a seedbed

#

Earth assumes many natures

sometimes quite sandy, sometimes the clay
we inherit

black loam's best for farming
excessive acid or alkali
impose their toll
compacted soil simply won't breathe
my Lady of Potting
explains

"organic matter," she says, meaning compost
and manure, especially. "it needs to be fed"

to say nothing of her disdain for "dead dirt"

so I stop to admire earthworms
flourishing in healthy soil

air appears in many natures
especially when it breathes
inspiration. expiration. a circle of life
a tornado, a cooling, a withdrawal into nothing
dry lines of laundry. clear a picnic table
swirl smoke from an open blaze. snuff burning matches
lift a kite. lift an airplane. lift birds
and countless insects. sometimes paper
sometimes squirrels. ripple the waters
ripple the flags. the prayer flags, especially
burn with heat. freeze with ice

water appears in many natures
sometimes sweet. sometimes salty
sometimes running. sometimes still
fresh or brackish. a cloud, a storm, a gentle rain
a stream, a pond, a cavernous pool, an ocean

rock appears in many natures

sometimes quartz-infused. sometimes basaltic
limestone's favored for buildings
granite, for headstones and curbstones
coal fuels industry. ore refines into metal
gemstones become mysterious in their clarity
mountains tear into the wind. shape the rain

some qualities are visible. many are not
they mix together in thousands of ways
look at the horizon, look at the ground
landscapes emerge apart from map-making

we move. like the water, like the wind
– across rock, across soil –
until people speaking of common activities
and customs will completely baffle

sometimes the growing season's quite short
compared to our place of origin
even so, she wants tropics

where everything in the closet
will mildew before sunrise
and there's no worry of frost

we've gone underground, ourselves
after trusting too much in human love
emerged not on rock or air wholly
but collected from scattered places
and pieced back, as best anyone can
with blueberry-stained hands

so what's the name of your divinity?
your desires? your natures?
the apple of your eye?

even the forest seeks climax
she'll say, quartering a winesap
its burgundy ringing

#

Despite the reality

our range is basically clay and hard fill
water gurgles up in one corner, seemingly
from a spring until I excavate the first buried pipe
and plug it with hydraulic cement
in line with the city engineer's advice

still, nothing stops the rainy season cesspool
or keeps most of that ground from its swampy seasons

from our second-floor window, I discern rows
hinting at structures predating the house
a shed, perhaps, or a fence row
asks just what secret histories
we may have attained with this purchase

in time, eccentric workmanship
introduces previous owners' shortcuts and blunders

I'll keep asking what stopped them
from doing a job right, snicker at their bad jokes
in the meantime, waiting to refurbish
the red cobwebbed mower my wife salvaged
from her first marriage. The plot grows waist-high
and matted until our elderly neighbor extracts
a scythe from his garage and demonstrates its use

after which I vow, "never again!" while admiring
its hungry edge and once commonplace muscular skill

all the wonder, even in a small space, to discover
crammed into every squirrel is a seven-foot digestive tract
can be enough to set you off digging

#

To celebrate

my elder stepdaughter's eighteenth birthday
I satisfy a fire department permit and
torch the three garage-sized brush piles, in pieces

and then for the younger one, erect a teepee
with gourds and climbing beans surrounded by zinnias

I mix peat moss, sand, and vermiculite into my soul
as my wife plants though a July too cool and rainy
for tomatoes to ripen

even so, a host of garden slugs and somehow
broccoli, cucumbers, zucchini, and peppers proliferate
before the tomatoes finally come on, in droves
by the end of August, this family will have feasted
as if with trumpet blasts

#

Submit to air circulating almost

one bit of good news

remove debris and deport from one side
for her garden, relocating the piles
in shadowed cesspool, a bonfire, a second

live-trap a dozen spewing squirrels

the as-yet unspecified glade
even without feathered friends
concentrates on the emerging line and shape

a full-time task, job-hunting itself
regarding implanted hierarchy

“Your generation just doesn’t know
how to have fun” and delight in thirst

out of the house and about
so you'd admit nearing release nearing an island

with us, the race to plant bulbs
would always have a late start

#

Establishing a rhythm

greens plant and weed beside the kitchen
and

the forerunner of a fern bed behind lilacs

on the swampy side ignore omens asking

the real question

 if you'll ever cry Where are we going?
"it's a big mistake" Going where?

my earth sinks would always sink if
it weren't for stones floating to the surface
each winter

land bridge jeopardy

Cruel ground stone soup rather than potato I
intended

to tame with compost, yes and worming

so it was holes in dirt with next year's
garden already planned out she's ready
to hear I've never been fond of mowing
a lawn but take to composting anyway

digging in royally singing in praise of red
wrigglers

like a man so truly the Cadillac

on my daily

commute extending the scale new

construction

along all his options have me wondering

how the routes would be by the time

I retire

what will be planted where forest was

#

Overnight, the climbing cucumber wilts

“so it’s a virus after all” she nods

“not drought stress?”

