

BEING A GARDENER THE GARDEN AND INNER WORK

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"La Mortella Gardens – Ischia – Detail of the lower fountain"

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As the sun rises behind the hill, a fresh and gentle breeze brushes against my face, with the promise of becoming milder as the day unfolds. The song of birds—bluetits, blackbirds, sparrows, robins — tinkles through the crisp morning air, a shimmer of sound that announces the daily return of light: dawn. In this place, I feel safe, protected, at ease. I take a deep breath and slow my steps.

I observe the light, the colors, the sounds, the scents: the blades of grass, still kissed by dew; the flowers I have planted with care over the years, returning like old friends to bloom once more and mark the passing seasons; the wise, steady presence of the trees. I smile — a smile that soothes, quiets the mind—and for a moment, it's just me and my garden.

As my gaze travels across every part of the garden — the soil, which I know well, yet never ceases to amaze; the plants (chosen); the weeds (to be tended); the corners (to be cleared); the structural plants (to be pruned at the right time) — I find myself reflecting on the garden as a possible mirror of ourselves, in all our parts: from the most visible and evident to those that are more hidden, working quite literally “underground”.

I love gardening without gloves because the contact with the soil, the scent of humus, the feel of branches and petals, the fragrances of flowers and herbs make me truly involved, not just a mere spectator. It is a kind of work I gladly embrace, one that frees the mind and offers new perspectives. Gardening itself, from preparing the soil,

to sowing, to minding, and finally to the satisfaction of its realization, can reflect our ongoing inner work.

The soil is where nature is born, literally the “fertile ground” from which growth and evolution emerge. Every experienced gardener or farmer knows that when you want to plant anything, you must first understand the soil: is it moist? Dry? Heavy? Loose? Rich in nutrients? Exhausted? Beginners often make the mistake of moving straight to sowing or planting, eager for results, without the knowledge or experience needed to understand whether the soil is suitable (as well as the necessary light, humidity, and temperature — the surrounding environment).

They take a risk, full of trust and good intentions, but not an informed one. It is possible, despite this, to be fortunate enough to see things grow as hoped, but the opposite may also be true.

The soil holds many properties that science is only now beginning to understand more deeply. It is a fundamental ecosystem, a subterranean life, organic matter in constant evolution, serving future growth. The soil must be prepared, nourished. Neglected or exploited soil risks yielding very “few fruits,” certainly fewer than a healthy one could.

In the same way, when we approach inner work, knowledge begins from the basics.

*We might think of the soil as a
metaphor for the unconscious,
at all levels.*

Materials buried, broken down, and reworked by insects and microorganisms are like experiences, memories, personal stories that are transformed, repurposed, or sometimes simply buried and hidden. When working the soil, we sometimes rediscover forgotten elements (such as bulbs planted the previous year), or unexpectedly encounter small forms of life, some beneficial (like worms that transform old leaves into nutrients), others harmful (like parasites that consume plant roots, draining their energy and vitality). Knowledge and awareness

make us gardeners, capable of acting where needed to transform any soil into healthy ground, and the contents of the unconscious into nourishment, wisdom, and inner resources to be used for a flourishing future.

The next phase is sowing. Every seed is a possible future, a potential. Each time I sow new plants, I am amazed that such a tiny grain contains the entire life of what will become, a project called life. It is truly miraculous. It reminds me how we are all different, even within the same species, each with our own characteristics and potentials (and, in psychosynthesis terms, “sub-personalities”).

This diversity — both individual and unified as humanity — is the beauty of our world.

Each seed has its own rhythm: some grow quickly, vigorously; others grow more slowly; some remain dormant for years, perhaps one day becoming a great oak - or a dainty daisy, who knows. Some seeds can flourish through concrete; others require rich soil. Like seeds, our potentials, when they encounter the right conditions, can grow easily; at other times they wait for ideal conditions; and sometimes they require courage to grow even where the ground is not favorable.

Sowing also means having patience. If we expect to sow and quickly see a mature plant, our expectations exceed the natural timing of growth. We sow, then care, and wait, actively waiting, with trust. When we finally see something we planted grow, it is a moment of pure joy.

