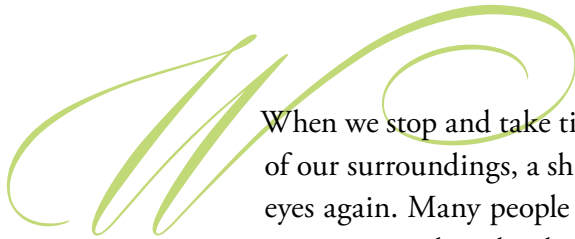


CHAPTER I

RECONNECTING WITH THE EARTH



When we stop and take time to listen, to sense, and to just *be* with the energy of our surroundings, a shift occurs within us and we never see with the same eyes again. Many people who work with the earth through gardening, farming, or natural studies have already felt and are living with that shift. I think it is a remembering that we are an important part of the vast force in Nature that is all knowing and all giving. Call it God, call it Great Spirit, call it Love, but know it is out there and has never really left us. As my dear friend and wise woman Rachael Salley says, “When God and I are far apart, who moved?” May this book inspire you to reconnect or deepen your connection with the earth through the vehicle of gardening.

So together, at the beginning of this journey, let us discover ways to rekindle this connection. As I said before, paying attention to what is happening in your immediate environment is a great place to begin. When I was a child, I took for granted that everyone talked to their plants, just like they talked to their dog or their cat. Yes, I know animals can’t speak English and talk back, but that doesn’t mean you can’t have a conversation with them. They speak in others ways, through body language and through pictures in your mind. My

*Bleeding heart (Dicentra
spectabilis) is a heart
connection flower*

cat stands and waits at her water bowl, and I know she is thirsty and wants fresh water. The dog has a wistful glaze to her eyes; I can tell she is missing my husband who is away on a business trip.

Likewise, looking at a plant with drooping leaves, you know it wants a drink. A plant with dull or yellowing leaves needs some fertilizer, and a one with brown holes is getting too much sun. Once you know about plants, these messages are obvious. At times this communication is what I call a knowingness, a sixth sense about what is needed. For instance, seeing an extra glow or vitality emanating from a plant, I know it is happy in its location. Sensing a dull lifeless energy from a plant lets me know it needs my attention, and is often asking to be moved elsewhere in the garden.

Watching my mother talk to plants since my childhood has given me the advantage of never questioning this practice of communication. But as I grew older, I did begin to question just whom or what was she speaking to? Was it the physical structure of the plant, or was there something more? This is when I discovered Nature Spirits, or Devas, and also that other people talked to them too. In fact, entire books have been written about the Devas and the energy they bring to a garden. I know many people garden without ever tapping into this dimension, and still they enjoy the physical rewards gardening provides. Yet Nature Spirits add a layer of spiritual dimension to gardening that takes one beyond growing an award winning tomato, or creating an eye-catching flowerbed. This relationship takes us deeper into our sacred self, and richly feeds our Soul.

It is a pleasure knowing this gardening “secret”: that there is another dimension that is overlapped with the one we can see with our physical eyes. I am so grateful that there is an entire group of entities in the garden just waiting for me to ask for their help! By working together, we can build a paradise of sacred space that is filled with light and becomes a haven for all who experience it.

I feel more than see this other dimension and it is translated into a sense of personal joy, love and healing when I am open to it. The palatable energy is everywhere in Nature, not just in a garden. It is even on a city sidewalk living within the one stubborn dandelion plant that refuses to surrender to such

harsh conditions. It is in a remote tundra landscape, sleeping quietly under several feet of snow. Acknowledging that it exists is what began my relationship with it.

Keeping this open heart and mind has led me to question many more unknowns in my gardening life. I have discovered the energies found in a garden are not there by accident. There is a very organized and orchestrated plan to all that helps a garden to thrive. And the human factor is but one of many in this equation, the one factor the Nature Spirits have been waiting to reconnect with for a very long time.

