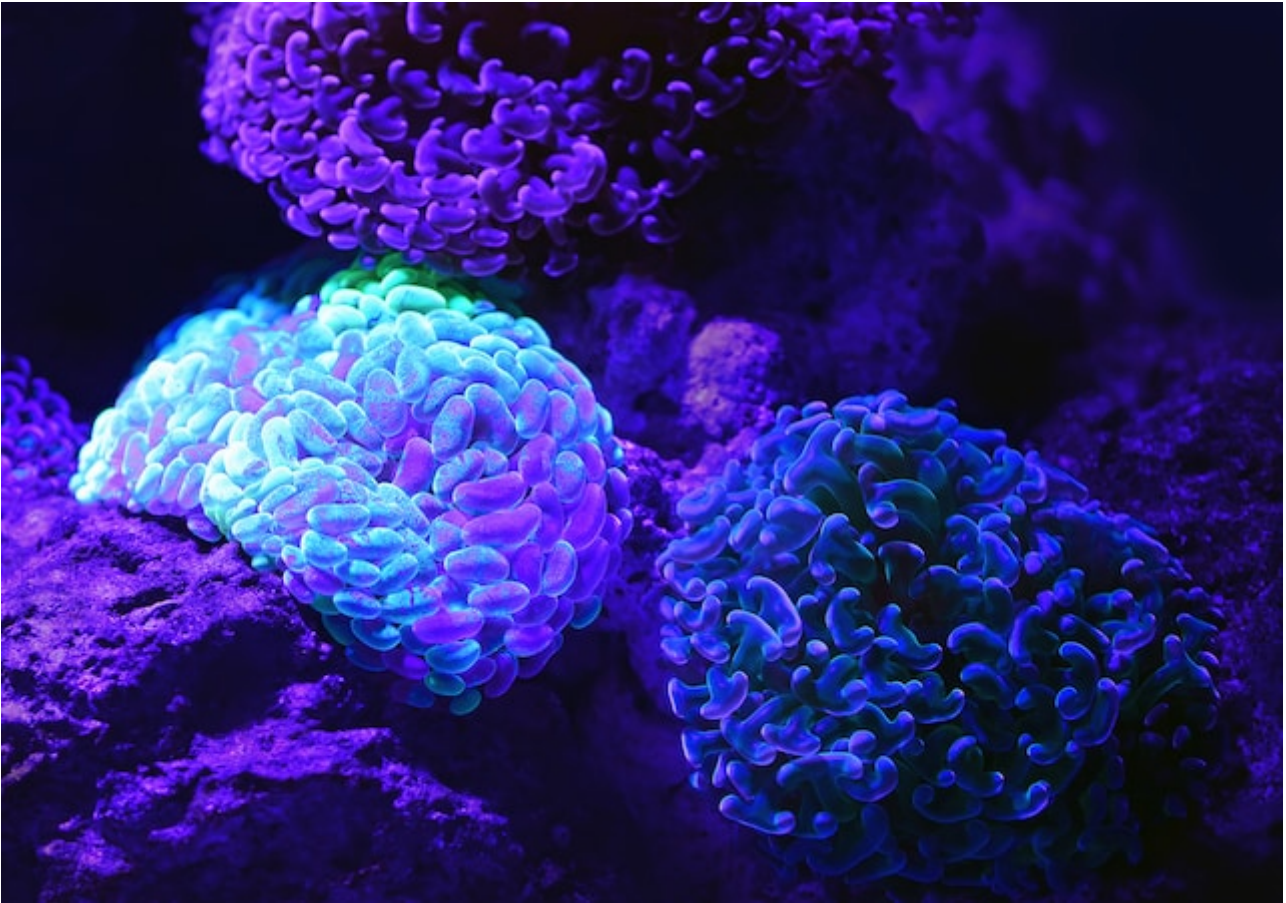


The Gardener's Brain



As you stand amidst the lush, vibrant foliage of a garden, your busy mind settles into the soothing rhythm of the natural world. The rumination stops. You notice the gentle rustling of leaves, the cheerful chorus of birdsong, and the earthy aroma of freshly turned soil. It's in these still moments that you realize there's something profoundly transformative happening inside your mind. This is a phenomenon that we might refer to as "the gardener's brain."

What Is The Gardener's Brain?

"The gardener's brain" is more than just a pretty metaphor. It's actually related to the science of how gardening impacts the brain. [Research](#) has uncovered that activities as seemingly simple as digging, planting, and weeding trigger a cascade of neural responses within the brain.

When gardeners immerse themselves in these tasks, their bodies release a surge of endorphins. These are the body's natural mood elevators, promoting feelings of happiness and well-being. This natural release of endorphins not only enhances mood. It also acts as a potent pain reliever, reducing the perception of discomfort and stress. The gardener's brain, it appears, is itself a garden of sorts – a garden of neurochemical delights.

