

“Synchronicity”

by Valerie Harbolovic, Aransas/San Patricio Master Gardener

Several trains of thought swirled around in my head, and then it all came together for me in a single wondrous discovery at a local nursery, in Corpus Christi.

Synchronicity? Maybe so ...

I had been pondering long and hard on what to do to clean up my garden prior to the visit of my expert-gardener sister from England. Where there should have been green there was crackling brown. Where once there was a fig tree, an avocado tree, and a blood orange tree, there was a smothering-mound of hostile and invasive grass - a tower of green choking death that climbed up and engulfed each dead specimen.

Where the ground should have been moist and hydrated there was a wasteland of neglect and desiccation. There were no two ways about it, my garden was a calamity, and as a Texas Master Gardener, I really needed to get my act together before it was too late, but how? In the oppressive August heat, I was lethargic, and I didn't want to do the work.

I yearned for my yard to look like the jungle in Africa that I remembered from my enchanted childhood in Lobito, Angola. A lush, green, dense, mysterious, cocoon where I could lose myself; I wanted the tropical palette that came with hibiscus, bird of paradise, bougainvillea, and pride of Barbados. And I craved the enveloping perfume of plumeria and jasmine in my special place. But the problem was that when we had a freeze in the Coastal Bend, it would all die, and I would need to plant all over again.

One of the best ways to create the riot of color my senses craved for was to fill a large steel stock tank from a farm supply business with a varied planting. I had two such tubs at the periphery of my patio, and they delivered! Color upon color upon color. But come a freeze, and it was all back to square one, an expensive and frustrating process.

In my planning fog, I pondered other ways to create my glorious garden of childhood. The tubs could wait!

I purchased two jacaranda trees, and a pot of black clumping bamboo. I needed to pot them on from the three-gallon containers they were shipped in, to seven-gallon, nursery-grade black plastic pots. So, I went to the local nursery. After I made my purchase, I browsed in the section where they sold books, wind chimes, and cane stakes. And there it was! Sitting on the shelf looking rather beaten up, but I knew an old friend when I saw one!

Let me explain, a beloved book burned up in my storage shed in the storage company facility fire of November 2019. One of my all-time treasures was gone.

Well, gone until that day when it reappeared in my life. The Complete Indoor Gardener edited by Michael Wright from 1974. And I had a revelation, a solution to all the dilemmas. A quick fix, if you like!

I loved container gardening and all the apartments and condos where I had ever lived had been filled with plants in pots. Why not adapt the concept and put all the plants I loved into the 3/5/7 gallon pots I'd just purchased and make a tasteful grouping of them in a stock tank.

Unlike the other two tanks, I did not need to fill them with layers of gravel, soil, mulch, but just gravel alone. Then stick the pots into the steel containers, and I'd have my jungle, and I could move the pots indoors when it froze, so I wouldn't need to repeat myself, year after year. Furthermore, I could place two smaller pots (three-gallon) of crotons atop a pair of Ali baba jars and remove them too when needed.

I danced my happy dance!

I am keeping the "planted" steel tanks as a control to compare with my "potted" tanks.

I like the idea that if a pot does not work well in one location, I can shift it to another; if one plant shows signs of infestation, I can isolate it and keep the rest healthy; if a freeze threatens, I can bring 'em all in and save myself the trouble of replacement year after year!

So ... here are some pretty pictures of what I did!



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