I suggest with a shrug

this was supposed to be a pyramid

at the heart of a raised bed

#

While cool, rainy weather delays the tomatoes ripening

slugs thrive, and I'm back in Seattle, except
that here, broccoli, cucumbers, zucchini, and peppers
arrive in waves

and our woodworker-electrician and I tackle the barn
renovation

in earnest

still, in a few breaks, I cross the line into Maine
sometimes with my Lady of Children's Television
leaping rapturously in big surf
and sometimes with the afternoon all to myself
and once with the whole family
only to discover I've packed No 4 sunscreen
rather than No 15

(as a serious burns will demonstrate)

in all of this matter of burrows and burrowing
in the earth, in the foliage, at the beach

while fully resolving to keep the wedding simple
my Lady of Parsley and Sage delves deep into planning
what has already become too complicated for my taste
("what do you mean, you don't want a potluck?")
and we meet with an Oversight Committee

in Portsmouth Harbor the family tours a Viking ship
on its way from Iceland to Manhattan
and the following week, a full-size Theodore Tugboat
with rolling eyes and all, as any kid watching PBS could
explain

all the while, life itself feels submerged in Limbo
as absconded as our plumbers

#

Overdue, the tomatoes

surge into grilling big-time (*better late than never?*)
as everything heats up the symbolic, the swirling
toward ceremony
parents flying in from Florida, promptly
enchanted and being enchanted by the children
still the postal service crushes a corner of the calligraphic
certificate everybody will sign as witnesses yet there's
something to be said for autumn equinox marriages
prefaced with a tin-whistle air and blossoms laced
with a serendipitous inchworm entertaining two flower
girls
through an hour of open worship "in the presence of God
and these our Friends and family" my bride caters
her own reception with much help from the kids, close
friends
and, especially, the Oversight Committee, hard workers all
(*suffice it to say, everyone ate well*)

for the two fiddlers get newcomers and experienced
dancers all smiling within New England country-style reels
and circles

these are traditions we link and continue

this is community we link and continue

this is friendship and family we link and continue

valued Old Ways for the future

we newlyweds linger a day with my parents before escaping
to a bed-and-breakfast for our honeymoon and a phone call
from plumbers, telling of complications now finally
getting around to replacing the cellar boiler
back home, as an early killer frost zaps the gardens

#

Three dark bunches cling to bareness

higher than my ladder's reach,
lower on the vines I yanked loose from the box elder
than the squirrels can claim

they're mostly bitter now, or have fermented wild
for a few days of intoxicated, carousing birds

in season, a distinctive rich flavor though gritty with seed
or too gelatinous to the tongue
someday we'll try our hand at winemaking, no doubt
perhaps on vines originating from these

some now shriveled, wrinkled with rot:
purple against clear sky or impending snow:
pendants
from the bare tree. Even now
the taste is still there
in some complexity

I would not trust
unless skirting starvation

the bottled up accusations
on nights I'd hoped we' be alone
to renew the romance
instead of the acrimony

we approach winter, of course
as long shadows lengthen

#

In constructing her garden

sod, roots woven tight, close together
the way I thought we would

overlooking the fact we both flower
quite conspicuously

our stems woody or thorny
even through winter

#

The human impulse to color

– dyes, ornamentation

black-and-white is focused defiance.

let's be honest – these are weedy gardens
even with the black plastic film protection
or the arbor with ferns now

I have a woman without freckles
she doesn't preen
she's all business
she's sexy as all hell

there are no wild boars here

“let's go bag a deer”
“and then what?”
“we'll make candles”



parables?

you'll never understand

without practice

Zodiac Rosary

to be aware, every day, through the seasons

*CAPRICORN, beginning with solstice
beside the wood-burning stove*

we cut an evergreen
bring it indoors
and decorate

we're old-fashioned that way

look out and see
the ubiquitous squirrel

balancing with difficulty on the power lines

a dove, with its tiny head and pointy tail
resembling a turtle

and laugh, connecting "turtle-dove"
of English folksong

I have emotions

I have my own mind

all the stacked seed catalogues

or Conservation District flier

await review and ordering

the bitter deep cold itself

at our pipes, finally breaks

with or without damage

AQUARIUS, in its degrees of blue

even with single-digit temperatures, clear, early
in the piercing frostbite
a cardinal begins singing
“spring’s on the way”

keeps singing lustily
every morning thereafter

the seedling shelves and fluorescent lights
are moved into the hallway
and placed against the radiator

howling, a nor’easter
piles snow two feet on our outdoor tables and chairs
our Japanese lantern resembles Marge Simpson

such a blue sky while we’re digging out,
as if nothing threatening had ever happened

the garden appears most perfect
after a new snow

twelve-foot-long icicles on the house
are a sign of lousy insulation and much heat loss

small tracks cross the yard
birds crowd the feeder

PISCES, with heavy snowfall or melting, depending

there's something delicious
about this snowfall
twilight at home

where we dwell, these days
define our particular winter
its length and intensity, especially

at the edge of melting, we watch
but the first snowdrop blossom is always a surprise

and then it's covered in two feet of new snow

robustly chanting at sunrise, the males songbirds
are finally joined by cooing mourning doves
lured to all the grain spilled from the feeder
in our recent heavy winds

two snowdrops bloom
and an inch of tulip blades emerges
in maple-leaf debris
before a half-inch of wet late-winter snow falls

it's seesaw, give-and-take in the air
and then the midday sunlight softens

at last, the white expanse dwindles and
batches of bare ground spread, exposing
the tips of daffodils and crocus

are we set to tackle gardening again?
"I'm not ready for this," my Lady at the Oven groans
but I'm out to trim the hedges
"getting an early start!" as a passerby quips

our first golden crocus blooms
and it's snowing

yes, when our yellow crocuses are up – crow-kie?
a foot more snow is expected

yes, with crocuses everywhere
we see the fruits of our labors
the design taking hold

“windflowers,” small blue blossoms
proliferate along the driveway

now that I’ve pruned the lilacs
(there are better times, I’ll learn)
I wonder where to put the prayer flags
as well as a hummingbird feeder