Neurology and Gardening

Gardening engages various neurological aspects that contribute to its positive impact on mental well-being. Here are some key neurological aspects of gardening:

Endorphin Release

Gardening activities like digging, planting, and weeding stimulate the release of endorphins, which are natural chemicals produced by the brain that help reduce pain and induce feelings of pleasure and relaxation.

Dopamine Production

Engaging in gardening can lead to the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward. This can result in a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when seeing plants thrive.

Stress Reduction

Gardening has been shown to lower cortisol levels, a stress hormone, leading to reduced feelings of anxiety and stress. This reduction in stress hormones can have a calming effect on the brain.

Improved Mood

Spending time in nature and tending to plants can elevate mood by increasing the production of serotonin, a neurotransmitter

linked to feelings of happiness and well-being.

Enhanced Cognitive Function

Gardening involves planning, problem-solving, and attention to detail, which can stimulate cognitive function and help maintain mental sharpness, especially in older adults.

Sensory Stimulation

Gardening engages multiple senses, including touch, smell, sight, and sometimes taste. This sensory stimulation activates different parts of the brain, providing a holistic cognitive experience.

Mindfulness and Meditation

Gardening often encourages mindfulness, promoting a state of focused attention on the present moment. This practice can have a positive impact on the brain's neural pathways associated with stress regulation and emotional control.

Neuroplasticity

Engaging in new gardening tasks and challenges can promote neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to adapt and rewire itself. This adaptability is crucial for learning and memory.

Social Connection

Gardening in a community or with others can activate areas of the brain associated with social bonding and cooperation, fostering a sense of belonging and connection.

Positive Associations

Over time, the brain forms positive associations with the act of gardening, making it a source of pleasure and relaxation, which can lead to long-term mental health benefits.

The Brain Benefits of Digging, Planting and Weeding

Let's take a bit of a closer look at how each of these three stages of gardening affect the gardener's brain in relation to the above.

The Brain Benefits of Digging

Digging, a fundamental gardening activity, offers numerous brain benefits. As the gardener plunges their hands into the soil and wields a spade, the brain's reward system springs into action, releasing dopamine—a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and motivation. This surge of dopamine not only fosters a sense of accomplishment but also reinforces the satisfaction of physically shaping the earth. Additionally, the rhythmic, repetitive nature of digging can induce a meditative state, reducing stress and anxiety while enhancing concentration. This combination of pleasurable stimulation, meditative engagement, and tangible outcomes makes digging a cognitive workout for the brain, improving mood and mental well-being.

The Brain Benefits of Planting

Planting seeds or young plants is a gardening endeavor that brings unique neurological advantages. When gardeners delicately position a seedling into the ground or gently nestle seeds into the soil, they engage fine motor skills and tactile senses, activating areas of the brain associated with touch and spatial awareness. The act of planting also instills a sense of hope and anticipation—a future harvest or a flourishing flowerbed—triggering the release of dopamine, which elevates mood and motivation. Furthermore, the nurturing aspect of planting fosters a deep emotional connection with the growing life, offering a source of ongoing satisfaction and a sense of responsibility. This emotional bond contributes

to a sense of purpose, enhancing overall mental well-being.

The Brain Benefits of Weeding

Weeding, often perceived as a mundane chore, conceals surprising neurological benefits. As gardeners meticulously remove unwanted plants or invasive weeds, they engage in an activity that demands focus and attention to detail. This heightened concentration can lead to a state of mindfulness, where the brain is fully immersed in the task at hand, relieving stress and promoting relaxation. Moreover, the act of weeding provides a tangible sense of progress and control over one's environment, which can boost self-esteem and reduce feelings of powerlessness. In essence, weeding transforms a seemingly routine task into a therapeutic exercise for the brain, offering mental clarity and emotional satisfaction amidst the garden's green tapestry.

Notice Your Changing Gardener's Brain

Since you started gardening, you might have noticed some amazing changes in your brain. You might feel happier and more relaxed when you're in your garden, thanks to all the fresh air and natural beauty around you. You might also find that you're better at focusing and solving problems now, probably because gardening makes you pay close attention to what you're doing. Plus, you've learned to be patient and persistent, just like your plants, which has made you more resilient in other parts of your life. Remember this each time that you head out to the garden. Celebrate all that this hobby does for you.

Read More:

- [The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits](#)
- [Being a Beginner In the Garden](#)
- [13 Gardening Books on My To Be Read Shelf](#)

My Favorite Garden Metaphors



The garden and the things that grow in it provide such great lessons for life. Perhaps that's why there are so many terrific gardening metaphors. By looking at what nature has to teach us, we truly can learn a lot. So, here are some of my favorite garden metaphors and what I love about them.

