



# mini. tending your summer garden

by Diane Glass

**While strolling through a wooded path** on a beautiful autumn day last October, I happened upon a small apple tree, partially obscured and surrounded by larger trees around it. As I got closer, I saw that almost a third of its branches and a portion of its trunk were dead, the result of apparent damage to the roots. Yet the other two-thirds sported large, bright red apples, ripe for picking.

The tree spoke to my heart: It fulfilled its purpose and created something nourishing and beautiful, despite its injuries. It reminded me of my own life story. Born with spina bifida and later diagnosed with breast cancer, I have known serious illness, yet my life has produced many fruits for which I am deeply grateful.

PHOTO BY PEG HAMMER

That day nature mirrored a lesson I had come to learn—that to grow I had to welcome the dark, as well as the light parts of life, to accept my weaknesses as well as my strengths and to realize beauty comes not in being perfect but in being real.

More than three years ago, my friend Deb Engle and I began to reflect on how nature, and especially the changing of the seasons of the year, teaches us about change in our lives. Both of us made significant shifts in recent years. I left a position in corporate life to pursue my interests in music, writing and teaching. Deb remarried, moved to the country and published a book, *Grace from the Garden: Changing the World One Garden at a Time*, interviews with gardeners across the nation who sow seeds to provide hope and nourishment for those around them.

We both knew other women also in the midst of addressing important life questions. Do I remain in my



PHOTO BY DEB ENGLE

demanding career? Should I retire? How will I cope with my illness? What is my next step now that I'm an empty-nester? Where can I find a community of women who share my interests? Am I really doing what I want to do with my life?

Interested in sharing all we had learned, we created Tending Your Inner Garden®, a program including workshops themed to the seasons, a dinner series, and an online curriculum and discussion group.

Women who participate consider what they want to plant in their lives, how to nurture their own growth, address fears and setbacks, harvest what they learned and let go of what no longer serves them. Through such spiritual practices like journaling, meditation, interaction with nature,

creative expression and movement, they learn to listen deeply—to themselves and others. The results bring life-changing renewal for many.

**“I’m like that tree that’s holding on to its leaves.”**

During our winter workshop, one young mother recognized herself on the snowy path of her nature walk. It was a fear of dying and leaving her eight-year-old daughter without a mother that bound her—a reflection of her own history. At eight, her mother died, leaving her hollow and afraid.

In an unexpected tree along the path, she saw herself, unable to complete her grieving for the loss of her mother. The imagery of that moment was the beginning of a healing process that would continue in the months ahead.

## “My life needs more grounding. I need to take better care of myself!”

A successful professional woman bemoaned her “never-ending round of activity” and her own “go, go” nature. Contemplating her life through journaling and inspired by the gentle way nature in autumn lets go of what has blossomed in summer, she decided to take a sabbatical from her busy consulting job and reflect on her true priorities in life.

She later changed careers.

## “My garden is rectangular, orderly, and neat, but it’s not me.”

One day, gazing out her window at the garden she cultivated, a counselor realized she was living a life that reflected someone else’s vision and priorities. She wanted more fluidity, creativity, spontaneity, and novelty in both her work and leisure time. First, she redesigned the garden and then she recast her life--starting her own business and pursuing her love of river rafting.

## “My cancer is back.”

Facing a terminal diagnosis, one woman used Tending Your Inner Garden® to develop her legacy for her children and grandchildren. Reflecting on the harvesting of crops as a metaphor, she wrote about what she had learned in life and wanted to pass on to others.

Like these women who found peace and answers within themselves, nature reassures us that life always triumphs. Dawn comes after night. Spring comes after winter. Our own suffering and brokenness yield to the fruits of wisdom, gratitude and love. †

While participating in a program like this provides encouragement and support on your spiritual journey, you can enjoy the transformational benefits of nature on your own or with friends. For starters, consider these ideas:

**Take a walk in nature.** Go outdoors for a walk with the intent of opening yourself to nature’s guidance. Bring to mind a question you have been considering. Pay attention to what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling. If you’re drawn to a particular spot, stop for a while. Gaze upon something that attracts you. Does it have something to teach you about life? About yourself?

**Create your own sanctuary.** Create a space where you can experience peacefulness and pleasure. It might be in your backyard, in a nearby park, or in the corner of a room in your house where you can place plants and other nature items of symbolic significance. Spend a few minutes there every day. “Free-write” - jot down without censoring or editing any thoughts that come to mind. Or simply rest.

**Envision your inner garden.** Find a quiet spot where you will not be disturbed for 15 minutes. Relax. Pay attention to your breathing. Now envision walking down a path that leads you around the bend to what will become your inner garden. Imagine a comfortable place to sit in that garden. Envision what you would like to plant in your garden. You may see flowering shrubs and plants, trees, a fountain or a brook. What do these things represent in your life? What

dreams and passions do you want to plant and allow to blossom in your external life?

**Take a closer look.** Examine the delicate structure of a dahlia. Distinguish the call of a cardinal from a flicker. Lie beneath an Austrian pine and gaze at the maze of intertwining branches overhead. Sit by a brook and note how many different sounds you can hear. Approach a lilac bush. At what distance do you first sense its fragrance? Paying exquisite attention to the beauty of nature grounds us in the present moment and eases anxieties about the past or future.

**Express gratitude.** Say “Thank you, Mother Earth,” when your feet touch the soil. Feel the energy of the earth move up through your feet and legs into your body. Know that you are home in your own body and that your body is connected to the natural world.

Ask women who have participated in Tending Your Inner Garden® what they have learned and they are likely to talk about awareness, mindfulness, and insight. Nature teaches us to listen, see, smell, taste and touch with new appreciation. When we do so with a willing spirit and an open heart, we change as gracefully and beautifully as nature herself.

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For more about Tending Your Inner Garden®, visit [www.innnergardener.com](http://www.innnergardener.com) or call Diane Glass at 515/989-4532. You can sign up for a single workshop or participate in the yearlong program. A notebook, providing journaling ideas for each week of the year and a CD of meditations for each season are also available.