

Reading in the Garden

I know I've bitten off more than I can chew, but I just can't help myself. I have rented a garden plot down at our church. I'd done this ten years ago at the community plots out by the airport and know what I'm getting into, but I just need the sunshine to get things like tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables to grow. Our garden at home has become too shady after forty years. We have glorious gardens, but not one with "full sun". So once again I am turning to the library for practical help. Currently, I have been studying *The Vegetable Gardener's Bible*, by Edward C. Smith.

Community gardening has become a movement. Saturday mornings summers past found me shopping at the Farmer's Market, picking up the freshest of everything. Now I may be able to supply my own table. If I have time, I'll visit the Farmer's Market anyway. I love the music and spirit of the morning and running into people I know.

But I am already impressed with the friendliness and helpfulness of my co-gardeners, who recognize that I am basically a new face and need a little advice. To help others with old, shady gardens like mine at home, the library has some stunning new books. I liked *The Shade Garden*, by Beth Chatto. For those wanting to grow their own vegetables, we have *Backyard Homestead*, edited by Carleen Madigan. Also, take a look at *Family Gardens*, by Lia Leendertz, and involve the whole household.

My interest in gardening must run in the family. My parents had a Victory Garden plot up the hill from our house, and all of us benefited from it during the World War II years. My mother loved flowers, and was essentially the gardener in the family. She had old fashioned flowers around the perimeter of our house, and I remember her walking through her garden every summer morning, making sure it got the watering it needed. My husband is the main gardener at home, and his work is tour-worthy. The absolute best place to read is out on our back deck, with the birds swooping through and the flowers blowing in the breeze.

Mother's Day is coming soon. My mother was a strong woman, and I am afraid I have become my mother, which I guess is almost inevitable. I adored her, and still miss her every day of my life. I think she would approve of all these gardening things that we do. My daughter is a gardener (as are my sons), and my eleven year old granddaughter Ellie has taken to cutting and arranging flowers for their dinner table.

There are so many strong women doing so much, accomplishing so much, that I don't think Mother's Day says enough about how and when they should be recognized. Many wonderful women have no children at all, but give unselfishly to our community, nurturing us all.

I have some summer reads for you that feature strong women, women who didn't just sit around and gripe, but in their own way really changed things. Find a favorite spot, get an ice cold glass of lemonade, and a copy of *The Help*, by Kathryn Stockett. It will take you back to the sixties in Jackson, Mississippi, where a local white woman with a conscience secretly interviewed and published the stories of black maids serving in white households. Even though they were anonymous, it took a lot of courage for them to go on record about their lives. Stunning.

Then there is *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*, by Helen Simonson. Set in immigrant-laden current day England, widower Major P. is being jerked around by his spoiled, self-involved middle aged son. Enter the village shopkeeper, a Pakistani widow with family

problems of her own. Reading this fiction title frankly changed my attitude towards Asians, and easily became my favorite book of the year.

A new nonfiction title I could hardly put down was *Game Change*, by John Heilemann and Mark Halperin, telling the inside story of the 2008 election race, Obama/Clinton and McCain/Palin. No shortage of strong women there. Politics for a lot of people can be a spectator sport, a blood sport, even. This page-turner was a real eye opener and the reader becomes a fly on the wall.

Find these books at the library and be entertained all summer. Or fire up your Kindle. Or download from the library web site via Overdrive audio books. Put the "Do not disturb" sign on the garden gate. Happy reading, and happy Mother's Day!

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