



# Upfront

I don't have a green thumb, but I love watching plants grow. Some nights, I don't feel like making the rounds to water things at the front door, on the street-side balcony, on the third-floor terrace, and in the courtyard out back. Fortunately, we have frequent midsummer storms, as useful as they are brash.

This year, planting was intentional and thorough. A project – in early May - that spanned much of a week. Alone, I would never have done it. Not the way it has been done. It's hard work – the physical part that includes hauling bag after bag of soil, digging and trying to hold back the walls of the void you've created while you awkwardly position roots, and – just when you think you can enjoy the product of your labor – the cleanup. And the decision part, which began at least 10 shopping trips.

I don't have the eye to imagine the end-product, the way the disparate elements of a scape come together to make a whole that far exceeds the sum of its parts. I don't know the differences between Podocarpus varieties (Podocarpus?). Before this summer, I had never heard of neem oil.

By myself, I planted flowers. One type to fill an entire space. They were pretty, unfussy, and limited. I believed these clusters of simplicity suited my minimalistic style (which, if you know me, isn't really my style, at all). In truth, it was just easier than composing something more elaborate, something beyond the limits of my own mind's eye.

Jenna is the change. She has a knack for mixing things up in ways that aren't obvious. She is tenacious when inspired. And she understands that foundational evergreens are as important as audacious blooms.

I look around me. I am happy and satisfied with what I see. When something unpleasant arises – a conflict or confrontation or failure to reach a goal I set for myself – I visit the portulacas. They are thriving, yet they were tiny and fragile just a few months ago. They are lovely. They make me smile.

*Scott A. Lawrence*



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