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## The Gardener (Make love not war in your eco-yard)

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*"Life is a mystery to be lived,  
not a problem to be solved"—Unknown*



*Amoebas*

### THE BIRTH OF A NEW VIEW: THE ECO-YARDS CONCEPT

Last year, I was asked to give a talk on chemical-free gardening. When the coordinator sent me drafts of the newsletter and poster blurb for the talk—"Come learn natural methods for getting rid of pests!"—I realized she and I saw gardening from very different perspectives. I was horrified by the prospect of being boxed into a future career of talking about vinegars and insecticidal soap, neglecting the bigger story of how we can steward our yards in a more ecologically-friendly way. I remembered the discomfort, during other such talks, of answering questions mostly about how to kill things. Once, I'd blurted at a participant, "My forté is not killing things; I got into this line of work because I love to plant and grow things!"

Bless the talk coordinator, because in my struggle to explain this feeling to her it became even clearer to me that eco-yards gardening is not simply about replacing chemical weapons with organic weapons in a war against pests. Eco-yards gardening is about replacing the common view of gardening as a war to control our little plots of land with a different view—that of gardening as a way to work in harmony with other beings in nature to revitalize the land we steward so it is shining with health.

## ***Growing ourselves: archetypes and our new role in the gardening drama***

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For many of us, this approach is a fundamental shift in how we view landscaping and gardening. What's the most effective way to make such a wholesale change? Embody the archetype of the Gardener rather than the Warrior.

The concept of archetypes was developed by Carl Jung, the great Viennese psychoanalyst. He found that similar characters showed up again and again in his clients' dreams. Archetypes are the great roles we all play in our lives. They are portrayed in myth, in movies, on television, in books and in our dreams. Many writers have used various archetypes as models to work with to further personal growth and development. (For more on archetypes, see the "Appendix.")

### **Examples of Archetypes**

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ARCHETYPE	EXAMPLES
<i>the Magician</i>	Gandalf in <i>Lord of the Rings</i> , Martin Luther King Jr.: "I have a dream"
<i>the Ruler</i>	any king or queen, Barack Obama
<i>the Innocent</i>	Dorothy near the beginning of <i>The Wizard of Oz</i>
<i>the Warrior</i>	a martial artist, a soldier
<i>the Caregiver</i>	Mother Teresa
<i>the Lover</i>	Don Juan
<i>the Sage</i>	Yoda in <i>Star Wars</i>
<i>the Fool</i>	Robin Williams in his comedy roles

### ***Eco-yards and the Warrior***

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The dominant archetype in Western culture for centuries has been the Warrior—so prevalent, in fact, we often don't even notice its influence. Today, the everyday language of mainstream media is full of metaphors of war and battle, metaphors that shape the common approach to many activities. We constantly hear about "battling cancer," "the War on Terror," "the War

on Drugs," "the target market," "our aim and objective," "my opponent," "our weapons."

Landscaping, too, is often thought of as a battle against plant diseases, a fight against the weather, a war on weeds, or an assault on insects to protect our lawn and trees. Is it possible to win these battles? In my experience, rarely. In real warfare, "winning" may take such massive firepower that everything is devastated; buildings are levelled, vegetation is killed, and the result is a lifeless wasteland. The civilians that warriors were trying to protect are dead or left without food, shelter or viable land.

### How Do You Define "Pest"?

The Oxford Dictionary defines pest as "any thing or person that is noxious, destructive or troublesome; a bane, curse, plague." – *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955). By this definition, humans may be the worst pests on earth.

The "civilians" in the urban landscaping warfare of the last 50 years are the tiny bacteria, fungi and other micro-organisms in the soil and on plant leaves that ensure plants receive the nutrients they need to grow. Soil micro-organisms are critical to life on earth; without them plants won't grow. And all living things on earth depend on plants. The firepower that has devastated the soil micro-organisms has usually been in the form of chemicals. This devastation may be difficult to detect because, while chemical pesticides have been used to do battle with "pests," chemical fertilizers have been used to feed the plants nutrients they can no longer readily get from the soil. So most of the plants live, but they're not as healthy and lush as they could be.

This warlike approach has been destroying the health of our soil—the basis of its fertility. We also may not notice, because it has happened over time, that in many locations there are fewer birds and insects and certainly fewer varieties, especially of some of the more delicate and beautiful species, such as songbirds. This is because of chemical use and loss of natural habitat.

