

Short Story - CNF

Confessions of a Failed Gardener



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Dreaded garden season is here. My gardening failures, like compost piles, amass and multiply. My perennials perish; the annuals expire. Neighboring yards will soon surge with green promise and emerging flowers. My beds will feature their characteristic spring look – something akin to the moon’s surface.

A few weedy remnants, like ravaged post-apocalyptic survivors, will continue to cling to shriveled roots in spent soil. My ultimate yield will be chronic back pain and permanently ruined sneakers.

My next-door-neighbor, Dori, must practice some kind of voodoo botanical witchcraft. Her gardens flourish. Flowers debut annually over there like celebrities. It’s an ongoing gala opening – sumptuous blossoms arrive wave after wave from spring through fall, each more beautiful than the last.

Years ago, when we moved in next door, Dori scurried over, breathless, bearing armloads of cuttings and shoots to share from her thriving plants. Now, courteously aware of the plant casualty rate over here, she brings cookies instead.

It’s not that I haven’t tried. Garden how-to books with beguiling titles line a long shelf: *Gardener’s Guide*, *Perennials for Dummies*, *Month by Month Gardening*, ... even *Garden Lust!* The titles seemed so promising when I accrued the hefty bill at the garden store and carted home the heavy armload. Dog-eared page corners tucked in, broad swaths highlighted in neon yellow, confirm my eagerness to attain garden splendor.

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The plans seemed simple enough: shorter flowers to be planted in front as a “border” and successively taller and increasingly showy flowers in a tiered “layered” design behind. None of the flowers conformed. None remained remotely within their designated space. Despite the smelly compost I hauled, the hand cramps suffered gripping the trowel while “working the soil,” and the blue crystal-infused fertilizer I sloshed all over myself, the devious plants went completely rogue and rerooted themselves higgledy-piggledy.

Countless other forces conspire against me. Despite deploying fancy powders and sprays, rabbits ruin, slugs slaughter, and aphids annihilate. Tender blossoms that manage brief appearances end up butchered by Japanese beetles. Neighborhood dogs favor my flower beds for executing their business. When I reach for one of the 19 pairs of garden gloves I’ve purchased, I can only locate four – all for the left hand.

Weather is the ultimate adversary. Early season warmth taunts little buds to venture forth. April follows with erratic temps that can dip to single digits to nip them. May arrives and offers up a random blizzard or two to further the death rate. Any bloom that *might* have survived will be pummeled by June’s golf ball-sized hail, then thoroughly finished off in the following weeks of searing heat.

There must be options. An expanse of brightly painted concrete? Gravel sprayed green with strategically placed decorative pots of cheery plastic flowers from Target?

Not all is lost – here comes Dori! Cookies! And a fresh-cut spring bouquet from her garden. God love her. “Hey, Dori!”