



Nature Speaks: Winter Dormancy in the Garden: An Opportunity for Rest and Renewal

Article by Jennifer Rotermund

Andras Corban Arthen tells an origin story of Yule, called "The First Song," where the first children of the earth (the first plants, animals and people), created my Mother Earth and Father Sun, live and celebrate and thrive through their first Spring and Summer only to be greeted with the shorter, darker days of Autumn and then Winter, as Father Sun moves far away and Mother Earth grows still and cold. Distressed, these first earthlings turn to Sister Moon for help, and she advises them to think their

happiest thoughts and then "yule" (related in an ancient language to the word "yodel" or "yell" and means to call out in song). So it was their yule-ing (or singing) that drew Father Sun back toward Mother Earth again, wrapping everyone in his warm embrace, and heralding in a new Spring.

The beginning of Winter in the Northwest can be especially challenging - the days are short and dreary, and the holiday season can leave us feeling exhausted. Outside we're confronted with the cold air and a garden that appears to be mostly dead. Yet it is at this time that we are given the gift - modeled for us in nature - of dormancy.

Dormancy is defined as a state of quiet, temporary inaction. A plant's energy is retracted back from the growing tips of the stems and branches, down into the roots, for storage in preparation for new growth the following Spring. As the days shorten in Autumn, and the temperatures drop, the metabolic process' in the soil decrease and dormancy begins - gradually at first, but reaching its peak during the darkest, coldest days of Winter. This pause, this period of rest is essential to the health of all plants; continual growth is not sustainable in nature with out dormancy.

I find great comfort and wisdom in this cyclical demonstration of slowing down, turning inward, and allowing rejuvenation to take place. And I find it interesting that we have traditions that inspire us to gather with friends, family or various social groups to sing at this time of year. In many indigenous cultures, singing is considered a form of medicine. Teacher and dancer, Gabrielle Roth, was quoted as saying, "In many shamanic societies, if you came to a medicine person complaining of being disheartened, dispirited, or depressed, they would ask you one of four questions. When did you stop dancing? When did you stop singing? When did you stop being enchanted by stories? When did you stop finding comfort in the sweet territory of silence?"

Winter is the time to slow down, find comfort in silence, and when ready, begin to sing (and dance, if you'd like!) toward the pending Spring - after all, in nature, dormancy is followed by a time of beautiful, yet incredible growth!

Jennifer Rotermund is the owner of Gaiaceous Gardens (an urban farming & wildlife gardening business with a teaching garden/urban farm and certified wildlife habitat/ sanctuary located in Shoreline). She is a Permaculture Designer, is certified by the National Wildlife Federation as a Habitat Steward and serves as a Docent at the Kruckeberg Garden. She is also an ordained minister with a particular focus on earth-based forms of spirituality.

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