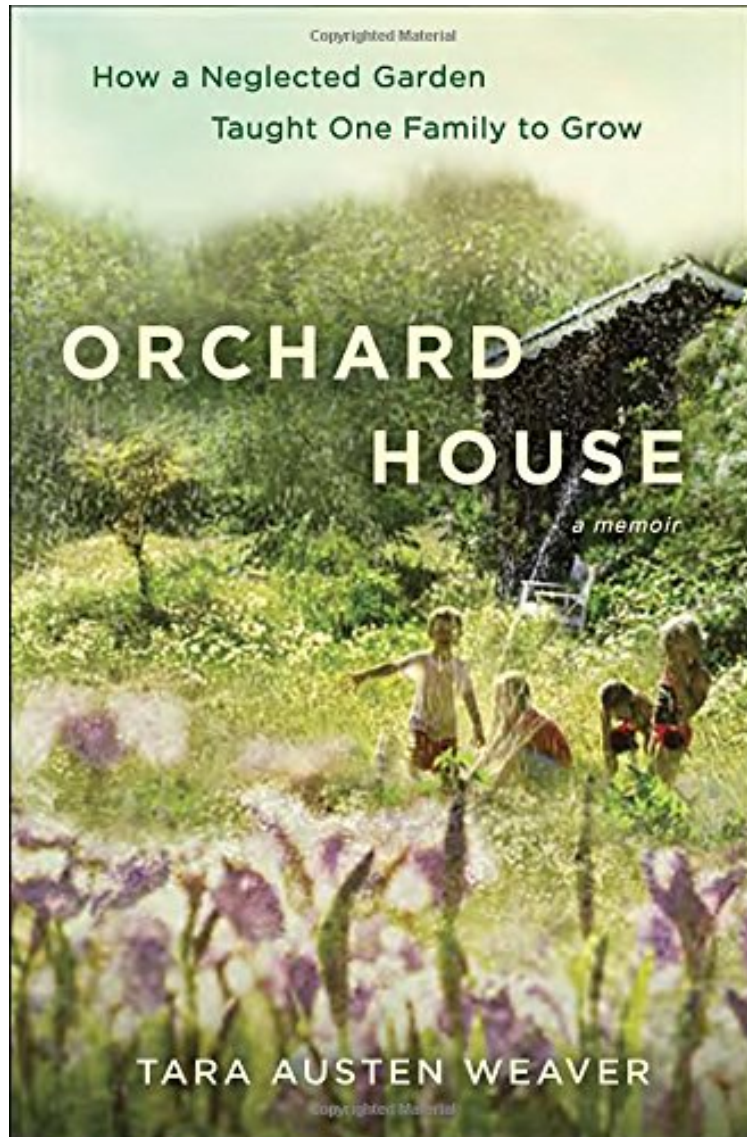


Orchard House: How a Neglected Garden Taught One Family to Grow

Tara Austen Weaver

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Tara Austen Weaver : Orchard House: How a Neglected Garden Taught One Family to Grow before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Orchard House: How a Neglected Garden Taught One Family to Grow:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Less than perfect is still good to me! By gigglewhizz I enjoyed this book. The writer shows understanding and compassion for a mother who perhaps did the best she could in less

enlightened times. I also enjoyed her descriptions of a less than perfect garden which I can identify with sooooo much! Ok, it's not my favourite book of all time but it sure kept me turning the pages. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. How gardening heals a family By Not Old Yet This was a selection of our garden book club. We enjoyed reading it and discussing it. Some of our members related to the setting in the Pacific Northwest and all of us found parts of the family relationship we could identify with. Once in a while the author felt sorry for herself, but all in all, I would recommend the book. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Tara Weaver writes with a candor that allows us as ... By Priyash Tara Weaver writes with a candor that allows us as readers to enter into the journey of reclamation with her, to find our own parcels of neglect to water and bring to light and fruit.

