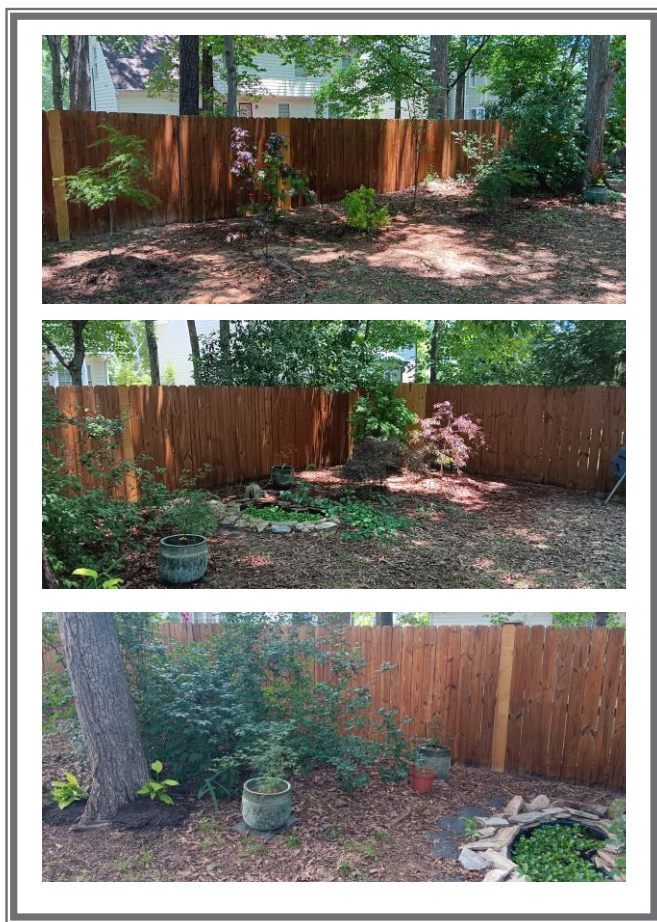


AU NATUREL

PERSONAL AND SALON UPDATES My Japanese Maple Garden and Other Pleasantries



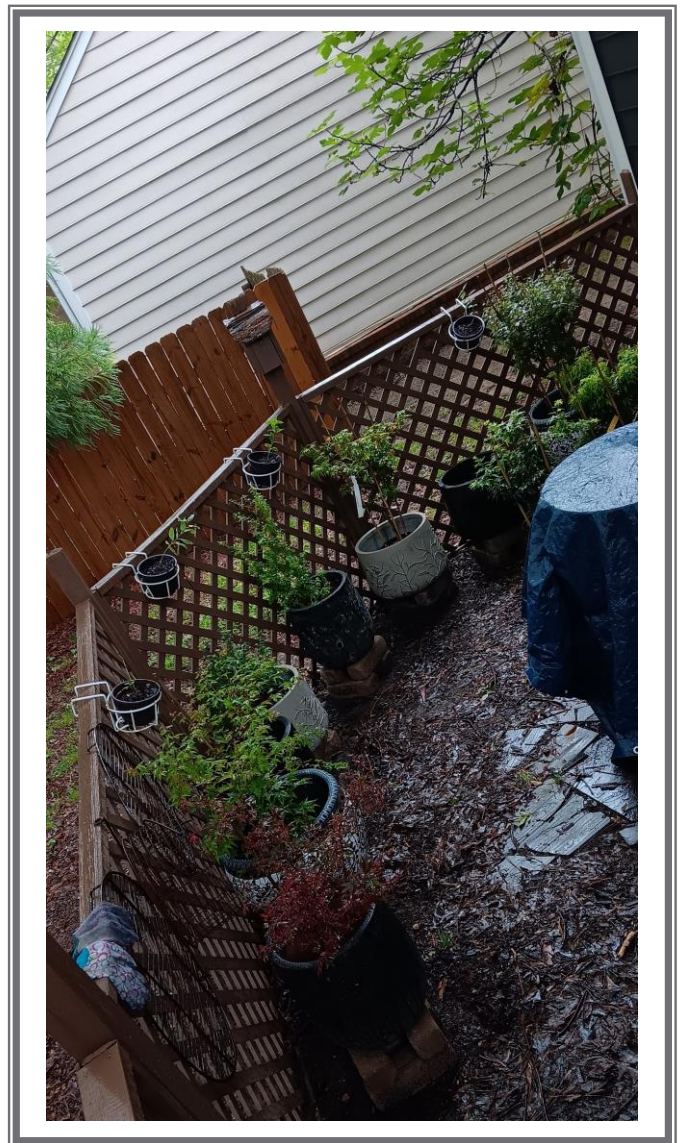
This summer has been rather memorable. I have been living in my home for 25 years and I just decided what I want to do with my backyard. My yard is heavily shaded by trees, so grass does not grow at all. We tried but it was an exercise in futility. So, we've just left things primarily "as is". When leaves fall, we mulch them with the lawnmower to enrich the soil and keep it moving. Well, about in the spring, I was watching a news program which was interrupted by an advertisement. The guy in

