

Gardening Genes

Outside the garden center I pause, inhaling the scent of springtime. Flats of violets line the sidewalk, calling for a permanent home. Orange and yellow Gerbera daisies peek from over-watered pots, yearning for tender care. I push my finger into the soggy soil, wondering if I can do any better. Should I buy a few and try my hand at gardening?

So far, my thumbs have been anything but green. Fall's tulip bulbs have surprised me by surfacing early. Little stems magically poked through the ground, rising above adversity to announce spring's arrival. As my excitement arrived, so did a family of deer. Eaten to the quick by week's end, my fledgling flowers never had a chance.

My yellow daffodils, another experiment in bulb planting, have barely had time to bloom before a freak snow shower snapped off their heads. I was left with nothing more than a row of tall, green shoots.

A knack for gardening is not something passed down through the generations. I actually grew up surrounded by soil. Summers were spent tilling my grandmother's vegetable garden, hoeing weeds and picking tomatoes and green beans. I watched as my grandmother created simple beauty around her farmhouse. Pink roses climbed along a white trellis, and giant yellow sunflowers proudly flanked the barn shed. Geraniums, both red and white, grew out of giant cast iron pots—big kettles of color that added a touch of whimsy to the yard. Maybe it was the fertile, manure-rich farm soil. Maybe it was my grandmother's hands, patiently watering and weeding. Whatever it was, it worked.

My mother inherited this gardening gene. Her dahlias, a rainbow of round floral heads, cause people to pause in admiration as they drive along her country road. My aunt's rose garden refuses to die, even 20 years after her death.



Despite being uprooted and replanted, the tenacious blooms arrive each year, just in time for summer.

Maybe I'm intimidated by all this gardening success. I should start small this year. The tag on the violets says, "Hardy...withstands cooler temperatures, even frost." Well now. This might be something that even I can keep alive.

At home, I dig out the potting soil and gardening gloves. I decide upon a container garden, something easy to maintain. Soon I am making a glorious mess. Water drips everywhere, and a mucky soup trickles down the driveway. As I free each little plant from its plastic container, I look up to find a pair of muddy sneakers inching closer. My 5-year-old daughter smiles and says, "Those are pretty flowers, Mama. They will make our deck look really snazzy!"

So far, my violets look perky, if not actually "snazzy." They seem to like the afternoon sun on the deck. My inner gardening gene, dormant for a season or two, is reawakened by these easy-going plants. As I water my pots, I dream big. Thoughts of sunflowers, dahlias and geraniums spin in my head.

Who knows? I just might follow in my family's footsteps, cultivating for my daughter a love of all that grows. **A**