ARIES, when the sump pump kicks in

gray and muddy
spring arrives
wearing a white mask
two nights in a row

wet, heavy late season thick on the branches
slush on the streets
the ground's thawed and thawing, so this will all melt off
soon

this tide going out

Easter, half the yard's still blanketed

our first daffodils open amid grape hyacinths
in front of the house

so many crows in flight while I cut pussy willow

against incredibly blue sky

our personal “ice out” is the first day you can walk
diagonally
across the swamp without stepping on snow

the goldfinches regain their yellow
first as a faint chartreuse under the gray
when they alight at the feeder

overhead, buzzards return

still, one large patch of stubborn snow
extends from the feeder to the berm

there's a purple martin invasion /
 a purple MARTIAN invasion
very rare in New Hampshire, but tell that to the mob
that cleans out the suet (or were they?)

and then it's raining
grass getting tall in the wetness

downtown waterfalls are furiously white
the floe cracking apart over the flash boards

behind the shed, I empty
the winter's garbage from the covered barrel
the contents quite wet, the vinegary smell resembling
manure but many red wigglers – *Eisenia foetida* –
are already working in the heat of decomposition under
way

I'd lop the hedges more drastically
but Omi wants her privacy

so much depends on turning the compost for the first time
in spring before trimming the hedges

TAURUS, the greenest weeks

en masse, goldfinches return

yellow-green grass

yellow-green deciduous leaves and catkins

new flood of sunlight

peepers in the night forest

lilies of the valley and wild ginger

by afternoon, our first ferns are up a couple of inches

where there'd been nothing in the morning

lilacs show "baby corn" blossoms about to erupt

the fiddleheads, especially, with their slow uncurling

some varieties of our ferns

appear a week or two after others

some emerge quite stealthy

(some even fake looking dead)

others are quite hairy

a few asparagus also show, however timidly

who's been eating my fiddleheads?
squirrel? or slug? or skunk? possum?

I put two of the fiddleheads in chicken-mesh cages
to thwart the marauding squirrels

still gray with spots of blue and daffodil
from extreme winter to extreme spring
as our weather guy puts it

a carpet of blue psilla parallels the driveway

blue-purple, spring
a finch that's yellow now

goldfinches

over the
daffodils

forsythias, camus lilies
swamp marigold, dandelions
even the buttery tulips

on a single bold stalk about to leaf over
lilacs open

someday maybe I'll know by song
all the birds that stay hidden in our treetops

the earth itself softens, breathes
and my seasons of mulching become evident
in the ease of pulling up weed maples, roots and all
without having to get pliers

we're making our mark
the daffodils on the mount look

so natural they would have been there anyway

the raspberry bushes thrive
the sweet woodruff prospers
the lilacs fill in

bit by bit, things come together

my Lady of Spring Rolls espies a pheasant under our feeder
me, a turkey along 101. two days running

the tree leaves open overnight
the first asparagus from our garden
proves unbelievably succulent and tender

Hosanna! and so forth

New England, bright green
a whirl, essentially
mow the lawn, turn compost

plant sugar-snap peas and spinach

lavender-black-yellow-green

bumblebee in rhododendron

GEMINI, making room for our parties

the buzz of lawnmowers

I'll soon join, though the yard's still way too spongy

I turn and move mounds of dirt

some to fill cavities in our yard

the ponds after heavy rain

“What are you going to put there?”

in the wallows after Emily from across the street

plays mud-pig without invitation

“Grass!” or maybe poison ivy! depending

we know what we're planting

already, I've plucked hundreds of maple seedlings

planted mountain laurel and two roses

two new blueberry bushes and a patchouli plant

tied up the raspberries
put stakes in for the peas
clipped grass and weeds

arrayed lilac cuttings in the bedroom

between the kitchen and the barn
Tibetan prayer flags proclaim warming
as much as a line of laundry

while Memorial Day brings hail
thunderstorm, noon

memories, in the irises and hostas
the woodland touches
the earlier lovers of springtime
everything as lush as it was then

so quickly, the lilacs pass

at least the beds are turned
and four covered in wet newspaper and straw
are strewn with “cutting flower” mixture

spread newspaper under the asparagus, too
for weed control, and top with finished compost

build up the concentric-circle strawberry bed
with the last of the last of the finished compost

refill the nearly empty compost bins
with the last bags of collected autumn foliage

each step of the progression appears slowly
but passes too quickly

composting matters, as a lesson in humility and humus

my potato bed has green shoots appearing

feed the acid-loving plants
it's hard not to become compulsive

now it turns out I bought eighteen paste tomato plants
instead of the dozen I thought were there
“you must be serious about tomato paste”
the clerk said with approval
of my cooks

a flicker pecks at cracks in the driveway
quickly, determinedly grubbing

our Asiatic lilies fall to beetles
another foreign import
with no natural predators here

crucially, to make room for the parties

first, for my Lady of Lemon Marigolds, five cubic yards
of composted cow manure arrive

after a delay by rain (we're flexible about birth dates)
we spread the riches
"the gardens are looking professional," she acclaims

and second, strawberries coming on
as my Lady of Linguistics's rose bush begins blooming
BONICA
and my wife's elated by the profusion of berries
to give them away, to friends and colleagues, or freeze
for later
the joys of a summer GLUT OUT

two days turning of soil and tall weeds to make room for
buckwheat

the lawnmower anxiety
regarding a jungle between the kitchen garden and hedge

just look at the weeds

CANCER, opening as sunflowers

summer, at last

hot, sunny, humid – 90 degree afternoon

maybe we'll salvage a round of crops stunted by earlier cold
(we're finding each annual growing season varies)

day lilies open down the street and next door

ours are always a bit later

for that matter, all of our bulbs are later

the yard – the year – begins to reflect our work

even the things we have no control over

the solid white mass of wild roses in the box elder

where wild grapes will soon appear

balloon-flowers, callendula, ox-eye daisy

masses of mint, blooming borage, sweet Annie, mock

orange, profusion of potato greens, asparagus, lettuce,

nasturtiums

all ours, in some kind of order

as my potatoes come on

add dirt to the barrels

the kitchen garden becomes a self-seeded sunflower jungle

with a hummingbird flitting there Tuesday

and another on the tomatillos Thursday

along with a host of goldfinches

our day lilies glow

as a prelude to fireworks

high summer, according to my Lady of the Lap Rabbit,

is when black-eyed susans bloom

right after the daisies fade, which saddens her

“I thought it was when the day lilies trumpet”

