

A vase of beautiful flowers will bring you pleasure for a few days, perhaps a week, but a handknit sweater will bring you joy for many growing seasons to come.

How Does Your Garden Grow

by Maddy Cranley

Having lived in apartments for the last twenty years, I have had little opportunity to put my paws into the earth except for planting the odd balcony pot or attempting to grow seeds on a spare-bedroom window sill. So now that I am the owner of a horticulturally-challenged property, I can't help but relate my passion for knitting to what I feel might become another passion in my life - gardening.

I never thought I would like getting my hands this dirty. I can feel this fascination and perhaps borderline compulsion to plant and grow flowers, nurturing them into splendiferous cut-flower arrangements to display on my dining room table. It all starts with those seed catalogs, fashion magazines for the gardening set, that arrive before the Christmas tree has been taken down, leaving you with just enough time to think about turning that very tree into mulch for the intended flower beds. The catalogs give us the opportunity to see what might be and we are encouraged to buy into the dream.

As with knitting magazines and sweater pattern leaflets, we chance to see what we might look like in a certain sweater, albeit never quite as blond or as thin of waist. The gardening catalogs promise a profusion of blooms of intense colors in idyllic weed-free gardens. We follow the dream, our imaginations in full bloom, seeing ourselves in that gorgeous sweater and magically skipping through acres of ever-blooming flowers.

So now we order the seeds and buy the yarn. Choosing colors carefully so as not to create any clashes in the beds or on the needles. We agonize over whether it should be rose or strawberry pink, tomato or cranberry red, lavender or lilac mauve, lemon or sunflower yellow. Matching and contrasting colors, balancing texture and proportion, we focus on a vision of a finished project that we hope would please both a Monet and a Fasset.

We hover over germinating seeds as we scour our Harmony Guide to Knitting Stitches for just that right stitch combination. Should it be tulip lace or crocus buds supported on a background of trellis stitch or lattice pattern? Perhaps clusters of bramble stitch scattered with embroidered daisies? Maybe a leaf edging, with a twisted tree cable framed with moss stitch? Optimal planting time schedules at hand, we are ready to start. With simple tools - needles and a good spade - the row of seeds is planted and the foundation row is cast on. Now what is needed most is patience. We watch our plantings slowly grow.

If the flower is a late bloomer or the stitch particularly difficult, more patience will be needed. Maintenance is important. Flowerbeds must be weeded and yarn ends darned in. In both scenarios, there comes that defining moment when you can see your efforts take shape, whether it be the appearance of that first flower bud or a completed pattern stitch sequence. In your hands, the digging and planting or the purling and twisting has transformed your design idea into reality. You become more confident as you see the project developing. Now you start to strongly visualize how you will accessorize that new sweater and which vase would best enhance those purple zinnias.

The sweater is finally finished and the flowers are in full bloom. Alas, this is where the shared journey parts company. Beautiful fresh cut flowers will give you enjoyment for a few days, perhaps a week, but a handknit sweater will bring you joy for many growing seasons to come.

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Maddy Cranley is a professional knitwear designer, who has created exclusive designs for knitting and craft magazines, authored and published three books on the subject of creating felt garments and projects from handknitting, and produces an ever-expanding line of maddy laine handknitting patterns. For additional information, see <http://www.maddycraft.com>

