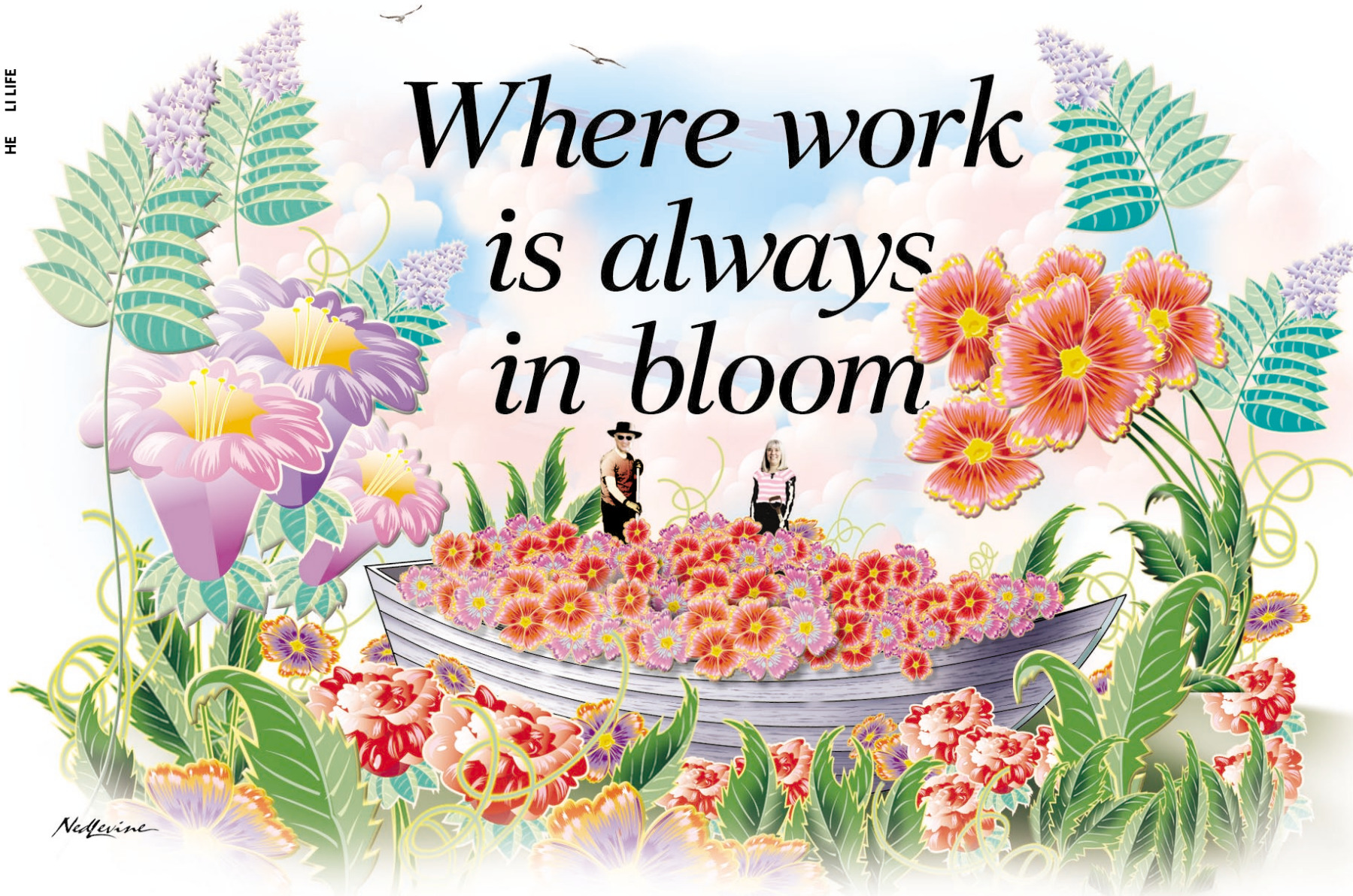


# Where work is always in bloom



NEWSDAY ILLUSTRATION / NED LEVINE



**IRENE VIRAG**

**M**y husband planted two flats of white impatiens in the old white rowboat this weekend, which gave him a chance to complain about his back. And he was able to inspect himself for ticks not just because it's a little woody in the backyard where the boat has been sitting ever since we bought our house 13 years ago, but because he's tick-phobic and likes to think he's heroic.

