

It's open season at your local gardening store!

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Gardening has been called 'one of the purest of human pleasures.'

According to the experts at Gardening for Dummies, 'you really don't have to be born with a green thumb to give life to a glorious garden.'

Obviously the authors of such inspiring words have never met someone like me. Green thumb? I think not. More likely my thumbs are various shades of blue and yellow - bruised from my feeble attempts at clearing the copious rocks that lurk just inches beneath the surface of our not-so-green grass. It's not for lack of trying, I assure you. Gardening might be a balm for some people. For me, not so much. It causes stress, anxiety and an incredibly sore back. Yet still, every year at this time it's 'open season' at our local nursery and naively I think, 'maybe this year will be different.'

It's not like I don't come from a long line of gardeners. Well, at least my mother, anyway. She's always had an incredible knack for nurturing nature. It's not an exaggeration to say that she could hack off the slimmest branch of a Rose of Sharon with a blunt kitchen knife, throw it in a glass of water for a week, watch it sprout roots, plant it and have a six-foot tree by the following season. Mum was famous for her bountiful flower gardens, beautiful shrubbery and towering decorative grasses, all of them forming beautiful pathways and pretty little archways and 'areas of interest' throughout her extensive gardens. 'You just plonk it in the ground' is her favourite explanation whenever I ask for advice on how, or where, to best plant a particularly picky perennial. Suffice to say 'plonking' never really works out for me, but, then again, I've never been all that clear on what a perennial vs. an annual is either so that might just be part of my problem.

I'm the person that goes to my local nursery year after year full of hope and optimism. I see all the beautiful plants, I diligently read the labels about sun exposure, planting depth and how many inches apart I should plant things and then come home with geraniums because they are the only thing I can be reliably certain I won't kill. If you pass by a house with a preponderance of red geraniums and not much else, there's a good chance it's mine. I've tried hydrangea, planted a magnolia tree, and once (only briefly) had a beautiful silver birch in my yard. Glutton for punishment that I am, I also planted first a dwarf Alberta spruce, then a weeping pea tree, and finally another spruce all in the same spot only to watch them perish. To this day I'm convinced some kind of toxic waste had previously been buried there and eventually we simply covered up the hole in the ground with some rocks and a decorative urn. Elsewhere, whether the front or back lawn it doesn't seem to matter, I have routinely witnessed the death of all manner of plants, trees, shrubs and flowers that nursery staff have assured me are 'indestructible', 'can grow in any type of soil', 'love the sun', or its opposite, 'love the shade' yet even when they are planted in the sunniest or shadiest part of our property they wither and die.

On those rare occasions I manage to keep something close to surviving, if not thriving, you can be sure other forces of nature will come into play to guarantee eventual failure. Just last year I actually had beautiful overflowing planters full of Calibrachoa, (look at me, knowing Latin!) more commonly known by us non-gardening types as 'million bells.' Bright, sunny yellow, and yes, thriving on my back deck; first one planter was knocked over by hubbie, who didn't tell me and quickly tried to shove them all back in, but so haphazardly that by the time I noticed they looked a little limp and forlorn it was too late to bring them back from the brink. Now left with only 'half a million' bells, I redoubled all of my efforts on the remaining planter only to watch in horror one morning as a creature rooted through them like they were on an archeological dig for lost Egyptian treasure. By the time it was over, I'm not sure if there was any more than a dollar's worth of bells left.

The only gardening success we've had is a little joint project between my husband and my daughter-in-law. Diligently planned, meticulously laid out, and carefully fenced in to protect against critters and our dogs, they had a thriving little garden going, from which we actually harvested quite a few zucchini and a few tomatoes too. Needless to say, I had nothing to do with it. Even they, however, were eventually felled by a wily rabbit eating all the lettuce and we still don't know what happened to the corn. One day it was there, over 6 feet tall and just about ready for plucking and the next day? Poof! Gone - every, single, ear of corn, completely

decimated in what must have been one helluva an overnight buffet.

Suffice to say it might be open season at my local nursery this upcoming long weekend and the time might be ripe for planting, but I'm in no particular rush to start digging. Actually, wait. Isn't the expression ripe for picking? As in, like what we do in the fall, when things ripen? No wonder I'm so confused about gardening, I can't even keep my metaphors straight. No, I think this year I'll wait until the dust settles, invite my Mum up to the house to help me 'plonk' flowers in the planters (it's their only chance at life) and while she does that, I'll also listen to her trying to hide her laughter as she tells me the 'weeds' I pulled up while preparing the garden beds were actually perennials instead. It's the story of my life, season, after season, after season.