



NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

GARDENnotes
FALL 2022



Nerine bowdenii
Image by Richie Steffen

Editing

Words & Images by Sue Goetz



Front border in need of editing

the Garden



Front border after editing & replacing plants



The word "edit" is not always a writer's favorite thing to hear. Typically, it means the removal of fractured sentences, wordy subjects, and confusing jargon. Editing cleans up and clarifies the intent. Now, head out to the garden with those same things in mind. All gardens evolve, change, and grow; even the most well-designed planted spaces need editing as the garden matures. So, what does editing do to a garden? It gives it longevity, sustainability, and lower maintenance: all the top buzzwords I hear from clients when working on a design.

Autumn is a great time to evaluate what happened over the growing season; consider editing now, if appropriate, and make a list of what might need to be done next spring. In addition, the slower pace of the garden this time of year makes it easier to consider different ways to "edit" the garden.

Plant removal

In writing, it is hard to take away well-chosen words, but sometimes there simply isn't space, much as it is in the garden. Look at the aesthetics of what plants are doing to the appearance and appeal of your landscape. When one plant overtakes another and steals away beauty and shape, then one (or both) of them have got to go. It also could be a matter of evaluation of both plants. Can they be shaped to make them grow next to each other better? If a shrub crowds to the point of killing another, remove it. Plants should also be considered for removal if you must shear them down every year to keep them from blocking a window, door, or pathway. Remember the familiar adage "right plant, right place." It will ring in your ears as you get out the shovel. Plant removal can be hard but tell yourself you are doing the right thing.



Overgrown rhododendron blocking a window

Divide to multiply

Plant division seems to be intimidating to some gardeners. Did I do it correctly? Is it the right time? Will I kill it? What is the point of dividing plants anyway? I currently have a beautiful *Agapanthus* that needs to be divided, but I do not want to lose it in the process; I always say next year as it blooms less and less. Fewer blooms and thinning in the center crown of many herbaceous perennials mean they should be divided. In the perennial world, many varieties perform better when divided as often as every 3 to 5 years. A freshly divided plant spends energy to promote healthy growth and bloom rather than keeping the extra baggage alive. In the process, the extra plants can be transplanted along mixed borders and garden beds for nice plant repetition. Better yet, have a plant exchange with garden friends. A clue to the right time to divide a plant is its bloom time. A good rule of thumb: divide spring and summer blooming plants in the fall and fall bloomers in the spring



These shrubs, sometimes referred to as green meatballs, are planted too close so they must be constantly sheared

Updates

Updating, renewing, and changing to a new point of view are things a garden could use now and then. Take a walk, pen in hand (bring your camera phone, too), and make notes of areas that need more texture, color, repetition, or a new plant. Look for spaces that are empty and evaluate the underachievers. Some plant varieties are simply not in it for the long haul and must be replaced. Leggy, overgrown, and wimpy are all words that come to mind in the evaluation process. Consider the unattractive blue fescue, the slug-eaten hosta, random bulbs (that the squirrels probably moved around), or a heather that is barely half alive. Don't hesitate to rip something out that is well beyond its prime. Consider the value of replacement; is it really worth trying to get that *Nandina* back into shape? How long does it have to be ugly before you are tired of it?

Next, look at areas that need a fresh flush of color in another season. Although spring is often a focus of the garden, good garden design does not show bias to any one season; it has something for every time of year. Sometimes the colder months are neglected, but plants can add winter interest with attractive bark, berries, and evergreen architecture.

Let it be

How about no editing needed; ahh, very sweet words to a writer's ears. Now, back in the garden, consider things you can just leave alone. Over-pruning is a problem in mainstream landscape maintenance when very few plants really need to be touched. Get to know why a plant might need to be cut back or thinned and the proper techniques to do so. Don't cut or prune shrubs and trees too severely in the fall and winter; just tidy up branches that are crossing, broken, diseased, or did not produce leaves. Just let plants be unless you need to prune for better fruiting on edibles, like apple trees, storm damage, or aesthetic shaping, like topiary. Some perennials and ornamental grasses with attractive seed heads and silhouettes should be left alone over fall and winter. They add interest and are beneficial for birds and insects.

Enjoy the slower pace of the garden in autumn, and consider the effects that some editing could do. Then, get a pen and paper and your camera to take notes and make a list. 🐾

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Dividing certain mature perennials can provide more plants & more bloom



Japanese maple is overtaking a walkway – it needs to be moved or removed



EVER GREEN GROUND COVERS

Cotoneaster × *suecicus* EMERALD BEAUTY™ Photo courtesy of PlantHaven International, planthaven.com

Words and Images by Richie Steffen (unless otherwise noted)

One of the delights of gardening in the Northwest is the enormous choice of evergreen plant material. It is especially apparent during the winter months. The reliability of the broadleaf evergreens and conifers standing in stark contrast to the deciduous silhouettes of other plants is what makes our Northwest gardens so unique. I find it easy to pick out evergreen shrubs and the occasional evergreen tree for the garden, but evergreen groundcovers always seem to be one of my last thoughts to add to the landscape. Over my years at the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden, I have come to appreciate and rely on a carpet of evergreen groundcovers that serve as the backdrop for a range of herbaceous perennials and as a skirt around the trees and shrubs.

