

# Thanksgiving

By Andrew Smith

Every Thanksgiving I invite Stanley, our septic guy, over for dinner with us. He's good company and I like having him, and especially his truck, around in case we suddenly can't flush with a house full of people. That unfortunate circumstance has happened more than once, and I have discovered that there is no one dearer to my heart than a septic guy on the holidays if you suddenly need him. So it's best to keep one close by.

And besides, Stanley has a general knowledge of nearly everything and can join in any conversation, whether the topic is new trends in gutting and cleaning fish, women's footwear, the constitutional convention of 1787, or current events. It turns out these things are all "a lot like septic," to use Stanley's term, and he can make telling comparisons between them.

This Thanksgiving we went out and looked at my bonsai trees before dinner, and I explained their care, feeding and artistic development in some detail with him. To my surprise he seemed to get it right away and nodded knowingly at me. "It's a lot like septic," he said.

"Bonsai, is like septic?"

"Sure," he said. "Just like your trees, your septic system is a living thing that has to be loved and cared for if you want it to stay healthy and strong".

"I don't think it's the same thing," I said.

"Oh sure it is!" exclaimed Stanley. "Your septic system is filled with microorganisms that recycle nutrients so they can be available again as energy. Didn't you just say that your bonsai trees roots depend on microorganisms to make soil nutrients available?"

"That's different," I said.

"Nope," said Stanley. "Without those microorganisms neither your bonsai trees or your septic system would stay healthy. So the first thing you've got to do is take care of your microorganisms. They need feeding. They need love. And if they don't get it they might get sick or die. You don't want that, do you?"

"No, but bonsai is more than just some bacteria in a tank. It involves everything from sunlight to artistic sensitivity to good soil drainage."

"I'm all about good soil drainage!" agreed Stanley. "Ask anyone."

"OK, but bonsai is a labor of love that can transcend lifetimes and last for generations."

“So is septic!” said Stanley. “Why, I’ve got ancient old tanks I’ve been working with for 30 years and they’re still going strong and working perfectly. I call them my Heritage Tanks. To be honest, some of them ought to be on the historic register. I take a lot of pride in that.”

“Yes, yes. But the essence of bonsai is creating something beautiful. You can’t say that about my septic system.”

“Of course you can!” said Stanley. “Why, right now your wife is in there making us a turkey dinner, a feast; with pumpkin pie, gravy, stuffing and mashed potatoes. You can’t deny that it’s made with love, and it’s a real work of art. It’s beautiful! And it’s made of all-natural ingredients that will keep you *and* your septic system healthy and strong. ‘Good cooking is the essence of good septic,’ I always say. And good cooking is an art that takes love, just like bonsai.”

“OK. Let’s talk about something else.”

“Sure. Like what?”

“I don’t know, politics.”

“It’s a lot like septic.”

“Health insurance?”

“It’s a lot like septic.”

“Um. Internal combustion engines?”

“They’re a lot like septic.”

“OK, the weather!” I said. “That’s not like septic! This sudden blast of winter is hard on my trees. First it’s so warm they think it’s still summer, and the next day it’s like January in Siberia! Bonsai trees need time to prepare themselves for winter. They have to go properly dormant. I can’t just let them freeze solid one day and say ‘now it’s winter.’ Whatever happened to fall?”

“Well, it’s a lot like septic,” said Stanley.

“What?”

“Yeah. See, both septic and weather are dynamic systems. And when they get out of balance they can cause all kinds of trouble. Things are supposed to keep flowing. If something gets stuck where you don’t want it, whether it’s arctic air or something else, it’s going to cause problems. Remember the first Thanksgiving you invited me here?”

“I see,” I sighed. “Well, I guess I’m just thankful to live somewhere where I can have a septic system and bonsai trees and a great family and a friend like yourself that can keep it working.”

“That’s the spirit. Say, when’s dinner?”

“Hmm. I think I smell it coming out of the oven right now.”

“Then let’s go eat!”

“Happy Thanksgiving Everyone!