

Quince offers its own monstrous charm

By Ginny Gregory

Each year, as we put in the early vegetable garden, this magnificent quince is at the end of the garden strutting her stuff! It vibrates with honeybees so I always equate this sound with this mighty shrub.

I see my grandmother in this shrub in that so many of our hybridized quince had this fine plant as its parent. She was my very fine grandparent and she adored this shrub. It pops with white; pink and orange/red blossoms all over the same shrub looking like the bad home perm many southern girls were given in the 50's.

It gets enormous by sending up new shoots from the base. Before you know it you have a whale of a shrub on your hands. The plant itself is never known as a soft, touch feely plant. It sports 1 1/2 to 2" thorns all along the spine, so at any given time when you are trying to cut branches from it, be it pruning or for a vase on the kitchen table, it will always leave you with some degree of a gardening wound.

Late August, it produces the largest, most unexpected fruit, from which I have never made anything. My grandmother used to make quince jelly from this strange fruit, which she always served with any pork meal. I'm pretty fond of anything in the food family in general, but I never had that "ah ha" moment with quince jelly. I also really believe in eating from the garden. I am not much of a vegetable processor be it frozen, dried or canned. I like to eat the fruits of one round of my labor.

It has been a standing conversation my partner and I have each year when we first start the spring vegetable garden. First of all, we are always late. Now, in this, our 11th year of gardening together, we are not planting in May what should have been



flowering quince

Seize the day. Live the moment. Take deep breaths of joy.

planted in February. We are sneaking up on the ever so important reality of timing in the vegetable garden. When spring slips one day into "full on" summer, all of your efforts just curl up and turn into non-eatable crunch. Timing is vital!

So we were pulling back the straw on our raised beds when I hear my partner clear her throat and say, "Well, we sure could use more sun on this garden." That is the preamble to the unspoken, "When are you going to move this monster of a quince?" Each year I reply, "I will cut it to the ground when it stops blooming and it will come back much smaller next year." Every year we have this exact conversation. I then get swamped with work, the time passes when I can cut it back and still have blooms next year and it keeps getting bigger.

There are several unexpressed truths about this quince. I really love this quince.

It is almost irrational. I suspect it is a historical flash back into my childhood ... one filled with so much love and connection. The next reality is I really am not sure that I could transplant it. This whale is like moving a pampas grass. It may be moved by hand, but some bobcat help would be suggested. And then there is the cutting it to the ground. Well, I feel so sad when I think about doing that. Cutting down part of my history is what it feels like ... so I just say, "I'll cut it back when it finishes blooming" and pray to get to another year.

My deep connection with plants has grown in me all of my life. Rented property or owned land, I have always planted flowers, shrubs and some veggies.

When I think of Chatham County, I think about the land, the clean air and the gentle whir of nature and humans. All of this what make it so grand here in this southern county. I like how we all really talk about the weather, crops going in, needing rain, the noticing of the first leaf of spring. Where could I ever have my big old quince and have so much joy than right here in Chatham County?

Seize the day. Live the moment. Take deep breaths of joy.

Ginny Gregory is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. She is the owner and creative energy behind Beyond The Pail... Creating Gardens and Beyond www.beyondthepail.net.



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