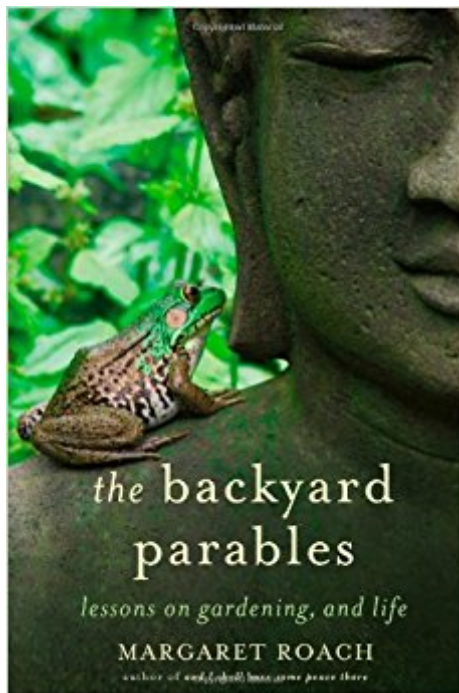


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The Backyard Parables: Lessons On Gardening, And Life



Synopsis

Margaret Roach has been harvesting thirty years of backyard parables-deceptively simple, instructive stories from a life spent digging ever deeper-and has distilled them in this memoir along with her best tips for garden making, discouraging all manner of animal and insect opponents, at-home pickling, and more. After ruminating on the bigger picture in her memoir *And I Shall Have Some Peace There*, Margaret Roach has returned to the garden, insisting as ever that we must garden with both our head and heart, or as she expresses it, with "horticultural how-to and woo-woo." In *THE BACKYARD PARABLES*, Roach uses her fundamental understanding of the natural world, philosophy, and life to explore the ways that gardening saved and instructed her, and meditates on the science and spirituality of nature, reminding her readers and herself to keep on digging.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As orioles flit, tadpoles leap, and Jack the Demon Cat stalks unsuspecting chipmunks, Roach muses on the nature of nature in a garden she has tended for 25 years. Roach would be the first to admit the garden has, in many ways, tended her, too, and she brings a Zen-like appreciation for the lessons gardens impart to those who are willing to watch, listen, and learn. Informed by the seasons, Roach also gardens with a spiritual respect for earth's basic elements. Water, in its frozen form, blankets trees in winter, while the land itself bursts forth in reassuring fecundity with spring's arrival. Summer blazes with fiery heat and color only to have it all drift away on

autumn's chill winds. A pensive gardener, Roach is also passionate in her critique of trends and practices she views as harmful or unproductive, from the politics of seed selling to the pollution of streams. Now aging, along with her beloved garden, Roach, with grace and humor, assesses and accepts the inevitable changes that beset them both. --Carol Haggas

"As a passionate, hopeful and often self-delusional gardener (the only kind of gardener there is!), I loved this book. Margaret Roach writes with intelligence, compassion, and-most of all-sanity. Her work is a blessing." •Elizabeth Gilbert, bestselling author of Eat, Pray, Love
"As I read this witty, revealing, sometimes poetic confessional I felt I understood for the first time what a garden could be-a work of art, a source of pleasure and solace, an object of beauty, a provider of nourishment. And why Margaret calls the plot she tends 'my monster.' This is the story of a real relationship: Margaret and her garden, a love story." •Anna Thomas, author of The Vegetarian Epicure and Love Soup

I liked "and I shall have some peace there," so I ordered "the backyard parables" (use of lower case her own, or the editor's). I was so disappointed with "parables"--in content, design, and organization. It's heading straight to the donate pile. Inserting numerous (I almost said "endless") sidebars of information--which, by the way, aren't really sidebars when they ramble on for pages and pages, is ugly (they're all printed on a dingy gray background) and senseless (they interrupt the flow of the book, and they often have little or nothing to do with the text they interrupt). What in the world happened? Who designed this book?? It's a sad thing, as this perhaps could have been another beautiful book. My hunch: they rushed it.

