# A Commonplace Garden

*"Spend a penny on the plant,*
*a pound on the hole."* ~Old English Adage

*"As for Good Taste, that overbearing tyrant that sends the inexperienced gardener into a spin – forget it. There is absolutely nothing intrinsic about good taste in gardens: it's as fickle as fashion."* ~Mirabel Osler

*"A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books."* ~Walt Whitman

*"My garden is a living library, a compendium of endangered and storied plants interspersed with contemporary favorites. The old, unusual plants have the added benefit of often being quite tasty."* ~Margot Anne Kelley

*"Coins are round and roll away;*
*Fertile Ground is there to stay."*
~Old Irish Proverb

*"My garden. . . . An hour or two of morning labor was all that it required. But I used to visit and re-visit it a dozen times a day, and stand in deep contemplation over my vegetable progeny, with a love that nobody could share or conceive of, who had never taken part in the process of creation."* ~Nathaniel Hawthorne

*"I must have flowers, always, and always."* ~Claude Monet

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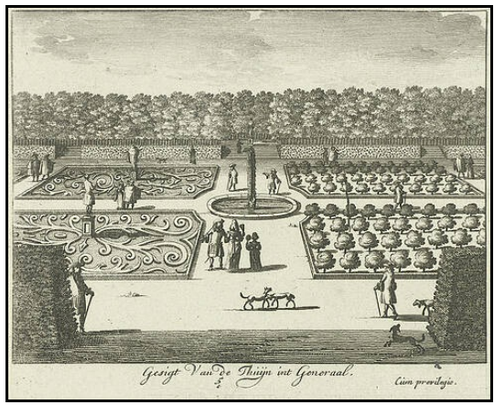
# The Garden Quarto

*"Gardens refuse to stay still. Because of their transience and aliveness, they seem to demand our immediate attention. The border that reaches its peak of perfection, the meadow filled with wild flowers, the blossoming tree: if you don't take it in now, the moment will soon be gone."*
~Claire Masset




# Fall 2025

## A Sonnet

Flower-muscle that opens, little by little,
the meadow-morning of the anemone
until the bright sky's polyphonous light
pours itself forth into her womb,

flexed muscle of unending welcome
poured into the quiet star-bloom,
at times *so* overpowered with abundance
that the sunset's silent gesture

can hardly return to you
the leaves' widely sprung-back edges:
you, resolve and power of *how* many worlds!

We, the violent ones, we endure longer.
But *when*, in which of all lives,
will we finally be open and receivers?

~Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* II.5
Mark S. Burrows, translator
(Monkfish Book Publishing Co., 2024)

## Sunday

I rip everything out—the rugged cabbage stumps,
frost-killed basil stalks, withered squash vines—
pull up stakes, unwind twine and, one-by-one,
lob rotten tomatoes onto the compost.

He plows it all back into earthy rows,
then scythes a patch of asters by the shed,
where, side-by-side,
we stack the wire cages for next year's crop.

If this land is the sermon, our hands in it
must be some kind of appeal.
The blue wheelbarrow full of onions—
friable amber skins—I cart to the barn,

leaving the south doors open wide,
knot an arm's-length of cord
over a peg in the rough pine wall
and in the dust-lit quiet, braid.

~Patty Crane
From the anthology *Leaning toward Light*
(Storey Publishing, 2023)

## A Pot of Red Lentils

Simmers on the kitchen stove.
All afternoon dense kernels
surrender to the fertile
juices, their tender bellies
swelling with delight.

In the yard we plant
rhubarb, cauliflower, and artichokes,
cupping wet earth over tubers,
our labor the germ
of later sustenance and renewal.

Across the field the sound of a baby crying
as we carry in the last carrots,
whorls of butter lettuce,
a basket of red potatoes.

I want to remember us this way—
late September sun streaming through
the window, bread loaves and golden
bunches of grapes on the table,
spoonfuls of hot soup rising
to our lips, filling us
with what endures.

~Peter Pereira
From *Saying the World* (Copper Canyon Press, 2003)

## October Morning Rose

Good morning, October rose
atop the breakfast table.
I would have ignored you
in favor of wheat toast with jam,
but you called me with your fragrance,
reminding me
I cut you from the bush
two days ago,
afraid cold night
could harm you.

Now you open fully in our kitchen
where just two
of the world's eight billion people
see you,
and you speak out to tell them
that bearing beauty bravely
is the greatest
of their daily tasks.

~Sally Witt
Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, Pennsylvania

## From "Digging 2"

Today I think
Only with scents,—scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field. . . .

It is enough
To smell, to crumble the dark earth,
While the robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

~Edward Thomas (1878–1917)

### From "Summer Like a Stranger Comes"

*The summer like a stranger comes*
*I pause and hardly know her face.*
~John Clare, "The Flitting" (1833)

Summer will always seem to come to us as a stranger because whenever we garden or indeed whenever we live through anything we do it as if it is for the last time. Looked at this way, summer is not a familiar returning friend but the living searing scary impossible now. It is *the summer* not "a summer" that we have borrowed from folk memory or a gardening calendar. This particular summer will hold us and pull us down to taste its depths. We think we know the season but we do not: it goes beyond us. We are carried along by the summer whether we want to be or not. The most we can ask is that the season will be a dream where the soul has talked to itself. Bitter-sweet are the garden offerings on the altar of a passing summer. We love the bright blade of the season but mourn its fleeting nature. It is necessary for us gardeners to meet the summer on its own terms and allow it to abide within ourselves, both the bitter and the sweet. What is for sure? The sun will rise and set and another summer will come somewhere in the world. So much of garden writing is essentially about time and how much we can achieve and enjoy in the allotted moment. I advise you to take summer on its own terms and allow it to abide within you. Time is always whittling and gnawing at us like a dog with a bone, yet we always hope that there is enough left of us for another summer. Summers are immortal though we are not. The seasons give us meaning and we measure our joy against their endlessly shifting pageant. For us gardeners, it is always wonderful in any season whenever we can turn our faces to the light.

~Rod Madocks
(*Hortus* #146, Summer 2023)