



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister  
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

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## “Earth’s Garden”

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Reflections delivered on April 19, 2015

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### Centering Thoughts

*If I had but two loaves of bread, I would sell one and buy hyacinths,  
for they would feed my soul. The Qur’an*

*One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. William Shakespeare*

*A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust. Gertrude Jekyll*

### Reading

From "[Where We Share Joy, Laughs and Hard Work,](#)" adapted from a web blog on gardening.  
The author is known by the signature -- dsl6625.

### Two Reflections

*Terry Jones, Gardening as a Spiritual Practice*

Gardening is an amazing activity. It’s good exercise for our bodies, but just as good exercise for our souls.

Gardening helps us connect our past to our future. How old were you when you first stepped into a garden? I grew up with gardens. My parents were too busy to garden when I was young, but during the summer we were sent to stay with relatives instead of to camp. And everyone had a garden. My favorite aunt lived on a farm and gave us all chores. Feeding the chickens was my favorite, but my second favorite was helping in the garden. After picking lettuce, beans, cabbage, etc., we’d take them into the kitchen and prepare them for dinner. After dinner, the scraps went to the chickens. There was no question as to where our meal came from. The fried chicken, salad, vegetables and even the milk came from right there on the farm.

My mother’s parents lived in Aurora, IL, on a small lot, but my grandfather had studied Sir Albert Howard’s method of composting and had very productive garden and what seemed to me like a huge compost pile. He wasn’t so happy to have us help in the garden – I guess it was his way of relaxing after a long day at work – but the fruits of his garden made a regular appearance in our meals. And I loved the applesauce my grandmother made from the apples she grew.

But my favorite garden belonged to my Grandma Evans. She grew raspberries and made raspberry preserves. YUMMY!

So when I grew up and we bought a house, I had to have a garden and fruit! I had only a small garden when my daughter was growing up but we had 2 apple trees and several blueberry bushes. We were able to make lots of applesauce and spent the summer pigging out on blueberries. Blueberries for breakfast, blueberries for lunch, blueberries for dessert after dinner. She started picking blueberries as soon as she could walk. Guess what the first thing was that she planted when she bought a house? Yep, a blueberry bush. The love of gardening, of fresh homegrown food, is an easy thing to pass on to your children and grandchildren.

Gardening teaches us so many things: patience as we wait for Spring to come or seeds to sprout or that first tomato to turn bright red. We learn to pay attention to details as we pull weeds - or was that the zinnias I just pulled out. And to notice the small things. Once, while picking blueberries with my daughter we heard a rustling in one of the bushes. It was 2 praying mantises, doing what bugs do in the Spring. We watched for a while to see if it is true that the female tears off the male's head afterwards, but this male seemed determined to make the most of the rest of his life and we got bored. We did find the egg case that winter, while we were pruning the bushes, and made sure we didn't prune that branch. And the next Spring we found many babies hunting through the bushes.

Gardening helps us learn to let go of control and to enjoy what Nature sends us. A few years ago my sister was amazed to see pumpkins, which she did not plant, take over her garden and yard. They crushed her lettuce and smothered her tomatoes and grew up her trees. But come Halloween, she had a row of decorated pumpkins lined up on the bench next to her front door.

Here at UUFA we have several gardens. The Herb Garden, in the corner of the parking lot next to the playground, was developed by a Small Group Ministry, and recently cleaned and renovated by the Green Sanctuary Committee. The Asian Garden was developed by Chuck and Suzanne Murphy and provides a restful focal point near our front door. In the playground there is a flower garden and further back a round vegetable garden which will become a pizza garden this summer, growing tomatoes, herbs, peppers and other ingredients to top a pizza. Bulbs line the path on the West side of our building, leading to the Memorial Wall and the Lenten Rose garden. And surrounding us is the garden that Nature created and for which we received certification as a Wildlife Sanctuary.

You never know when you start a garden how it will turn out. But if you garden with someone – a grandparent, a child, a friend, a stranger – one thing is certain, you will grow memories. Recently UUFA started gardening with Hill Chapel Baptist Church, in the hopes of growing a deeper relationship with a different faith community. Hill Chapel has a large community garden supported by Athens Land Trust. We had a great start on MLK Day as a group of UUFA folks cleaned the beds and helped to build several frames for raised beds. Then we ran into a snag. The land on which the garden sits does not belong to Hill Chapel and was thought to be up for sale. All work stopped on the garden. Luckily it was not the garden property which is up for sale but the building next door. Last week we got our first plants in the ground and hope to have a bountiful harvest which can be shared through the Northeast Georgia Food Bank. If you'd like to grow some memories this year, you're welcome to join me in the Hill Chapel garden.