When considering groundcovers, it is important to pick the right plant for your location. Far too many overly vigorous plants are placed in too small of a location only to result in excessive pruning and digging to remove shoots and sprouts. Groundcovers can be thought of as either spreaders or clumpers. Spreaders will naturally fill in an area with low sprawling stems or by rhizomes or stolons that form new plants along a running stem. Spreaders need room to grow and fill a space. This type of ground cover needs to be carefully selected to be certain an overly aggressive plant is not added to the garden. Clumpers maintain a tight compact crown and do not run. We rely on these plants to grow into each other as they mature. You will need to plant more of the clumping groundcovers to fill in a space, but you will have reduced long-term maintenance from less pruning or weeding out of unwanted plants.



Cotoneaster microphyllus var. *thymifolius* hort.



Euonymus fortunei 'Kewensis'

One group of groundcovers that can be a little tricky is plants that reseed. These should be viewed with caution and careful consideration, especially if it is also a spreading groundcover. Reseeding groundcovers will pop up in random open spaces around your garden and possibly your neighbor's garden. There is nothing worse than deciding you no longer like the plant and removing it, but your neighbor decides to keep it. You will be stuck weeding it out forever!

When considering evergreen groundcovers take note of the growth rate and the space to be filled. Also, remember design principles such as color, texture and habit. This can take a groundcover from a functional problem-solving planting to an elegant and beautiful asset to the garden. When dealing with large areas, 200 sq ft or more, consider mixing more than one type of ground cover. Monoculture plantings are difficult to keep looking good for the long term. Inevitably, a plant or two dies and it can take years for new plantings to fill in. By using more than one groundcover this problem becomes much easier to resolve and visually looks more interesting. Remember that groundcovers are a way to link areas of your garden together and are not insignificant in the design.

Covering large areas allows you to use fast spreaders for quick results. Cotoneasters are often panned for their over-use, but this is the situation for which they are perfect. A new selection that should be considered over many of the older cultivars is *Cotoneaster* × *suecicus* EMERALD BEAUTY™. This is an introduction from the Oregon State University ornamental plant breeding program in Corvallis, Ore. This greatly improved selection replaced the popular, but ungainly, *Cotoneaster* 'Coral Beauty'. EMERALD BEAUTY™ is a quick grower but has a more compact habit and a high



Rubus rolfei – Great Plant Picks



Euonymus fortunei 'Wolong Ghost'



Ophiopogon planiscapus



Ophiopogon planiscapus 'Nigrescens' and *Lonicera crassifolia*



Mahonia nervosa



Veronica peduncularis 'Georgia Blue'

resistance to the damaging disease, fire blight (*Erwinia amylovora*). This cultivar is floriferous and produces copious amounts of coral red berries that hold well into winter. It is tolerant of a wide range of soils and grows best in full sun. You can expect it to spread about a foot a year. A tiny leaved cousin of EMERALD BEAUTY™ is *Cotoneaster microphyllus* var. *thymifolius* hort., thyme-leaved cotoneaster. This fine textured shrub is especially well suited to cascading down rockeries. The small gray green foliage highlights the bright matte red berries in fall and winter. Both of these shrubs are adaptable to sun or bright shade.

If you seriously dislike cotoneasters, but need an area covered fast one of the evergreen brambles may be the plant for you. The most common is *Rubus rolfei*, Taiwanese creeper. The dark green leaves are shiny with deeply impressed veins giving a rugose texture. If grown in full sun, mature plants can produce flowers followed by yellow orange berries. The plant became more widely known and popular after the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden introduced the hardier cultivar *Rubus rolfei* 'Formosan Carpet' (originally called *R. calycinoides* 'Emerald Carpet') which is now the dominate clone sold, often without the cultivar name attached. This tough groundcover is best in well-draining soils with occasional watering during dry weather. Although rare now, there is a variegated cultivar called 'Sonya's Parasol' with leaves splashed creamy white. Another big plus is that Taiwanese creeper is rabbit resistant.

Most gardeners have much smaller spaces for groundcovers, often less than 200 sq ft. These smaller areas are often bordered by walkways, lawns or driveways making it more critical that the groundcover is easy to keep in bounds. Slow spreaders are the better choice for these limited areas; but if



Adiantum venustum



Asarum caudatum

your patience is short, moderate spreaders can be used, just know that you will need to do some regular maintenance to contain their spread in future years.

