

Whimsical Ain't for Everyone



That was not a typo. So I'll say it again, in what is considered a more grammatically correct manner. Whimsical is not for everyone. Not the garden style, but the adjective. To be honest,

charming and quaint aren't for everyone either, but I digress.

Of course I love and use these words that are popular in garden communications. For me, a whimsical garden may very well be preceded by a photograph or mention of an artist, such as Erykah Badu, just so my audience can visualize it. This is not for their lack of intelligence. It's because whimsical is not part of the vernacular—the everyday language of many communities, including mine.

MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

I grew up a little black girl—born and raised in the Deep South—I speak and understand three English vernaculars: American, African-American and Southern. I am intentional and proud in the use of multiple vernaculars and slang for my garden communications.

But why would a person do that? To connect the dots and speak in a way that is real to their heritage and culture. Everyone can code switch into a language recognized as our professional voice to express ideas. But if this is the only form of acceptable communication, we eliminate the diversity we try so hard to create.

I once listened to a person grumble about how they loathed the term yard. "It's a garden not a yard," were the specific words said. Well, as a southerner I can tell you my mama knows the genus, species and common name of every bush in her yard. You see, diminishing a person's words diminishes their identity. When we acknowledge the use of words like yard, people feel validated. Bush isn't slang for shrub, although slang is part of vernacular. It's just the way we speak. Our linguistic stories must be told through our garden writing, visuals and speech.

People from around the world have so much pride in their individualism, spirituality,



culture and ethnicity. True inclusion is embracing people for uniqueness. Their word choice and tone for garden communications may very well be different than yours. No one group is a monolith. But there are words that permeate a culture.

NOT DUMBING DOWN

For example, most all African-Americans will understand extending an invitation to "the cookout." For those who don't, the cookout is a metaphoric place where we gather to eat the best food, socialize and have a great time being our carefree selves. It's where we don't have to code switch. Carefully vetted visitors are extended a coveted invite to the cookout. If you've received one, consider it an honor. Invitations can also be easily rescinded for a misstep, such as correcting a person about calling their garden a yard.

It's not dumbing things down to get the message across. It is making yourself relatable to the audience so you can continue to introduce more advanced ideas. People want to be educated and entertained. If you are an intellectual and the big academic words are your sweet spot for communications, then by all means do your thing.

Or maybe you want to change things up and use a more colloquial approach. That is okay, too. As gardener communicators, whether formally trained or self-taught, it takes

courage and confidence to deliver a message. Whatever country or continent you are reppin' for, be it Puerto Rico, Australia or Canada, communicate in your truth.

We talk about the age and plant blindness problems in the garden world. Young people aren't signing up in droves to make gardening a career. Many adults cannot identify basic plants. The language that we use to communicate is not helping these issues. I am not referring to garden speak—things like botanical Latin, macronutrients versus micronutrients or propagation. That is part of getting your bearings when embarking on the journey to understand plants. This is about the tendency to speak at people instead of speaking to them.

How does GardenComm use diversity through communications to solve some of these problems? Extend paid opportunities to people with writing and speaking styles that don't sound like what we may be used to. Allowing people to communicate in their truths helps us grow audiences and learn about cultures, experiences, plants and gardens, especially when their truth is different from yours. That is where real representation starts. And as we say in the South, if their yard ain't broke, don't try to fix it. 🌱

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