

THE 'TEEN WINDOW

... An Opening On The Natural World Around Us

by
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GARDENING WITH WILDLIFE



I've been thinking about how much fun it is to share gardening experiences with other animals.

At a produce stand the saleslady complained about depredations of birds. "They're eating all the berries," she said. I couldn't believe it. Not with her stand loaded with heaping baskets of fruit.

I saw one big strawberry with a nip taken out. "There's one picked by a bird," I said. "I'll take that one."

"Oh no, you don't want that. Here, take a good one," she said, and she tried to remove the damaged berry from my view.

"I love birds," I insisted, "and I want berries picked by them."

Two days later my husband stopped by to get more berries. "Give me some that the birds have picked," he said. She began again to lament about the birds.

I imagined the following conversation between a gardener and a robin:

GARDENER: Robin, these berries are not yours at all. Didn't you see me mulch them last fall? Can't you see how I've slaved and sweat And still haven't eaten a berry yet?

ROBIN: Don't you value the nest I tended? Didn't you notice the grubs I ended? Couldn't you hear my rain-day song That gladdened your garden all summer long?

GARDENER: Yes, I heard, and I grant your due; But couldn't you let me have a few?

It looked to me as though the produce lady had more than a few berries, but I guess she didn't value the robin's song.

In my own garden, however, I can enjoy both birds and fruit. I used to wonder, in light of local farmers' complaints about bird damage, how my blueberries, strawberries and raspberries would make out. The blueberries swelled to almost grape size beside a stream whose borders housed nesting mockingbirds, red-winged blackbirds and robins. I watched these birds comb the bushes for insects. "Good for you," I said. "And help yourselves to the berries when they get ripe."

I suppose they did, but the bushes remained loaded with more fruit than I could use. Much of it dropped to the ground. I found turtles with their mouths full and heard families of quail merrily feasting on abundance.

Both robins and bluebirds helped themselves to my strawberries, and right in among the raspberry canes a brown thrasher nested on the ground. Another

berry-eater—and one who must have done her share in controlling insects along the rows.

In my raspberry patch lived a toad. He was unusually tame and would stay put as I pulled weeds close by. I sometimes watched him bury himself from the heat of the day. Slowly he twisted his rear, worked with his feet, and sank into cool earth until only his eye could be seen, shining like a golden spark.

A green snake visited my berry patch. I found him draped among the fruiting stems. One day he left his shed skin festooned like a cat's-cradle among the crimson spines.

Rabbits love beans. They can eat a lot, too. But by planting a thick stand just for them I found that they ate their fill and left enough for me.

There's a rich harvest of peace in a garden. I watch the fully armed wasps and marvel that they do not attack. In the neutral territory, which is everywhere but near their own door, they go out of their way to live and let live. Humans could learn a lesson from them.

Sometime we will learn the lesson that humans are not the whole thing, but a harmonious part of something too sublime to comprehend, yet something we can live with and enjoy.

NOTE: Have you been doing some thinking lately? If it is about animals, what you've seen that disturbs or delights you, write a letter to this column. Here's a chance to express your deepest feelings, your most profound thoughts. If you are 12-18 years of age, we would like to hear what you think about animals. We may publish what you say (unless you specifically request that we do not). Sorry, but we cannot answer each letter personally.

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