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Bonehead II: The Story Continues
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“For Every Mistake We Must Surely Be Learning. . .” George Harrison, 1968, The White Album

Ok, we’re back with even more Glitches, Gaffes and old-fashioned Goofs from Master Gardeners. These brave souls have submitted their most deeply wounding gardening errors, under conditions of strict anonymity. We pass these along in the spirit of “Do as we say, not as we do.”

I’ll kick things off with a scene from 30 years ago, when we started putting in a garden at our first home. *“My sister, known for enthusiasm uninhibited by common sense, was helping loosen up the raw clay soil in the veggie garden-to-be. She had dug down about 14 inches when she exclaimed “Look! Indian Bones!” We crowded around and viewed something pale in the bottom of the hole. As my husband started to say ‘wait!,’ she gaily swung the pick for the coup de grace. Yep---you guessed it! The water pipe, complete with geyser, revealed itself.”* Not sure what the moral of this story is -- Dial before you dig? Know where your water lines are? If you suspect an archeological find, perhaps a pick-axe isn’t the correct excavation tool? I do this on a minor scale every spring as I turn the garden beds, inevitably cutting through the hidden irrigation tubing. They now recognize me at the irrigation supply store. “Back again?” they smirk.

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Oh here's a good one: *"Somebody" sprayed organic homemade compost tea (worm compost to be exact) over the entire yard and garden. Usually we see healthy, strong, vibrant growth on the 3rd day after applying but instead we saw the plants suffer a slow, agonizing death. All the spring-planted annuals like tomato, pepper, eggplant, basil, and flowers suffered the worst... The plants that grow more than one year like the fruit trees pulled out of it but they definitely took an initial hit.*

Oh, the problem - *Glyphosate (aka the weed killer Roundup) had been used once recently in the backpack sprayer.* Moral of the story: Label your sprayers and NEVER use herbicide sprayers for anything else.

Yet more heartbreak: *A young enthusiastic MG trainee sets her mind to start tomatoes from scratch... What could go wrong? The seeds sprout---Huzzah! They develop leaves and are about four inches tall---Double Huzzah! She notices that the tops appear a bit odd: kind of curly with smaller leaves and stems a different color. "Oh well," she thinks, "I'm sure they're OK, just need to get planted out in the ground. Or something?" She gives some of the plants to fellow MGs. Luckily, a steely-eyed veteran takes one look and delivers the fatal verdict: "Mosaic Virus!" Veteran thrusts them away in horror. Trainee, sadder but wiser, throws the whole lot out.*

Moral: sterilize pots and potting soil. And rotate crops from place to place in the garden so that pests and diseases can't get a foothold.

Talk about frustrating! *We placed garden boxes in close proximity to a group of large trees without putting anything in the bottom of the boxes to keep the roots out. Result was three garden boxes full of roots and nothing will grow. Filled three 96-gallon green waste bins full of tree roots.* Planting in and around large established trees is a big challenge. There are only some plants that are up to this type of environment. You might end up losing your smaller plants, as in the above scenario, or you damage the large trees with excessive soil disturbance and or watering.

Common pitfall: *A friend is always giving me bits of plants. One day he asked me if I wanted some Euphorbia he had potted. He mentioned that it was invasive in his garden. I blithely said something like: "I doubt it would be a problem in my yard and even if it was, I needed some greenery." Boy, what a mistake. It is invasive and is taking over the yard and seems to be virtually indestructible.* Oh my, haven't we all done this -- at least once? St John's Wort (Hypericum), Oregano, and Japanese anemones will feral in your garden, too. They spread by underground runners and are difficult to dig up. Even small bits of root or stem left behind from your attempts to eradicate will sprout relentlessly. Euphorbia (Spurge), by the way, is a huge family of plants. Just like all extended families, there are obnoxious members and the ones that you are fond of and enjoy their company. Euphorbias range from delightful succulents and perennials to shrubs. Poinsettias, believe it or not, are a member of the Euphorbia group. Another moral of the story is to know your plants (or the plants that might come into your life)

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by genus and species. That way, you can research them and prevent problems like this from occurring.

Well folks, that's enough heartache for one day. We have many more dark tales to share, so stay tuned for the next episode of "Bonehead."

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County have a free class this Saturday, Dec 10 on Home Orchards. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C 2850 Fairlane Ct in Placerville. Learn all aspects of beginning and maintaining a home orchard. Also the Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open from 10:00 a.m. to noon to meet with Master Gardener Barry Wold and discuss winter vegetable gardens; 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.