The Warrior archetype is not suited to eco-yards gardening. A different set of qualities is required. Eco-yards gardening is life-affirming; it's not about win-lose. Eco-yards gardening is about partnership and cooperation with the plants, the soil and the conditions, rather than about control.

Eco-yards gardening is about supporting the ecosystem in its complexity of interactions. This does not mean there is no destruction. Creation and destruction are an essential part of the circle of life. In an eco-yard, destruction supports the ecosystem. Weeding, pruning and digging to plant are all destructive acts that support a healthy eco-yard. And in an eco-yard, whatever is destroyed usually goes into the compost pile to become new soil and food for plants.

Eco-yards gardening is about letting go of looking for "silver bullets" or "quick fixes" and having the patience to allow everything the time it needs to develop and grow and shift and die. It's not about trading in chemical weapons for potent organic ones, but rather building the health of the whole ecosystem of the yard. It's about tending and planning for the long term and being open to surprise at what unfolds.

## **ECO-YARDS AS NATUROPATHY**

Some people compare the difference between Warrior and eco-yards gardening to the difference between conventional Western medicine and naturopathic or preventive medicine for human health. The former often relies on drugs to cure symptoms. The drugs then may cause side effects and other problems. For example, antibiotics can weaken the basic digestive system by killing off some of the beneficial bacteria that help us absorb nutrients and stay healthy. Naturopathic medicine, on the other hand, focuses on balancing and strengthening our whole body; this may, for example, involve taking probiotics (beneficial bacteria) to restore the digestive system. In preventive medicine, the focus is on taking the body to optimum health so it can naturally address any germs or diseases and stay healthy.

Taking a similar naturopathic approach to your yard really works. Why? First, because healthy plants are less susceptible

to infestation by insects and disease. So-called pests—insects that eat plants, and diseases that infest plants—sense differently than humans; unhealthy plants give off a different light frequency than healthy plants, for example. To the “pests,” unhealthy plants are more attractive: they’re weaker, less protected by a layer of healthy microbes and therefore easier to chew through and lodge on. Who wouldn’t go for the easy meal? Animal predators do the same, minimizing energy output in the hunt by picking off the weakest members of a herd (the young, the old, the sick). This process actually helps to keep the ecosystem healthy and balanced. So “pests” have their role.

Taking the naturopathic approach further, we can understand weeds as an indication that the soil minerals and chemistry are not balanced. Once the soil is more balanced, healthy plants will grow where only weeds would grow before (see Chapter 5, “Weeds and Bugs”).

### The War on Weeds

“The War on Weeds? We gave that up long ago! And everything out here at our nursery looks just fine. We hoe weeds when they’re small. We mulch with wood chips to prevent weeds. And when the thistles get tall in the few areas they grow, we mow them. When lots of aphids show up on certain trees, we leave them. It’s usually just a cycle: this is their year and they’ll be gone next year.” – Ken Wright, Bow Point Nursery, Springbank, Alberta

## CHANGING ARCHETYPES

The Warrior archetype is so engrained in our culture that it can be difficult to think differently about landscaping and gardening. If we don’t, though, we won’t know how to act differently. To change our approach we must adopt a new archetype, stepping into a different way of thinking about how to be in the world (or at least in our gardens).

Although we may not think of it as such, we step into different archetypal roles all the time. For example, a good parent will embody several archetypes at various times—the Ruler:

"Everyone get ready—we're leaving in five minutes!"; the Magician: "I'll kiss that hurt spot and it will get better"; and the Caregiver: "Let me give you a hug and a bath and then put you to bed." A parent may shift archetypes from moment to moment, sometimes embodying several at once.

Embodying the appropriate archetype is important to play a role fully or to make the most of a situation. For example, you probably won't have any fun at a party until you activate at least a bit of the Fool archetype within you. If you are engaged in a martial art, you want to embody the Warrior archetype to avoid getting hurt and be a worthy opponent. Acting from an inappropriate archetype can mean a lack of synchrony between thought and action. So making the switch from Warrior to Gardener is key to success in eco-gardening.

### The Warrior and the Gardener

Two young men have worked with me in landscaping over the last few years. One embodies the Warrior archetype thoroughly, and I learned to have him mainly do tasks for which Warrior qualities are helpful—digging out sod, hauling soil, building walls. He has broken numerous handles of weeding tools as he tries to muscle the weeds out of the ground rather than sensing resistance and backing off from tree roots and then rocking gently to pull the weeds out. The other young man is a true Gardener. When I first saw him carry plants as if they were newborn babies, I taught him how to plant, and this is largely his task now. One of my favorite memories is coming upon him sitting in lanky lotus position, gently digging with a trowel between the rocks of a pathway as he planted low groundcovers. His rhythm was smooth and he looked relaxed and serene, like a part of the landscape.