the segment asked an older woman: "If you had any advice to give the next generation, what would it be?" She said: "It would be that the best time to plant a tree was 10 years ago. The next best time to plant a tree is today." I smiled at the simplicity of the statement. Then, I remembered the Japanese maple that my grandmother gave me some time between 2008 and 2010. I planted it on the right front side of my house in front of the fig tree. It was pretty scrawny. Not much to write home about. I just made sure it didn't die by reminding my sons to keep the lawnmower away from it and watering it in times of extreme heat. Otherwise, I did NOTHING to help it. Nature did the rest. Today, it is a beauty to behold. I have no idea when all of this growth took place. I don't remember it at all. But today, the branches reach towards the ceiling of the second floor. Not bad for a puny little tike. I really appreciated its growth the most this spring. Then, it hit me! Japanese maples grow under the canopy of other trees. They come in all sizes from dwarf to intermediate to large. And they often wear a different color for each season. I thought: I should plant Japanese maples in the backyard. They will thrive in the shade and will add a lovely splash of spring and fall color to the landscape. I was mildly annoyed that I didn't think of it sooner. So, I went window shopping at a few nurseries. The Japanese maples were pretty expensive. So, I searched for just the right one to place near my flower pond. I wanted a weeping variety that would reach towards the water's edge. I found it! It was a pretty penny, so I told Lloyd to buy it for me for Mother's Day. He obliged and we took it home. Then, I went plant shopping at another nursery and found a different variety

that I absolutely could not resist. I was driving Lloyd's Jeep so I paid for it and had the staff load it up into the truck. It was about six feet tall so that was no small feat. I then started to read and research everything on Japanese maples. They advise you to buy the largest plant that you can afford because they are so slow growing. I can testify. Mine is about 15 years old and is still looks younger than the volunteer wild cherry tree that appeared at the mailbox about the same time and is now over 30 feet tall! Once I started researching, it was like I became an addict. There are so many beautiful varieties with different characteristics and I couldn't stop at two trees for the backyard. I wanted everything that could possibly fit into the space. I stopped shopping when I hit the number 13. Lloyd argued that I was planting too many trees but I noted maximum height and width while installing. Some will become no larger than shrubs, and others are growing in pots which will naturally limit their size. But despite my explanation, he protested. So I said, "Lloyd, I am a woman bound for nothing but the grave. If planting some trees makes me happy, why should you care." He said, "Don't say that!!" And I haven't heard another word from him about. Yes, I fight dirty.

Then, I eyed my rose bushes which sit below my living room window. They have stopped blooming because they are shaded out by the two oak trees in the front yard. So, I decided to murder them. They simply don't get enough sunlight to perform. I decided to get a few more dwarf varieties and replace the rose bushes. (Incidentally, Mom lost her Obama roses due to the extreme heat, so she wants me to hold the roses bushes for her until the fall and transplant them at her house. So, my flower bed has to wait. But, I've been purchasing all the same. I purchased four dwarfs that I liked, including the Mikawa Yatsubusa. I love this tree because it grows with a dense habit that looks much like bonsai. Very beautiful. I did a bit more research and found an entire family of trees that spring from the Mikawa lineage. WHAT??!! So now, I decided that I would plant only Mikawa family trees in the front flower bed. What to do with the three other trees I purchased? Then, I eyed the inside of my deck fence. It's a pretty large area so suddenly, a whole new round of purchasing was launched. Because I don't want the trees to rot the fence, I purchased large pots for