Life is a Garden and You Are the Gardener

This metaphor beautifully encapsulates a powerful life lesson about personal responsibility, growth, and mindfulness. Just as a garden requires careful tending, planning, and nurturing

to flourish, so does our life. Further thoughts on what we can learn from this idea that [life is a garden](#):

- **Personal Responsibility:** In a garden, every plant's well-being depends on the gardener's attention and care. Similarly, in life, we are responsible for our own growth and happiness. We have the power to make choices, set goals, and take actions that shape our path.
- **Growth and Development:** Gardens need regular care, including watering, weeding, and pruning, for plants to reach their full potential. Likewise, in life, personal growth and development require continuous effort, learning from challenges, and letting go of things that no longer serve us.
- **Patience and Perseverance:** Gardens don't bloom overnight; they need time and patience to bear fruit and flowers. Similarly, in life, achieving our dreams and aspirations often demands perseverance and resilience. It's essential to keep moving forward, even when progress seems slow.
- **Mindfulness and Attention:** Successful gardeners are attentive to their plants, noticing signs of distress, and providing the necessary care. In life, being mindful and present allows us to recognize when we need self-care, prioritize our well-being, and build strong connections with others.
- **Seasons of Change:** Gardens experience cycles of growth, dormancy, and renewal as the seasons change. In life, we, too, go through various stages, facing ups and downs, but like the garden, we can adapt, grow, and evolve as we navigate life's different phases.

Life's Garden is Filled with Seeds of Opportunity

This metaphor likens life to a vast garden filled with seeds

representing various opportunities and possibilities. Just as a garden offers an array of seeds waiting to be sown, life presents us with countless opportunities for growth and success. Further thoughts:

- **Abundance of Choices:** Just as a garden has diverse seeds, life offers us a myriad of choices and paths to explore. We are presented with opportunities for education, career, relationships, personal interests, and more. Embracing this abundance empowers us to make informed decisions that align with our passions and values.
- **Nurture and Cultivation:** Seeds need nurturing, proper care, and the right environment to grow into thriving plants. Similarly, seizing opportunities in life requires dedication, effort, and persistence. By investing time and energy into our pursuits, we can cultivate our potential for success.
- **Timing and Patience:** In a garden, different seeds germinate and grow at their own pace. Similarly, in life, seizing opportunities may require patience and recognizing the right timing for certain endeavors. Understanding that success may not come overnight helps us stay committed and focused.
- **Weeding out Negativity:** Just as weeds can hinder a garden's growth, negativity and self-doubt can impede our progress in life. By recognizing and removing negative thoughts or influences, we create space for positive opportunities and personal growth.
- **Embracing Diversity:** A diverse garden is beautiful and enriching. Similarly, embracing the diversity of opportunities in life allows us to expand our horizons, learn new things, and experience a more fulfilling journey.
- **Harvesting Rewards:** A well-tended garden eventually yields a bountiful harvest. Similarly, taking advantage of life's opportunities and pursuing our dreams can lead

to the fulfillment of our goals and aspirations.

Planting Seeds of Success

This gardening metaphor emphasizes the importance of taking intentional actions and making consistent efforts to achieve success in our endeavors. Here are some key lessons that can be drawn from this metaphor:

1. **Vision and Goals:** Just as a gardener starts with a vision of the garden they want to create, success begins with setting clear and meaningful goals. Identifying what we want to achieve gives us direction and purpose.
2. **Embracing Failure:** Not every seed will grow into a plant, and not every attempt will lead to immediate success. Embracing failure as part of the growth process allows us to learn, adapt, and improve on our journey to success.
3. **Cultivating Skills and Knowledge:** A gardener may need to learn about various plant species and gardening techniques. Similarly, acquiring new skills and knowledge relevant to our goals enhances our capabilities and chances of success.
4. **Creating the Right Environment:** Just as certain plants thrive in specific conditions, success may require creating an environment that supports our growth and development. Surrounding ourselves with supportive people and a positive atmosphere can be beneficial.
5. **Consistency and Daily Actions:** Success often comes from consistent daily actions and habits. Like watering and caring for a garden regularly, consistent efforts contribute to steady progress and growth.
6. **Adaptability and Flexibility:** Gardeners adjust their strategies based on weather and other conditions. Similarly, being adaptable and flexible in our approach allows us to navigate changes and challenges on the path to success.

7. **Celebrating Progress:** As plants grow, gardeners take joy in their progress. Likewise, celebrating small milestones and achievements motivates us to keep moving forward and maintain a positive outlook.

