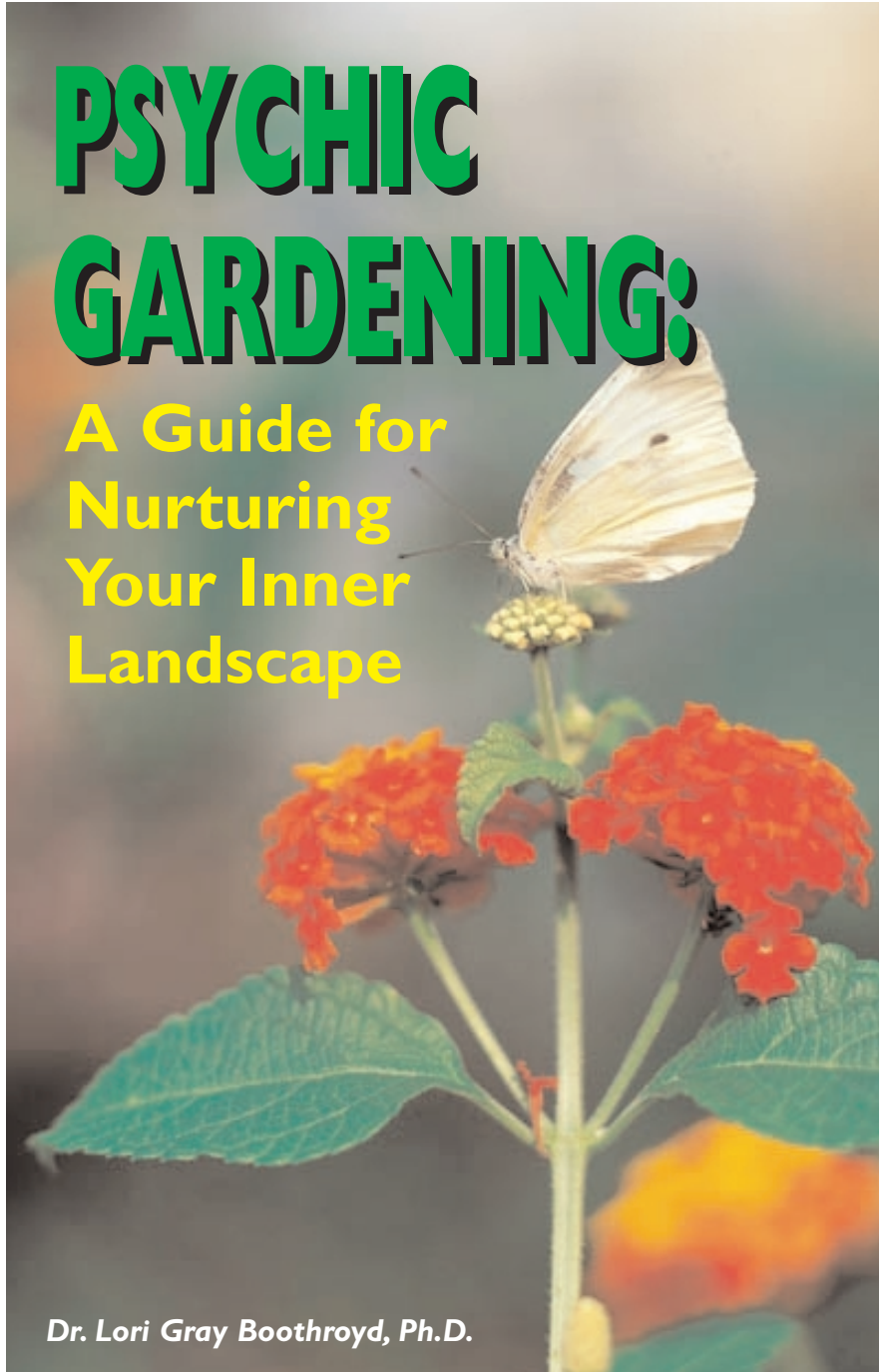


PSYCHIC GARDENING:

**A Guide for
Nurturing
Your Inner
Landscape**

Dr. Lori Gray Boothroyd, Ph.D.



