How does your garden grow?

Surely our inner life is a garden
The plants therein are the thoughts and feelings we cultivate in our soul.
When we are young we gaily seed our garden with the ideas we gather from other people, choosing only by the picture on the packet.

My sister would decorate her outer garden with found objects, old tin buckets, coloured bottles, seaweed and shells lay amongst the grass and plants. Compared to the plants that grow up and die back these struck me like opinions that we find around us and accept as decorative to our image of how life is.

In contrast to such imported opinions, living ideas we take on need to be allowed to die before they can become ours, like seeds that must break down to reveal the shoot. More, even this breaking open transformation must happen under the ground, in the dark of the unconscious. Until we become more familiar with this process we often do not realise that this or that green shoot or leafy plant has arisen from the ideas we received from others and seeded all those months ago into our fertile inner life. Mostly such new growth is believed by us to be original creativity.

Most of what we scatter in our garden comes up to be wonderful flowers. Occasionally like Japanese knotweed they become problems that threaten to overrun other things we try to grow. With experience we become more selective of the ideas that others encourage us to seed in our souls.

In our inner garden we are also responsible for the weather: our sense of wonder and reverence at life is like sunshine to the plants, they grow rich and flower well. Those times of sorrow and awareness of our own weakness can, like the rain, seep deep into the soil activating seeds that had lain dormant for years.

Some masters of the inner garden have compared meditation to the digging and hoeing required to make the soil our ideas grow in, more responsive and fertile.

We may also erect a shed, or sculpture in our garden. Unlike plants these do not depend on the whim of nature to survive, but nor do they change and develop with time. These might be compared to ideas that we insist on maintaining, ideas that we do not allow to rot like a seed lest what comes from them no longer fits our idea of how our garden should be. These may be philosophical structures, learnt ‘scientific’ ideas or religious doctrines. Any part of our world view that we have swallowed without much critical thought. Like a shed they may be very useful indeed, or they may simply cover ground that could otherwise be fertile.

If we bring produce out from our garden to offer around and it is met without enthusiasm we no longer bring it out. Conversely, our interest in other people is what enables them to offer the flowers and fruit of their own cultivation to the world. Our interest encourages people to bring out the <u>best</u> of their produce, to cultivate more of what is original. How sad is it if the things that any of us grow are never brought out to share. The stimulus of this interest may come from our immediate family, it may come from more peripheral friends. Sometimes it even comes from passing strangers. A conversation had on a train may encourage us to bring out a flower or fruit we had been selectively breeding for many years that the world suddenly finds is worthy of special attention.

The cultivation of our inner garden, attention paid to our personal weather, interest shown at the gates of other people’s gardens. These are things that make life on earth fruitful, sweet, rewarding.