

Rediscovering Your Passion: Lessons Learned in a Southern Garden

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My personal thoughts on gardening are that you become a gardener when you accidentally ruin more plants than your age, and hopefully along the way you learn how NOT to kill that plant. So, hello, my name is Azeen, and I am a gardener. Don't ask me my age. Just know I have ruined enough plants to make me somebody's great grandmother.

I cannot translate that definition to anyone's career, but my garden has put my own purposes and passions into perspective. I tried to grow many plants this past year and as a result, few things thrived. Yes, plants need water and attention, but they also need space and intentionality. Lara Casey, a once ambitious career woman, wrote a great book called *Cultivate* where she shares her experience gardening with cultivating her spirituality and purposeful intentionality. This parallel between gardening can also be made for our lives, professions, and passions.

What kind of garden are you growing? What is your passion? I hope by reading this editorial, you'll reflect on some important questions.

What do you want to grow more than anything else?

What is stealing energy from your purpose?

What is preventing your passion from fruiting?

How has your past provided resources for your future?

What will you do when things don't go as planned?

Do you take time to enjoy your gifts?

How do you approach seasons of change?

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1. Seeds turn into plants. BIG plants. - *What do you want to grow more than anything else?*

Space in a garden bed, like time in our days, is fixed. An open spot is tempting to canvas with exciting arrays of seeds. Don't plant too many seeds too close to each other. Yes, they may be exciting and wanted seeds. I grew roselle hibiscus and okra 2 feet apart *thinking* that was ample space. But both plants are massive at their full size. And because of this, the roselle crowded out the okra, casting a large shadow over it and competed with water and nutrients. The okra was stunted.

Seeds seem teensy and small. Some may never grow, but many do. Prioritize which plant you want to thrive and protect it.

2. Weeds steal energy - *What is stealing energy from your purpose?*

Anything can be a weed. Technically a weed is anything that escapes the boundaries you set for it. Even if it seems like a welcome thing. Think mint, oregano. Think Netflix, Twitter, Instagram. Or even perhaps poor documentation habits and toxic patterns in your career. It is stealing energy from what you wanted to protect.

3. Pests and diseases are frequent, common, and annoying - *What is preventing your passion from fruiting?*

Welcome to Louisiana. Home of the toti-phagum insect (latin for "eat everything" bug – okay, I made that up). In any locale you will face pests and diseases. Blight, bugs, and squirrels. Or in our lives, how about discontentment, comparison, and undue self-pressure? What about lies that you believe about yourself or your career?

Treat this ASAP or they will quickly destroy your prized plant. These can be detrimental to any harvest. In fact, be proactive to prevent them.

4. Dirt is a good thing - *How has your past provided resources for your future?*

Dirt is decayed, composted, and thoroughly rotted out. But chock full of nutrients. Failures become our dirt. Our past suffering and trials do too, as do our faded successes. Our dirt is also composed of all the laundry, chores, errands we run - although not attractive, it is necessary and vital.

Your history is providing you with the nutrients you need to thrive.

5. You're not (fully) in control - *What will you do when things don't go as planned?*

Water, sun, and dirt- a gardener can sometimes control aspects of it, but a significant portion of it remains out of their control. But let's say you get all the controllable variables right. Then- *bam!* Your super cute fluffy dog kills a squirrel and uproots an entire plant to bury it. Or perhaps your clinic manager embezzles money, your clinic merges, or COVID and natural disasters hit. What can you do? I think many of us have gotten a crash course this year! Fix what you can, give thanks for the rest, and still find joy in what you have.

6. Flowers and fruits are momentary gifts, savor them! - *Do you take time to enjoy your gifts?*

There is no guarantee that just because you plant something, that it will grow into what you expect. Only one of my many bulbs bloomed this year – hovering at 6 inches off the ground. I got on the ground and took a moment to smell and admire this beautiful flower and savor the aroma. Fortunately I did, because just a couple of days later the heat destroyed the bloom.

7. **The end is not the end** - *How do you approach seasons of change?*

Seasons change. When a plant bolts, it goes to seed and in the process it dies. Growing season is over and softly enters a season of rest, but is it welcome? Or do you shun rest in the time of the holiday bustle. This is a time to reflect back and see what worked, what did not grow, and why. What are you thankful for and will you try again? The soil - the earth's canvas - gets a season of rest. As does the gardener. As do you. Composted into the dirt are all the past seasons' successes and shortcomings. All of it fertilizing the future's hope of a new growing season.

The end of growing season is not the end. Harvest the seeds, the memories, and the lessons from this past year and as you do, give thanks for the successes and failures. Let your spirit swell with hope and joy. The good news is that this is not our only season, but we have hope. And it's the harshest winters that yield the sweetest blooms.

As we enter winter, I hope these questions linger. *What kind of garden have you been growing? Does it resonate with your purpose or your deepest passions?* Take a moment to reflect on what you are grateful you received and what you learned. And from this, you can better know what to keep and what to grow. Best wishes for next season's garden, my friend.

“There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot”
Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 NIV