Dear Reader,

Welcome! Thank you for subscribing to my Centered Living E-Newsletter. This book chapter I've written about "Psychic Gardening" is your bonus gift with your subscription. I hope you enjoy it!

The home of this chapter is within a book co-authored by my husband, Dr. Gregory Boothroyd, titled "Going Home: A positive emotional guide for promoting life-generating behaviors". A few years back we revised and expanded the book and I added some new chapters. Psychic Gardening - probably my favorite.

The book title, "Going Home", refers to our inner journey of returning "Home" to our best selves. Symbolically, "Home" refers to our authenticity and wellness: Those times when we are living fully, mindfully and joyfully. The book is based on a metaphorical retelling of the archetypal Hero's journey: We grow up, leave "Home" and as a result often find ourselves lost and disconnected from our authentic selves and our health. We must again "Go Home" to return to wellness and vibrancy. Psychic Gardening is a guide and pathway to begin that journey.

If you would like more information about our book, please visit the following website: www.honupublications.com.

My best wishes to you in your psychic gardening and your own journey Going Home.

In Wellness,

Lori Boothroyd
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Centered Living

Psychic Gardening:

A Guide for Nurturing Your Inner Landscape

Excerpted from the book:
Going Home:
***A positive emotional guide for promoting
life-generating behaviors***

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.....each day is a journey and the journey itself is home. – Basho

LGB:

HOPEFULLY WE HAVE made it clear that the process of “Going Home” is never finished and we are always walking on the path of imperfection. The goal is never perfection, but rather making choices that promote the best of who we are and who we can become. Psychic gardening is offered as a supplementary tool to assist on the road going home. Initially conceived by Milton Cudney in the 1970s as a self assessment tool to assist counseling, it was since further developed by Gregory Boothroyd, who has introduced psychic gardening for the past several years to counselors in training as well as at workshops for a variety of mental health professionals across the country. Most recently, I have taught the tool to my clients and also provided it in telecourse format as a tool for psychological and spiritual growth.

Part of the beauty of psychic gardening is its simplicity. The process provides non-clinical and non-pathologizing language to communicate with ourselves, loved ones and clients. At the heart of psychic gardening is a message of self-care, with tools to help us identify how we may be burning ourselves out or becoming holistically depleted. Psychic gardening is a metaphor that provides a way of sharing needs with partners, friends and family. If you're interested in the latest ideas of positive psychology, this is also a way of identifying strengths and characteristic virtues, both in yourselves and your clients. I often share this exercise with my clients, whether they are coming to me for counseling/psychotherapy, or for professional coaching services.

I'd like to take you through the nuts and bolts of psychic gardening after providing a theoretical framework within the field of positive psychology and systems theory. So, put on your gardening gloves and your favorite hat – here we go!

Positive Psychology

In January of 2000, the American Psychologist published a special issue on the topic of Positive Psychology. This issue signaled an emergence of interest in the development of a science of “positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions”, which promised to “improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless”

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(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.12). The contributing psychologists in this issue purported a gap in the knowledge base of psychological theory and predicted that this century would bring a science and practice of positive psychology which would support and build an understanding of factors that could allow “individuals, communities, and societies to flourish” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5).

The basic message underlying the positive psychology movement is clear: We know a great deal about pathology and the weaknesses of the human experience, but very little is known about what makes life worth living, or what constitutes happiness and positive growth. Some of the common questions posed by positive psychology include: What makes a good life? How do typical people survive and thrive under difficult conditions? How do people flourish? What encourages positive traits, such as happiness, creativity, hope, contentment, satisfaction, courage, forgiveness, and wisdom? The purpose of positive psychology is to initiate a change in the emphasis of psychology from preoccupation with repairing the worst things in life to creating and promoting positive, life-enhancing qualities. Rather than a medical model stance of repairing after the damage has been done, positive psychology values holism, wellness, and subjective experiences.