Harvesting the Fruits of Our Labor

This conveys the idea of reaping the rewards and benefits of hard work, dedication, and perseverance. Just as a farmer collects the fruits of their labor during harvest time, we too can experience the gratification of our efforts in various aspects of life. Here are some essential lessons from this metaphor:

- **Delayed Gratification:** Like crops that take time to mature, achieving significant accomplishments may require patience and delayed gratification. Understanding that results might not be immediate encourages us to stay committed to our endeavors.
- **Effort and Investment:** Farmers invest time, resources, and energy in their fields, and in life, hard work and effort are necessary to yield meaningful results. The more we invest, the more we stand to gain.
- **Joy in the Harvest:** Harvest time is a moment of celebration for farmers. In life, reaching milestones and achieving our goals brings a sense of fulfillment, joy, and pride in what we have accomplished.
- **Reaping What We Sow:** The quality of the harvest depends on the care given during planting and cultivation. In life, the outcomes we experience are often a reflection of the choices and actions we make along the way.
- **Gratitude and Abundance:** Harvest time is a time of abundance, and it reminds us to be grateful for what we have achieved. Practicing gratitude for our successes enhances our overall sense of contentment and fulfillment.
- **Renewal and Planning:** After harvest, farmers plan for

the next planting season. In life, success should be seen as part of an ongoing journey, encouraging us to set new goals and continue our pursuit of growth and improvement.

You may notice that a lot of these lessons are themselves metaphors related to gardening: reaping what we sow, harvesting rewards, cultivating gratitude ... turn to your garden to see what life lessons it has to teach you!

Read More:

- [Playlist: Best Songs About Gardens](#)
- [Gardening for Mental Health](#)
- [Being a Beginner in the Garden](#)

Playlist: Best Songs About Gardens



I have been known to pick really random themes and make music playlists around them. One of my favorites is a playlist of songs about rain. Fire, sleep, and “bang bang” are a few other themes. It’s easy to find songs about nature. However, what about songs that are specifically about gardens? Here are the songs that I would put on a garden songs playlist:

“Garden Song” or “Inch by Inch”

This is a folk song written by David Mallett. It’s been covered by many famous folk singers. However, the most popular version is John Denver’s. It really is just about life in a garden ... and how that’s a metaphor for all working together to make the Earth a better place.

“The Garden Song” has become an [anthem for gardeners](#) and nature lovers alike, inspiring a sense of connection to the Earth and a desire to cultivate and nurture life. Its positive message and engaging melody have made it a beloved and enduring song in the realm of gardening and environmental awareness.

Favorite Lines:

*"Pullin' weeds and pickin' stones
Man is made of dreams and bones
Feel the need to grow my own"*

"The Garden Rules" by Snow Patrol

This song is about childhood and innocence and first love, reflected in storytelling about playing games in the garden as kids.

Favorite Lines:

*"You would call the garden rules out like commands
And we would all obey
But you'd stifle giddy laughter as you spoke
And puncture the pretend
Then we would chase our tails, until the sun forgot to
shine
And our parents called our names, 'til just you and I were
left"*

Van Morrison's "In The Garden"

"In the Garden" is a track from Van Morrison's 1986 album, "No Guru, No Method, No Teacher." The song is a contemplative and spiritual piece that reflects Morrison's interest in mystical themes. The lyrics evoke a sense of personal transformation and the desire to find solace and connection in a garden setting. It's about finding meaning in life and reflects that tuning in to nature, and to oneself through connection to nature, is part of that process.

Favorite Lines:

"No guru, no method, no teacher"

*Just you and I and nature
And the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost
In the garden wet with rain"*

"Garden" by Nahko and Medicine for the People

This is another song reflecting the spiritual essence and power of nature. The singer describes the song [in an interview](#):

"When I'm alone, I am surrounded...by nature, my ancestors, and Creation. We are never truly alone. Look deep within, above and below. That's what gets addressed in this song. It takes time, nurturing, and patience to turn the stones, or even the soil, that has been there since we were children. It takes courage to tend the garden of your body, mind, and soul."

"Safe in My Garden" by The Mamas and The Papas

This song contrasts the safety of a bucolic peaceful garden with the turmoil of the 1960's wartime and civil unrest. On the one hand, the singer is "safe in my garden" where "an ancient flower blooms." On the other hand:

*"When you go out in the street
So many hassles with the heat
No one there can fill your desire
Cops out with the megaphones
Telling people stay inside their home
Man, can't they see the world's on fire"*

It makes you want to find the peace of the garden again. But also safety is a privilege and activism is important, so

there's this contrast of what to do.

“The Garden” by Rush

This song uses the metaphor of a garden to convey its deeper philosophical message. The garden represents life itself, with all its complexities, choices, and experiences. Like a garden that requires nurturing, tending, and cultivation, the song suggests that life is a journey of personal growth and self-discovery. It encourages individuals to embrace the challenges and opportunities that come their way, much like tending a garden and watching it flourish.

Gardens can be tranquil spaces for reflection and contemplation, and the song evokes a sense of introspection. It prompts listeners to reflect on the meaning of their own lives, the choices they've made, and the lessons they've learned. It's a song that is [driven by the melody](#), and this lends itself well to that sense of introspection.

