



# Lettuce Garden

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Almost spring—outside my window the ground is hard and cold. But in my hand, tiny lettuce seeds roll from packets, settle into the creases of my palm. I summon dexterity, ask my fingers to pinch just a few, release them one at a time into seed-starting soil, the welcome I’ve prepared for tender explosions of root and sprout. Tamp down lightly, water. This is one of the ways I pray.

Four weeks pass, seedling leaves grow hungry for daylight. So one Sunday morning as the sun rises, I carry my plants to the garden under a waking sky. Birds sing from the maples as I pass through the gate and up the hill. A gentle breeze ruffles the new leaves in my arms as I tuck them into a sheltered spot beside shoots of iris and peony, then turn to get my tools—shovel, trowel, wheelbarrow, bucket.

I dig into year-old compost. Black, crumbling humus slides onto my shovel, releases a rich aroma—geosmin, earth smell. I breathe in wholeness. My body knows this elemental; my own dark humus responds. Yes, it says, This.

Within the compost—decaying stems and small gray sowbugs, tiny armadillos with a mission. The center of their own universe, they are bent on survival, eating dead plants, spinning them back toward life, unaware how much they turn the wheel.

I roll bugs and compost to the lettuce bed, spread the mix over the soil. Molecules in humus will cross through cell membranes, signal roots where to grow.

Plants and earth have been part of my life since my grandmother taught me. I was about nine, when, one day, she knelt down beside me, showed me a flat of grown-together primroses soaking in her garden

bucket. Water and potting soil dripped across her apron. She didn’t seem to notice. I looked up at her round face, her white braids pinned in buns above her ears, her brown eyes that looked like mine. “Watch,” she instructed. I saw how her hands eased the lacework of tangled roots, pulled the plants free of their entrapment.

She gave me the whole flat of primroses to do. That day, my fingers learned about living plants. Now, at seventy-five, I’m older than she was then. Now, I know how much it meant to her—seeing her grandchild become a gardener.

I begin the familiar ritual: trowel in hand, mix soil and compost, make an opening. Turn seedlings upside down, work one plant free. Cradle the tender roots. Slip them into the hole, use bare fingers to shape the earth around it, keeping the young stem erect, the roots undisturbed. Lower it to just the right place so the juncture of leaf and root are just below the surface. Gently push the soil down, so air pockets can’t dry out the roots.

By the time I finish planting, the sowbugs have disappeared into the top layer of soil, hiding from the sun. Below the surface, young roots touch the web of life around them.

An hour later I join my prayer circle.

Our Sufi teacher smiles, seeming to remember, suddenly, what he wanted to say. “We are the connection point between heaven and earth.”

We sing, *La illaha illa’lah*—there is no God but God, God is all there is. Immersed in prayer, I remember the touch of plants in my hands. In my mind’s eye, I see a glowing light at the center, where seed becomes root and leaf.

Lettuce leaves reach upward, cupped together, frilled tips touching. 🌱