I urge you to spend some time in a garden soon. It could be your own garden, our gardens here at UUFA, a friend's garden, a community garden or even a public garden like our State Botanical Garden. Take in the smells, the colors, textures, shapes, shadows and the creatures that live there. Revel at the tremendous variety of life that comes from the very dirt on which we walk.

Gardens. From dirt comes such beauty and bounty. Garden for love, garden for life, garden for memories, garden for your soul.

*Bill Pierson*

I have been asked to share why I am personally involved with helping to make the UUFA a certified Wildlife Habitat.

One of the reasons is that nature has a lot of fascinating stories to tell. Years ago, one scene that comes to mind is on a hot summer's day in Northern California at a vacant lot. Unlike here in Georgia, where vacant lots are rampant with trees, this lot was golden with dead dried herbs, except for one small green bush. I walked toward that bright green bush in blazing 100 degree plus weather and found out that the bush turned out to be a native milkweed plant that was blooming heavily with flowers. There were an amazing number of insects of all different types living there. I took some pictures of the flowers and insects. Later, while looking at my photographs, I noticed a particularly colorful wasp that I never noticed before. I ended up looking up more information about this wasp and it turns out that it was a tarantula hawk. The more I read about it, the more fascinating it became. I learned that you could tell if the wasp was male or female by counting the number of segments on the antennae. I also learned that this particular wasp paralyzes tarantulas with its sting and then injects its young into the spider. The wasp larvae end up parasitizing the tarantula. Eventually the young emerge and the cycle of life starts over again. (Another amazing fact is that tarantula hawks have been known to drag their parasitized tarantula up to a mile away to some place safe from other predators.) You probably couldn't think of a more gruesome science fiction fantasy. This is just one story that comes to mind when thinking about the ecological diversity of nature. And, by the way, we have spider hawks that parasitize wolf spiders, which are the largest spiders we have here in Athens and go through the same cycle. So if you look down sometime and see a wasp dragging a spider away the wasp probably is some kind of spider hawk.

By removing the invasive exotic plants and planting Georgia native plants we are hoping to encourage ecological diversity and still keep the garden attractive to wildlife and humans alike. Also, as an added benefit, when you plant natives, they are genetically engineered to thrive in their native habitat. So once they are established, you do not have to put as much energy into their upkeep. This means that you do not have to water them or sometimes even worry about them being over grazed by other wildlife. You just have to control the exotic invasive plants. Also we may be able to share new stories about nature in our garden that come up by just being in it and we are hoping to be able to help others who would like to learn about making the world more sustainable and more friendly to wildlife right here at the fellowship.

One question that has come up is: What is a sanctuary? To some people it means a safe place like in this fellowship. We of the green committee, among others, are expanding this meaning to include creating spaces that are safe for people and wildlife, and ideally to making the whole world a safe sanctuary for all of earth's creatures.

One of the key elements of our application to become a green sanctuary is to become certified as a wildlife habitat. Kate Mobray of the Audubon Society and a naturalist at Sandy Creek said that we are the first church or organization to actually apply for a certification. We want our wildlife habitat to serve as a demonstration area to encourage other organizations and individuals to make their own gardens or other gardens more wildlife friendly.

When the Audubon Society came out to evaluate the property they found that we had a lot of potential for a wildlife sanctuary. They liked our woods, and they said that we already had some native plants here on the property, and if we removed the invasive plants (such as privet and elaeagnus), this would allow the natives a better chance to grow. On the day the Audubon Wildlife certification group came we saw birds, insects, frogs, and even a couple of deer out in the woods.

One of the things we have accomplished so far is that we have removed some invasive exotic plants, such as privet, elaeagnus, nandina and honeysuckle. Now you can see more of the flowering irises, daffodils and other bulbs that we have planted throughout the years. And we are adding native plants such as sweet shrub, some blueberry bushes, a native azalea, some Farkleberry bushes and a Carolina jessamine vine. Why are we doing this? Because we want our garden to be more sustainable and these plants provide food and shelter for insects, birds and other animals.

We have also put out mason bees, and have provided them with homes. If you haven't seen them go out by the woods and look for our colorful signs. Near the signs you will find PVC tubes filled with paper straws, these contain larva that will come out and then lay eggs inside the straws. We don't always realize that we are dependent on insects for our very existence. The mason bees will help pollinate the native plants and vegetables we have planted and allow fruit to develop. And in case you are wondering, mason bees are small greenish-black bees that almost never sting anyone. Some wasp nests have been seen in the tubes, so we are not sure about the fate of the mason bees. Another story of nature to investigate.

We are trying to follow our 7<sup>th</sup> principle, which is to respect the interdependent web of life that we all share.

Our landscape at UUFA is still a work in progress and we still need volunteers. If you are interested in helping the Green Sanctuary team, please talk to one of us after the service.

