

Spiritual Gardening: Creating Sacred Space Outdoors

Peg Streep

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“The Latin word for sacred gives us the word sanctuary,” explains the author, “denoting not only a sacred space, but also a place for refuge and protection.” Streep believes that the tasks of planting and tending a garden, which connect the gardener to the cycles of growth, are effective therapeutic tools. Ten types of gardens described and pictured here, drawn from all over the world, represent different religious and spiritual traditions.

The Aromatherapy garden, for example, focuses on the use of floral fragrance to affect mood and promote health, to heal and revive both body and spirit. Zen gardens, which emerged from Japan and China, teach readers that enlightenment can be attained through meditation and self-contemplation. The Healing garden demonstrates that physical and spiritual balance can be restored by being outdoors; Streep explains that even the work of weeding and raking has repetitive aspects similar to prayer and meditation.

The Celtic garden “encourages us to see all things as animate with spirit, whether they are living or not.” In the Biblical garden, writes Streep, the spiritual landscape takes on a form that links readers’ present-day lives in both literal and symbolic ways to the events and people in the Bible.

The Gaia garden is a sanctuary that honors the earth as a Mother, a place to celebrate the divine feminine in nature. The Feng Shui garden is concerned with how the energy of natural surroundings affects human well-being, aspirations, and achievements. The Saint’s garden should be a place of peace “where a vision of God reveals itself in the details of nature.” The Labyrinth garden takes on a specific geometric form; its landscape is shaped to create what Streep calls “a tool for spiritual awakening and transformation.” In the Tranquillity garden, planting the right mix of flowers will bring the gardener a feeling of calmness and order.

Streep, who holds advanced degrees from the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University, has written, edited, and illustrated several previous books with spiritual themes, including *Altars Made Easy* and *Girl in the Mirror*. The photographer, whose superb pictures complement Streep’s text, is a graduate of the Slade School of Fine Art in London. His work has appeared in *Garden Design* and *Gardens Illustrated*.

Streep recommends a variety of plants and trees for each of the gardens, some of which will attract birds and butterflies. She views gardening as a vehicle for spiritual and emotional connection, concluding that “gardening is, for most of us, as close as we will ever get to witnessing a miracle firsthand.”

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