

Lessons from my Garden

By Rosemary Clark

Over the years I have loved gardening. Not the vegetable kind, the flower kind. Oh I know, fresh homegrown vegetables are wonderful, but all you can do is eat them! With flower gardening you have beauty, color, variety, fragrance and it attracts wildlife of all kinds. And besides all that there are spiritual lessons to be learned in flower gardening that you can't learn from a vegetable garden.

1. Flowers come in all different colors, shades of colors, mixes of colors, and well, just colors! I love the colors of flowers. Rich, deep lush colors, pastels, stripes, feathers, spots, etc. It speaks to me of the creative genius of my heavenly Father. It comforts me to know that the God who chose to create all those colors so that we could enjoy them, cares about me. He could have made them all black and white! But He chose colors and built into us an appreciation of those colors. Wow! If He cares about such little details, need I worry about Him caring for me? Matthew 6:25-32

2. Gardens take hard work to keep the weeds at bay. When I became a believer I didn't automatically get rid of all my sins. Positionally yes, I am righteous in Christ, but practically, daily, I struggle with sin in my life. Those pesky "weeds" are hard to get rid of! And just as I have to keep up with them in gardening, so I need to keep short accounts with God to keep the "weeds" of sin from taking over my spiritual life. It takes a lot of hard work! Some weeds look like the flower. They are deceptively alike, but a true gardener can tell the difference. God is our Gardener. He knows which "weeds" need to be removed from my heart, even though at times they may look like the genuine fruit of the Spirit. I don't fool Him. He knows my heart and motives. He knows my very intimate thoughts. Lord, please take out the weeds from the garden of my heart and make me pure

in thought, motive and action I pray. Psalm 119:9; I John 1:6-9

3. Some plants need to be pruned to look their best, and some need to be cut back drastically to stop them from taking over the whole garden. At first it may look exceptionally ugly and the casual non-gardening observer may think you're ruining your garden, but the Master Gardener knows that this is necessary for the future appeal of the plant. God is also in the business of pruning. He brings difficulties and testing into our lives to mold us into the image of Christ. He disciplines us, showing us that we are totally dependent on the Master Gardener for growth and for becoming more Christ-like. He will do whatever is necessary for this to happen. It's not fun and it doesn't look pretty, but He knows it needs to happen and He knows the end result is well worth it. If we are to be a fragrance of Jesus, the pruning and cutting back are an essential part of the believer's life with God. Hebrews 12:11

4. Each plant needs specific care, depending on the type of plant. Some need sandy soil, some more acidic, some need lots of sunshine, some more shaded areas. Some need lots of water, some less. Some do well being moved around, others like to stay put. Some take a couple of seasons to bloom, some bloom every season, all season long. Some are perennial, coming up every year, some biannual, some annual. All are different and all need specific care. I'm comforted to know that even though every one of us is distinct in our personalities and needs, God knows each one of us intimately and cares about the smallest details of our lives. He knows when I need encouragement, when I need discipline or correction. He knows when I'm down, and when I'm up. He knows that sometimes I like to be around people, and when I don't and that that is ok. He knows when I despair, and when I dance around the house singing at the top of my lungs. He knows when I trust, when I worry. He knows all about me and is actively interested and involved in my life. My God lives and I can have a personal relationship with Him. That is so awesome! Psalm 147:11, Psalm 139, Matthew 6: 25-32; 7:9-11

5. Every year there are animals that hide out in my garden. Mice, bunnies, hummingbirds, and kids! Did I say kids? Okay, not kids. They know better! Snakes, yes. And mice, and bunnies. When I go into my garden early in the morning I know they are there because there are strange rustlings around my feet and all of a sudden a bunny will bound away across the sunlit lawn in front of me. I know the snakes are there but I try not to think about them. I leave it up to my boys to find them. The mice are there because when I finish cleaning up the garden for the winter they all mysteriously appear in my garage. The garden provides a haven of refuge for these

small critters. They don't necessarily see its beauty as I do; all they know is that it is a refuge. The leaves of the plants provide shelter, necessary moisture, food, and shade from the heat of the sun. They enjoy the benefits of my garden without a thought of how long they'll have it or who's going to take care of it. My life with God is like that. He provides everything I need and sometimes even the things I want, and I take them and enjoy them and often don't even think about where they came from. He provides whether or not I'm aware that it is He who is providing them. He's just like that. These things are temporary on earth, like my garden, but God's care will go on for all eternity. He is forever my refuge and strength, my strong tower to whom I can run and be safe. He is my haven for all eternity. Proverbs 18:10; Psalm 145:8,9

6. I like to sit on my front or backyard steps and breathe in the fragrance of my flowers. Not all of them have pleasant smells. In fact some of them have no fragrance at all, and some of them downright stink! If those flowers weren't so pretty they'd be of no use to me! I just can't resist the colors of those stinky flowers. Lucky them! I've told my husband, don't bring me roses that don't have a fragrance because what's the point! I love the smell of my flowers. I often wonder what kind of "fragrance" I am to people around me, in my sphere of influence. Do I "smell" wonderful to people, a truly great fragrance of Christ, or do I create a stench in people's noses, turning them off to the life of God within me? I so want to be a sweet fragrance of Jesus! 2 Corinthians 2:14,15

These are just a few lessons I have been learning from my garden. If you're reading this and you're a gardener, it may be that you will never look at your garden quite the same again! If you're not a gardener, you don't know what you're missing! J