GARDEN DEVAS

It was mid-June and just a few weeks after moving into a new home that I encountered my own Landscape Deva. I was eagerly raking new topsoil over the barren sand on the East side of the yard. My goal was to get the lawn seed planted by that weekend so I would perhaps have a green and glowing lawn sometime that summer. As I raked, a sense of a very tall angelic-like presence came swooping around the corner of the house, as if in anticipation. She was a wispy white color, much the texture of silk or gauze flowing in the wind. I could see her face clearly, but the rest of her body flowed into this white, transparent energy shape, seeming to float about two to three feet off the ground. I knew who she was without having to ask, and in our acknowledgement of each other I was shown the yard in the future tense.

As I looked at the new barren ground around me, I saw the lawn as green and lush, the perennial beds bursting with color and light. I could see clear as day the Children and Creativity Garden in its full splendor. There was a trickling fountain in one corner, and orange and yellow tiger lilies, purple coneflower, black-eyed susans, and old-fashioned delicate pink fairy roses filling up the space. To my left I saw the Helpful People Garden, with a 2-foot gray statue of a sitting Buddha surrounded by pink and white Japanese anemones. A golden ginkgo tree loomed over the Buddha's head providing a serene sense of shelter in the dappled shade. The Landscape Deva was pleased

with my labors and my heart was buzzing with excitement. I smiled to her and myself, knowing this was truly going to be a magical experience for us both in the seasons ahead.

Three years after that meeting, I stand in the same spot on the Southeast side of the yard. I smile at the lush growth of emerald green grass beneath my feet. In the near distance a rotund statue of Buddha sits quietly under the protective branches of a delicate golden ginkgo tree. The bright pink petals of the japanese anemones sway in the breeze. My gaze moves down the hill to

*The fairy gardens as seen with
the Landscape Deva three
years before it was planted*



the Fairy Garden in the Children and Creativity area. It is ablaze with color. Fluorescent purple echinacea on sturdy stalks, brilliant yellow lilies, and vibrant black-eyed susans shine their cheery faces towards the sky. The sound of water trickling in the distance from the three-tiered fountain is comforting and cooling on this hot summer's day. I am now physically surrounded by the exact visual the Landscape Deva had given me years ago, when all this was only sand and rocks as I raked the dark brown topsoil over its surface. She had shown me the magic to come; I had seen the vision of the garden years before it was complete.

For me this type of visioning helps to manifest all the parts that eventually become a garden. When we can see it in our mind's eye complete, or are able to sketch a visual image on paper, the real work has already been accomplished. Learning how to communicate with your Landscape Deva will greatly assist you in this process.

Nature Spirits, also known as Nature Devas, are the unseen energies of a natural space that orchestrate all that occurs in that place. The three levels that most humans interact with when working in a garden are Landscape Devas, Plant and Animal Devas, and Fairies. Forming a relationship with them ensures an easier and more joyful process of gardening. It takes gardening to the deeper and more intimate level of working in co-creation with another dimension of life to enrich the harmony of the land we live on.

The most beautiful and accurate definition of Deva I have ever heard is: "*That which brings light.*" Is it any wonder that the words Deva and Angel are often used interchangeably? Devas take light and manifest it into the beautiful three-dimensional flowers, fruits, vegetables, and plants that grow in our gardens. Every garden, plot of land, and expanse of grass has a Landscape Deva connected with it. This Deva works like the general contractor for all that is growing in that space. It orchestrates the overall vitality found in that particular organized area of the garden.

As I have said, I have often seen this Landscape Deva in my mind's eye moving down a swoop of beautiful emerald green grass on a hill at the Southeast side of my garden, even when it was still all just bare sand. She moves like

the energy I call Chi flow, the life force that is in all living things. Often I sense her as more of a feeling than an image, yet I do sometimes see a billowing, gauzy, haze and the color white. She loves racing around that corner to greet me and to fill my heart with pure glee. This Landscape Deva is beauty and grace and ease of motion. She is the essence of my garden in full bloom, as it sways in all its colors on a breezy afternoon. She emulates the feeling I wish to create in all places, everywhere; inside and outside my home. She is peaceful tranquility, and she is alive!