I’ll argue, but no, she says that can be mid-June – too early

LEO, at the heart of Lammas

I crease the last of their lingering flats into the ground
the middle bed on the swamp, especially
do or die time, after my Lady of Big Schemes
has threatened to compost 'em

our two strawberry beds keep sending out runners

behind the shed, my Lady
knocks down the prospering St. Jerome “gout weed”

so many flowers! as well as the garden beds
and weeds, simply looking fine
sufficient moisture, all summer, when needed

I'm not a happy weeder
it's something I rarely set out to do
or for that matter set as a priority
even when it comes to writing

it's hard to tell what's a weed – the esoteric potential –
unless it's by proliferation, the way ground ivy takes over
beyond any balance, say and what's
domesticated for nutrition or color

for that matter, I'm seldom a happy gardener
unlike our Lady Jane who cannot decide if her art or garden
comes first

so I put in five good hours of yard work
moving wood chips and covering
kitchen garden pathways
with landscaping fabric in cleared out lanes
while ants attack my ankles
out of the already occurring decomposition

high summer, rains now, too
cooler. relief
dramatic thunderclouds
multiple construction delays on my commute

my Lady of Resolution has eleven varieties of tomato –
celebrating yellow and red Brandywine, taxi, early girl,
goldenglow – aside from a fascinating array of insects
on the goldenrod and leeks' bobbing balls of florets

and serves our first large tomato for lunch
with fish chowder

to the clear the plate
we keep weeding
in moving toward harvest

I get a haircut
mow the lawn
as a window of opportunity

cool, dry autumn days
alternate with hot, humid summer
and incredible overnight thunderstorms

lavender

Joe Pye weed and asters

bring the first hint of turning foliage

the garden, full and lush

yet the laurels and rhododendron show signs of stress

after drought in their first year

cucumbers

blueberries

goldenrod

peaches

VIRGO sunflower seed, sweet corn, tomatoes

asparagus covered with ladybugs
devouring asparagus beetle eggs and larva

in addition to cricket profusion
skunks roving in the night
lettuce and tomato sandwiches

I pull Jerusalem artichokes from the hedge
which needs to be trimmed again

squirrels attack the sunflowers heads
and ripe melons

the “mild red peppers” are too hot
even for my Lady Who Does Not Put Tools Away

bouquets of cut flowers appear around the house
the Joe Pye weed’s taller than me

Chinese lanterns
in the compost barrels
puzzle me
(tomatillos)

and then it's happy anniversary

LIBRA, the color of bronze and scarlet

over the kitchen, one black walnut is bare
the other's just beginning to turn yellow

a dash to the farm for two more bales of mulch hay
a half-dozen ears of sweet corn, gourds, etc.
and then the wine store
before grilling thick pork chops

10 pumpkins wait beside the driveway
even before I collect squashes and gourds
from the garden

our blooming cardinal flower
makes me wish more had survived, even just one, to
remind us

autumn touches, make my Lady of Spices happy
chrysanthemums and a few poppies

repotted to barrels and pots around the barn and kitchen
entry

the mums in the barrels so gorgeous
next to the pumpkin-filled wheelbarrow
the harvest in a wheelbarrow – eggplants, too
or vines in the compost

with a full spider web in sunlight
by the barn loft door
who equated dreams with insects?

if, by mid-October and still no frost
the garden's on borrowed time

half the leaves are already down from the trees
while half of the ones still standing turn color

as for the green stubborn remnant, the day is coming

and then, first hard frost

Indian summer
and see your breath

after clearing the garden of last peppers, eggplant,
tomatillo, harvesting meagre bits of potato and sweet
potato, too

in a warmer than usual season, a single
 rhododendron blossom
roses too, have been fooled

I scrape frost off windshield, first time
light frosts knock the peppers down, but not all
the tomatoes, meanwhile, just pooped out anyway

dig up the last of the potatoes
a large basket
the marble-sized ones quite tasty
roasted with garlic

under either scenario,
make that Indian summer now
and more lobster tomorrow

I empty two of our five potato barrels
and it's spitting snow

SCORPIO, of the early nightfall

of the neighborhood cats, the gray one prowls everything
“you’d think after five years here, they’d finally come up to
me”

white-bibbed black cat often snoozes in the berm
solid black beside the catnip watches the bird feeder
and heifer cat, Spooky, and Nimrod, who’s caught a
squirrel

time to pull up the tomato cages and groundcover
layer of black plastic, burn the asparagus fronds
spade for next spring and weed, time permitting

the many tree rootlets invading the compost bins
make emptying difficult, yet I divide the half-done compost
rich in red wigglers
and collect more bagged leaves
from the neighbors

line the side of the barn to cut the wind flow
drain the garden hoses and hang them
clean up my Lady of Inspiration's pottery and peat moss
bags
the mess beside the shed

and miss the first Met broadcast altogether

SAGITTARIUS, with cut paper snowflakes

looking at a Japanese garden book in the morning

I remark

how much that looks wild there requires constant care!

