

The Gift of Plants

“. . . God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.”

(Genesis 1:11-12)

“Flowers changed the face of the planet. Without them, the world we know – even man himself – would never have existed. Francis Thompson, the English poet, once wrote that one could not pluck a flower without troubling a star. Intuitively he had sensed like a naturalist the enormous interlinked complexity of life. Today we know that the appearance of the flowers contained also the equally mystifying emergence of man.” So wrote Loren Eiseley in his book *The Immense Journey* (1957).

We owe a lot to plants – our existence, food for body and soul, food for other creatures – from the largest to the smallest – those almost invisible, for keeping soil from eroding, for making our air and water healthy, for their work in helping pollinators. The list goes on.

Yet, many are in danger. Open spaces are being covered over and torn up for buildings and other structures, parking lots, roads and sidewalks, forests are disappearing, pesticides and herbicides are killing the soil, plants and animals and humans, especially the most vulnerable, – making the land in many places unsustainable.

Many of us are responsible for wanting more and more, for being such consumers, for not being satisfied, for losing touch with the land and plants. We have set ourselves apart from the flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs. We have lost our connection with the land and the plants that grow on it. Some of us live in urban areas with little or no land bearing plants nearby. Robin Wall Kimmerer, in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, writes, “It’s not just land that is broken, but more importantly our relationship to land.”

So how do we recover this relationship with the land and its plants and work to restore and sustain plants and the land for all people, all creatures? Let me suggest some actions we might take.

1. Spend time outside on the land, amid the grasses and flowers and trees. Go to a park or woods or walk in your neighborhood. Observe what’s growing, when and where, what animals and insects and birds abound in the area. Sit and look and listen. Contemplate all the connections, relationships and how you fit in.

2. Reflect on what your faith is calling you to be and do; write down your thoughts, questions, concerns, and prayers.
3. Plant a pollinator garden to provide nectar for bees and insects and help in the necessary work of pollination, if you have the space, or gather others to make a community pollinator garden, in a common space or vacant lot.
4. Plant a tree or trees or donate to organizations that encourage the planting of trees, have tree planting projects, work on the restoration of forests.
5. Plant a vegetable garden and share surplus with those in need, organize a community garden, or volunteer at a community garden.
6. Research and learn about plants native to your area. When choosing plants for your garden, choose native plants.
7. Keep abreast of legislation, in your town or city, state and national legislature, that impacts the land and its plants and animals. Make your voice heard.
8. Read what naturalists and environmentalists have to say.
9. Invite others to join you in walks or gardening, in making your voices heard.
10. Give thanks for the land and all its plants, for the opportunity to tend and care for Earth's garden.

“You cause the grass to grow for
the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human
heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the
human heart.

The trees of the Lord are watered
abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he
planted.

In them the birds build their
nests;
the stork has its home in the fir
trees.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!”

(Psalm 104:14-17, 24)

Some resources:

American Earth: Environmental Writings Since Thoreau, Bill McKibben, ed., The Library of America, 2008

Arbor Day Foundation, 888 448-7337, www.arborday.org

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants. by Robin Wall Kimmerer, Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013

Community Garden Checklist/Let's Move!,
www.letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/community-garden-checklist

League of Conservation Voters, 202 785-8683, www.lcv.org (has state affiliates)

The Man Who Planted Trees, by Jean Giono, Chelsea Green Publishing Co., White River Junction, VT, 1985

Native Plant Trust, Hdqtrs: 180 Hemenway Rd., Framingham, MA 01701, 508 877-7630,
Nasami Farm Nursery, 128 North St., Whately MA 01373 , 413 397-9922,
www.nativeplanttrust.org

Serving New England, formerly the New England Wildflower Society.

Pollinator Pathway, www.pollinatorpathway.com

Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest, by Joan Maloof, The University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA, 2005

This is a work in progress. Please share your ideas and resources that you know.