The plants in turn are governed by the energies of an Overlighting Deva for each plant family. For example, the Rose Deva is in charge of making sure that its plants create the awesome, sweet smelling flowers we recognize as roses. The Carrot Deva is in charge of the cellular and energetic makeup found in the plant that directs it to form carrots. There are also Devas in charge of species of animals, for instance the Mole Deva. This is the energy you would want to communicate with if you were having a maze of mole tunnels crisscrossing your garden. We will discuss more about that in the Natural Gardening chapter!

Each plant may also have its own individual Deva, and often these are called Fairies. Fairies help to form the physical structure of each particular plant within the family group. In my garden I have never seen a fairy in the form made popular in storybooks, the tiny humanlike creatures with gossamer wings, though I would love to. It is said fairies will appear to you in the form you feel most comfortable seeing them in. What I *perceive* as fairies are tiny golden dots surrounding a plant or as a light green to white wispy flow that comes in and out of my visual perception. I most often sense it when I am not looking for it; for instance when my physical body takes over the labor that needs to be done, like the digging or watering, and a rich humming feeling takes over my mind. These are the times when I get to sense my gardens' true energy; huge and all encompassing, yet sometimes it condenses so I get a glimpse of its wonder.

It wasn't until I studied feng shui and developed my ability to focus on Chi flow that I began to visually *see* the Nature Spirits. Working in the garden, a

sense of present moment mindfulness comes over me and the rest of the world is far away. One day as I was weeding in the Cottage Garden, I saw a flash of white in my peripheral vision head off under a nearby plant. My rational mind woke up and thought it must have been a frog or snake that moved so quickly. I searched for several minutes and found no physical evidence of what I had seen. I know now it was my first acknowledged glimpse of a Nature Spirit. So, one of the first steps in connecting to them is to be in the present moment with your surroundings, working with such joy and concentration that you automatically go into a quiet place of intuitive attention.

ACKNOWLEDGING NATURE SPIRITS

Your Nature Spirits love to be acknowledged even if you haven't *physically* connected to them yet. Honoring these Spirits will make their vibration stronger for you and help you to begin tuning into them. I often honor them by using the Native American tradition of a sprinkling of cornmeal over my plants. Maize (corn) is symbolic of the abundance of the earth.

In Bali and Thailand, the people construct beautifully ornate Spirit Houses for the Nature Devas to live in. They believe it is essential to their happiness and longevity to keep the Spirits of the land happy. Before a home construction has even begun, the Nature Spirits are informed of the changes coming. A Buddhist monk comes to the site bearing a tray filled with food and flowers, and while chanting many prayers of gratitude, makes this offering to the Nature Spirits to allow a home to be built on this site. The monk would then move the tray of food very slowly, Nature Spirits following, to an auspicious area in the yard where the Spirit House would then be permanently placed. The Spirit House must never have the shadow of the house fall on it, and it must be more beautiful and ornate than the owner's home. Offerings of flowers and rice or special foods, as well as prayers, are given to the Spirit House daily to ensure happiness and well being for the business or home. They believe a displaced Nature Spirit can cause challenges in your life and your surroundings.

There are many reasons for acknowledging the Nature Spirits through ceremony. Often, it is when we want to take something from Nature; be it land, food, medicine, or even a living tree.

When I first moved to my home, the twelve acres of land had not been honored with any ceremony, but even more so, it had been abused. The only contact with humans in recent years had been men with chainsaws cutting down the trees. Men cut deep into the woods to make the driveway, the first invasion into its protected depths.

Then there was the clearing of the land for the placement of the house. Because we bought this home three years after it was built, we unfortunately had no influence in its construction. I encourage new homebuilders to honor the land throughout the entire building process. Connect with the Nature Spirits of the land from the first time you visit it, and they will reward you with a smooth and uneventful building experience. Don't connect, and you will feel the resistance in subtle and sometimes major ways.

