

Thankful for November

by Vivian Lawson Hogue

It took a lot to get to November. It took the hot summer interrupted by occasional passing clouds that sent teasing raindrops that returned upward as humidity, both with the same effects.

The dry air slurping up water from our sprinkler was invaded by winged friends we didn't know we had. The cicadas came and went, but not without being some birdy's lunch. Their waning caterwaulings became less as their population fell prey to the blue jays with beaks large enough to wrap around and pierce their armor. The gardening community wondered why there are not birds with lesser beaks who could feast on the gnats and white flies. Or even others with tastes for the hairy worms and squash bugs that kill vegetables before the water boils in the pot.

Getting to November took forcing summer to step aside for a comfortable late fall. Sunflowers, bent over and tired of standing firm against the hot wind and sun, offered their fast food, seed buffet to hovering visitors. Other flowers, too, had enough of a good thing and scattered their seeds so they can try again next spring. Bulbs and rhizome plants pulled the covers of grass or weeds up over their heads, keeping their

buried treasures deeply asleep, confident that nature has set an alarm.

It took fig leaves falling, with their dried leaves resting on the ground still emitting that sweet, heady aroma. In a good year, of which this one was not, the fruits ripen unseen under large, flat leaves. We know they're there though because a bird jostles the branches as he steals a morsel or just maddeningly pecks for a taste. We then know to run out with a bowl to remove the fruits that will find their way to a dessert plate or a canning jar. Our small bush, we call "The Centenarian" because of its possible 100 years, produced more than its usual crop and earlier. We praised her as her 15-foot tall step-siblings of only 55 years stood flaunting their stature and beauty, but offered nothing else.

Those of us without Cadillac grass may still be mowing our Chevrolet varieties which are now chigger habitats. But those bugs will become fewer and go wherever they go for winter, perhaps to join the fleas and mosquitoes. Hopefully, the Summer of the Nuisance Gnats is over. I cannot answer why Noah let sparrows, gnats, chiggers, roaches, flies, slugs or snakes on his ark, but I have to assume they have their place in the world, too. I just wish that place wasn't in my backyard.

This later season of November listens as honking geese fly over in their V-form on a quiet evening, their bellies showing white from the moon or too many city lights. Robins will become scarce, as we wish marauding sparrows were. The

bluebird boxes look abandoned as the sparrows have run them and the robins out of every box or nest we could have enjoyed watching.

And, yes, it took waiting for a time set aside to give thanks. If for no other reason, it keeps us aware that we are not self-made and did not even get here by ourselves. We have in recent years become aware that not everyone wants us to give thanks or perhaps even have anything to be thankful for. However, whether Thanksgiving is spent alone or with several celebrants, we need to know that expressing gratitude to God can and should be done every day, silent or out loud, at any time and any place. I especially want to thank Him for November.