

Bill Rea ? Spring take getting used to

It seems to be a common joke this year that spring is taking its own sweet time arriving.

My wife and I received a bit of a lesson on that last weekend. We were up in Muskoka for a couple of days. Not only was there still snow on the ground and ice on the lake (the ice actually melted while we were up there), the snow continued to fall.

So I can understand why many people seem to be asking when all this winter is going to end.

I think it's pretty clear now that the change of season is at last here, just in time for the NHL?playoffs. That means we have to change some of our habits.

Beth and I still have our winter coats out, and they will have to be soon put away. Actually, I think the cloak I spent most of this winter using to keep myself warm has just about had it. It's an old one that I sort of abandoned several years ago. I kept it in the event of an emergency, and that came up at the end of last winter. The coat I had been wearing sustained a bad tear, and went someplace where I was sure to never see it again. I dug out its predecessor when things started to get chilly in the fall, resolving that I would just wear it until I got around to getting myself a new coat. I have yet to get around to it, but I had better. The thing I have been wearing is falling apart on me.

So in terms of my wardrobe, spring could not come at a better time, although I do have some clothes shopping to do (what on earth else is new?)

But the coming of the nicer and warmer weather involves a lot more than just my clothes closet. The nice thing about winter is unless there's snow to shovel, there's not a lot in the way of outside chores that need doing. Such is not going to be the case in the months to come.

I know I'm going to have to cook a certain amount of dinners, starting pretty soon, as Beth presses me into barbecuing service. Not a big chore ? I'm actually rather good at it, if I do say so myself.

I'm also going to have to break out the lawn mower and get it ready for another year of work. I have a bad habit of not cutting the grass as often as I should. The problem is with this job I have. Unlike most of you lucky people who have your weekends free and can make definite plans to cut your grass every Saturday (weather permitting), I never know what kind of work demands are going to be imposed on me. That means the lawn can wait two or sometimes three weeks (if not more) to get cut. And that's just the front lawn. That normally gets priority because that's what people passing our house see. The back lawn often waits until I feel motivated enough to take it on ? It can be a jungle back there.

And then we have to worry about the garden.

I do not have a green thumb. I never have and I never will, and that's despite my father's best efforts to make me a gardener as a kid. Beth is only a little better in that regard, despite the fact she grew up on a farm. But we have tried in the past, although the efforts have been somewhat wanting the last couple of years. But we have talked about trying to get back into the groove this year. I'm hopeful that we'll go a bit beyond the talking stage.

Some years ago, we bought a lilac bush for our back yard. The folks who sold it to us offered the warning that it would need about five years in the ground before it came into its prime. We were mindful of that, and the first couple of years gave us lots of reason for hope. Last year was the fifth one, and the balmy March, followed by the frigid April, did to our lilacs what it did to the apple crop in this area; a lot of no good. But as this spring season comes along, I think we're both hopeful. Much of my interest in this bush is governed by nostalgia. There were two glorious lilac bushes in our back yard when I was a kid, so I guess I'm hoping for more of the same.

As for the rest of it, for several years, Beth and I bought a whole bunch of annuals. During years when the strategy worked, we had a lot of colour. Since I admit I'm not much of a gardener, I'm reluctant to commit myself to perennials. Give me time, because I have a lot of growing-old years ahead in which to make a mess of things.

I referred above to the years in which our annual-planting strategy worked, because we've had a couple of crummy years too. The worst one was really a case of it being our own fault. That year, I guess we were a bit too anxious to get things going, so we got our plants into the ground early, and they never quite recovered from the mid-May frost. It turned out to be a summer of frustration and disappointment, from a landscaping point of view. On the other hand, I think we did learn a good lesson that year. Since then, nothing goes into the ground prior to Victoria Day.

But I think we're resolved this year to put something in, and get rid of as much grass as possible in the process. It has been some years since we've had any grass to speak of. I use my lawn mower to keep the weeds under control. It gets depressing sometimes. We have spent many a Saturday afternoon on our knees pulling weeds out of our front lawn, knowing in our guts that it was all amounting to a drop in the proverbial ocean. And our contemporary society has a problem with using chemicals on those weeds.

More frustration!

I am planning ? pending Beth's approval, of course ? (I know my place) to create more flowerbeds this year, banking on the hope that weeds are easier to control in the midst of pansies (or whatever else we park there) than in grass. That means there will be less grass to cut, which means fewer weeds to cut (in my moments of reality).

Actually, there's a certain irony to all of this. Most of this piece was composed Saturday, as Beth was channel-hopping between the Jays losing to the Yankees and the Leafs losing to the Habs. But there was a rabbit siting in our back yard most of the time. If I have any luck, that bunny was munching away on the weeds. If that keeps up, we might save a pile of money on flowers we don't have to plant.

But I'm not that lucky.