

Ragweed grows a Garden



It was a lovely spring day. Clouds circled slowly over the Santa Inez mountains. The blue sky was really blue. And although Ragweed was a mere five years old, she was old enough to recognize that her parents' perfectly manicured lawn and garden was boring. It lacked luster. It lacked...well, plants.

Ragweed loved Lupines. They popped up unannounced in the spring, all purple and fun. You never knew where they might be, but you knew they were coming any day. Why people mowed down perfectly good flowers, that smelled delicious, and put in camellia bushes, that were dull and didn't smell at all, and a lawn, was an astonishing thing to Ragweed. And the gardener that came weekly to mow grass, pull weeds, and generally flatten the landscape was completely convinced that anything uninvited was "outta there."

The gardener, Carl, was a nice enough guy, but he lacked vision. He apparently thought that life consisted of mowing anything uninvited down. In his serious minded fashion, his job was to mow things. Once Ragweed had "dropped" a stuffed bear underneath the kitchen window, just to see what would happen. Sure enough, it got mowed. Unfortunately for Carl, it was a windy day, and the stuffing flew everywhere. Although that was fairly satisfying to Ragweed, something else needed to be done. Ragweed's manicured parents would never understand. They thought lawns were great. They never walked on them, or had picnics on them, or even noticed them really...unless there was an issue of some sort, like a brown spot, which Carl would never allow.

Ragweed hated lawns. They were ridiculous in her eyes. Once they were grown, and mowed, then you weren't allowed to run and play on them anymore. So what was the point? Of course, back East you have to mow the grass, otherwise you wouldn't be able to find your home in about a month. But that was different. That was about survival. This was Southern California. Grass just wasn't a normal thing. Yet people thought nothing about how much watering it took to keep the grass green and growing, only to turn around and mow it down.

One day, for no apparent reason that Ragweed could fathom, Moms and Pops told Ragweed she could have a little part of the yard for her very own first ever garden.

“I would like to plant a garden,” Ragweed told her parents, who lent their support to the idea even providing seeds and tools. Ragweed planted a few things, and ran out everyday to see how the seeds were doing.

Relatives and friends of the family were surprised with Ragweed’s interest in the garden, as many believed her to be allergic to plants and flowers. After all, Ragweed got her nickname because she sneezed so often. Her parents thought it was allergies. Little did anyone know it was foolishness that spurred the symptoms – for instance when asked to wash dishes, Ragweed had a sneezing fit. And after Ragweed had sneezed all over the dishes, no one wanted her help anyhow. Being given orders of any kind also seemed to bring about a sneezing attack, like “It’s bedtime.” Ragweed’s sneezing would clear out the den, then she had the TV to herself for the night.

Truth be told, Ragweed loved the outdoors, the smell of the earth, the way each wildflower perfumed the air. As long as things were going her way, Ragweed never really needed to sneeze.

Taking the seeds Mom and Pops gave her, Ragweed planted little onions, carrots and tomatoes. She delighted in watching the little seeds sprout. Every day she would run out to see if her garden had flourished. And Carl could barely keep himself contained as he would leer over at Ragweed’s little garden, with his mower at full throttle, and scowl. “Too bad”, thought Ragweed. “Scowl away.”

Once Ragweed’s “garden plot” began to take shape, the grass surrounding it looked even more disgusting, and another “plot” began to form. Strolling along the edge of the lawn, Ragweed contemplated on just how to change a bigger part of the landscape, without anyone knowing how it happened. But how? She thought about an overnight planting of Elephant Ear with its giant leaves. “It might be a little hard to sneak those past Carl,” chuckled Ragweed. Plus it would be a huge amount of work, which Ragweed really was allergic to. Then, all of a sudden, she remembered her beanbag toys, and a smile began to lighten up her face.

The ever-resourceful Ragweed would plant her own beans. She would miss her two beanbag toys, but those beans would do the trick. They would get watered; they would grow; they would annoy. With her “plot” hatched, Ragweed crept inside, and grabbed the beanbag toys. She then meticulously cut a hole in each bag, just big enough to let a few beans out at a time, and then snuck back outside, strolling casually across the grass; going about the entire yard, planting “bean” seeds everywhere. To tell the truth, Ragweed was more than a little amazed at how many beans it took to put a toy together. Then Ragweed sat back and waited.

With all the water and fertilizer, it didn’t take long for little bean plants to sprout; all over the place; in no certain order. Up they came. Much to Ragweed’s delight, Carl, the gardener, was mystified on a weekly basis with the sprouting of these little plants. Every week he would come, more would be sprouting up out of that highly manicured grass, in different spots than the week before. He mumbled things like. “What on earth are these? I don’t understand what is going on. I used the same grass seed. Where did these things come from?

And why are they ruining my lawn?”

Just when Carl thought he had gotten them all, more would pop up in defiance. He apologized many times over to Moms and Pops, who thought Carl had probably been tipping a bit of the “sauce”, and should spend more time paying attention to their lawn.

Ragweed just watched and smiled as a symphony of Mother Nature’s making was played out on the lawn. For a short period of time, the lawn had become a wild place where anything could happen and it was fun to watch. Finally the seeds quit sprouting up, but Ragweed didn’t care. And even when there were no more sprouts, Carl continued to come out each week with a giant vat of poison, just in case a sprout would rear its ugly head. He was crazed over his lack of lawn control. It was great. He would never be the same.

Ragweed never told anyone what she had done, and never would. It was a delicious memory; a mystery that only she would know about. And whenever Moms would bring up the odd little plants that sprung up from nowhere, Ragweed would smile. And Carl would get a crazed look on his face, and go home early.

And, best of all, Ragweed had learned a lesson. She realized she could now look at any lawn and even grass could always be just one step away from a garden.



