

Let squirrels fend for themselves

Horticulturist or naturalist, which are you? This question could spark a reader-writing frenzy similar to a pet dog/pet cat debate. On which side are you?

The end result could be a 50-50 split. Regardless, we're climbing out on a proverbial limb and placing our horticulturist/naturalist dilemma squarely in the hands of you the faithful.

Which do you favour, petunias, marigolds and roses or grackles, starlings and squirrels?

Be honest. There's a blatant difference between the selections, so much so, any attempt to connect the two would be impulsive. We know. For we've tried and it didn't work.

Jean, my wife of 54 years, enjoys flowers. Every spring she eagerly engages in a seasonal labour of love that transforms a very mundane back yard into an enviable bower of beauty.

While modest concerning her botanical skills, I'm amazed for not only is her success rate exceptionally high, she times her cultivating schedule so that as one strain of florets succumb, others rise to take their place. The result is a floral masterpiece that extends from early May until late October.

To these envious eyes, it's downright spectacular.

Not to be outdone, however, I, too, have expanded my interests to include a personal plantation on the opposite side of the site. While considerably smaller in size to the Garden of Eden perfected by Jean, I'm extremely proud of the flowers I flaunt. But although one can fool some of the people some of the time, one can't fool all the people all of the time.

My blooms are fake, obtained,



Roaming Around

with Jim Thomas

I'm ashamed to say, from the shelves of Dollarama in Stouffville. To impress our neighbours with their authenticity, I water them daily for no other reason than to wash off the dust. While I make no apologies to those who, at first glance, are misled by this deception, I do feel sorry for the dozens of bumble and honeybees that continually circle my phony flowers in search of taste treats that don't exist.

Hopefully, come January, my initiative will be more appreciated.

However, hoax vs. honesty isn't our foremost dilemma. It's birds and rodents vs. petunias and roses that have drawn a solid line in the sand. I feed the blue jays and squirrels and they, in turn bury surplus peanuts among the flowers. In doing so, roots are damaged beyond repair.

While we both enjoy the flying circus as seen through our kitchen window, end results are extremely discouraging. Stems, leaves and blooms are continually scattered everywhere.

The fact half the town's squirrel population resides within our residential borders only increases our frustrations. They entomb more nuts than they eat.

While departed plants are easily replaced, the helpful staff at Sicilia Gardens are undoubtedly wondering if I've become a competitor rather than a purchaser. In recent months I've returned for refills close to a dozen times. Add this expense to the cost of bird seed and the seriousness of the situation becomes clear. Something has to stop.

In explaining the problem to folks on our street, I've learned most decline free-will offerings of food during the summer.

"Let the birds and squirrels fend for themselves," one homeowner told me. "Save the welfare for the winter." Good advice. But the absence of nourishment will mean the non-existence of nature - nature as I've known it.

No more goldfinch, no more nuthatches, no more blue jays, no more chickadees and no more doves. Also no more chipmunks.

Perish the thought. For I've had chipmunks coming out my ears - literally. They'd sit on my shoulders and atop my head. They'd even steal peanuts clenched between my teeth. Lots of fun.

Unfortunately, all things, even good things, must end. If flowers are to stay, squirrels must go. If seeds are to flourish, grackles must vanish. Simple as that. The practice of caring and sharing doesn't work. Not for us. So who should concede? Who else?

Until the snow flies, I've terminated all hand-outs of feathered fodder. I've also limited squirrel gratuities to six peanuts in the morning and six at night. The blue jays aren't happy but, unlike my wife, they don't feather my nest.

Jim Thomas is a Stouffville resident who has written for area newspapers for more than 60 years.

At 94, ex-Canadian champ keeps hand in plowing

Before bricked side-splits popped out of the ground behind our home, there were crops. It was a year-round lesson in agriculture right outside the bedroom windows of our three children.

And tending the fields was no ordinary grower.

An always-smiling "Farmer Floyd" would wave from his trusty blue tractor.

We'd watch him do everything in the farming cycle, from picking rocks to harvesting wheat, and all that happens in between.

The kids didn't know it, but they were watching agriculture royalty.

Floyd Forsyth won the national plowing championship in 1969. He'd represent Canada at the world finals in Denmark the next year.

Now 94, Farmer Floyd has not forgotten his roots. As he's done on so many Labour Day weekends, there he was again at the 183rd York Region plowing match on the Brock farm in northern Markham Saturday.

Floyd's great-great-grandfather, arrived here in 1814, trading a horse for a piece of land.

He hasn't competed for years, but he remains a director on the area association. He collects sponsorships, among other duties.

Match day is old home week, an annual reunion of farming folks from across the area and beyond.

"I really enjoy it," he said. "I just enjoy meeting people."

Deep roots? James Forsyth, Floyd's great-great-grandfather,



Off The Top

with Jim Mason

arrived here in 1814, trading a horse for a piece of land. He'd build the area's first sawmill near Glasgow, just east of Stouffville.

Born in Pennsylvania, he brought his family here by covered wagon.

Still, plowing didn't come naturally to Floyd.

"I had to learn how to plow if I was going to get my wife," he said from the Stouffville bungalow he still maintains.

He'd marry the late Reita Wells in 1939, she of one of the first families of plowing in this area.

Floyd was a fast and lifelong learner, even hosting the York match one year at his Tenth Line fields across from the Stouffville Country Market where Forsyth Farm Drive and Coronet Street now sit.

He can't recall missing a regional match since about 1937, which brought him back to that Warden Avenue farm Saturday.

It wouldn't have been the same without him.

Jim Mason is editor of The Sun-Tribune. Follow him on Twitter @stouffeditor

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