

# Winter *Garden*

ALANDA GREENE lives in British Columbia in Canada, where the winters bring darkness and a quilt of snow over the garden. It's a time of inward rejuvenation and recharging. How does that affect our own inner cycles of busy-ness and stillness?

I'm working at the kitchen table these days instead of upstairs at my desk. It's winter and the house is cold, especially where I usually write. This is my version of a seasonal migration, a tiny replica of the cyclic nomadic journeys that the indigenous peoples of the plains made. When winter's freezing temperatures, wind, snow and ice conspired, they moved to a location that gave shelter from these forces. It just makes sense, both out on the prairie and here in the house. The indigenous peoples moved closer to forested hillsides, out of the wind and with fuel nearby. I move to the warmth of the kitchen, as our firewood is gathered and stacked outside the door.

The garden is outside the window, covered in a thick quilt of white. I glance occasionally to it but feel no call to be there. During spring, summer and fall, I often tell myself a story: when the winter comes there will be so much more time for creative pursuits such as writing. Certainly the time I give to the garden in those other seasons is now available for other activities, but the anticipated expanded space where writing ideas burst forth is as absent as signs of growth outdoors.

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There's an outer cycle to seasons and there's an inner cycle also. They tend to mirror each other, but I often don't acknowledge that my own energy and creativity has seasonal fluctuations. Instead, I berate myself for not being more purposeful now that I have the time, not applying myself with more focus and diligence. I recognize self-accusations, such as "undisciplined, lacking focus, lazy, scattered."

These accusations often function just under the surface, like all the things currently hidden by snow, so it requires listening and reflecting to catch the words that go with the feeling. They are old concepts, cultural and familial ideas that are as outworn as my old garden clogs. Unlike my clogs, they never did serve a useful purpose, but there's a lingering suspicion that without the whip of these criticisms I would not get anything done; nothing would be accomplished or completed.

As I age and give more time to exploring these ideas, I suspect that less is done of importance and a lot is done that is busy-ness without purpose, cleverly disguised as purposeful engagement, because of the sting of these words.

Thoreau wrote, "It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?" He spent much time in stillness, observation, listening and reflecting. They are not activities that fit under the 'busy' column, but they may well fit under 'effective use of time'.



The garden lies quiet and still. It's a time when I imagine the roots of trees and bushes, the filaments of garlic and tulips and crocus, to be quietly recharging, filled with dreaming. This quiet cycle of rest is crucial for their months ahead. This is also true for me. The amazing stillness in the world outside brings a stillness to my own heart and mind.

Occasionally deer walk by and expectantly examine the place I regularly toss apples that froze in the storage room. The pileated woodpecker bangs away on the wooden siding, finding hidden insects, while the grouse do trapeze artist contortions while trying to grasp cherry and plum buds. Watching them is a delight. It's a quiet delight, however, and I'm present to enjoy it because I'm sitting quietly with a cup of tea and just looking.

Yes, there's a voice telling me I could use this time more efficiently and productively. But the woodpecker's steady drumming reminds me that efficiency and productivity are part of a rhythm. For now it is persistent and persevering and determined. For a while. Then it rests in the big

larch tree at the edge of the forest. Rhythms and cycles are everywhere.

I value work and effort, but there's a rhythm to it that includes rest and reflection, a quiet mind and body, recharging. Not only daily, but in yearly turns of the planet. I know that deep in the earth, unseen and unperceived, roots are growing into new territory and quiet roots are absorbing what they need to support the burst of growth that will come in spring. This rhythm of the seasonal cycles reflects the cycle of the earth turning around the sun, the daily spin of light and dark, the seasons of a life.

My own reflective musings, rest and incubation also join the cycles, in a healthy pattern. That pattern is only distorted when the prodding of self-criticism and expectation come into the picture. It's like those times when there's a lovely harmony of sound, when rhythm, cadence and melody support each other. Suddenly something disrupts the rhythm, the notes don't fit, the drumbeat is out of sync, and then the sounds don't blend. It jars the ears. That's

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what happens when the natural cycle within my own being is not honored.

Soon enough, the spring imperative will arrive. Buds will swell, the birds at the feeder will eat twice their regular number of seeds, the soil will rise in bumps as crocus and scilla push up to the light, and I will feel the urgency to turn the soil and plant seeds and also engage creatively with renewed inspiration. My own energy mirrors the enthusiasm of all the growing things.

When this time arrives, the plains indigenous peoples packed up their lodges and moved. I'll relocate my piles of papers and notebooks upstairs to my desk and think about the time I will have next winter to apply my energy in other creative pursuits, while the garden once again lies dormant. Perhaps I'll laugh at myself and remember that it is better to surrender to the rhythm of the seasons. Perhaps I will ignore the tedious phrases that prod me to do otherwise, and instead give more respectful time to what the season asks for – stillness and rejuvenation ●