In the past, my wife, Jackie has volunteered at Bear Hollow and Sandy Creek so that she could help other learn about animals. I, myself, have volunteered along with many other UU's at Sandy Creek and had the opportunity to share nature with local school groups by serving as a trail guide. As birdwatchers, we ended up donating the birdbath in the herb garden here at the UU. Others have donated their time, plants, bird feeders and have purchased birdseed. Just for fun, raise your hand if you are a birdwatcher or just enjoy watching wildlife.

Raise your hand if you have worked in a garden away from your home such as a cooperative vegetable garden or have gardened at the fellowship?

If you live at a place with yard, raise your hand if you have worked on turning it into a certified wildlife habitat garden? (*4 persons raised their hand at the first service and 6 people raised their hands at the second service*)

Please keep your hands up. As a base line for 2015 we will count how many members already have worked on making a certified wildlife habitat garden so that in 5 years or so we can see if there will be any additions. And then count 5 years after that.

Please join us outside today after the service, we will be installing our Wildlife Sanctuary sign to commemorate the work we have done so far and will do in the future. (*Unfortunately, it was raining so hard that we didn't have a chance to put up the sign after the service.*)

### **Time & Talent Moment**

*Recognizing Green Sanctuary, by Carol-Lee Baker*

The Volunteer Recognition Team, under the leadership of Susan Curtis, is coordinating with the Lay Ministers to recognize some of the many volunteers who carry out our mission and vision here at UUFA.

In February, we recognized the Fellowship cluster, focusing on Pastoral care and Care Rings. Other members of the Volunteer Recognition Team are: Jane Mayer, Diane Bridges, Herb West, and Barbara Leisner. Today we recognize the Green Sanctuary Team which is part of the Justice Cluster with Karen Solheim as Lay Minister.

The Green Sanctuary Program provides a path for congregational study, reflection and action in response to environmental challenges. Initiated in 1991, it evolved from the Seventh Principle Project which published a Green Sanctuary Handbook, introducing Unitarian Universalist congregations to the concept of integrating our environmental consciousness into our faith communities. That first handbook helped UUs begin to imagine what it would look like if congregational life reflected the seventh Principle of Unitarian Universalism, "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."

The handbook has since been revised many times to include other aspects of environmental concerns, environmental justice and specific focus areas for becoming accredited as a Green Sanctuary.

In 2006 greater attention was focused on environmental issues by congregations within UUA and the commitment to address those issues through a structured program intensified. At General Assembly a Statement of Conscience was adopted on the Threat of Global Warming/Climate Change. This very strong statement became a grass roots effort, closely associated with the Green Sanctuary work in many congregations. A more defined program was developed in combination with a process for renewing accreditation every five years.

The Green Sanctuary Team here at UUFA began working toward the activities and projects necessary to become a candidate for accreditation in 2010 under the leadership of Patti Freeman-Lynde, thus joining the efforts of many Unitarian Universalist congregations in becoming stewards of the earth. Terry Jones took over as chair in 2011.

Current members of our Green Sanctuary Team at UUFA include: Terry Jones (Chair), Larry Dendy, Cara Andrews, Bill and Jackie Pierson, Liz Weaver, Merridy McDaniel, and Melanie Hennings.

The team has recently completed requirements for creating a Wildlife Habitat on our grounds. The process included removal of exotic invasive plants, creating sustainable sources of water for wildlife, providing bird food for our feeder and improving the existing herb garden. The team is also working toward obtaining and planting beneficial native plants. Other current projects include continuing with composting and recycling efforts, and maintaining and upgrading the children's Religious Education garden. The team has partnered with Religious Education to install Mason Bee houses on the grounds.

The Green Sanctuary Team has several projects that they want to work on, but they need additional help. They are: Reducing energy usage in our building and on our grounds; working on transit issues both in the community and in our Fellowship; researching and addressing environmental justice issues in our community. Each of these could have significant impact on our Fellowship.

In recognition of the efforts made by Green Sanctuary, the Volunteer Recognition Team is presenting them with a native azalea bush which will be planted out near the Chinese garden. We also have some note cards beautifully designed by Barbara Leissner for each member of the team. (*Handed out*) Barbara will be in the foyer following the service with some additional note cards available for a donation, in honor of the Green Sanctuary Team. Thank you to the Green Sanctuary Team for your many efforts.

### **Questions for Reflection or Discussion**

1. Do you gain a sense of renewal or joy from activities like digging in soil, planting, watching seedlings grow, and/or enjoying the flowers, fruits, or beauty of your labors? Share.
2. What ways might you support diverse habitat and wildlife at home or in your community?
3. Share a time when you saw an interdependent relationship between a plant and animal.