

Confessions of a Lazy Gardener

Issue #13: How to Be on Tour

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Well, **2001** had the darndest spring! I took the week before Memorial Day off to get ahead of the gardening game. (You remember that week? When the high temperatures were in the 40's and it rained every day? I got a lot of reading done.) Instead of being ahead, I'm farther behind than usual: I still have three flats of things to find homes for. There are 60 bags of unshredded leaves in the garage (very fragrant, I might add). The weeds are everywhere, and the warm-season annuals are just sitting there, waiting for their cold wet feet to dry out.

As I scramble to catch up, I constantly remind myself of one thing: At least I'm not on tour this year.

My garden has actually been on MGCM August tours twice -- once in 1994, and again in 2000.* Here's what I have learned.



1. Don't bother to paint the house unless it's really, really bad. Gardeners do not come to your garden to look at your house. I'd bet that most visitors to my garden can't remember much about the house at all. Quick quiz: Do I have a double or single garage? Do I have a garage at all?

2. It is important to repair sidewalks, since you don't want visitors to trip and fall. Injuries take a lot of fun out of garden tours. If you're going to pour new sidewalk sections, measure and calculate carefully before starting to avoid frantic trips to the nearest cement source partway through the process. Helpful hint: if you're about a pint of concrete short, push small rocks into the concrete to bring up the overall level. (By the time I thought of this, it was too late, but maybe someone else could benefit.)

3. Do not start new projects, like ponds or major flowerbed renovations in the year that you're going to be on tour. Yes, I know that Dave Moehnke** put in a new water feature two days before he was on tour a couple of years ago, but I'm quite sure that Dave and Renada do not qualify as Lazy Gardeners. Lazy Gardeners are made of less stern stuff, and should focus on spiffing up what they have rather than trying to add more complexity to their lives.

4. Prepare some extra containers to stash in bare spots at the last minute. I used bowls of coleus, begonias, salvias, impatiens, etc. to fill in bare spots that I normally wouldn't even have noticed. I don't know if people touring noticed them, but it made me feel better. This year, I have reverted to ignoring the bare spots.

5. Do not allow any of your relatives to rope you into helping them move over the last full weekend before the tour. Make them change their closing dates if they need your help.

6. Gladly accept any assistance. I was very grateful for those who stopped by and helped weed, and then Margaret Hibberd came by the day before the tour and worked wonders on my patio and porch.

7. Try edging your sidewalks. It's kind of a novel experience, and they will look quite a bit neater. Don't buy more than two different edging tools for this, though, because you won't use them all that often, and they won't get worn out!

8. If you choose to use straight bleach to clean six white plastic Adirondack chairs, wear rubber gloves. Chemical burns on your fingers can take the edge off your fun.

9. If possible, have a few refreshments for thirsty tourists. If you ended up with leftover beverages from the tour the month before, that's ideal. But it might not be possible. Just do your best!

10. Don't worry! Gardeners are a very kind lot, and will not embarrass you. As Bob Olson*** once pointed out, gardeners will head for one thing in your garden and admire the heck out of it. Though I still remember someone telling me, "I really like your garden. It has weeds and everything, and I feel better about my own garden." Just remember that we all enjoy seeing other people's gardens, even if they're not all perfect. Just share your garden. And relax!



* I have been on tours another couple of times since then.

** We were sorry when Dave and Renada moved out of town.

*** We will always miss Bob!