

UNSWAYED BY FENG SHUI

By Leann Barron

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I just found out my garden has bad feng shui. Aside from the merrily clacking bamboo wind chimes, nothing in the garden is cooperating.

For those of you who have had your head in the dirt for the last few centuries, Feng Shui (pronounced Fung Shway here in the south) is the Taoist (pronounced Dow-ist, like Dow-Jones) philosophy and experience of nature, in particular the idea that the land (and your house and garden) is alive and filled with energy or “chi.” The term literally means wind and water. Taoism classifies natural features as either yin (shadow, female) or yang (light, male). Water is yin, and mountains are yang. Earth is yin, and sky is yang, and so on. Confused? Not to worry, there are a bazillion books on the subject, a legion of feng shui devotees, and an abundance of well-paid feng shui consultants who would love to offer clarity. The idea is to keep the energy (chi) flowing, and presumably you will see and interact with the world in a new and better way. But somehow, the whole notion makes my stomach chi turn.

I reluctantly turn my third eye’s gaze to the garden. Examples of things that block one’s garden chi would include cluttered potting sheds, unsterilized pruners, dirty gloves with holes in them, you get the idea. So already I am in deep horse feathers. And when July comes around, I gleefully abandon the garden for the air conditioned house. By the time September comes around, not only have the weeds set up house in my roses, there are very determined Bermuda AND crab grasses, tender, undesirable shoots of a veritable arboretum of tree species, and a choir loft full of insatiable garden pests. Where do they all come from?

Now there’s a certain amount of shame involved in having bad feng shui. Last week, my feng shui-addicted friend unexpectedly stopped by to see my garden. No time for deadheading, I pulled out my rusty chain saw and made quick work of the roses. In record time, I piled up the sad canes around the side of the house on the ever-growing brush pile the neighbors have dubbed Mount Everest. But before she was even out of her car, I could see her evil eye surveying the borders, looking for illegal plant immigrants and garden terrorists. At first, she nodded approvingly at the beautiful red blooms of ‘Veteran’s Honor’ and marveled at the 4’ x5’ leaves of my prized *Colocasia gigantea* (if you have to ask how to pronounce, just say “elephant ear”). But as she moved closer to the rose bushes, her eyes widened, and then narrowed until they were mere slits. “YOU HAVE BLACKSPOT AND MILDEW! When was the last time you sprayed?”

Looking down at my mud-encrusted clogs, I’m thinking, “Okay, so burn me at the stake! Lead me to the guillotine! I haven’t sprayed since June!” She didn’t notice my cool new tin owl, protecting the garden against evil spirits, or the hummingbird feeders--oops, empty--well, at least I fed them once. But while I was pouting, she had rounded the corner of the house, and I broke land-speed records trying to prevent the inevitable, but it was too late. She stood agape at Mount Everest, and grimly said, “This cluttered mess is in your Love and Career sectors!” Oh no, I will surely die a slow, painful death on a barbeque spit because of my beloved brush pile.

But my well-intentioned friend made a good point. My garden was a bit of a mess. Okay, I had slacked off. But worse, my shameful secret was out: I have bad feng shui. So this autumn I’ll be tidying and mulching the beds, sterilizing the pruners, aerating the soil, filling the bird feeders and catching up on the farm chores, so come Old Man Winter, I can curl up on the sofa with a good Feng Shui book and a cup of green tea. Life is good.

Enthusiastic NRS and ARS member Leann Barron is a Master Gardener and landscape designer. She collects interesting and rare plants, as well as roses. Leann is an avid student of horticulture and all things flora. She lives with her husband Jay, two large dogs and an old cat in a turn of the century house in the historic Belmont-Hillsboro neighborhood of Nashville.