SYMBIOSIS OF PLANTS AND PEOPLE

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Seminar: Plants and People

[Assignment: Write an essay describing a person's relationship to a garden. The person may be a friend, family member, neighbor, or even yourself. The garden can be of any type, public park or private ownership, and the relationship positive or negative. Your goal should be to express yourself, explain something, or entertain.]

(1) As my grandfather and I stood at the roadside in front of a desolate plot of land, taking cover under an umbrella from a driving rain with an annoying real estate agent blurring blandishments at us, I remember wondering if I truly enjoyed gardening or if I was fooling myself. I suspect my grandfather was asking himself similar questions. Somewhat apprehensively, we returned to the real estate office to sign papers for the pitiful scrap of land. On the way home, I remember asking my grandfather what we were going to do next. He said, very simply, "We're going to get dirty." The land we had just purchased was to become a 1000 square foot garden, a project we had longed to undertake for some time. Those are the events of a stormy spring day when I was fourteen years old. My grandfather and I made a special commitment to each other that day: we would dedicate all the blood, sweat, and tears necessary for the completion of this monument to our combined skill in gardening no matter what it took. Unfortunately, the land we had chosen, although it was well-situated geographically, was very poor. Consequently, we both started out with a somewhat negative attitude toward the land, but over the course of the next two years our feelings changed dramatically.

(2) Our first year with "the plot," as we called it, was filled with obstacles. Preparation of the soil, first and foremost on our list of goals for that season, progressed slowly. The removal of gravel and refuse was tedious at best and recruitment of other family members to help accomplish this task was next to impossible. Finally, after about two months of spading, digging, and raking we felt that the land looked fit to grow on. But a soil test disproved our belief. Organic materials such as peat moss, limestone, and manure had to be added in order to rejuvenate the nutrient count on "the plot." After a few weeks of tilling these materials into the ground we were satisfied that this land now provided the optimum growing conditions. Unfortunately, we had spent the entire summer on this task so growing anything this year was out of the question.

(3) Confident that our efforts had not been for naught, we exercised extreme patience and began a master plan for the following year. We spent the fall measuring "the plot," and reading our journals in which we kept records of our experimentation. By mid-October, we had
planned the major features of the garden. We decided to plant a small orchard of fruit trees in one corner, which we promptly ordered and placed in "the garden." What I remember most about this point in the project was that we no longer called our land "the plot" but now referred to it as "the garden." Our land now possessed distinct visual features and our outlook on the entire project also began to improve radically.

(4) As winter dragged on and cabin fever set in, both of us became anxious. Someone was watching over us, though, because spring came unusually early. We were, of course, very pleased with this turn of events and took advantage of the weather. The land quickly began to take on more and more characteristics of a real garden. Suddenly, we were inundated with offers of assistance from family and even friends, many of whom had seen me on my knees begging for help earlier. We declined politely; the two of us alone had shared in the toil and we intended to enjoy completing "the garden" ourselves. Since its completion, however, "the garden" has benefited from the efforts of many family members and friends. That summer brought the best harvest I have ever seen in a home garden. We took pictures and kept records of the fine specimens which rivaled those we had read about the previous fall and winter.

(5) The efforts of almost two years were richly rewarded and "the garden" became a focal point of the area. My grandfather and I are continually amazed at what has become of "the plot." We have achieved a symbiotic relationship with "the garden." The land has been good to us in return for all we have done for it. As we look back to a stormy spring day when we purchased a pile of gravel and refuse, we find it hard to imagine that we were ever apathetic toward "the garden."