## THE SECRET GARDEN

The best model I know of the Gardener archetype is the character Dickon in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *The Secret Garden* (1911).<sup>1</sup> The book has been made into a few movies, at least one of which should be available at your local video store or



library—and may already be on your children’s video shelf. In the story, the 12-year-old “common cottage boy” Dickon guides a young crippled boy and his girl cousin through caring for a garden in such a way that they (along with the young boy’s father) are restored to their true loving, laughing, lively and healthy selves from an earlier state of lonely unhappiness.

The story is set on the Yorkshire moors in England. Dickon spends much time out on the moors and in the garden of the estate where the two little cousins, Mary and Colin, live. Mary and Colin believe Dickon to be doing magic because he has tamed squirrels and a crow, and birds follow him and listen to him play his flute. Dickon explains that, far from magic, his close relationship with nature is a result of living on the moor so much and knowing the ways of the animals. Moreover, he “feels sometimes as if he was a bird or a rabbit himself.”

Dickon has a way with plants too. He tends a vegetable and herb garden for his mother. “We’d never get on as comfortable as we do,” says his mother, “if it wasn’t for Dickon’s garden. Anything’ll grow for him. His ‘taters and cabbages is twice th’ size of any one

else's an' they've got a flavour with 'em as nobody's has." Dickon has also planted beautiful flowers in this garden.

When the crippled little boy starts to walk, he asks Dickon if he's making the magic that helps him walk. Dickon responds, "'Tha's doing Magic thyself'.... It's same Magic as made these 'ere work out o' th' earth..." Dickon then touches "with his thick boot a clump of crocuses in the grass.... 'Aye... there couldna' be bigger Magic than that here—there couldna' be.'"

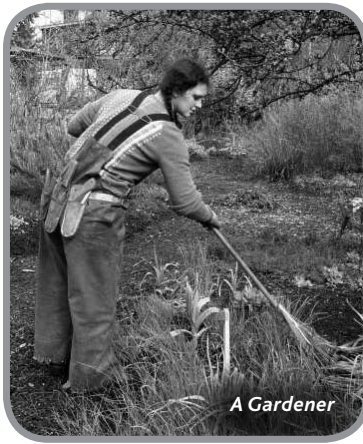
Dickon demonstrates a strong Gardener quality, continually sharing his vision of what the garden will become. He inspires the children to love tending and maintaining the garden and keeps them open to its wonder—they can't wait to get up and see what will unfold there each day.

Dickon embodies an awareness of and reverence for natural patterns, a sensitivity to all other beings, the ability to envision what could be in the garden, the know-how to create that vision (which comes from years of observing natural patterns) and the nurturing to care for all the elements of the garden. He also loves and appreciates the natural ecosystem, its complexity and surprises, and approaches it with wonder and delight. As a result, everything flourishes around Dickon: the plants, the birds and other animals in the garden—and the two children.

### ***A real life Gardener in Oregon***

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As I was thinking about who, of those I knew, embodied the Gardener archetype, I had a magical experience of synchronicity—I met a Gardener. A friend took a group, including me, to lunch at a farm using organic methods near Portland, Oregon, that included a restaurant, hotel, vineyard and large gardens that provide produce to the kitchen. A woman was tending the herb garden near the restaurant, raking leaves off low strawberry plants. Someone asked, "Are you making the strawberries happy?" The woman, Leah, responded, "Yes—all it takes is a little love." I perked up, excited to meet someone who embodied the Gardener archetype. I asked her if the farm and orchard were organic, and yes, they were. I asked what she thought of my view that people often just trade in their chemical weapons for organic ones, still essentially fighting with



### *From Warrior to Gardener*

*Changing archetypes from Warrior to Gardener is a matter of shifting from seeing ourselves as dominant and in control of the land to understanding our role as its temporary steward, working in cooperation with its many natural processes.*

nature. She responded that the people who tended the farm only used a bit of pyrethrin, considered a natural pesticide, in the greenhouse when they needed to control some insects in that unnatural environment. They used compost, compost tea and some mineral sprays in the orchard. “We weed and tend plants by hand and once in a while I may squish some bugs. Otherwise, it all works itself out if you leave it alone.” She then was silent for a minute and offered, “The most magic happens in the vegetable garden. I figure plants have egos and want to show us what they can do, so I ask them ‘Who’s going to show me their stuff first?’ and they respond—they all seem to grow better!”