These spaces often require working around existing trees and shrubs that will cast shade in all or part of the area. It is wise to look at plants that will tolerate a wide range of light levels. The low growing *Euonymus fortunei* is a tough and adaptable plant. Two cultivars that I think are particularly interesting in the garden are *Euonymus fortunei* 'Kewensis' with its tiny leaves and slow growth and *Euonymus fortunei* 'Wolong Ghost', a faster grower with larger narrow leaves with prominent silver white veins. Both have been rabbit resistant at the Miller Garden (although, this may not be true everywhere). Two other groundcovers that have been rabbit resistant at the Miller Garden are the grassy textured *Ophiopogon planiscapus*, mondograss, and the brilliant blue flowered *Veronica peduncularis* 'Georgia Blue'. *Ophiopogon planiscapus* is best known for its dark colored variant 'Nigrescens', black mondograss. This unusual colored plant is striking in the garden, but the typical green form is also very useful and adaptable. The *Veronica* is a tough and hardy plant that will tolerate partial shade but will flower its best in full sun. The small leaves and relaxed habit make it a great choice for creating a softer more romantic feel in the garden.

Two excellent natives for groundcovers are *Mahonia nervosa*, Cascade Oregon grape, and *Mahonia repens*, low Oregon grape, both being sun and shade adaptable. They grow denser in full sun but offer striking textures when grown with other groundcovers in shade. One of the nicer groundcover medleys we have developing now is *Mahonia repens* growing through the light green *Adiantum venustum*, the evergreen Himalayan maidenhair fern, with patches of *Asarum caudatum*,



Blechnum penna-marina



Saxifraga 'Primuloides' in the landscape



Saxifraga 'Primuloides'



Saxifraga x polita 'Dentata'

our native wild ginger with dark green heart shaped leaves. These two native shrubs are some of our most useful drought tolerant garden plants and unlike some mahonia do not appear to be very palatable to rabbits.

Edging beds with groundcovers is an elegant solution to a finished appearance in the garden. These small areas require low and slow groundcovers. One of my favorite ferns for small areas is the adorable *Blechnum penna-marina*, little hard fern. This slow spreader only grows 4 to 6 inches tall and often has red new growth. Although it will tolerate a considerable amount of sun if kept watered, it is best in bright open shade. London pride saxifrage is another great edger that works well with the little hard fern. One of two cultivars that has an interesting texture is the small and compact *Saxifraga 'Primuloides'*. The tiny rosettes of foliage look more like a sedum than a saxifrage. The other is *Saxifraga x polita 'Dentata'*, with eye-catching tooth-edged foliage. If a little brightness and color is needed, use *Saxifraga x urbium 'Aureopunctata'*; the dark green rosettes of leaves have patches of lemon yellow. Amazingly, these three succulent-looking perennials have not been touched by rabbits.

If your bed edge has more sun, try dwarf mondograss, *Ophiopogon japonicus 'Nana'* or 'Gyoku Ryu'. This very short, tufty grass-like plant is very slow to spread, but requires little maintenance once established. If that is a little too ordinary, try the penny leaf honeysuckle, *Lonicera crassifolia*. This low, evergreen honeysuckle is a cute and well-behaved spreader. The dark green round leaves are shiny and turn a bronzy red in winter with enough sun. In spring, tiny honey-

suckle flowers dot the plants, opening creamy yellow then deepening in color with age.

Using groundcovers effectively in the garden can alleviate weeds, help conserve water and give your planting a look of completion. No matter what your conditions there is a groundcover that is right for you. An easy place to find good reliable information on groundcovers is the Great Plant Picks website, www.greatplantpicks.org. This easy-to-use resource has beautiful photos and cultural information that is specifically focused on growing in the maritime Pacific Northwest. I hope you find a few that you like and keep in mind fall is a great time to plant! 🌿

Richie Steffen is Executive Director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and president of NHS.

LITERARY NOTES

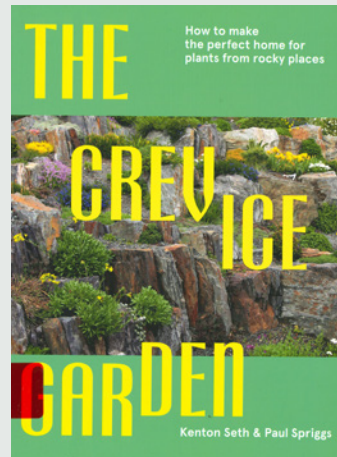
from the Miller Library

Brian Thompson

Last May, I visited the Denver Botanic Gardens. After I tore myself away from the array of tall, bearded iris at the peak of bloom, I found nearby different renditions of the traditional rock garden. The rocks were not the smooth, roundish boulders but instead craggy slates, positioned vertically and close together, with only limited cracks for the plants.

