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Forging an alliance with the land

Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí.

(Praise the young and they will blossom.)



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Mary Reynolds often features in various top ten international landscape designer lists. She is an Irish garden and landscape designer, famous for her wild garden designs. Her life was the inspiration for the film "Dare to be Wild."

Each individual patch of land longs to evolve into a healthy, self-sufficient grown-up, the same as any child. Even without your presence as guardian, the piece of earth you are working with has a strong intention of its own—a fierce need for stability and growth. It has the core intention of working toward harmony, balance, and health.

It's just plain silly to work against the intention the land has for itself. Most of our gardening energy is spent trying to stop our gardens from becoming what they want to become. If we work to facilitate the land's needs, managing it just enough to allow our own expression and requirements to be part of the process, we are working within the flow of life.

Maturity is reached when nature is allowed to move through all the various stages of succession until it has settled into a balanced ecosystem. Most land that has been inhabited by people (apart from landscapes such as savannahs, wetlands, and flood plains) would naturally revert to woodland over time, if allowed to do so. Forests have evolved over millions of years to become the most efficient and balanced growing system possible.

Land can bond with the people who work with it, but that doesn't mean it always does. The special relationship between you and your land is the same as the bond that develops between a parent and a child. The parent can choose to love, cherish, and support the child, or treat the child harshly and without respect. The quality of their bond will be forever shaped by the quality of love, care, and attention the parent puts into it.

Cleared land is like a mirror: It reflects the love and attention it receives from us. Children, in large part, develop their self-image through their interactions with their parents. In the same way, if land receives the message that it is valued only as long as it looks pretty, it will try to contort itself to wear those ill-fitting garments you may insist on. But I guarantee, it will not want to stay clothed in any pretty enforced planting scheme forever, inevitably bursting out of the seams you have imposed—sometimes gently, sometimes not—and its true character will emerge.

The land simply cannot help itself; that's just its nature.

— Excerpted from *The Garden Awakening: Designs to Nurture Our Land & Ourselves* (\$39.99, Green Books, 3/16)