When we first moved to our home, the land edging the driveway felt very hostile. My then 10-year-old son didn't even want to move here. He said the land felt angry. When the driveway had been built, all the trees cut down were placed in a large pile in a field near the road. By the time we purchased the house, tons of construction debris had been piled there, too: plastic, plywood, lumber and the like. It became an eyesore every time we entered the driveway, reminding me of dead bodies that had never been properly buried. I would look at those dead trees and feel a sinking in my Soul.

We knew we had to do something and that we wanted to do it slowly, because after three years several families of rabbits, and who knows what else had made homes in these construction piles. My husband and I decided to get rid of it one log at a time, for however long it took. He would cut each tree into manageable size pieces, and we would place them in the woods, hidden and able to decompose naturally. He began the work with his chainsaw and made slow but steady progress.

One dreary November day I woke with uneasiness in my heart. Although it had been drizzling lightly all day, my husband decided he would go do

*A traditional Spirit House
to honor the Nature Spirits
in Chiang Mai, Thailand*



some more cutting on the log pile. As he left the house that afternoon, that familiar feeling of dread returned, and I asked him to be extra careful while he worked. Later that day an accident with his chainsaw occurred. While cutting deep into a log that was lying on the top of the pile, the tip of the saw hit the log below it and kicked back like a powerful fist into his face, knocking him flat on his back. Upset with himself, and in shock, he gathered his belongings and headed back to the house, unaware of how injured he really was.

“Honey, I need you” was what I heard in my office, which is on the lower level of our home. It was in that strained voice of controlled panic, and I knew immediately something was desperately wrong. The voice came from our master bathroom, and as I followed it upstairs, I found him leaning over a sink filled crimson red. He had a blood-soaked towel over his entire face, and I was afraid to ask what had happened, though part of me already knew. “I had an accident with the chainsaw,” he said. “Can you still see?” was my first question. Yes, he could still see, thank God, but I wondered how long he would stay conscious. After calling a neighbor to care for our children, I drove him to the emergency room in that determined, calm way that takes over in times of crisis. Four hours and over 150 stitches later his face was finally sewn back together. While he was recovering he joked that he wished Halloween had not already passed, because he would not have needed a costume that year!

Every time I tell that story people gasp and put their hands to their faces as if in protection. There is something very vulnerable about injuries to this part of our bodies where so many sensory organs are located. Years later, he barely has a scar and is grateful for the minimum extent of his injury.

I share this experience to explain how the land can get angry with us and tell us it has had enough in all sorts of ways. I believe the Land Deva was giving us a message loud and clear. NO more chainsaws!!

My husband has since sold his chainsaw and is only armed with a single blade handsaw to do light maintenance. It is much safer and can only do minimal damage before the person using the saw gets exhausted.

There was much cornmeal and many prayers given to the land after this mishap. After neighbors and friends learned of the accident, they generously offered to help us clean up the log pile once and for all. We decided to do a slow burn on it, giving those trees back to the earth. On an unusually warm 50-degree New Years Day we gathered together in a community of support to honorably give these trees back to the earth. Interestingly, two fires evolved that day; with the women feeding one and the men feeding the other. I called them, most appropriately, the Yin and Yang fires. Yin is traditionally a feminine receding energy, where Yang is an outward, masculine type energy.

My husband even found the log he had been cutting at the time of the accident, and ceremonially offered it to the fire, saying prayers of forgiveness and gratitude for all that we had learned from his accident. In the evening as the embers still glowed, we wrote down on pieces of paper that which we were ready to release and fed them to the fire, too. I kept vigil over the fires that night, and in the morning they were reduced to pure ash.

That spring, my son and I planted a garden where the burned log piles had been, with a mixture of wild and annual flower seeds. Mother Nature had a plan of her own, and filled in the spot with her much hardier seeds of mullein, pokeweed, mustard, and phlox. So there they were, two small hidden circles of garden, about two feet high, of bachelor buttons, sweet william, coreopsis, and marigold surrounded by five-to-six foot tall giants of the natural and hardy field varieties. I laughed to think I could even begin to plan a garden better than her!

