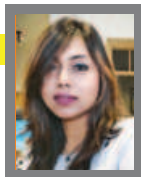


LIFE AS IT IS

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Autumn has arrived!

I smell the fragrance of fall in the air. The morning air is crisp, the leaves are turning, the days are getting shorter, and the temperature is dipping. The quilts are out, the comforters are in. Summer dresses are out, sweaters and light jackets are in. While the aforementioned changes are easier to adjust to, it is my garden and its changing appearance that asks me of my patience, for it is going to be a long wait before my garden dresses up in a myriad of colours afresh.

My vegetable plants have nearly stopped producing. The Japanese eggplant is still bearing blossoms, but which dry out and drop to the ground, because nights are getting chilly. The leaves of my sweet banana pepper plant and tomato vines are turning yellow, but even so they are sparing no efforts to bear fruits. Many plants try till the end! The cucumber vine, however, has given up on climbing and getting taller. The herbs and leafy vegetables are done for the year.

The lilies, peonies, and hydrangeas have died back; they will come back to life come March or April. Pansies and petunias, which are annuals, have already perished. The only plants that are holding up are annuals

like marigold and cosmos. However, with most of my perennial plants preparing to go dormant, my backyard is colourless; it is now merely a lacklustre reminder of what it used to be during the summer months.

Roses are quite hardy and many varieties withstand low temperatures until it gets too cold for them to bear. However, my

hybrid roses, too, will go dormant in the coming weeks. Seeing their leafless canes, one will then find it hard to imagine that six months down the road, tiny red leaves will sprout from them, harbingering the advent of spring.

The good thing about roses is that some varieties bear one or two flowers even in late fall. My yellow floribunda rose, for instance, gifts me with blooms as late as November. My Blue Girl rose, however, bore her last flower of the season in the last week of September; a fragrant lavender-coloured beauty she was!

The arrival of fall means that you need to collect and bag dead leaves, branches, and sometimes, whole plants. It also means that you have to cut back your perennial plants. Cutting back does not work for vegetable plants, though. You need to remove these plants completely and also clean any materials used for supporting, for instance,



sticks, tomato cages or trellises. Needless to say, it is a lot of work and the kind of work that gives me no joy, for it is always hard to say goodbye to gardening.

Once the fall clean-up project is over, my little garden surely looks tidy, but it stands out there like an artist's still life; no leaves flutter, no flowers sway to the wind, and no blue jay comes to the bird bath to quench its thirst.

By Wara Karim
Photo: Wara Karim

#PERSPECTIVE

The Importance of an aunt

Imagine loving a baby to bits, being able to spoil them rotten but then having the liberty to hand their squalling faces to parents and breeze a carefree goodbye — sounds enviable? Because it is. Sometimes, it truly seems as if aunts have the best of both worlds. With all the fun but without the daily mundane responsibilities, aunts are the first links for children between family and the real world.

Being a parent is hard work. From getting children to finish the peas on their plates to being the sole decision makers for their wellbeing, the physical and mental load can often leave parents impatient and angry at their children. Similarly, mothers and fathers can get overly concerned for their children, coming across to them as overbearing or anxious. Without the pressures and responsibilities of parenthood, an aunt is usually in a much better state of mental health and therefore, a great alternative for when parents are looking for a time-out. She can ease the situation, mediate if needed, and give the parents that much required breather.

Every aunt knows how much she loves her nieces and nephews but the real magic lies in the way the children perceive them. An older, safer person who is also fun and does not skimp on the treats makes a great package deal for them. They see aunts as

a mix between sister and friend and find opening up to them safer than confiding in parents. Parents tend to get too anxious and let their emotions get in the way of children's independence. An aunty who is not tied down to that baggage can let the child breathe, and find their own solutions independently. Simply put, an aunt listens objectively, provides real life advice and does not turn it into a lecture.

Parenting experts feel that aunts are great mediators for children. Whether in their "terrible twos" or their "rebellious teenager" stage, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons are bound to clash at some point. Enter aunt with her calm, sensible, grown-up voice, calming the mother here, reassuring the daughter there. This makes children feel buffered and valued.

Looping the same topic,

children feel that aunts judge less and listen more. This reassures them and provides them with a safe space to ask questions without the fear of backlash or repercussions. Many a child has been saved from danger thanks to a sensible aunt and many an aunt has been the first to know when a child goes on their first date or gets their first periods. It is reassuring to parents to know that children have someone more reliable than Google to answer their most

embarrassing (or potentially dangerous) queries. It also allows children to grow into themselves and want to become trustworthy individuals themselves.

Aunts show children a side of them that parents, with their more serious role, often cannot. Whether blood related or not, these patient and loving individuals make great playmates during children's childhoods and the best coffee and gossip partners when they grow up. After all, who else knows the best tidbits about your family, if not your aunt?

By Munira Fidai
Photo: LS Desk

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