For fans of Anne Lamott, a profoundly moving memoir of rediscovering, reinventing, and reconnecting, as an estranged mother and daughter come together to revive a long-abandoned garden and ultimately their relationship and themselves. Peeling paint, stained floors, vined-over windows, a neglected and wild garden Tara Austen Weaver can't get the Seattle real estate listing out of her head. Any sane person would have seen the abandoned property for what it was: a ramshackle half-acre filled with dead grass, blackberry vines, and trouble. But Tara sees potential and promise not only for the edible bounty the garden could yield for her family, but for the personal renewal she and her mother might reap along the way. So begins Orchard House, a story of rehabilitation and cultivation of land and soul. Through bleak winters, springs that sputter with rain and cold, golden days of summer, and autumns full of apples, pears, and pumpkins, this evocative memoir recounts the Weavers' trials and triumphs, detailing what grew and what didn't, the obstacles overcome and the lessons learned. Inexorably, as mother and daughter tend this wild patch and the fruits of their labor begin to flourish, green shoots of hope emerge from the darkness of their past. For everyone who has ever planted something that they wished would survive or tried to mend something that seemed forever broken Orchard House is a tale of healing and growth set in a most unlikely place. Praise for Orchard House This touching memoir chronicles how the act of transforming a garden together of planting hope helps a mother and daughter reconnect and revive the sense of groundedness that had been lost within their relationship and themselves. . . . [Orchard House] deftly [captures] the love, laughter, trials and tears that make motherhood the joy and job it truly is. American Way Honest and moving . . . [the story of] one woman's initiation into intensive gardening with her mother, which changed a neglected space into something beautiful and bountiful and shifted their relationship as well. Kirkus Reviews Fascinating, tender, often heartbreaking . . . The perfect gift for a mother or a daughter with an appreciation for the transformative power of gardening. HGTV Gardens A wise exploration of family roots . . . Nurturing a garden is a lovely metaphor for healing a family. . . . [Orchard House] could serve as a handbook for both. Shelf Awareness With buoyant grace and empathic insights, Weaver offers an ardent tribute to both the science of perseverance and the art of letting go. Booklist This is a glorious book lyrical, honest, compassionate, and wise. It reminds us that gardens and families are messy businesses, but from them we can harvest hope and food and moments of grace. Erica Bauermeister, author of The School of Essential Ingredients Filled with sensuous descriptions, this beguiling story enchants. Gardeners and non-gardeners alike will delight in this lyrical tale of how a garden grows a family. Diana Abu-Jaber, author of The Language of Baklava and Birds of Paradise Orchard House is a glorious and deeply moving story of one family's redemption. If Anne Lamott and Wendell Berry ever had a literary love child, Tara Austen Weaver might well be her. Elissa Altman, author of Poor Mans Feast

This touching memoir chronicles how the act of transforming a garden together of planting hope helps a mother and daughter reconnect and revive the sense of groundedness that had been lost within their relationship and themselves. . . . [Orchard House] deftly [captures] the love, laughter, trials and tears that make motherhood the joy and job it truly is. American Way Honest and moving . . . [the story of] one woman's initiation into intensive gardening with her mother, which changed a neglected space into something beautiful and bountiful and shifted their relationship as well. Kirkus s Fascinating, tender, often heartbreaking . . . The perfect gift for a mother or a daughter with an appreciation for the transformative power of gardening. HGTV Gardens A wise exploration of family roots . . . Nurturing a garden is a lovely metaphor for healing a family. . . . [Orchard House] could serve as a handbook for both. Shelf Awareness With buoyant grace and empathic insights, [Tara Austen] Weaver offers an ardent tribute to both the science of perseverance and the art of letting go. Booklist This is a glorious book lyrical, honest, compassionate, and wise. It reminds us that gardens and families are messy businesses, but from them we can harvest hope and food and moments of grace. Erica Bauermeister, author of The School of Essential Ingredients Filled with sensuous descriptions, this beguiling story enchants. Gardeners and non-gardeners alike will delight in this lyrical tale of how a garden grows a family. Diana Abu-Jaber, author of The Language of Baklava and Birds of Paradise Orchard House is a glorious and deeply moving story of one family's redemption quite literally from the ground up, and of how the very act of working an overgrown, wild garden with invasive vines and painful thorns that threatened to smother and tear resulted in the fruits of peace and healing. If Anne Lamott and Wendell Berry ever had a literary love child, Tara Austen Weaver might well be her. Elissa Altman, author of Poor Mans Feast Orchard House is an honest portrayal of the thorny process of mending a broken family; like coaxing a neglected garden into full fruit, the process

is painful yet offers moments of sweet redemption. Weavers prose especially when talking food sings. Novella Carpenter, author of *Farm City* About the Author Tara Austen Weaver grew up running wild on the rocky coasts of Northern California and British Columbia. A writer focusing on travel, food, agriculture, and the environment, she is the author of *The Butcher and the Vegetarian* and *Tales from High Mountain* and writes the award-winning blog *Tea Cookies*. Her work has appeared in *San Francisco Magazine*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and on *Apartment Therapy: The Kitchn* and *Chow.com*. She is trained as a master gardener, master composter, and permaculture designer. Weaver lives in Seattle, Washington, where she is also the editor of *Edible Seattle* magazine. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

