

DOGS AND FLOWERS, FLOWERS AND DOGS **(And a Few Other Thoughts)** *by Ronnie Brancazio*



Dogs and Flowers

I was just looking through the (thousands) of photos in my iPhone and was not surprised to see that over the last 3 1/2 years there are equal numbers (BIG NUMBERS) of pics featuring the two topics above. What a surprise! As if those weren't my two obsessions!

Sure, there's the occasional grandchild, or friend, or landmark/event - but that's only to be nice!

And why so many D&F photos? Besides the fun and the desire to show off, one major reason is that I am constantly in awe of both subjects - Riva for incredible cuteness, and flowers for their unbelievable beauty! I was going to say that another reason is that both subjects are constantly changing and surprising me, but that isn't quite so true of Riva now that she's grown. But - there is ongoing change *because of her*, namely all the Hardscape investments and plant replacements that I've had to make to keep her safe and to keep things safe *from her*!

Then there are the flowers! I'm not telling you anything you don't know when I say that every season, and every week of each season, and every hour of each day, brings new beauty, new surprises, - and new problems and worries. That's the joy and challenge of gardening! And every new addition, or creative idea, or serendipitous plant combination, just has to be captured and preserved for

remembering and sharing. In fact, *remembering* is often my main reason, so that I can repeat the good ideas and make sure NOT TO repeat the bad ones!

Good and Bad Ideas

I've also been doing some mental reviewing of some of the ideas and projects I've thought of, taken on, or (especially) invested money in over the past year. We could call this "*The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*"!

So what did I get right? Well, *Riva's Bridge*, which keeps her from running through mud, was quite a life-changer, so I'm proud of that. It's very attractive besides.

I also think it was a clever idea to take my old, rotted-out, *window boxes* and place them end-to-end in a small, root-compacted garden, thus creating a *raised bed* for flowers that I could not have planted in the hard ground. Then I purchased new window boxes which are beautiful cedar with a thick waterproof lining (with holes, of course) which should be a worthwhile investment. Better be, because the key word is "investment"!

What did I not get right? Well, this winter I did a very poor job of *wintering over* many of my patio plants on my *unheated porch*. It was a lot of work in the fall to get so many heavy potted plants onto my porch, but in past years this has been mostly successful, with just a couple of losses each year. This time, I lost mini-roses, bougainvillea, and a number of other things. That was sad but not tragic, but I did think I lost my potted fig tree and bay laurel, both of which I've kept going for many years and both of which lost all their leaves and looked truly dead - and that would have been very upsetting to say the least. Good news though - both sets of roots must have survived, and both plants are putting out healthy leaves! An interesting success/failure is a braided hibiscus which I tried to winter over. Of the three braided plants, only one has survived and is producing leaves, but it will be a while before I know if it's the yellow, red, or pink which toughed it out. It's an interesting experiment, I guess! And why did I lose so many plants? One theory is that I didn't water enough: even in winter plants need some moisture. Another thought I had is that this was a mild winter punctuated with one very cold spell. It's possible that in the relative warmth the plants didn't go fully dormant, so that they were more vulnerable to the sudden cold blast. Just a thought - any ideas from readers?

Speaking of planting in pots, that's something I do a lot of, and there are many advantages. Obviously, they can be moved around to feature those that look best at any time, and they are great in small spaces, like my patio. But I just realized that their best feature is that if you - like me - go to the garden centers and *simply must have one of everything*, then pots are the way to go. In the ground one-of-each can be a jumbled mess, but in pots you can indulge the need and make it work visually.

A Must-Read Book

I was recently gifted with a remarkable new book, and I strongly recommend that you check it out. It is called "*THE LIGHT EATERS*," written by *Zoe Schlanger*. She is a science writer for The Atlantic Magazine, and usually specializes in climate change. When she became exhausted by the relentlessly bad climate news, she took a break to research and write about the latest scientific discoveries about plants. That did indeed cheer her up, and for good reason!

There are remarkable things being discovered about plants, which must inevitably change the way we think about them. If you are now in awe of the properties and behaviors of plants, prepare to be further amazed!

HAPPY GARDENING!

