

## **Emerging Women**

### **THE GARDEN**

**By Sophia**

A garden is really a reflection of the personality of the folks who create it. A continues patch of yard, a little ornamental garden or a large flourishing one reveals a personality. Either it is an extension of oneself or, in the case of some of us lucky ones, we are give or find a garden or grove and make it ours. In any event, I've come to realize that a garden is not just a bunch of flowers, it is a place of magic and wonder.

My mother has told me stories of her grandmother's 'old English garden' and how it grew and how it flourished with masses of colors and wonderful forms. Her mixture of vegetables and flowers and her loving care was what made all the plants grow to their peak. People loved it, it brought out the best in them. What could have been better? My great grandmother was not from England but the style suited her fine, one could say that it was 'in her blood.' A garden reflects us and teaches us what is inside of us and what it is that we may not want to know. My grandmother loved cactus', but in the soggy climate of Aberdeen it was no easy feat to grow them. Yet the human will is strong, and there they were.

They bloomed every year in coffee cans. My grandmother had a chance to emotionally and spiritually revisit the desert every time she looked indoors at her cactus'. The rain outside did not suit her sunny personality, so she compromised by magically bringing in what she needed for her soul, a growing piece of the desert. The desert never left her and she never left the desert. She could hold true to who is she was in this way, all through plants.

Outside in the rain Calla Lilies and roses were on their own to fend for themselves, and because they were often loved as well they did prosper and were able to get what they needed. The roses grew profusely over the swamp where the ducks lived and the Calla lilies grew in huge massively-blooming bunches in the front of the yard along the dirt road. These too revealed a part of my grandmother's spirit, the part that was rooted here, that was a little wild and colorful and very big-hearted.

Gardens and yards are what often comes to mind when we talk of favorite places and special magical spots in our memories and in our hearts. How many people had strong feelings when they saw the movie or read the book "The Secret Garden?" What is it that we remember about other people's homes? Special rooms, of course, but if there is a lovely garden this is what sticks in our mind.

My husband and I had never really had a garden until a few years ago when we finally bought a house. We were lucky to have a wonderful garden come with it and so it has become a recent addiction of ours. This has made me think about the energy, power and magic of gardens and I have come up with a number of interesting ideas about the subject I'd like to share.

Before we 'settled down' and got a house, boxes and suitcases held our clothes, so many times had we moved and traveled. When we lived in rentals and apartments, the question always came up: Why put in a garden? Life is so transient. We knew we would just move, we only rented, so why bother? In short, we felt that is what parks were for. My husband was the one who missed gardens and liked to get his hands in the dirt so he would grow a few things and work in the yards that we lived in. I never cared about such things, but I realize now that I was wrong.

Why should we garden no matter where we live? Because a

garden is something that you leave behind for the next person to change, it is something powerful and concrete, a magical thing that the next people who get it can add their energy and personality to as well. It is a gift that keeps on giving, as they say.

My husband always longed to garden, Pan spirit that he is. I, on the other hand, was always checking to see when the next cheap flight was to some undiscovered corner in the world. When it came time to find a real home, we just wanted a fenced in back yard for us and our son and I figured that if my husband wanted to put in a vegetable garden he could. Don't get me wrong, I love flowers and always have. I enjoyed flower arranging and I received my teaching certificate in Ikebana (Japanese flower arranging) from the Sogetsu school in Tokyo. If I could buy and arrange flowers, that was good enough for me. Flowers were something someone else grew for me! Then we went house hunting and we faced the problem of what was available and the reality of what we could afford, just like every other first-time home-buyer does! What we could afford, it turned out, was not much. After months of looking and not finding that 'right' place, we really clearly and intently focused our energies on what we wanted and sent this out into the cosmos. Then we waited for our special spot to appear.

Soon I met a wonderful real-estate agent at a house opening. We told her exactly what I wanted and in a few days she called me from her cell phone. She was excited and she said, "I found it ! Come now, I am in the driveway and I want you guys to be the first bidders! I found your house!" We did, expecting to be disappointed again, unhappy that our dinner was interrupted and we drove to the address she gave us. When we arrived, I was mad that she had called us to interrupt dinner; This could not be the house that we were suppose to have, it was obviously way beyond our means! I mean, it was landscaped! Then we walked in and we both knew. We had found our new home. This was the home that was meant to be ours, the home beyond what I thought we could

offered. As I wandered the rooms and felt how right it was, my husband walked right through it and out into the back yard. I heard him call me and when I joined him I saw why. A Garden, a very big garden. He told me later that the house had hardly registered but when he'd seen the garden, he had known that this was our place. I soon realized, as I stood looking at the flowers and many trees, that he was right.

