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A pedestal can add depth to an awkward space in much the same way as a mirror... The shape is graceful, something your eye will instantly focus on.

Alexandra Stoddard

A summer of hard-learned lessons for gardeners

Giant scarlet runner beans are hanging heavy in big clusters all along the vines. There's fresh, crunchy beans to be had every day. There has been plenty of lettuce and arugula and a handful of tomatoes and cucumbers. Big tufts of tassels top the corn plants and the stalks are getting amazingly fat. A few cayenne peppers are peeking out of the pepper patch. Some summer squash - the ones that didn't give in to rot - are grouping close to the ground, long and lemon-colored.

But the summer of 2009 will go down on record for many gardeners as the summer of hard-learned lessons. Even though runner beans and greens have been plentiful, the inimitable summer garden stars like basil, tomatoes and dry weather-loving herbs like thyme and oregano - the foods I yearn for all winter - have been assaulted by slugs, drizzle and generally hawkish weather.



BARBARA DOUGLAS

The Gardening Spirit

I was in Van Wilgen's last week to pick up some supplies, and asked an associate there if he had heard many gardeners complaining about slugs. He said he's been selling chemical baits and deterrents like never before. Those little, slippery, muscular-footed hermaphrodites have been loving our moist, humid environment, with its abundance of plant material to

eat all night long. If I lay in bed and listen hard enough, I can hear the little guys rasping away at the parsley and basil and leaving their telltale slime trails behind. If during the day I upend a pot there they are, digesting dinner and gathering energy for another go at the salad bar.

On the other hand, we had great raspberries and rhubarb this summer and there was lots of raspberry-rhubarb crumbles and pies at the dinner and breakfast tables. The blueberries, which a neighbor grows and sells every year, were fat and sweet. Blackberries and wineberries have been thriving and feeding us. Fungus notwithstanding, this summer was kinder to our berries than it was to the vegetables.

With change comes adaptation. It has not been a season of fat, red tomato salads sprinkled with fresh basil and drizzled in olive oil. Instead, I've been crunching away at raw bean salads dressed in balsamic vinegar, bowls of Buttercrunch lettuce, and creamy pasta salads spiked with sharp arugula. Necessity is the mother of invention, as they say. After almost two months of harvesting beans as they burst on the vine, I've perfected a delicious recipe that uses them all up and feeds us nicely.

Raw green bean, walnut and feta salad

1 pound raw, fresh green, red or yellow beans, or a combination, rinsed, trimmed and cut in half

1 cup grape tomatoes, whole
1 small red onion, thinly sliced
1/2 cup chopped walnuts
1 cup crumbled feta cheese

For the dressing:

Juice of one fresh lemon
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1/4 cup olive or walnut oil
1 teaspoon honey
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
2 tablespoons fresh oregano, minced
1 tablespoon sesame seeds
2 garlic cloves, minced

Lightly toss the green beans, tomatoes, onion, nuts and feta cheese in a large bowl. Combine the dressing ingredients in a separate bowl, and pour over the salad just before serving. Combine gently with a large spoon or spatula. Refrigerate leftovers. Makes enough as a side dish for about four people.

We've also been drinking lots of sun tea, which I make whenever the sun puts in an appearance. Gone are the days of ordinary black tea; this summer, I've been craving dif-



JillsBirds 'nWords™

i
love
summer

The livin' is easy

By Jill Butler
Special to the Times

I love summer and early morning swims in the lake with the swallows. Sometimes a dragonfly or an occasional fisherman joins me.

The nearby camp is barely awake, but when the bugle sounds I'm back on Warner Lake at my Michigan Girl Scout Camp. Fond memories and this camp's awakening pulls me along and encourages me to swim farther and farther out into the lake until I'm passing their raft with my eye on the distant shore.

My ritual is to first do my journal writing lakeside sitting on "my" bench with coffee in hand. And then a moment comes when it's time, time to dive in. We wait all year for these opportunities. Do we take advantage of them? What else do we love? A music concert opportunity or a picnic with neighbors, it matters not, it must not be missed.

I love summer when the sun remembers to shine, the geraniums are in full bloom, and the hydrangeas turn to periwinkle bombshells. I may have cut my hydrangeas a bit too enthusiastically, their blooms are robust but few. I love the trees

sparkling after one more rain and am curious about the giant crabgrass clumps that look like a rare shrub.

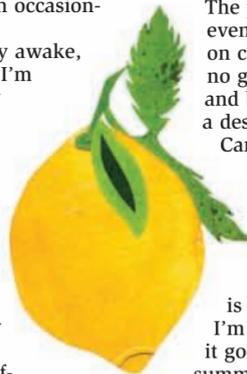
I love summer because I'm most happy in what feels like my rain forest studio. The paper seems to be dripping before I even start to throw some paint. Painting on craft paper is so satisfying. There is no grand scheme here simply to show up and begin. It's difficult not to have a goal, a destination, we're all so goal driven.

Can we step out of our usual patterns and stay away from it all, even the media and the communication tools and "just be" on vacation? Vacate. Empty the mind and take (time) off!

I love summer because every glass is filled to the brim with ice. Normally I'm not an ice lover, nor reportedly is it good for the digestive system, but it's summer and I want ice and sweetness.

Lemonade is my favorite.

I love summer and this year I've made an extra effort to bank the seasonal fruits. The body wants us to eat with the season. It begs for what's seasonally ripened, fresh and inviting. Some seasons the strawberries, raspberries and blueberries go by so fast I totally miss them. Not this year. Local is so appealing, their just-in-time arrival at the local markets. I finally got to the Chester Farmer's Market and was rewarded with lots of seasonal treats including a blueberry smoothie accompanied by two of Laurel's gingersnaps available at the new green grocery, The Local Beet. The Beet is now fully stocked and rewards your visit with worthy choices of local milk from



Summer: The livin' is easy; writer extolls the season

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the CT Co-op. The milk is processed right here in CT (no shipping it to the Midwest for processing which seems to be the norm) and no hormones are added. I like the milks' name, Farmer's Cow. Closer yet is another "pure product" offering that's made right here in Chester. Salsa made by Mama Manga is available at The Beet.

I love summer with fireside chats and roasting a marshmallow until it bursts into flames and turns to charcoal. And then I love the cross breezes traveling South to North through the

porch as I am invited to sleep in my red sleeping bag.

I love summer even when I say I'm working. We need, and I do, sneak away to be rewarded with a hot sticky day at the ocean with sand in our suits, walks along the shoreline, castles built to melt and disappear into the night. I love the sailboats bobbing, sails lagging, or blowing crisp, either way, we're on the water celebrating summer.

And mainly, I love summer because it is.... summer!

Editor's Note:

*Jill Butler is offering her next "Creating Your Vision" Workshop, Tuesday, Aug. 25, from 6 - 9 p.m. and Saturday, Aug. 29, from 10 -1 p.m. in her Chester studio. The fee is \$35. To register, or for information, call Jill at 860.526.5155 or e-mail, jillbutler@jillbutler.com. Butler is the author/illustrator of the book, *Create the Space You Deserve*. Butler's cottage and book were created based on the ideas you'll discover in her workshop. For more about the book visit: www.jillbutler.com*

