

The Spirituality of Gardening

Donna Sinclair

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While some may easily speak of gardening and spirituality in the same breath, far fewer will consider gardeners as the leading edge of resistance, or gardening as a political act. All these currents flow through this glorious compendium of garden images and reflections.

Calling on all the senses, the author, an award-winning Canadian journalist and long-time gardener, writes out of her gardening experiences and draws on stories and quotes from spiritual traditions around the world. Christian mystics share space with the Bible; the Talmud; Greek, Native American and Polynesian stories and wisdom; ancient Chinese proverbs; reflections from Thoreau, Emerson, and Wendell Berry; and slips of poetry from Sarton, Blake, Hopkins, Dickinson, Piercy, and more.

The photographs are as luscious as the earthy and storied text. Full-page and sidebar images include some that are peopled, as well as close-ups of clematis, tulips, peonies, rows of fruits, the larger universe of woods, lakes, and birches, and the classic view of planet Earth, living Gaia, a blue jewel against the black backdrop of space.

In these inspiring stories of the garden, of the Earth as a garden, the author finds a call to Being. “Gardeners strive to recreate Eden on their own small pieces of earth,” she writes. “In fact, the whole Earth is a garden and what we learn on our little plots we bring to the larger landscape of creation.” In seven chapters, she traces the spiritual essence of gardening—as connection, balance, memory, healing, hope, spiritual practice, and resistance. Sinclair observes, “In the face of self-destructive impulse, gardeners say no. Their efforts to save and create what is useful and lovely are deeply subversive ... Gardeners understand that these seeds and the land that nourishes them are sacred ... Gardens are our connection to the land and to the One who created it.”

Metaphors and stories provide eye-opening perspectives. What city dweller hasn’t observed container gardens perched high on urban high-rise balconies? The author’s deft reflections connect the cliff dwellers of the ancient past to her Toronto balcony garden. In another story, she reflects on millennia of seed saving in the Fertile Crescent. In today’s Iraq, according to Sinclair, it is illegal to save seeds. Under U.S. occupation, Iraqis can only use seeds sold by global corporations.

A timeline of the history of gardening offers a welcome big picture, and the bibliography adds to the usefulness of this volume. Images and text together inspire readers to connect with the greater possibilities. Open-hearted and beautifully illustrated, *The Spirituality of Gardening* offers a powerful addition to the literature covering direct connection with the Divine through nature, in this case, people’s own gardens. This book should be planted in both gardening and spirituality sections.

BOBBYE MIDDENDORF (August 18, 2009)

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