

Shrink Rap: In With the New

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There's nothing like waking up to the sound of chainsaws in the morning, those burning-oil belches emanating from their innards as they grind their metal teeth relentlessly through old boards, tree limbs and ground cover, destroying everything in their path. The workmen are perpetrating a chainsaw massacre of our yard.

Pickaxes have their way with a 25-year-old wood patio deck, deconstructing it section by section. Jackhammers pound through brick pillars. And a Bobcat with a spike that looks like the snout of an anteater turns thousands of paving bricks into crushed rubble.

It's all for a good cause: a major landscaping of our property. We interviewed 12 architects and six contractors before making choices. We labored over initial, final and revised plans, regulations, and permits. But here we are, three years after the vision, finally letting the games begin.

These days, the first thing I do in the morning is put in my earplugs. It's the only way I can survive the noise and block out the chaos. When I peek outside my windows, I see everything changing, much of the landscape I've come to know and care for over the last eight years being demolished into nothingness. But if we're going to make room for the new, we've got to let go of the old. And that's what we're doing.

The celebration of the New Year honors the same issue: letting go of the old and making room for the new. How is your mental and physical landscape changing? What do you want to create that's new for yourself this year? What part of your life needs transformation?

Do you need to make psychological, emotional or physical changes that require plans and permits from others? Or is it more on the order of clearing away some of the old mental debris and emotionally overgrown ground cover to make room for something new? Maybe a change in your diet or beginning a new activity? Or letting go of someone who is no longer right for you?

One of the reasons we find it so hard to change is intuitively knowing that we've got to give something up to allow for something new. We hold on tightly to what we have - beliefs, material possessions, old patterns of behavior, notions about who we are, and relationships that help us feel secure and meet our needs. The older and more set in our ways we become, the harder it becomes to make radical changes in our lives. And yet, without facing the anxiety and insecurity of letting something go, we can't let ourselves take any real risks to let in the new.

Making changes means questioning some of these hardened beliefs and morphing them into new beliefs that are more fitting of our present reality. Sometimes it takes a jackhammer to get through our own psychological bricks.

January is a good time to think about what you'd like to create for yourself this year. Even if you don't like setting goals or making resolutions, at least let yourself think about what you'd like to see that is fresh and new in your life. Do you want to make the change enough to drop whatever must be given up?

Aside from all the careful planning and research required, part of why it took us three years to actualize our vision was that we were reluctant to radically transform our yard. We weren't sure how things would turn out, no matter how many detailed drawings were made. It took a calculated leap of courage for us to enter into the unknown, not sure whether all the time, money, and aggravation would be worth the outcome. And we're still not. But at least we took the plunge to bring in the new.