at noon I find

small garter snakes in the beer cellar

here is where I've settled

here I live

with all the rest, beginning with my Lady of Advent

and the Gingerbread Castles

somewhere, she collects bittersweet strands

a decorative swag

and for Thanksgiving and Christmas Day dinners

I cut frost-sweetened Brussels sprouts from the snow

#

The year, more or less

I wish I could claim this as a single year, but it's many
in the barrel.

but I do these as part of a rhythm, part of the grounding,
part of the everyday reality
that admits / proclaims / accepts

I am here

this life

my Lady of the Grid Paper says the first thing you should
plant

in the first year you move in is

asparagus / raspberries / strawberries, maybe rhubarb
and pussy willow, too

knowing that the third year, you'll realize you put them
in the wrong places

next spring, repeated, blueberry bushes, mountain laurel,
ferns

strawberry bed for one of the central raised ovals
about the only gardening project left
rest is small touches here and there

all of our plants, from Lady Jane's jacks-in-the-pulpit
Barbara Sturrock's irises
ferns from roadside and friends' woods and fields
basil, we think of Connie Weeks
asparagus and it's a ha-ha-ha thinking of Chuck Cox
Quaker ladies from the burial ground
forget-me-nots from across the street
manure runs from Steve and Barbara and Bill

in other words, connections: you can't do it alone
yet it's always personal

#

In the greening

in the end, we miss the freezing rain
that becomes fog in treetops on my commute
over melting snow

still achy from gardening
so what do I know?
a touch of lime oil in my morning coffee

green swags
my windows

watch my back and sides
spasms
all that digging

a full month of April showers compresses into thirty-six
hours Monday and Tuesday welcome relief, but

uproot a hundred stealth maples
and a squirrel
every day
this time of year

the garden looks great, so luxurious to have cut flowers
indoors
a second sprig of laurel in my lair
against the deep velvet of Siberian iris
now we're sinking to detail ...

a bucket of strawberries, to the office

too much rain and the sump pump kicks in
a downpour leading to rare July flood warnings across the
state

our Lady of Pink Flamingoes keeps taunting
"Have you been flocked?"

such a strange summer
cold, wet July days
rain and thunderstorms forecast
into next week, without break
my Lady of Coriander had the stove going three days

by Bastille Day, still no time in the 90s
and only a few in the upper 80s

where's it going, our summer of plastic flamingos?

or the alternative, of very humid, stale air –
80 Fahrenheit, 80 percent humidity –
can't move much
despite intentions

some sun, some rain
including brief downpours

the continuing decay

I mow the lawn, saturate a T-shirt in sweat
of course, it's extreme high tide at the beach

1 a.m., bedroom windows open

thinking of the past

I smell a skunk

crossing the darkness

below me

into a lazy day, mostly on the deck

frozen daquiris, relief from 90-plus heat/humidity

the first time in five years

profusion of glorious mock orange

in and over the kitchen garden hedge

just because I watch the stars
doesn't mean I trust them

Scale

as in music, as much as anything

A smoking garden

I don't smoke, we need to make that clear
haven't for ages
(except when dealing with stinging insects
as I learned of beekeeper Lydia Frink
from the newspaper photo)

but my mother-in-law, the German, rolls her own
and that's why, when we bought this place,
I envisioned her reclining
and leisurely wrapping herself in blue fumes
in the square beside the barn
the small gravel plaza
complete with a large round fiberglass table
previous occupants left us
the corner I soon dubbed the Smoking Garden

of course, over the decade since, she's rarely gone there
even after I'd cleared it of overgrown maple and lilac

and strung twinkle lights overhead and along the barn
and ringed the space with torches

instead, we grill and party there
or in season it's my space to sit
at the end of the day
in the middle of the day, with lunch, especially
or even first thing, with coffee

Any smoke comes from the grill or torches or our old wood
stove
removed from the kitchen and now used as a chiminea
or citronella candles or an emotional outburst

Our outdoor furniture from yard sales or trash day
recycling

Such is our style



With a city farm

I've learned to think small

What others would call a bed

I consider a garden:

the fern gardens, either side of the pathway

out from the Smoking Garden

or the iris and hosta garden, or the blueberry and forsythia

as well as the kitchen garden beside the driveway

and the maze of raised beds in the swamp

any decisions, of course, between food production

and ornamental beauty stand apart from the garden

of repose –



let me praise the secluded outdoor corner

as part of an urban dwelling:

a patio or deck

(my last apartment lacked one)

the courtyard with a fountain

a large porch or gazebo

at the least, a place to sit
or, better yet, cook
any place close enough to the kitchen
with a degree of privacy and a view of something



grilling flatbread pizzas
expecting

WHERE THERE'S FIRE



the two panels of gravel and landscaping
plastic I ripped out
for the ferns, and a third for a wood-chip pathway

Homage to Jane Kaufmann

the bulkhead to the beer cellar

as early as a warm afternoon in late April
sit back in the Smoking Garden
with three of our homebrewed boch beers

very good, tasty, rich, smooth
and carrying a wallop

popped down in the Smoking Garden with a beer,
my Lady of Much Wisdom and I grilling ... she asked if I'd
mind going down to the cellar
for another bottle, little did she know I had a bottle of
champagne
chilling all day in the fridge, so out came the flutes ...
surprise, with a baguette
soon followed by strawberries, cake, and candles ... all
thirty-nine

clear Christmas lights arrayed abstractly along the barn ...
Smoking Garden ...
magical, Mendelssohn's *Midsummer's Night Dream*,
complete, with verses
repeating through the *Midsummer's Night*

surreptitiously, we listen to neighbors

“let me just step into that shadow”

Danny, age 5, to companions

in the wading pool

(how can anyone be fond of pigeons?)

the Tiki torches, hints of pathways in five directions from
the Smoking Garden

October, after apple picking

homemade pasta with our own roasted tomatoes, basil,

and parsley

quite lovely, followed by homemade eclairs

a little after six

and it's twilight

and cold!

