



*High Hope for the Freelance Writer*

C. Hope Clark, Editor

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## Gardening with Your Grammar, Writing with Your Rake

Gwynne Spencer

In the beginning, everything I knew about gardening I learned from Mr. Greenjeans on Captain Kangaroo. When I started growing herbs as a hobby and then as a business, I had to look at gardening differently from when I just putzed around in the garden for fun. To my surprise, I found that gardening and writing have the same organizational problems. You can treat them both as hobbies, or you can treat them both as businesses. You just have to make some choices.

First, you have to choose what to plant, knowing you have only a certain number of days of frost free growing: should you go for basil, sage, borage, mint, or cilantro? It's like choosing what to do with an idea taking seed in your brain: should it be a short story, a poem, a screenplay, a picture book, or should you use it to start tonight's fire in the stove?

Seed catalogs, like your new Writer's Market, snooker you into thinking anything is possible but you know perfectly well that the deer will eat that basil, mugwort will survive anything, and mint will take over like an invader from outer space. Choosing the topic, finding the market, selecting the format for your writing is as bad as the agony produced by the Seeds of Change catalog.

Then there is the question of how much time you are planning to spend on the garden. Do you want to water every day? Are you going to have to give up summer trips to defend the crop against the grasshoppers and drought? Similarly you have to realistically look at how much time there is for your writing. While it would be lovely to have a year to write your Great American Novel, how long can you really go without sleep?

The next decision is whether you want to hire somebody to do the rototilling, the hoeing, the making of lasagna beds?

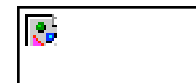
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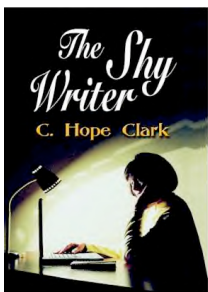
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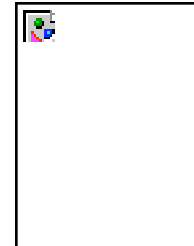
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To me, that's most of the fun of working in the garden, playing with the dirt, sifting out the rocks, defying the possibility of failure. At the beginning, we are all optimists. I'll check with you in August about those big tomatoes, okay? In your writing, do you really want to take on a project that requires hours and hours of research for an on-spec article? Is it better to sell an article for \$50 that only took you an hour, or something for \$200 that took 10 hours of preparation?

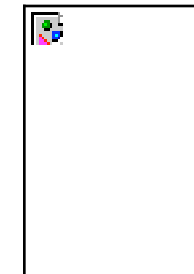
And then there is the small matter of money. Should you buy organic seeds for twice the price of those in the supermarket? Should you spend \$100 on soil amendments or just invite all the cows and horses in the neighborhood over? While it's nice to write without any concern for selling, you still have to think about postage, printer supplies, marketing, taking time from something else you could be doing like earning a living instead of sitting at your computer and waiting for a salable piece of writing to emerge.

Eventually, you have it all figured out. Your seedlings are poking their hopeful skinny little necks up out of the starter pots. You've already spent many dollars and many hours getting ready to send them out into the world, like those twelve manuscripts that Hope Clark says you need to keep circulating in order to make money at writing--twelve perfect manuscripts ready to go to twelve perfectly matched markets at a total cost of \$1.50 each, counting the SASE.

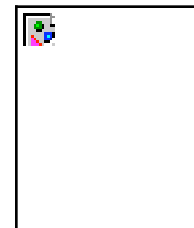
That's when you know that writing and gardening are pretty much the same deal because when you come right down to it, the main thing you need is optimism. You put those manuscripts out to publishers, just as you have to put the seedling in the ground, and hope for the best. If you've done your best, you can take a glass of iced tea and go sit in the sun, looking forward to being outstanding in your field, fully appreciating the fact that gardening, like writing, is a business that has an organizational chart with only one box. YOU.



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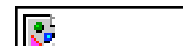


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Gwynne Spencer writes and grows herbs near Mesa Verde. She writes a monthly newsletter, The Cosmic Raccoon which you can receive by emailing her at [pengwynnes@aol.com](mailto:pengwynnes@aol.com), or check out past issues at her website, [www.gwynnespencer.com](http://www.gwynnespencer.com)

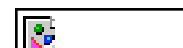
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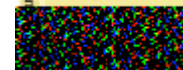
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