TOASTMASTER SPEECH

FOR

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“Mary Mary quite contrary.

How does your garden grow?”

Many of us have grown up with that time-honored nursery rhyme in our heads. As children we hear the melody formed by the matching words and it becomes a lesson in verse. As we get older we listen to the words:

“With silver bells and cockle shells

And pretty maids **all in a row**.“

As an adult, for me the thought became more than just a nursery rhyme…. it became a mission…. As the words went round in my head I wondered, “How **DOES** my garden grow? What would it be like to plant my own garden?” So I decided to find out what it **really** takes to grow a flower garden and what message or philosophy may be concealed in the soil and seeds that would sprout buds and stems and beautiful life.

Luther Burbank said, “Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul.” As I thought about how I might grow my garden, I decided to do some research. Flowers are not only beautiful to look at; their fragrance has the ability to lift our spirits. Their petals can be used for food and medicinal purposes, and throughout history some people even believed flowers possessed mystical powers. I would like to say that I would be just fine if the flowers in my garden looked beautiful and smelled terrific… I don’t need them to have mystical powers!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Gardens were originally established in Ancient Egypt, first as a practical means to have vegetables and herbs. As the Egyptians became more civilized and the upper classes grew, flower gardens became more popular. The Egyptians liked to relax in their gardens under rows of shade trees. They grew vineyards and willows as well. In Victorian times flowers had their heyday. Buds and blossoms adorned everything from a woman’s hair to her dress; from stationery to “Tussie Mussies” … those were small, sweet bouquets given as gifts of friendship. Each flower had a different meaning- Apple blossoms stood for good fortune, bluebells were a symbol of gratitude, and carnations, depending on the color, signified admiration, innocence, or maybe disappointment or rejection… there are so many details and distinctions…let’s just say… I wouldn’t want to get yellow carnations!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

I became really interested in the concept and read more about the best ways to plant a flower garden. Through the research phase I realized I had the opportunity to learn so many lessons that went far beyond the basic introductions of planting a flower garden. There are many steps and choices to experience in the process. Let me share some of them with you.

The most important part of planting a garden is … **PLANNING** the garden. Although it’s best to plant flowers in the spring, the anticipation and the plotting can begin before then. Where will I place my garden? What will I grow? Where is the best sunlight so that the flowers will bloom and thrive and last as long as possible? What is the most sensible way to arrange the flowers? What colors do I want to see in my garden? Do I want annuals that live a full life cycle in one season- they grow, bloom and dye, or perennials that hopefully come back and visit year after year? What is the best soil to use for planting? For someone who doesn’t know much about gardens, I realized that there was a lot more to learn than what I had expected, but in the process I learned one of the great lessons of gardening… to have a garden is to cultivate… **PATIENCE**!!! The more I research the more interested and fascinated I have become.

Flowers need certain conditions in order to grow and thrive. They need about six hours of sunlight each day in order to be nourished. It’s important to observe the spot that will contain the garden so that you know how much sun it will get each day. Some suggest that you place the garden in a spot you cannot ignore so that you are aware of the need to water the plants on a regular basis. Before planting the ground has to be cleared and the soil must be enriched. A soil that is fortified with nutrients… from compost, fertilizer, decayed leaves…. and “other animal byproducts,” will support the growth of the flower garden. Since flowers need so much sun and exposure, it makes sense to plant them in size order with the smaller shorter plants at the front and the taller plants at the back… There are more practical reasons for this arrangement as well… it’s easier to reach the taller plants in the back, the taller plants don’t block the light for the shorter members of the garden, and all in all visually it is a harmonious arrangement. I like to look forward to the day when my flowers bloom and I can enjoy each row of diverse, colorful, and beautiful shapes while I take its “class picture!” (**Wait for the laugh**).

Hans Christian Andersen reminds us, “Just living is not enough… one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower.” Flowers are good for the soul and the spirit. Their delicate beauty reminds us of the wonders of nature. Working with the soil literally deepens our connection to the earth, and witnessing the growth and blossoming of something we planted provides a sense of accomplishment and affirmation of the circle of life. A blooming garden inspires us with patience, beauty and the order of Mother Nature.

Mary’s garden was filled with silver bells and cockleshells. I don’t know if I will plant those particular flowers but I know I will have pretty maids all in a row… in size order, shorter ones up front… and they will be glorious!! Thank you all!