

ongardening

companion planting

BY SANDI CRABTREE

Recently I've taken on a new role in life as the full-time gardener at our quaint little bed and breakfast. It's the dream of my life, but I'm having a difficult time fully embracing my new position.

After leaving an office job to pursue my dream of working all day in the garden, I longed for gardening companionship while my husband was earning our living. Against his better judgment, I decided that I needed a large gardening presence—a big dog.

So, for the past seven years, I was the companion to a 110-pound black Labrador named Marley (before the book) who shared his time with my husband and me at our home on 5 acres. Marley was my boss, and he was in charge of my time, especially while in the garden. The Dog Whisperer definitely would not have approved.

Marley had a knack for hunting anything that moved, and his excavation methods were well honed. But most of all, he insisted on being the center of my attention. Of course, he got his wish. I remember days when I would think, "When he's no longer here, I will get so much accomplished." He was about 7 years old when we adopted him, so I knew his elderly years were approaching.

While Marley was with us, my husband and I chose not to do any

overnight travel because we couldn't bear having Marley stay in a kennel and miss his daily morning walks and his evening "field time." Fortunately, during this time we were building our garden and guest-house business, so we didn't have the time or funds to travel very often. This stay-at-home



arrangement we had with our dog worked out just fine for all three of us. As noted botanist and author Janice Emily Bowers writes, "Gardening makes homebodies of us all."

We knew that when our boy was no longer with us, we would have the freedom to pick up and go for as long as we liked without guilt or worry. It was bittersweet knowing his passing would give us the freedom we so often desired.

On June 11, 2012, Marley left us in a peaceful, dignified way. Months later, our hearts still ache for him.

Now, once again, I find myself alone with the opportunity to garden as much as I want without the need to change plans because of a big, black, lovable furry dog. Yet the freedom somehow seems less important than it did when Marley was

here. I know I'm still grieving and that my sadness will eventually lessen. And, I know that gardening will help ease my pain, as the garden has always been my solace.

The odd thing is, after a few day trips to gardens and other attractions, my husband and I find we don't have a yearning to leave our garden. Instead, we find comfort in walking through the meadow where Marley loved to run. We enjoy hearing the songbirds in the hedgerows and watching those pesky chipmunks dart around, all the while knowing their hunter is no longer here. And we cry. •

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