

Before long the irises will be blooming again. A few weeks now. Maybe a month. Every year I look forward to the return of those delicate but deceptively resilient flowers that my grandmothers called “flags.”

The blossoms will go too quickly, so I’ll soak up the images and inhale the heady pungent scent while I can. My nose is going to drip and my eyes itch, but what the heck? They’ll last two or three weeks at best and I know it, so I’ll let myself experience the floral beauty and my nose will just have to pay the price.

The iris’s growth cycle will naturally move on through the seasons and, as the rhizome gathers strength and nutrients, hibernating underground during the winter, it’ll be ready for next the season when the time is right to show its stuff.

For those plants that come back, spring after spring after spring, quiet work of preparation goes on after the show of blooming, when the seasons are subdued. Restrained colors paint the landscape, abandoning nature’s more flamboyant color palette.

Out the window muted, yet subtle, colors mask the active process of renewal that’s happening just out of sight, below the surface. Under the mossy greens, mild beiges and golden ochres of leafless limbs and sage grass, under the rich darks of rotting leaves, life is still happening.

The results of the work will be gloriously visible in a few months.

The stillness is essential for beauty to re-emerge. Essential for growth.

We need still times, too. Adults and children alike need time to simply “be” quietly with the cycles of our lives.

The temptation in our culture toward intense activity and constant accomplishment robs us of the value of seasons of depth and mindful hibernation in our personal lives. Yet, like the iris, the capacity to be still with ourselves and with others and let the process of living unfold in its own time, is vital to our well-being. It’s vital to our blossoming.

Times for stillness serve our well-being under a variety of circumstances. After a loss or an emotional injury especially, attentive time to winter with the painful reality of what has happened may eventually result in new roles--new birth, if you will.

By the way, during this cycle of development, it’s important to have supportive others in our lives who are not scared of the place where we are, folks who can tolerate our discomfort without withdrawing into being overly helpful or critical.

A hard-charging friend who’s gone through a year of health issues that finally resulted in major surgery quickly shares that the mandatory down-time she spent at home during her recovery gave her something she didn’t realize was missing from her life. She took charge of where she put her social

energy, comfortable with only a couple of friends who didn't push or encourage but simply rejoiced with her that she was having a new experience.

She was finally open to stillness. Sitting in front of her wall of windows, she saw for the first time the visits from a hawk so regular she could set her watch by them. She noticed the details of what birds came to which feeder, where the cat liked to nap, and how often the neighbor's dog beat a path through the yard.

The same windows she'd kept sparkling clean, she'd never stopped long enough to see through. While my friend has eased back into activities, she remains committed to staying in touch with the part of herself that was born during that time.

During seasons of change in our lives, for whatever reason, the cycle is as natural for us as it is for the iris, if we've had support along the way in letting it be. Uncomfortable, yes. Sometimes it hurts horribly. But unnatural, no.

Not the facetious isolation of depression which results in emotional paralysis, this is the natural journey through life's cycles, fully aware, perhaps growing slowly, but never stuck.

The iris doesn't flip a switch and suddenly bloom. Nor do we.

If the iris misses out on the process of building its store of nutrients, it'll shrivel up. If we miss out on the process of experiencing all that our lives are made of, we eventually wither emotionally.

Wherever we each are in the cycles of life, under the surface, may we always be growing. When the time is ripe, we'll be ready to, once again, show our stuff!