

# GREEN MOUNTAIN ZEN CENTER

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## The Zen of Puttering

By Ellen Sandbeck, From Eat More Dirt

Concentrating on an interesting and complex task can make the hours fly by like minutes. Artists refer to this state of consciousness as “flow,” and many athletes refer to it as “being in the zone.” The timeless feeling of “flow” is what keeps gardeners puttering all day long in their gardens, day after day, and has inspired countless plaques, tiles, greeting cards, and stepping stones inscribed: “One is never so close to God as when one is in the garden.”

Communing with God in a garden is not a recent phenomenon. In Genesis, God created man and immediately planted a garden to put him in. In ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, China and Japan, the earliest gardens were laid out and planted by monks. In ancient Greece, gardens evolved from sacred groves; they were used as places of public worship and were tended by priests.

Buddhist texts tell us that the young Prince Siddhartha, who was to become the Buddha, first

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experienced meditation while sitting under a rose-apple tree (*Syzygium jambos*). He had accompanied his father to a ploughing festival, and plight of the worms and the other small creatures that were cut by the plough had aroused his sympathy. He sat in the shade of the rose-apple tree to think and entered a state of deep meditation.

When young Prince Siddhartha was a young man with a wife and infant son, he left home to seek enlightenment. He became a monk and wandered in search of spiritual masters. He studied sitting meditation with various masters for several months at a time, learning to reach higher and higher states of consciousness.

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## Successful Gardening

By Felder Rushing & Walter Reeves, From The Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Book

Gardening Success can be summarized in just three rules:

1. Know your plants.
2. Know your site.
3. Even if you ignore the first two rules, plant anyway!

You might have success in spite of yourself, or you might suffer failure. Either way, you'll learn new information, get good exercise, have fun, and you will have started down the road to being a *Southern gardener*.

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After several years of meditative studies, he decided to try to reach enlightenment through asceticism. He practiced extreme austerities for six months, until his hair was falling out in clumps and his skin hung on his bones. Then, while sitting in meditation in a cemetery, he remembered the first time he had sat in meditation, as a boy under the rose-apple tree, and he realized that mind and body are connected, and to abuse the body is to abuse the mind. He used this experience to formulate the Middle Way, the path to enlightenment which avoids the extremes of both overindulgence and self-denial.

Siddhartha resolved to gain back his strength, and abandoned his attempt to escape the phenomena of the world. He began eating and drinking normally again and began practicing walking meditation. He began meditating on natural phenomena—bird song, sunlight glowing through a leaf—and realized that each breath, each small step, everything he encountered, were all part of the path to liberation.

When he had regained his strength, the former hermit sat down on a cushion of newly mown hay

under a peepul tree (*Ficus religiosa*) and resolved to meditate there until he attained enlightenment. He sat in the lotus position for a whole day and night until the next night, while armies of demons and devils unsuccessfully tried to distract him. He reached enlightenment, then sat under the tree for another week. He had become the Buddha, the Enlightened One. The peepul tree became famous as the bodhi (awakening) tree, or bo tree for short.

While the Buddha was meditating, he realized the interdependence of all phenomena; the stars, the trees, and the universe itself were meditating with him, and he felt at one with the thousands of insects, birds, and animals that shared the forest with him.

All this is very similar to the natural meditation that any child, or lucky adult, can achieve in the shade of a tree. But of course the Buddha went much further than that, and went on to found one of the great religions of the world. The depth of his experience exceeds that of the casual meditator under a tree as the ocean exceeds a drop of water.

## Congratulations, Fennel!

Since November 2005, Fennel Blythe (once a member of the GMZC) has been training to participate in an endurance event as a member of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training program. Team In Training is raising funds to help stop leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin lymphoma and myeloma from taking more lives. She raised money and completed this marathon, recently, in honor of all individuals who are battling blood cancers. Congratulations, Fennel, and a deep Gassho from the GMZC Sangha!



# Garden Meditation

By Ellen Sandbeck, From [Eat More Dirt](#)

The Garden of Eden was not the House of Eden, and Paradise is described as a garden. I think it is no coincidence that Prince Siddhartha became the Buddha while meditating under a tree. Sir Isaac Newton “discovered” the law of gravity while under a tree (how else could an apple have fallen on his head?); Gregor Mendel and Charles Darwin’s garden had a “Sand-walk,” where he walked in circles every noon while he thought, refined arguments, and refuted counter-arguments.

Every time I have attempted sitting meditation, legions of anti-meditation demons have assailed me. But even the Buddha enjoyed walking meditation. I do working meditation.