Favorite Lyrics:

*“In the fullness of time
A garden to nurture and protect
In the rise and the set of the sun
'Til the stars go spinning
Spinning 'round the night
Oh, it is what it is and forever
Each moment a memory in flight”*

“Garden Kisses” by Giveon

There are several songs that use the garden as a metaphor for love/sexuality. There are a lot of garden metaphors about women's sexuality. This incorporates some of those. Think “forbidden fruit” references. It's a sensual song.

Favorite Lines:

"Please sprout up for me

Your tulips are my fate."

"Secret Garden" by Madonna

This is another sensual song, in which the secret garden refers to the singer's sexuality and pleasure. I include it because it has some great garden metaphors. Additionally, it's one of my favorite songs on the list. It comes from her Erotica album. The chorus is:

*"A petal that isn't torn
A heart that will not harden
A place that I can be born
In my secret garden
A rose without a thorn
A lover without scorn"*

"Garden Party" by Ricky Nelson

This isn't really about gardening. It's about Nelson's musical career and the people he encountered with it. However, it is set in a "garden party." This actually references Madison Square Garden. The song is based on a 1970's concert there. However, I love picturing it as a party in an actual garden with Yoko and Dylan and Mary Lou. It's just a fun fantasy. And a catchy little song.

Favorite Lines:

*"People came from miles around
Everyone was there
Yoko brought her walrus
There was magic in the air
And over in the corner*

*Much to my surprise
Mr Hughes hid in Dylan's shoes
Wearing his disguise"*

What are your favorite garden songs? Tell me the ones I don't know about yet!

Read More:

- [Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness](#)
 - [10 Best Gardening Podcasts](#)
 - [The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits](#)
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The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits



My two biggest passions in life are art and mental health. Gardening is an art form. Also, gardening has many mental health benefits. I was curious to do some research into the best plants for mental health benefits. Of course, this will vary from person to person. Nevertheless, there are some plants commonly considered beneficial in this way.

Plants and Mental Health

[Keeping plants improves mental health](#) according to numerous studies and personal anecdotes. Potential benefits include:

- Reduces stress
- Reduces loneliness
- Improves mood
- Creates routine and structure
- Improves cognitive function as well as creativity
- Enhances self-esteem
- Improves sleep

Notably, of course, this will vary from person to person. I'd argue that keeping plants can help most people's mental health but that what this looks like for each person will vary. For example, if you have severe depression, then it can be really challenging to get the motivation to water every day. Going out to your garden each day can help ease the depression. And yet, if you can't keep up with it and your plants die, that can make you feel worse. As someone who lives with recurring depression, I understand that there's a fine line. So for people like me, keeping fewer plants that require less care can be a good solution.

The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits

The plants that people prefer are also very individual, of course. Some people feel best when growing healthy vegetables

that they can eat. Others thrive with lots of very colorful flowers around. You'll know – and continue to discover – what is right for you. That said, there are some plants that are [widely considered](#) the best plants for mental health benefits. Here are some common examples:

Lavender

Lavender is known for its calming and relaxing properties. It has been shown to lower heart rate, blood pressure, and levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Lavender also has a soothing scent that can help to promote better sleep. Personally, I use lavender essential oil in my diffuser every night. I also use lavender spray on my bedding. Natural lavender growing in a garden would likely be even better.

Jasmine

Jasmine has a sweet, floral scent that has been shown to reduce anxiety and promote relaxation. Like lavender, it can also help to improve sleep quality. Moreover, it's been shown to reduce symptoms of depression. If you're looking for an all-over "feel good" plant for mental health benefits, jasmine is one good choice.

Aloe Vera

Aloe Vera is a low-maintenance plant that can help to purify the air and remove toxins. It can also help to reduce stress and promote relaxation. In fact, aloe vera has natural sedative properties that can help to reduce stress and anxiety, improve sleep, and boost mood. Therefore, this is a really great indoor plant for both physical and mental health.

Peace Lily

Just the name tells you that this plant might have mental health benefits. Similar to aloe vera, the Peace Lily is

another plant that can help to purify the air and remove toxins. Moreover, the plant contains compounds that can help to promote relaxation and improve mood. It is easy to care for and can thrive in a variety of environments, making it a great choice for those looking to improve their health without taxing their energy.

Snake Plant

The Snake Plant is yet another low-maintenance plant that can help to purify the air and remove toxins. The plant releases oxygen at night, which can help to create a more restful sleep environment. Additionally, it is known for its hardiness and ability to thrive in a variety of environments, so it's a versatile option in terms of plants for mental health.

Spider Plant

Similar to the Snake Plant, the Spider Plant is a low-maintenance plant that purifies the air. While the Snake Plant is particular good at cleaning the air at night, the Spider Plant provides overall toxin clearing. A room with both of these should have nice clean air, making it easier to breathe and rest. This is always good for our mental health!

