

Lessons From the Garden

By Kimberly S. Brown

I have been blessed with a love of growing things. It gives me great pleasure and satisfaction to plant, tend, harvest, and enjoy the fruits of my labor. Gardens, specifically vegetable gardens, are great teachers for life if you understand the lessons they produce along with your crops. Fortunately, there were women and men in my life who guided me in some of these lessons, even though it might have taken years before I understood the correlation between what was taught, and what I was supposed to learn.

For example: My dad's mother Mamaw always raised a huge garden, then the women in the family would go down for harvest and canning. The resulting Mason jars of green beans would be distributed to enjoy through the winter. We didn't do this from necessity as she had been forced to do while raising four kids in Eastern Kentucky during the Great Depression and in World War II when everything you could do to feed yourself was done. (When I later raised my own garden, my kids learned early in life the difference in "home canned" and store bought, and knew which was better.)

One summer as a 12-year-old, I went with my mother and two aunts to Franklin, N.C., to help pick and snap the beans. The adults did the hot and sometimes dangerous canning. Most years the beans were White Half-Runners, so you had to be careful to string them well or you'd be eating strings all winter. (Lesson One: A job not done well often results in your own dissatisfaction later.)

My grandmother sent us into the lower patch of beans, and we were disappointed. The beans had many bug bites and spots on them, requiring lots of careful picking, paring away, and time to sort the good from the bad. It took a couple of long days to get through that patch and have those beans finally sealed in jars waiting for winter eating. There was probably half the number of jars that would have come from a patch that size had the beans been good.

The next morning Mamaw sent us up to another patch. We steeled ourselves for more days of hard labor. Much to our surprise, here were beautiful White Half-Runners,

not a blemish or spot on them. You can imagine how we all felt after slaving away for two days on the blemished beans!

Why did we waste our time on the bad beans when there was another patch full of perfect beans?

Mamaw said if we had worked in the good beans first, we wouldn't have wanted to work as hard in the bad beans and wouldn't have gotten as many canned. And, she added, the bad beans made us appreciate the good beans.

Lessons from the Garden is a book to help you think about life, and hopefully live it a little fuller and with more flavor and variety. You don't actually have to plant, grow, and harvest to understand the lessons a garden can teach you. But who knows, by putting a few of these lesson to work, you might end up enjoying the fruits of your labor a little more each day.