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Cultivating Delight
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Q: As a naturalist, a poet, and a dedicated gardener, how are you able to rectify your human and scientific desire for order versus your love and respect for all things natural (and therefore chaotic)? Do you garden by color, species, height, or emotion?

A: Complexity excites the mind, and order rewards it. In the garden, one finds both, including vanishingly small orders too complex to spot, and orders so vast the mind struggles to embrace them. An orderly garden is always on the brink of chaos, and that's part of its charm, I think. Gardeners may create order briefly out of chaos, but nature always gets the last word, and what it says is usually untidy by human standards. But I find all states of nature beautiful, and because I want to delight in my garden, not rule it, I just accept my yen to tame the chaos on one day and let the Japanese beetles run riot on the next. I don't require perfection from my garden or me. Although I do have separate rose beds, so that I can saturate my senses there, for the most part I don't garden according to color, pattern, or species. I'm guided by what's possible (in a shade garden, for instance) and what might combine in visually pleasing ways.

Q: You're a naturalist, and therefore a dedicated student of science who closely watches and records habits, colors, and personalities. Do you generally find yourself thinking (as you would an insect, animal, or human) of the garden itself as a living, pulsing being?

A: The garden IS a living, pulsing, singing, scratching, warring, erotic, and generally rowdy thing. I may find peace in its midst, but I regard it as a whole with many parts, a plural organism.

Q: Gardeners, by nature, detest weeds, and although they may think that deer are beautiful creatures, they don't much want them nosing around the tulips or the rose bushes. You appear to not only tolerate weeds & you've considered the unthinkable (by gardening standards) and pondered the actual planting of them on your lawn. You also feed the ravenous deer, often welcoming them to your property with gifts of fruit. How and why have you come to terms with the pestiferous creatures (both plant and animal) that taunt gardens far and wide?

A: Ah, yes, the deerfolk. I love the deer and I love the garden. I don't regard them as adversaries but as neighbors. Hungry neighbors. I find that compromise works (and feels) best in nature. Instead of battling them all the time, I protect my roses and daylilies behind a deer fence, but the deer have to live, too, so I let them prowl the woods and front garden, where I plant as many things they dislike as possible. Fortunately, deer dislike some mighty beautiful plants and flowers& tulips, monkshood, foglove, and ornamental grasses, for example.

Q: You live in upstate New York where, presumably, the summers are short and hot, and the winters long and frigid. Do you ever feel seasonally hindered, and if so, what do you do to overcome your desire to be out in the garden? If you were able to successfully plant something that was not native to your region, what would it be?

A: Nope, I enjoy all the seasons. In the winter I enjoy cross-country skiing, and raising orchids and amaryllises. If I could grow tropical flowers as perennials, I would, especially hibiscus and mandavilla.

If you were to offer some words of advice to new gardeners, what would they be?

A: Forget about winning in the garden. Just cultivate delight.