Rosemary

There are several great herbs that you can grow to promote mental health. Rosemary is a great example. The scent of rosemary has been found to stimulate the brain, which can improve cognitive function. Many mental health conditions affect concentration and memory. Rosemary can help with that! And yet, even while it boosts mood, it's also a calming plant.

Moreover, you can, of course, consume the rosemary that you grow. This has many physical and mental health benefits. Reducing inflammation and improving immune system function are two of the biggest benefits. This helps both the body and the

mind.

Basil

Basil is another herb that can help to improve memory and concentration. It also has a calming effect and can help to reduce stress and promote relaxation. Moreover, it has cardiovascular benefits. Plants that support your overall health are good for your mental health. After all, mental health is health, as they say!

Sunflowers

Personally, I find it hard to be unhappy when looking at a sunflower. Of course, in the throes of depression, it's hard to recognize that beauty. Nevertheless, I've found that the little things do help with my baseline mood. Sunflowers are mood-boosting flowers. Their bright yellow color and large size make them a joy to look at. Plus, their association with sunshine and warmth can have a positive impact on mood.

Marigolds

These are also great flowers for mental health benefits. Their vibrant colors and easy care make them a popular choice for gardeners and flower enthusiasts. The bright colors are great mood boosters. And yet since they're easy to take care of, you run less risk of low self-esteem from times when you lack the energy to provide full care.

Chamomile

This is another flower that is relatively easy to grow and care for. Chamomile is especially known for its ability to promote sleep and reduce insomnia. After all, haven't you ever been offered chamomile tea to sleep? You can make tea with the plant in your garden or just reap the mental health benefits of tending to it.

Read More:

- [6 Health Benefits of Gardening](#)
 - [5 Ways Healthy Gardens Help the Planet](#)
 - [Being a Beginner in the Garden](#)
 - [Choosing a Bed: Sleep Number vs Tempurpedic](#)
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13 Gardening Books on My To Be Read Shelf



I love my local library. In fact, I get pleasure not just from going to the library and reading the books I get there but also from the process of looking through their catalog regularly and adding books to my “for later shelf.” There’s something satisfying about even just learning about which

books are out there that I might get to read someday. So, I thought that I'd head over to my virtual bookshelf and let you know about 13 gardening books currently waiting there for me.

13 Gardening Books on My To Be Read Shelf

There are actually more than two dozen gardening books on my SFPL "For Later" shelf. However, here are the top thirteen on my list:

1. The Climate Change Garden by Sally Morgan

Subtitled "Down to Earth Advice for Growing a Resilient Garden," this book seems like a must-read for gardeners in our times. Soils are eroding, rainfall is unpredictable, and plants are blooming earlier or being damaged by pests.

This book provides techniques, practices, and equipment that can be used to adapt gardens to climate extremes and protect them against exotic pests and invasive weeds. It covers topics such as adapting plant selections, using season extenders, reducing a garden's carbon footprint, and planting more of the right trees for a future climate.

The aim is to create a low-maintenance, climate-savvy garden that can withstand the effects of a changing climate.

2. To Stand and Stare by Andrew Timothy O'Brien

The subtitle of this one pretty much sums up what interests me about it: "How to Garden While Doing Next to Nothing." Honestly, I'm a bit lazy about active things. I'm the kind of person who goes to the yoga studio primarily for the restorative yoga class. So, this book feels right up my alley.

3. The Joy of Gardening: the Everyday Zen of Mowing the Lawn by Ellen Mary

With a background in integral psychology, I am a proponent of the [benefits of mindfulness](#). I have a busy mind and I don't always practice what I preach. However, I regularly read books that remind me to get back in touch with the slower side of life. I like books that teach me again how to "be here now." This one looks like a must read for me.

4. Growing Joy by Maria Failla

This one's subtitle is "The Plant Lover's Guide to Cultivating Happiness (and Plants)." How I love the idea of growing joy! This one was written by the host of the Bloom and Grow Radio podcast. It also seems to look at the mindfulness benefits of gardening.

5. Creating a Garden Retreat: An Artist's Guide to Planting An Outdoor Sanctuary by Virginia Johnson

Virginia Johnson shares her personal garden journey, from a small city lot to a beautiful and welcoming oasis. Her garden is wild and carefree, with hornbeams, peonies, hollyhocks, roses, and hydrangeas. Johnson explains her process with ease and clarity, bringing her ideas to life through words and illustrations. The book is organized into clear chapters about trees, flowers, seasons, and more. It sounds so inspiring!

6. The Philosophy of Gardening by Karen Caruana

This one doesn't actually have a very extensive description on the library website. In fact, all it says is, "A collection of essays about different gardening philosophies and practices, mostly from a German point of view." However, that's enough to

pique my interest. I am so curious to see what is inside those pages!

7. The Regenerative Garden by Stephanie Rose

This one's subtitle helps explain what it is all about: "80 Practical Projects for Creating a Self-sustaining Garden Ecosystem."

