

The Environment



Summer 2009

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Backache, Beets & Butterflies

by Jackie O'Hara

ONE WOMAN'S JOURNAL OF BECOMING
A GARDENER



Jackie waters the plants in her Brewster Garden Plot

"What if my garden is a failure?" This worry comes and goes as I begin this new adventure in my life.

I have a heritage of gardening - both my parents have green thumbs. When I was growing up, my father took care of a large vegetable garden for our family of eight. My mother, an excellent cook, created many delicious meals with our vegetables. She canned some of the crop and made pickles and relishes each Fall.

My mother also created beautiful flower gardens, a hobby that my oldest sister inherited and became proficient at. For a long time I had no interest in any of this. I preferred to look at plants "in the wild" rather than cultivate them myself. In fact, most of the things I tried to grow would suffer and slowly die. It came as a great surprise when I began to think about gardening, a few years ago.

Eager to have healthy food for my family finally led to a strong desire to start that first vegetable garden. Selling one home and moving to another, however, put the garden project on hold. Finally, when we were all moved in and I was left with no more excuses, the vision of my garden began to grow.

At first, it began with the back yard vegetable plot. My husband, who is very handy, built a raised and enclosed garden bed last year. We bought all of the plants, except the lettuce, the only one I was inspired to plant by seed. Several things conspired to make a mediocre season - early wet weather, untested soil and beginner's limited knowledge.

Undaunted, I did research this past winter.

Now my vision includes the backyard vegetable plot, a berry garden with blueberries, strawberries and raspberries, an herb garden, a butterfly garden, rose garden and shade garden. With my wonderful husband's help, so far most of these gardens are underway, but doing it all in one season has put the pressure on.

I realize that I now have a new passion. Like other passions, it can sometimes border on obsession. I find myself thinking about my plants, researching and talking about them. If I am anywhere near plants for sale, I seem to be buying them. This may or may not be a good thing, depending on my budget. I know many gardeners who have been through this. My sister has mentioned to me, several times, how she "steals" seeds when visiting gardens. Now I am thinking about it too.

I am excited to have obtained a 20 x 20 plot in the Brewster Community Gardens. This plot will be a place for our family of four to grow lots of vegetables, cutting flowers, sunflowers and big pumpkins.



Tomatoes, Peppers & Mint wait to be Planted

Along with the vegetables, I am hoping to have some "community" time with my family. I made a deal with my two teenage boys - if they help their father and I, for one day, to get the plot ready for the seedlings we'd started in April, they wouldn't be required to do anything else all summer. We really needed their muscles to get the job done.

The four of us worked all day, tilling and weeding. My sons never complained. By the end of the day we were all exhausted, dirty and covered in ticks. But then I began to visualize again: the beets, carrots, zucchini, squash, corn, peppers, tomatoes, radishes, and so on.

My sons have mentioned that they will continue to help in our gardens throughout the summer. I can't wait to get those plants and seeds in the ground. I probably should have done it today, but I have to go finish the butterfly garden.

Jackie O'Hara is a Montessori early childhood teacher.

In addition to gardening she loves to write. Jackie hopes to find time between the weeding and harvesting to contribute an article about teaching yoga to children in the Fall.

Jackie lives in Brewster with her husband and two teenage sons, and their black lab, Ella.



Katie O'Sullivan's Tomato crop Summer 2008

Planning your Vegetable Garden

Plant in beds rather than rows

Keep beds small enough to weed & harvest without stepping on them

Raise beds 8 - 12 inches to improve drainage & keep soil warm in cold spells

Plant flowers with herbs & vegetables to create functional yet attractive gardens

Plant companion vegetables

Give your gardens plenty of sunlight

Practice consistent watering - use a soaker hose for larger gardens

Rotate your crops on a four year plan

Time the planting of your crops with harvesting in mind - plant crops that are ready to eat at different times of the season so you can enjoy your fresh vegetables all summer long