It is easy to appreciate plants known for their beauty: tulips, daffodils, roses, camellias, fruit trees, majestic trees. But what about weeds? We call “weeds” those plants that spread easily, adapt to any soil, require little care, and often thrive where there is neglect. A well-prepared, cultivated, and cared-for garden, if later abandoned because its work seems “complete,” will eventually be overtaken by weeds that had previously been kept at bay: bad habits, unresolved past experiences, emotional patterns, inner conflicts, reactive behaviors.

Every garden, sooner or later, has weeds, not as enemies, but as teachers; not to be eliminated with fire or poison, but approached with method, consistency, love, and forgiveness. Just as we should see our fragilities as opportunities for transformation and growth, weeds show us where attention is needed, where balance must be restored. They are little messengers saying, “we are here too” (or, excuse the pun, *forget-me-not*), and can themselves be transformed into compost, rich nourishment for what we truly wish to cultivate. An opportunity for inner transformation.

Removing weeds is often a task given to children, as adults tend not to enjoy it, seeing it as tiring, repetitive work. Yet working with weeds tells us much about ourselves and can guide us into an almost meditative state.

It is also worth noting that some weeds contribute positively to the ecosystem, especially for other living beings — perhaps they are not “beautiful,” but useful. Some people even maintain a more “wild” area in their garden, so-called “rewilding,” increasingly popular in recent years, which is a conscious and positive choice in support of other forms of life. What is a weed for one, may be life for another.

There is another factor in gardening that has not yet been considered: will. It is easy to think “I would like to” or “I should,” but the garden demands: “I want to”. A personal garden is both a study and a set of conscious, deliberate choices. It is our “I want to”. The placement of plants, their care, their form, all are choices, but also vital necessities for the garden itself.

When we plant a tree, shrub, or hedge, we know it will eventually need pruning, not as an act of domination, but of care.

Proper pruning is an act of kindness toward the plant, allowing it to grow better. It removes what is no longer useful: dry, unproductive branches that drain energy. Without pruning, some plants fall into chaos, their energy dispersed. Pruning restores form and redirects

energy where it is needed. What conscious choices can we make in our lives to prune what no longer serves us? What choices can we make to plant seeds where they can grow best? How can we better direct our energy?

Every garden has its moment of peak expression, both outward and inward. Every garden follows a cycle: growth, harvest, rest, renewal. It does not exist as a straight line, but as an ascending spiral. Throughout history, the seasons have marked our time, even before time was understood as the system that exists today. We have learned — and perhaps partly forgotten through industrialization — to live in harmony with these cycles.

The seasons guide the garden: spring as awakening, opportunity, and growth; summer as expression and consolidation; autumn as harvest, reflection, and planning; winter as rest, integration, and transformation. This metaphor applies to every aspect of life, whether to a phase we are living, or to our age.

It is easy to say life is beautiful when the weather is fine, when we are strong and our garden is full of color and life. Winter, however, is often seen as a metaphor for crisis: everything appears dead, empty, cold, and inhospitable. Yet beneath this outward appearance, transformation is taking place: everything is following its own timing, preparing for renewal. Winter is preparation and rebirth.

Assagioli says: ‘Wisdom is the root of patience. Patience does not arise from forcing the emotional nature, but from wisely understanding the rhythm of processes, including inner development. This rhythm is part of the cosmos. The cosmos includes human beings. Everything in the cosmos is rhythmic. Even trees, for example—some grow in a few years, others, like the giant trees of California, take centuries. Everything has its own rhythm.

*There is a natural rhythm in
human development... and
also in spiritual realization.*

This is the wisdom of patience.^{?(1)}

Our work as gardeners is never finished, just like our inner work. By caring for a garden, we quietly learn to care for ourselves. The garden helps us understand our growth and makes us active participants in it. As Assagioli reminds us, patience arises from wisdom, following a natural rhythm, even when it comes to spiritual growth. Growth should not be forced, but supported with attention, awareness, understanding, conscious choice, and wise action. But perhaps most important of all: love.

Notes

1. Roberto Assagioli – SAGGEZZA E PAZIENZA (Archivio Assagioli – Firenze).

