

Q & A
Ricki Grady

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You were a graphic designer for thirty years before you started gardening. Did having a polished design eye help or hinder you?

Visual editing becomes second nature after a while. Plants have a way, like cats, of refusing to bend to your will. The garden is always different in the mind's eye than the reality of it. A design background comes in handy in the plotting and planning and in recognizing the rare moments when everything comes together. When that happens, best to get a photograph because all of the elements contributing to that perfection are less than likely to act in concert again.

What makes gardening jazzy for you?

I often think of the plants as ensemble players. The woodland garden is reflective of Miles Davis in his *Kind of Blue* mode. Out in the berm where the red hot pokers cozy up to the lambs' ears and the hot pink 'Lipstick' strawberries, a Michael Jackson song might get stuck in my head. What's really cool about it is that I don't have to get stuck in any single genre. I can put these players together any which way and see how they harmonize...or not. My baton is my shovel and my audience is anyone who happens by.

Is gardening meditative, social...or what?

I will take a stab at boiling it down, with the disclaimer that there could be as many answers as there are gardeners. I think part of what makes it so mesmerizing is that it is a creative process, but one that moves at such a slow pace that the creator is never "on the spot" in the way that a painter, say, would be.

Why a gardening book without pictures—especially from a visual designer?

One of the first lectures I attended after joining HPSO (Hardy Plant Society of Oregon) was Mirabel Osler. I was transfixed by her genteel, yet approachable, manner as she showed slides of the tree house where she and her husband would end their days with wine pulled up in a basket. I ordered all of her books from the library.

I was new to gardening, and my idea of a gardening book was 90% pictures with just enough copy to describe them. Imagine my surprise when *A Gentle Plea for Chaos* turned out to be all words. Suffice it to say that the picture books languish on my shelves, while the books that bring gardening to life on the printed page are revisited regularly (yes, I wound up buying my own copies of those library books).

It is nice, of course, to see images of gardens. That's where blogging comes in. My blog,

Sprig to Twig, is a journal of others' gardens, successes and failures in my own and any other thoughts, amply illustrated with photos, that occur, on a roughly bi-weekly basis. I include links to other bloggers, so it acts as a portal to the world of garden blogging (www.bannersbyricki.com).

Do you have a favorite plant and why?

No. I think you would find that plant lovers are a fickle lot. We got that way because just as one diva begins to fade, another is coming on to take center stage and dazzle us for a while. At this very moment my fave is a goofy little four-inch cactus-like fellow that looks a bit like a Charles Schultz drawing with a punk haircut, but by the time you read this, my roving eye will have landed somewhere else.

Are there any plants you absolutely despise?

I am laughing because for years Richard has been trying to sneak *Arborvitae* into our landscape. We rarely veto one another's choices, but this was one I simply could not tolerate. We were shopping at Portland Nursery recently and I picked out a feathery little bronze evergreen tuffet, which turned out to be...you guessed it...an *Arborvitae*.

Have you ever walked into a garden you coveted? Conversely, one that you saw so neglected you started digging your hands in on the spot?

Well, yes and no. Admired, for sure; wanted to settle in and enjoy for a week or two, often enough. Where the question gets a little bit thorny is when I think about the long haul. Gardens are all about process, so if one were to take over another gardener's fully realized vision, there would be nothing left to do but maintenance. I would miss the evolutionary process of a garden that is always "becoming". As for the second part of that question: it doesn't take much neglect before weeds begin popping up. Miss Manners directs us, difficult as it may be, to resist the urge to plop down and start digging them out when they are in another gardener's oasis.

You're even newer to authorship than you are to gardening, yet your book is being sold as a literary gardening book. How did you become a writer?

I have always enjoyed wordplay and language. Chided as a "bookworm" as a kid, I have been soaking up literature all my life. I guess I just stored up so many words that they needed to spill out of me, and I have been fortunate to find a few venues where I could practice until I was ready to try something completely self-generated. (NB: Grady designed and wrote a newsletter with a cult following for the former Max & Hildy's Garden Store in Portland, and penned a semi-regular gardening column for the Ventura County Reporter for several years.)

To arrange an author interview or appearance, or request a review copy, please contact info@dymaxicon.com 650.275.3568.