The people who had lived in this home for more than thirty years wanted to meet us and they greeted us at the door. This was unusual, our agent said, but Mr. & Mrs. Kyle were adamant. The Kyle's had raised three children here and now were going to retire to Arizona. "Let me show you the garden", said Mrs.. Kyle and she took my young sons hand and began to point out all the green particulars. The back yard was ringed by a huge rock garden and several long beds level with the house, it sloped up to another level with more beds and these were surrounded by woods in the back, Beyond these trees was what appeared a huge woods beyond our back fence, this was a forested park that lay behind us. It was a green belt that had been created by the neighborhood many years ago when everyone donated a chunk of land so that everyone could enjoy a park behind them. An old rustic potting shed sat in the back, filled with pots and even some peat moss, ready for the next inhabitants. In the back corner was a small secluded level place surrounded by pines which later turned out to be a great place to mediate.

But back to the first day!

We followed Mrs. Kyle around the yard as she pointed out to us what we needed to do to keep the yard up. A northwest formal flower garden on an acre of land. What could be better, what could have been a greater gift than this? My husband was in heaven, I felt a bit shocked. I was overwhelmed: How could I keep this up? I didn't know anything about gardening and I wasn't even into it!

Yet, as these things do, it grew on me, like a long, slow love affair.

We bought the house, of course, the Kyle's wanted us to have it, sensing maybe kindred souls in us and our love of the garden. We realized later that they had taken twice as much time showing us the garden as they had taking us about the house; This said a lot.

So, we started to go to nurseries and ask questions. Our garden, if you want to know, is classified as a 'woody garden.' A shade garden with peonies (which we have in abundance!) is impossible, we were told and still I read that they need full sun. Somebody needs to tell the 250 magenta peonies. They belong here and will not leave. We found that our garden had other personality quirks; it loved geraniums, hated lupine, loved pansies, hated roses and on and on. The books always seemed to be off! Our garden had a real spirit to it.

I started to add my own visions to the garden, beginning with tulips and plenty of them. The only problem was a squirrel who love them most of all, and happily dug up what ever I tulip bulbs I put in the ground. He later ate a huge pile of crocuses as well (like \$40 worth)- all gone, dinner at some little evil squirrel feast. This critter is now known in our house as 'squirrel bastard.'

After two years and no compromise on either of our parts, I planted piles of daffodils. These are not a tasty treat to my nemesis. It was after I planted them that I heard a little knock on my back sliding door. I looked out the window, no sign of anything. The tapping continued. I looked down. It was the 'squirrel bastard' (now fondly called SB.) I opened my glass door and I was roundly scolded by his chatter. 'What I am suppose to do?' cried the squirrel, 'Winter is coming and I have no food?' 'Hey,' I was sure he said, 'The Kyles weren't this mean!' SB was right I had taken away a source that he depended on. I, of course, had not seen it this way. I thought of it as an expensive subsidy (entitlement?) and felt

the disappointment of one blooming tulip instead of 100 of them.

I kept the door open and started to turn my back and wondered what else I could feed SB, after all, he had been here before me and he was part of the garden too. I found peanuts and thought that they might do as squirrel chow. He was satisfied with what I gave him then ran off to hide it. The squirrel came back for more (and still regularly does so), but not enough so that he would not find others sources of food or become completely dependent. This spring I was rewarded with 100 daffodils and eighty yellow primroses as well as a new friend who happened to stop by last week. He was not looking for peanuts but was just checking up on me and running in my home just to let me know who really is the boss. It is a baby SB, and he obviously now knows the routine!

This is just one of many special things that happen in my garden, a place I now consider the spiritual center of my house. We have taken the precious gift the Kyles gave us and are in the middle of transforming it. A rock daphne here, some heather there, a dogwood in the back with the cedars; every step a magic spell, every plant a new spirit that joins a whole crowd of dancing happy green beings. At nights on full moons, I go out and I can feel them all dancing and laughing and intertwining with the woods and with us. And my garden is not just fun or an artistic work-in-progress, it is also a magical circle, a temple of our spiritual energies that affects our lives. I mean, we live out here in the summer, writing, eating, talking and just sitting at the cedar picnic table in the center! What kind of garden magic do I mean? Let me tell you.

In my garden I have begun planting 'money plants' and I have changed other things to make them attuned to the 'feng shui' or flow of energy around my yard. Also, medicinal herbs are now there to keep us strong, and other plants that seem to bring different kinds of positive energy into our lives. It's been three years since Mrs. Kyle entrusted me with her legacy, and I think

she'd be proud. Someday I will leave it to someone else, maybe my son, and then it will again transform and give joy and positive energy to them as well. A garden is far more than a collection of plants, it is many many things and I have not finished discovering all the magical things it is. I doubt I ever will, and so it has transformed me as I transform it. Isn't that what growing is all about?