Sunday afternoon, Smoking Garden

glass of Rioja

clear, cool, with a breeze

we grilled individual pizzas

My Lady of varigated leaves

saw our first hummingbird at the feeder

a circle of jays, shrieking at a raven

yet another morning

dead squirrel in the Smoking Garden – d-CON?

Another, dazed, lethargic, on the deck.

Live trapped three more for release elsewhere.

after grilling sausage and corn-on-the-cob

back outside, to take care of the fire,

I plugged in the strand of lights and realized

I'd nearly stepped on a skunk

good thing ours are friendly

while having two martinis in the Smoking Garden, looked
up

and saw a hummingbird pause, over the barn

a damned squirrel killed the parrot lights
ate through the cord

as we ate in the Smoking Garden
two skunks passed by
we went to bed early

sweet corn, tomatoes, pinot grigio in the Smoking Garden

lamb and chicken grilled / anniversary / rice pilaf, green
beans and tomatoes from our garden, fresh humus ... all the
torches lighted, well into evening

“I haven’t enjoyed a meal this much in ages – there wasn’t
anything that didn’t come out nicely”

late March

I ate lunch in the Smoking Garden (38 degrees but sunny)

my bowl of lentil soup steaming

driving with the windows down, too, when it hits the low

50s

grilling corn-on-the-cob

listening to Beethoven concert live from Tanglewood

or the Sox at Fenway

Smoking Garden ...

cooking three lobsters Monday ... My Lady of bubbling

obsessions shells 1½ of them, for meat to make lobster

ravioli ...

eaten outdoors, make a mess!

a lobster, tougher ... its shell harder than normal ... had I

overcooked it? Then learned that's what happens just

before molting, the tightly packed meat ... winter coming

9:IV first day to lunch in the Smoking Garden

a lovely Vietnamese concoction from My Lady of Chinese
noodles

that year, we used the Smoking Garden more on September
evenings than all of the rest of the summer this year. Often,
with the fire going ... the sense this may be the last time,
how sweet ... how quickly the sun goes down or darkness
descends these days ... that's why I light the torches as early
as I do ...

spinach au gratin in the Smoking Garden

with all the Tiki torches blazing

grapefruit and toast al fresco

remembering the Fairy Godmothers who blessed this place
and its people ...

what was shaping up to be a muggy day
turned cooler, I mowed the lawn,
weeded some. A phone call woke my Lady already turning
beside me
and she decided it was a great day to grill
so off she went to buy some
marked down steaks, crusty sourdough
fresh broccoli and zucchini
POIFECT, as they say
and then we slept ten hours

light the charcoal / and kick back

marinated vegetables and mushrooms

grilling

sirloin tips, Chinese ribs, beer-can chicken

#

On our own ground

each springtime and summer
we go our rounds, grubbing out

pervasive maple sprouts, glistening slugs
the evil elegance of bindweed

to open way
for what flowers or what bears would harvest

each repetition its own mixture
of success and disappointment



as my Lady of the Fabric Bins explains
the palette of the tongue

its savory and sweet
variations of wine tannin or bite

torches in our smoking garden twilight
with charcoal, glowing and ready

#

Fresh, as in May

strawberry ice
on strawberries
under whipped cream

sugar rimmed
glassware

or on chocolate

which of the lovelies do I think of?

the asparagus is in, meaning it's May
and the bed's taken hold

all the years of wandering
after fleeing the desert irrigation canal banks
just to get here

as if I'd ever stick my neck out again

take my body and my blood

turning green out of the thawing brush pile

#

Assume the rose lover or tulip breeder

appreciating nuance, history, even
patience that parallel another practice
how quickly nationalities come to mind
English or Dutch giving way to French
even Turks as lineage unfolds naming
domestic floral species will often challenge
varieties then typically ascribe connoisseurs
of petals, vine, or bulb, wildflowers advance
specialty leading to bog or alpine tundra

how tulip lovers or rose breeders regard
other breeds, no doubt beholding more
than the general color or aroma
bouquet, block of texture beside the pathway
what rare touch here would advance my own
devotion married year after year in its season
bush or trellis as prickly as the star in the heart

of cut gemstone, to raise roses or tulips
requires more stability than I've sustained
since the onset of adolescence

#

Wildlife, close to home

no squirrel today

3 got away

tally for the week: nine squirrels, plus three mice

more squirrels than girls – and there are a lot of girls in this neighborhood

relocated Squirrel No. 13

and then, we went out for a goombah smash

two horny squirrels on a tree

I hate cartoon slapstick ... as for real actors ...

The Dead See Squirrels

who know nothing of the next state nor the globe
their world branches endlessly, effortlessly
and is anything but round

the thistle feeder found in one of our coolers ... ah! the safe
place!

a girl named Bambi
sounds like a dear
or at least, a little fun

Snow White
lighting
a cigarette

a hummingbird in our herb garden
enough to make me think my sighting over the barn
was a goldfinch, but can they – do they – HOVER?

the fact our yard's so full of wildlife pleases me
as long as the squirrel population's held in check
allowing us a bumper crop of pumpkins and self-seeded
sunflowers

with binoculars from the deck, a goldfinch in a sunflower
bloom
only to discover two more feasting in the same cluster
when one breaks away, she initially thinks the flower is
taking flight

remove the peavines and the cosmos and cabbage breathe
a bit more

with the binoculars again, watching incredibly high gulls
moving east-west
and then, all alone, the unmistakable bald eagle
sailing south, not a single flap
to be lost to a cloud and then sun glare

how is it the eagle soared southward
while the gulls kept going east-west
before and after?
or did the eagle simply Trim Sails somehow
in the upper wind?

