

World Naked Gardening Day Hits Lucky 13

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The Saturday of May 6, 2017 was busy for me, but I had planned to mow the backyard in the afternoon when the weather warmed up. I aimed to do so nude. A phone call early in the day, however, reminded me of the event my wife Kathy, my friend Daniel Johnson, and I had concocted 13 years ago. Erik Lacitis, a writer for Washington's principle daily print newspaper, *The Seattle Times*, phoned to ask what I'd be doing for

World Naked Gardening Day.

We talked for 15 minutes or so, with him asking fairly standard questions ("Do the neighbors mind?" "What about bushes with stickers?" "Do you wear shoes?"), and then probing for local WNGD connections. I explained that the Body Freedom Collaborative (active in the early-mid 2000s) invented

WNGD to encourage people to try being nude while gardening. We knew that the top non-sexual activities people imagine being pleasant while nude included swimming, walking, and gardening. A World Naked Swimming Day would not work well, since many have no access to water for skinny-dipping, and the same went for nude walking. But—we believed—nearly anyone can garden nude, as long as we understand "gardening" to include potting plants indoors, weeding outdoor flower beds, raking leaves, mowing lawns, maintaining secluded wilderness trails, or doing anything else with plants. We even weeded beds at public parks nude in the early years of WNGD, selecting sites and times that would minimize unwanted encounters with others.

The idea behind WNGD was and remains to encourage people to discover how pleasant and life-affirming it is to be nude, and to try this experience initially in an activity *naturally* suited for nakedness. The WNGD tri-part mantra is to get naked, do some gardening, and *tell someone* about it. Over the years it has been astounding how many people from across the globe have taken this event on for themselves, as individuals and groups. No one owns it; it's not political; anyone can do it.

My wife, Daniel, and I knew that the media and individual commentators would make jokes about it, and that was fine. This was not a dour, in-your-face, protest. WNGD is intended to be fun-loving, lighthearted, and both body- and earth-friendly. Recent online reports refer to the "cult following" in some parts of the world, and any Internet search of "World Naked Gardening Day" will bring up hundreds of sites with reports





Photographer Mike Siegel from *The Seattle Times* doing a photo shoot of Mark mowing his lawn on World Naked Gardening Day.

and photos of men and women enjoying at least the appearance of gardening nude. Many images are of gorgeous young ladies posing with watering cans, coyly tending to tomatoes, but many images show real people enjoying real nudity while really gardening. It's rare to hear or read a "discouraging word" about WNGD; jokes abound, but more often than not, the commentary ends making it all sound like pretty pleasant stuff.

Additionally, in recent years, magazines and websites directed specifically at gardeners are more routinely going beyond a passing gaff at the day, to reporting on it and addressing why so many readers apparently want to give it a try. If naked gardening becomes mainstream and "normal," then three aging naked gardeners from the Seattle area will be delighted. They'll not take credit for anything (because it's the joy of naked gardening that has been the driver of WNGD), but they *will* be delighted.

Lacitis wanted to send a photographer to my house to take a picture of me mowing my lawn nude, and with some prodding I agreed. I wanted to support *The Times* in this story, because this particular newspaper had been evenhanded

and informative in their reporting on other nudity-related projects I helped orchestrate in the past.

I agreed to hold off mowing my lawn until a *Times* photographer arrived. When Mike Siegel drove up, I met him at the street (clothed). He seemed amused at his assignment in a friendly sort of way. I said, "Boy, *you* got the plum job: photograph a middle-aged naked guy mowing his lawn." He chuckled and we headed to the backyard with Kathy.

He took a few minutes to decide on a background for his shot, looking for some foreground foliage to hide my dangly bits. I told him that given it was now late in the afternoon and shady with temps in the low 50s, he need not look for a very large leaf. "Can we quote that!?" he asked.

I took a few swipes along the lawn, and he eventually got a shot he liked. The two-page story appeared in the Monday, May 8, 2017 *Seattle Times*, and can be found online at seattletimes.com/life/lifestyle/world-naked-gardening-day-it-all-started-in-seattle. The pleasant afternoon reaffirmed my belief that being upfront about one's naturism while retaining a sense of humor usually works well. My peers at the col-

lege I teach at offered a few good-natured chuckles the day the article appeared, while others (more secretively) said, "Oh wow, that is so cool!"

Our neighbor showed up the day the newspaper came out to talk about something. She knows we're naturists, and jokingly asked if we did anything for World Naked Gardening Day. She had intended to show she knew of a nude event unknown to us. Kathy showed her the article, and explained that we'd been in part the instigators of WNGD. The neighbor broke up laughing, loving that she lived next door to such craziness. Again, being upfront about naturism, and doing so with a smile often pays dividends.

World Naked Gardening Day for 2018 will be, again, on the first Saturday of May. Your nudist club might have a volunteer gardening project already planned, or you can orchestrate one for them. Even cooler might be to host a clothing-optional gardening session for your gardening club. Or you can just enjoy the day yourself, making the botanical world a healthier, prettier place.

For more information on World Naked Gardening Day, see wngd.info. **N**