

Growing Your Garden of Creativity

“Cultivate”

By Tom Kamp

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Summer is my favorite season, followed by Spring. Now that Spring is finally here, I'm revisiting, revising, and sharing this post I started last summer.

“I was watering the vegetable garden, hanging baskets, and hydrangeas the other day, during a period when we were having record temperatures. I had just come from my daily walk, and part of me was feeling “Just go inside and cool off and do this later.” Then the thought popped into my mind that rather than resent having to water and stay out in the heat, I should appreciate why I'm doing it. It's all part of my “be in the moment” mindset and activities this summer.

Taking care of the garden reminds me that I try to look at projects and my time like a farmer- everything has a seasonal life cycle that matches the agricultural year. One can also see parallels in the academic year, and this is all based on the calendar seasons. Whether your project lasts one year, one day, or about ten years, as in the case of my first book, if you allow yourself to observe and follow this “season cycle,” things seem easier.

Spring is the time of planting, rebirth and exerting the intense energy needed to start something. Following is Summer, a period of growth, tending, cultivation, and sustenance. Next comes Autumn with the harvest, when effort is again needed, this time to bring things to a conclusion, reap the rewards, stock up, and clean up in preparation for the winter and the next cycle. Winter is a time of rest, planning, preparing, and living lean off the rewards of the harvest. I've had this idea for a while, and I feel like it's

not original. I seem to recall reading about it in a book somewhere, but I haven't been able to "re-find" the source.

The new insight I had while working in the garden this time, was that we need to set priorities. I'm also a fond believer in the principle of cause and effect and the law of attraction as guiding forces in understanding what happens in our lives and why.

I enjoy the fresh fruits, veggies, and herbs that come out of our garden. I enjoy the sense of satisfaction in knowing that we grew them, I love the freshness of picking something and eating it an hour later, I appreciate the minimal carbon footprint (as compared to having fruit shipped from South Africa) and knowing how it was grown (organically.) If I want the EFFECT of fresh, homegrown food, the CAUSE must be to take care of the garden that produces the food. And as the Law of Attraction would say, if you want the fresh fruit and veggies, you must create the conditions in your life for them to come to you.

But taking care of the garden, or to bring the metaphor back to the creative process, taking care of a project, is more than just watering the plants. Here's what I mean: In a word, CULTIVATE. Cultivating means feeding, yes, but also providing a sunlit, fertile, safe location conducive to growth. It means training, supporting, and helping guide the growth of the plant, but it also means pulling out competing weeds. Now, if you saw my lawn or garden, you'd laugh at this mention of weeding! (My motto: "If it wasn't for crabgrass, I'd have no grass at all.") However, this is where the big idea of cultivating a project through its life cycle took off for me. I need to weed out distracting or competing ideas when I want to cultivate one big idea or project. Not that I don't diversify what I plant, or what I work on. Not that I put all my efforts into one, ideal tomato, or one big scheme, but that to give a plant or idea/project room to grow and make the best use of the available resources, attention must be focused. Priorities must be made. Commitments must be kept.

That's a big-picture view. In the day-to-day, it also applies. I recently encountered a musician, conservatory-trained, who had to play through a very detailed, elaborate, and comprehensive daily routine in order to warm up and "play at a peak level." Unfortunately, the circumstances of our working together prevented this musician from taking all the time needed to finish the workout, so I never was sure if I was hearing "the best stuff."

Over the years, through the words and guidance of many wise teachers, and through my own experimentation and deliberation, I've learned to reduce my warm-up to the bare minimum needed to get ready to play. I've been there with the long routines, and at a certain point, I realized it no longer served me to go through that extended process.

Cultivate, prune down, make space, and focus on what's working, but be open to change.

As I get older, I get ever so slightly more comfortable with the idea that there are some things I might find interesting, but that doesn't mean I need to pursue them. I read or hear a book review and think, "That sounds like a fascinating book," but now I can recognize that there are shelves full of books I already own that clearly speak to me more, since I've already acquired them. There are creative pursuits I *could* follow, but there are others that ignite my passion to a greater degree. My ambition still outstrips my available time, but I think that's a positive sign of creative motivation. As I learn to focus on things that are best suited for me to bring forth, or areas where my contributions may be unique, I think I'll get a better harvest from my garden of creativity. Who knows, I might even win a ribbon at the county fair!