

*Musings on Yoga and Nature: **Butterfly Garden***

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As a response to the challenge of Covid-19 many, like me have turned their attention to their gardens on a balcony, in the backyard, or in their local community garden: tuning in to that need and passion of cultures everywhere to cultivate an intentional growing space that supports community/ies. As local Lekwungen peoples, whose traditional territories we live upon, have ‘cultivated’ Gary Oak meadows for Camus for many generations, we too are drawn to these generative, and often healing spaces.

As I have watched and learned from the Hummingbirds in my backyard garden flitting among the spring flowers of Lilac and Cherry, Bluebells and Irises, curiosity has also been stirred again in the vital act of pollination. While some seeds pollinate through wind dispersal – I recall blowing on that feathered tuft of milkweed as a child - many need the vigorous work of a pollinator: a butterfly or bee who, in their quest for the energy of nectar, move pollen (male gamete) from one flower to the ovary of another flower of the same species, enabling fertilization and the production of seeds. Some might say that ‘seeds of ideas’ can be moved through society by pollinators too, such as the David Suzuki Foundation that sells localized seeds through their Butterflyway Project, focused on developing butterfly habitat across the continent as a fundraiser for their many ecological projects. The idea of creating a richer, more diverse butterfly habitat seemed sweet and led me to buy seeds to develop a richer ‘butterfly garden’ in my own backyard this last month, through planting their recommended plants Western Yarrow, Mountain Sneezegrass, and Woolly sunflower. Appreciating of course, that as we create habitat for butterflies we support other ‘pollinators,’ including our beloved, bustling bees, be they European honeybees or Indigenous Mason bees! I decided to plant my seeds in a blue tub as an experiment that could be grown on a balcony, but from which I can also create small clusters of butterfly friendly plants throughout my yard, and into the back alley.



Western Tiger Swallowtail

Photograph by brad davis

Creating my butterfly garden has meant becoming more discriminating in what I wish to grow, and what I wish to limit in my garden. While I've chosen to support the Suzuki Foundation as a fundraiser, a means of education, and out of a simple curiosity to learn about more species, I appreciate that another path could have been to plant flowering plants common on these traditional territories of the Lekwungen peoples, such as Oceanspray, Stinging Nettle or Kinnikinnick. Being selective has also meant being purposeful in removing plants that are defined as weeds (appreciating that 'weeds' are often simply plants in the wrong place), especially those species which excel at invading habitats and displacing other species. And, as yoga is essentially ongoing deepening enquiry I continue to learn many other things about creating a butterfly garden – from the importance of planting 'host plants' for caterpillars to eat and grow under, to leaving messy sections for bee homes, identifying the difference between bee and wasp, and planting flowers that bloom throughout the seasons as 'nectar plants' providing continuous nourishment for butterflies.

Seeing through the lens of creating a more holistic butterfly garden has stimulated me to consider, what do I consciously or unconsciously plant, maintain and water in the 'garden of my life'? Participating in all the exploding possibilities of springtime, parallel with the opening of communities in this shifting Covid time, there are so many choices to create nurturing patterns and uproot older restrictive ones. What is truly valuable and essential to me, and my vision of what would support a movement towards creating a more sustainable, equitable and life affirming society? Do I wish to feed the flowers or the weeds in my internal garden of becoming - feeding the aspects of myself that brighten, while shifting those aspects of self that limit or veil a fuller, more authentic and truer self.

Now, as I use this analogy of planting for butterfly flowers, I do not wish to demonize the weeds because they too are part of us and indeed, may fill a niche within an ecosystem, or tell us something of our lawns and gardens soil quality, even acting as 'Band-Aids' for injured landscapes. Consider the vibrant yellow dandelion, the bane of many who work diligently to maintain that smooth, green expanse of lawn. Out on hands and knees trying to extract that amazing deep-reaching taproot with trowel, or working with some concoction (pesticide or vinegar) that has been defined as proper by that generation. This wee prolific plant in its growing warns us of poor soil quality, soil being the foundation of growing things, offers remarkable nutrients in its greens, and has inspired lyrics for songs by musicians from Johnny Cash to Bowie to the Hollies, of the sweetness of 'dandelion wine'. Even the weeds may offer us clues, as well as pains on our learning path.

What do I plant – Yarrow and Sunflower, or Kinnikinnick and Stinging Nettle, or both? What weeds do I need to tend to, learn about, or limit that will nourish this butterfly garden of my life? While I have long known how yoga and meditation support ones' journey through challenge and life in general, I have noticed how it has been so sustaining for many in this time of Covid challenges. It has reinforced how much this practice we share of yoga, meditation and mindful compassion, on and off our mats, could be, and perhaps should be, a foundational 'planting' in our butterfly gardens. Coming to our mat over and over again, by ourselves or in our zoomed

communities feeds the workings of the physical body, be it muscle or connective tissue, clears channels for the flow of chi or prana, or even for many of us, supports an expansion of spirit, of interbeing, as the world brings us challenges, be it Covid, or all the other challenges that are part of life. At times, it seems my whole garden lives on my yoga mat shaping my day, from doing the dishes mindfully, to expressing gratitude to that weary soul admitting me to the local grocery yet again, moving me to ride my bike to work, or reminding me to watch the Anna's hummingbird float through the shrubs.

As my evolving practice on the mat over the years has expanded my understanding of how my garden affects the gardens of others in the world, I continue to learn how ones actions, so seemingly small, can add to a wave, a critical mass, or a feedback loop through our interconnected world, literally or energetically, affecting the development of both flowers and weeds. Furthermore, some contend that this may be a moment in the unfolding of the human species that supports a shift in the evolution of consciousness through people making choices to nurture the growth of the most beautiful, equitable and life affirming. As groups, organizations and businesses that I value struggle to survive, I know that even here I can plant for butterflies and work to extract those weeds that limit or harm. As Moksana Yoga adapts to stay vibrant, I have been drawn to offering writings that may stir the yogic juices. I have been going for an occasional social distanced special coffee at local coffee shops, even as I have been depending on Tim's, who have been kind with always having a washroom available for working folks. I've taken time to buy from my favourite local bookstore. Ordered a bike part from a coop online. I am deciding on where to contribute money or time that will help meet a crisis of funding in organizations that care for those most vulnerable. I am learning who the local butterflies are that live all around us (<https://www.goert.ca>). I have built a new garden box, planted more kale, and am again going to have a go at cherry tomatoes. Yet, I am also looking forward to the opening of the local farmer's markets, appreciating how many small businesses are supported there. Finally, I am working to become a better butterfly gardener by reading and researching online, including attending free conferences to gain knowledge and develop tools that support life affirming pollination, along with learning more about trends stimulating weed growth that may lead to a limiting of freedoms, dialogue and collective community creation. Selecting, planting, listening, watering, weeding, a bit at a time.

And then.... after all that.... I will come to my mat again, in community when I can, to nourish those with whom I resonate, along with creating perhaps a pulse of energy to send out into the world... to breathe, listen for the intention of this particular moment, flow and be still, nourishing the garden within and without. Nurturing that evolving butterfly within, even as I look forward to catching a glimpse of a fluttering Western Tiger Swallowtail, Cedar Hairstreak or Dun Skipper at play in this world we share.