

# Plant Whatever Brings You Joy

by Kathryn Hall



*EDITORS NOTE: For the past three decades, Kathryn Hall has spent most of her mornings in her garden — a love, habit, and passion that she has channeled into a multitude of resources such as her successful gardening blog, [plantwhateverbringsyoujoy.com](http://plantwhateverbringsyoujoy.com). Her latest offering comes to us garden lovers in the form of a book; *Plant Whatever Brings You Joy* which encapsulates Hall's "blessed wisdom from the garden" — culling over twenty years of horticultural experience into 52 life lessons. Each lesson is brought to life with meaningful and touching observances of the author's own time in, and out of, the garden. The Whole Person is pleased to share two of our favorite chapters.*

## REMEMBER THAT ALL SEEDS HAVE THEIR OWN RATE OF RETURN

The earliest seeds of *Plant Whatever Brings You Joy* emerged shortly after my daughter left home for college and I moved north to Mendocino where I almost immediately started working on a garden. It was the first time in a long time I had lived alone, and I found I landed in the woods with an insatiable passion for experimenting with all kinds of new plants. It was there I discovered the delicate columbine, the beauty of blue canterbury bells, the joys of growing pink, lavender and white cosmos, and the thrill of scented honeysuckle. Early mornings found me already out among my plants, like as not still in a bathrobe and slippers, anxiously seeing what new thing had emerged or changed from the day before. There was always something. In this morning ritual I began seeing the obvious connection between what I was learning in the garden and how that same lesson held true in other areas of my life, and I began to take mental notes. Later I was inspired enough to purchase a bound journal where I began writing down what I was noticing.

Thus the inception of this book.

I had the luxury of taking years, actually, of making these observations and at some point I began to very tentatively share some of these ideas with close friends. Consistently faces lit up and people nodded and smiled and I began to blow hope and faith into sharing my vision.

Evolution of the project turned up in unexpected places. I took a workshop with a woman who described the phenomenon of "parallel jobs." She described musicians whose souls were longing for

expression who had jobs as DJ's or set designers who longed to act. This struck a cord, and I began to wonder if perhaps I was carrying some of this parallel longing in my life as a publicist. This was a job I believed in and loved, but it was also true that all the while "my book" was in the shadows.

I began to publish articles. Tiny tendrils were emerging from the earth.

Then a wonderful opportunity came at a seemingly strange time. Just at the time in my personal life my grandmother was catapulting towards heaven, I was in my business life conversing in cyberspace with a colleague in London who was taking a kind of survey about business travel. I emailed back that while I didn't necessarily do a lot of business travel, I had actually begun a second book, on that very subject. You can imagine my surprise and delight when this editor wrote back to me and asked how much material I had! Next thing I knew I had been hired to write about all the ways in which one might stay healthy while on the road, a subject I loved writing about and could readily contribute to. This was my official launch into being published in a book, a lofty start, indeed, as the publisher was a well-known British firm.

My inner flower grew.

Life had taken me to many new gardens over this period of time and while I cherished "my gardening book" still it seemed to be in somewhat of a dormant period.

An old close friend would remind me now and then, saying she hoped I would continue with this dream, and once she sent me a birthday card she herself had designed. On the cover she had drawn a lovely gold tree with deep and abundant roots with a large

chestnut lying below the tree and a myriad of twinkling stars in the sky. Underneath she had written an Ani DiFranco quote, "I will not be afraid to let my talent shine!" Inside she wrote, "Happy Birthday, Kathryn! In the year of the risk."

I don't know what risks I took that year, but it wasn't this book. Still slumbering under that gold tree inside the chestnut, undoubtedly.

Then there was stirring in the roots of my book tree.

One Christmas my darling daughter happened to send me a gardening journal for Christmas. On the cover was a bunny holding a rake and hoe. I knew she was thinking of my book and my love for that project when she chose it and I was touched at her loving thoughtfulness. I thanked her and told her I was going to dedicate the journal to seeing me through on my book.

There are only two entries in the journal. The first states the purpose of the journal and an affirmation for what I saw for my book, written in the present tense, as if it were already happening.

