



# GARDEN POEMS

Poetry selected by Shokai for the Spring 2021 Ango Theme.

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## THE GARDENER BY MARY OLIVER

Have I lived enough?  
Have I loved enough?  
Have I considered Right Action enough, have I come to any conclusion?  
Have I experienced happiness with sufficient gratitude?  
Have I endured loneliness with grace?  
I say this, or perhaps I'm just thinking it.  
Actually I probably think too much.  
Then I step out into the garden,  
where the gardener, who is said to be a simple man,  
is tending his children, the roses.

# THE SEVEN OF PENTACLES BY MARGE PIERCY

Under a sky the color of pea soup  
she is looking at her work growing away there  
actively, thickly like grapevines or pole beans  
as things grow in the real world, slowly enough.  
If you tend them properly, if you mulch, if you water,  
if you provide birds that eat insects a home and winter food,  
if the sun shines and you pick off caterpillars,  
if the praying mantis comes and the ladybugs and the bees,  
then the plants flourish, but at their own internal clock.

Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.  
You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.  
More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.  
Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.  
Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.  
Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.  
Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.  
Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving.  
Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in,  
a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside but to us  
interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.

Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen:  
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.  
This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always,  
for every gardener knows that after the digging, after  
the planting,  
after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

# DIRT BY KWAME DAWES

I got one part of it. Sell them watermelons and get me another part. Get Bernice to sell that piano and I'll have the third part.

—August Wilson

We who gave, owned nothing,  
learned the value of dirt, how  
a man or a woman can stand  
among the unruly growth,  
look far into its limits,  
a place of stone and entanglements,  
and suddenly understand  
the meaning of a name, a deed,  
a currency of personhood.  
Here, where we have labored  
for another man's gain, if it is fine  
to own dirt and stone, it is  
fine to have a plot where  
a body may be planted to rot.  
We who have built only  
that which others have owned  
learn the ritual of trees,

the rites of fruit picked  
and eaten, the pleasures  
of ownership. We who  
have fled with sword  
at our backs know the things  
they have stolen from us, and we  
will walk naked and filthy  
into the open field knowing  
only that this piece of dirt,  
this expanse of nothing,  
is the earnest of our faith  
in the idea of tomorrow.  
We will sell our bones  
for a piece of dirt,  
we will build new tribes  
and plant new seeds  
and bury our bones in our dirt.

## [UNTITLED] BY BASHO

Coolness of the melons  
flecked with mud  
in the morning dew.

Basho

## PEONIES BY MARY OLIVER

This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready  
to break my heart  
as the sun rises,  
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers

and they open ---  
pools of lace,  
white and pink ---  
and all day the black ants climb over them,

boring their deep and mysterious holes  
into the curls,  
craving the sweet sap,  
taking it away

to their dark, underground cities ---  
and all day  
under the shifty wind,  
as in a dance to the great wedding,

the flowers bend their bright bodies,  
and tip their fragrance to the air,  
and rise,  
their red stems holding

all that dampness and recklessness  
gladly and lightly,  
and there it is again ---  
beauty the brave, the exemplary,

blazing open.  
Do you love this world?  
Do you cherish your humble and silky life?  
Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?

Do you also hurry, half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden,  
and softly,  
and exclaiming of their dearness,  
fill your arms with the white and pink flowers,

with their honeyed heaviness, their lush trembling,  
their eagerness  
to be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are  
nothing, forever?

# TODAY, WHEN I COULD DO NOTHING BY JANE HIRSHFIELD

Today, when I could do nothing,  
I saved an ant.  
It must have come in with the morning paper,  
still being delivered  
to those who shelter in place.  
A morning paper is still an essential service.  
I am not an essential service.  
I have coffee and books,  
time,  
a garden,  
silence enough to fill cisterns.  
It must have first walked  
the morning paper, as if loosened ink  
taking the shape of an ant.  
Then across the laptop computer — warm —  
then onto the back of a cushion.

Small black ant, alone,  
crossing a navy cushion,  
moving steadily because that is what it could do.  
Set outside in the sun,  
it could not have found again its nest.  
What then did I save?  
It did not move as if it was frightened,  
even while walking my hand,  
which moved it through swiftness and air.  
Ant, alone, without companions,  
whose ant-heart I could not fathom—  
how is your life, I wanted to ask.  
I lifted it, took it outside.  
This first day when I could do nothing,  
contribute nothing  
beyond staying distant from my own kind,  
I did this.