

## Mary's Musings, thoughts on making a life...

### Tending the Garden of Life

*When we give ourselves what we need, we are much more likely to blossom!*

As spring turns to summer, many of us turn to our gardens. There is something so satisfying about planting and tending and watering new life. When we reap the harvest of our own efforts, nothing tastes sweeter or delights the senses more. Lately, I've been musing about how well gardening principles can be applied to growing a happy, purposeful life. Here are my thoughts:

#### **Choose what to grow.**

*Who do you want to be? What do you want to do? What do you want to have?* Many of us focus heavily on the having and the doing parts of these questions. But, it's the "being part" (our values and principles) that can act as our compass. When we're clear about what we want to grow (for example, kindness, integrity, contribution, effectiveness, etc.), "what to do" becomes obvious, and "having" follows doing.

#### **Prepare the soil.**

When we are preparing to plant, we till, rake, and add compost *first*. Bringing this kind of forethought to all areas of our lives could certainly reduce wear and tear on us! How often have we plunged into a project, a relationship, or even a purchase, without much thought about what might be required to finish it, take care of it, or pay for it?

For example, my undergraduate degree is in journalism. I like to write and the folks in the Journalism Department were friendly. When I began looking for work after graduation, I very quickly realized that I didn't want the pressure

of daily deadlines, nor did I want the focus of my day to be on the negative events of our world. If I had discovered these things about myself earlier (perhaps by working for a newspaper during the summers, or shadowing a reporter) I wonder what different choices I might have made.

#### **Plant according to directions.**

Do your "plants" get too much sun? (Perhaps the people around you are overly critical. Maybe you are overly critical, holding yourself to impossible standards about how much you should be accomplishing, and how perfect the end results should be.) Did you put a sun-lover under the trees? (Are you working at home alone when you thrive on being with people?) When we give ourselves what we need (and we recognize and avoid that which depletes us), we are much more likely to blossom!

#### **Water often and with care.**

Nourish your self, your dreams, your priorities. Read things that inspire you. Pay attention to beauty. Take care of yourself. Eat right, go for a walk, clean out a drawer or call a friend during your mid-afternoon slump, laugh, take hot baths, go someplace new. We can't expect to become blue ribbon winners (our personal best) without taking care of ourselves.

#### **Pull the weeds.**

Be aware of your negativity. Negative thoughts and words are as powerful as

deeds. What we think about and speak about creates the lens through which we look at the world. If you think the world is unfriendly, you will notice every unfriendly experience. Conversely, if you think the world is friendly, that's what you will see.

In what ways do you sabotage your best intentions, allowing 'weeds' or 'bugs' to take over your garden? All of us have inner slugs who will eat away at our self-confidence and try to keep us safe by keeping everything the same. (To a slug, the status quo - no matter how miserable - is more comfortable than the unknown.) When we understand what motivates our self-saboteurs, we can exercise compassion while firmly booting the slugs out of the garden.

#### **Thin the seedlings.**

Are your "plants" too close together? (Do you have more on your agenda than you will be able to do well, thus compromising the flourishing of everything?) Clarify your priorities. This can be especially difficult for creative people. We love to dabble. How many of our really good ideas never made it to harvest because too many things were competing for our attention? You truly *can't* do it all right now - at least not well and sanely. Focus your energies on what's most important.

#### **Provide support.**

Sometimes support looks like maintaining good boundaries. Peas would probably love to wander the garden and use the tomatoes as a living trellis. We gently guide them onto fences because fences offer appropriate support. Regular routines can provide that kind of support for our priorities. Routines help us to relax because we can let go of worrying

about "When will I paint? Pay the bills? Play with the kids?" When we know we have planned time to paint, pay the bills, and play, we can be present with what we're doing right now. It takes time to develop these rhythms (and yes, there are times when crisis mode takes over) but the peacefulness that results is well worth the effort.

#### **Fertilize as needed.**

Like sunflowers, most of us gravitate toward sunny people - people who like themselves, like others, and like life. Friends who encourage, believe in, and help us to keep our perspective enrich us, especially when we are feeling low.

Our own struggles can also support our growth. The dairy barn down the road from me fertilizes their fields every spring with cow manure. This is accomplished by feeding the manure into a spreader (does the expression "when the sh\*t hits the fan" ring a bell?!) Likewise, the trying times in our lives offer valuable nutrients for our growth, provided we recognize that manure can become fertilizer. Some people say that every problem contains a gift. When we use our challenges to catapult us into rapid bursts of growth, we have received the gift!

#### **Pick fruit when ripe.**

Gardening truly is an exercise in faith and patience. Don't attempt to force outcomes. Every project and every person is different, much like one cantaloupe ripens in early August and another isn't ready until late September. Can you potty train a resistant 2 year old? Yes, but is that the battle you want to fight? Your two-year-old will not go to kindergarten in diapers! When *she* is ready, the transition will be almost effortless. Practice faith and patience in all things.

**Compost when done.**

Snow peas and lettuce give their all in early summer. Parsnips are at their best after a few frosts (or even the following spring.) When all that's left of the snow peas is dried-up vines, we pull them out of the garden and recycle them in the compost heap. Similarly, when something is no longer productive -- because it's outlived its usefulness, or it hasn't born

fruit, or it's taking over and making too many demands on you (like zucchini), or you just plain don't like it -- pull it out of your life. Recycle the energy invested and the lessons learned into new projects and possibilities.

Just remember, when imagining what you want to create next, choose what you want to grow ...prepare the soil ...plant according to directions ...

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