

Buzz Worthy

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Of Balls and Blooms

Ellen C. Wells



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I took a half-day off to watch Fenway Park's Opening Day from the comfort of my couch. I've made watching the Red Sox's home opener a spring tradition, akin to putting in the window screens and ordering worms for my composter. What about actually going to the game? Not in April. I much prefer to wear shorts to baseball games, not my ski jacket and wool hat.

As I watched, I saw the ball field starting to green up like my lawn. I saw the infield dirt waiting for action, just like my garden. I saw other fans out in the elements doing what they love to do—cheer on the home team—like I'm cheering on my emerging garlic crop.

Do you see where I'm going with this? I'm realizing that professional baseball and gardening—the boys and blooms of summer, respectively—have some commonalities. Lawn and dirt aside, here are some of the ways that growing

and the great American pastime interconnect:

The overly eager: Some plants and players begin their year way ahead of the other players. Witch hazel, hellebore and Dustin Pedroia start their calisthenics while the snow is still knee deep.

Spring training. I got a head start on my garden game by sowing some seeds in my grow room. I'm getting back into the swing of things with remembering that I have plants to care for. It's my practice time.

Opening day: Having your first game in your home park is like going into your garden for the first time in spring. Despite the chill, you hit the field to see which of your plants/players made it through winter in decent shape. The garlic is up—yay! Oh dear, that heuchera has seen better seasons.

Nurturing prospects: I sow a nursery bed in my veg garden. The young kale, chard, beet and cabbage seedlings hang out until I'm ready to call them up to the bigger plot. I nurture them there, show them some extra love with insect netting and thin out the weaklings. It's very much like the minor leagues.

Changing the lineup: You assess what worked/didn't work, whether it was last year or last week, and make some changes. Maybe the lilies go in back and you move the hydrangeas over a bit. And maybe you just bench a guy for a game or two.

Trading deadline: At midseason, sometimes you just have to bring in a new player and say so-long to someone who just isn't working out. It happens. Move on with the players that you feel will get you to the end of a successful

season.

Weeds: You wish it didn't happen, but sometimes there's a member of the clubhouse that is a bad seed. They cause discord, crowd out the potential of others and sometimes, quite frankly, cause a rash. Pull 'em!

It's a long season: It begins with cold weather, ends in cold weather and its most critical and productive time period happens when the weather is the hottest. Rain helps because it gives you a time to rest.

September: Some players and plants throw in the towel while others are just finding their stride.

The playoffs: Not every plant and every team make it to October (it's not basketball). But those who do are glorious to watch.

There's always next year: Whether the season ended with a championship run or petered out dismally, players and gardeners alike dream of the glory that is the coming year. It'll be different, we'll be even better, I'll train and plan and work harder. And there's selective amnesia that erases the bad and fills that space with hope. A multi-million dollar contract helps.

Oh, there's one last definite commonality: sunflower seeds. Once they are in your garden or dugout, you can't just get rid of them. **GP**