them so that they can be moved around. In all, I have purchased 25 trees to date. I have one more plant that is on my "to acquire" list before the winter comes. It is of the Mikawa family, either Mystic Mikawa or Japanese Princess. Whichever of these that comes available first in a 3 gallon or higher size will be mine. [July 25th update: I have now purchased 26 trees. Japanese Princess came online from my favorite grower on 7/24. I know because I looked on July 23rd and they weren't there. I called the grower and asked about Japanese Princess and voila! They were there the next day!! It's only the 1 gallon size



that they have available. All other growers are sold out of this variety. So, I figure that if I can get a 1 gallon size now while it's still in the growing season, I'll take it. There is no guarantee that larger sizes will be available

because of the desirability of this plant. So, I grabbed it! I can only fit about four Mikawa varieties in the flower bed because some of them have a spreading habit and I don't intend to prune them to keep them confined. They need room to grow and chart their way. I've spent a mini-fortune. But since I haven't done anything in my yard for years, I think it balances out. 😊 The best time to plant a tree IS today! I told Lloyd, "These trees are going to take at least 10 years to show you what they're made of. Since I would like to live to see them in their glory, I figured I better get everything I want now." And so, I did. But I confess that I'm starting to look at my azaleas with a jaundiced eye. They are located at the front adjacent to the garage. Don't be surprised if this time next year, I'm sharing photos of my expanded Mikawa family lineage. There are a number of other Mikawa's that I would love to plant there. The azaleas bloom for about a month and that's that. The Japanese maples have spring, summer and fall colors. So, we shall see! But, I confess that this is the most fun I've had in my yard...EVER!!! I go out daily to stroll among them and look at the effect of what I'm creating. There is no plan. It's all been organically formed. But, I'm happy with the results. Prayerfully, I'll share photos over the years, as they grow into their glory.

Within the salon, we are blessed. Diving Grace, Hadiyah's 9-month-old and Bailey-Renee, her 10 year old, are the Beauty Girls who grace us with their presence from time to time. I don't know Hadiyah's schedule, so it's always a treat to see them come in. Things are going well, by God's grace. We were nominated "Raleigh's Best"

in the Hair Salon and Day Spa categories, so we are grateful for the vote of confidence from our community. We endeavor always to be worthy of the faith entrusted in us to serve the community with integrity and with love.



Embrace the beauty of you.

TRESSFULLY BEATING THE HEAT

Tips for Summer Dryness

The heat this summer has been one for the record books. Here in Raleigh, the temps climbed to a record 106 degrees a few weeks ago! Can you say: easy bake oven? That's what 106 temps feels like when you're going about your day in the great outdoors. Your only reprieve is one or many nice shade trees. It's amazing how the temps can be 10 or more degrees cooler under the canopy of trees.

It's no surprise that with these soaring heat temperatures, more clients are complaining of dryness. One salon solution is deep conditioning treatments. Deep conditioner is applied to the hair, covered with a plastic cap, and the client is placed under a dryer for about 15 minutes. The extra thick and rich conditioner has humectants which are known to draw moisture to the hair. The steam created inside the plastic cap, under the dryer hood, is the equivalent of a steam treatment for your hair. Steamers are known

for opening the cuticle of the hair to infuse moisture and increase softness. When I was opening my salon, I debated about purchasing a steamer for hair treatments. But the added purchase didn't make sense to me. Deep conditioning treatments with a plastic cap create steamed conditions under the cap. The hair is wet and covered. So, the heat dryer is creating steam underneath the plastic cap. Hair is always softer and more manageable after a deep condition. If you're a DIYer and don't have a hooded dryer at home, apply the deep conditioner, cover your hair with a plastic cap and do a few household chores or walk on the treadmill. The heat generated from the physical exertion will have a similar effect and will increase blood circulation to the scalp. Rinse and style as you see fit. Your hair will love you for it.

If you don't have time to shampoo and want to beat summer dryness, try my go-to dryness remedy. At bedtime, pour castor oil into the palm of your hand and work it down your hair shaft with special

emphasis on the ends. Do not oversaturate the hair. Castor oil is super-heavy, so you don't want the effect to weigh your hair down making it lifeless. Be sure to reach the hair strands at the nape of your neck and behind your ears. Pull your hair into a satin bonnet and go to sleep. When you wake in the morning, the dryness will be completely gone. Your hair will not be excessively oily, as the oil was absorbed into the hair shaft overnight. This is my solution when my hair feels crunchy, and I don't have time to shampoo. It works like a charm. I had to use this method EVERY OTHER DAY when I went to Egypt for two weeks in the summer of 2017! It's that dry in Egypt! I believe that one of the primary reasons women in the Middle East cover their hair is to protect it from the dryness and heat of the sun. Trust and believe: If I lived in that part of the world, I would be covering my hair. The heat is brutal and robs the hair of all moisture in large doses. Thankfully, there are easy solutions that are readily accessible. Happy conditioning! 😊

THE ALLURE OF TAYLOR SWIFT

(Warning: Do not open if you don't want to become a fan!)