This was my introduction to crevice gardening. This design expands the plant palette for gardeners in the dry, high altitude of the Rockies, but also in our own cool Mediterranean climate, by providing protection from wet winters that kill many plants.

It is appropriate that the new – and almost only – book on this topic, *The Crevice Garden*, has two authors that represent these climate extremes. Kenton Seth is from western Colorado. Paul Spriggs understands the needs of Seattle area gardeners from his crevice garden in Victoria, British Columbia. Both have careers as gardeners, and they discovered their passion for alpine plants in part through backpacking and mountain climbing.



A crevice garden has more rocks than a traditional rock garden, covering at least half of the surface and typically raised to resemble an outcropping of rock. This keeps the plant tops and roots widely separated and in conditions they both prefer. The roots need the deep run with dependable moisture and even temperatures. The leaves and flowers stay dry and free of excessive moisture.

How do you do it? The design process is somewhat complex, but a detailed guide will take you through each step, from calculating how much of each material (rock, soil, dressing) to design and garden placement. And yes, planting! Some 250 plants are recommended, many new to me, but all sound intriguing. Most important is a location where you can watch your (often tiny) treasures from close by.

Several case studies display beautiful examples, including the garden at Far Reaches Farm in Port Townsend, Washington, appropriately titled "alpines in wet winters." The authors appreciate that "gardening continues to be our most common connection to nature" and hope readers will embrace crevices to explore plants previously only available to keen specialists. 🌿

Brian Thompson is the manager and curator of horticultural literature for the Elisabeth C. Miller Library.

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GARDENnotes

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Thank you to our Patrons!

The Lecture Program would not be possible without the tremendous support of our Patrons. Their generosity helps NHS provide an outstanding educational program for Northwest gardeners. With the great success of webinar lectures over the past two years, which has reached an even wider audience than in the past, NHS will continue to provide fine speakers online as our organization opens for in-person classes and lectures on a limited basis.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear NHS Members,

As I finish my term as President of NHS, I leave with pride and excitement at where we stand today. Our organization has grown tremendously over the last few years adding nearly 500 new members. Our robust webinar program is now supplemented with a growing in-person program, and we are returning to participating in full support at the upcoming Northwest Flower & Garden Festival this winter. Our

community support through grants and scholarships is fully funded, and we are on the cusp of implementing a new scholarship program for the horticulture students enrolled in the regional community college and technical programs.

I truly enjoyed seeing so many friends this summer when I opened my home garden during the Meet-the-Board Tour. The in-person events and classes have been a very pleasant turn of events as we have started to learn to live with the pandemic. I have also very much enjoyed connecting with so many through webinar programs. This has become such an important part of NHS, and I am really excited to see what 2023 brings in the way of webinars. I know there are some excellent speakers currently being considered for the next year!

These events have not happened by chance. I am indebted to my fellow NHS board members who have spent many hours planning and coordinating our programs and working diligently behind the scenes to make it all look easy. In particular, I appreciate those board members who have gone the extra mile and chaired a committee. The extra efforts these board members put into the preparation and coordination and execution of their duties make NHS better for us all.

We have four board members retiring from the board at the Annual Meeting in November, Rhonda Bjornstad, Gillian Mathews, Susan Picquelle and Sherri Wilson. Each of these retiring board members participated actively in NHS by serving on committees and lending their creative touches to many activities during the last year. I especially want to thank Gillian Mathews for her extraordinary care and diligence as co-chair of the day tour and multi-day tour committees. The lucky members who were quick enough to sign up for these excellent tours are filled with fond memories. An extended thank you also goes out to Sheri Wilson for serving as our treasurer. These officer positions are crucial to the success of NHS, and I appreciate her wisdom shared at our executive committee meetings and finance committee meetings.

My final thoughts of appreciation go to two individuals who made my success possible, Karin Kravitz and Rick Peterson. Our administrator, Karin, has been a pillar of the NHS for longer than I can remember. Her sage wisdom and advice has kept me moving forward and has reminded me of many things that otherwise would have been lost to the recesses of my mind (and email!). I am in deep gratitude for her caring assistance and solid, supportive friendship. My serving as president this year would not have been possible without the support of my husband Rick. Rick is my anchor keeping me on an even keel and having endless patience for the multiple lectures, meetings and long winded complaining about poor internet connections effecting my zoom events. He is a man of great patience, and I look forward to spending a few more evenings together after November.

As I continue my work on the board as past president, I look forward to seeing you at upcoming events and sharing time with you online through the webinars. Thanks for a great year, and I look forward to what the future holds for us all!

All the best,

Richie Steffen
NHS President



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"There is an element of chance about these gorgeous days of autumn: each one, you feel, might be the last, and nothing can be taken for granted."

*—Anna Pavord, in *The Seasonal Gardener: Creative Planting Combinations**

Autumn in the Miller Garden
Image by Richie Steffen