

prayer toolkit

prayer garden

AIM

To explore the concept of prayer garden as a space for prayer.

Let me tell you

My mother loved her garden. It was a huge space and wild. I contained many memories of all the growing up we had done there. There were many special things she had grown that had their own story and told of her commitment to grow unusual things. Some were gifts from other people and some were things she had brought back from her travels. The best thing in the garden just grew there one year. It was a rare British native orchid. After that we declared it a national park and a wildlife haven. It was also visited by a wide range of birds and animals. When I am in my own garden I often think of that one, and others I have visited over the year both amateur and professional, of the colours and shapes and scent I've experienced in them. As I sit by the sunny wall or stand on the leaf-strewn path I am in touch with God's creation in a way that is more personal than in many other places and it feels good as I prepare to pray.

INTRODUCTION

*The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,
One is nearer God's Heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth*

Mrs Dorothy Frances Gurney (1858-1932)

'One is nearer God's Heart in a garden than anywhere else on earth', so the saying goes.

Whether your garden is large or small, shared or in a pot think about how you could make it a place for prayer. Perhaps you have a church garden or a community garden nearby that needs a revamp. Each season has its own characteristics and these are expressed in the garden in their own way. Now is the time to plan a good year's gardening and praying.

Some bible verses for gardeners

Either in small groups or alone think about some of these Bible verses. Read them carefully aloud or silently and see what they suggest to you:

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. Gen 2:8

I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. John 15:1-2

This Easter morning encounter was in a garden

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary." John 20:15-16a

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To think about

The gardener and the potting sheds

There was a gardener who was invited to garden in a new landscape. This landscape was very varied made up as it was of places from wild countryside to urban wastelands. Dotted around the landscape were a number of potting sheds. Some of the potting sheds were small and some were larger, some were new and some were older, some were in good repair and some needed significant attention. Each potting shed had its own local gardeners; old and young, experienced and novices: some sheds had a few and some had a few more. The new gardener wondered what to do in the landscape.

The gardener began by visiting the potting sheds, the wild countryside and the urban wastelands. In each place the gardener noted what was thriving and what was struggling. The gardener met many other gardeners and noted how they did their gardening: some formed committees and talked a lot about gardening, some like 'Gardener's Question Time' and asked the new gardener lots of questions, some looked things up in gardening books, some wanted to spruce up their potting shed and open it up to other gardeners, some wanted to keep the potting shed to themselves, some liked to get their hands dirty and side by side with the new gardener to transplant seedlings and take cuttings.

The new gardener liked to take some of the seedlings and cuttings along whilst travelling through the landscape and share them with other gardeners, both those in potting sheds and those in the wild countryside and the urban wastelands. The new gardener also liked to encourage the other gardeners to try new plants, to experiment with the soil and conditions and the other activities of the potting shed; plant sales, bar-be-ques, making jam and the like. Sometimes there were difficult situations to face: a decision to move a plant out of the potting shed thinking that the frosts were over for the winter might backfire and a sudden late frost take all the gardeners by surprise. There was global warming and increased flood risk to face in some places, and unsafe or unused potting sheds in others.

The new gardener didn't have the answers to all these questions, only a deep and passionate commitment to gardening. The new gardener new that gardening was unpredictable at times, needed time, patience and respect, an ability to cope with setbacks and a sure and solid hope that the sun rises everyday. Each day the new gardener would give thanks for this and go out to meet gardeners and garden with them, confident that we are all still growing.

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Planning a Prayer Garden

Most churches include a gardener or two. However, the purpose of planning a prayer garden is not to set up another committee or to get one or two experts doing it for everyone else. If you're doing it in your own garden it maybe easier to overcome some of these tendencies of the contemporary church.

Planning your prayer garden will require a lot of different skills and abilities. Consider some of them:

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- A willingness to get your hands dirty
- Some gardening tools to lend or borrow
- Some seeds, cuttings or plants
- Compost
- A calendar

I'm sure you can think of a lot more. Planning is important. Visit a few gardens; those of your friends and neighbours, public gardens or gardens in the Quiet Garden network and see what they have done. If planning a public garden, depending on the size, you may be eligible for funding from a local or national initiative to encourage the development of eco-friendly spaces or the like. Perhaps there are other local groups who would like to help make the garden project a more communal activity.

But so is action. Try not to get so held up in the talking that you miss the season for planting, as this will also mean missing much more. You might want to choose plants for looks, scent, usefulness (i.e. eating them) or because they attract birds and animals. Try not to be too precious about the garden. Usually, stuff grows. Just as God accepts our prayers so try to accept your garden even if it is not quite as perfect as you hoped.

Praying in the garden

You may want to have the garden open for prayer at certain times, or all of the time. A leaflet of explanation can help people to feel at home in the garden as can some simple information panels depending on the size and scope of the project. Look at the prayer walks on the website and see if you can find a way of having a prayer walk around the garden. Or instead of a walk, perhaps one of the seasonal meditations seems suited to your garden at a particular time of the year. Experiment with different ways of praying outside.

Prayer

Easter Gardener,
bless the space and the species in this garden.
May everything that lives praise you!
As we come alive to you through our gardens
may we nurture others and together flourish
as you call our names.

Resources

<http://www.quietgarden.co.uk/>

The website of the Quiet Garden Trust which offers a global ministry of hospitality and prayer based on quiet gardens. You will find a list of gardens you can contact and arrange to visit on their website as well as other resources for those wishing to develop a quiet garden ministry.

The book '**To Garden with God Manual**' by Christine Sine includes 15 years of her gardening experience and spiritual lessons from gardening. See it at <http://msainfo.org/blog/to-garden-with-god-garden-manual>

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more toolkit items please revisit the website. There are also other seasonal material added to the website during the course of the year.

Acknowledgements

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