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Contributed by Samantha McCall

Thugs, Squatters, Drifters and other Dysfunctionally Functional Relationships in the Garden

As I was strolling through my less than manicured garden the other day, Felcos in hand and eyes always open for something unique to add to my floral designs, I happened upon a few analogous relationships in my humble yard. But before I go any further, let me be the first to say my gardens have been um, er, somewhat neglected this growing season. Okay, okay. Not somewhat neglected but totally neglected. They have been forced to figure out this growing thing by themselves.

Anyone that required molycoddling, helicopter gardening or extra attention didn't stand a chance in the garden this year. In fact, one could say it was an unplanned course of Darwin's theory of evolution illustrated with painstaking accuracy and unsurprising truths in my back yard. Survival of the fittest was in plain sight. For example, American pokeweed has made itself very much at home in the compost bin. While a few stems are terrific for floral design – and even better for the birds - the pokeweed has created a glade and taken up squatters rights. We couldn't evict it if we tried.

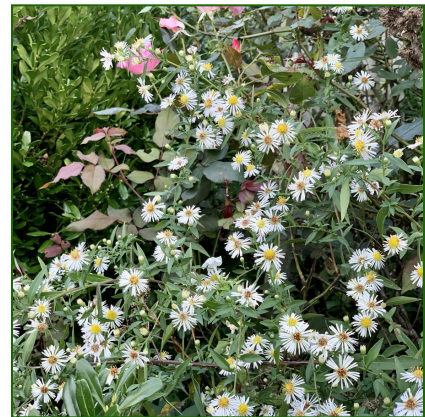
There is a spot off our deck where garlic chives, mountain mint, mint and bronze fennel have defensively marked their turfs and aren't leaving. At any given time, the two mints are trouncing on each other, with a constant back and forth of advances and retreats for four months of the summer. This organic uprising may be upsetting to some but the way I see it they are both green, they can be used in flower arrangements and the pollinators go crazy for them.

Also roaming around the garden without fear of extermination or decapitation are various ferns, valerian, verbena bonariensis, heuchara, sea oats and even tomatoes!

A curious relationship has emerged in the cutting garden between the virile Sweet Autumn clematis and my favorite vine, Love in a Puff. The two frolic and twist together, one supporting the other, with reckless abandon up a metal obelisk, their vines and tendrils gracefully intertwined.

Unbeknownst to me and without any consultation, the heuchara volunteered to grow along the brick path leading to the front door of our house. Three of them grow in moss-covered cracks where the brick steps rise - much to my amazement. I have trouble growing them in the landscape but clearly they have ideas all their own.

The roma tomatoes are my biggest surprise. Only the gray gravel chips in our driveway can possibly explain how the most successful and most ignored tomato of 2020 is thriving. You can't miss it. It's in the spot right next to where the Brazilian verbena and sea oats have made a home.



White asters were a gift from the birds. Invasive yes, but could you cut these down this time of year?