

So Ends Another Gardening Season

With our first fall freeze safely behind us, the gardening season has come to a merciful end. LuAnn and I closed out our annual exercise in premeditated futility last weekend when we unceremoniously chopped down the remains of every plant that we laboriously planted and carefully tended to all summer.

After such a dry autumn, it's hard to remember that our growing season began with the wettest June on record in Iowa. I was mowing our lawn every three or four days and I had never seen happier weeds, particularly mixed in with our grass.

One day last spring I came into the house after my semi-weekly mowing ritual and said to LuAnn, "We have got to do something about those weeds." She said, "They're not too bad – we just have some patches of clover growing in the grass."

"That's what we had three years ago," I replied. "What we have now is patches of grass growing in the clover."

One problem with being an aspiring environmentalist is coming face to face with the tradeoffs. Twenty years ago, we used to hire guys in trucks with big chemical tanks to come around four or five times each summer and spray the heck out of our lawn. They ensured that any plant not resembling Kentucky bluegrass suffered a swift and horrible death.

Our lawn looked great, but our consciences bothered us, so eventually we went cold turkey and let Mother Nature have her way. Every now and then I yank out the worst of the thistles and dandelions, but during weak moments I temporarily abandon my principles and sparingly spot-apply a pet-safe broadleaf herbicide when LuAnn isn't looking.

I'm happy to report that consistently mowed clover and crabgrass can pass for a meticulously tended lawn from 20 feet away, particularly to moderately myopic drivers who are speeding by in their cars near dusk.

LuAnn and I are frequently complimented on our landscaping and plantings. Every now and then we'll get new neighbors who will say something like, "I don't know if I'll ever get my property looking as good as yours." I tend to reply, "No pressure, we'll cut you some slack for a few months."

Of course, what they are looking at is the end result of 25 years of consistent effort, but they don't need to know that.

Perversely, I'm happy to accept the accolades from friends and neighbors, although if it was up to me, I'd live in a concrete condominium with no outdoor duties whatsoever. I have other hobbies that are cleaner, cooler and require less effort. If necessary, I could watch the Weather Channel with the window open to get my outdoorsy fix.

But as you probably know, domestic duress is a powerful stimulant. LuAnn is the brains and whip-cracker in this enterprise; I'm just the indentured servant providing much of the begrudging labor. Not to mention taking as much of the credit as I can.

Dave Parsons co-owns a beautifully planted and landscaped business (thanks to Quality Care) on the Coralville strip.