

Freedom finder

Peter Shaw believes we should all take the opportunity for some self-expression

When someone asks me what's the best first step to take in the garden, I say put a plan together.

And that makes sense because a masterplan, pinned to the back of the laundry door, will help make the garden develop the way you want it to.

Whether your projects are big – a new drive, deck, pergola, pool – or small – renovating a garden bed, planting some trees – your masterplan will keep things ticking along very nicely. That's the logical approach and it's my professional approach. But there's also another way to garden.

I'll call it mindful gardening. It's what happens sometimes when you head outside with a job in mind, but somehow a subconscious thought creeps in. And this is the moment when I say, go with your sub-consciousness, because gardening is also about not forcing things. There are times when it's about not having a plan.

Sometimes I drift outside and look around, letting myself see and feel what's to be done, and then I just do it. Like when I spontaneously decided to shape up a tree that had become a dominant dark mess in the corner of the garden.

I grabbed a few tools and slowly worked at it, taking out the lower branches, raising the canopy, and standing back and taking a good look every now and then to feel where it was heading. Once I'd finished with the tree, I could see that I'd managed to open up a whole new section of the garden.

After some more careful pondering and contemplations (as we gardeners do), I grabbed a bench from elsewhere and put



it under the tree. With just a bit of pruning and some outdoor furniture rearrangement I'd created a completely new place in the garden, one with a new outlook and unique feeling when we sit there. A new garden space wasn't on the official plan for that day, but I'd let my sub-consciousness lead me there and it was a joyful experience.

And this is the sort of approach I think every gardener should take from time to time. If you deliberately let your sub-consciousness lead you occasionally you will find a freedom which opens up opportunities in the garden.

Of course this doesn't mean a garden plan has no value. Or that the usual cycle of planting, weeding, mulching and pruning aren't important. All I suggest is that there are times when it's quite enjoyable to be spontaneous.

So if you find yourself at the nursery admiring a plant you've not planned to buy – buy it. If a water-dish catches your eye, take that home too, along with a sack of river pebbles you've noticed. At home, the rest of the gardening day may end up being about arranging the new dish with the plants and rocks – being lost in creating something, of taking the opportunity for some self-expression.

None of this does away with the need for a masterplan, or the need to have professional help at key moments, but it's an approach to gardening that enhances the joy of it. Don't throw out the rule book altogether, but do enjoy some freedom and some personal creative space through your gardening.

Peter Shaw
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