1 Stolen Berries The day after we saw the house with the realtor, my mother convinced me to go back, to break into the garden to pick those luscious blackberries. There was a solid stripe on the dry lawn where the berries were falling to the ground and staining the grass purple, unpicked and uneaten. What if someone catches us? I was nervous. The house was on the market; it was a weekend; we would, technically, be stealing. My mother was unmoved. She has always been bolder than me. No one is going to catch us and those berries are just going to waste. If there is one thing my mother hates, it's wasted food. Her childhood taught her there is always someone who is hungry. We grabbed six large plastic containers and a bag to carry them in and made our way to the garden. The house had been on the market for a year, uninhabited all that time. Large private property no trespassing signs hung on each of the tall wooden gates. The first we tried wouldn't open. Through the slats of the fence, I glimpsed the heavy padlock keeping it shut. For a moment it seemed our expedition would fail. This would have been more comfortable for me no risk of discovery, no getting in trouble, but also no berries. Peering on tiptoes over the tall wooden fence at the weedy backyard, I could see laden vines in the distance. The second gate, on the south side of the house, was unlocked. Trying to ignore the angry red letters of the warning sign, I swung the sturdy door open, and we entered the garden. The grass, mowed short and dry from the late summer sun, stretched from the house down the hill. On either side of the lawn, blackberries hung on vines that had engulfed whatever lay beneath them. The slightest shake or tug and they tumbled into our outstretched hands. The house was uninhabited, the garden fenced; no one had been there to pick. My mother and I looked at each other and grinned. In a lifetime of picking blackberries, these were the largest I had ever seen. They plunked into our containers with a deep and satisfying thud, tasting like childhood, like summer condensed and made sweet. The sun warmed our backs as we fell into the slow rhythmic pace of picking. Do you really think you'll buy this place? For me the property was equal parts enchantment and horror. I suspected the only way to redeem the house was to tear it down and start over, but I knew my mother wouldn't see it that way. I don't know, she said, picking steadily, always in motion. As long as my mother is busy, as long as something is being accomplished, we can talk. Otherwise she is off and running, and I am left trying to keep up. Do you really want to move back to Seattle? It was the question I kept asking. Are you sure? I'm not sure about anything, she said, but I am moving. My mother had tried moving to Seattle once already. It hadn't worked. Five years earlier, when my brother and sister-in-law were expecting their first child, my mother had bought a house on an island in Puget Sound, just off the Seattle coast, with a view of Mount Rainier. She settled in and prepared to play grandmother. It seemed a good idea at the time. This baby was the first of a new generation: anticipated with such excitement, loved long before she arrived, so many hopes and dreams embodied in this small creature. When she was born, on a gray day in late January, we all rejoiced. An unexpected reality quickly descended. The baby had been injured during the birth; there were complications, doctors appointments, medical decisions no one was prepared for. Differences of opinion between new grandmother and daughter-in-law soon emerged, strife no one knew how to fix. I was hundreds of miles away, still living in San Francisco, the recipient of anguished phone calls. I sat there, unable to make things better, listening to the sound of a family coming undone. After a year my mother packed her things and fled back to California, to the home there that she had never gotten around to renting out. She didn't like Seattle, she said. The weather was gloomy, the island isolating; the mystical mountain that was her view rarely appeared. But I knew the real reason lay deeper. It seemed we were better at being a family from a distance. Now, five years later, she wanted to move back. I thought of my mother in California, in the house surrounded by the leafy yard where I had spent my teen years. The distance made things between us easier, smoother. We were kinder to each other on the phone than we ever were in person. And yet, in some ways, it would be good to have her close. She was getting older. It was hard for me to reconcile the woman who had always been the solid cornerstone of my world with the idea of frailty, but when I hugged her now, she felt smaller in my arms, less steady. Like a bird that might easily be crushed. Already there had been times when I couldn't reach her on the phone and I had worried she might have fallen and been unable to get up. She had few friends and no family in California, no one to check up on her. In some ways it would be a relief to have her in Seattle, especially as time passed. Is it locked? I stopped picking and rattled the doorknob of the cottage that stood halfway down the garden. It was a small two-room thing, set atop a cracked patio and painted brown with decoratively carved white trim. Moss grew on the roof, and the windows were marked with strips of tape arranged in a diamond pattern. It looked like something out of Bavaria, out of Hansel and Gretel, an enchanted garden cottage. The agent didn't know where the key was, my mother said, peering through the dusty windows at empty rooms with faded beige carpet. What would you use it for? Already I was imagining her living there. It could be my office, she replied. For most of my life, my mother had seen her private practice therapy clients in an office on the lower level of our home, with my brother and me on orders

