

**IMMIGRANT LIVING:
101 AND BEYOND**



MONETTE ADEVA MAGLAYA

(Here's a condensed version of an old favorite, a belated "Ode to Spring," sort of.)

Lessons from the Garden

The best way to garden is to put on a wide-brimmed straw hat and some old clothes. And with a hoe in one hand and a cold drink in the other, tell somebody else where to dig.

—Texas Bix Bender,
Don't Throw in the Trowel

THE delightful tongue-in-cheek quote above is a humorous dig at the tedious nature of gardening. But

spring will soon give way to the dog days of summer when a slice of heaven could mean rocking slowly under a tree in a hammock with a book in one hand and a chilled margarita on the other.

I am a reluctant gardener. I was thrust into it by circumstances since I have a thing about not wanting anything dying on my shift. Nothing I did seemed right at the time. I tended to over water not knowing about the dangers of root rot. Very few plants like to have wet feet. Plants died on me the same way Jerry Seinfeld's plants tend to commit suicide on his watch.

My track record at growing things was dismal, yet I have often wondered what it would be like to watch something grow. I marveled at my mother's green thumb. She can stick a seemingly lifeless stump at a clump of earth and grow a new beautiful plant nearly every time. I wasn't one to give up easily though. Tenaciously, doggedly I hung on to an image of me as a confident gardener. My

education on the art and science of growing things had begun. I took baby steps and stumbled countless times and still do. I became quieter within as I began to observe and seek to understand the process of growth, the seasons and the cycle of life. I read voraciously volumes upon volumes about plants and watched public television that featured gardening. Nurseries and gardens have become my favorite haunts where I could ask those who knew better. I boned up on my rusty, halting Spanish quizzing the gardener as best I could. Finally, I slammed on the brakes fearing I had become boringly, compulsively obsessive. But I found that unless I got down on the ground myself, nothing happened.

I have discovered gardening to be a quiet, solitary pursuit somewhat fit for hermits and loners — unglamorous, unexciting, backbreaking, time consuming, manual, icky, down in the dirt labor that was certainly not meant for immediate gratification. So, why do it at all? I don't really know. Must be borderline idiocy. Of course, I speak only for myself. For one thing, it teaches you the patience of Job and the virtue of humility. I have failed more than succeeded and am still working on it. But as time passed, I have been encouraged by modest

results. I became synchronized with the seasons and their gentle nuances. I took baby steps and was off and running at one point. At times, I would even become bolder with the temerity to dispense advice a la Martha Stewart and help a few others with their own patch of earth. I must confess however that lately, I have become a slacker and it shows. I squirm at the sight of how neglected the garden looks.

I know I will have to take up gardening 101 once again and devote time and energy to see results. Back to square one, I suppose. It will be easy because I only have a small patch of earth to work with and a bit of paid help to do the grunt work. Did I mention that I have a garden the size of a postage stamp? Oh, all right, maybe a wad of postage stamps. But it is small, really small — just the way I like it. Truth to tell, I don't think my aching back, my diminutive size and what I have available in time, energy and resources, can tackle anything bigger.

Years ago, I bought a discarded ugly duckling — a pot bound areca palm tree with about three pathetic fronds for half a song and a dance. This is one gardening fairy tale you could believe in. Well, it has turned into a tall, graceful swan with luxuriant fronds. I gave it rich soil and placed it in a bigger pot, top dressing it and sticking some time-released

fertilizer pellets. That palm tree is like a person that grew because it was given the opportunities and the environment to do so. But it took a bit of work, some imagination, and a dash of patience and considerable time.

I could call most plants by name these days and seem to instinctively know what to do when a problem arises. If things don't work on my own accord, I seek help. I still am a failure with azaleas. Azaleas have been dying on my shift so I am staying away from them. I suspect it has something to do with the amount of light and too much water that has drenched the soil because of an unusually wetter, longer winter season. I said goodbye too to a beautiful sago palm that must have suffered root rot. Farewell too, to a French lavender bush that gave me so much fragrance. The garden gets a lot of shade being in a Northwest orientation so I am quite alright with the fact that I will never have roses which I would love to have but can't. Believe me, I tried. So I just admire them in my neighbors' gardens with a southeast orientation.

My journey to self-discovery has been made easier by understanding the process of nature, the seasons and the nature of things: of why a seed no matter how good cannot grow in a certain type of soil; or how a young tree cannot grow in

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