Positive psychology takes a strong stance on prevention as well. This prevention perspective also focuses on building individual strengths and competencies, rather than on correcting or rehabilitating weaknesses or mental illnesses. Is it possible to prevent problems such as school related violence, depression and schizophrenia? Prevention research has shown that human strengths can act as a buffer to prevent the development of mental illness; part of this work requires a deeper, empirical understanding and a knowledge of how to introduce and promote these virtues in people.

I'm not suggesting or purporting the process of psychic gardening to be an empirically valid assessment. Psychic gardening is a way to identify and maintain strengths and quality of life. It is a beneficial self-help tool and can easily be adapted for use with clients, students and workshop participants. The language is a helpful way to teach individuals to communicate needs and also to share their gifts with family, friends, partners, colleagues and society.

Growing life inside the self

To know how to grow life inside yourself and become an effective psychic gardener, you should first know some ideas of systems and how they are arranged; specifically we need to consider how humans fit into the 'big picture'.

Our universe is comprised of systems that lie within systems and as we move in or out from a particular system there are openings each way. Each part of this system has a "life circulatory system" consisting of life going "in" or "out". I always imagine an infinity sign as I consider this circulatory system. For example, our bodies are open to the environmental systems we live in and are also part of our internal systems. Each entity within the universe is a distinct phenomenon in and of itself – yet also part of something larger than itself.

Human consciousness is a miraculous creation and also perhaps a product of "life circulation". It is the ability to do something and at the same time stand back and witness what we are doing. We are able to use our consciousness to do for ourselves what the systems we live within do for us – create and nurture a nourishing array of 'life foods' that grow within our psychic soil. Each of us are also systems, individuals with consciousness and the ability to make choices that are either, ultimately, self-defeating or life-generating. By bringing awareness to the ability to bring life into ourselves, nurture it as a gardener tending to seeds and plants, we can send life out to others as well. We can nurture our strengths and virtues in this way. This is psychic gardening at its essence. This process feels for many as if it has a psychospiritual piece to it as well, because we are exchanging life energy with something larger than ourselves. During a teleconference workshop I taught on psychic gardening, one participant commented "this feels like another way I can communicate with God."

The Path Through Your Inner Garden

It's time to take inventory of your psychic garden, the one growing inside. Whether you cultivate it or not, something is growing. Where are the weeds? Where are the roses and veggies? Are you growing any nourishing food for your psychic systems? Are you stingy with the food you do possess? Serve yourself a heaping plate of honesty and compassion as you guide yourself through the following psychic gardening steps.

1. Identify current sources of life generating energy (psychic food)

List specific examples of psychic food that's available to you in your every day life with which you do a good job of nourishing yourself. This is an opportunity to evaluate your 'self-care plan' and also just to acknowledge your current

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strengths. Give yourself some compliments! This list should help you get started:

- Love/friendship from other people
- Music
- Nature
- Humor
- Spiritual practice
- Exercise
- Considering different perspectives
- Human touch
- Accepting praise
- Taking criticism constructively
- Thriving in a difficult situation
- Sharing your life with children
- Reading books
- Traveling
- Partaking in cultural events
- Taking classes/workshops
- Embracing the unexpected
- Showing courage
- Being compassionate with yourself

What would your list include? The possibilities are probably endless!

2. Identify potential sources of nourishing psychic food available to you right now.

List sources of life energy you could use to nourish your psychic gardening which you are not utilizing at the present time. Use the list from step one to jump-start your thinking. Keep in mind that this list will provide an area for you to improve upon immediately, simply by identifying them to yourself.

This process can be particularly helpful when undergoing a major life transition, like getting married or retiring. Reminding yourself of the resources you have available to nourish yourself everyday makes undergoing major change more fulfilling and less difficult.

In addition to creating a list, sometimes it is also helpful within this step to recall incidents in which you consciously were able to take nourishing energy into yourself. If you can think of moments when you have done this, write them

down along with your list. I can think of simple moments, like when I accepted a hug of consolation from a dear friend, went for a run on nature trails, or just watched a spider build her web; each of these moments were opportunities in which I chose to take in nourishing life energy (psychic food). It's like planting the best seeds life has to offer in the soil banks of our psychic garden.

