



GROWING GREEN BEANS & FAMILIES

*I thought a garden would help me be self-reliant.
Little did I know that it would also teach me about
cultivating relationships.*

By Forrest J. Nielson

Some 20 years ago as a young husband and father, I found myself thinking about the counsel President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) had given us to be self-reliant by growing our own gardens. Despite the fact that my family had no yard, I felt strongly prompted to follow his counsel.

At first I borrowed some land from my neighbors to plant a garden, but the land had long been unused, and I didn't have the proper machinery to make it fertile again. Then I remembered an older gentleman, Vern Draney, who had befriended my parents while I was serving a full-time mission. My mother had mentioned that he was a great gardener. I wondered if Brother Draney had a garden now and, if he did, whether he would mind some help. I decided to visit and find out.

Brother Draney's house had a large untilled field beside it. When I knocked on the door

and explained my desire to help him create a garden, I was pleased to hear him accept my offer. But he did so with a condition. He told me I would have to commit to care for the garden according to *its* needs, not my own. This would be absolutely crucial. "I'll be there," I promised, "whenever it needs me." And the next thing I knew, we were off to buy the first seeds! At that time I had no way of knowing exactly how much I was about to learn from this special garden or how it would change me and my family.

Brother Draney and I spent a lot of time together cultivating our seeds. I loved each day. Seeing the plants begin to grow and prosper was magical, even mesmerizing! Because the last time I had eaten fresh green beans was at my grandmother's home when I was a child, I looked forward to those beans more than any of the other vegetables, and caring for them



became my personal responsibility. I was filled with excitement and hope as the beans began to sprout and then as they curled into vines. I knew I would soon be able to provide fresh green beans for my family.

Before much time had passed, thoughts began to creep into my mind that it was too hot to spend so much time in the garden. After all, the plants were healthy and growing well, so I figured it would be OK to leave them alone for a while. Slowly I began spending less time in the garden.

Then one day I noticed some beautiful trumpet-shaped flowers blooming from what I thought were the vines of the green beans. How wonderful it is, I mused, that Heavenly Father gives us pretty flowers to go with these vegetable plants.

It wasn't until days later, when I saw some of the green bean plants turning brown, that I discovered that the pretty flowers were actually field bindweed, sometimes called wild morning glory. It's a beautiful yet dangerous weed. The vines grew camouflaged to look like those of the green beans, and they had wrapped themselves so tightly around the bean plants that they were now literally choking the life out of the beans. My heart sank when I realized what I had let happen. How could I exterminate so many powerful weeds without damaging the green beans? Guilt and regret swelled within me.

Finally I found the courage to confess my neglectfulness to Brother Draney. He immediately reminded me of the promise I had made to him. I should have taken care of the weeds when they first came up, he told me. Paying close attention to the green beans and providing them with daily care—regardless of how well they thrived—would have let me see the

dangers of bindweed in time to pull it out and keep my green beans safe. I understood that if I had spent more time with the beans, I could have protected them.

The bindweed had done so much damage already that I couldn't save the green bean plants. They eventually withered away and died.

As I thought about our lost green beans, I began to reflect on my family and my divine role as a father. Each person in my family, I realized, was like a special green bean plant, and together we made up a whole garden. We would all need the attentive care of others to grow strong. I knew that just like the bindweed's damage could have been prevented by my consistent care, spending time with my children and helping them grow spiritually could allow me to recognize the temptations they would be dealing with so I could help them through these challenges. We could be a safer, happier family if I put forth the effort to actually notice and “pull up weeds” in our home before they choked the life out of my family's happiness.

Now, years later, as I cultivate the garden in my own backyard, I often remember Brother Draney and the lesson I learned in his garden. This lesson changed me, though I hadn't realized then that it would. I have become a better father by being more aware of what's going on in our children's lives. I pay careful attention to their needs, ask for their input, and prayerfully help guide them as they make important decisions.

My family and I may not have been able to enjoy those green beans that year, but we have been able to enjoy the love, compassion, and wonderful spirit of selflessness and caring that have grown in our home ever since. ■