May, a profusion of birdsong before sunrise
September, a profusion of cricket fiddling after sunset
incessant, rapturous chorus

September, why so few birds singing?
May, why so little fiddling?

migrating geese sound like a squeaky floor

suet, downy woodpeckers tweet for each bite

in the pile of garbage bags, rustling
a skunk determined to rip it open by the back door
the colors reversed – a black stripe on a white body

EVEN IN WINTER GARB

cardinals singing boisterously, 5 a.m.

a raven or two in our yard

regular visitors

under our bird feeder

corn / cracked corn in the mix

Megan's been sitting a California king snake

(Eric's quite impressed)

Sara's rabbit, Radar, quite a thumper

"We thought books were falling from the shelves"

when Megan babysat, and so the kids slept in the big bed

and I slept in the loft

already the goldfinches are losing their bright yellow, s

shifting over to their "traveling clothes" ...

cardinal flower still scarlet ... the sunflowers nearly past ...
will we have any pumpkins in this crazy year?

blue jays as monkey birds squawking

a stream of crows, maybe a hundred, all headed south
(the ten thousand roosting together in a cemetery, how
spooky)

admiring the white gull against blue sky
and the black band on its wing
four white droplets fall away and vanish
never seen that before!

today, two large hawks, soaring

now-dun finches at the feeder

long enough we could see the flashes of ruby throat
a flash of flight in front of me

only one thing it could be, that fast motion
latter, sitting in the crossbars of the feeder before dropping
to the sugar water

continue to see flits around the house
that big bee funny motion

a hummingbird at our feeder, size of a dragonfly

neighbors report a large groundhog ... where are those
dogs?

unfamiliar sound in the trees a red squirrel, rather than
birds
chased by gray squirrels

yes, red squirrels: nasty, neurotic, jittery ... that spastic flash
...
and a taste for rat poison

the squirrels are stripping my blueberry bushes
as fast as they ripen
when I'd expected a bumper crop

outside the office
had to dodge to miss a skunk that moseyed into the brush
along the shoulder
next night, on my own street, I braked to allow another
to scurry to cover under a parked car
how funny they look, running
their back arches, and both ends drop
nearly to the ground
how laborious!

hummingbirds arrive late April or May
leave in August or early September
fly 600 miles across the Gulf of Mexico
bulk up in Georgia and Florida adding
an ounce of fat to their four-ounce bodies ...
amazing creatures

a possum in the bottom of one of our plastic barrels
furrer than I expected
turn the cylinder on its side, still takes a while f
or the critter to move off ... injured? stunned? no idea

“You could see every scallop in the feathers! It was BIG!”
the eagle swooping down on Central Avenue by the
hospital

a young porcupine crossing Hill Street four doors down ...
a neighbor watching from the stoop ...
next night, a dead adult porcupine in the street

and the goldfinches lost their yellow ...
how sudden and uniform this molting!
a cooper’s hawk or peregrin at the thistle feeder
as I was showering ...
long barred tail but the rest, amid a lot of commotion,
Spooky the cat came forward! everything so fast ...

on our apron by the back door
a small snake, whip motion,
ever so slowly

mammals that groom each other

#

Reprise

The amount of wildlife in our yard continually impresses me, especially compared to Oakdale Avenue or Woodbine. The abundance of squirrels, of course, and possible rats but also skunks, opossums, the groundhog can be added in plus snakes and insects.

We must be doing something right, or just be in the right location.

A first: amid a throng of blue jays chasing a crow, a mockingbird:
was its nest raided or threatened?

#

Birds of our yard

feeder, especially: goldfinches purple finches house

sparrows

black-capped chickadee junco tufted titmouse nuthatch

mourning doves pigeons pheasant cardinals blue jay

catbird cowbird mockingbird starlings purple martins

cedar waxwings downy and hairy woodpeckers phoebe pine

siskel

rufus towhee hummingbird robin (as an afterthought!)

blue-gray gnatcatcher Peregrin falcon and/or Cooper's

hawk or sharp-shinned hawk common grackle

overhead: geese hawks crows gulls raven bald eagle

swallows

#

Garden dimensions

“They already were like gods
made in Yahweh’s own image
and didn’t even know it.”

“I could see the Woman would be easier
to convince. She appreciated color and
the bouquet, where the Man noticed
only the fruit’s heft and taste.”

Every snake has its own hole.
Sometimes a snake is just as snake,
Doctor Freud.

And the Serpent went on to make a fortune
developing shopping malls lined with retailers
promising to cover everyone’s nakedness.



God creates a Helper for the Man
and she helps him, all right:
helps him get into trouble,

helps him to the forbidden fruit,
helps him get ejected from Paradise.
Not only that, but I'd venture

she believed she was doing something
beneficial for him all along,
something for his own good.
(And it was very good)



Where has Eden gone? Maybe
it's now ahead of us, down
the road, rather than behind
with its gates shut tight.

As for Original Sin,
life's not fair.

Some parents gamble
away the mortgage,
their children's
college tuition.

Others get to be boss
through the injustice
of genetic roulette.

But that's not really
part of this story.



Where do the other people come from?
Maybe the question becomes, for us,
where *do* other people COME FROM?
You! My neighbors! My antagonist,
my friend, my spouse, my children?

