

Chuckling with World Naked Gardening Day

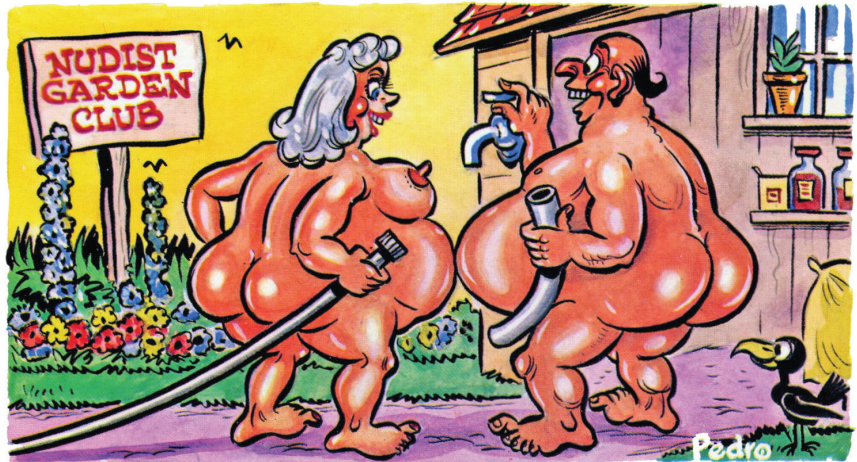
Mark Storey

World Naked Gardening Day has developed a life of its own. Begun as a Body Freedom Collaborative project in 2005, and designed to be controlled by no one group, WNGD has matured into a self-sufficient phenomenon that continues to bring smiles to the faces of the naked and clothed alike.

Radio talk shows, gardening journals, newspaper columns, and Internet sites are finding that a day devoted to celebrating naked gardening is worth playful notice. That should be fine for naturists aware of the original concept: to encourage people to explore the pleasures of clothes-freedom in a safe, comfortable, and renewing context. WNGD understands that working with soil and plants to beautify, nurture, and glean from the Earth is an ideal way to discover the benefits of being nude and natural.

The idea behind WNGD was that if people try engaging in the life-affirming activity of gardening, and do so while nude, they'd see that nudity was as natural and instinctive as humanity's desire to nurture the botanical world. Humor, joshing, and ribbing were expected as initial media responses. "Nude gardening? Ha ha. *This* I've got to joke about." And WNGD takes off as a social meme.

Naturism (or nudism) has long been associated with gardening in people's minds, and usually in a comic way. Perhaps it's the



"THE COCK'S ALRIGHT—WE JUST NEED AN EXTENSION"

Fig. 1

story of Adam and Eve that set the stage for all manner of humorous images tying nudity to gardens, but the association continues today, and advocates of WNGD need not shy away from it. Humor and a smile will win hearts and minds far more effectively than a fist pumping the air in angry protest. We should welcome some lighthearted ribbing about gardening naked.

Any manner of popular media could be examined to see how people have associated nudists with gardening over the years. Vintage comic postcards, for instance, have revealed the humor society has seen in combining the two.

There is, of course, the hackneyed association of sex to nudism. At times nudists need to respond seriously and challenge this usually baseless correlation, but there are times when it's best to see the jab as simply an attempt at being funny. A 1970s card by Pedro shows an overweight couple at a nudist garden (fig. 1). The double-entendre needs no explanation, but it's worth noting that the idea of a "Nudist Garden Club" hardly needs justification. Gardening *is* what nudists are likely to do, or so many think.

British artist Arnold Taylor, working for Bamforth and Company in the 1970s,

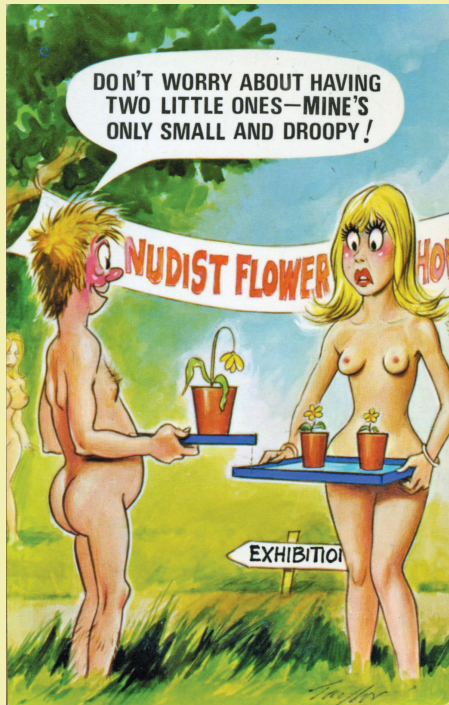


Fig. 2

makes light of bodily size at a Nudist Flower Show (fig. 2), while a 1969 French postcard by CP aims for low-brow male fantasy, with one nude gardener asking, “When you finish, can you lend me your wheelbarrow?” (fig. 3). Surprisingly, sexual associations to gardening like these are relatively rare among the hundreds of nudist comic postcards produced this past century. More common is the humorous theme of danger to genitals, and particularly the male bits (figs. 4, 5). Men in nudist comic postcards have their little guys assaulted by bees, ducks, snakes, snow cones, firecrackers, sausage prickers, knives, and prickly plants. It’s amazing nudists can reproduce, given the dangers naked men seem to face. It’s no wonder, then, that nudist garden-

