Garden Lessons

**As a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up,**

**so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise**

**to spring up before all the nations.**

***(Isaiah 61:11)***

**Gardeners are notoriously hungry for advice. Each growing season brings a bumper crop of new gardening books, and few newspapers south of the Arctic Circle are without their gardening columnist. This hunger for enlightenment reflects the fact that the number of ways to garden successfully is exceeded only by the number of ways to fail. Four hundred years after the tomato was introduced into cultivation, observes horticulturist Sam Cotner, “there are people who would argue with me till the sun sets about how to plant them.” The discouraging fact is that almost any plausible technique has given good results at least once, and failed dismally at least as often. *(Newsweek, as it appeared in the July, 1983 issue of Reader’s Digest)***

**My mother, an avid gardener, has a much-admired flower garden. One day, while she was out tending to it, the little boy next door stopped by with his friend. “See, there she is,” he said. “The gardening angel.” *(Theresa Sweeney, in Reader’s Digest)***

**One day last summer, hiking with m children through the hills of north Georgia, I came to a cabin clinging to a rocky ledge. Behind a picket fence a white-haired mountain woman was working in her garden. When we stopped to admire her flowers, she told us that she lived there all alone. My city-bred youngsters regarded her with wonder. “How,” asked one, “do you keep from being lonesome?” “Oh,” she said, “if that feeling comes on in the summertime, I take a bunch of flowers to some shut-in. And if it's winter, I go out and feed the birds!” An act of compassion -- that was her instinctive antidote for loneliness. (Arthur Gordon, in Reader's Digest)**

**A gardener is someone who believes that what goes down must come up. *(I. B. Gibson, in Reader’s Digest)***

**A book is like a garden carried in the pocket. *(Arab proverb)***

**Planting a family garden would be a good character-building experience for our five children, I determined, but the trip to the nursery was a nightmare. They insisted on seeing every plant in the five-acre warehouse, squabbled over who got to push the shopping cart and complained when another child chose the same color petunias. Home again, I ranted and raved to my patient husband. “All I want,” I concluded in exasperation, “is peace, quiet and beautiful flowers.” “I understand,” he intoned calmly. “I believe they call that a funeral.” (D'Ann Jones, in Reader's Digest)**

**Grateful for the opportunity to settle, the dandelion was content to make wayside and wasteland bloom. It generally prefers hard homesteading on barren ground to pampered living in potting soil. The dandelion smiles just as brightly amid backyard tenement clutter as it does beneath the boxwood border of an English garden. When the going gets touch, pansies and petunias wilt. Neither strong winds nor heavy rains can break the dandelion. When the petals of the dogwood blossom are scattered and the peony is beaten to the ground, the dandelion still holds its head up bravely. *(Samuel Pickering, Jr., in Reader’s Digest)***

**Gardening didn't keep Adam out of mischief. *(Arnold H. Glasow)***

**Sometimes, when I am working in my garden, when the day is hot and still, I am transported to another world. The hum of bees seems like singing wires from Eternity. It is as though a message were trying to come through, and I know what it means but I can’t hear the words. I like to think my garden is Eden, but I know it is only evidence of Eden. (Dorothy Gardener, in Eastward in Eden)**

**While observing Mr. Wilson down on his hands and knees in the garden, Dennis thinks to himself: “Gardenin’ is just an excuse for grownups to play in the dirt.” (Hank Ketcham, in Dennis the Menace comic strip)**

**You play your hand. And, of course, all your money. You can do everything right, but there are so many factors you can't control. The question is, “Will you hit pay dirt?” Gardening is really just gambling outdoors. *(Hilary B. Price, in Rhymes With Orange comic strip)***

**If God had wanted us to plant gardens, he wouldn't have created supermarkets. *(James Dent, in Charleston, West Virginia, Gazette)***

**A good gardener always plants three seeds -- one for the bugs, one for the weather, one for himself. *(C. Collins)***

**According to a Gallup survey sponsored by a nonprofit group called Gardens for All, many of these home gardeners claim they raise vegetables to save on food bills – although when their time and effort are figured in, that makes about as much sense as raising children so they can help with the dishes. *(Newsweek, as it appeared in the July, 1983 issue of Reader’s Digest)***

**Gardener's lament: "No garden for me. Last year all I grew was tired." *(Quoted in Milwaukee Journal)***

**If this were my last day I’m almost sure I’d spend it working in my garden. I would dig about my little plants, and try to make them happy, so they would endure long after me. Then I would hide secure where my green arbor shades me from the sky, and watch how bird and bee and butterfly came hovering to every flowery lure. Then, as I rested, perhaps a friend or two, lovers of flowers would come, and we would walk about my little garden paths and talk of peaceful times when all the world seemed true. This may be my last day, for all I know; what a temptation just to spend it so! *(Anne Higginson Spicer)***

**Come and listen to my story of Mother Nature in all her glory, of gardens, filled with precious flowers, in which I love to walk for hours. And sometimes just like in a dream, I sit beside a crystal stream, or maybe in the water wade, or lay contented in a shade. Come and hear of scenes so grand, like oceans blue with golden sand, and mountains leaping toward the sky, where gay and cheerful birds go by. And how at dusk the sun do set, and all my care I soon forget, as twinkling stars and moon shine bright, and in my heart is sweet delight. Come and listen! *(I. Dalrymple)***