A healthy, organic, regenerative garden is a self-sustaining ecosystem where everything works together. The goal of permaculture is to turn your garden into a functioning ecosystem that is less reliant on external resources and can sustain itself through many seasons.

The book's projects cover six living elements of the garden: soil, water, plants, climate, ethics, and community. They reduce workload, conserve water and other resources, and create a habitat for wildlife. Projects include intensive planting, living mulches, self-watering planters, rain gardens, and compost systems.

8. Native Plant Gardening for Birds, Bees & Butterflies. Northern California by George Oxford Miller

I live in Northern California so this one makes a lot of practical sense for me. Plus, I love butterflies. I like birds. And I know that bees are important. A friend of mine has a garden here that is a [Certified Wildlife Habitat](#). I imagine that this book has tips along the lines of what she incorporated in her amazing space.

9. Grow More Food by Colin McCrate

My sister is the biggest gardener in my life. She prefers only to grow edibles. So, this book, subtitled "Vegetable

Gardener's Guide to Getting the Biggest Harvest Possible From a Space of Any Size," seems right up her alley.

10. No-dig Gardening: Raised Beds, Layered Gardens, and Other No-till Techniques by Bella Line

The book says that it teaches you everything you need to know in order to start and care for a kitchen garden. No-dig gardening is better for the environment, easier on your back, and can produce an abundance of vegetables, herbs, and flowers. So, it's worth reading about, right?

11. The Elegant & Edible Garden by Linda Vater

As you might notice, I'm often enticed by the title and subtitle of a book. The subtitle of this one is: "Design a Dream Kitchen Garden to Fit Your Personality, Desires, and Lifestyle." That just captures my imagination!

12. Striking Succulent Gardens: Plants and Plans for Designing Your Low-maintenance Landscape by Gabriel Frank

I love succulents. I'm originally from the Arizona desert, so naturally I find myself drawn to cacti and succulents of all kinds. Also, they're easier to grow than many other plants. Since I'm not really great with plants, that's best for me. I think that even if I don't learn a lot from this, I'd love just looking at the images inside!

13. Garden for the Senses by Kendra Wilson

Subtitled "How Your Garden Can Soothe Your Mind and Awaken Your Soul," this one intrigues me because of the mental health benefits of gardening and plants.

Do you read gardening books? Any that you recommend me to add to my virtual To Be Read shelf?

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- [A Garden to Dye For Book Review](#)
 - [7 Free Gardening eBooks You Can Download Now](#)
 - [Gardens, Books, and Legacies](#)
-

5 Things I Learned About Gardening in 2022



I am happy to be back here on this blog with all of you who are interested in frugal gardening. I had taken a break due to health issues and a loss in the family throughout much of

2022. Luckily, a colleague was able to step in. It looks like they provided you with a lot of wonderful tips and information while I was gone. Now that I am back, I have been doing a lot of thinking about what I would most like to share with you in the months to come. In order to get into that, I think the best thing to do is to look back at 2022 and see what I learned. Here are the top five things I learned about gardening in 2022.

1. Plants Are Very Personal Gifts

I suppose that this is something that I already knew. However, I had many opportunities to think about just how personal plants are throughout 2022. As aforementioned, it was a year filled with illness and loss. As a result, many people wanted to reach out with their condolences. I received many wonderful handwritten cards. Moreover, I received practical help and emotional support. I didn't receive a lot of gifts, and I didn't receive any plants. And I am happy it was that way. Looking back now, though, I am a little surprised by this.

In my mind, it's so common for people to show up with flowers when they want to express sympathy. Or when visiting your home. And yet, I realized, people actually don't ever bring me flowers. This got me thinking – is that an old-fashioned idea? Do my people just not think of that as a gift because it's not their love language or do they know it's not mine? Mine is words and I receive cards, so that could be.

Recently, I read a memoir called "Where You End and I Begin." The mother in the memoir has a lot of rules that people in her life find unconventional. One of them is that you don't bring cut flowers to someone's home because it creates work for the hostess. However, she liked to receive potted plants. To me, that requires a lot more ongoing work! And yet, I can see the point. So, what I learned – or what I have been musing on recently – is how personal the giving and receiving of plants

is.

2. Plants That Are Best For Sympathy and Grief

Since I was on this topic, I started wondering what plants people do choose to give if they offer them to someone who is grieving. I learned that there are many different [sympathy plants](#) each with its own meaning. For example, gladioli represent strength. Hyacinths represent sorrow.

Since plants are indeed so personal, I don't know whether or not you want to gift one to someone who is grieving. For me, though, what I found was that perhaps I could do some intentional plant shopping in order to find plants that represent the specific stage of grief that I'm in. I learned that palms represent protection, which is something that sounds nice to have during a challenging time. The plant I selected most recently, however, is a very small orchid.

