

## The Reasons to Garden

April 10 & 11, 1992

It feels good to get our hands into the soil again. Late snows and freezing temperatures kept us out of the garden longer than usual this year. Last weekend though, we found the soil in wonderful condition (warm, and with just the right amount of moisture) as we planted early greens and peas.

We also found some treasures left from last year's garden. A row of turnips we'd been using for greens into December has lovely rosettes of tasty leaves. We found garlic we'd missed at the harvest. We lifted it, took some inside to cook with, and separated and replanted the rest. We also discovered parsnips, just starting to put on their second year's growth to flower and reproduce. Sautéed in butter, they were delicious.

Recently, I asked the 28 students in Suzanne's fifth-grade class at Hallen School in Bridgeport to list some reasons to grow a garden. Over the course of the school year the students have harvested produce from the garden started by last year's class. They've also planted flower and garlic bulbs with the second-graders, sown a winter cover crop of rye, made compost and studied its processes, and grown rye inside in different media, i.e., compost, soil, sand and clay. Currently they are excited by growing seedlings of many garden vegetables and flowers for spring planting. We hadn't discussed the benefits of a garden, except perhaps to talk about saving money and transportation energy by growing lettuce in Connecticut instead of in California's deserts.

I was astounded and moved, by the reasons they provided and the quickness with which they produced a long list. These children want to garden:

- to eat
- for beauty
- to save money (instead of going to the store)
- for health
- to provide a use for food wastes, that is, compost
- to see something new
- to have fun
- to earn money
- to feed others
- to become more responsible
- for experience
- to learn to feel good about themselves
- to produce more seeds
- to do something good for the environment — you don't have to drive and can avoid packaging if your food is near your home
- to keep busy
- to save energy

to impress family and friends  
because fresh vegetables taste better  
to win contests at fairs  
because the food is fresher and more nutritious.

These fifth graders understand the reasons to garden. And, judging by the enthusiasm with which they show me their seedlings, growing plants generates excitement.

Two days after this lesson, I was visiting a client in New Haven who is a successful lawyer, still practicing well past normal retirement age. As soon as he greeted me, he took me down into his basement. There, just beyond clothes drying on a rack in the boiler room, were his seedlings, hundreds of them, growing under lights — vegetables, herbs, and flowers — most for his own garden, but some for his friends, too.

The near miracle of the growth of seeds, with their promise of beauty, nutrition and pleasant activity for the rest of the year, brings the same excitement to this well-to-do 70-year-old as it does to fifth-graders from Bridgeport. This excitement has been shared by gardeners throughout history, all over the Earth.

Since tax time is near, it may be useful to point out that, like the heat the sun delivers to our south windows in winter and the air conditioning that trees provide in the summer, food from our gardens is really tax-free income. When we do for ourselves and for our families, we receive full value for our labor; we avoid the costs of subsidies and regulations which have become such a large part of everything else we do.

Doing more for ourselves and our community is consistent with what, more and more each day, seems like our only hope: to withdraw money and power as smoothly and quickly as possible from Washington and Wall Street, to shrink the political and financial bureaucracies which have ballooned to fill the space between us and the real world.

Get your hands into the soil this weekend. Plant some seeds for your health, pleasure and sanity.