

# *Adventures in Gardening*

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## **Negative Space**

*An invasive species, a weed, a plant in the wrong place...*

When one thinks of gardening, growing is a word that comes to mind, but what do we actually do when we tend our gardens? Isn't it more about killing? When we see all nature has to offer, growing without bound, we begin to select. We carve away at what "doesn't belong" and allow our selected plants to thrive in the space we have provided for them. This is a neighbor's garden. I saw her dig up all of her plants, replace the mulch, and put them back, carefully arranged. I enjoy her garden every time I walk by and notice such a perfect composition.



But I've never achieved this kind of garden. My yard is full of thriving plants, competing and getting in each other's space.

**Come Help Us Grow!**

When I do battle with those plants that I don't want growing in my yard, I have to admit a grudging respect for them – they are prolific, they are merciless in their takeover of soil, they are relentless and fertile, they are successful. So why don't I want such a super plant in my garden? If only they – didn't look so scraggly, if only they produced beautiful flowers, if only they weren't such bullies – killing the other plants around them, if only they produced something I could eat – then maybe I would welcome them.

The monster I respect and resent the most is the trumpet vine. I imagine it's body underground, beyond my reach, massive, perhaps the size of the world – who knows. I see a vine poke up, I dig for it and it breaks off from that mother-out-of-sight, and I know that tomorrow, like the hydra of mythology, it will return with more vines. It grows so fast I wonder why it hasn't covered the planet. I did see a house once, buried in the trumpet vine. It was pretty, and a bit scary...

Of course there are the old favorites, the dandelions, those plants we are told have delicious roots if only we knew how to prepare them (and I've never tried). They give such a satisfying thwap when you pull them up root and all – but wait too long and they will produce enough seeds to come back in greater numbers. You will never find all of them. And you have to admit, they are trying to be beautiful, sometimes I see a yard completely given over to dandelions and I think – pretty...



I'm sure you have your favorites as well, the plants we love to engage in battle – thinking maybe if I just do this one thing I will win. Maybe you even resort to chemical warfare but are you prepared for the fall out, the unintended consequences (e.g. to the bees and other pollinators)? Can we be sure that when we add herbicides it is our favored plants that will be left standing? Or will these super plants evolve and become resistant to whatever we throw at them, these cockroaches of the plant kingdom, while our favorites succumb to our toxic cocktails?

How about those native gardens, prairie gardens, those places we relax our vigilance and let nature take its course? Can we admit they have a kind of wild beauty? Perhaps if we added a trail, a fence, a few accoutrements, they could become acceptable. I keep such a wild place in the parkway. So far, my neighbors have been supportive. The beekeeper next door is appreciative. Some strollers stop to even tell me it is beautiful and I hope they are not just saying that to comfort me, perhaps assuming that I don't have the energy for the cultivated garden (I don't). I tell myself it is all for the good of the soil. These "weeds" often are drought resistant with deep roots supporting an entire ecosystem in the soil. They provide safe harbor for butterflies. They are home to rabbits who are food for hawks. They are pretty, aren't they?

