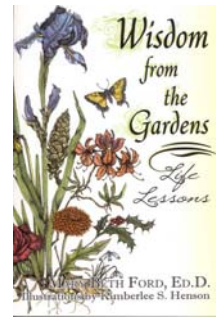




Dr. Mary Beth Ford's



Garden Wisdom Secrets

Wisdom for Relationships - Life Lessons from Nature

The natural world reminds us that relationships are wondrously varied and complex. Through nature's diversity, we observe some cooperation and some competition. But we cannot look for parallels in nature to resolve our life questions. The answers lie deep within us, waiting to be discovered. Still we can learn from nature wisdom. We gain insights to enhance our relationships, our life meaning and purpose. We learn ways to restore our life balance.

The natural world offers us wisdom about cooperation and competition.

Observe the butterfly and the blossom. Cooperation must directly benefit each member's efforts to succeed. Both need one another to flourish. Both benefit from the exchange. But as we witness garden predators in action, we must confront the presence of competition in relationship.

Bird feeders in winter provide a perfect place to observe competition in the natural world. Snow falls and food becomes scarce. Tiny birds twitter about, snatching bits of seed and flying nearby to enjoy them. Occasionally larger birds will intrude and take over. The small birds retreat and watch for an opportunity to sneak back. This dance of competitors around a bird feeder allows each creature's best traits to flourish.

How does competition in nature turn destructive?

The story of kudzu can offer us some insights. Kudzu is an ornamental plant, native to China and Japan. It has large leaves and sweet-smelling blooms. Ground kudzu has been used for centuries in foods and medicines. In recent times, however, kudzu has been transplanted to new environments without any natural insect enemies. Its vines have become invasive, keeping out the light and destroying valuable forests. Depending on its use, kudzu can be either beneficial or destructive.

Human competition also has two sides.

It intensifies our effort and sharpens our focus. But for what end? Loving service unites us in a worthy cause. War and hatred also create a common purpose. Remember the story of kudzu. Even the beneficial aspects of our lives can become invasive and keep the light from reaching within. When we stay close to the earth, we recover our sense of balance and make good choices. We remember our place within all creation.

From the world's viewpoint we live a lonely and isolated existence that requires us to compete for survival. Yet sacred wisdom traditions share the vision of a Divine Essence that flows through all creation. Plants and flowers, trees and shrubs have nourished our sense of oneness with the universe for eons.

Appreciation of our oneness gives us hope. We are not alienated from one another. We are not alone. Appreciation for our diversity encourages trust, openness and inclusion. We are unique and special. Appreciation for our shared purpose celebrates each one's part in the world's harmony. And garden wisdom offers us ways to balance our inner needs with responsibility to serve in the world with generosity, forgiveness and gratitude.