

One local gardener's awakening

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While I'm away somewhere vegetables pop out, ready to pluck and eat on my return. But like all Californians, I've been cloistered at home for months along with my family, and I don't know when I'll be able to travel again. I'm longing for the newness of places I've never been.

Yet, newness is all around me: the spider skittering across my patio with an enormous egg sac; the constant squawks, growls and honks of the blue herons that nest in a hundred-foot-tall eucalyptus down the street; the heady aroma of compost, fungi and microorganisms in the freshly turned soil of my vegetable beds.

Wild radish, four feet tall, billows with flowers of white, pink, and pale yellow for hundreds of yards along a paved path near my home. I've walked that path for over 20 years; how is it that I'd never noticed those prolific blooms until now? I startled a crow on the sidewalk and as it exploded into the air, I thrilled to an unexpected shrok-shrok-shrok

from its wings, like a muffled hand saw enthusiastically cutting wood.

Unlike the beans, my basil seedlings are growing very slowly. They took the same time to germinate but have hardly changed in weeks. Are they ill, or are they secretive, preferring for now to let their roots do the growing, out of my view?

I don't know what the future holds, for them or for me. While I wait, I'm delighting in the present. The laughter of the Amazon driver who said, "You made my week!" simply because I smiled and said good morning; the rush of a crow's wings; sounds as memorable to me as the haunting call to prayer I once heard sung by a quavering old man in Chefchaouen, Morocco.

When I can travel again, I hope I'll continue to be enthralled not just by what's exotic, but also by what's right in front of me.

Mike Bernhardt lives in Moraga with his wife, Yvonne, their two cats and, for now, their Class of 2020 son.



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