**One of the nicest thing about gardening is that if you put it off long enough it’s eventually too late. *(Bill Vaughan, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Christopher Falconer, a professional gardener in Suffolk, England, remarks on the fact that a large percentage of the local gardens open to the public belong to ex-military men: “I think it must be something to do with order. They love complete order, and nobody can stop them imposing it on a garden. Gardening allows them to go on having routine, tidiness, straight edges, upright posts. You can be strict in a garden.” *(Ronald Blythe, in Akenfield)***

**Few things seem as peaceful as a summer garden, with its bright-colored flowers, the sweet perfume of growing plants, the hum of insects, the song of birds and the dancing wings of butterflies. Yet scientists are discovering that in the midst of this seeming serenity, the struggle for survival is intense – with plants using specialized chemicals to defend against enemies or to attract needed allies. In fact, researchers in the emerging science of allelopathy, the study of how plants use chemicals against other plants, are finding that the battle is quite sophisticated. (Lowell Ponte, in Reader’s Digest)**

**Indeed, scientists have found that most plants produce chemical herbicides to use against other plants, and insecticides against one or more kinds of insects. But to be effective in the garden jungle, a plant need not kill those that threaten it. Often a plant only weakens its enemies enough to deter them and thus protect themselves. The tobacco plant produces nicotine, an insecticide so effective that one whiff of its vapor can paralyze an aphid. Oak and pine trees and many other plants load their leaves with tannins. Tannic acid causes enzyme changes in the stomachs of herbivores that make the leaves hard to digest. The more oak leaves an insect eats, the less the nourishment absorbed by its digestive system, and thus the attacker is weakened. *(Lowell Ponte, in Reader’s Digest)***

**All too often, gardening provokes the same passions and jealousies as other life-and-death enterprises, such as golf. Why else would Burpee, the giant seed company, develop “bragpatch” items, bred to be the biggest vegetables on the block? How else to account for the annual battle that almost every gardener must wage within himself between the desire to have the first ripe tomato in the neighborhood and the fear of murdering his seedlings by setting them out too early? (The ideal time to set out tomatoes is right after the last frost of the season, a simple matter for anyone who knows which frost is going to be the last.) *(Newsweek, as it appeared in the July, 1983 issue of Reader’s Digest)***

**A gardener with vegetables on the vine sleeps the unquiet sleep of a father with a daughter at a punk-rock concert. He worries about vine borers, cabbage loopers, leaf hoppers, flea beetles, blister beetles, sap beetles, pea weevils, onion maggots, white flies, thrips, mites and slugs, not to mention small boys. “Each plant has its own insect,” says Glenn Van Bramer, who directed an experimental garden center at Marist College in upstate New York. “There may not be another cucumber for 15 miles around; you plant one, and suddenly there are cucumber bugs all over.” *(Newsweek, as it appeared in the July, 1983 issue of Reader’s Digest)***

**There is also a spiritual dimension to gardening. Through tga4rdening, says Lee Goldman, executive editor of Organic Gardening magazine, “you develop a reverence for life, for persistence and the generous bounty of nature.” Says John Gettys, a retired steelworker who grows all his own food on three acres of land in Bessemer, Alabama, “God grows the garden. I just water and weed.” *(Newsweek, as it appeared in the July, 1983 issue of Reader’s Digest)***

**Spring is here. If you are inclined to look for the meaning of life, get thee to a garden. There are profound reasons why the garden is central in the sacred texts of major religions. Since ancient times, it has been the place where the soul goes to exercise, while simultaneously engaged in a multilayered dance with earth, plants, sun, birds, bees, hummingbirds, butterflies, night and day, temperature, the faithful earthworm, water, minerals, fragrance, a cast of thousands of microorganisms, our stalwart friends the fungi, chlorophyll, nectar. I think of it as a ballet in the biosphere. *(George Ball, in The Wall Street Journal)***

**Successful gardening is doing what has to be done when it has to be done the way it ought to be done whether you want to do it or not. *(Jerry Baker's Second Back to Nature Almanac)***

**I’ve made an odd discovery. Every time I talk to a savant I feel quite sure that happiness is no longer a possibility. Yet when I talk with my gardener, I’m convinced of the opposite. *(Bertrand Russell)***

**Good thoughts bear good fruit, bad thoughts bear bad fruit -- and man is his own gardener. *(James Allen)***

**“When I am unhappy,” says a woman I know, “I can’t be grateful enough for my garden. The weeds won’t wait until I’m through crying; they have to be pulled now, and that takes all my energy.” The more difficult and challenging the thing we are working at, the better, for we can’t work hard without using up some of the energy that might go into self-pity. *(Ardis Whitman, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Every gardener recognizes that valuing vegetables by their weight alone is like pricing an oil painting by the square inch. Gardeners will concede only a distant genetic connection between a tender, dark-green rosette of their Royal Oak leaf lettuce and a head of supermarket iceberg stiff as a home permanent in its plastic wrapping. *(Newsweek, as it appeared in the July, 1983 issue of Reader’s Digest)***

**A gentleman had worked on his garden a great deal, and all his work and effort had really borne fruit. One day another fellow came along and saw this gentleman working in his beautiful garden and said, “How blessed you are. You must be so grateful to God for what He has done for you. He has blessed you with a truly beautiful garden.” The man kept going on praising God for all that he had done for this man who was working so hard in his garden. As the fellow kept working and listening, sweat was pouring off his brow. Pretty soon the gardener looked up, wiped the sweat from his face and said to the gentleman, “Yes, you're right. I truly am grateful to God for all that He has done for me. But you should have seen this garden when God had it alone.” (Frank Giudici)**

**One of the worst mistakes you can make as a gardener is to think you're in charge. (Janet Gillespie)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***