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## The Best Laid Plans

By Tammy Borden ©

I don't know about you, but for me, the growing season in spring begins with a lot of ambition, enthusiasm and good intention. Similarly to a New Year's resolution, I resolve to tend my gardens with the utmost care to make this year, the year when I'll host that garden tour or send those prize winning photos to Better Homes & Gardens for publication.

Pretty soon my notebook is filled with sketches of grandiose garden plans showing where I'll transplant that Lamb's Ear that's overtaking my front bed, how I'll construct and place that arbor with a climbing trumpet vine, add that shade garden, and fill each nook and cranny with colorful blooms.

Ah... the hope of spring. Now, September is here. The Lamb's Ear is bigger than ever. The arbor still sits in my garage, cleverly displayed as a pile of wood. The new shade garden consists of a dozen hostas still sitting in their pots behind the house. But hey, those nooks and crannies are filled, albeit filled with weeds. No prize winning photos will be featured on the cover of next month's gardening magazine.

As I looked out across my yard, I contemplated what went wrong. I fondly recalled those glorious plans, wondering to myself, "Where is that notebook, anyway?" I began to reason with myself, reciting in my head the excuses: a busy summer, the weather, those darn squirrels, the price of mulch, that sore shoulder, and the list goes on. I walked across the path, noticing the thistles that sprang up along the stepping stones. "Some master gardener *you* are," I said to myself with condemning tones. I knelt down to pluck a weed. Just as I was about to go in for the kill, I noticed an insect. It wasn't one of those scary bugs. It was a fly of some sort, one I'd never seen before, brilliantly colored in iridescent green, purple, pink and yellow. It stopped me in my tracks. The sun shone bright, making it look like a magnificent jewel resting among the thorns. It was so stunning that it distracted me from the weeds and I suddenly felt contented. As I stood up, I thought to myself, "I didn't expect to find something so beautiful hidden among what seemed to be such a mess."

There are other times I've made grandiose plans in my life – more important in the scheme of things than a well-manicured yard. I recall when I was younger and planning an education, a career, a marriage, a family... a life. Very few of them ever turned out the way I planned. I saw my thwarted plans as failures. Even more so, I saw myself as a failure. I wanted to be in control of every aspect of life, and when things didn't turn out the way I wanted, I felt devastated, like a victim of circumstance. Soon, excuses began piling up, and I began blaming many family and friends for the reason my life was so miserable and unfulfilled. Life became a pity party, filled with damaged egos and emotions, and more importantly, damaged relationships.

Through the years, though, I've had many wise and wonderful people speak into my life – people whose stories are filled with tragedy and heartbreak more devastating than my own. Life had not been kind to them. Their plans were dashed by job loss, broken marriages, a stray son or daughter, an illness, financial struggles, and death of loved ones. Life and their plans seemed out of control. Yet, they shared their story with a profound sense of purpose and hope, and I longed to know their secret.

Their secret: control. Oh, not the pursuit of it, but the pursuit of letting it go and allowing life to unfold. It didn't mean they didn't plan. It didn't mean they were irresponsible. It just meant they trusted in their heart that they would do what they reasonably could, yet understand that they couldn't control every aspect of life. So, when life got difficult, their circumstances were no less painful, but they had learned to look for those magnificent jewels resting among the thorns. They searched for those jewels, and they distracted them from the weeds of life. And yes, no matter how out of control life felt, they found something beautiful hidden among what seemed to be such a mess. It's a paradox, but when we acknowledge how powerless we really are to control our lives, it's then that we're most empowered to live our lives to the fullest and seek out the beauty.

Many plans are noble. Many are also unattainable. So, I'm determined to enjoy the beauty I discover along the way and not spend too much time mourning what could have been.