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Dirty Little Secrets

By Michael Knowles



Moving with Plants

Alas, the house I had rented for 3 years sold a few months back. It wasn't supposed to happen that way. Surely, I thought, no one would want to actually live in it year-round. There just wasn't any storage space. It was Riverside and prone to flooding. The guest house and lower unit were already "modernized" when I moved in. Post '06 flood the renovations were called "well appointed." One of the main reasons I have appreciated living in West County/ the Lower River has been that rustic quality. Slowly but surely the charm and warmth of the 40's is being replaced by "modern", one flood or house raising at a time. But seriously, modern isn't necessarily better. Upgraded is good for rental cars and other traveling conveyances. What is so wrong with things staying as they are. (Why can't they just stay little?)

So, the last few months were spent frantically seeking new digs then packing, moving and unpacking. Some of the places that some consider actually livable are laughable at best. Luck notwithstanding a charming house (circa 1945) was discovered just down the street - both on the River and with a front and backyard full of potential. In addition to looking through boxes for items, I am able to indulge in planning and sketching. There are several mature fruit trees and plenty of open sunny space for a vegetable garden. Given the fence, the chances of marauding deer meandering up from riverside to snack on my bignonia are slim.

Moving with many plants is quite the challenge. Making the transition during the winter months is easier than during any other season. As the majority of plants are mostly dormant, their needs are significantly reduced. My habit of under potting turned out to be helpful in the long run. Not being afraid of hard pruning also lent itself to the transportation process. The freezing nights are not that difficult to manage when everything is crowded together in pots and watering hasn't been an issue. The most susceptible of the plant materials are currently crammed into a quarter of the sun porch and although experiencing low temps they are surviving and will survive the winter.

A few favorites, which had been planted in the ground, were left behind. It couldn't be helped. Correlating plant material with yet unknown space and exposure is difficult. I would rather leave some plants behind than take them along only to have them perish from inadequate conditions. However, if I had

KNOWN the eventual when and where - things would have been different. Being a plant person and a renter has its drawbacks. A word of advice - if you are renting be mindful of what you plant in the ground because if and when the property sells the plants that are in the ground are no longer your plants. That is correct. Thankfully 95% of what was left behind were rapidly growing succulents and common, annuals and perennials.

Another plus is that since I have never minded gardening/landscaping I had no attachment to the unpaid efforts put into my maintenance of the property. Just having neighbors and friends comment on how nice things look is sufficient compensation if one needs other's praise. "If they only knew," I would tell myself. Add to that the fact that whomever planned the original landscaping was whimsical moreover practical in their plant selection. Hydrangeas and tree ferns planted with a southwest exposure are not going to fare well regardless of how one tends them - especially when the established shade providing overstory, specimens have been pollarded. Having the experience and knowledge of how plants grow and mature is a blessing and a curse. One must remember to always be kind moreover critical.

Most people haven't a clue as to what a plant will become as it matures. Most people want instant gratification and believe me, nurseries and garden centers want to sell their stock and are not all that concerned with correct and appropriate plant selection and eventual placement. Oh, the stories I could tell. Some are quite amusing and some are not. Having been in the trade for 30 plus years has its definite plusses. My back, however, would not agree. But I can honestly state that I would never put a plant where it didn't belong and I have no trouble telling someone so. When one knows plants, one can offer praise and criticism with detachment and also spare someone else's feelings. Heuristic learning is priceless when it comes to horticultural pursuits. Providing one's self with the permission to fail is as important to embracing the sweet smell of success. If one doesn't experience failure on some level one is not learning. Don't be afraid to try something new.

Shalom. Holla at me - dirtylittlesecretz@yahoo.com

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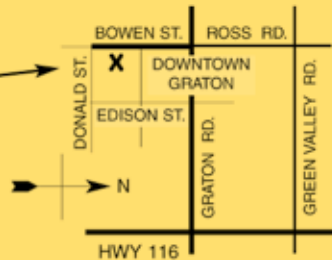
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