

Project becomes War of the Roses, battle of branches

BY SALLY D. KETCHUM
Special to the Record-Eagle

It's April, and National Arbor Day is the 26th. I don't always remember the date, but I do recall Arbor Day from a couple of years back.

That day my husband came through the kitchen door from the yard and said, "I am going to cut down that big tree that is shading the rose garden."

Since I know my husband is fond of mysteries regarding such things as ropes, knots and (especially) pulleys, I said: "Dearest, modern horticulture has developed many lovely roses that will grow in the shade, consider the pink Jaune Despres and then Gruss an Aachen..."

"Nope," he said, "I've already called Bill to help. He's an engineer and so the job will be a snap."

I was beginning to hear twigs, even big limbs, sturdy trunks snapping and shattering. I grew concerned

about this Arbor Day venture.

"Isn't Bill an oil field consultant?"

"Yep. Be easy — with the two of us," he said.

So the project began. The rose garden is outside the kitchen window, and somehow it suddenly seemed like a good time to polish the table, clean the spice cabinet and scour the sink — all the time with one eye out the window on the Prince of Pulleys and the Engineer.

Having partially sawn a major limb that was overhanging the rose garden, the Prince gave the Engineer one end of a rope and sent him across the yard — something about leverage, a word I recall from high school physics. Then the Prince took his end of the rope, climbed the tree and wrapped the sturdy rope around the hanging limb. Then gleefully he ran the rope through a maze of pulleys. Hanging dearly onto

the trunk of the tree, with the excitement of a 10 year old playing Tarzan, he signaled the Engineer the across the yard, and yelled "Timberrrrr!"

"What?" said the Engineer. "I can't hear you, what do you want me to do?"

"Pull! Pull your weight against it, Bill. Tug-of-War pull."

"Again! Can't hear you," said Engineer Bill, cupping an ear with a hand. I'll come closer."

He did. So did the rope. It went slack, the limb came down and branches smashed my rose garden, which now looked like a forester's unsuccessful project.

"Bill let go," said my Prince of Pulleys, coming through the kitchen door."

I was forgiving. I love roses, but my good husband more. He looked sheepish. And, truly, they say, he never promised me a rose garden.

Since it was only April, the limb and branches were removed, the roses trimmed and propped up, and most came to life quite soon, about the time for planting annuals. With the roses now thriving, I yearned for planned beauty, master gardener stuff, not the mish-mash of my usual plugging in this and that, all willy-nilly.

No, I bought several flats of frilly, multi-shaded pink — blush to mauve, but all pink — double petunias. I bordered the kitchen garden with them. I repeated the motif again and again, under the birdbath, in a pot on a cedar stump at the garden's back, in a huge antique bucket on the deck. Under the kitchen bow window. I felt the garden had unity; for once I stuck to my plan. As the seed catalogs read, there were "extraordinary masses of frilly pink" wherever the eye landed. Things were going well in

the garden, and my good husband helped me; however, he lacked his former enthusiasm. Was he unwell, I wondered? Finally, after a good but quiet dinner, I confronted him.

"Dear," I said, "Having read Dr. Phil's book, and having watched Oprah, I am intuiting that there is something wrong. I trust the strength of the 30 some years of our marriage to take the news. What is troubling you? Can I help?"

"You're going to be upset," he said.

"Tell me." I girded myself for the news. Finances, I thought.

"Pink," he said, "Pink, pink, pink. I don't like pink. The whole darn yard is pink. It looks like Barbie Doll's powder room. Enough! Next year I want a riot, a rowdy bright multi-colored garden. Manly, like tall and stinky orange marigolds," he added. "Maybe peas climbing up sunflowers and those



BY SALLY D. KETCHUM
Local columnist

upside-down onions. Those purple cabbages that you can't even eat!"

"Flowering kale," I said, meekly. "Sure, Honey, we will do that."

And we did, and it was fun, and though I plan petunias this year, none will be pink. Ever again.

After all, I have my rose garden.

Sally Ketchum writes from the Upper Peninsula where she tends an herb and kitchen garden and English roses. She can be reached at ketchum@direcway.com

Do it yourself or find a good handyman

BY VINCENT HANCOCK
Special to the Record-Eagle

If you've survived the winter and protected your home from the cold weather, congratulations. Soon it will be time to tackle the projects that built up while you were bundled up. While some projects are feasible for the homeowner, others may require outside assistance.

There are many ways to find contractors and handymen. Whether you respond to handwritten cards posted on bulletin boards or contact someone who's posted a classified ad online, the same criteria apply. One of the most important factors in hiring help is responsiveness.

This factor partly led Traverse City resident Mark Norton to establish his Handy Helper business last year. When he tested the market to see what it could bear, he discovered that many handymen demonstrated only tepid interest.

