



**BY VIRGIL  
ADAMS**

*I want to raise our hobby to its rightful status in the scheme of things.*

This "sermon" was inspired by Lewis G. Regenstein and a delightful little booklet he sent me entitled *Replenish the Earth*. It deals with the Bible's conservation message and cites numerous scriptural references to man's stewardship responsibilities. If you are interested in obtaining copies for yourself, write to Mr. Regenstein at the Interfaith Council for the Protection of Animals and Nature, 4290 Raintree Lane, NW, Atlanta, GA 30327.\*

I want to point out right up front that I am not a preacher. Furthermore, I don't think I will ever be a preacher. I don't know of any job harder than preaching. Teaching school comes close. You could double the salaries of both of 'em today and they'd be underpaid tomorrow.

The reason preaching is so hard is because of people like you and me: the flock. I knew a Methodist preacher once who was chided by his administrative board for not preaching as well or as often as they thought he should. "We pay you to preach on Sunday," they told him. Whereupon he replied, "No, God called me to preach on Sunday; you pay me for putting up with you the rest of the week."

I am sure you are wondering what all of this has to do with gardening. It has everything to do with gardening. Although I am not a preacher, I have written a little sermon this month on what it is we are doing out there in the backyard. I want to raise our hobby to its rightful status in the scheme of things. I'm here to tell you that we are doing a whole lot more than just digging in the dirt. Ours is no mundane chore. It is a sublime exercise. We are engaged in a spiritual pursuit, and the sooner we realize that, the better gardeners—and persons—we will be.

If this had a text, I guess it would be a verse from the Twenty-fourth Psalm: "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."

I want all within the sound of my voice to know that this sermon is for everybody. It is not just for Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Moslem, Hindu, and Buddhist scriptures also emphasize God's ownership and love of his creation.

I happen to be more familiar with the Bible, and that is my main source. No doubt about it, the Good Book recommends—in fact, commands—reverence for nature. It seems to me the Master Gardener expects us to be good stewards of the world he created. I can't find anything in there that justifies raping the land, damaging the environment, or killing off entire species of wildlife. To do so is certainly not to do what he told us to do: "Replenish the Earth."

Replenish the Earth! What an awesome responsibility. I don't know of any group in a better position to carry it out than gardeners. And if we don't?

A real minister, the Right Reverend Robert Hatch, put it this way:

*The cause of conservation involves man's soul. It is a spiritual choice, grounded in ethics, and its roots are in the Bible. Conservation teaches the principles of wise stewardship. The Earth was made by God, and it belongs to God. . . . Churches should reiterate that man is not the real owner of anything, and that he is here only as a steward, and that he will be judged by the way he treats what has been loaned him. This not only involves wise use of our land and resources for the sake of the present generation, but it also upholds the rights of those who will inherit the Earth from us. If we leave them nothing but desecration, we shall be judged accordingly, and the judgment will be a moral one.*

See what I mean by "awesome responsibility"? But where does our responsibility begin?

It seems to me that a good beginning point is our own backyards. It is well and good to be concerned about our county's overcrowded landfill, the polluted streams, rivers, and lakes of the state, the damage acid rain is causing all over the nation, the disappearance of the rain forests in South America. But we walk around in our backyards everyday. We plant things there. We water, we weed, we cultivate, we harvest. You can't get much closer to home than that, and that is where a gardener's responsibility for the Good Earth begins.

I believe I am a better steward when I am aware that the soil I till does not belong to me. Oh, I have a deed to it, all right. But it was here before I was. Hopefully, it will be here after I am gone. In the meantime, it is on loan to me.

Do we not misunderstand and misinterpret that passage in the Bible (Genesis 1:26) where God gives us "dominion" over nature and animals? I am afraid we take this as a synonym for ownership, with the right to treat nature as we please.

Dominion consists of stewardship. And stewardship means treating the Earth with loving care, protecting it from abuse, and replenishing it—for ourselves and posterity, and in worship and praise of the Real Owner. ■

\* The Interfaith Council for the Protection of Animals and Nature is an affiliate of The HSUS.