Perhaps they come from that other couple
God created, in the first creation story,
just before Eden. Perhaps they, too,
are ejected from their own Eden.

Perhaps there were other gardens
that were also released –
the ones whose stories we've forgotten.

#

The solace of familiar spaces

richness / depth

discovery and a confession we don't have it right, yet
as for a prescription, we'll never have it exactly right
if we wanted surprise, we'd go someplace else
so by narrowing the focus, the unexpected twist appears

the asparagus bed or lilacs

my ferns, finally

eight springs at this dwelling

this repetition for greater completeness

complexity as a responsibility

within myself/yourself, too

a spouse rather than a lover alone

#

Ten holiday uses for zucchini

HALLOWEEN JACK O' LANTERNS: Wonder what to do with zucchini that get away from you before you can pluck 'em –

the ones that grow fatter than a baseball bat?

Rachel loves to put them aside for carving into decorative dragons. She suggests placing a votive candle in the skull. Take that, Martha Stewart!

GAME NIGHTS: Zucchini slices make good poker chips.

You can even eat your losses.

VEGETARIAN TURKEYS: Perplexed by what to serve vegetarians

at Thanksgiving? Zucchini make great drumsticks, necks, and thighs

to dress up that pumpkin you've dolled up as a big bird.

White paper "bracelets" or turnips optional.

CUTE CRITTERS: Jab a zucchini with toothpicks to serve as legs and you have the beginning of a miniature squirrel or reindeer.

KEEP 'EM GUESSING: Wrap zucchini in colorful gift paper and ribbon, and you can bet people will never guess what's inside.

Will they be surprised! And impressed with your "green" consciousness, too.

MENORAH OR TABLE CENTERPIECE: Drill holes for candles and, voila, you're set.

(Unusually large curly zucchini can even serve as Advent wreaths.)

ORNAMENTS: Use an ice pick to make a hole for string or ribbon,

and you can hang zucchini on the Yule tree. They won't break like those gaudy glass bulbs do, either.

STOCKING STUFFERS: Beats a lump of coal as a deterrent to bad behavior, kids.

BACK RELIEF: As back scratchers or massage rollers, good in any season.

NEW YEAR'S DAY: Out with the old, perhaps as a group contest to see who can heave one the farthest, and then prepare to order new seeds.

#

As in Eye, Flower, and Goddess of the Rainbow

Your harvest, meanwhile, is most impressive. Just how much land do you have under cultivation? Our little “city farm” is a mere third of an acre, including house, barn, shed, and driveway – all of it having clay soil and partial shade. In a wet spell, our garden slugs rival Seattle’s; they took out most of our potatoes last year – the ones I was growing in barrels, up off the ground. Maddening. And, by the way, you have a longer, milder growing season. Last summer, we came close to buying half a pig from a couple halfway up in Maine – maybe that will happen yet. We are able to support some small-scale agriculture around here, which is satisfying. And there’s a lot of produce-swapping at Meeting – including eggs. Oh, yes, we have an interesting exchange with Rachel’s best friend and her husband – the ones I jokingly call my in-laws; we provide them with a lot of seedlings, and since they work a much larger community garden tract, we get a lot of it back for

the table and freezer. In addition, Claudia does help herself to a lot of our strawberries, currants, and asparagus. Even some of the irises and daffodils. I really hadn't thought about the range of connections going on there. Still, there's no substitute for the taste of fresh food, or having your own, from the freezer, come deep winter. Maybe we go through all of it for a spiritual awareness and gratitude or simple out-and-out holy deliciousness? To say nothing of all the wildlife we attract, especially around the bird feeders. We rather miss the skunks, and were surprised to find some possums living in the crown molding a story up in the barn last fall. How'd they ever get up there? Just don't ask about squirrels.

One insight or comment stirs a dozen others

Keep dry, but don't forget to water the seedlings

#

Looking out

picnic table with a block of snow 2-feet deep atop it
and a hole at the center

extraordinary deep purple in the Siberian irises

Quaker ladies bloom on the meeting burial ground –
even on the Friends graves in Pine Hill Cemetery

the ox-eye daisies I lifted from rock and sand
to transplant here – my wife's beloved June flower,
the blossom smaller and more delicate than the Shasta

old woman across the street with her phlox

sunflower, yes

forest sunflower

jungle sunflower

and the jingle, from the neighbor's
wind chime

#

ABOUT THE POET



Marriage to a passionate gardener gives rise to this set of field notes by Jnana Hodson. In their years of coping with a century-old house and attempting to reclaim suitably tillable soil on its property, the poet and his wife find far more than vegetables, fruits, and flowers at play – the act of gardening reflects a net of relationships that sustain them. As he observes, you're often surprised by what pops up, including the broken bottles and plastic toy spacemen.

ALSO BY JNANA HODSON

Poetry:

- Blue Rock
- In a Heartbeat
- Johnny Badge
- Harbor of Grace
- Waves Rolling Too
- Returning to the Table
- Elders Hold
- Winged Death's Head
- Green Repose
- American Olympus
- Over the Mountain
- Back Pack
- Susquehanna
- Riverside
- Rust & the Wound
- Long Stemmed Roses in a Shattered Mirror

Novels:

- Big Inca Versus a New Pony Express Rider
- Hometown News
- Promise
- Peel (as in apple)
- St. Helens in the Mix
- Kokopelli's Hornpipe
- Daffodil Sunrise
- Hippie Drum
- Hippie Love
- Subway Hitchhikers
- Ashram
- With a Passing Freight Train of 119 Cars and Twin
Cabooses

Non-Fiction

- Revolutionary Light

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