

GARDEN FORM FOR CATHOLIC TIMES ARTICLE
Submitted by Father Mark Schulte

- 1. I know you have been a gardener for a number of years, but could you tell me how long you have been gardening and what got you interested in that in the first place?**

I guess you could say that gardening is in my blood. My maternal grandparents were gardeners by profession. "Frericks Gardens and Greenhouses" in Quincy, Illinois. Like most businesses, it had humble beginnings. Back in the 1930's, my grandfather hitched the horses to an old chicken coop and drug it down to the highway. That was their first vegetable stand. My grandmother said, "Al, where are you going with that chicken coop?", my grandfather just said to the horses, "Git-up" and nothing more was said. That's the way I heard it from my mother who was a little girl at the time. As a young boy, I worked for my grandparents and then for their son, my uncle, during summer months and after school. Hoeing, picking various kinds of vegetables and berries, moving irrigation lines, caring for greenhouses and hot beds. I can't say that I was very excited about it back then, but it was part of my responsibility to the family. After that, I didn't do any gardening for many years but rediscovered it after my college years. My father's parents were gardeners as well. Primarily for subsistence as most people did in those days and he always loved flowers around the house. My brother has a vineyard and operates a winery. My sister lives in the heart of Chicago and has turned her backyard into a green space. Another brother produced Christmas trees and my other brothers and sister garden in their own way as well. I guess you could say the apple doesn't roll far from the tree.

- 2. Where is your garden (is it at one of your parishes?) and what do you have growing this year?**

I garden wherever it seems practical. In small plots around the parish grounds and mingled among my flower beds. I operate a large garden with our Knights of Columbus Council on some ground that a parishioner generously lets us use. I have always gardened in some fashion at every parish that I served. We grow most of the more common vegetables: tomatoes, potatoes, beans, peas, cucumbers, onions, sweet corn, sweet potatoes, cabbage, melons, pumpkins, and peppers. I started growing oak tree seedlings from acorns this year. I also grow a fairly large selection of perennial flowers and herbs.

- 3. Do you do all the work yourself or do parishioners help out? Also, what is your most favorite/least favorite part of gardening?**

I do all the gardening work in the gardens that are on the parish grounds. The Knights of Columbus and other volunteers help out in the other large vegetable garden. I don't really have a "favorite" part of gardening. It's all part of a whole. One thing is connected and dependent upon another. It is organic just like our Catholic faith (CCC 18). But it is very gratifying watching God's handiwork in the various plants. There isn't anything I really dread or dislike

about gardening, even the sweat and toil. I understand how it all goes together, like a piece of art or a fine piece of furniture. The work is simply part of the finished product.

4. Since you are obviously an accomplished gardener, do you have any tips for beginners?

People ask me all the time about what some of the best gardening practices are. There are certainly important things to do. But I think it's just important to get started, don't put it off, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. Gardening is as much of an art as it is a science. If you are willing to put in the "sweat equity" God will do the rest.

5. Do you use a lot of your vegetables for your own cooking, and do you share what is extra with others?

When it comes to production, I am a big fan of "abundance". So, I can't eat everything I grow. Most of the produce goes to the Knights of Columbus vegetable stand where the proceeds go to charitable causes. The vegetable stand is on the parish parking lot and people come from all over town and even from some distance to support it (2 Cor 8:15).

6. Do you ever spend time in prayer while gardening or do you ever think about your homilies while in the garden?

The Apostle Paul said that we can know God simply by observing his creation (Rom 1:20). Gardening is a form of prayer in itself because work is a form of prayer and a fulfillment of God's will. After all, in the beginning God commanded Adam to "tend the garden" (Gen 2:15). And after the fall of Adam and Eve work was no longer an optional thing, but an essential part of fulfilling God's will (Gen 3:19). This was certainly understood from ancient times by the monks in monasteries where "work and prayer" is a model for life. Gardening, or agriculture in general, can play an integral part in my homily preparation. The Gospels are full of agricultural metaphors. Jesus frequently used elements of agriculture in His parables: the sower and the seed, the wheat and the tares, the vine and the branches, the unfaithful vineyard tenants, the fig tree, and others. Without some understanding of agriculture, I would feel very naked when preparing homilies. My homilies can be found on our parish website (www.stmaryspittsfield.dio.org). Man comes from the earth, and he will return to the earth, "dust to dust". A man will do well to have some familiarity with the soil. Like the plants he cultivates, he will become part of it someday. Even the cemetery is a garden that should be maintained well.

Gardening can be good training for the priesthood. If a man is not willing to sweat and get his hands dirty, he is not likely to be a good candidate for the priesthood.

prayerful time comes when I am planting the seeds. Usually early in the season the weather is pleasant, and planting is kind of an act of creation in itself," he said.

Father Mark Schulte, pastor of St. Mary in Pittsfield and St. Mark in Winchester, says gardening is "in his blood" as his maternal grandparents were gardeners by profession. Their company was called Frericks Gardens and Greenhouses in Quincy. As a boy, he helped with the family business and then rediscovered gardening again after college. He has small garden plots around the parish grounds, which are mingled among the flower beds.

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Submitted photos

