



Working With Soil, Attending To Soul, by Gunilla Norris

A garden tends to get inside us. If we go there to accomplish something or to get something, the garden soon becomes a burden. With

expectations that it must look good or that it has to produce no matter what, we will soon grow tired. The garden is really a place in which we can give ourselves away. This is true of any serious contemplation, too. We are transformed by it. We are reduced and revealed by it. In it we may experience a lived sense of our connection to the earth, to our inner freedom, and to the Sacred, the ground of our existence.

"For me gardening is a process that invites me to be fully engaged. It is also a constant exercise in letting go since so much happens that is not in my control. Strangely this duality seems to cultivate a joy that embraces impermanence and finds refuge in the invisible.

"Gardening brings food and flowers to the table and sustenance to the soul. I am not talking about having a perfect garden. Ours certainly isn't! Weeds are as happy here as are flowers. Bushes get bushier and need trimming. What may start out as an elegant garden plan becomes more haphazard over time. With the years our garden has turned out to be a bit of this and that and always too big to really tend properly.

"From the start this is not the garden I designed. Someone else did, and before that there was a yard of sorts. Coming here to live I have inherited what already was, just as I inherited my parents, my siblings, and my particular time in history. We work with what we are given. That's the real garden. I can't claim anything here. I can only 'be' in the garden, tend it, and further it. Isn't that what we all do, what life asks us to do? [...]

"In my garden while I am digging I am also tilling inner soil. My garden is a place of commitment and of neglect, of arrogance and humility. It is a place of taking stock and of deep silence – a place of contemplation. And so for me over time it has become a place of grace.

"I experience as the particular human being I am. I have no choice about that, but I trust that I am more like other people than not, and that what I find working the soil might also be what others find working theirs. I want to trust that with reverence for the place and awareness of my foibles, I can grow to be more present and a better steward of my small corner of the earth.