Repetitive tasks can be quite meditative. I hate to blow my own horn here, but I am capable of having a perfectly empty head all day long while gardening. At other times sudden thought strikes like lightning. For instance, last summer while scything the path through our woods, I suddenly understood for the first time the metaphor of the Grim Reaper. The scything mentality is relentless and remorseless. Anything in the way comes down, whether it is grass or small saplings.

I believe that a well-loved garden can be an external manifestation of the gardener’s mind, a visible, living dream.

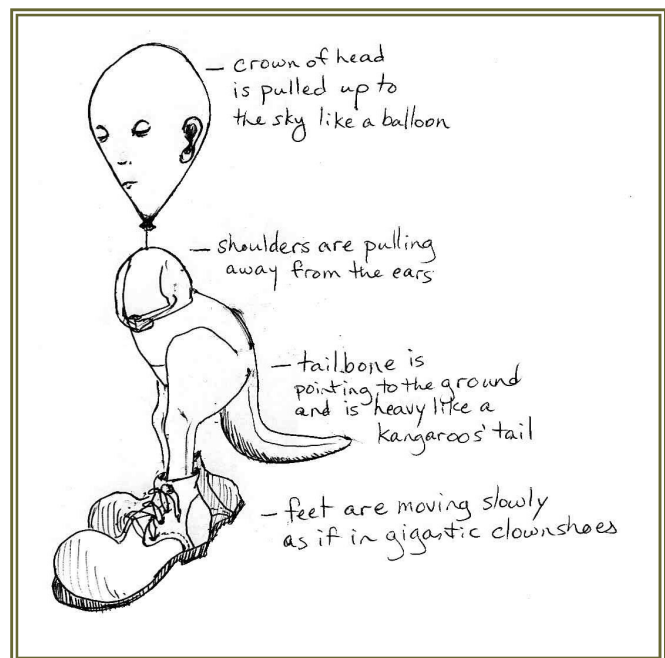
Our friend Eleanor is one of the most spiritually active people I have ever met: always reading, thinking, talking, attending lectures, and experimenting in her garden. Eleanor is a master gardener for our country; other master gardeners in the program get misty-eyed when they talk about visiting her garden. It is not a fancy garden, but it

produces tranquility more prolifically than a zucchini plant produces zucchinis.

Eleanor grew up on a farm in Edmonton, Alberta, and now lives with her husband and son on Connemara, a small farm on Island Lake, about five miles from our house. Eleanor, though in her early eighties, is always willing to try something new, never assuming that she knows a subject already. Though she knows a lot about gardening and farming, she is always eager to learn more.

Eleanor cultivates experience as avidly as she cultivates beans. “Along with knowledge comes insight and understanding. Be open for any little insight that comes your way. If you have a closed mind, all kinds of knowledge will float right past you,” says Eleanor. She also stresses the importance of reading and learning from other people’s experience: “I don’t say it isn’t real if it hasn’t happened to me.”

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*Kinhin Dance. Illustration by Shelley Quinn from an idea by Vicki Butler, a dance instructor.*

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Once, while Eleanor was deciding which perennials needed to be dug out of one of the flower beds, she said, "You can't have everything at once; you have to get rid of some stuff," then laughed, because, like most farms, Connemara is full of stuff. She added, "We are so tied up with material things; we're so happy we get things. And I have so much stuff and I don't know how it got here!"

One of the many charming "things" on the farm is a tiny old house that stands at the edge of the asparagus patch. Its front wall is missing, and shelves of old bottles and a few old tools line its walls. The missing wall makes it look like an enormous dollhouse.

#### **Sunday Zazen Services**

6:00 pm to 7:30 pm

#### **Newcomer's Meditation Instruction**

Every Wednesday at 7:00 pm please contact us or call 426-3344 if you plan to attend.

#### **Dharma Discussion Group**

Sunday, March 26<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm Dharma Discussion and Teleconference with Atlanta Soto Zen Center  
Topic: "*Wash Your Bowls*" Led by *Mujin* Shelley Quinn

#### **Looking Forward**

May 12—14, 2006

Weekend Sesshin

Led by *Taiun* Michael Elliston  
Abbot of the Atlanta Soto Zen Center

May 14, 2006

Public Lecture

by *Taiun* Michael Elliston  
(Time and Location TBD)

"Science, Religion, and The Middle Way"

A Zen Buddhist Approach to Some of the Contentious  
Aspects of Our Modern Lives

#### **Contact Jim Gordon for more information**

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#### **Website**

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