I have never kept orchids because they are known to be such finicky plants. However, I was very drawn to one, so I decided to get it for myself. And only afterward did I do some research and discover that orchids have many different meanings but one is eternal love for someone who has passed away. That feels so meaningful for me right now.

3. Best Crystals for the Garden

Although I find crystals to be pretty, I have never been particularly "into" crystals. In other words, I don't carry them around or add them to an altar in order to manifest the energy that I need in my life. And yet, recently, I also find myself drawn to them. Do they have inherent natural energy? Maybe, maybe not. It sure can't hurt to learn more about them and choose ones that could offer what I'm seeking, could it?

In that vein, I started learning about [crystals that are popular for gardens](#). I will write about this in more detail in the future. The gist is that each one has a certain meaning and is good for certain types of energy. Some that are great for gardens include clear quartz and chrysocolla to promote growth, amazonite to protect against toxins in the soil and air, and black tourmaline as a protective border around a garden. It's an intriguing new approach to adding different colors, textures, and energies to a garden space that I am excited to learn just a little bit more about.

4. Best Plants for Natural Plant Dyeing

I shared some of this with you in my early explorations. I have continued to explore this facet of gardening. In other words, I am very interested in growing plants for the purpose of dyeing fabric and, more specifically, organic cotton yarn. Additionally, I am interested in foraging for natural plants that are good for dyeing. To be honest, this is something that I've pursued wholeheartedly. However, thinking about doing so has been a beautiful way to enhance my daily life. And I hope to actively engage with this more in this fresh new year.

5. Plant and Gardening Podcasts

There is no substitute for first-hand experience. However, when I wasn't home to take care of plants, or there wasn't a garden nearby for me to enjoy, I found that books, documentaries, and podcasts made great additions to my life. Did you know there are lots of good podcasts about plants and gardening? I'll do a full post on this soon. To get you started, though, you might want to check out "The Simple Garden Life," "Garden Culture," and "Roots and Refuge." If you have any other recommendations, I'd love to know what they are!

You Might Also Like:

- [Being a Beginner in the Garden](#)
 - [5 Ways Depression Costs Me In the Garden](#)
 - [6 Tips to Revive Wilted Plants in the Garden](#)
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Being a Beginner in the Garden



I've admitted to you in the past that I honestly have a bit of a [brown thumb](#). During periods of [depression](#), this can make me feel like I will never be able to grow a plant ever again. However, most of the time, I'm able to turn off that kind of thinking. I'm able to embrace the beauty of being a beginner at something. It's okay to be a beginner. And it's okay to always be an amateur at something. In fact, I think it can be

a really beautiful thing.

Being a Beginner Is Hard For Me

It's taken me a long time to learn how to NOT be good at things. Obviously, I don't mean that I'm naturally good at everything I try. Far from it. However, historically, I give up really easily at things I'm not immediately good at. School was always easy for me, so I pushed forward in that and excelled. Flute lessons and athletics were hard for me; I quit or didn't even begin.

Learning How to Learn

Over time (I'm in my forties now!), I've learned how to embrace being a beginner. It started in school. It took me a really long time to comprehend the idea that school was a place for me to learn things, not to be automatically good at them. Since I had fit so well into traditional school growing up, it all came easily to me. I never realized I was there to learn hard things. Honestly, I didn't learn a whole lot from my Bachelors' degree either. I did the work, got the grades, moved on.

However, grad school was hard. I got my MA in Psychology. The school work wasn't hard at all. The papers and tests came easily to me. However, the actual experience of pushing myself and learning and growing and being part of a complex group dynamic was really, really hard for me. And I did it. And I'm prouder of that than of any grade I ever got.

The Beauty of Being a Beginner

I've finally learned about how great it is to NOT know something but to want to learn it. I've learned that it's not only normal and okay to mistakes; it's great. Here are some of the reasons that it's beautiful to be a beginner, in gardening

or any other pursuit:

- The pressure is off. You don't have to do this perfectly because YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW YET.
- The excitement is high. There is so much ahead to learn!
- You don't have preconceived notions. Or you do but you can let them go. Thus, you're more present in the experience.
- [Hope, possibility, openness, curiosity](#) ... these are all things that it's possible to bring to the garden as a beginner. And you can bring this beginner's mind to the garden even if you've been gardening for a really long time.
- The rewards feel huge! I feel good when I complete something I'm good at, of course. But I feel amazing when I succeed at something I'm not good at, yet!

So, I think it's wonderful to be a beginner in the garden. I think it's wonderful to stay an amateur. After all, I don't plan to do any professional gardening. Therefore, I'll never have to worry about striving for perfection, layering business over the hobby, etc. I have other things for that. A garden can just be a place to play.

What are your thoughts on being a beginner? Is it hard for you? Easy and exciting? Both?

Read More:

- [Quotes About the Benefits Of Gardening](#)
- [Pine Street Garden, San Francisco](#)
- [Could I Make Money With Worm Farming?](#)