If you have difficulty in identifying sources and experiences of psychic nourishment, it is possible that you are at risk of neglecting your inner garden, which inevitably leads to suffering and psychic pain. Are you a helper and a giver to the point of holistic depletion? When you have an opportunity to nurture yourself are you at a loss of what to do? Grab your hoe because you have some extra tilling of your psychic soil to work on. Untended soil will still grow weeds which, unfortunately, is also the perfect environment for self-defeating behaviors to grow and thrive.

3. Identify examples of sharing and delivering nourishing life food to others.

To this point, the exercise asks us to consider the kind of psychic food we take in from the outside world and then share and deliver to others. Sometimes it helps to think of this as the fruit we have in our fruit cellars which we share openly with our neighbors. Here are some examples; please add your own:

- Expression of feelings
- Ideas
- Humor
- Listening
- Talents
- Skills
- Giving compliments
- Being honest
- Sharing vulnerabilities
- Admitting when we're wrong
- Apologies
- Expressing trust
- Eagerness to learn
- Good judgment
- Constructive criticism
- Intuition
- Sharing stories
- Being cooperative

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Tenderness
Being spontaneous
Assertiveness
Sensitivity
Empathy

4. Identify your inner “Ebenezer Scrooge”

Using the list from step three as a springboard, acknowledge the gifts and energy (psychic food) which you possess but do not readily share with others. Where does the stinginess come from? It may be from some weeds that need to be gently, yet firmly removed from your garden. Sharing our gifts is part of every spiritual tradition and 12 step recovery program. AA reminds us that in order to keep what we have we must “give it away”. St. Francis of Assisi shares in his prayer “It is in giving that we do receive”. The following story always moves people and I’d like to share it with you here. It is a poem written by James Patrick Kinney from the magazine “Liguorian” and is titled “The Cold Within”:

*Six humans trapped by happenstance
in dark and bitter cold
Each one possessed a stick of wood
or so the story’s told.*

*Their dying fire in need of logs
one woman held hers back
For on the faces around the fire
she noticed one was black.*

*The next one looking across the way
saw one not of his church
And couldn’t bring himself to give
the fire his stick of birch.*

*The third one sat in tattered clothes
and gave his coat a hitch –
“Why should my log be used
to aid the idle rich?”*

*The rich man just sat back and thought
of the wealth he had in store
And how to keep what he had earned
from the lazy, shiftless poor.*

*The black man's face bespoke revenge
as the fire passed from his sight
For all he say in his stick of wood
was a chance to spite the white.*

*The last man in this forlorn group
did not except for gain
Giving only to those who gave
was how he played the game.*

*Six logs held tight in death's still hands
was proof of human sin
They didn't die from the cold without
They died from the cold within.*

Along with this “stinginess” inventory, list an example of a time when you did not share in proportion to what you possess. I acknowledge that I have become stingy with my time in recent years. When I started to consider it as a gift that could be shared with others, I knew it was necessary to cultivate and be more generous with my time. Strangely enough (really, there is no mystery), when I do this, it benefits me as well! It's yet another cosmic reminder of the life circulatory system.

5. Identify synchronous experiences of the life circulatory system.

We can only choose to increase optimal life experiences if we are conscious of them. Take a moment to reflect on experiences in your life when it felt as though the flow of life energy (psychic food) was being taken in and also shared outward in a balanced, reciprocal process. This kind of life exchange can feel almost transcendental, when we lose our sense of time and are totally engrossed. Positive Psychologists sometimes refer to this as the “flow” experience which was introduced by Mihayi Csikszentmihalyi (1990). Some examples might be:

- A friendship that feels mutually nourishing and supportive
- A marriage/partnership
- Engaging in teaching – when teacher is excited and students are responsive
- Sharing something and feeling understood and appreciated
- Nurturing plants, which then return life
- Preparing a meal for guests
- Effective helping relationship (therapy, coaching)

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Being comforted and comforting others during grief and loss
Sharing a talent and being applauded
Feeling connected with a higher power or something larger than yourself
Time spent caring for pets
Having fun with a child, or teaching them something important

What are the moments in your life when you experienced a higher truth, flow, reciprocity? How can you cultivate more of those moments?

