

GOOD DAY FOR A CRY

Susie Quinlan Hill, Frederick County Master Gardener

It is a glorious day. The crickets are singing, humidity is low, and the sky is cobalt—a perfect complement to the goldenrod. It is an ideal day to have a good cry.

This lump has been building in my throat for a couple hours because today is a day of massive transition—emotionally. My kids' play set has just come down. It was disassembled in a matter of minutes by the backs and hands of five strong men. It took far longer for my husband to assemble it. It took 10 years to build a cache of memories that will last a lifetime. My kids would swing or climb while I was working and playing in the garden. Sometimes, they would join me. Often, they would stop me to say, "Look at me," followed by, "Look what I can do!" They were really saying, "Please look at me when I am talking to you. I want to spend time with you. Are you listening? I want to feel important today."

Before I laid out my garden, I spent months thinking through all the things I wanted to grow and how much space would be needed. I admired photographs in kitchen garden books and foolishly thought my garden might one day look the same. It was folly, but I thoroughly enjoyed it and was tickled when it was finally laid out and ready for planting. Many people looked at me, shook their heads, and told me it was too big. They were right...this garden I had dreamt up was far too big to manage, and I am now in the process of downsizing it.

There was, however, one thing I did that I will never regret: I made room for the kids' things in the garden, too. The swing set sat in the middle. I dedicated one bed to a playhouse. I tried my hand at sunflower mazes and bean teepees. I laid paths and boards on which they could meander. I allowed them to use my marigolds like snowballs. I had tea parties in the garden with them, and we drew with sidewalk chalk. Costumes were welcome, as were all children who wanted to plant, pick, play, swing, or just be.

I always said that I would cry the day I pulled into the driveway and saw grass growing under the tire swing. Somehow, it happened and I didn't notice. It was just like the way you don't see your own kids growing under your nose but the growth spurts of other people's children are striking. The grass started coming in slowly, under my nose. The swing set came down in a flash. It was a harsh reminder of the passage of time and opportunity.

In my mind, the garden was always sacred territory with the kids. I never fussed at them or demanded help. I just wanted them to feel welcome to enjoy the space with me, hoping that they, too, would find peace and solace there. Although the swing set is now gone, my hopes remain. Removal of the swing set has made room for a fire pit, far more appealing to teens and 'tweens than a play set they have outgrown. I will put it right in the middle of the garden. And if those big kids decide to have a tomato fight (it has happened before), I will turn my head and pretend not to see. I will do anything for the opportunity to have more kids, of any age, in my garden.

That just might bring a little tear to my eye.



For many years, the Hill children's play area was in the middle of their mother's garden. Now, with one off to college, the teens are trading their sliding board and swings for a fire pit.

Check our website for upcoming seminars at <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening>, or call us at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596).

For more information about the Frederick County Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.

Find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>

The University of Maryland Extension programs are open to any person and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, national origin, marital status, genetic information, political affiliation, and gender identity or expression.