

# Gardening

A real student essay with feedback from our Head Writing Specialist

On a late night by the poolside this summer, I bit into the center of the sweetest, juiciest watermelon I've ever tasted. It's an enduring summer ritual that has brought people together at countless Fourth of July barbecues and Labor Day parades. But rarely has the taste of freshly ripened fruit meant so much as it did that night.

Intriguing opening.  
Draws the reader in.

The story of this watermelon started months ago, 100 days to be exact. I carefully placed the tiny seeds in the ground as the excitement of beginning this journey washed over me. Each of these little embryos, I thought, will one day be able to feed my family and friends a homegrown watermelon. Every day, I went outside and showered the soil with water, anxiously waiting for the seeds to germinate and start their journey. On the 6th day after I had sewn them, they sprouted into healthy, beautiful little seedlings. Their daintiness was short-lived; as the weather warmed up they quickly flourished into strong, vigorous vines that soon took over much of my garden. But they did not grow without help: unsurprisingly, watermelons need quite a bit of water, so I spent time every day for the next three months giving my precious vines the tender care they needed. I even found the unforgiving heat of a North Carolina summer invigorating. These were my babies, and it was my responsibility to make sure they thrived. After months of steady growth, the first flowers emerged, and soon after they began to fruit. "I did that," I said to myself, reveling in this euphoric sense of achievement. This feeling is why gardening consumes my life. Nothing else gives me such a powerful, yet simple sense of pride.

The writer does a great job of letting the narrative unfold naturally, giving the reader a detailed, slow and steady account of what happened (a nice nod to the theme itself).

Simply stated, yet completely effective.



When I first hammered the nails into the frame of the garden bed, staked the fence, and poured the soil, I had no idea how much joy this garden would bring into my life. Today, I don't know what I would do without it. Gardening is the one thing that helps me clear my head. It's the ultimate therapy, reducing life to its simplest form. Plants only care about three things: sun, water, and soil. So when I'm gardening, there are no grades, no email, nothing that unavoidably consumes our lives on a daily basis. It's just sun, water, soil, my plants, and me.

The writer does a nice job broadening the scope here to reflect on the meaning of the experience.

Everything in our lives today teaches us to crave instant gratification. For the privileged, food is omnipresent; if you're hungry, you go grab something to eat. There is no work required to feed yourself, not directly at least. Until I started gardening, I craved that same instant gratification, never stopping to think of the time and labor required to make those vegetables so easily available. Now I find fulfillment in this delayed gratification. I plant seeds knowing that I won't reap the benefits for months. I spend hours carefully hand-pollinating the flowers, internally lamenting the human-caused shortage of our natural pollinators. I plant and replant when deer and rabbits inevitably find their way into the garden, a devastating setback that threatens to crush any devoted gardener's spirit. All for that eventual harvest; for that final reward: a vegetable that tastes better not only because it is homegrown, but because I'm literally tasting the fruits of my labor. This new found appreciation for delayed gratification has entirely changed my life. I approach everything with a different mindset, a new perspective. Instead of focusing on what will bring me immediate joy, I've learned to put my all into what will bring me a deeper, more enduring long-term happiness.

A very natural way to contemplate the 'so what' of the larger message. This idea 'grows organically' from the initial seed planted in the opening.

As I sat by the poolside that night, surrounded by friends and family reaping the rewards of my garden, I came to realize what really matters in life. Patience. Hard work. Peace of mind. And of course, sun, water, and soil.

It's a simple story. There are no fireworks here, no drama, no tragedy. But that's sort of the point. It's not just well written.

It's authentic.

While we don't learn about the student's life story or background here, we don't need to. We get a solid sense of who he is from his voice on the page, and from the ultimate message he conveys.