

Get Back To Your Roots

Clifton T. Speed, Jr.

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Instructor: Ms. Elisabetta LeJeune

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I never understood the value of my Grandfather's garden, a pastime I truly despised in my younger years, until now. Every weekday afternoon, I sat in my living room, dreading the phone call that was soon to come. When the phone finally did ring, I reluctantly answered it and listened to my Paw-Paw's voice. I knew exactly what he wanted. Within minutes, I was at his house, smiling and giving warm greetings to both my grandparents. However, I was secretly complaining to myself the entire time that I did not want to "waste" my afternoon working in a garden. I felt I had many more important things to do, such as watch television and lounge around the house. After a bit of small talk, Paw-Paw looked at the clock on the wall and said it was time to begin. As soon as we walked through the doorway, however, I started whining about how hot and humid it was outside, believing that there was no good reason to be working under such dreadful conditions. When I finally stopped complaining about the heat and humidity, a new problem arose: mosquitoes were everywhere and they seemed attracted to our skin. It did not take long to figure out that no matter how many of those blood-thirsty insects we killed, there were always more. I felt like the unluckiest person in the world. Not once did I take a deep breath and look at the positive effects of Paw-Paw's garden and how much I learned from it. Until now, I never realized how much could be gained from this simple outdoor pastime, including everyone's favorite green-money.

First, a garden can be a great money saving hobby. My Paw-Paw was a teacher at Greensburg High School for most of his life. Although education is not one of the highest paid

jobs around, Paw-Paw always had extra money. In his garden he grew corn, tomatoes, green peas, cabbage, mustard greens, potatoes and squash. This provided more than enough food to feed his family every night. My Maw-Maw never had to worry about finding a side dish for dinner or supper; she just went into the freezer to find exactly what she needed. Of course, those just starting their garden may not notice a difference in their checking accounts a year after they begin; nevertheless, they are saving some money, at the very least, and it only takes a little time to see an obvious difference in their savings. Also, as years go by, stores constantly raise their prices. People may feel they are not saving money now, but in a year or two, when there is a rise in prices, they will see what they have gained. Money is a universal incentive for a beginning gardener. Still, money is not everything, and health may factor into the decision to own a garden.

A garden puts many people on the road to eating healthier foods, but, more than that, it is a terrific source of exercise. Paw Paw's garden got me out of the house almost every day of the week and helped me stay active. If my Paw Paw did not have his garden, I probably would have spent most of my time becoming a couch potato. Of course, working in a garden is not strenuous, but it does keep the blood flowing and muscles moving. While caring for a garden, one must be ready to do considerable amounts of walking. A gardener also has to dig, to water, and to hammer in bean posts. Still, some other tasks may be slightly more energy-consuming, such as carrying large bags of seed or spreading fertilizer from a bottomless bucket. Only a limited amount of energy is needed to maintain a garden, but the little bit put forth can make a difference. However, while health should be an important issue in everyone's life, it is not the most significant facet of a garden.

Primarily, a garden brings friends and families together. Upon reflection, I now understand that, while Paw Paw loved his garden, more than anything, he loved being out there

with me. I realize Paw Paw could have done most of the work on his own—without my help. But, he just wanted to spend some quality time with his grandson. I can still see myself walking behind Paw Paw, dropping small corn seeds into the tiny holes he had just dug into the dirt with his hoe. We often did this for over an hour, going down each row until the job was done. As we worked, my Paw Paw and I talked about anything and everything. Our conversations consisted of current events, politics, history, his younger days, and my family. Many days, he spent his time quizzing me on state capitals and Presidents. Still, more than anything, he loved to hear what was going on in my life. My education was important to him, and he always asked how I was doing in school and what I was learning. I will cherish these memories forever. Many families in America are growing apart, and a garden can be a practical way to spend quality time with each other. Even if the garden is small and only limited work is needed, the little time spent with each other is worth it.

Gardening is a pastime for people of all ages to enjoy. It benefits people in three of the most important elements of their lives—money, health, and family. It is a hobby that, if given the chance, will make one's life more enjoyable. I wish I had realized this years ago, while my Paw Paw was still around. If I had been more open and less selfish, I feel I could have gained more from it. Learning from this, I hope to one day share a garden with my children and grandchildren. My Paw-Paw's garden brought us closer together and gave me memories I will treasure for the rest of my life. My prayer is to share this experience with my grandchildren and give them the love and guidance my Paw-Paw gave to me.

Ms. LeJeune's Comments: *Cliff's essay shows how an activity at first perceived as bothersome became a cherished memory of the time spent with his grandfather.*