



Bernadette's Spot

Passing it on. By Mark Burton



I am not sure if I could be considered a successful gardener or not. I certainly have the desire, and I spend my fair share of time working around the yard. Results are mixed.

However, as I approach middle age and watch my children grow, my metric for success in many areas of my life has boiled down to a single question: Have I successfully passed on my passion to my children? In this, too, results are mixed. But . . .

One summer day I was driving down a gravel road when I came across a box turtle on the side of the road. We used to see them a lot as kids, but not so much anymore. I decided to take her home and show my children: Mike (10), Mark (8), and Sarah (7).

The kids were entranced. They quickly named her Bernadette and asked if they could keep her. I thought I'd let her go in some nearby woods once the kids got bored with having a turtle. To my

surprise, they didn't get bored. Still, I didn't want poor Bernadette getting turned into a pet. We finally agreed to release her into one of the garden beds. That way she'd have a safe route back to the woods when she decided to leave. It was a hot July day, so I turned her loose in the bed along the north side of the house. Bernadette quickly—for a turtle—slid in amongst the hostas and ferns. With that, she was forgotten. Or so I thought.

A couple of weeks later I was out mowing the yard when Mark came tearing around the corner of the house yelling. I shut the mower off and followed him, anxious to make sure the other two kids were OK. There they were, clustered around the spot where we'd turned Bernadette loose. And there was Bernadette.

Bernadette stayed in the garden all summer. We checked on her from time to time—and she seemed happy. Once fall came along, school picked up, gardening stopped, and Bernadette was forgotten.

*I glanced at the
shade bed just
in time to see
Bernadette
emerge from
a hole in the
ground.*

 he next spring I was out mowing the yard and cleaning up from the winter. I happened to glance at the shade bed just in time to see Bernadette emerge from a hole in the ground. I yelled for the kids. They were thrilled!

Bernadette didn't stick around that summer—at least I don't think so. In fact, it's been three years now, and we haven't seen Bernadette again. I don't know where she is now. Probably not far away; she is a turtle, after all. But the kids still talk about Bernadette and look for her from time to time. It can be tough getting them to help in the garden. But I never have any trouble getting help with Bernadette's spot.

The kids bought a turtle statue, one about five times bigger than Bernadette. I put it on Bernadette's spot. It startles me every time I come across it when I'm working among the hostas and ferns. That's OK, it's fun to be reminded of Bernadette.

Have I passed my passion for gardening on to my kids? I don't know yet—results are mixed. But I still see the kids checking for Bernadette from time to time. For now, I think that is enough. ❖