Lamorinda
OUR HOMES

Lamorinda Weekly | Volume 17 | Issue 26 | Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Composting tips from a naturalist *... read on Page OH9*

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Sandbags, moss, lichen, butterflies, and garden gossip

By Cynthia Brian

Photos Cynthia Brian

The storm caused branches and palm fronds to fall.

Look how delicate the moss growing on these bricks is!

"Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished." ~ Lao Tse

What a storm last week! It certainly seemed like nature was hurrying to topple trees, flood streets, and dare us to pay attention! Various reports noted the winds were hurricane equivalent. Shorn branches, palm fronds, and other debris littered streets. The local creeks were rushing as houses relied on sandbags as an extra layer of protection.

We need precipitation, yet it is better to have a break between these very volatile atmospheric rivers. The hills are greening, and the weeds are sprouting. If you live on a hillside, it is best not to begin weeding until the rains halt as roots help stabilize the soil.

With the wet weather, you may have noticed a multitude of mosses covering bricks, stones, and wood. This ancient non-vascular species has existed for millions of years around the globe requiring damp, moist conditions to thrive. Mosses are rootless and reproduce via spores. There are over 10,000 known types of mosses, and yes, there are male and female mosses. If you have hiked in a fern forest or camped in the redwoods, you have probably enjoyed sitting on a cushy, moss-covered log. Moss is important in the ecosystem because they stabilize soil and reduce erosion. They fight against air pollution and are effective indicators of CO2 emissions. Mosses filter water and provide food to insects and other invertebrates. As an elegant top cover for my potted plants, moss maintains moisture.

Often, people mistake lichens for moss, yet they are very distinct organisms. Mosses are singular organisms while lichens are composites formed when fungi and algae enter a symbiotic relationship. Lichens are ubiquitous, with about 15,000 species in every size, shape, and color. They grow on trees, rocks, and walls, and can even make a home out of decaying fabric. Lichens are a primary colonizing species with around 3,600 species reported in North America. Through decomposition, they influence soil formation, which helps create the correct conditions for other organisms to flourish. Lichens are keystone reflections of the health of an environment. Where lichens prosper, the area is healthy with good air quality. Lichens fight air pollution as they absorb carbon dioxide through their photosynthesis process.

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