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CELEBRATING THE ARTS | JUNE 2015



SLICE of LIFE

Magic Wand

LESSONS FROM THE NATURAL WORLD | BY CRAIG R. GRALLEY

Janet said our forest was becoming overgrown and unsightly with a variety of woody nuisance vines and shrubs. The thorny rose with its long, prickly brown stem was an eyesore, and in late spring it had grown quickly and without blooms around the edge of our woods. So I put on long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and leather work gloves and started yanking. After 10 minutes, I uprooted two vines. Dozens remained.

In the garage, I found a hand pump sprayer and in an old cardboard box and a bottle of brush killer. I added water to the chemicals in the sprayer, screwed the top back on and used the hand pump to pressurize the liquid. When I pulled the red plastic trigger, a soft, fine mist was gently released from the long tube. The venting made a quiet, almost imperceptible hiss. My wand was working.

I pointed the wand at the Virginia creeper that was growing up the cherry tree. The fine mist was dispensed effortlessly. I wet the leaves of the prickly rose and pointed my wand at the poison ivy and other plants I didn't like. There was something magical about my wand—it held a dark force that gave me power. I knew the ugly vines would lose their leaves; the woody brush would turn from green to brown and fall to the ground.

I cringed a bit when I saw a harmless garden

snake pull away from under a thorny bush I had just sprayed. He received a dose of the brush killer, though perhaps not a lethal one.

I didn't stop using my magic wand even after two cardinals lighted and then chased each other through the wild willow I had just sprayed. They didn't eat many of the berries on the vine entwined within the willow's branches.

I used my magic wand on the thistles next to the culvert in front of my house, still full with water from a hard rain a few days before. Only then did I notice the tadpoles congregating.

Then when I sprayed, the wind picked up and I saw the colors of the rainbow as the sun hit the droplets that were lifted high in the sky. As I walked back to the garage, my nostrils burned a bit and I had a slightly bitter taste in my mouth.

When I turned out my bedside light for the evening, I considered the thorny rose that would die but also would not bloom. The wild water plants and willows would disappear, but so too would the refuge for frogs and birds.

And then I thought that perhaps in growing the woody vine and brush, nature creates its own life-sustaining magic—a magic more powerful than forces that try to destroy it.

And just maybe my wand was not so magic after all.