

# NOT SO GENTLE REMINDERS?

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Last year it was drought. As I write this column, I fret about drowning soon; in the past week I've poured 7 inches of water out of my rain gauge. The garden looks downright English; everything is sprawling with abandon, and I need to keep cutting herbs regularly or they'll overrun the house. Of course, the weather may turn dry, as it usually does every July and August. Whatever the good Earth, who is Mother of us all, has in store we should escape another terrible dry spell.

Americans are notorious for their short memories, but I suspect that readers of Whole News are anything but typical Americans. Nevertheless, I recommend a bit of meditation to help recollect and to put our current overabundance of water into context. First, in your garden, yard, or local park find a spot that has done well despite our bipolar climate. Since I cannot predict the weather when the column goes to press, I will simply assume that some spot will have done well! Next, cast your mind back to the baked, cracked soil last summer, when our gardens withered and even century-old trees acknowledged, with drooping leaves, that life can be a fickle, passing thing. Spend a moment in meditation to visualize that drought, and bring into focus again how you felt about the land. Not about yourself—this meditation is not “all about you” but about

climatic forces far beyond your control, even beyond the reach of your and my spiritual practices.

With that vision of drought registered in your head, continue to sit comfortably and give thanks for whatever bounty—food, beauty, inspiration—that the place and its plants have given you. Next, apologize. Say that you are sorry for what our species has done to make the weather so mercurial, what our habits of consumption do to wreck the climate and endanger not just plants, but the air, water, and soil we share with them. Most importantly, as a final step, make a very small, easily kept resolution to make a change.

I'll explain. For years I just another angry young man, enraged by the ravaging of the good Earth in the hands of what poet e.e. cummings aptly called the “busy monster, humanunkind.” Now I'm a slightly less angry, middle-aged man who learned, through neo-pagan practice, that even small changes can undo a bit of our species' vandalism. Like me, you may begin with tiny actions, each of them a form of “walking meditation.” Here are relatively painless choices I've made that don't cost much money, but add value to my life and, more importantly, to what I consider sacred: the life of all creatures who live alongside me. A few ideas:

- ❖ Buy paper products with recycled content, or even switch from paper to cloth towels and napkins. If your store doesn't stock earth-friendly products, ask them why or switch stores.
- ❖ Support a local artisan instead of buying something shipped hundreds or thousands of miles, with the attendant burning of fossil fuel.
- ❖ Commute to work in a carpool, or mass transit, on foot or a bike.

- ❖ Push a mower without a motor when you can, or instead of a riding mower use a gasoline push mower, thus saving money spent at the gym to burn exactly the same number of calories.

I could add more suggestions, but you can make your own list, even while acknowledging that “doing it all” would probably make you a nervous, bitter wreck. So begin with a single item. Add more later. As in the garden, where plants can be worked in gradually over many years, it takes time to alter our lives. Such change is doubly hard when advertisers and peers encourage destructive, consumerist habits. That said, with changes in gardening or living, in time the results become so integrated that the plants look like they’ve always been there, earth-wise habits become second nature, requiring no premeditation.

Sometimes, when I’m biking to work and the latest \$70,000 SUV thunders by, I wonder if it’s a futile gesture to be Green in this (supposed) land of plenty. Then I recall that I’m not the only subversive anti-consumer, and I cast my eyes to the sky and reflect on the not-so-gentle reminders we are getting from Mother Earth. The weather we’re having shows us that She can be cruel, at least from the perspective of us busy monsters. Moreover, the “plenty” some of us enjoy may be only a temporary situation, not a God-given right. Perhaps, with enough drought, flood, and tempest, we’ll learn a thing or two. Meanwhile, may you dig your garden deeply and learn deep truths there. Many blessings.