

Down Home: Busted sprinklers, wilted plants and faith

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Maintaining a yard simultaneously tests and reaffirms my faith.

The testing part sometimes overshadows the affirming part. Many things can go wrong out there.

Like a couple of weeks ago, when I came home from work, and Joanna said: "You need to check the sprinkler heads in the back yard. Water was standing under the hammock this morning."



The Beautyberry Bush (*Callicarpa americana*) While every sentient human being in Texas would be thrilled if a little more water stood in all our lakes, standing water in the backyard is not good.

So, the next Saturday, Jo worked the controls of our sprinkler system from our garage, while I stationed myself out in the yard to see what would

happen.

By the time we checked two or three stations—out of a total of 11—I knew that while we are in a drought, we were in over our heads.

“Let’s stop running the stations,” I told her. “We’ve got to call Shane.”

Shane knows how to fix sprinkler systems.

“None of the heads have popped off, but scads of them must be cracked,” I told her. “Water’s squirting everywhere.”

This time of year, Shane is one busy sprinkler-fixer. He couldn’t come over for more than a week. But when he arrived, he made up for lost time. In about an hour, he handed me a bill for replacing 20 sprinkler heads.



Fatsia (*Fatsia japonica*) “Those hard freezes this winter did a number on you,” he said.

Indeed.

Shane’s expertise doesn’t come cheap, but he’s worth every penny. Shoot, if he hadn’t fixed my 20 busted sprinkler heads, at least two bad things

would've happened. First, counting gas and parts, I would've spent much what I paid him on an untold number of trips to the hardware store. And second, I'd still be wandering around in the yard, sweaty and muddy and unsure if I'd fixed 'em all.

Our recent tussle illustrates a yardwork truism: If something in your yard isn't broken or dead, you just didn't look hard enough.

Still, our yard also yields surprises from time to time. They restore my faith in God's creation and the divine power of regeneration.

Consider, for example, my fatsia.

Do you know what fatsia looks like? Fatsia — technically, *Fatsia japonica* — produce big ol' honkin' leaves. One per stem. And they do pretty well in shade. So, I planted some in a nook by the kitchen on the northeast corner of our house, underneath a big elm.



Monk's Cap

(*Carmichaelii fischeri*) My fatsia fared about as well as I would've fared if I stayed out in the yard all night during our last hard freeze. It arrived after all the plants and most of the people in our neighborhood thought spring

had arrived.

The fatsia tanked. Cratered. I thought they were goners.

But I've learned that, in yardwork, patience is a virtue. Sometimes, if you wait, good things happen. And even when they don't, if you've been waiting, you've had time to store up your energy for cleaning up the mess.

In this case, every single fatsia leaf turned yellow and fell off. Then they turned brown and cracked. But now the shiniest, greenest leaves those plants ever produced sprouted. They're gorgeous, and I can't wait to see them when they mature.

Same for the beautyberry bush (*Callicarpa americana*) out by the back fence, and a couple of monk's cap (*Carmichaelii fischeri*) in the northwest flower bed.

I planted them last fall when the original occupants of those places (*Bushicus uglanii* and *Vinicus wornouticus*) looked so pathetic, I dug them up. All winter, I imagined what the beautyberry and monk's cap would look like when they bloomed this spring. On blustery days, I imagined loveliness in those barren patches.

And then the late freeze just about did them in, too. Spring came; spring went. The plants looked like tiny dry twigs. The only reason I didn't yank them out was because the timing was all wrong. And I just didn't have the heart.

Now, they're green. Maybe they won't bloom this season. But they're not dead. And if they can survive last winter and get just enough water this summer, Lord only knows how gorgeous they'll bloom. Someday.

That reminds me of life and faith. Sometimes, the hard freezes and sweltering breezes of life just about cause our faith to wilt. But give it time.

And God's grace. And sprinkle on a bit of hope. Then, faith blooms.

Believe it or not, faith that flowers after disappointment and grief is the sweetest, most fragrant faith of all.