

Miracles in the garden

by Sabine Eiche

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There has been a miracle in my garden, but I don't mean the kind of miracle attributed to divine intervention. Instead, my miracle fits the meaning of the Latin word that is its source – "mirus," wonderful, astonishing, extraordinary.

The heroine of my story is the flower Nigella, also called Love-in-a-Mist. It's wandered all over my yard, self-seeded from the first flowers I sowed in 2010. A cottage garden favourite, it grows straight on a slim stem, with delicate fronds, and can reach the height of about two feet. In May, when the Nigella started blooming, one of the specimens caught my eye. Its stem was almost snapped in two towards the top, yet for some reason I didn't pull it out. Although the damaged length of the stem can't have been connected to the lower stem by more than a filament of plant tissue, by the first week of June it had managed to grow in a hairpin curve so that the top was again upright. And now it was supporting an immaculate, large flower. For me, this particular Nigella has become a symbol of the force of nature, of nature's determination to persist in the face of all odds, to survive.

The word persist persisted in my mind, and became a magnet, pulling in other words – assist, insist, resist, desist, consist. They nudged me towards the dictionary to discover their common etymology. Clearly here we had a core concept, the different prefixes letting it serve various purposes. The core was the Latin verb "sistere," meaning to stand, take a stand, come to a stand, stand on, cause to stand, stand firm, set, place, stop. Resist, documented from the late 14th century, was the earliest of these words encountered in English; the others arrived between about 1450 and 1580. Also

exist belongs to this group, but it entered the English language somewhat later, in about 1600.

These are all terms that I could apply to my garden – where herbs, flowers, fruits and vegetables insist and persist. Occasionally, they resist, and when that happens they desist. in other words, cease to exist.

But the *Nigella* miracle wasn't the only miracle I witnessed this year. There's a large patch of dill in my garden, which draws aphids en masse. In their wake come ladybugs, who together with their larvae gobble up the aphids as if there were no tomorrow. One evening, while trying to count the number of larvae on the dill, I saw something else – strung along a leaf was a neat row of about a dozen ladybug eggs, bright yellow, not longer than 1 millimetre each. Every day for a week, at dawn and dusk, I'd check the eggs for progress. Finally, the evening of 2 July, they hatched. Looking through a magnifying glass, I watched the tiny, black larvae emerge and swarm over the eggs, which had turned a pale yellow. I was jubilant (from the Latin "jubilate," to let out whoops) and once again full of admiration (another word deriving from the Latin "mirus") for wonderful, astonishing, extraordinary nature.