It's nice to see him happy, but what pleases me most was that he finally got the impatiens in the soil-filled boat — they were getting leggy and root-bound in the cellpacks. Things are shaping up. Ivy geraniums thrive in urns on the four corners of the garden gate and in the faux stone swan beneath my beloved Japanese maple alongside the pool. I'm fond of the swan because it looks real and its reflection undulates in the pool. We prefer the real swans to mind

their cygnets as well as their own business in the fresh-water pond behind the house. Especially after I had to chase one out of the pool with a hose. Swans are beautiful but they're not nice.

Newly purchased dahlias show off in pots on either side of the garden gate, love-in-a-puff makes its way up a rusted lamppost, morning glory and black-eyed-Susan vines climb an obelisk, and the elephant ears that winter nicely in the garage are nestled by the bedroom patio. My husband planted his cucuzz — an Italian squash that produces fruit the size and shape of baseball bats — on either side of an arbor in the garden. Red and white stalks of Swiss chard Bright Lights hold down the corners of the vegetable beds and we just planted ageratum along the borders.

Planting and potting have been weekly — sometimes almost daily — activities at our house. I hate to waste anything and we even transplanted some of the cleomes that popped up in the garden pathways. Cleomes are essen-

tially annuals but they love to self seed.

But I have a question. Why is there so much left to plant? From spring on, every time I turn around I see

something else that needs a home. Right this minute, the potting bench and the path to the patio are crowded with flats and containers filled with the unplanted. Some of them have destinations — the coleus will go in plant-

ers outside the front door. If any plant proves that foliage can rival flowers, it's coleus and I try to make the most of it. And the birds of paradise that I brought outside for summer vacations are slated for domiciles in larger pots that will be placed by the koi pond. And, obviously, the collards and beet seedlings are destined for the vegetable beds.

But what about the flat of petunias — in purple and

white and two shades of pink — and the holly and lilac bushes? There are two pots containing rose bushes on the patio that are, I'm ashamed to say, left over from last season. I hate to think the holly and lilac bushes face the same fate. And what about the four cellpacks of *Eragrostis* Wind Dancer — a drought tolerant native grass with a graceful form and narrow bluish-green foliage? I think someone sent it to me as a gift but I'm not sure who.

"Where do all these plants come from?" I asked my husband.

He snorted. He actually snorted. "You buy them," he said.

"So what," I told him. "I like them."

Besides, he's not kidding anybody. I guarantee I didn't buy the extra cucuzz plants he tried to hide behind the holly and lilac bushes. I'm worried about those because the vines cover more ground than even the fruit. They could take over the neighborhood.

And I swear there are some things out there whose origins are a mystery to me. I really don't know where they come from. They're like coat-hangers. You just keep finding them. I once read a story about coat hangers that might per-

tain to plants. It intimated that they come from another dimension. Or maybe outer space.

Or perhaps plants keep coming because we can't resist them. Because we long for them over the winter and the catalogs are so beautifully done. Because it's difficult to go into a garden center without picking something up — whether it's a perennial blue salvia you never considered before because you always buy the annual varieties or a dayli-

ly hybrid that's not in your already ample collection. And what about that gorgeous blue lobelia that catches your eye?

Or, perhaps, because it's the nature of gardeners to go forward, to find new frontiers — to dream of what our gardens

could be. To chase perfection.

"Maybe you can put the extra cucuzz on the back fence to hide the gap by the hydrangeas," I told my husband. "And the petunias would work next to the plum-bago. It'll be a very nice color combination."

I thought for a moment. "But it's a fairly large area. We'll have to buy some more."

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