

THE GARDEN DIVA

Kristin's fellow dug up the front lawn. When the digging was finished it looked awful. The grass mounds that were used to make a border right next to the sidewalk didn't help. The house is on the way downtown and everyone walks by. Strangely enough the houses that have been here a long time belong to all the residents of the town, so people have a say in things. When our house was painted last summer, some people liked the lime yellow (like a lime Popsicle) and some people didn't. The old houses have been painted all kinds of new colours. The old heritage houses are often in two or three colours to highlight the styles of Victorian bric-a-brac.

The day that Kristin planted her garden, she worked from eight in the morning until sundown. The next day I noticed that she had mulched it with grass clippings. That didn't improve the look but the days of lovely old mansions with gardeners to look after them are long gone. I was impressed with her dedication to grow vegetables. I have a garden too, but it's in the back. Some of our Italian neighbours don't believe in grass either; some gardeners plant tall broad bean and put up stakes right in their front yards. I think it's just an out-of-date affectation to have a showy front yard, but I still have a little nostalgia for the front yard with a lawn.

We live in the older part of town where there are a number of lovely old houses. Our house has the original wood siding. It is a three-story heritage house. I live on the top floor of our house behind the red brick fire hall. From my deck I can stare at the high turret painted against the sky (the radio antenna on its pinnacle). When we have a bright sunset, the fire hall shines like new; much like the lights that lit up the old red bricks when they were filming the movie, *Roxanne*. A whole crowd came every night to watch. People sat on the curb across the street.

It seemed like no time when the ground that Kristen planted was filled in with huge vegetables. Everything had grown. Giant sunflowers grew beside the sidewalk and passers began to take photographs. Others just stopped to stare.

Everything in the garden had thrived: two kinds of tall grains along with varieties of lettuce and herbs. On the side that leads to their basement door, Kristen planted miniature zinnias of Mexican pink, yellow, orange and fuchsia. She planted the zinnias from seed. Their brightness was fluorescent. These and giant sunflowers remind me of summer. They remind me of the gardener; the one who would come home on the weekends from tree planting and in the summer evenings, walk through her garden.

The earth luxuriated in flowering sunflowers of pale yellow, magenta, and traditional bright yellow. The huge squash was hidden in the leaves behind the giant sunflowers. Perhaps the squash could be a pumpkin; their healthy green leaves appeared endomorphic. The garden turned into a pleasure to the senses. I was witness to the miracle of living, from my view, two floors above the Garden Diva.

A gardener's note: Kristin mixes glacier rock dust and chicken manure for the garden