



## **Gardening for the Soul**

*Like gardening, prayer takes determination and patience*

From the syndicated column "The Prayerful Heart"

By Julie McCarty

Last summer, in a burst of enthusiasm, my husband Terry and I bought 225 tulip, crocus, and daffodil bulbs, thinking how nice it would be to have a burst of color after the long, drab winter. Planting bulbs is simple, we thought. Just dig a hole and plop 'em in.

Reading the planting directions at home, we decided to carve out a section of lawn for a sunny bedding area. Thus began the Great Grass Elimination Project.

After living for years in a desert climate, destroying an area of lush green grass, even if it's just a small section around the mailbox, just doesn't come naturally. Setting aside our environmentalist leanings, we broke down and spread grass killer, naively believing the label that it takes a couple of days to work.

Two weeks later, we finally had a lovely curved area of dead, brown grass. At least the top looked dead. Looking back, I think we must have had some form of Super Grass, because the roots clung stubbornly to the sod even in death.

After trying various methods of removing the "dead" grass from the dirt, we ended up with a huge pile of fist-sized chunks of earth, each one decorated with sturdy wisps of wheat-colored grass. After filling the 64-gallon yard waste container, we discovered that the weight was such that the two of us together couldn't budge it. Then we noticed the faint imprint of "no dirt" on the side of the can.

Envisioning a wrongful death lawsuit if the trash truck's mechanical arms lost hold of it, we shoveled the mess back out onto the lawn, spreading it out in the sun like giant grapes waiting to change into raisins. We hoped drying it would help us with disposal.

Well, our sod clumps dried all right. The sun baked them like clay fired in a kiln. Now we had a front yard adorned with misshapen, hairy cement chunks.

One weekend, I glanced out the window to see Terry thrashing these things with a hoe, muttering under his breath. This was too much for me. When he wasn't looking, I wheelbarrowed the mess to a spot under our deck in the backyard, building a system of mini-canals and dams to channel the runoff from melting snow. (My reward for this was a sharp blow on the head when I forgot the precise location of the deck above me.)

By now it was mid-October and we were feeling a little desperate to get the bulbs in the ground before it froze. After doing soil improvements and installing a planting border, we bought a special tool to speed up the digging of the holes for the bulbs, a tool which we managed to completely destroy within 20 minutes of use. Digging individual holes with a trowel proved to be tedious. In the end, we dug trenches.

At last, our bulbs were tucked in their little winter beds. Suddenly there was nothing to do but wait. Wait through arctic winds and snow. Wait five or six months. Did we do all the right

things? Would our bulbs bloom in the spring? Suddenly I felt very helpless before the mystery of life.

Despite the challenges and frustrations of this project, I often receive spiritual blessings while gardening. Working the soil or tending plants calms my spirit. It leads to spiritual insights and thoughts of the Creator.

Designing our little flower patch reminded me that prayer, like gardening, involves a good deal of effort and determination. Digging deep into a relationship with God through prayer is not for wimps. It takes blood, sweat, and tears to remain faithful to prayer, day after day, year after year.

But prayer also involves waiting, waiting for the Lord to act. In Scripture, St. James reminds us to wait for the Lord's coming, patiently, like the farmer waits for the harvest. "Wait for the Lord, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the Lord!" writes the psalmist. We wait in hope for the Spirit of God to transform our hearts into spiritual gardens that bear fruit thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold.



For further reading:

"The Garden of the Soul: Cultivating Your Spiritual Life" by Keri Wyatt Kent (InterVarsity Press, 2002).

"God in the Garden: Discovering the Spiritual Riches of Gardening: A Week-by-Week Journey through the Christian Year", by Maureen Gilmer (Loyola, 2002).

"Spiritual Gardening: Creating Sacred Space Outdoors" by Peg Streep (Inner Ocean, 2003).