Okay. I have to confess that I'm a fan of Taylor Swift. I'm not sure I qualify as a bona fide "Swiftie" but I respect her craft. Of course, I've been listening to her music for years. If you're listening to Pop music, it's impossible NOT to know her stuff. But of late, I have come to realize that some of the songs that I loved over the years were hers. So, I started to dig a little deeper. When 1989 Taylor's version was released on my Dad's birthday in 2023, that's when I realized "I like this chic!" I already knew I loved "Blank Space." That was a favorite from years before. My next favorite from this album is "[Wildest Dreams](#)" followed by "[Is It Over Now?](#)" and "[Style](#)". The whole album is entertaining but I am arriving at the party quite late. 1989 was originally released in 2014 under another label. But, Taylor had no control over her masters, so she signed a deal to allow her that control and then released all of her albums re-recorded. That is why she is ON TOP of the charts! All of her past music is being re-released at the height of her career and people just can't get enough. Old tracks are being heard with new ears, and she is being discovered by

new fans who may have only marginally been fans, like me.

Her debut album was back in 2006. I knew nothing about her because she was primarily a country music singer. The lead single from that album was "[Teardrops on My Guitar](#)". Not bad for a 17-year-old newbie. She followed up in 2008 with "Fearless". This is when she began to cross into Pop music. The lead single on this album was "[You Belong with Me](#)." Sorry Kanye. She deserved the award for that song. I knew and liked it even back then. I didn't know two hoots about Taylor Swift. I just knew I liked that song! I think it was years later before I actually saw the video. Seeing it really sealed the deal for me. I particularly like the way she taps into her good and bad sides by acknowledging both with two separate characters both played by her. But, a lovely track on the song about her love and appreciation for her family is "[The Best Day](#)." I didn't know this song before buying her CDs this year. But, it hit me the first time I heard it. I only saw the video when looking for the link for this article. Beautiful!

In 2010, “Speak Now” was an album she wrote completely on her own while touring to promote her second album. The lead song is an ode to following your heart. It is the story of a woman crashing her man’s wedding in an effort to “speak now” so she won’t have to forever hold her peace. “[The Story of Us](#)” is a memorable track on this album but my favorite on this album is “[Innocent](#)”. It has a maturity that is hard to imagine in a 21-year-old. But, it was a ballad that she wrote to Kanye West as she empathized with the public outcry against him after his debacle at the Grammy’s when he took the mike from Taylor. “Dear John” is also raw and honest with a strong country music twang that makes it all the more endearing. It is a song that women of all ages can identify with if they’ve walked that path. But as the ultimate anti-bullying song, the single that hit the charts was “Mean”. I confess that I like that one as well. And, every mother can relate to “Never Grow Up” which is a song she clearly wrote when she had absolutely zero perspective about motherhood. That is the hallmark of Taylor. Her songs transcend time in such a way that women of all ages personally relate to her message. Empathy is her superpower, and she wields it like a magic wand.

From her Red album release in 2012, “[All too well](#)” is the masterpiece that has a short film to accompany it. This song is viewed by many as her best lyrical piece ever. Many have debated that the red scarf in the story represents her virginity. I think they’re right. My favorite from that album is “[I bet you think about me](#)” and “[I knew you were trouble](#)”. “[Traacherous](#)” is a song that speaks about the dance of forbidden love, while “Begin Again” celebrates the joy of finding a love that you never thought was possible. The ultimate break-up anthem is “We are never ever getting back together.”

As stated earlier, the original 1989 album was released in 2014. A song that I didn’t realize came from this album until finalizing this article is “[You Are in Love](#).” It’s absolutely beautiful. I love the phrase “And you understand now why they lost their minds and fought the wars, And why I've spent my whole life tryin' to put it into words.” She HAS lived her entire life defining LOVE in its EVERY NUISANCE. And that is why

SHE is loved. If you’ve EVER FELT LOVE, you can relate to her songs. She rips out pages of your life, adds a melody and sings your pain. 1989 was followed by “Reputation” in 2017 which was her last album for Big Machine Records. This album is not one of my favorites. Perhaps it’s because of all of her albums, it’s most fueled by anger. In light of the music custody battle that she was waging, I can totally understand that. On this album, it’s all about “[Delicate](#)” for me, which is the song from which the album title originates. I like “End Game” as well, although one of the main chart toppers on this album was “Look what you made me do.”