6. Identify what is growing in your psychic garden as a result of your intake and sharing of psychic nourishment.

What qualities, strengths, characteristics and emotional states comprise the constellation of your life and your inner garden? What do you feel deeply attached to? Some of the positive outcomes might be things like:

Happiness
Meaning
A sense of purpose
Connection to spirit
Loving family
Positive support system
Kindness
Love
Openness
Inner Peace
Curiosity
Wisdom
Confidence
Calm energy
Creativity
Emergence of skills/talents
Empathy
Gratitude
Compassion
Patience
Commitment
Intuition
Resilience
Courage

What are more examples of life growing inside of you that are not on this list? A client once asked me “How will I know when I get there?” I asked “Where is there?” and she thoughtfully replied, “I guess it’s right here!” As we laughed I suggested that she start looking for ‘symptoms of inner peace’. When we feel them, we know we’re on the right track.

Now what?

It seems that insight alone is much like chinese food: It tastes yummy but within a hour or so you’re hungry again! This is a tool for awareness but also for growth. Commit to this process and journal or find a fellow “gardener” to talk to on a regular basis. Change is a gradual process for us and it is not a one-way street. Insight and change comes slowly, but with it also comes healing, the return of joy, authentic happiness, meaning and endless possibility.

Are any of you gardeners? I mean, literally gardeners. This past spring I became an “outer” gardener for the first time. I felt excitement as I prepared the soil and planted seedlings and young perennials with my Mom’s guidance. I arranged blossoming annual flowers in large pots. Throughout May and into June I watered and nurtured my garden carefully. By July the process of weeding was growing old; I learned that even weeds have their seasons and if I ignored them, they would only go to seed, strengthen their root systems and be back again next year. There were times when my frustration resulted in neglect of the garden. Then my intended blossoms and plants began to rebel; I realized that some herbs, for example, can spread like weeds and smother out daisies and marigolds. I had to prune and balance even the intended growth. Sometimes I neglected to pick flowers and share them with others. Let’s just say it was a process. By late summer, my garden became a place for me to slow down, attend, accept and appreciate. It is beautiful in its imperfections. It will never look like the pictures in a magazine and for that I am truly grateful.

My initial reactivity and subsequent acceptance and appreciation for my garden became an outer reflection of what goes on as I “inner” garden. I weed unwanted behaviors from my life in much the way I worked in the dirt this summer – steadily but not frenzied, compassionately but not apathetically. The work is never done. When I am aware of a self-defeating behavior popping back up in my psychic garden, I gently notice, pluck it and remove it, concluding that it is unworthy of living in my garden and entirely useless for the person I aspire to be. I always hope the behavior will not return as I focus on filling my garden with life-generating flora. Yet, sometimes the behavior sprouts again; so once again I pull it up until the last bit of root is removed. This process can take many

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seasons. That's okay! As long as we are attending in an intentional way with a mindful and gentle stance, we will bring compassion to the weeds we destroy as well as the flowers we fertilize. We have a lifetime to cultivate the inner garden that makes us each unique, vulnerable and beautiful.

***“.....And then - the day came when the risk to remain
tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to
BLOSSOM!” - Anain Nin***

About Lori Boothroyd

Dr. Lori Boothroyd is a licensed psychologist and an ICF certified coach, holding specialized licenses in executive wellness coaching and mentor coaching. She works primarily with women in midlife transitions to create significant, positive changes that reflect their authenticity and deepest values.

A dynamic and supportive coach, Lori offers individual and group coaching services as well as popular tele-classes and coaching retreats through Centered Living, her business which is dedicated to holistic health and a return to wellness. To learn more, please visit her website: www.loriboothroyd.com

For more information about the book "Going Home" and the Drs. Boothroyd, please visit these websites:

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