To this day that meadow garden is constantly changing and evolving, and we no longer interfere with our store-bought seeds. I go walking through it often, remembering the accident, the healing of scars, and the gifts that occurred there; the gifts of friendship, and gratitude, and releasing that occurred in this sacred space. It now feels like a sacred burial ground for all the beautiful pines that were sacrificed in order for my home to be built. It also feels like a healing space, where the Spirit of the land and myself finally put down our barriers and became deep and cherished friends.

CONNECTING WITH THE DEVAS OF YOUR GARDEN

Look deeply into the lovely forms of the flowers and the trees you care for, and you will see the essence of their spirit dance and play as a rarefied white flame within their bodily form. This is the love and the laughter of the Goddess as she smiles upon the Earth, giving charge to her angels and fairies to vivify and create all Nature anew. To open your heart to the fairies, you must nurture feelings of wonder, reverence and love for every detail of your garden, for the airs which blow about it, the musical rain which falls gently upon it, the high-riding storms which cause its spirit to resonate with the mighty spirits of the elements, the moon and the stars which silently look down on it, the great sun which is the source of its being, and for the clouds and the changing skies which provide it with a canopy. When you can truly feel the sweetness of this magic, you will begin to discover the fairies, for they will make themselves known to you.

SARAH GREAVES

FORBIDDEN AREAS

It is helpful to create an area on your property for the Nature Spirits or Devas that is off-limits to human manipulation and interaction. This area can be roped off or marked with colored flags to remind family and friends it is private ground. This token symbol of respect for the Devas acknowledges your belief in their existence, and provides them with a natural area from which to build their energies. This Forbidden Area, as we call it at our home, is located in a low, wooded valley off of the driveway that has always felt off limits to me. It has a strong vibration of wildness coming from it, and is a place I often leave offerings at its edge of cornmeal or flowers from my garden.

My young daughter feels drawn to playing there, and I used to worry that she was trespassing on that special Devic land, and warned her that she should stay off. The Nature Spirits then told me that children are welcome, as long as they are not destructive. I often see Jessie leaving gifts of flowers or stones to trees in this area, and talking to her “friends” as she calls them.

Every garden needs a wild area, even in the city. Once, at a client’s home, I asked her if she had a special area set aside for the Devas. She said, “Yes,” and proceeded to show me a neglected corner of the yard filled with garden debris, plastic pots and flat containers, bags half-filled with soil, etc., all covered in a tangle of weeds. I told her the weeds were great, but her human garbage had to go if she truly wanted to honor and work with the Nature Spirits of her land.

I speak with my Landscape Deva often, but especially at the start of a new growing season. One February, on a rather blustery day, I heard a small nudging in my head to go outdoors and take a look at the gardens. For over an hour I wandered from one side of the yard to the other, receiving detailed instructions about which plants needed moving, or dividing, and what to plant in specific areas on the land. The Deva and I had long discussions about improving soil and balancing an over-population of destructive insects. There was so much information it filled up four pages in my gardening journal!

STONE PEOPLE

Just as the land and plants have spirits that you can communicate with, so do rocks. The Native Americans call them Stone People, and revere them for their ancient wisdom and centered-ness. I call them the Rock Devas. I know talking to rocks sounds crazy, but it is really more listening that I do. Why do you think so many people have rock collections? How do those stones end up in your pocket, anyway?

Living in Michigan and having access to the Great Lakes, I grew up learning how to collect rocks. My mother had floor-to-ceiling bookshelves at home not filled with books but with rocks! On vacation, it is still the best souvenir one could ask for. A hand-gathered stone holds for me the beautiful energy of the place I wish to remember. Just ask my husband how many rocks he has lovingly relocated for me. Even when we moved into our new home, there were several large rocks he willingly hauled onto the moving truck for me that I could not leave behind. Like accessories for my garden, they travel with me wherever I go.

The incredible energy found in rocks also speaks to me when I am working in the garden. I love to border the perennial beds surrounding our log home with beautiful fieldstones. They have an organic feel that compliments the logs and the natural setting of the woodlands. When using hand-gathered stones for a border, I have found the placement of each one is crucial. If I happen to not listen and place them incorrectly, I am hounded until I find its perfect location.

