

# I am a forever beginner gardener

BY NOEL RUIZ

I have gardened avidly for 15 years, recognizing gardening as a life passion in my very first season. It resonated deep inside, a “this feels right,” grounding, loving, appreciating kind of feeling. Starting my first garden, I planted seeds, watered them...and they grew! What a miracle! I fell in love with my daily garden visits and fawned over new growth, flowers, and bugs. It felt good to slow down and be present with garden life.

I got better at growing every season, but I didn't start with a green thumb. It was years before I could grow a good tomato. Thankfully, tenacity and passion kept me going. I didn't choose my passion for gardening—it chose me. But tenacity is a choice I keep making so that I can feed my heart the delicious joy of gardening.

I really appreciate my tenacity, because over the years, I've experienced countless crop failures—shallow soil drying out, winter rotting seed, soil not ready for no-till, weeds covering slower growing veggies, seedlings struggling to push through clay “crust,” bugs, turkeys, gophers, squirrels, deer...! My list doesn't end there. I suspect I suppressed a few from memory!

I am writing to you, dear reader, in midspring, when my dreams are at their fullest (dreams born in January over cocoa and seed catalogs). Springtime offers a cozy space to stretch out and enjoy the glory of my magnificent dreams of the most abundant garden ever! Of course, all my plants will thrive, I'll tend everything with ease, there'll be not a blemish on a fruit, not a pest taking over, not a plant

dying, and it will be amazing! By the time you read this summer edition, some of my dreams are most certainly swelling to the point of bursting as real-life gardening reveals its challenges. The biggest dream-pops often set in by early fall, after months of brutal heat and pest pressure. I've learned to budget emotional space to process the inevitable fails in my garden every season. I'm getting better about accepting honest feedback from the garden. It also really helps to talk to well-seasoned gardeners and local farmers. When I hear about *their* crop failures and disasters, I am relieved to know that it's not just me. Did you get the memo? We can't control nature, and uncertainty comes with the dance of life! Regardless of what thrives or doesn't, there is always something to harvest in the garden. Greens and Mediterranean herbs rarely let me down. Perennial fruits, berries, and vegetables are forgiving, and if I can just keep 'em alive a season or two after planting, they reward our family for years. Then there are the weeds...

Weeds are *always* abundant. Dandelion, chickweed, purslane, chicory, and pigweed (wild amaranth) are among my favorites. Weeds always sprout in the garden *without fail!* There they are among my veggies, serving as helpful shade for the soil



Noel Ruiz proudly holding home grown leeks and son.

around my tomatoes' roots—and offering extra leaves and roots to harvest for the stew pot. When a vegetable crop fails? Weeds are vibrant and nutritious. Food as medicine. How wise the weeds are!

Comparing the now-me with the back-then-me, I find some differences. I got better at growing tomatoes. I no longer want to pull out every single weed. I am learning to accept loss in the garden as part of the game. I don't know as much as I thought I did.

What remains the same? The love for quality garden time, the adoration of plants, the wonder for life, the natural slowing down, the ease of breathing in the garden. It was my singing heart that tugged me to keep gardening all those years ago as it does today. The soil, seeds, plants, flowers, birds, worms, and all—they feed my heart.

I appreciate full beds, lush blooms, and abundant harvests like the next gardener. More and more, though, what I'm *really* after are the many micro-moments—the harvests of joy and wonder from quality time in the garden all season long. They add up, you know! To garden—what a blessing.

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*Noel offers seeds and writes about homesteading from the heart at homesteadculture.com.*

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