## **BEING A GARDENER**

While the character Dickon represents the Gardener ideal, most of us probably aren’t able to spend enough waking hours out of doors and in the garden to have the squirrels following us and robins talking to us! Still, we can emulate the qualities of love, connection and vision that Dickon brings to gardening.

My Gramma Belle was a Gardener in her unique way. She simply believed that anything would grow for her regardless of the conditions—and it did! She grew houseplants in what seemed like clay and baked them in her bay window, and they looked healthy and bloomed profusely. Her vegetable gardens and flowerbeds were full.

My Gramma Bertha communed every morning with her beloved Hansa rose (almost taller than she was), drinking her coffee from a teacup as, in her housecoat, she deadheaded the spent blossoms to encourage the rose to keep blooming. Her grandchildren and her sister's grandchildren came to identify the Hansa rose with her and most of us have one in our yards—some from the original bush.

It's not surprising that "Magic" (of nature, of the moors, of healing) is a prominent theme in *The Secret Garden*. In addition to more obvious caring qualities, a true Gardener embodies and taps into what can be seen as magical qualities. When we understand that our small actions in the yard have an effect on the world at large, when we conjure a vision of our future garden, when we transform initial disappointment at rain into joy (the plants will be watered and we can take a walk in the rain or stay inside and do something else we wanted to do), we are doing Gardener magic.

While some may sense or see the actual energies of the trees and plants, simply feeling appreciation is also a sign of a Gardener. I do a small ritual of walking around my yard almost every day and saying hello in my mind to the plants and sometimes the other features in the yard (like the compost bin). Sometimes I will feel my joy at their beauty (even in the dusty early spring) as I greet them. Whether the plants feel this or not, it helps me to feel connected to them and to enjoy caring for them. I also like to imagine the microbes on the plants and in the soil and greet them too, simply to remind me they are there carrying out vital functions.

### Plants Have Feelings Too!

Research has shown that plants respond to our feelings and may have their own feelings too. Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird used polygraph techniques (also used for lie detection!) and found that plants respond much as humans do to different situations.<sup>2</sup>

## Recreating Eden

*Recreating Eden*, a production by Canada's Vision Television, highlights a gardener and their garden on every show. The first seasons of the show are available on DVD. I've found it truly inspiring to see how gardeners around the world have had a vision and co-created with nature to build beautiful gardens.

Rituals of any kind align one's body with mind and spirit and are a powerful way to strengthen commitment. Any ritual you invent that is meaningful to you, for instance, when you break ground or plant, can help you remember and commit to the principles of eco-yards gardening.

Other ways you can reinforce the Gardener in yourself include hanging out with people who embody the Gardener archetype, reading books like *The Secret Garden* and watching movies or TV shows on gardening. Having a uniform for your Gardener archetype—a set of pants or vest, a gardening apron or gloves—can help you step into the archetype. Taking the posture of the Gardener—rounded and soft, looking or reaching up or down, aware of earth and sky energy—may also help.

## GARDENER FOR A SUSTAINABLE PLANET

This book is about how to be an eco-friendly gardener in your yard. If we are to truly develop sustainable human living on this planet, the Gardener archetype must become a norm. It is this fundamental shift in attitude and worldview about the natural world, and our place in it, that will support us in creating new ways to live and in taking action.

The Gardener is nothing new; rather, it is ancient. Most indigenous cultures approach the world this way. Our ancestors did. We have it in us. We just need to remember.

## Re-thinking Cottonwood Fluff

Many people blame the fluff that appears from cottonwood poplars each year for their allergies. The fluff isn't at fault—fluff is the female seed holder. The male pollen from trees and grasses is what triggers allergies. I've encouraged people to think of the fluff as magical feminine energy floating around full of seeds, just waiting to find a place to land and plant those seeds.

## SUMMARY

- Gardening the eco-yards way requires working with nature rather than battling to control nature.
- Embodying the Gardener archetype rather than the Warrior archetype is the most effective way to think and act in harmony with nature.
- The Gardener archetype is needed for humans globally to restore harmony with nature.

## NOTES

1. Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (New York: Dell, Yearling edition, 1987). Originally published in 1911.
2. Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, *The Secret Life of Plants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