The second entry was written after I returned from a conference in New Mexico where I heard the presentation of an author who revealed to the audience that her book had actually sat in her desk drawer for ten years. I felt the goosebumps on my skin as I listened.

I returned to home charged up, determined and committed. The old Goethe quote had long been taped to the top of my telephone when I first began my book publicity business:

*"Whatever you can do  
Or think you can  
Begin it  
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."*

I began to act from that place. Clearly the tree had sprouted from its long incubation.

The plant had taken root. I began my blog and over time found a worldwide readership, for which I am incredibly grateful. And now. A book.

Within each big dream are many many seeds and stages of growth. Some seeds fall on barren ground. Some are caught in a sudden breeze of inspiration and grace, falling back to solid ground and everything that is needed to bring it to lovely fruition.

What seeds lie within you that long for all the right ingredients to bloom to glory?

## PLANT WHATEVER BRINGS YOU JOY

I had thought I would never live in a city again, having put in time in both San Francisco and Mexico City, but Amsterdam proved to be the exception. It was quite safe, clean, interesting, and charming. Still, after two years passed, I began to grow restless with being in an urban environment. Short trips to the small charming town of Marken broke up the tension of city living, but it was not enough.

In my neighborhood the building of flats across the street had been torn down, leaving a gaping hole as my view. Small trees had been planted at the edge of the broad sidewalks, but we were, when it came down to it, surrounded by cement. My restlessness with the situation grew to agitation. Coupled with the fact we were in an urban environment was the undeniable fact that we were still, after two years, outsiders. By now Antonia spoke fluent Dutch, but she remained somewhat isolated. Her mother was a foreigner. Our neighbors consisted of born-and-bred Dutchmen and a small number of Turkish families (also tagged as forever being foreigners in the eyes

of the locals). We were the Americans.

One afternoon I looked out at the brick and concrete landscape, nearly exasperated, and I suddenly heard a voice in me say, "If you don't like it, change it. But don't complain about it anymore." I was startled to hear this voice, but I recognized instantly that it was the truth of the situation.

I went downstairs and examined the sidewalk. Dutch sidewalks are made of very very large (but not deep) cement blocks manufactured elsewhere and then laid down on sand. What I discovered by poking around is that while they are very heavy, they could be removed. A liberating realization! Standing and staring at the broad sidewalk reaching from the wall of our building to the curb, I suddenly envisioned how convenient it would be to remove the blocks just adjacent to the wall. And, once removed, the exposed earth would create a perfect sized garden plot! Interesting!

I advised my landlord, who lived downstairs, what I intended to do. No protest from him. I enlisted the help of a couple of male friends, and they were able to pry up four of the large cement blocks in front of our building and move them to the area behind our flat (just in case the City Fathers ever wanted them put back). I dug up the sand underneath to a depth of about two feet. Perfect. Antonia and I filled up the hole I had made with fresh earth. I began to purchase flowering plants and gradually filled the earthen area with their living beauty.

And a strange thing happened. Strangers began appearing at the door of my flat. Strangers who had previously shied away from us "foreigners." Some brought plants. And some shoved money into my hands! I was dumbfounded, amazed and delighted!

Children showed up to help set the plants in the ground. Soon we had our garden! We had made a difference in our neighborhood. Everyone could see and enjoy the beauty. It made my heart burst with joy. The momentum from that single action was so unexpected.

One evening an elderly woman came to the door and told me she lived down the street and that her husband was an invalid who sat inside all day. Watching out the window was one of his main activities. She asked humbly if we would consider coming down to their flat and planting another garden, which we did.

This simple act of the willingness to go against the grain, to step outside the box, to challenge the way things had always been done proved to be a deeply transformational experience for both me and my daughter, and the heartstrings that surrounded this vision and action extended into the hearts and minds and eyes of a neighborhood.

What seeds of joy might you plant that would transform your life and those around you? What commitment would it take? What risk? What courage? What vision have you discounted as impossible? What would you gain by doing something about it and what might you lose by not?

*This is an excerpt from *Plant Whatever Brings You Joy: Blessed Wisdom from the Garden* by Kathryn Hall. Please visit [www.plantwhateverbringsyoujoy.com](http://www.plantwhateverbringsyoujoy.com) for more information.*

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