



# *More Garden Dirt*

*Great garden tips from Living Landscapes!*

## Reap the Rewards of Making Your Garden Your Own

Those of us who are caught up with work and child rearing appreciate any relief from the mayhem. Luckily, as gardeners we can find an oasis of peace, or at least a mini-vacation, right in our own backyards. During this busy period of our lives, it's tough to find time for more than basic lawn care and summer annual and fall mum plantings. While basic gardening does enhance our lives by brightening our homes and getting us out into the sun and fresh air a bit, investing more time and attention brings even greater rewards.

Growing vegetables requires more effort than annuals, but vegetable gardeners derive great satisfaction from growing the freshest and most delicious food available for their tables. Flower gardeners find perennials, with their glorious range of scent and color, to be endlessly rewarding. Some gardeners work to attract wildlife by providing safe places for creatures to rest, root and feed. One reward of wildlife gardening is the gift of watching those birds, bees and butterflies flourish.

Beyond these tangible rewards, gardening can affect us in more subtle ways. As we plant, dig, water and weed, we experience the stress-reducing benefits of gentle exercise such as lowered blood pressure and mental and physical relaxation. While digging, bending and pulling, we also improve our strength and flexibility. Through gardening, we can find a means of creative self-expression. People often observe that gardening and landscaping are like painting in three dimensions. Some gardeners feel a spiritual benefit from time spent in the garden. They speak of gardening as meditation and find that it offers the time and space to take a mental and emotional vacation – an opportunity to think of nothing more than which weeds to pounce upon or where to best show-off those new purple asters. Sometimes, it's during these simple relaxed moments that we can finally reflect upon events that may have passed too swiftly to absorb in the moment.

So, beyond lawn care and petunia planting, we can think of gardening as a way to strengthen our bodies, deepen our senses and create a place of peaceful sanctuary at home. Gardening for its spiritual benefits can be as simple as taking the time to feel the sun warm your skin and the wind cool it, to appreciate the strength of



Reap the Rewards continued –

of spider silk and the fragility of dragonfly wings, to smell damp soil, freshly pulled weeds and pungent fertilizers, as well as the scent of flowers – or it can be as formal as employing the ancient principles of feng shui to design your garden.

One thing is certain, the more of yourself you put into the garden, the more of yourself you'll discover there. Choose to grow plants that appeal to you. If your neighbor grows beautiful azaleas that's great, but if you love peonies, then growing peonies is what will make your heart sing. And while you find a spot in your garden for your favorite plants, tuck in a few of your favorite treasures too. You might incorporate gathered things like seashells, beach glass, sand dollars, starfish, driftwood, bird's nests and pretty pebbles. You can add little surprises like winsome figures, plaques, pottery, old tools, utensils, furniture and mirrors – whatever makes you smile.

Add soothing sounds to your garden with wind chimes or pipes, a trickle of water, or simply your awareness of wind moving through the leaves and grasses. Most important, make your garden a place to relax. A hammock, boulder, bench, tree stump or any seat will do just as long as it invites you out into the garden, your own patch of heaven on earth, to look and listen, to linger and enjoy.