

## Academic gardening

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Despite my first paid job being in a garden centre, I certainly do not have 'green fingers'. However, a tweet from Trish Greenhalgh (2015) seeded an analogy in my brain that has taken root and grown. Professor Greenhalgh's tweet was inspired by a recalled conversation with Anna Donald. Anna's mum once told her to think of her career like a garden. Anna's legacy is greater than this analogy (Smith and Gray, 2009) but I hope she would approve of it being propagated

Careers are often referred to as ladders (Mendel et al., 2004; Kenner and Pressler, 2006). Climbing your way to a non-existent top. On your way up there can be very little preventing your fall back to *terra firma*. With all but an occasional look back at the damage behind, you clamber up leaving everyone in your wake. A willingness to undertake such a climb can be associated with some undesirable personality traits (Hill and Scott, 2019) that can contribute to people developing some killer behaviours (Thompson and Darbyshire, 2013). Whilst in my younger days I did enjoy rock climbing, regarding this type of corporate climbing, I never felt quite comfortable.

An alternative to ladder climbing is doing some gardening. As gardeners among you will attest growing plants is not as easy as it looks. However, some readers will already have some good-looking gardens. Even so we need to accept that all gardens started, or need to start, somewhere. A garden tip is to start small. Do not be tempted to construct Kew Gardens without understanding plant basics. Learning how plants, soil, watering (but not too much), fertiliser and worms all interact are important elements. These fundamental concepts are taught to budding gardeners in inspiring schools, colleges, and later universities. The better the educator, the easier these concepts are to understand (Feynman and Robbins, 2005).

Inspiration for your garden can come from others. Looking at how others have propagated their gardens can guide your own. Your unique garden will not copy theirs, but elements may help shape yours. Learning from other's successes and mistakes regarding which plants grow, or do not, are crucial elements. There are even some big names and societies where you will find inspiration. Royal Horticultural Society could be considered equivalent to National Institute for Health Research, National Health and Medical Research Council or National Institutes of Health. However, at a more local level you can seek out sage advice.

Academic gardening should not be a solo enterprise. Enlisting help from others maybe appropriate at times. Over the hedge advice from a local expert, or joining a community allotment, can be invaluable. From here advice about which projects will be best suited to the current soil type or academic climate might be vital.

Pest control can be an important part of gardening. At times people may attempt to trample your best efforts or you will experience weed infestation. Prior to jumping in too quickly with powerful insecticide or weed killer, ensure these items are not useful. These could be opportunities for new growth. Some weeds are just plants in the wrong spot that might need nurturing. Wasps, whilst irritating at a picnic are actually very good pollinators. Remember that manure is important for plants to grow. Incorporated into the soil, these 'mistakes' can be valuable points of learning.

Do not be so confident that you fail to seek help from junior gardeners. People with their own gardens can help your garden flourish. These helpers, like your plants themselves, need careful attention. There are real pleasures in looking at another's developing, or blooming, garden and thinking that I have helped make that look magnificent. Of course, shared cuttings from this garden may also look nice in yours.

When planting a seedling, or sapling, sometimes you do not know what they are going to grow into. Some seedlings may flourish into large grants. Others may perish because they were not in the right spot or planted at the wrong time. Whilst disappointing, there are often more avenues to try or garden centres to receive supplies from.

Over time seasons will change. Winter periods of little growth should be weathered. With some tendering spring and summer will surely follow. It is important to stop and spend time looking around, taking stock of what you have achieved. Celebrate your successes no matter how big or small.

Your garden may not look like you initially planned but you will benefit from many vegetables, fruits, or pretty flowers. When you look at your garden you see flourishing articles, papers, books, inspired colleagues, and memorable patient encounters. Your garden stands as a testament to your career that has not been achieved at others' expense. As an added bonus you are more likely to be listed as an academic thriller (Darbyshire and Thompson, 2014).

Gardening has its own satisfaction (Soga et al., 2017). Academia too can have its pleasures. When you survey your crafted garden, tips you have shared or an arid landscape you have made fertile. Who would not swap this for top rung vertigo on an ever-precarious ladder?

Happy gardening!

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