How could I not love, at least a little and maybe much, a book whose cover shows a frog (leopard?) contemplating the right earlobe of a Buddha or whose first chapter includes the story of the deep snow rescue of a pond of frogs. The de-icer, it seems, failed. Froggies might suffocate if the pond froze well & truly. Into the winter snows went Margaret Roach, equipped primarily with a cellphone flashlight and ready to flop on her belly, unsure of the pond circumferences, sticking her bare hand into electrical stuff to disarm the current, and then whacking away at the ice. A fine story, well-told, but a parable? In "The Backyard Parables," Margaret Roach describes her works and days in her country home through the four seasons. This usually is a tried-and-true framework for books about gardening as well as for books about Gardening as a Metaphor for Life. Usually, such a book is linear and makes for an easy-to-follow story line, reminding us, perhaps of Thoreau's "Walden." Not

so here. Think matrix where the story is episodic, horizontal, revealed from season to season. Consider, for example, the woodchuck. The woodchuck does its thing in spring, eating the sprouts of the peas down to the ground. Our heroine, alerted by its whistling and the vanished seedlings, tracks it to an opening likely to be its den, plans to set a trap. Next paragraph is off on an utterly unrelated topic. Many pages onward, in a later season, the rodent reappears in several pages of failed trapping efforts, followed again by another set of thoughts entirely. And in a third season we have even more on the by now very fat fellow in a riff on neighbors who have trapped successfully and on the impossibility of ridding the woods of woodchucks. Really, why bother, and what are the relative claims of chucks and men? Thus, across seasons, an interesting story that can be read as a parable without too much stretching. Within seasons, however, thought follows thought fractally, like a conversation with some one whose mind leaps from idea to musing to facts to riffs connected in ways many of us can't understand. "What," we may say, "made her think of THAT next? Where's the sense in all this sensibility?" Reading Roach can be like reading "Finnegan's Wake." Joyce's language can be gorgeous, the wordplay sometimes impenetrable but rarely dull, yet where "Finnegan's Wake" is going & what's the meaning(s) still a puzzlement to scholars and a barrier to readers who can say "Why bother?" or choicer epithets. "The Backyard Parables" can seem like this. It is part autobiography, part observations, part fillers of culinary and horticultural sidebars, part continuing stories of country living and familiar characters from earlier books, such as Roach's cat, Jack. The sidebars include Garden Design 101, Look Out the Window; The Politics of Seed Shopping; Seed Shopping Rules: You Can't Have It All; and Why I Grow Hybrids & Beirlooms---and that is just from Chapter 1, winter. Thus "The Backyard Parables" is likely to be zero stars to readers who can't stand this style and five stars to readers who find the idea-bytes provocative, charming, Anne-Tyler-like good reading. OK: so this calls for a different kind of reading where the continuities are across the seasons for the main themes, associated, I think with Myself, My Family & Friends; Animals; and Plants. The lessons may come more from animal than plant life: the complexity of family relations, the human/animal balances in woodchucks and the deer, and with romance and near-death of some highly individualized frogs. There is, to be fair, plenty on plants, such as readiness for survival or thrival among transplants and on the matter of weeds in the compost. Yes, at times the writing reaches for wit and grasps cute; at times, the six synonyms for one verb seems too transparently "I promised 250 pages"; at times the fractals get overly fractured. Yet if the reader is willing to deal with this, or even is pleasantly challenged by it, the gain is worth the pain. Perhaps to those brought up on texting and blogs, there may be no pain at all, in which case, this may be your joyous read for the winter season. Dismay at style and format for those brought up more on

Vita Sackville-West's gardening books or better still for lessons on gardening and life, Thoreau, think again before you buy.

I really enjoyed this gardening book- offering advice but not boring like a textbook. Rather, it felt as if I was sitting across the table sipping tea with an old-time friend. I enjoyed it much more than the previous book, but that is due to the heavy concentration on gardening in this one.

I was very intrigued to hear about the author on a gardening blog, and had to buy the book. She left a high powered career in the city to live in the country and garden. It is a wonderful, insightful book, written loosely in a seasonal form. Not only is it very fascinating just to read about her everyday life with its struggles and joys, but she also offers practical advice. I loved reading about her experiences with potted plants and am going to use some of her ideas in my own garden. Highly recommend this to anyone who likes to garden or is looking at finding a little peace in their life.

Margaret writes about the real life of trying to be a good steward of the land! This is not only informative but written with humor and story like way. I am also a retired woman that never had the time to tackle landscaping, pruning, building things with my hands (can't hit a nail straight but think I can tackle anything, Boy did I relate to her tales of sometimes your mind and brain doesn't get the message that you may dream it but you might not keep in mind your body! I love gardening and laughed all through this book because Margaret Roach talks directly to the reader and makes her stories of victory and defeat like a talk over a cup of tea!

Haven' finished it yet, because so far I'm finding it depressing, but she does write beautifully. Hopefully it will get better!

This book was such fun for me to read. Gardening, life stories, cat stories, human interest stories.....Caused me to sign up for her blog, Way to Garden. Wonderful!

As a followup to her first book, this one is really great. The first inspired me to think about gardening and this one has really gotten me enthusiastic about it! Some of her lessons/parables are really helpful in planning the garden of my dreams!

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