I once intuitively made a border edge for a garden that resembled a snake. I had amassed a large pile of round fieldstone rocks and placed them in my daughter's wagon to begin construction. With a trance-like focus on my task, I went to the wagon and asked in my mind, "Which stone goes next in the border?" Each individual stone would glow, sparkle, or just be the easiest to pick up as I reached for it. When I had completed the entire edge of this garden hugging my backyard, I stood back and realized that the first stone in the line was larger and had an arrowhead like shape and the final stone was ringed and looked like a rattlesnake's tail. For me the snake is a symbol of



Simple stones provide a beautiful, natural, and energetic edging to garden beds

transformation and with the new subject of feng shui in my life, that is exactly what I was experiencing that summer.



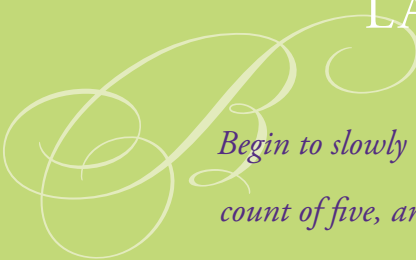
TUNING INTO YOUR LANDSCAPE DEVA

Because he or she acts like the general contractor for the energies in your garden, the Landscape Deva is the first Nature Spirit to begin a conversation with. A simple guided visualization is an easy way to make this connection. You may find it helpful to pre-record the following meditation and play it back to yourself so that you can be fully present with the words you are hearing. It is also really powerful to hear a meditation in your own voice. As you read the words onto your tape, read slowly, leaving some time for visualization between paragraphs and after the questions and experiential statements. Meditation is not to be rushed; it is your personal quiet time. Feel the calm. Also, feel free to adapt the wording so that you are comfortable with the meditation. Make this journey yours, and enjoy.

To begin, find a quiet, comfortable place in your home or outside in your garden, where you know you will not be disturbed for about 20 minutes. It is also helpful to have a notebook and pen handy for taking notes immediately following the meditation, while the information and experience is still fresh in your mind.



LANDSCAPE DEVA MEDITATION



Begin to slowly relax by breathing in deeply through your nose, holding this breath for a count of five, and then exhaling through your mouth. Do this several times until you begin to feel an exhalation, a letting go inside yourself. Sink heavily into what you are sitting on, and have a warm, totally relaxed, clear focus on the present moment. Now in your mind's eye begin to see, sense, or feel the energy of your garden.

Take yourself to a favorite spot, or remember a favorite plant, and begin to sense what its energy feels like. Totally concentrate on just being there. Pay close attention to what is happening around you. Is the sun shining on your skin? Is there a breeze in the air? What does it smell like? What do you hear? Are there birds singing, crickets chirping, frogs croaking? Is water moving somewhere? What do you see? What colors are there? What shapes and textures? Spend some time tuning in to the energy of this place.


As you are present there, a mist begins to roll in at your feet, a beautiful rainbow-colored mist that energizes your entire body. It now covers you from head to toe. Feel the warm pulsing of the colors of this safe, secure blanket of amazing light. Let go and fall into its warm, healing vibration knowing all is well and you are safe in its presence. Now this mist slowly begins to rise and dissipate, and you see or sense your Landscape Deva, standing in front of you smiling, waiting. It may be distinctly a male or female energy, or a blend of both. It could also just be a color or a feeling, but know, in whatever form you sense it, how pleased it is that you want to communicate with it. Co-creating with and teaching humans

to remember their connection with Nature, is a joy for them. It is how life used to be in the beginning, when you worked and played so intimately together. Feel this lost piece of you, this old friend, coming forward to be with you again. Take time to acknowledge one another. This is a time of remembering and reconnecting to that ancient relationship.

Now ask this Deva anything you would like to know about your garden. It may be helpful at this time to rise above your home to get a bird's eye view. With your Deva, begin to access your garden from this high vantage point. Feel what areas you are drawn to and begin there. Are there any places that have been neglected? Are there problem areas you would like to focus on? Ask specific questions at this time. Walk around, in your mind's eye, from garden to garden and have conversations with your Deva.

