



## Charlie

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It has been really interesting being part of my local Community Garden in south eastern Tasmania, Australia, for nearly a year now. People participate for all kinds of reasons and are all kinds of ages. Dare I say it, but my favourite gardener happens to be 3 years old and as cute as they come! Calling her a gardener may not be quite telling the truth as I have never seen her do work. For the first few weeks that she accompanied her mother and baby sister to the garden, she was very tiresome and bored. She poked her sister constantly and sat glumly in a corner waiting to 'do' something.

However, slowly she began to get used to us and to wander onto the garden beds to follow butterflies. She tried sowing some seeds. She started to see what was around her. The focus has gradually moved from herself to her surroundings and she has blossomed along with the garden. She now jumps with joy at the sight of seeds germinating into tiny plants and is always the first to spot a ripe raspberry!

Her name is Charlie and she knows the names of everyone at the garden and most of the plants. She also knows what we are interested in and will always choose the best person to rattle off to about her latest find, whether it be an egg just laid by one of the chooks or a cherry she cannot quite reach!

She and my little dog Pickle are great friends and each squeals with excitement when they catch sight of each other arriving at the garden on Tuesday mornings. I am the one she runs to with news of Pickle.... 'Pickle is eating the broad beans?.... 'Pickle is digging in the garden?.... 'Pickle and I have been playing chasey' and so on. Charlie's eyes show constant delight at all that is happening in every corner of the community garden.

At 11.30am or so we stop for a cup of tea and to have a nibble on some home made goodies but always there is Charlie's contribution - a little basket of things freshly picked by her - peas, raspberries, baby zucchinis and cherries were on offer this week. She does not always wait until they are ripe or big enough to reach their best but that is not important. This is Charlie's first experience of a garden. She is learning to see through gardeners' eyes and thoroughly enjoying every moment.

If only every child could spend time getting to know their food; how long it takes for a pea seed to get big enough to make its own peas; how to tell if a raspberry should be picked or left; how big a zucchini can grow from one Tuesday to the next; how the seasons change what we can grow; the flavours of home grown food.

Not only is Charlie learning, but the lives of all the gardeners at this Community Garden are brightened by her glowing eyes, rosy cheeks and delightful chatter. And that's just as important as the growing of the food, if you ask me.

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