



# INTRODUCTION



*...faith is the substance of things hoped for....* HEBREWS II:1

That is especially true when what you're hoping for is a lush lawn and beautiful garden. After all, it takes real faith to put a bunch of tiny, dead-looking seeds into the ground and expect them to even sprout, much less grow into beautiful, healthy, and maybe tasty plants. And when trouble strikes, whether it's in the form of icy winds, plant-devouring insects, or nasty diseases, faith gives you the strength to see your charges safely through the challenge—or, when necessary, to accept God's will and start all over again.

Now don't get me wrong—I'm not suggesting that faith *alone* will give you the lawn and gardens of your dreams! As we all learned in Sunday school, God helps those who help themselves. And for more than half a century now, I've been spreading the gospel of doing just that, using the principles that any successful gardener needs, which we'll talk about a lot as we move along. I first learned them long ago at my Grandma Putt's side; they're what she called the four P's:

- Practice
- Patience
- Persistence
- Prayer

Of course, it also helps to have a collection of fast, fun, and easy techniques to call on, and you'll find plenty of them here. And the more practice you have, the more fun they'll be. But in this book, we'll go beyond the practical details of your yard and gardens and talk about the spiritual aspects of maintaining a relationship with the plant kingdom (and our fellow animal-kingdom members, too). You see, I've

always felt that gardeners have been given a special blessing from above: the chance—and the obligation—to keep the cycle of life in motion on this glorious green planet of ours. I have a hunch that you share that feeling, and that you'll relate in a special way to the inspirational quotations and stories scattered across these pages.

We'll start off Part 1 with a look at God's firmament: strong, healthy soil that's just teeming with life. I'll let you in on my best secrets for nurturing some of the billions of tiny organisms that can turn plain old dirt into fertile, root-pleasing humus—the foundation of any thriving lawn or garden. (Yes, this process will

take a little patience on your part, but it will be worth every minute of your time!) Then we'll move on to planning, planting, and tending your own personal paradise. I'll guide you through the process of deciding exactly how you and your family want to use your yard, analyzing its growing conditions, and choosing plants that will thrive there. You'll also learn how to get all your leafy charges off to the best possible start and give them the care they need to grow up big, strong, and healthy.

Part 2 is all about plants. We'll take an in-depth look at each kind of green, growing thing the Lord has blessed us with, from lowly turf grass to towering trees. You'll find a cornucopia of simple secrets for pleasing all of the plants in your life—whether they're growing in the ground, in pots, or maybe some of each. But that's not all! In these chapters, I'll show you

how to put plants to work in all kinds of ways, ranging from screening unwanted views to inviting some of God's most beautiful creatures into your yard.



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## The Gardener's Faith

Throughout history, some of our greatest poets, philosophers, and theologians have written eloquently about the oneness of all life, the wonders of God's creation, and the spiritual joys of gardening. I'll share some of these nuggets with you as we move along—starting with this thought from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

*The roses under my window make no reference to former roses or better ones; they are what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.*

If you've ever planted even a few petunias in a window box, then you know that our Heavenly Father has plenty of ways to keep us gardeners on our toes. But never fear: In Part 3, I've gathered some of my favorite tips, tricks, and tonics to help you through all kinds of growing challenges, ranging from insect invasions and devastating diseases to wild and woolly weather-related woes. (Sneak preview: The key to stopping a whole lot of trouble before it starts is persistence in delivering good, basic TLC.) And, because none of us mere mortals is perfect, I'll also let you in on a few secrets for coping with spills, splatters, and other, um, "blessings" that arrive by way of human error.

Finally, in Part 4, we'll round out the book with a collection of special plans that'll help you create your own personal Garden of Eden. You'll find designs and plant lists for seven different gardens, including one that consists of plants mentioned in the Bible, and another that's inspired by the monastery gardens of medieval Europe. Feel free to copy any one of these designs, mix and mingle elements of several of them, or simply use them as a springboard to launch your own masterpiece. No matter how you use them, I'm sure you'll be delighted with the results.

Well, what are we waiting for? It's time to put the four P's to work in your yard. So say a prayer for God's blessing and—as I always say—let's get growing!

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## In God's Garden

Plants of all kinds play a big role in the Bible and all through the lore of Christianity. Many of the tales you'll find in this book concern dramatic miracles. Others are simple, touching stories about the history of some of our best-loved flowers. For instance (just to whet your appetite), legend has it that columbine sprang from the ground at the touch of Mary's foot—earning it the common name Our Lady's slippers. And Lady's bedstraw (*Galium verum*) got its common name because Mary tucked its sweet-smelling foliage among the hay in the Baby Jesus' manger.