

Get Wild: Secret gardens

Joyce Mosher



Upper McCullough Gulch, located north of Quandary Peak, is pictured in Summit County. Wild spaces like this one should be cherished, "Get Wild" columnist Joyce Mosher says.

Joyce Mosher/Courtesy photo

Each of us has favorite places in the outdoors — spots where we feel most at home. There might even be that one special place we go to for beauty, quiet and peace of mind. Our favorite locales are often wildlands, usually quite large, protected areas that retain their natural character and are uninhabited by humans. We feel wonder and awe in these natural environments, and we understand that they are results of millions of years of natural processes. Along with an emotional affinity comes a sense of hope that these places will survive for future generations.

The great Kentucky poet, farmer, and environmental activist Wendell Berry captured these two ruling emotions with his line, "What I stand for is what I stand on." He means that we should be willing to protect the land that supports our lives. When we give attention and respect to our surroundings, we begin to belong to that place. As Berry puts it, just lounging in a meadow by a pond, "I come into the peace of wild things. ... I rest in the grace of the world, and am free."

Though most of us are not agriculturalists or poets like Wendell Berry, we nevertheless hold deep-seated ideas and feelings about places that provide us with the richness of air, water, birds, animals and plants. We shape our identities according to place, and we proceed to enrich that

locale in cultural ways. We find ways to belong to the environments that we depend upon and admire.

Space is perceived as an empty, abstract area without meaning, while place becomes a portion of space that humans name and invest with personal and collective significance. Place, then, is a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world. Places are spaces that people have made meaningful and to which people are attached. So powerful is the human urge to belong to specific places that we construct and live in worlds partly of our own making, searching for feelings of security and rooted identities.

We may experience, on a clear, blue, September day, a grove of golden aspens rustling and singing. Suddenly, a chance moment has offered a unique retreat, a patch of paradise. In times like these, the natural world has granted us a refuge and an oasis of peace.

Human geography, the study of places, is a relatively new area of study established in the 1970s. This discipline examines humankind's role in shaping the world around us in many ways, including economic and cultural. The basic notion is that each of us affects the places where we work, live, and play, and are at the same time affected by those places. This helps explain why we are attracted to certain places, and how we develop secret gardens that offer comfort and deep connections to nature, whether in high, dry desert lands or rich, wet river bottoms.

Our much-loved places can be the monumental remoteness of national parks and wilderness areas, or a little spot on a beach where the sunrise takes our breath away. Our favored spot can be a certain turn in the trail on our daily walk, or a destination that we travel to maybe once in a lifetime or every chance we get. Often our experience of a place produces emotions that are not easily put into words.

We get to enter new rhythms of time in our special places, where the elements combine to enchant all the senses and promise new possibilities.

So, where is your secret garden?

“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Joyce Mosher is a longtime Breckenridge resident and a professor of literature and sustainability.



Joyce Mosher