From the [Lover](#) album, the cover song is a sweet, colorful and romantic track about what life looks like when stars align. The cinema quality video takes it to a whole ‘nother level! Funny enough, my favorite song on that album is actually “[The Man](#)”. I can totally relate to that song. For her, she is finally The Man. When the NFL has to bow down to you, the world can safely say “You have been inducted into the Male Hall of Fame.” It is well deserved. She works damn hard! I can’t even imagine what her life must feel like. But surely, she must love what she’s doing. It’s impossible to be THAT PROLIFIC without being driven. Unfortunately, she was forced to cancel her world tour of this album due to the advent of COVID-19.

But, as a testimony to who Taylor Swift is, she released two albums in 2020—5 months apart, as a mythological flow of thoughts and ideas. “Folklore” and “Evermore” are considered sister albums that were very well received during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. She recorded studio performances of the Folklore tracks and released a concert documentary under Disney+, sealing her fate as a master innovator. While the majority of the artistic world was on lockdown, her people were still being paid! That is a testament to her passion and innovation and is NOTHING to thumb your nose at. If she did not LOVE HER CRAFT, she would have laid down and rested like almost everyone else in the world. Passion and exceptionalism demand more. “The 1” is the lead track on Folklore. I like it A LOT.

In 2022 with COVID over, she released “Midnights”. The tracks that plied the airwaves the most were “Anti-

Hero”, “[Bejeweled](#)” (I love the Cinderella themed video.), “Lavender Haze” and “Karma”. The latter is my absolute favorite of the lot. The lyrics conjure imagery for me like no other single track that I can think of. I’m totally not surprised that she concluded her European Eras Tour with this track. It’s powerful! I confess that I prefer the radio-version to the explicit one. The virgin lyrics are just...BETTER! Other tracks that I have been deeply moved by on this album are “[Snow on the Beach](#)” which is about God’s mystical wonders that are, as stated in the track, “weird but fucking beautiful”. “Labyrinth” is another gem.

The latest album by Taylor, released earlier this year, is “Tortured Poets Department.” “Fortnight”, the lead track on the album, has already received 93 million views and it was released only 3 months ago! The song is so relatable but has a sinister edge to it. I’m not completely comfortable with this track though I really love it. But, love does have a thorny side. In her quest to define all the shades of love, it’s logical that this perspective would be shown. I confess that I haven’t purchased this album yet. I’m still in catch-up mode. Also, I went to Target and found four different versions of the same album. Each version has a different bonus track. If that’s not knowing how to maximize sales, I don’t know what is!! Even her website doesn’t have all of the CDs on it that are available at Target. She knows where Swifties shop!! I have no doubt that many of them will purchase all four CDs just to get all of the bonus tracks. I wasn’t about to go down like that, so I left the store with nothing. I’ll

wait. It’s all good. I can listen on the radio and on YouTube and decide what to purchase after all the hoopla has died down. I have all of her albums except this one. I went online and found her entire collection of CDs (old and Taylor’s version re-releases) for under \$100. (Yes, I still purchase CDs. Our salon CD player is still kicking and doesn’t require a subscription, so...) The collection is massive. So, she has been dominating the airwaves in the salon of late. The more I listen, the more I’m convinced that the hype is real! There will always be haters like Kanye and Jay-Z who insist that Beyonce doesn’t get her full props. But, I’m sorry. Beyonce doesn’t consistently write her own lyrics. That is a testament to Taylor’s genius. Plus, she plays the guitar AND the piano. The hype is real! I’ve explained to people in the salon like this: A track runner was the best ever in their high school. Then, they were the best in the district. Then, they were the best at regionals and went on to become the best in the nation. Then, they went to the Olympics and were outclassed by Usain Bolt. We don’t try to say they should have gotten more praise or accolades than they did! They simply met a superior force and were eclipsed by a god. That is who Taylor Swift is in the music industry right now. When Drake even has to pay [homage to Taylor](#) (explicit version)—although inserted at the end of a dis-track targeted at Kendrick Lamar, you know: She has truly become “The Man.” Long may she reign!

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