

Growing An Essay

"The soil, it appears, is suited to the seed, for it has sent its radicle downward, and it may now send its shoot upward also with confidence."

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Planning

Get Ideas

You go to a store, or order online, any seeds you would like to grow. Similarly, ideas for writing topics abound in the world. A search on any topic whatsoever can lead you down a rabbit hole of inspiration. You might find a seed for your garden in the wild, a friend may give you some seeds, or you may have harvested seeds from your last crop to plant this year.

With writing, you find seeds of inspiration in many locations. This inspiration may arise from something you read, something you see, or something someone says, sparking the seed of creativity. To produce a garden worth harvesting, or in this case writing an essay, you must take the steps necessary to tend, water, wait on, and finally reap the rewards of your labor.

"I had had my seeds ready. Many think that seeds improve with age. I have no doubt that time discriminates between the good and the bad; and when at last I shall plant, I shall be less likely to be disappointed." *Walden*

Planting

"Beans so late! peas so late!" - for I continued to plant when others had begun to hoe..." *Walden*

Start Writing

You have a kernel of a thought that needs a place to grow. My ideas for writing topics begin growing in my head. I won't plant garden seeds immediately, or start writing immediately. I mull over the possible locations where I could plant the seed. Where will it get the best light? Where will it thrive? Should I even plant this seed in my garden.? Is it invasive, and does it work harmoniously with my other plants? How long will it take to grow, and what kind of nutrients does it need? This is exhausting, and we haven't even gotten started planting.

I better go get my tools. I'll need a rake, a shovel, compost, soil, and pine bark mulch. Thank goodness I built that raised bed last year. I already have somewhere to put my seeds. I'll need water, sunshine, and patience to see this through. I better write all this down before I forget. I finally started writing. Thanks for my computer and notebook where I start the ideas. I'm grateful for the other tools I have acquired. Drafting, editing, peer review, and understanding the work it takes to be a writer. It was nerve wracking getting started, but the seeds are planted. Now just wait, and tend the ideas.

Watering, Fertilizing & Grooming

"It is well to have some water in your neighborhood, to give buoyancy to and float the earth." *Walden*

Work & Tend

Water proves essential to the new plants growth and development. You must also provide nutrition for your essay. You need time to write. It's easy to forget that writing takes practice, and hours must be devoted to working on the craft of writing. Your garden will die if you don't water when there is no rain. Your essay too may shrivel and perish if you don't give it the proper attention. You might add more compost to your garden if the plants look yellow. Your essay may also need an infusion of newer, richer material, if the text becomes sallow or barren.

I've watered the idea seeds, and now I am growing an essay. Like gardening, the writing process allows for downtime to reflect and wonder what is wriggling around under the surface, and to think about what is going to happen in the future.

Suddenly, the green shoot of the idea you planted weeks or days ago peeks out and says, "What will I become now?" Transformation needs to occur before this seedling is ready for you and the world to admire the harvest. Time must pass, til you can say, "Yes I grew the strawberries that I made into this jam." Ok, that may be pushing it. I may grow the strawberries and eat them, but I'm not yet making them into jam, to give away as gifts.

Problems

"First look out for worms, and supply vacancies by planting anew." *Walden*

Keep Writing, Drafting, Editing, and Resting

Everything is going great. Until you spy a **huge Hornworm Caterpillar** who destroyed a third of your tomato plants in one night. How did you miss him? You check the plants every night for any signs. Still, half your harvest disappeared into the hungry caterpillar's stomach. You don't kill him. He just needs to eat, so he is removed to a safe distance away, and the plants are angrily scoured for more signs of intrusion.

This may remind you of a major edit of an essay that causes you to destroy what you have written. This can be difficult. You think, how did I miss this before, and why did I waste all that time? Then, after calming down, you realize you don't need that many tomatoes anyway. What would you do with all those tomatoes? You'd have so many, you couldn't give them away. It's hard letting go of all that hard work.

"Commonly I rested an hour or two in the shade at noon, after planting, and ate my lunch, and read a little by a spring ..." *Walden*

Harvesting

"The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning and evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched." *Walden*

Finally the rainbow clutching phase of writing and gardening.

For me this phase is focused on producing quality material, whether it be written or vegetable, to share with the world. As the Thoreau quote from the beginning of this essay says, I have "sent the radicle downward," by reflecting on my writing process, and trying to get to the roots of my thoughts. Now, I am ready "to send its shoot upward also with confidence," and send my writing off into the world, while harvesting the onions of my labor. Ok, that was awful, onions are probably not the best choice if I want to sound like I know what I am talking about. I should have planted pumpkins instead, pumpkins sound much more authoritative and interesting.

What will I do with all those herbs, vegetables, and essays I harvest? I think I will send them off to be judged at the county fair, maybe sell them at the farmer's market. Like my essay, if it doesn't work out, there's always next year. I wonder if I should plant squash or zucchini? Maybe both.