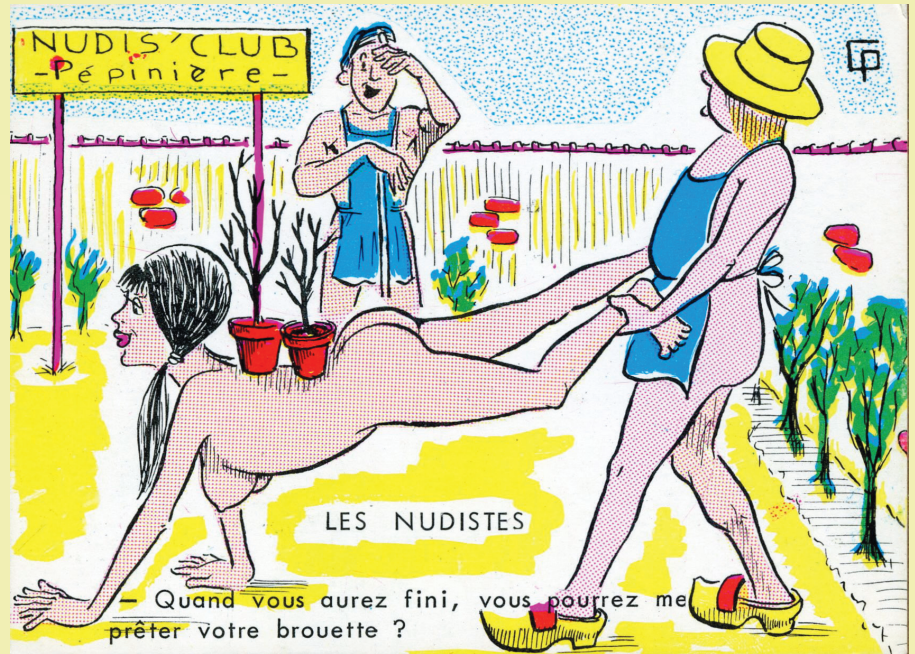


Fig. 3

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Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

ers, or those within reach of their leaf-trimming blades, are fodder for postcard humor.

One specific theme seems to be nudist lawn mowing. American postcard artist Ray Walters spoofed U.S. vacationers with the publisher's clear intent of selling cards to those on holiday. He also produced nearly a dozen nudist themed cards, one of which in 1936 features an older nudist man pushing a mower near a dazzlingly pretty young woman (fig. 6). "It's nature, simply nature in the nudist colony," the card says, associating lawn mowing with natural activities.

A 1970s French card in the *Campagne* ("countryside") series by the prolific Alexandre depicts a dressed man mowing a lawn and shooting the clippings onto a nude woman (fig. 7). Most of Alexandre's naturist cards indicate with some sort of signboard that the context is a *nudiste* or *naturiste* setting, helping the

viewer make sense of the mixed-sex nudity portrayed. Here, however, we have merely a sunbather, probably married to the man who says, "Well, you wanted to go where it was green!" The naked woman is not gardening, but her nudity and desire to be outdoors in nature play for laughs in a gardening context.

Since the 1980s, postcards have become less popular, and nudist-themed comic cards fell largely to the wayside (with a recent revival in comic cards now available through Internet sites). In the last few decades, it has been popular instead to be "ironic" (whatever that's supposed to mean), and make fun of anything within reach. Various postcards are found today of vintage photographs of nudists—often showing the genitalia the comic postcards discretely hid—but adding dialogue or comment that somehow makes the nudist scene appear goofy. Nudist gardening is common



Fig. 8

within this theme (figs. 8, 9). Nudists gardening makes just enough sense for the image to be an odd slice of off-the-wall reality, but incongruous enough to allow viewers a laugh.

Mean-spirited? Nah. Stupid? Probably. What it does, however, is show naturists that there is power in not taking ourselves too seriously, and to allow—and even encourage—a laugh now and then at our expense. Humor draws people, and if naturism is truly of value to people, then that experience—more so than our polemical arguments—can do the work of changing minds and hearts. World Naked Gardening Day is intended to do that.

So, on the first Saturday of each May, do some gardening nude, indoors or out,



Fig. 9

and tell someone about it. Host a grounds clean up at your nudist club, do some spring planting in your back yard, work on some potted plants indoors, or clear a lonely stretch of hiking trail. But don't forget to smile while you do it.

*Images are from the author's collection. For more information on WNGD, see wngd.info. **N***

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