*Virgil Adams is a contributing columnist of Georgia magazine, from which this essay is reprinted by permission of the editor.*

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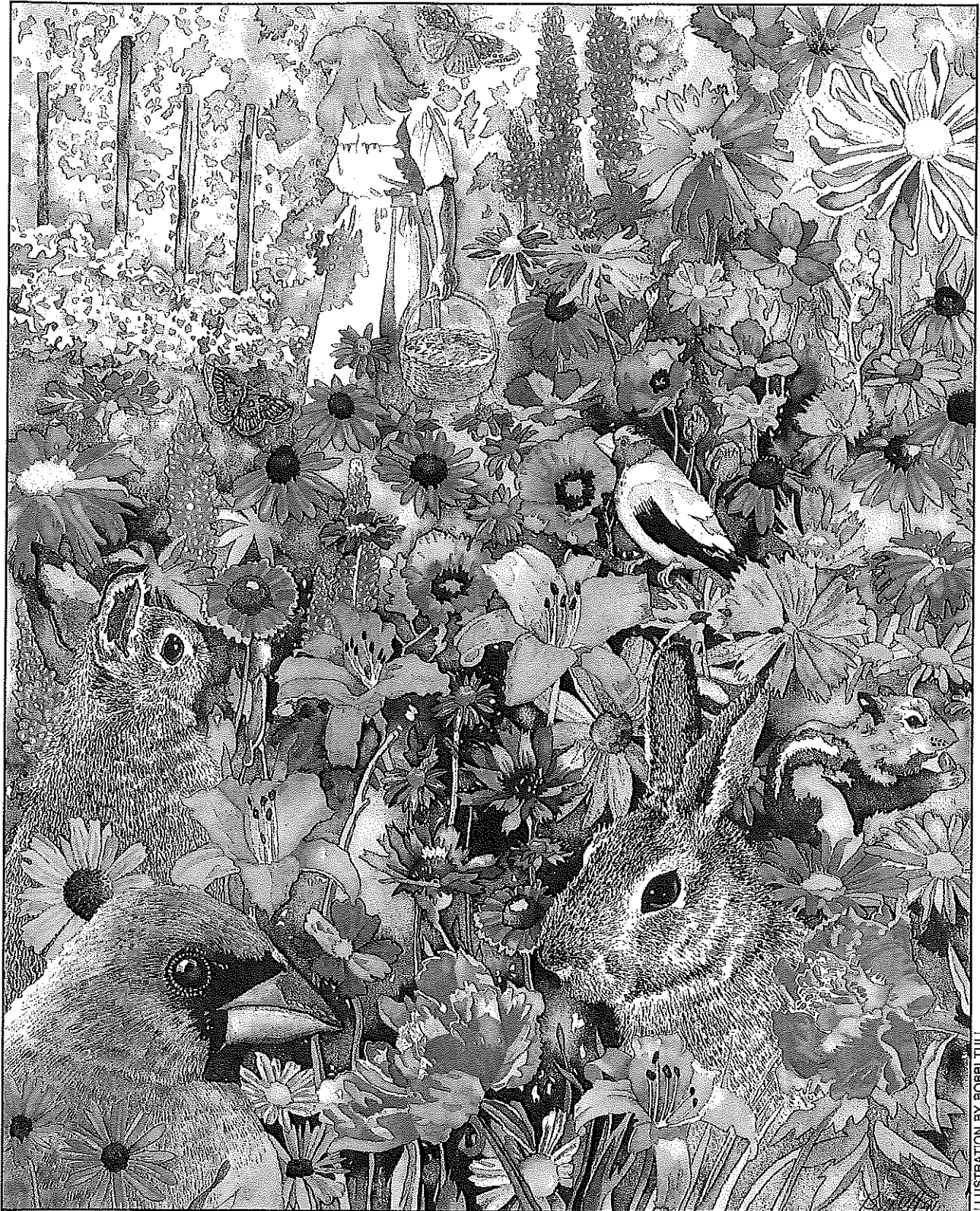


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