Once a response is received, Norton recommended that homeowners inquire about the worker's depth of experience and whether they have specific knowledge of the problem at hand. A builder's license, insurance and references are also extremely important.

Beyond these common criteria, though, Norton said it's worth the time to evaluate their commitment to solving a problem. Often he's replaced a door's threshold because it's rotted. While a few lines of caulk could temporarily halt problems with outside water leaking through, more is required.

"It might last for a season or two," he said, "but if moisture gets in there again and it freezes, it will pop everything apart and you will get water coming in

your house."

When it comes to ensuring a good price for the service, Norton suggests the old standby — comparison. Both the total expense and length of time it will take should be factored into a decision. A handyman's flexibility in pricing can also be a key factor, said Norton, who adds that surprises can appear once any job is started.

"At that point you have to have a conversation and discuss additional time and cost," he said. "I put myself in the customer's shoes. I'll often give a customer free hours if that happens because I'd feel bad if it happened to me."

For handy homeowners, money can be saved by using one's own labor. In addition to the plethora of information found in books, television shows and magazines, home improvement initiatives can learn how to do projects in person. Several free clinics offered each week at Home Depot can answer many questions.

Berard Priante is assistant store manager at Traverse City's Home Depot. Along with seasonal classes, popular classes such as floor replacement and repair are offered year-round. Priante said the instructors are careful not to leave students with unrealistic expectations.

"Setting tile can be a week's time of work," he said. "This isn't something you do overnight or in half an hour, like you might see on TV. At the clinics, we let people set the tile and we're there as they mix the mortar."

The instructors, Priante said, are also regular employees at the store, but have experience in their subjects.

"Generally our associates have done the work for a liv-

ing and now works here," he said, "and they'll be here if people come back to the store with more questions."

Classes at Home Depot are offered on a drop-in basis at least four times a week, with several on the weekends. Schedules can be found in store flyers, inside the store, or by calling the store at 922-9440.

In addition to instruction and encouragement, another vital tool is personal initiative. Copemish resident Dick Ketchum first got acquainted with construction as a teenager. 53 years later, he says that personal investigation can provide the necessary guidance.

"You can always talk to someone at the lumber company and they'll give you ideas," he said. "After you get some information, have them figure the materials for you. Don't be afraid to ask." Ketchum will also gladly offer advice and can be reached at 885-1923.

For the actual work, Ketchum finds that three of his power tools have proved their worth. He recommends that the do-it-yourselfer invest in a miter saw (also known as a "chop saw"), a circular saw, and a small table saw with a six or eight inch blade. Essential hand tools include a square, a handsaw and a good hammer. If you're working on your own and can afford it, Ketchum also suggested

investing in a nail gun for easy and quick fastening.

For home plumbing, basic repair and maintenance can save one from headaches later on, according to Ketchum. Often overlooked, pipes should routinely be checked for drips. Any minor instability with the toilet should also be confronted immediately.

"You might have to pull it up, put a new seal in, and recaulk around the base," Ketchum said. "A lot of times people won't pay attention to that and it will develop a bit of a leak. The next thing you know the floor around the base falls apart, and then you have to replace that, too."

Plenty of time should also be provided for projects — far more than television shows might suggest. Ketchum recommends at least two days for vanity replacement in the bathroom, and a full week for kitchen remodeling.

Finally, if time runs out

Rose pruning tips

It's vital to prune your rose bushes. Pruning renews the plant by encouraging new growth from the base and allowing air to circulate, resulting in less disease. It also trains the bush to grow the way you want it to. Here are some tips:

■ Cuts should be properly angled — slanted at almost a 45 degree angle. Upper point is 1/8-1/4 inch above growth eye with lower point slightly above level of eye on opposite side of stem.



Correct



Too close to bud



Too far from bud

SOURCE: www.napagarden.com

■ Rose bushes should be pruned to a vase shape with the middle left open.

■ Strip all leaves from the bush.

■ Remove all dead and diseased wood by cutting at least one inch below the damaged area.

■ Remove all weak shoots and those growing toward the center.

■ If two branches rub or are close enough that they will do so soon, remove one.

and patience runs thin, professional help is available. Mark Norton at Handy Helper said he's glad to assist the over-ambitious homeowner.

"It can be scary," he said. "They get into it hip-deep and they say, 'what am I doing?'"

Norton said that one shouldn't be uncomfortable asking for help.

"Sometimes just a little hand-holding is needed and often I will show a customer what I'm doing while I do it. That's one of the best parts of the job," he said.

Handy Helper can be reached at 275-5520.

Vince Hancock is a local freelance writer.

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