

Who will plant Kathy's Thieves Garden?



It is possible, in certain situations, to grow a garden that is too lovely & tempting for its own good (consider, for instance, Eden). If your garden space fronts on a busy street or is in a central town location frequented by flower starved persons with little sense of floral ethics, you may have to plant with great care if you wish to maintain an attractive ever-blooming aspect.

I once gardened the lot surrounding a small downtown cottage. To the east, in a tiny yard fenced with a classic picket fence, roses & all sorts of delights did well. To the west, fronting a parking lot, I laid out a pattern of herbs & small flowers interspersed with a few roses. I planted bulbs thickly here & there. One lovely spring day I watched in amazement as a sleek car pulled up, out came a well dressed woman who methodically picked a very large bouquet consisting of every *iris*, *tulip*, *hyacinth*, *daffodil* or other flower in the side yard. I rushed out & watched the car speed down Redwood Drive where it came to a stop near a bar.

Now, in my own life, I have certainly been guilty of many a plucked or purloined bloom, an irresistible little piece of *rosemary* or a snippet of *geranium*. Perhaps compassionate understanding should have marked my action that day, but it didn't. Full of flower proud rage I marched to the table where the unsuspecting thief sat. "I planted those flowers. I liked looking at those flowers. I watched each & every plant from its beginning and you had no right to take them. For heaven's sake don't let them just wilt on the table." She told me she had assumed they were wild flowers desperate for a home. Ha.

It was my introduction to the first rule of gardening where flower snatchers live – don't try to grow those lovely bulbs that have a single bloom & a long stem. They are irresistible. Planting the long sidewalk border near my bookstore later I forgot this rule. How beautiful, I thought, to have a great mass of silky pink tulips – say 50 of them – beneath the flowering plum tree. They were beautiful, a joy to the eye, a brilliant affirmation to the heart – for three days.

The woman who picked them (yes, again I got to glance out a window & watch the process just a moment too late) told me they were God's flowers & God had told her she needed to have them. I couldn't say much to that. God hadn't directly contacted me that day, not that I noticed. I hope she remembered to put them in water.

What does do well in an exposed & public space? All the small multi-flowered little bedding plants make it – the *alyssums*, *forget-me-nots* for shade, *violets*. *Pansies* & *violas* are tempting to the passerby -- who can resist those velvety little flower faces? – but they benefit from frequent picking. In the strip by our old store I ended up planting a great many drought resistant silver leaved plants – *snow-in-summer*, *thymes*, *lamb's ears* -- & the pretty striped *malva*, *althea zebrine* (which my landlord was certain was a weed), as well as *hollyhocks* & *rosemary*. I tucked in *crocuses* (too short stemmed to tempt the average flower picker. I forgave the kids under three who grabbed them). *Roses* are generally a little too seductive, though I did once grow a sadistically thorny *rugosa* hybrid (*Pink Grootendorst*) that had lovely clusters of fringed carnation-like flowers & ripped open the hand that sought to pick them. From my kitchen I could hear the occasional yelp that meant another passerby had been tempted by those pink flowers.

There's another, more gracious approach, of course. The generous gardener could plant a border that was thick with multiflowered blooms for cutting – *cosmos*, masses of great *dahlias*, hundreds of *Dutch iris*, blazes of zinnias & offer handfuls of flowers to all who passed, with ample sun & water & fertilizer & no sleek cars driving silently up in search of purloined beauty - it could make for a happy flower enriched neighborhood. I'll have to try it someday. Meanwhile, if you try it, let me know how it goes.

~ Kathy Epling



DROUGHT

Hope your sweet weight clamped to my ribs, how could I resist your disaster

earth cracked as my lips the corn shriveled as it stood no rain

not a cloud to count; reaching out what need of breathing

the air stone still; only your hard pulse at my bone, speaking

dry harvest seeds the lean shock

Kathy Epling

LOVE MADE UNPRACTICED THIEVES

love made unpracticed thieves of us uneasy lions guarding every step – comfortable strangers what could we do being unused to burglary & though we stumbled with our hands tricks of magic, masks to hide the hesitation of the face, all disappeared into our dream judgement & conviction gone how we were startled, our moon eyes open & pillaged nerve from bone, come long undone & dealing in our pain & here between the icons & the chains we balance out our theft, each greeting with its threat, each wrist made red with apple rinds or razors our beds stretch bright as racks, amazed yet if we came to this too new cat innocent, still we have gained relics, claws, jewels that bleed

Kathy Epling

EXTINCT THING BIRD: FEATHERED LIZARD

Here at the cliff, rock crumbling, the wild grass threshed white I have been

sorting my small murders naming them who moved with me known & unknown, sure as my bone set sex

& what we lose each waking, like some other extinct thing bird; feathered lizard my skin a dead country

like the dawn horse, unrecognizable breathing this ice crazed air; the past's slow carapace

which bears my unthawed blood now all the ocean, salt as your hair turns back

Kathy Epling

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- Lt. Ehren Watada, Veterans for Peace 2006 National Convention

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