

Clean up Time!

“From the day we arrive on the planet.
And blinking, step into the sun.
There is more to be seen than can ever be seen,
More to do than can ever be done”.

From the song Circle of Life, by Elton John

The leaves have begun their fall decent.

We feel changes in the air, dry a short time ago, cool and moist now with the changing of the season. With the appearance of morning tulle fog spiraling above orchards and vineyards, we are reminded of what lies ahead.

From an ecological gardeners perspective, this is clean-up time. From an old farmers perspective, farmer Fred’s perspective, this is clean-up time.

What is true for one is true for the other!

November and December are typically the months when one old farmer brought the tractor out of the shed and attached the Cats claw plow. The plow was used like a rake to pull the leaves, along with the volunteer grass, out from beneath the walnut trees and around the yard. During this season, the old farmer could be seen plowing the perimeters of his vineyard. Later, he plowed the old tomato beds under. Still later, he was seen stacking logs, cleaning and readying the yard to make way for the spring.

The walnut and mulberry leaves would later be taken to the vineyard and plowed under, adding valuable nutrients to the soil. This was assuming the ground was not too soggy for tilling.

Actions in conformance with a farmers work are part of a cycle that both repeats and persists. The farmers way is predicated by the weather, the environment, the soil and knowledge he draws from, and lest we forget, the passion for what he does.

Faithfully, the farmer adapts to the seasons cyclical patterns. Seasonal patterns are circular patterns, like the song, “It’s the circle, the circle of life.”

Moving now from a poetic vantage to a more practical one, I acknowledge the old farmers well-worn approach to a day. The tenet he lived by had nothing to do with prose,

musings and romanticizing labor. The principles he lived are best summarized in the words, "Go to work."

The work that called him daily was neither a high calling, nor a humble one, but reason enough to give his day meaning, reason enough for his existence.

Isn't this the time to plan the garden and carefully select plants for next year? Will the garden location be moved? Will the garden plants be rotated? Will amendments be added in advance of planting? Will you, the gardener start plants by seed (seed catalogs come out in the winter) or buy from nursery?

Yes, it's is the time.

This is the time to remove diseased branches and plants and destroy diseased vegetation to help keep problems at bay. It is time to check for mummified fruit and nuts to destroy them to minimize the potential for disease.

This is the time to increase the latent potential of growing healthy plants through preparation. Clean debris and areas where pests over-winter. Adding compost (and manure) to soils improves its structure, texture, aeration and water-holding capacity

This is the time to initiate the first treatment of dormant oil, particularly for peach trees, to prevent peach tree curl. "Better do that now than to try and solve the problem after the curl begins developing," says my aunt Coral Lee, and the experts agree. Aunt Coral Lee loves peaches better than anything, which, in my mind qualifies her for offering advice.

This is the time to clean, to prepare, to plan and attend.

"There is more to do than can ever be done. There is more to see than can ever be seen."

This is the circle, an everlasting circle, this is the circle of life.

Go to work!

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