



Kathy's Garden:

Raising Children Among the Flowers ~

Along with the rain & mud, the slippery avalanche of spring catalogues continues. And a good thing that is, too. Spring gardening catalogs and a vivid imagination are often the only things that sustain a gardener through dreary winter days & nights.

True my family looks at this pile of dreams with alarm, daily expecting me

to announce we will give up one meal a day so that I can order more plants. I never really said "let them eat roses" though my partner says I did. Yes, I did suggest trading one or another of the kids for another shipment of perennials, but I was joking. Besides, the company in question wouldn't accept my first born son in trade.

I can't imagine why. He'd look very nice posed next to a dahlia or a begonia.

Looking through the current crop of catalogs two things, besides greed, strike me. One is how often the slicker catalogs do feature beaming little children (I guess my 18 year old wouldn't qualify). The child in question leans confidently towards the monster sized dahlia, or grins happily next to a pumpkin large as your average dog house. The novice gardener who is also a parent is meant to think fondly of those summer afternoons in which the little ones will joyfully join the garden crew.

Well yes, it is a wonderful adventure. My eldest waited till he was 14 to gently inform me that during all those years of sunflower houses and honeysuckle sipping he kept wishing I'd let him stay inside to read. Still, he is useful for the digging of large holes & the hauling of heavy loads even now. And he does, on appropriate occasions, come up with gift certificates for plants. Garden with your children and they will learn to tolerate, if not emulate, your passion.

My younger two still trail happily to the garden. Were my smallest to pose next to a fine begonia it would be a matter of moments before a nice flower was clutched in his hand and offered to me: "pretty, mama!" At the advanced age of ten my daughter still loves to pick flowers more than she likes to plant them. Her dolls ate flower petal salads years before it became trendy.

For all the distraction & occasional depredation, gardening with children does keep your senses & your heart open. Thus, those glossy catalogs are not far off in offering enchantment along with their plants.

The other thing that occurs to me as I turn the slick pages & listen to the rain fall, is that the novice gardener needs to understand what these catalogs really mean when they pause in their glowing descriptions to offer cultural advice or warning. The little plant that arrives on your porch in its 2 and a quarter inch pot & is described as "very hardy; spread nicely" might well turn up in your neighbor's yard next year. Does your neighbor really want to grow bamboo? Better check.

On the other hand, that splendid plant, pictured in blazing color, that is said to offer a "challenge" to the gardener, may well turn out to need daily lacings of peacock droppings and a winter vacation in Bali to survive. Of course, if you can afford the airfare, you should buy several. You'll have an excuse for deserting friends, family, business, and the soggy Northern California hills next winter. Though beware; if the plant in question is really a challenge it will be dead by June.

Which is not to discourage you from dreaming, or ordering plants through the mail.

Amongst the current pile of catalogs I have the Van Bourgondien Bros. (**Dutchgardens.com**) which features in its new introductions for the year a deep maroon pincushion flower (*scabiosa* "satchmo") as well as pink & blue ones. These are excellent trouble free perennials for a sunny corner. They offer a double flowered tiger lily; I can't decide if it is lovely or hideous. Van Bourgondien also offers the old fashioned tiger lilies, as well has several attractive anemones & a beautiful rosy *alstroemeria*. I've ordered from these folks many times & have been more than pleased with the quality of their plants.

Bluestone Perennials (**bluestoneperennials.com**) offers a wide range of perennials in three sizes. The small liner sized plants are a great bargain; one season is all it takes for these vigorous little plants to reach a sturdy size. The year my daughter was born a relative sent a check to go for important baby supplies. Now, some ten years later, the plants I bought from Bluestone are doing well. *Primulas*, *columbines*, *violets* and delicate masses of *lady's mantle* are clear necessities for childrearing.

Even without the inspiration of children in your household you should find sweet visions and tempting dreams in the catalogs.

Good luck at convincing your household how important those dreams are.

— Kathy Epling



A Traditional Reading

You don't remember your dreams or the scent of bay & rosemary on your body hours after

Sun in your eyes you drive east over the mountains, past the three rivers, old photos on your dashboard

childhood, marriage, children It's a traditional reading You throw the cards

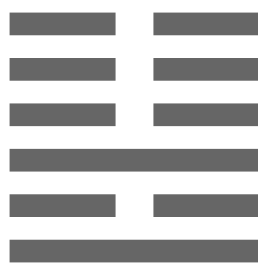
a flight of blackbirds scatters the square of morning light in my cabin I'm not sure

what to tell you waking here at dawn; love's a peculiar blessing everywhere

sky holds us together Lives change Night after night we still walk the fire & clear water

touching in the unencumbered air

Kathy Epling



Hexagram 36 Darkening of the light

Darkening of the light, I haven't seen you for weeks. Meadows unfold brocade acres of embroidery, brodaiea


& meadow lark. Even here, back to the sun I keep thinking I could meet you Yellow book says: Be crazy.

If there is no bread, taste the stones. Suck this bitter stem. If there is no water, wait. Rain tastes of tears or kisses.

Missing your life, find it. Throw it away. Hawks fly from the dark daily double-winged, single hearted.

Kathy Epling

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Marijuana Defense, counseling and licensing.

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