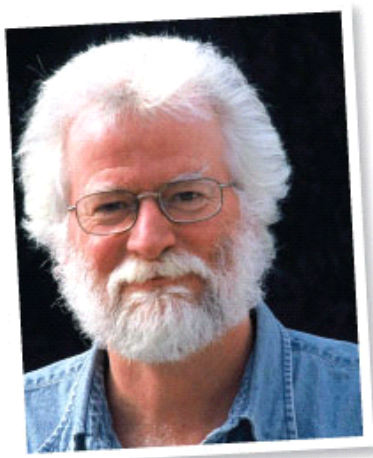


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May I Quote You?

John Friel



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Nothing stirs a writer like a well-turned phrase, whether it's one's own or one that inspires admiring envy. Consider the classic battle of wits between painter James McNeill Whistler and author Oscar Wilde. After a pithy Whistler bon mot, Wilde sighed, "I wish I'd said that." Whistler zinged back, "You will, Oscar. You will."

But that's got naught to do with horticulture. Let's explore some plant-related pith.

Anonymity

Some of the following quotes were scribbled in dim auditoriums during lectures by presenters whose names, alas, didn't survive in notes or memory. Anonymous quote #1: "Don't put a gorilla in a dog cage." Looking for a more colorful way to say "Right plant, right place?" There you go. Who

said it? What rampant plant inspired it? Sorry. But anyone who's ever expected, say, English ivy or *Tanacetum* to stay put can relate. My younger self once planted spearmint in a well-tilled garden and—predictably, now—spent the next year getting rid of it.

Another humbling lesson we've all learned: many plants—especially, but not exclusively, prairie natives—thrive on benign neglect and can be literally killed with kindness. Anonymous quote #2 supports that finding: "The quickest way to kill this plant is to pamper it." The subject: *Amsonia hubrichtii*, the deceptively delicate-looking 2011 Perennial Plant of the Year.

Do the Right Thing

"The excellent choice and the horrible choice are often the same price." —Patrick Cullina, Highline honcho.

"We're all complicit in the problems around us. The least we can do is to use our energy to make things a tiny bit better, rather than worse." —Buster Benson.

"The climate is changing, and anyone who says it's not is being irresponsible." —Stephanie Cohen.

This thread treads dangerously close to politics, so we'll stick with facts. Fact: Japan's 2021 cherry tree flowering date was the earliest ever recorded. How long have records been kept? A mere 1,200 years. The date has crept up a couple of weeks just since 1800. Various species are blooming earlier over the decades worldwide, and while a

decade is an eyeblink in geological time, it's hard to dismiss 120 of them.

Unlikely Flowerbedfellows

Sculptor Auguste Rodin and plant breeder Luther Burbank (no, wise guy, I didn't hear these two in person) each lived 77 years, many of them the same years, but otherwise they're a counterintuitive couple. They molded very different materials into very different shapes. However, both evidently believed that humans could commune with the vegetable kingdom.

Here's the evidence. The creator of "The Kiss" and "The Thinker" wrote, "The artist is the confidante of nature, the flowers carry on dialogues with him." The father of the Shasta daisy and the Russet Burbank potato said, "The secret of improved plant breeding, aside from scientific knowledge, is love."

Burbank believed humans and plants could communicate, each sharing its needs and wishes with the other for mutual benefit. I think every perennial, annual and grass breeder I've met—and I've met quite a few—holds that belief to one degree or another.

Still dabbling in the arts, let's bring in Theodore Roethke, poet, professor, madman, scion of a Midwestern nursery family. In "Big Wind," he likened an old glass greenhouse to a ship bearing precious freight through a storm at sea: "Lunging into the lashing wind ... ploughing with her stiff prow, bucking the wind waves. She rode it out ... she sailed until the calm morning, carrying her full cargo of roses."

Finally, my favorite snarky quote ever, from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "I hate quotations. Tell me what YOU know." I wish I'd said that. **GP**

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