

READINGS: Rev Baylies**READING: Natures Gardeners**

Autumn for me is about nuts. Squirrels and nuts. Acorns on my car, in the walkways and thrown at me if I dare to come to close to a “secret” hiding place. I have come to the conclusion, after careful observation, that the leaves only fall because of the hectic antics of squirrels who are bouncing all over the treetops, frantically trying to secure a place to hunker down and hide their nuts for winter. In desperation, when all of the remaining woody condo’s are taken, they bury their nuts before the ground freezes. In spite of my dislike for the mess they make as I slip and slide through their rolling obstacle course, I remember the value of what they do. Their forgetfulness becomes the sprouts of spring that provide the roots for the trees we so adore in this time of the changing of the season. In nature’s course all things leafy green do wither and bend to the call of autumn. Temperatures drop, the air takes on a purity that wafts away the breezes of an August haze. Squirrels and chipmunks load their cheeks with nuts and scurry away to hide them.

Thus begins a time of autumn planting, led by the frantic antics of nature’s first gardeners, the nut gatherers who have forgotten where their stash was hidden and the seeded trees germinate in their new location. Even humans carry seeds far away for plants - by taking an apple on a picnic, for example, and throwing the core, with its seeds, into the bushes.

Sometimes, as in the case of growing Mistletoe, which we seek out at Christmas time, for our romantic pursuits, the seeds are covered in a sticky slime which the birds rub off on a new tree where they root and germinate, then are harvested for the holidays.

In the throes of the autumn harvest we give and take from the natural resources in so many ways, and as they replenish themselves through the wonders of nature’s own efforts.

Also when I think of Autumn I also think of cattails.

As a child I loved to play with the wispy fluff that spread throughout the landscape to spread its seed for new growth. Cattail stalks were not only a basic food source for native Americans but, during World War II, American schoolchildren collected both cattail and milkweed floss to fill life preservers for the armed forces.

This same floss is being used today by a Nebraska company to stuff jackets, comforters, and pillows-and some people believe that it will become an important natural fiber crop in the future. It has an insulating effect surpassing that of goose down .

These are just a few examples of nature's planters and of the unending gifts to us, which do not end with summer, but continue to feed and clothe and entertain us through the darkest of months, by which we cuddle in and gather our strength for the days to come. And it all begins with nuts...

(STRING BAND SELECTION)

READING AUTUMN PLANTINGS

E.B. White described his wife, Katharine in her final years. "The small hunched-over figure, studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring ... sitting there with her detailed [garden] chart ... in the dying October calmly planning the resurrection."

There is a hearty breed of gardeners who truly understand the ways of life, and growth, who are not convinced that all that blooms and flourishes in the spring must die in the frost.

They in turn are the planters, the gardeners of the heartiest of plants and vegetables, knowing that their lifespan depends upon the winter's blanket to thrive. Autumn gardeners know that there is still warmth in the soil to help germinate the seeds. They know that in fall, the soil still holds the summer's warmth, which encourages root growth up until the ground freezes. Plants shift their objectives when the sun wanes and the

temperatures go down. Although they cease the spring and summer work of making leaves, shoots, flowers, berries, and fruit... All their energy goes into establishing roots.

Ah, establishing roots, the secret to all life from its beginnings. The endings never come, they just lie quiet for a time, some evolving in a different form, savoring the stuff of endurance and sustenance for the days ahead of light and heat. The beauty of autumn is a prelude, to the respite of winter. Each and every challenge of nature's cycle is a test of readiness for new growth. The resilient bulbs of autumn are the heartiest of all, those with the deepest of roots are the artichoke, squash and broccoli, cabbage and onions, leeks potatoes and garlic, they are also toughest and healthiest of all. Life abounds, in the winters sleep, silent, deep and unseen, taunting the elements to take them, instead they thrive, awaiting their resurrection back to a visible presence.

Their lessons are our lessons too. Instructions from the earth to treasure this time of change, the winter to come, our roots grow deeper, stronger and ready to bloom one more.. For the harvest we have labored over, canned, kept and eaten, for those who plant when the days grow frigid, life never stops growing.

The poet May Sarton wrote

"I long for the bulbs to arrive, for the early autumn chores are melancholy, but the planting of bulbs is the work of hope and it is always thrilling."

(STRING BAND SELECTION)

READING: SEASONS OF THE SELF

The seasons speak to us in the same stages as the evolution of our own living, as if the yearly forces of nature were in fact mimicking the life of a

single human being with the ebb and flow of its own earthly cycles, in birth, growth, maturity and death.

We speak of the onset of spring, of April and May as we would illuminate and expound upon the act of our own birth. First as icky and muddied but as each new shoot forces itself out of its earthly womb and unfolds in full awakening, it is always wondrous. All earthly new life, in spring seems to come forth with all the efforts, joys and pains of creating a human being. Like the tiny shoots of new plants, we speak of June and July, as the prime time of our living of rapid blossoming growth, of playfulness and joy, of sunsets and morning stars bringing warmth and delight, of shedding the corsets of dormancy for the unrestricted freedoms that mirror the sounds of new leaves blowing in a southern wind, as we mature to full growth. In October and November our own leaves and limbs wither, sense the changes and bow to nature's bidding, leaving the playfulness of summer for another time, another one, another season. In November and December, Lower to the earth we fall, knowing of winter's call to rest to lie dormant and still. Through the months of the depths winter we hunker down and wait, listless and tired, struggling to free ourselves from the casings that hold us in. Our inner roots are nourished as we paint and write, wax poetical and ponder the seasons of our own times as one with nature's call. Even our music changes with the turning of the planet on the pinpoints of its axis, as it dutifully marches around the sun in pursuit of its yearly course.

Now, we speak of autumn as the harbinger of one last blast of glory before nature's seasonal death. As it bursts forth in one magnanimous effort to show its colors, we too resist its call and prepare to glorify and curse the snows to come that cover all that has fallen as if it is the end of existence. We forget that beneath the appearance and deception of the demise of earthly delights, renewal is brewing beneath the frost and ice.

No living thing that once flourished and has dropped to the earth is lost or forgotten, rather it is merely re-planted as an autumn bulb and strengthens,

reserves its power to replenish and restore and return to bring back once more the magic of new life of spring.