



## Jamming in the Garden

If I'd known gardening was like jazz, I might've started sooner. Over the years, I pored through glossy books on the subject and explored public gardens. But to actually *garden* seemed overwhelming. Soil types, sun exposure, watering schedules, fertilizer formulas—so much to keep straight! I already spend my days juggling instant messages, e-mails, and phone calls at work. Life is hectic enough. So my terraced rock garden, complete with waterfall, languished uncultivated through our long East Tennessee growing seasons.

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Then, two summers ago in a burst of organic enthusiasm, I planted a few tomatoes in pots on my patio. That seemed manageable. I was amazed to see the yellow flowers that preceded the fruit. And when the first socket sprouted a tiny tomato, I scrutinized it much like a new parent counts fingers and toes.

Inspired, I planted an herb garden. I often visited, smelling the rosemary, thyme, and basil. Emboldened, I

planted with abandon, no longer intimidated by confusing instructions. Sure, I paid attention to sun versus shade, and I watered, and I even fertilized once in a while. But that was it, and I soon realized gardening is not so complicated after all.

That's when I found myself jamming in the garden. I had no blueprint, no plan; trips to the nursery were an exercise in free association. I didn't pick plants for specific spots; I figured I'd have room for whatever spoke to me.

I also discovered the joy and challenge of happy plants. If a plant wasn't happy, I improvised. And improvisation usually involved relocation. When the foxgloves drooped in the shady spot by our bedroom window, I moved them to the dappled light near the oak tree. When the sprawling spiderwort invaded the tidy herb garden, I transplanted it to roomier quarters by the hydrangeas. Dig, dig, move, move, I spent many sunny afternoons with no agenda except observing and responding to my plants.

One day, grandly gesturing with my trowel, I announced to my husband, "Gardening is like a jazz riff." I thought of musicians experimenting, finding their groove, making spontaneous magic. And I knew it was one of the truest things I've ever said.

As I jam in the garden, I create my own magic. I riff off plants, sun, shade. When I survey my village of plants, I'm filled with an emotion that doesn't easily fit into an overly planned life. I think it's called joy.

—LUCY RYAN SIEGER

*Lucy Ryan Sieger; her husband, Mark; and their two dogs live in Knoxville, Tennessee, where her garden is a refuge for her closeted free spirit.*