



The Harmless Little Fern

*The strange plant continued to spread, but I left it alone.
After all, what harm could a delicate little plant do?*

By Kathleen Ryan

My garden is situated in the back left corner of our property. On the other side of our yard we have a fruit orchard, pecan trees, dogwoods, beautiful azaleas, and 100-year-old camellia bushes.

One day I noticed a strange plant growing around the base of the oak tree just outside our fenced yard. It was tiny, feathery-fine, and looked like a fern. It intrigued me, so I decided to leave it.

A few weeks later, I noticed that the fern had spread itself evenly around the base of the oak tree. I smiled and thought how nice it looked.

Days later I caught a glimpse of how fast it was growing and thought I should cut it back, but that's when I noticed tiny pink flowers starting to bloom all over it. These enchanting flowers made the plant all the more desirable to me. I decided to leave it alone. After all, what harm could such a delicate little fern do?

Meanwhile, my vegetable garden was taking root beautifully. Tender green shoots grew strong in the rich earth under bright sunlight. I watered, weeded, hoed, and even sang in my garden. Most important, I prayed over my

garden as instructed by Amulek in the Book of Mormon: "Cry unto him over the crops of your fields, that ye may prosper in them" (Alma 34:24).

Invading the Yard

Then one day I noticed my little fern had filled up the entire area between the oak tree and the fence. In fact, it had climbed up the fence and looked very pretty, but I knew I would have to pull it down. I meant to do it, but other demands took away my spare time.

A couple more weeks passed before I noticed hundreds of pink flowers making their way up through the grass. Sure enough, it was my ferocious little fern. It had jumped the fence. I decided immediately that, pretty as it was, it had to go. I grabbed it and tried to pull some out, but the wiry vines clung tightly in place.

Then I noticed it had overtaken my azaleas, had completely entwined itself around the camellias, and was choking my dogwoods and young fruit trees. I panicked. How could this have happened? I was obeying all the rules of gardening and was watching and praying over my garden. It was just a harmless little fern. Now it was killing everything in my yard.

Destruction

I realized too late that what had appealed to me as a harmless fern was really a noxious, fast-growing weed that was heading straight for my vegetable garden. I began the painful process of weed eradication and, in the process, lost many treasured plants and tender fruit trees.

As the invader slowly died, I pulled it from the fence, trees, and bushes. How I regretted ever letting it grow in my safe, protected environment. I should have plucked it out the instant I first noticed it lurking under my oak tree.

Sadly, while I was battling this evil weed, grass took a stronghold in my beautiful vegetable garden. Eventually my vegetable garden that had held so much promise stood knee-deep in grass and had to be mowed down.

Weeding Out Evil

Most of us are good people. We obey the commandments as faithfully as we can. Yet sometimes, while we're doing the right things, we let our guard down and allow some tiny seed of evil to slip into our lives.

Satan finds clever ways to make these things seem acceptable, giving deadly sins attractive guises, just like my little fern with its appealing pink flowers. He convinces us to ignore these sins as they spread.

We can't sit idly by as I did with my garden while some evil grasps hold of us and takes root in our lives. We must not think it is just a little thought or a small act. We must be ever watchful of such invaders of our peace and happiness and protect the security of our families. ■

The author lives in Alabama, USA.



THERE IS HOPE

"Sin appears occasionally attractive but hides its destructive nature until it is too late and harm is already done.

We need to understand how to recognize and avoid the evil and be prepared to detour around it in time. If we do fail, however, there is hope and relief made possible through the atonement of Jesus Christ. Sincere repentance brings us forgiveness and peace in this life and puts us back on course to live again with our Heavenly Father."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Happy Landing," *New Era*, Mar. 1995, 7.

