

CONFESSIONS OF A FORMER LAWN JUNKIE

By Elizabeth Baker

I admit it. I once believed that my very life depended on maintaining a flawlessly manicured and weedless lawn. So for most of my adult life, I allowed pesticides and herbicides to be slathered on it to insure its perfection. Wasn't that what one did in suburbia? After all, ten times the amount of chemicals are used on lawns than in all of agriculture. But about a decade ago, it was all upended for me.

For it was then that I foolishly opened Pandora's box by reading the research regarding those lavishly-strewn lawn chemicals. And while there was no smoking gun in it, it was disturbingly persuasive – so much so that it forced me to break my addiction to lawn pesticides and herbicides cold turkey by switching to an all-organic program. Ten years later, I can frankly state that I have not so much as an isolated Round-up craving.

At first, however, the withdrawal symptoms were intense. After it rained, I could invariably be found ripping intransigent weeds out of the newly-softened ground with my bare hands, though I kept a hefty screwdriver handy for those devilishly long dandelion roots. Despite my efforts, however, the weeds spread far faster than I could uproot them. Truly, Chinese water torture could not have psychologically unhinged me more than their relentless pace. What was worse, they seemed to be making a fool of me and my good intentions.

Reaching a point of utter frustration, I masked my eyes with self-righteousness and studiously ignored them. That went on for several years. During this eyes-averted period, my backyard became mostly clover, infused with violets, while my front yard remained largely grass with a smattering of dandelions. These, of course, were enhanced yearly by wish-blowing children.

Yet, try as I might, I couldn't help but notice the bees that clustered on their early blossoms, seeking their first sips of nectar, nor the ground hogs and bunnies that came to feast and fatten on the clover after a long, cold winter. In short order, however, I went from not only noticing them to watching for them and even worrying about them. I began taking immense pleasure from the fact that neither they, nor the grass-licking dogs passing on the sidewalk, were ingesting toxins from my yard. And that no beehives were collapsing because of me.

Eventually, this resurgence of wildlife in my yard, and the satisfaction I take in it, has apparently altered my brain chemistry. For now I'm positively entranced by the profusion of violets and dandelions in my yard and delight in their spread. But I guess the clearest indication of my complete withdrawal from lawn addiction came early last July when I noticed that a large area behind my garage had been taken over by aggressively spreading wild strawberries. And my reaction? Sheer delight!