When you have finished, and with gratitude in your heart, say farewell to your Garden Deva. Know that at anytime it is there for you, willing to help you in any garden decisions. It is a part of the land and a part of you, always.

Now begin to focus on your breathing once again, inhaling and exhaling at a rate that feels good to you. Slowly move your fingers and toes, stretch your arms over your head and yawn, bringing yourself back into the present moment, fully alert, feeling energized and ready to go about your day.

Take some time now to write down what information you have received during this meditation. 

DUAL COMMUNICATION

Communicating with Garden Devas simultaneously can be a challenging task. Between the Landscape Devas and the Plant Devas, there is a constant dialogue that occurs. Usually I am being told where to place the plant, how deep to plant it, and what prayers to say for its healthy growth. My intuition is open wide to receive these messages, and all of this listening puts me in a deep meditative state concentrating only on the task at hand. It is as if time becomes non-existent. I feel free, relaxed, focused and energized by this experience.

Just ask my family how long I can be in the garden. Often it is ten o'clock and getting very dark outside, and I am still communing with the plants. A good friend of mine just lights some beautiful outdoor candles and keeps on gardening!

When we moved to our present log home, it was from a location less than a mile away. With permission from the buyers, I relocated over 100 perennials from the garden I was sadly leaving behind. The three days it took to “pack” the garden were long and laborious. Speaking with each individual Plant Deva, I asked it if it wanted to be moved, divided, or to stay where it was. There was much dialogue, and I was surprised that only one hundred plants eventually made the trip. These one hundred were all placed in pots and stayed at a neighbor's garden for over a week. To ease their stress and transition, they were watered with a weak solution of the Bach flower essence, Rescue Remedy. Only three plants were lost during this move, while all of the others adapted well to their new surroundings, filling in new gardens that were dug even before inside boxes were unpacked.

CONNECTING WITH THE EARTH AGAIN

A garden planted with intention is more than just digging holes, planting, watering and weeding. It is about creating in yourself the ability to use your human body as a precious link between heaven and the earth. There is a communication, a dialogue that takes place in Nature with our Souls if we but stop to take the time to listen. I believe it is this connection that will not only heal us, but make us wise as well. There is a circle to life, and right now, at

this time on earth, we have become the missing piece. In order to take back our rightful and necessary place in the circle, we need to kick off our shoes and feel the *souls* of our feet on the earth again. As kids we loved to get dirty, to roll downhill on the grass, run through the mud puddles, and play in the sand. We grew up and what happened? Appearances became more important than having fun. Clothes took a priority over spontaneity. How did we get so serious? I say it's time to get dirty, have fun again, create new experiences and forget about what the neighbors might say. Here are some earth connecting ideas to get you started.

- ⇒ Choose to walk on the grass rather than on the sidewalk. Revel in the uneven surface and soft textures beneath your feet.
- ⇒ Take your shoes and socks off and walk on grass, bare ground, sand, gravel driveways, dry leaves, or moss. Experience the energy that radiates from the earth's surface. Pull it into your physical body through your legs.
- ⇒ Pick a wild plant that you know is edible and eat it right from Nature's table. Violet leaves, dandelion greens, and chickweed (pesticide free please) are great plants to start with.
- ⇒ Really look at a leaf or a flower for at least one minute straight. Nature does detail like no one else. Sketch it if you want to learn it intimately.
- ⇒ Take a walk, not a run, in the rain – without an umbrella or raincoat. Let your face, hair, and clothes get completely drenched. Feel the nourishment of water on your skin.
- ⇒ Lay face down in the grass, breathe deeply, then turn over and look up through the treetops to the sky and the clouds. (You did this all the time as a child . . . remember?)
- ⇒ Garden without gloves on. Sift the soil back and forth through your hands; let your fingernails get really dirty!
- ⇒ Take a fist full of earth and breathe in the ancient aroma. Think about the decaying cycle of all organic matter. This soil was once the living trees, plants, and animals you see around you.

