

Of Mice and Men...And the Need for Botanical Scents in Designing Plant Landscapes.

Humans have a powerful sense of smell but since the mid-19th century about the time of Charles Darwin a myth evolved that humans, because of our intelligence, lacked the capacity found in many lower animals to detect scents. Smell was a primitive sense, and our brains have a much larger cerebral part, and our olfactory bulbs only occupy only sixty cubic millimeters which proportionately is small. Through evolution, the olfactory lobes for humans have remained constant and the more cerebral lobes have grown bigger. Also having a large brain is not detrimental to smelling. We have the same number of neurons as a mouse, 10 million neurons, although for mice that is 2 % of their brain. Mice and men match up closely in detecting scents, both possessing a keen sense of smell, although polar bears, bloodhounds, elephants, sharks, and bees are better. Humans are born with their sense of smell fully intact. We underappreciate our sense of smell with less than 1% of people ranking it as their most treasured natural sense. Shockingly, in a 2012 survey of young adults, a survey found that half of them would rather lose their sense of smell than their cell phones! Smells are often emotionally charged, those we like work to make us happier and those that repel us provoke disgust, but it all combines to complete us in our humanness.

When designing a plant landscape do not forget the power of botanical scents. Pleasant scents from flower beds, vegetables, grape vines and shrubs and trees can make a homeowner's yard a sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of modern life and remember that a fragrant scent is often a way back to the most prized childhood memories. Stepping into a fragrant park, yard or flower garden is a doorway back to our youth. Smell should not be the forgotten sense in landscape design.

Fragrant plants and flowers for New England include: Azalea, Rhododendron, Honeysuckle, Hyacinth, Winter Jasmine, Witch-hazel, Lilac, Lemon balm, Lemongrass, Sweet pea, Chamomile, Lavender, Patchouli, Gardenia, Rose, Narcissus daffodil, Bay Laurel, Daphne, Sweet Alyssum, Sage, Lemongrass, Creeping Rosemary and Thyme, Mint; and don't forget about dill, fennel, marjoram, oregano, basil, tomatoes, peppers for summer gardens and pine scented evergreens for winter.

Be intent about scent!

References:

Olofson, J. *The Forgotten Sense: The New Science of Smell and the Extraordinary Power of the Nose*. Mariner Books. Boston—New York. 2023.