to tiptoe around creaky floorboards and ignore any crying we might hear. You could use it as a writing studio, she suggested, looking at me as I squinted through the windows. There was electricity in the cottage; I could see baseboard heaters and light switches. I could bring my laptop here to work surrounded by leafy green. The girls would love it. I imagined handmade do not disturb signs posted on the front door, no grown-ups allowed, the walls soaked through with laughter and whispered secrets. They'd be old enough for things like that in a few years. There's a sleeping loft, my mom pointed out. A tall ladder led to an open platform under slanting ceilings. I imagined them having sleepovers there, the proud and important feeling, as a child, of having a small corner of the world to claim as your own. The garden was honeycombed with leafy bowers formed under towering rhododendrons, plenty of places to hide, and enough fruit to eat so you wouldn't have to stop for lunch. It reminded me of the semi-wild country yard I had grown up in, where apples off the tree and wild blackberries had fueled escapades of fort building and water-skeeter catching and where there was always a tree to climb to escape and read a book. This would be a wonderful place to be a child. Did you see the greenhouse? my mother asked. This was what I had been most excited about: a greenhouse. It was not an elegant greenhouse. Instead of glass, this greenhouse was made of corrugated plastic. It hadn't been well maintained either. Paving stones failed to suppress weeds now tall and yellowing in the summer sun. It didn't matter; I was thrilled. A greenhouse would allow me to get a jump on the growing season, to sprout seeds in January or February and coddle them through the cold, wet spring. Peering into the plastic structure, looking at shelves and a venting system, I felt a bit giddy. Beyond the greenhouse lay a long field. The blackberries were growing high there, hedges fifteen feet tall and loaded with fruit. Through a gap I could see the neighbors yard, where chickens were running around, a rooster crowing triumphantly. Look, a fig tree. My mother was standing next to a tree slightly shorter than her five-foot frame. She reached out to touch the tiny fists of green. They're not ripe yet, she said, disappointment in her voice. In California, a towering purple fig tree kept her in fruit through the late summer and into fall. Beyond the fig was an Asian pear, the tree my nieces had found the day before. The fruit here had fallen to the ground, as if waiting for us to arrive and gather it. Crunching on a juicy pear, tasting the clean, clear notes of approaching autumn, I was reminded of Japan, the far-off country where my mother used to live and where my family had all spent time. There these pears were served peeled and cut in wedges, a surprising juxtaposition of grainy texture with sweet juice. One bite and I could almost hear the creak of feet on tatami-mat floors. It made me feel oddly at home. Look at this. At the sound of my mother's voice, I turned to where she was standing, facing the tall, impenetrable hedge of blackberry brambles. There, suspended among the berry vines, hung a single red apple. If the apple was attached to a tree, we could see no sign of it. I looked at the wall of berries, at least a decades worth of growth. The vines were thick, jagged leaves on stems swollen and woody with age. Are there fruit trees under all of that? Who knows what's under there? my mom said. There could have been anything old garden sheds or rusty cars. Yet there hung an apple, glinting in the sun, tempting us to pick it. It was late afternoon as we rounded the end of the yard and made our way up the south side. Large stands of pine and cedar in a neighboring yard cast shadows, and we had picked nearly six quarts of berries. Yet the garden still held a few more surprises for us. Is this an arbutus? I ran my hand up the trunk of a medium-sized tree, the cinnamon-colored bark peeling away under my fingers. The more common name for these trees is madrone, but in my family we refer to them as they do in Canada: arbutus. My mother looked up at me, surprised; then she smiled. Arbutus grow on the small Canadian island where my family once lived, when I was a baby and my father hadn't yet left us. My mother loved the way the bark peeled off in sheets like writing paper. To see one here felt like a bit of serendipity, like it might have been planted just for us. As with the Asian pear, it was a sign of our past, of where we had come from, a reminder of home. My mother reached out to touch the tree. Will you look at that? she said, a slight bit of wonder in her voice. My attention had already been drawn to a larger tree behind it, the largest tree in the garden. I couldn't believe I hadn't noticed it. I hesitated before I said anything. I knew my words had the potential to change everything. I think that's a tulip tree, I said slowly. This was the name we used for magnolias, their flowers like tulips, like saucers of pale, milky pink. These were the trees my mother sighed over. Every spring she called me from California with her annual announcement: The tulip tree in Larkspur is blooming. Each year her words transported me back to when I was a little girl with knobby knees and shoelaces that wouldn't stay tied, when my mother took pictures of me and my brother under the outstretched branches of the old magnolia tree that grew on the main road into the town of Larkspur. It wasn't our tree, but we thought of it as our own. I remember looking up into a sky filled with petals, pink and soft like damp velvet. For a moment it felt as if the tree might reach down and hug me. For a moment I wished it would. My mother stood there and surveyed the garden, gazing down the long, sloping yard, a hand on her hip. I saw what she saw: dry grass, berry vines, ramshackle cottage, fruit trees. I also saw what wasn't visible: potential, promise, hope. I guess that does it, she said and sighed. In the sunshine of that early-September day, my mother found her new home. And with it, my family found our garden.