

20 Lessons from the Garden

20 Lessons from the Garden (excerpt: Broken Arrowheads and Dragonflies)

I once found a broken arrowhead in my garden. It was made of pink flint and the tip was broken off. One day, long ago, a Native American had [knapped](#) the arrow and used it to hunt a small animal. I was not the first one to walk on this soil, nor will I be the last. Being a gardener gives you time for reflection and teaches you many things about life. Here are 20 lessons I have learned in my garden:

1. **Sometimes there are sinkholes.** Just when you think you are making progress, a tiny hole forms out of nowhere. It grows larger and larger. Unless you excavate to find out why-and repair the foundation-it can destroy all your hard work.
2. **Water frequently.** If you want fruit, you need to water. Left to the fate of the environment, they might shrivel and die. Everything needs moisture. Some things need less than others, so don't overdo it.
3. **Prune with purpose.** A sucker is an unwanted stem which saps nutrients from the main plant. It won't produce much while sucking off the parent plant, but removed and planted in a new spot, it is free to grow to its full potential and produce fruit of its own. Some suckers need to be thrown away.
4. **Weed daily.** Let a weed take hold for a week and it will develop an underground network of roots, which are nearly impossible to search and destroy. Some weeds reproduce by sending out new shoots this way. A garden can be quickly overtaken if neglected.
5. **Thin liberally.** Grow your vegetables too close together and they will be small, weak and deformed. But if you thin out the overgrowth, the ones left behind will grow large and strong. Quality is better than quantity.
6. **Save spiders.** Spiders love gardens because they are full of bugs. Some bugs serve no purpose other than to eat your hard work and grow bigger on your labor. Spiders will help keep the destruction of these pests to a manageable level. They will work hard for themselves which will benefit you. Learn to thank the spiders.
7. **Feed the wildlife.** Your garden will produce more than you need. Will

you let the excess rot or share with the creatures whose habitat you disturbed to plant your garden?

8. **Grow flowers.** Flowers remind us that there is beauty all around if we take the time to look. Not everything we plant has to serve a physical need. Some things we plant feed our souls and that is their main purpose.
9. **Save seeds.** If you want to have more control over your life, you will learn to harvest and save seeds. Don't be so dependent on others to supply what you need. You are capable of supplying yourself with seeds for the future.
10. **Harvest daily.** If you neglect to check the garden when harvest time is near, you might be dismayed to discover that your cucumbers are past their prime and have begun to rot. Have no fear-if you have learned to save seeds for the future, even rotten fruit has a purpose.
11. **Condition the soil.** The building blocks of good soil is found in decay. It is advantageous to add layers of decaying plant matter to your soil. But learn the difference between decay and disease. The wrong thing added can introduce disease which could destroy the fragile ecosystem permanently.
12. **Watch birds.** Birds do not worry about their next meal because they know God will provide it for them. If a bird decides you are God's garden, then be willing to share.
13. **Put up a fence.** Fences are for keeping out raccoons and other destructive animals who find pleasure in reeking havoc on your hard work. They are not there just for a bite to eat, but to have fun destroying what you have worked so hard to make. It's okay to lock them out.
14. **Wear gloves.** You will work harder with gloves on. The harsh weeds will not hurt if your hands are protected. You will not be timid and will be stronger with the proper equipment for the job.
15. **Use sunscreen.** It's hot in the sun. Your skin is not armor, nor is your pigment protected by chlorophyll. Protect yourself from the harsh rays of the sun. Know your limitations.
16. **Make a plan.** A well planned garden will produce more than a haphazardly planted one. Some plants don't like each other and grow best next to others. Learn the signs. Make the best use of those who grow best together.
17. **Let volunteers grow.** If a volunteer plant has the strength and quality to reproduce on its own, why would you want to pull it out or lower its

chances of survival by moving it? This is one that you want to nurture and save the seeds. It is a survivor.

18. **Don't use chemicals.** Chemicals are overused in our environment and diets. If you are in charge of this garden and have the choice to reduce your exposure to manmade chemicals, why wouldn't you? Chemicals are poisoning our world and us.
19. **Rotate your crops.** Repeated growth of the same plant in the same place year after year will eventually deplete the soil of the nutrient that that plant uses the most. Rotate your crops into different places each year to make sure your soil is healthy.
20. **Thank God.** God provided you with the soil, seeds, sun, water, strength, tools and knowledge to grow this garden. Thank Him for everything.

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